

A Study on Early Childhood Educators' Aesthetic Teaching Beliefs and Practices in Taiwan

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Abstract

This study explored early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices in Yunlin, Chiayi, and Tainan counties in Taiwan. Survey and interview methods were employed. The findings were as follows. (1) The average of early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices was high. Their teaching beliefs were stronger than teaching practices. (2) There were significant differences in aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices in terms of location and educational background. (3) There was a significantly positive correlation between aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices. (4) The interviewed early childhood educators agreed with the importance of aesthetic education. They argued to develop children's aesthetic feelings through exploring nature and arts, and to guide children in appreciating various arts and local arts. However, their difficulties were a lack of enough knowledge in arts appreciation, and insufficient arts resources in the mountains and rural areas.

Keywords : aesthetic teaching beliefs, aesthetic teaching practices, early childhood educators

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Introduction

Recent educational reforms implemented by Taiwan's Ministry of Education (MOE) have resulted in more focus on aesthetic education. The Arts and Humanities Learning Area in the *Grade 1-9 Curriculum* argues for the importance of aesthetics and understanding (MOE, 2003). At the high school level, the "Arts and Life" domain focuses on developing students' aesthetic ability (MOE, 2008). Aesthetic education is also emphasized in early schooling. For instance, the new *Curriculum Guidelines in Early Childhood Education and Care Activities* incorporate the aesthetic domain into the early childhood curricula (MOE, 2009; 2012). In addition, MOE proposes *Intermediate and Long Term Plans for Aesthetic Education* from early schooling to life-long learning (MOE, 2013).

All teachers hold beliefs about their teaching, subject matters, students, and their roles (Pajares, 1992). Their teaching beliefs have strong implications for their teaching practices. Teachers play an important role in making educational reforms successful, and their teaching beliefs can directly influence their implementation (Leung, 2008; Cheung, 2012). Some researchers found that teachers' teaching practices are influenced by their teaching beliefs; however, some researchers indicate that teachers' teaching behavior does not always consist with their teaching beliefs (Cheung, 2012). Although research on teachers' beliefs and practices is not new, aesthetic education in early schooling in Taiwan is still under researched.

This study explored early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices in Taiwan. Using mixed methods, I surveyed and interviewed early childhood educators in Yunlin, Chiayi, and Tainan counties. The research questions were as follows.

1. What was the status of early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices? Were there the significant differences in aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices depending on early childhood educators' background variables?
2. Was there a correlation between early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices?
3. What were the interviewed early childhood educators' views on their aesthetic teaching?

Literature Review

Aesthetic Education in Taiwan

The term, “aesthetics,” derives from the Greek word, “aisthetika,” which means to perceive and to feel. Aesthetic education in the Chinese tradition is defined as a way to educate people to express aesthetic feelings, cultivate their temperaments, and help them to achieve happiness, delight, and a high quality of life (Hsuang, 1986). According to the MOE (2013), aesthetic education aims to help learners perceive, explore, feel, and create beauty, and thereby develop holistically. It is also a way of imbuing society with beauty and goodness.

Aesthetic education is advocated as one of the essential components of modern schooling in Taiwan. Since 1979, compulsory education has aimed to develop students' sound minds and character from five perspectives—morality, intellectuality, physical education, collaboration, and aesthetic education (MOE, 1979). Aesthetic education has recently been integrated into the early childhood curricula. The aesthetic domain emphasizes helping children to perceive the environment, enrich their imagination and creation, and develop aesthetic feelings and preferences (MOE, 2012). It is meant to help children develop their aesthetic ability and to find enjoyment through various media—visual arts, music, and drama.

Although aesthetic education is advocated as one of the essential components in education, it is not well implemented at some schools (Wang, 1998; MOE, 2013). Because of the examination-oriented education system, some schools have reduced art related classes and give priority to students' academic achievement. As for art/music/dance talented programs, the emphasis is on skills training, rather than aesthetic education (MOE, 2013). In early schooling, young children are expected to develop holistically and less emphasis is placed on academic achievement. Thus the aesthetic domain can play a relatively important role in the early childhood curricula.

