

Opinions of Junior High School Art Teachers and Students towards Art Competitions: Individual Case Studies

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Abstract

In this paper art students from a public junior high school in central Taiwan were chosen as research subjects to explore why art teachers and students enter art competitions as well as their opinions on art competitions. Interviews of four teachers and a survey of art students at the schools found that: 1. Teachers feel that competitions help augment students' creative experience, reinforce their self-confidence, increase their motivation to study art and add variety to the art curriculum. In addition, teachers also assist students with entering competitions due to enrolment and administrative pressure. 2. School is an important source of information on art competitions. In most cases, 63% of the students volunteer to enter the competitions, but they also feel pressure as a result. 80% of art students love to compete due to the positive benefits competing brings. When students are forced to enter a competition, the setback from not winning an award makes them dislike

competitions. 3. The interviewed art teachers are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of art competitions. The teachers have developed appropriate counseling measures for their students and also pointed out areas where art competitions do badly and need improvement.

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Keywords: Art Learning, Art Competition, Art Class, Art Education, Visual Arts

I. Introduction

Art students in Taiwan frequently come into contact with art competitions as part of their art studies. Various government or privately sponsored competitions have now become a means for evaluating and recognizing ability. For winning students, competitions provide positive encouragement, the recognition of their peers and may also help them secure entry to their chosen schools. Teachers may also receive a commendation if their students win prizes at competitions. Teachers' attitudes towards art competitions are therefore of particular interest. Do art teachers consider student awards the best proof of their teaching ability? Do teachers encourage students to enter competitions as part of their teaching philosophy or are they forced to supervise competing students?

While art prizes may boost the winning student's self-confidence and creative drive, there are questions about the fairness of competitions, the psychological effect that losing has on students and whether competition influences normal teaching. There is little research on the effect of art competitions on teaching in art classes. The attitude of art teachers and students towards art competitions in particular should be studied in more depth to better understand their views. Teachers and students from art classes at a public junior high school in central Taiwan were chosen as the research subjects for this study to explore the following questions:

1. Why do art teachers encourage students to enter art competitions?
2. What are students' reasons for entering art competitions and what are their views on these competitions?
3. How do teachers handle art competitions? What are their observations and recommendations?

II. Review of Literature

The review of literature began by looking at the hosting of art fairs during the Japanese Colonial Period and the subsequent popularity of art competitions in Taiwan. Studies related to modern-day art competition in Taiwan are also described.

Origin of Art Competitions in Taiwan

The signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895 ceded Taiwan and the Penghu islands to Japan in perpetuity. The first "Taiwan Art Exhibition" (TAEX) was held in 1927. The colonial government hosted these exhibitions to publicize the accomplishments of its administration (Yen, 2004). Artists that won prizes in official art exhibitions received not just prize money; media coverage also indirectly enhanced their profile and social status. A new social environment gave painters new freedoms and developments (Lin, 1995). New creative concepts and training techniques were also introduced from Japan to Taiwan through TAEX and new teaching philosophies.

In 1937, TAEX was suspended due to the Sino-Japanese War. In 1938, the exhibition was resurrected by the Office of the Governor-General and became known as the "Provincial Exhibition". After the Second World War, the "Art Exhibition of the Taiwan Province" (Provincial Exhibition) was held. In addition to preserving the institutions of the art exhibitions from the Japanese colonial period, the Provincial Exhibition was also intended for "increasing interest in art research and the standard of art culture" (Hou, 2005, p.1); the charter was modified after the 15th exhibition to include emphasis on the spirit of creative arts. Later, the goals became the promotion of art education, encouragement of creative arts and raising of artistic standards.

Over the years, exhibitions that provided professional artists with a competitive stage gradually evolved to include competitions for students. The "Provincial Student Art Exhibition of Taiwan", for example, was first held in 1951. The name and format of the competition has changed over time, and it continues to be held today as the "National Student Art Competition". Various competitions are frequently organized by the Ministry of Education, county and city governments and at the regional level as well. The events feature varied themes ranging from anti-spying in the early years to anti-smoking and anti-drugs as well as evaluating the success of art education, developing the artistic potential of students, promoting environmental conservation and life education.

