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A Feeling–Thinking–Acting–Reflecting Instructional Model for Cultivating Imagination and Aesthetic Experience

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Summary

Ulrich Beck (1944–2015) coined the term "risk society" in 1986, stating that, although the material civilization of people in the 21st century is highly developed, its spiritualty is replete with various crises (Beck, 1986). This is reflected in college students' environments today, which are full of incendiary information and uncertainty. Students' interpersonal relationships are often entangled with contradiction and conflict, and their career paths are full of unknowns and obstacles, which can heighten students' emotional tension. To face various crises in the risk society and respond to the pandemic that has been sweeping the world since 2019, higher education must formulate strategies for guiding students in developing new mental models.

This research developed a curriculum to guide individuals in developing their imaginations, to expand their aesthetic experience through a series of aesthetic courses, and to assist them in developing new mental models to cope with the physical and mental demands of the risk society. By stimulating individual imagination or developing aesthetic experience, the study of aesthetics has always emphasized self-cultivation and subtle influence. However, practical methods and assessment tools must be developed to surmount the difficulty of measuring the effects of such imagination-stimulating curricula. In this manner, abstract concepts and their associated teaching strategies can be made concrete and practical.

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Based on Dewey's experiential learning theory, this research used aesthetic works, art and discourse texts, and canonical artworks as media and combined the theories of psychological perception and consciousness development to guide learners in freeing and cultivating their imaginations. In addition, this study borrowed the principles of "research in action, action in research" from action science and, through the teaching practice process, developed learning content and a "feeling–thinking–acting–reflecting" model of instruction.

The main objectives of applying this model are to promote perception and imagination during the learning process, cultivate learners' ability to understand structural changes, drive individual creative thinking, and enhance aesthetic experience. At the same time, the model emphasizes how the processes of students' learning and teachers' teaching should mirror each other. On the students' side, the learning curriculum contains four units with the following foci: breaking down and rebuilding perception—using gaps to stimulate the imagination; freeing the imagination—connecting previous experiences to new knowledge; exploring an experience—the starting point for change; and forming a creative mindset—developing individual learning modes.

Corresponding to these five principles, on the teachers' side, the guiding method integrates the following five principles:

1. Providing students with feedback to steer the emotions evoked through encounters with aesthetic works in a creative direction.
2. Providing space for personal choice to increase students' willingness to act autonomously.
3. Providing students with the flexibility required during the incubation period to increase their readiness for action.
4. Guiding learners in using their autonomy to cope with strong emotional tension finding an outlet for this tension in creation or action.
5. Supervising students in making decisions, supporting their drive to achieve their goals, and cultivating their resilience and progress in the face of adversity.

By adapting teaching practices to adhere to these principles, this study devised an instructional model comprising four elements that complement the students' learning units: feeling—guiding exploration and deepening perception; thinking—creating an atmosphere of focus, concentration, calmness, and tranquility to deepen exploration; acting—promoting debate and narrowing the gap between knowledge and action; and reflecting—providing space for dialogue and the integration of internal and external experience.

This research demonstrates the usefulness and feasibility of the developed model. This model can be used to stimulate learners' imaginations at different levels and deepen their aesthetic

experiences. Specifically, quantitative and qualitative results indicate that this curriculum can stimulate the development of learners' imaginative capacities. The program's effects on initiating and conceiving imagination were statistically significant, but only slightly improved transforming imagination. Therefore, the curriculum can efficiently develop learners' experience with novelty, production, exploration, intuition, feeling, concentration, effectiveness, and dialectics, and provides learners the opportunity to demonstrate their performance through various assignments. Qualitative data revealed that the curriculum enables learners to use their imaginations to generate perceptual and aesthetic experiences, which can encourage learners to abandon their conventional habits and activate their aesthetic perception; by encountering canonical works, learners can free their imaginations and interact with aesthetic objects. Finally, through small-scale creation that narrows the gap between knowledge and action, learners can identify their own creative languages and integrate their experiences.