Research on Aesthetic Teaching

In recent years related studies have been carried out on aesthetic education in schools (e.g., Chen & Walsh, 2008; Lim, 2000), have studied the effects of aesthetic education on young

children's aesthetic judgment (Acer & O' merođlu, 2008), and have researched aesthetic education programs focusing on specific media (e.g., Lo, 2008; Madura, 1995; Stokrocki, 2001). How some of these studies relate to aesthetic teaching will now be explored.

Chen and Walsh (2008) investigated how aesthetic education was perceived and valued at two elementary schools in Taiwan. Using qualitative methods, they explored how arts teachers guided children to experience visual arts, music, or performing arts through the formal arts curricula. They found that both schools have a shared respect for nature and a concern for local culture. They also found that the seven arts teachers' folk pedagogy¹ emerged from the following cultural values: (a) connecting beauty and arts learning through the appreciation of artistic forms and cultural meanings; (b) developing children's aesthetic feelings by seeing, hearing, moving, feeling, and perceiving the elements and expressiveness of the arts; (c) cultivating children's character in morality, goodness, and self; (d) integrating the arts into daily life.

Lim (2000) explored various approaches to aesthetic education in early childhood settings in the United States that used the Bank Street, Reggio Emilia, or Waldorf school programs. She found that in some ways art specialists and classroom teachers had a common understanding of aesthetic education. They considered aesthetic education as a means of helping children to see the world with aesthetic delight and a sense of beauty, and by becoming aware of the basic aesthetic elements in visual arts, music, and movement. Yet, the teachers had varying perceptions and approaches due to different philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings at each school. Based on Dewey's philosophy of education, the Bank Street teachers guided children to develop their interests and experiences as social beings. Adopting Vygotsky's ideas of social constructivism, the teachers in Reggio Emilia school program helped children to expand their higher thinking skills as intellectual beings. Based on Steiner's philosophy, the Waldorf teachers expected children to have a sense of feeling and imaginative consciousness as spiritual beings. Overall, the teachers showed their strong commitments to schools' philosophy and pedagogy in their different approaches to aesthetic education.

In another study, Lim (2005) explored early childhood teachers' beliefs and concepts of

¹ According to Bruner (1996), a culture's folk pedagogy is informed by that culture's folk psychology. Folk pedagogy is guided by the folk psychology's view of what children's minds are like and how children should learn and how teachers should teach.

young children's aesthetic experience in the arts. She interviewed 12 early childhood teachers who taught in the visual arts, music, or dance. Her findings showed that the teachers' approaches were based on their recognition of three dimensions of aesthetic experience. In the *perceptual dimension*, children perceived aesthetic qualities in nature and the social context. In the *exploratory dimension*, children's aesthetic delight derived from exploring a variety of art forms. In the *intellectual dimension*, children integrated feelings and thoughts related to their aesthetic experience. These teachers believed that they played an important role in guiding the children's aesthetic experience. For example, they provided appropriate various art materials to inspire children to challenge themselves. They created a safe atmosphere and asked stimulating questions to help children transform aesthetic experience into expressive art forms.

Using qualitative research methods, Chen and Hertzog (under review) documented an art project in an inclusive early childhood program in the United States. Using a project approach to curriculum, the teachers conducted a project with children about "Art All around Us". In the first phase, the children recalled prior experience of where they saw art and the teachers made a concept web with them. The children further explored different art media and made artworks. In the second phase, the children categorized their initial questions and investigated the field work by forming three study groups—Art at Home, Artist's Studio, and Art We Wear. In the phase three—culminating events, they displayed, celebrated, and reflected on what they learned from the project. Overall, the children explored art in their everyday lives by studying the elements of artwork, making art with various media, and investigating art in different settings. The prolonged project approach transformed the children's natural artistic instincts into aesthetic experiences, and cultivated their aesthetic sensibility.