Government-sponsored exhibitions and competitions were also complemented by the long-term support of art exhibitions and competitions

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by community groups and businesses. Generally speaking, as the handful of large government-organized "exhibitions" in the early years expanded into the many large and small art competitions we see today, their intended participants have also expanded from professional artists only, to encompass students of all grades. These events combine several objectives including promoting government policy, enhancing art education, promoting cultural exchange and improving the corporate image of business. This study is concerned with those art competitions targeted at students at school.

Literature on Art Competitions

Art competitions as well as their links with school art education have been criticized by some scholars. Nevertheless, there is research and opinion that supports the competitions. Critics such as Ni Tsai-Chin (1991) feel that children's art competitions introduce competitiveness into the innocence of children's art education, and parents, teachers and children have now become caught up in the trap of utilitarianism and winning for winning's sake. As schools and parents often evaluate the performance of art classes via prizes and enrolment prospects, the curricula of such classes ends up neglecting art theory, and students are instead encouraged to practice specific techniques that improve their odds of winning, completely perverting the function of art education.

Chang Shih-Chung (1996) noted that art exhibitions or competitions are traditionally judged on still life artworks. As a result, competitors strive to emphasize sophistication, maturity, technique and precision in their artwork. The psychology of the desire to win means competitors create artworks that are intended to appeal to the judges' "preferences" rather than being true to their personal inspirations. Such an outcome is at odds with the spirit of art and education. Lin Man-Li (1995, p. 48) also highlighted how "competition culture" and "artwork-centric" have become defining characteristics of Taiwan's art education over the past decades. Artificial "Children's Paintings" now dominate the competition culture. "On the surface they claim to promote children's creativity and emphasize their self-expression, but at their core they remain rooted in traditional art theory and techniques".

Wu Wang-Cheng expressed a different point of view in an interview: “Competitions are a passive form of promotion”, “it is a kind of stimulus” and “aren’t the exams and tests you see in other disciplines a type of competition as well? They are all competitions, just under different names” (Hsiao, 2003, p. 33). Wu believes that competitions and exhibitions have a catalytic effect because they made parents and school teachers pay attention to art education and give teachers recognition. Pan Yuan-Shih also believes that international competitions help to build confidence in students. Competitions are, however, a means to an end and not an end in itself, so Pan disapproves of teachers interfering with children's self-expression for the sake of winning prizes (Hsu, 2003). Ting Chan-Ao also said in an interview: “Competition is the means and not the end. Competing every now and then is perfectly acceptable, but it should not be for fame or fortune”. Ting therefore advises against excessive teacher or parent involvement that interferes with the student's creativity and self-expression (Chu, 2003, p. 34).

In addition to discussions published in periodicals there are also numerous masters' theses that examine the issue of art competitions in Taiwan. Yeh Wang-Chiang (1996) studied the “World School Children's Art Exhibition of R.O.C.” held between 1966 and 1995, and then proposed several concrete recommendations on the competition format. Wang Shih-Tzu (2003) used the Calligraphy category of the Elementary School division in Taichung City as an example to examine the judging format of the “National Student Art Exhibition”, the calligraphy style that grew out of this judging format, as well as how the judging format influences the planning and design of art classes. Chen Yu-Chuan (2003) investigated older elementary school students' participation in art competitions in Miaoli County. Chen found that the vast majority liked art competitions. Students felt that the number of art competitions entered were correlated with their drawing ability, but weren't sure why they won. Winning increased their interest in studying art.

Wu Kuan-Hsun (2004) conducted in-depth interviews and observations of five elementary school art teachers in the Yunlin-Chiayi region to explore these teachers' art teaching, personal involvement in art competitions, as well as their thoughts and opinions of art competitions. Chang Li-Lian (2006)

used an elementary school art exhibition as a case study to study the development of school art exhibitions, analyze the factors that influence their development and explore the value such exhibitions bring to art education. Existing research generally approaches the topic from the perspective of the judges, teachers and students. Apart from highlighting the positives of student exhibitions or competitions, the literature also offers a great deal of constructive criticism. In particular, it points to the links between participant belief, competition format and the style of winning artworks.