In addition to the studies above, some researchers studied aesthetic education in their own classrooms. For example, Lo (2008) conducted an action research project by exploring the drama appreciation curriculum in her kindergarten classroom. Based on the curricular goals of the aesthetic domain, she applied multiple drama strategies (i.e., discussion of roles, development of plots, and reflection) to teach drama appreciation. She found that she improved her teaching practices, and that the children gained a better appreciation of drama and improved their ability in art creation and scaffolding-learning with peers.

Research on Aesthetic Teaching Beliefs & Practices

Teaching beliefs can be defined as teachers' beliefs of teaching-related matters, such as educational goals, teaching methods, curriculum development, teacher-student relationships, learning activities, and classroom management (Chen, 2007; Hsiao & Yang, 2010). Teaching beliefs also indicate teachers' knowledge about theories, teaching methods, and child development (Wang, 2000). These beliefs have a direct bearing on teaching practices (ibid.). I discuss the study related to aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices as follows.

Wang (1998) studied elementary school teachers' aesthetic teaching in Taiwan. Using mixed methods, he surveyed 756 teachers regarding their views on aesthetic cultivation, and their beliefs and practices in aesthetic education. He also interviewed 12 teachers concerning their perspectives on aesthetic education. Findings indicated that teachers' aesthetic cultivation was on the average. Their average scores on aesthetic teaching beliefs were better than aesthetic teaching practices. There was positive correlation between aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices. Overall, the teachers had strong beliefs about the importance of aesthetic education, the necessity of improving teachers' aesthetic cultivation and practices of aesthetic education. For these teachers, aesthetic education was integrated throughout the curriculum into all aspects of children's school life. Yet, the teachers felt that aesthetic education was not well-implemented and more emphasis was placed on academic achievement.

As shown above, early childhood aesthetic education can be implemented in various ways. Although some studies showed elementary school teachers' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices in Taiwan, the issue in early schooling is still under explored. Therefore, this study aimed to explore early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices in Taiwan. It will provide references in aesthetic education in the future.

Methodology

In order to get a broad picture of early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices as well as a deeper understanding of individual educator's perspectives on aesthetic teaching, I conducted a survey and interviews to explore early childhood educators' aesthetic

teaching beliefs and practices in Taiwan. The design of this mixed method study is as follows.

Participants

Participants were early childhood educators at public and private preschools and kindergartens in Yunlin, Chiayi, and Tainan counties in southern Taiwan. Using stratified random sampling, 873 questionnaires were distributed to the educators in the three counties. A total of 725 questionnaires were completed, equaling a retrieval rate of 83%. All of the participants in this study were female. The average age was 36 ($M = 35.84$, $SD = 7.97$), ranging from 22 to 62 years of age.

Measures

I developed the aesthetic teaching beliefs-practices scale according to the related literature in teaching beliefs and practices, aesthetic education, and from the main ideas found in the *Curriculum Guidelines in Early Childhood Education and Care Activities* (MOE, 2009). In this study, aesthetic teaching beliefs consisted of knowledge and teaching methods in aesthetic education. The aspect of knowledge includes beauty, aesthetic perception, aesthetic domain, and aesthetic education. The aspect of teaching methods indicates the ways to develop children's aesthetic ability. Aesthetic teaching practices consisted of teaching methods in arts integration and arts appreciation. The aspect of arts integration means the integration of various arts into the thematic curriculum. The aspect of arts appreciation indicates the ways to guide children to appreciate various arts. As for content validity, five professors who specialize in visual arts, music education, drama, dance, and early childhood education examined the questionnaire and provided feedback. A pretest was carried out with an experienced kindergarten teacher. After careful review and correction, the 25 statements were finalized (refer to Table 1 and Table 2).

The aesthetic teaching beliefs-practices scale was a self-reported survey, with possible responses on a four-point Likert scale. The questionnaire contained two parts. The first part consisted of 10 statements relating to aesthetic teaching beliefs, including the aspects of knowledge and teaching methods in aesthetic education. Higher scores indicate stronger

beliefs about aesthetic education. The second part consisted of 15 statements on aesthetic teaching practices, including the aspects of teaching methods in arts integration and arts appreciation. The internal consistency reliability for the total survey, as measured by Chronbach alpha, was .961. The Chronbach alpha coefficients were .956 for the beliefs scale, and .949 for the practices scale.