III. Research Design

Art teachers and students from a public junior high school in central Taiwan during the 2008 academic year were chosen as the research subjects for this study. Four art teachers were interviewed for the study and a questionnaire survey for students in the art class at the selected school was conducted to learn about their views on art competitions. The selected school was the first in the county to set up an art class, is relatively well-known and is also considered a benchmark in central Taiwan. The school was chosen for the case study due to the research team being familiar with the school's teaching system and art curriculum.

Interview Subjects and Execution

A total of four teachers were interviewed and they were tagged Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C and Teacher D. The basic profile of each teacher was as follows: Teacher A has taught for more than nine years at this school and specializes in watercolors, drawing and prints. Teacher B has over 11 years of teaching experience. Specialties include water colors and drawing. Teacher B had served as the special education section chief and is therefore also familiar with the school's administrative affairs. Teacher C had taught art at another school and was transferred to this junior high school shortly before the interview. Teacher C has extensive experience teaching art and is familiar with teaching in schools with art classes. Teacher D has taught at the junior high school for over 11 years and teaches ink painting. Teacher D also held an administrative position and understands the school's administrative processes.

The teachers were provided with a general summary in advance. The interviews began by asking about the teacher's "opinion of art competitions" and "motivation for encouraging students to enter art competitions". The interviewed teachers were then asked to explain "the relationship between art competition and art curriculum" and provide examples. They were also asked about their "feelings when students win art competitions", "how winning an art competition affects the school" and "art competition, talent art education and parents' attitude to competitions". Finally, the interview concluded by asking about "the influence of art competitions on art education".

Survey Subjects and Implementation

The questionnaire was distributed in January 2009, with research subjects comprising 90 students in the art class at the school, including 30 students in 1st year, 30 students in 2nd year and 30 students in 3rd year. Three of the recovered questionnaires were incomplete and declared invalid, leaving 87 valid responses.

The questionnaire design was based on the question format of related studies (Chen, 2005), and the questions were re-designed and simplified after extensive deliberation by the research team to better match the focus of the research. The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions including five multi-select and 13 multiple-choice questions. The 12 questions asking about students' feelings used the Likert 4-point scale. Questionnaire content included "student profile", "source of art competition information", "art competition format and frequency" and the relationship between "art competition and art curriculum". Data on students' "experience with art competition" and "art competition's influence on the student" were also collected. The final part of the questionnaire explored the "relationship between art competition and school" and the "influence of art competition on art education".

IV. Research Findings and Analysis

The research findings and analysis will begin by presenting teachers' motivation for encouraging students to enter art competitions. Next, students'

reasons for entering art competitions are explored, followed by a description of how teachers actually incorporate art competition into the school curriculum along with complementary measures.

Teachers' Motivation for Encouraging Students to Enter Art Competitions

The interviewed teachers were generally positive about incorporating art competition into their curriculum: “They aren't forced to enter the competitions but are encouraged to do so” (B9809003). Though Teacher D was generally positive about incorporating art competition into the curriculum, the prerequisite was that “It should not affect the student's academic work and their interest in learning” (D9809020).

Experience the Meaning of Creativity, Strengthen Interest in Learning and Enrich Course Content

When asked about the motives for incorporating art competition into the curriculum, Teacher C said “the still life drawings made by students in class are for practicing basic drawing techniques, so they rarely touch upon the student's internal emotional landscape. Encouraging students to enter competitions may help them experience the meaning of creativity”. If a student wins a prize in an art competition, the accolades make the student feel that their artistic ability has been recognized, and will make them more motivated to study art. The pressure of competition also helps to correct students' passivity and feeling of boredom with routine practice. The student's experience of entering the art competition will become a milestone in their art education, and their artworks, their academic records in the year book or list of prizes will also serve as a reminder of their art studies at school.

Teacher B felt that students that attend outside art studios tend to have more exposure to art competitions, and the assistance and encouragement of teachers at school can provide students that don't attend outside studios with a different learning experience. As competitions come in different formats, the process of preparing artworks for competitions can help to enrich the curriculum. In addition to the above teaching considerations, teachers also mentioned the pressure from the school administration.

High Expectations from School Administrators

As other schools also have art classes, the teachers felt that parents' views of the school were influenced by the winning of art competitions. School administrators attach great importance to the results of art competitions, due to how they reflect on the school's reputation and student enrolment pressure. High expectations from school administrators in turn influence the direction of the school art classes. Teacher B felt that public notices on awards may leave visitors and parents with a positive impression that "Yes, the school does appear to put a lot of effort into art classes" (B9809012).

Declining birth rates means that student enrolments are a very serious immediate problem and source of pressure for schools. Teacher C said that school officials and parents attached great importance to competition results and it has a great deal of say in many areas:

A lot of things are interconnected, and who gets caught in the middle? Teachers! We are the innocent victims in all of this. Teachers don't have the time to keep fixing students' drawings, but sometimes you have no choice (C9809019).

While teachers don't want to interfere with students' artistic expression, the very real problem of enrolments means they must help students "improve" their work in order to achieve better results.

Local Schools with Art Classes are Required to Enter Some Competitions

Schools with art classes host student art exhibitions for county competitions on a rotating basis. To ensure there are enough entries or to meet the requirements set by the local government, local schools with art classes are often "obliged" to enter the competition.

In summary, teachers' motives for encouraging students to enter art competitions include not only teaching considerations such as helping students with their art studies but also realistic factors such as compulsory participation, student enrolments and administrative pressure.

Students' Reasons for Entering and Views on Art Competitions

How convincing the above teachers' motives for encouraging students to enter art competitions may be very subjective. What about students' perspectives? How do they acquire information about art competitions? Do they feel pressure from entering art competitions? Where does the pressure come from? What are their motives for entering? How does the competition affect the individual? The findings from the student survey are as follows.

In the survey, a multiple-choice question was used to ask students about their source for information about art competitions. The results showed that out of the 87 students surveyed, up to 90% (78 students) of students received information about art competitions from teachers at school. School is therefore an important source of information on art competitions. The 37% (33 students) of students also received competition information from their parents; 27% (24 students) of students received competition information from newspapers, TV or the Internet; and 24% (21 students) of students received competition information through their art studio.

In response to the question "Do you feel pressure from having to enter an art competition?", 57% (50 students) of the students said "sometimes" and 6% (5 students) said they felt pressure from entering "every time". When a multiple choice question was used to ask about the reasons for feeling pressured, the reasons selected by the 55 students included: "Don't know what subject to draw" (62%); "fear of losing to other students" (58%); "fear of not winning" (36%); or "not interested in drawing but was ordered to enter" (9%). On the other hand, 32 students (37%) said they "don't" or "never" feel pressured by competitions. The findings showed that the psychological pressure on students from entering art competitions varied according to the individual. Apart from the psychological pressure from the creative process, the competition results were also a major source of psychological pressure on the students.

When students were asked "Do you think you entered the art competition on your own initiative", the proportion of those that ticked "always voluntarily" and "voluntarily most of the time" were 21% (18 students) and 42% (36 students) respectively. Of the 87 students, 36% (31 students) answered "not always voluntarily" and "never voluntarily" (1%). Based on the

above, 63% of students voluntarily enter competitions most of the time. Only 21% “always voluntarily” enter the competitions. From this it is obvious that most students enter competitions unwillingly.

When asked “How much do you like entering competitions?” 2% (2 students) of the students answered “strongly dislike” and 14% (12 students) answered “dislike”. Up to 75% (64 students) of students said they “enjoy” entering and 9% (8 students) answered “greatly enjoy” entering. Further questions showed that students had various reasons for entering the art competition, 92% (66 students) of students felt that competing helped to “increase drawing experience”, 74% (53 students) said it was about “challenging yourself”, 67% (48 students) felt that it helped to “improve artistic skill” and 64% (46 students) felt that “winning a prize helps with school selection”. Students also enter art competitions “to win money and prizes” (57%) and due to encouragement from “teachers” and “parents” (50%). The reasons why students enjoy entering art competitions are summarized in Figure 1.