Interviews

Eight of the early childhood educators who participated in the survey also agreed to be interviewed. They loved art and had experience in teaching visual arts, music, drama, or dance for young children.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with each educator in person or by phone. The interviews were intended to obtain information regarding the educators' views on beauty and aesthetics, children's aesthetic experience, ways to enrich children's aesthetic experience and ability, their views on the aesthetic domain, and difficulties they encountered as teachers in aesthetic education. Each educator participated in one interview, each lasting for 30–50 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed with the SPSS 16.0 program. In order to gain a clearer picture of the general situation and any differences which may exist, descriptive statistics, t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Scheffe's method were used. Pearson correlation was used to analyze the correlation between teaching beliefs and practices.

The qualitative data was analyzed using coding and categorizing (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Examples of codes are aesthetic feelings, aesthetic experience, exploring the nature, listening, sharing, appreciating, temple art, etc. Examples of categories include aesthetic teaching beliefs, aesthetic teaching methods, arts appreciation, local arts, etc. The data was triangulated using theory triangulation (aesthetic education references in the literature review) and data source triangulation (questionnaires and interviews). The participants were invited to do member checking. All the participants' names are pseudonyms in the report.

Results

In this section, the results of early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices are presented according to the research questions.

Status of Aesthetic Teaching Beliefs and Practices

Table 1 shows that the mean score for the aspect of knowledge in aesthetic education is 3.382 ($SD=.439$); for the aspect of teaching methods it is 3.385 ($SD=.463$). The mean score for aesthetic teaching beliefs in total is 3.383 ($SD=.426$).

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations in Aesthetic Teaching Beliefs Scales (N=725)

Aspect	Items	M	SD	M	SD
Knowledge in Aesthetic Education	(1) I think beauty is what makes senses and mind pleasant.	3.433	.496	3.382	.439
	(2) I think aesthetic perception is the ability to perceive good things.	3.374	.523		
	(3) I think aesthetic education is helpful to young children's development and learning.	3.422	.500		
	(4) I know the aesthetic domain in the new Curriculum Guidelines.	3.291	.506		
	(5) I think aesthetic education is through children's exploring, creating, and appreciating the arts.	3.392	.505		
Teaching Methods	(6) I think teachers should guide young children to explore the beauty in life.	3.392	.497	3.385	.463
	(7) I think teachers should guide young children to explore and create the arts.	3.361	.495		
	(8) I think teachers should listen to young children's sharing about their feelings and preferences in artworks.	3.430	.504		
	(9) I think teachers should guide young children to appreciate artworks.	3.377	.510		
	(10) I think teachers should guide young children to appreciate local arts or multicultural arts.	3.370	.499		
Total				3.383	.426

Table 2 shows that the mean score for the aspect of arts integration is 3.142 ($SD=.446$); for the aspect of arts appreciation it is 3.092 ($SD=.446$). The mean score for aesthetic teaching practices in total is 3.105 ($SD=.424$). However, the results show that early childhood educators have lower mean scores ($M<3.00$) on guiding children to appreciate arts with art elements. These are items 20 ($M=2.983$; $SD=.599$), 18 ($M=2.977$; $SD=.627$), 22 ($M=2.913$; $SD=.587$), and 24 ($M=2.884$; $SD=.622$).

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations in Aesthetic Teaching Practices Scales (N=725)

Aspects	Items	M	SD	M	SD
Arts Integration	(11) I integrate visual arts into thematic curricula.	3.170	.510	3.142	.446
	(12) I integrate music into thematic curricula.	3.206	.496		
	(13) I integrate drama into thematic curricula.	3.073	.540		
	(14) I integrate dance into thematic curricula.	3.120	.537		
Arts Appreciation	(15) I guide young children to share their artworks.	3.343	.503	3.092	.446
	(16) I guide young children to appreciate their peers' artworks.	3.372	.501		
	(17) I guide young children to appreciate visual artworks.	3.244	.523		
	(18) I guide young children to appreciate visual artworks with art elements.	2.977	.627		
	(19) I guide young children to appreciate music.	3.152	.540		
	(20) I guide young children to appreciate music with music elements.	2.983	.599		
	(21) I guide young children to appreciate drama, such as children's drama.	3.069	.554		
	(22) I guide young children to appreciate drama, such as children's drama, with drama elements.	2.913	.587		
	(23) I guide young children to appreciate dance.	3.021	.584		
	(24) I guide young children to appreciate dance with dance elements.	2.884	.622		
	(25) I guide young children to appreciate local arts or multicultural arts.	3.051	.577		
Total				3.105	.424