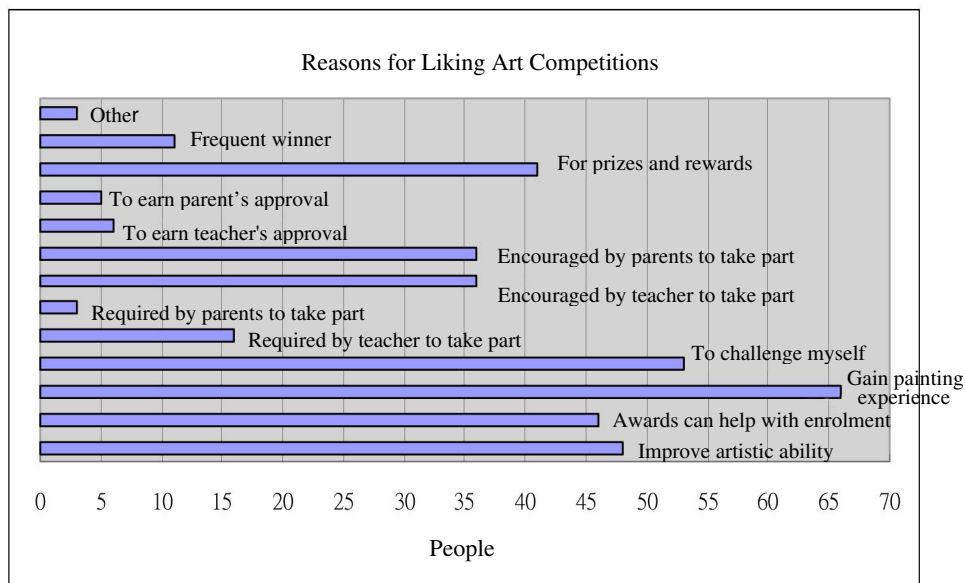


Figure 1. Reasons Why Students Like to Enter Art Competitions.

The 14 students that said they dislike entering art competitions in the previous question were asked to express their reasons for not entering: “Dislike being forced to enter competitions” (8 students), “too few prizes” (6 students), “no chance of winning” (5 students), “unfair competition” (2 students) and “dislike drawing” (1 students). In the above responses, being forced to enter the competition, not winning, and doubts about the fairness of the competition all affect students’ attitudes to art competition.

Students do not appear to comprehensively dislike art competitions. When encouragement, students generally believe that competitions have positive benefits. Although 84% of students said they liked to enter, 63% said that it brings psychological pressure. For some students, the setback from not winning brings negative emotions and a sense of loss to the competition.

Teachers mentioned during their interviews that the students themselves care a lot about competition results. For teachers themselves however, winning has long ceased to have any novelty value after entering so many over the years.

As for winning... We are a bit desensitized to it all now... Sometimes....
Let's not call it going through the motions... Basically it's become part of
the job (A9809017) .

For Teacher A, expectations from school administration means teachers include art competitions into the curriculum. Entering competitions have therefore become a part of the routine over the years. Many art students attend outside studios after school and some studio teachers are familiar with supervising competition entries. If an artwork is completed after school, the school teacher can't be sure how much of the work is the student's own. Whether the studio teacher helped or even created the whole work becomes a concern because it defeats the whole purpose of entering the competition.

In the survey, students were asked “Do you receive instruction when you enter art competitions? If you do, from whom?” The results showed that 62% (54 students) of the students usually received instruction from school teachers on their competition entries; 36% (32 students) of the students received instruction from outside studio teachers, or both school teachers

and studio teachers. Just 14% (12 students) students entered competitions without instruction.