In summary, the mean scores of early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices were high. The t-test analysis also shows that the mean scores for beliefs and practices were statistically different ($t = 20.126$, $p < .01$). This result seems to suggest that

teaching beliefs ($M = 3.383$, $SD = .426$) are stronger than teaching practices ($M = 3.105$, $SD = .424$).

Differences in Aesthetic Teaching Beliefs and Practices

Differences in aesthetic teaching beliefs. Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference in aesthetic teaching beliefs in terms of location ($F = 5.043$; $p < .01$). In multiple comparison, the Scheffe' method shows that early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs in Tainan were significantly stronger than those in Yunlin.

Different educational backgrounds also affects early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs ($F = 7.201$; $p < .01$). The Scheffe' method reveals that the early childhood educators with a master's degree had stronger beliefs about aesthetic teaching than those with only a high school diploma or a bachelor's degree. However, no significant difference is found in terms of years of teaching experience.

Table 3. *Analysis of Variance in Aesthetic Teaching Beliefs*

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Scheffe'</i>
Location					
(1) Chiayi	266	3.397	.437	5.043**	(3)>(2)
(2) Yunlin	248	3.319	.405		
(3) Tainan	211	3.443	.428		
Educational Background					
(1) High school	61	3.331	.408	7.201**	(3)>(1)
(2) Bachelor	620	3.373	.423		
(3) Master	44	3.614	.439		
Years of Teaching					
(1) Below 5 years	183	3.351	.401	2.619*	ns
(2) 5~12 years	293	3.348	.431		
(3) 13~20 years	160	3.446	.434		
(4) 21~28 years	59	3.493	.448		
(5) Above 28 years	30	3.387	.387		

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Differences in aesthetic teaching practices. Table 4 shows that there is a significant difference in aesthetic teaching practices in terms of location ($F = 4.725$; $p < .01$). The Scheffe' method shows that early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching practices in Chiayi and Tainan were significantly better than those in Yunlin.

Educational background affects early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching practices ($F = 5.372$; $p < .01$). The Scheffe' method shows that early childhood educators with a master's degree were better than those with only a bachelor's degree. Years of teaching experience also affects early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching practices ($F = 4.824$; $p < .01$). The Scheffe' method reveals that those who had 13–20 years of teaching experience were better than those with 5–12 years of teaching experience.

Table 4. *Analysis of Variance in Aesthetic Teaching Practices*

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Scheffe'</i>
Location					
(1) Chiayi	266	3.132	.430	4.725**	(1)>(2)
(2) Yunlin	248	3.039	.414		(3)>(2)
(3) Tainan	211	3.149	.422		
Educational Background					
(1) High school	61	3.110	.359	5.372**	(3)>(2)
(2) Bachelor	620	3.090	.427		
(3) Master	44	3.306	.433		
Years of Teaching					
(1) Below 5 years	183	3.058	.440	4.824**	(3)>(2)
(2) 5~12 years	293	3.059	.406		
(3) 13~20 years	160	3.191	.431		
(4) 21~28 years	59	3.203	.400		
(5) Above 28 years	30	3.236	.412		

** $p < .01$

In sum, different location and educational background seem to affect the differences in early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices. Years of teaching experience had no significant influence on aesthetic teaching beliefs, but did in aesthetic teaching practices.

Correlation between Aesthetic Teaching Beliefs and Practices

Pearson correlation analysis on Table 5 reveals the significantly positive correlation between early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices ($r=.616$; $p<.01$). This is similar to what Wang (1998) found in his study on Taiwanese elementary school teachers.

Table 5. *Pearson Correlation Analysis on Aesthetic Teaching Beliefs and Practices*

Aspect	Aesthetic Teaching Beliefs	Aesthetic Teaching Practices
Aesthetic Teaching Beliefs	1	
Aesthetic Teaching Practices	.616**	1

** $p<.01$

Individual Early Childhood Educators' Views on Aesthetic Teaching

The interviewed early childhood educators agreed with the importance of aesthetic education. I discuss their views on their aesthetic teaching as follows.

Developing children's aesthetic feelings through exploring nature and arts.

The participants believed that there were two ways to develop children's aesthetic feelings: experiencing nature and exploring the arts. For example, Ms. Choi shared how she guided her students in experiencing the changes of the seasons, such as observing the changes which took place in the trees and flowers, and feeling the steps on the fallen leaves. As she stated,

I love to expand my classroom to the outdoors. I guide the children to feel the four seasons... to discover the changes in the trees, leaves, and insects...I want them to discover beauty and feel beauty . . . to step on the fallen leaves, to hear the sounds, to feel the situation. I think it's very important to appreciate beauty! (Interview 5, 20120504)

The participants also described how they guided their students in developing aesthetic feeling through exploring various arts. For example, Ms. Wu asked children why they chose

particular colors when drawing and how they felt about the colors they chose. Also, Ms. Chen used storytelling and guided her students in expressing aesthetic feelings with body movement. Some research also reveals that early childhood teachers tend to use a wide range of media to enrich children's aesthetic experience. For example, Lim (2005) found that early childhood teachers helped children to expand the experience of beauty to exploratory behaviors through manipulating art materials.

Appreciating various arts and local arts. The participants indicated that they integrated various art forms into the thematic curricula. The forms they mainly used were music, visual arts, and drama. They also taught their students to appreciate local arts, especially that seen in temples. Here are some examples.

In visual arts, Ms. Fang said that after her students made their own artwork, she guided them to appreciate their artwork, and to compare good artwork with bad artwork. Furthermore, she encouraged them to share their feelings by asking: "When you look at a piece of good artwork and a piece of bad artwork, what's your feeling? What's the change in your emotion?" (Interview 7, 20120515)

In music listening, Ms. Yang guided her students to feel the music elements with body movement. For example, she invited the children "to imitate the movement of elephants and feel heavy in music" (Interview 1, 20120406). In drama appreciation, Ms. Choi based on the film told a story to the children. She then showed them the film and asked them to share their ideas about it.

As for the local arts, Ms. Cheng invited her students to discuss the traditional activity of welcoming the Buddha on the tenth day of the Chinese New Year. She then took them to visit temples and observe the characteristics. Influenced by the temple culture in the local area, the children made artworks of temples in the classroom. The aesthetic domain indicates to integrate local arts and culture resources to enrich children's arts experiences (MOE, 2012). Ms. Cheng's teaching also echoes with this idea.

Difficulties in aesthetic teaching. The interviews showed that the main difficulties encountered were a lack of knowledge in art appreciation and insufficient arts resources in the mountains and rural areas.

Ms. Yang stated that most teachers had insufficient knowledge of arts appreciation. She said, "I think we are weak in arts appreciation. For example, I enjoy viewing paintings, but I don't know much about the painters, their dates, and their styles" (Interview 1, 20120406). Another teacher, Ms. Cheng, also experienced a similar problem. To solve this problem, Ms. Cheng suggested teachers attend art workshops to improve their aesthetic literacy.

Some participants lamented the paucity of arts resources in the mountains and rural areas of Taiwan. Ms. Kuo suggested using the internet to make up for this lack. Also, it was suggested that local governments should promote local arts and more arts activities in the mountains and rural areas.

Discussion

The survey results showed that the mean scores of early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices were high; however, the mean score for beliefs was higher than that for practices. Wang (1998) also found that Taiwanese elementary school teachers had higher scores for beliefs than for practices. Since aesthetic education is being promoted in Taiwan, educators seem to have a strong belief in the value of aesthetic teaching. Yet, their actual teaching practices depend on their different situations.