As for whether students would “lose confidence in themselves if they don't win art competitions”, 51% of the students selected “tolerable”. 28% (24 students) and 14% (12 students) of the students answered “No” and “Never”. There were 7 students (8%) that admitted losing made them lose confidence.

The results of the competition may just be a landmark in the learning process as described above. Still, will it affect students' future careers? Teacher C believed that competition results influence students' future enrolment prospects to some extent.

If he wins, he feels that “Hey, I received a great deal of affirmation in this area”. He may then continue to study art in senior high school. If he doesn't ever win... He might feel “Hey... Maybe this is not for me” (C9809004).

Prizes from art competitions serve as a kind of feedback mechanism. Students may feel encouraged or discouraged as a result, which will in turn affect their willingness to continue studying art in the future. When students were asked “Do you feel that entering and winning art competitions will help with your enrolment prospects in the future?”, 52% (46 students) of students felt that entering art competitions improved their enrolment prospects, 42% (37 students) were unsure and 6% (5 students) felt that winning a prize didn't help at all.

Teachers' Actual Approach to Art Competitions

Regardless of the primary reason for encouraging students to enter competitions, the interviewed teachers had all helped students with their competition entries during art class. Described below is how teachers helped with students entries and counseled students that didn't win.

Guidance During Competition Preparations

Each of the interviewed teachers had their own way of incorporating art competitions in the curriculum. Generally speaking, the interviewed teachers placed the most emphasis on two large-scale competitions: the

submission-based Student Art Exhibition and the Central Taiwan Water Color Landscape Painting involving five counties and cities. The teachers generally did not get involved in other competitions and allowed students to do as they wished.

During the preparations, the teachers allocated specific times during art class to help students with their entries for the Student Art Exhibition and the Landscape Painting competition. Apart from describing the nature of the competition and course content, the teachers also gave a brief summary on the process and objectives. Students were then asked to prepare the relevant materials themselves to stimulate their creativity. Here the teachers played a supporting role by reminding students to think about their creative philosophy and produce their own original work. This method of guidance differed from the format used for regular training with still life. During the process, the teachers would remind students that the competition is a good experience but they should not let the competition results outweigh the nature of creativity. As for what works are ultimately selected, the teachers said this was based on whether the work conformed to the theme of the competition.

The interviewed teachers felt the process helped: 1. Peers to learn from each other. 2. Allowed the teacher and student to identify problem areas in learning. During the learning process, the creative themes are generally left up to the student to decide on their own so students can inspire each other and boost their own self-development. Given the inevitable obstacles and setbacks in the creative process, teacher-student interaction helps the teacher understand students' needs and problems or give them a clear idea of their advantages and areas that require improvement.

Counseling After the Competition Results are Announced

The teachers also noted that students' willingness to learn was also influenced by whether they won an award or not. Teacher A observed that winning students seem to be more confident in their art studies and become more proactive in class. Winning an award therefore boosts willingness to study art. As most students invest a great deal of effort into the county-level Student Art Exhibition, the competition results significantly influence their

willingness to learn for several days after the results are announced. Some lose the will to learn and even think about giving up. By comparison, the Central Taiwan Landscape Painting competition required less investment from students, so whether they win an award or not has less impact.

As entering the competition led to extreme swings in willingness to learn, the teachers adjusted the school's internal pre-selection mechanism for the county competition. Instead of returning students' works that did not make the grade immediately after the pre-selection, the winning works as well as the works rejected during pre-selection were only returned to students after the results of the county competition were announced. This change was intended to reduce the impact on students not chosen to represent the school. Teacher B also explains to students that different judges have different criteria. If a work does not win, the teacher will submit it to other competitions as they see appropriate. When it came to counseling for students that didn't win, the teachers each had their own approach. Generally speaking these include:

Recognition of the student's hard work: Students' learning performance and commitment are recognized by the teacher to balance the sense of loss.

Emphasize the subjective nature of art: The teacher explains that the judges' subjective views can influence competitions' results in much the same way that there are different schools of art appreciation. The teachers analyze the factors that the judges may have considered in order to answer any questions the student might have.

Reinforce the nature of creativity: Art is an expression of personal emotional thought. Teacher B said that students were reminded of the following: "It's more important for you to have fun while painting. It's also more important to express what you want to say." (B9809009). Teacher B emphasized that the student should not take the competition results too seriously because it's the experience gained during the creative process that really matters.

Explain that luck can be a factor: For Teacher D, regular practice is important, but "I feel that subjective factors really play a major role" so "luck" becomes a factor that influences competition outcomes (D9809011).

Explain that it's the practical exams in the future that really matter: High school art classes not only look at academic results but also the results of practical

exams. The teachers will invite students to analyze their own ability and explain that if they wish to continue studying in art-related programs in the future then it's the practical exams that really matter. The competition results today do not necessarily represent future enrolments.

Art teachers' views and recommendations for art competitions

The teachers and students had many different views on art competitions. The following are the most frequently mentioned and discussed topics.

Questions About the Judging

The interviewed teachers said that art is a very broad field and art education can be very diverse. Even if a student wins an award in a particular medium or category, it is still just a part of the teaching process for the teacher and is not truly representative of a student's true art education. Competition is also just a process. The teachers believe that if a student enjoys creative art they can then identify the key learning points themselves, which in turn help them understand their own interests and ability.

While the results may not actually shake the teachers' confidence and they have long learnt to cope with whatever happens over the years, they are familiar with the student's creative process, so they tend to consider students' everyday learning performance when deciding which works to submit. During competitions however, judges mainly work from the submitted entries. Discrepancies between competition results and the teacher's views often arouse deep feelings in the teachers.

Sometimes, a child submits his entry but the rankings are completely... different from what I expected. So a child can work very hard but not win anything. Sometimes it just turns out this way (A9809016) .

If a competition's judging is too one-dimensional... the criteria is too limited or restricted to a particular style, it can sometimes be a hindrance instead (B9809018) .

Teacher A raised questions about the judging process and criteria based on past experience. Teacher A felt that the winner's technique and

ability may not necessarily be superior to those that didn't win. The selection of the judges and the judging criteria are often manipulated or subject to political interference, leading to unfair results.

One of the judges might be senior to the others and speak with more authority. I've also seen judges say "Hey, I think this one is quite good, what do you think?" So once someone says something then everyone else goes along with it. I've seen it happen on at least one occasion... (A9809028).

In other words, the results of art competitions depend on the subjective judgment of the judges, and people actively trying to influence the results can lead to unfairness. A student's original artwork is then not judged on its own merit and their originality is ignored.

Teacher B also shared some insights on judging that he and many other art teachers have in common. The teachers felt that there was a very large gap between the number of awards given to urban and rural students in the Student Art Exhibition.

I keep wondering about this question. "Why judges feel that rural kids' artworks are not up to scratch? Are we really not as good as other people or is it because the judges have a different perspective?" If it's a difference of perspective, then I think the competition is rather biased (B9809020) .

The teachers have observed a rural and urban divide in the distribution of awards, so they have come to wonder if rural children's artistic expression may not conform to a certain type of aesthetics. This has led to doubts about the meaningfulness and fairness of the competitions. All of the interviewed teachers mentioned the subjectivity of the judging process during the interview. They also raised questions about the judges' judging the entries based on their own personal aesthetics without bothering to learn about the students' creative process. With the results of the judging not meeting their expectations, it has led to teachers feeling that the winning or lack of awards

does not properly reflect the results of teaching and learning or the level of involvement during the creative process.

Competition Flaws and Suggestions

Over the years, strategies have evolved for winning prizes in competitions that only focus on the results. Teachers are well aware of these strategies but can do little about them, and their biggest concern is whether the instructor becomes involved in the student's artwork.

Submitted Artwork Might not be the Student's Solo Effort

The teachers said that in submission-based competitions the teacher is often involved to a great extent, even if the student came up with the original idea:

The Student Art Exhibition has fallen so low that in many cases the students are just following their teacher's instructions. So it's actually the teacher that came up with the idea and not the student, and in many cases it's even painted by the teacher as well. In the end, it becomes hard to tell if an artwork is based on a student's original idea in the first place (C9809001).