As for background variables, different counties had significant differences in aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices. Regarding teaching beliefs, they were stronger for the participants in Tainan than for those in Yunlin. Regarding teaching practices, they were stronger in Chiayi and Tainan than in Yunlin. In the interviews, it was also found that the early childhood educators in Tainan and Chiayi shared more information about their aesthetic teaching. This may be because in Yunlin there are many small villages and rural areas with low-income households, and most parents and kindergartens in such villages and towns pay more attention to academic performance (Wei, 2005). It is therefore suggested that local governments sponsor more arts activities and workshops and encourage educators to participate in them.

It was found that educational background affected aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices. Early childhood educators with a master's degree had higher mean scores in both aesthetic

teaching beliefs and practices. Years of teaching experience had no significant influence on beliefs, but did in practices. The participants who had 13–20 years of teaching experience had higher mean scores than those with 5–12 years of teaching experience. Chen (1993) and Wang (1998) also found that Taiwanese elementary school teachers who had more years of teaching experience had higher mean scores in aesthetic teaching practices than those with fewer years of teaching experience. Thus, early childhood educators need to be encouraged to learn about aesthetic teaching from more experienced educators.

The aesthetic domain indicates the importance of exploring and perceiving the beauty in the surroundings, including nature (MOE, 2012). This sentiment was also expressed in the interviews. For example, Ms. Choi shared how she guided children in exploring nature by experiencing, observing, and feeling. Similarly, Chen and Walsh (2008) found that elementary school art teachers guided students in observing nature or using natural materials to make artwork. This view corresponds with the traditional Chinese attitude toward aesthetics, which was associated with daily activities such as observing flowers and nature (Kong, 1998).

It has been suggested that educators provide enough time for children to discover different artistic elements (MOE, 2012). However, the results of the survey indicated that early childhood educators had low average scores on guiding children to appreciate art/music/drama/dance with artistic elements. The interview data showed that early childhood educators mostly guided children to appreciate various arts by observing artworks and sharing their feelings. Only Ms. Yang guided her students in feeling the elements of music. Lim (2000) and Lo (2008) argue that teachers need to apply artistic elements to guide children in experiencing the beauty of art. Feeney and Moravcik (1988) suggest that teachers raise such questions as: What do you see? What do you notice about the colors, lines and shapes? How do you feel about it? What did the artist feel when he painted? In addition, early childhood educators can make a connection between local arts and local culture. They can raise questions by asking: What do you see in the temple? What does this symbol mean? What does it mean to the local residents? Although teachers are constrained by the Taiwanese culture and tend to raise close-ended questions (Chen & Walsh, 2008), early childhood educators are encouraged to help children engage in mean-making in the process of art making and viewing.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Using mixed methods, this study explored early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices in Taiwan. The survey result provides us a broad picture of early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices. Furthermore, the interview result provides a deeper understanding of individual educator's perspectives on aesthetic teaching in the local context.

The overall findings revealed that the average of early childhood educators' teaching beliefs and practices was high; their teaching beliefs were stronger than teaching practices. There were significant differences in aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices in terms of location and educational background. There was also a significantly positive correlation between aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices. The interviewed early childhood educators agreed with the importance of aesthetic education for children. They argued to develop children's aesthetic feelings through exploring nature and arts, and guide children in appreciating various arts and local arts. Yet, the difficulties they encountered were a lack of enough knowledge in arts appreciation and a dearth of art-related resources in the mountains and rural areas.

There are recommendations for future direction. First, it is suggested that local governments provide workshops in aesthetic education and arts appreciation for early childhood educators to improve their aesthetic literacy. Second, early childhood teacher education programs are encouraged to provide courses in aesthetic education for young children. Since the MOE (2013) has proposed making aesthetic education a required course in teacher education programs, early childhood education and care programs are also encouraged to provide such courses. Third, it is suggested that early childhood educators learn from experienced teachers or conduct action research to improve their aesthetic teaching practices.

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