Students may receive competition help not just from their teacher at school but also outside teachers. The interviewed teachers were particularly worried about teachers at outside studios excessively supervising students' work in the desire to win awards. Even if the work wins the judges' favor, the lack of input from the student may make them lose interest in art altogether.

Teacher C said that If the competition is a life painting and the student must create the painting themselves at the designated location, some teachers have also trained their students to handle these situations. For example, "they take photos of the area in advance and then bring it to school. The teacher then makes a painting for the students to imitate". "Some organizers don't even know where they did the painting. In many cases, they bring their teacher's work along and then copy it stroke for stroke (as a reference). These are ways of cheating" (C9809002).

For submission-based competitions the most common problem is excessive instruction by the teacher. Sometimes even landscape paintings are not drawn on location, thereby defeating the original purpose of the competition. A disgruntled Teacher C said that excessive interference by teachers in students' artwork has become all too common. With so many "painting revisions" or teacher's ideas injected, "...is it still a "Student Art Exhibition" or actually a "Teacher Art Exhibition"?" (C980090019). What was supposed to be just an art competition between students has become so twisted that it has become a competition between art teachers.

Suggestions for Organizers

Years of exposure means teachers have many personal observations on how competitions can be better run. The teachers often suggest these improvements to the preparation committee, but practical considerations such as cost means they are rarely adopted. Many good ideas are therefore discarded to save time, effort and money. Over the years, competitions have become just another formality. Teacher D said: "If the format becomes fixed because it has always been done a certain way for many years, this makes it somewhat less meaningful" (D9809001). The teachers offered the following measures and suggestions for making the art competition more meaningful:

a. Clearly define judging criteria

The teachers suggest announcing the judging criteria so that competitors can prepare in advance, which will make the judging more fair and impartial.

b. Add more awards

The teachers felt that the results of competitions often "offer little encouragement but a lot of disappointment". There should therefore be more awards to "give children encouragement, more opportunities to win awards and use this to find affirmation" (D9809009).

c. More variety in the competition format

The teachers also suggested that there should be more variety in the competition format. For example, "don't just limit on-site artwork to landscape paintings". Consider other formats such as 3D artworks or composite media. Use exhibitions to promote exchanges so

competitions don't "feel as if they are becoming more biased" (B9809020).

Generally speaking, teachers suggest that the judging criteria should be clearly defined to avoid judges giving out awards based on personal preferences; students should also be given more positive encouragement; more varied competition formats to alleviate problems with existing formats and boost the mutual networking and learning aspect.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study found that the teachers' opinions about art competitions touched upon most of the benefits and weaknesses of art competitions. There were, however, some paradoxes in students' views of art competitions. For example, most students did not voluntarily enter competitions, citing the stress that competition preparation brings. Nevertheless, they agreed that competing can have positive benefits.

Conclusion

Below are the research findings and conclusions for the following research questions.

Teacher's Motives for Helping Students Enter Art Competitions

Teachers incorporate art competition into their curriculums partially due to enrolment concerns or government regulations requiring local art classes to take part. Education-wise, teachers felt that competitions help to enrich and compliment the classroom content. Competition experience will help students understand their strengths and areas that need improvement. Winning awards will increase students' interest in studying art and help them choose their future program and career; students' entries or award records will also serve as a snapshot of their art career. Most people are therefore positive in terms of teaching attitudes which in turn makes school into an important channel for art competition information.

Art Students' Opinion on Art Competitions

63% of students in most cases volunteer to enter competitions and they also feel pressure as a result. Causes include: “don't know what to paint”, “fear of losing to other students”, “fear of not winning an award” and “forced to enter despite not being interested in painting”.

Students that love competing believe that entering helped to “increase painting experience”, “challenge yourself”, “improve artistic ability”, “helps with enrolment prospects”, “receive money and prizes”, as well as encouragement from “teachers” and “parents”. Since “it's always optional”, just 21% took part in competitions. Some students (8%) expressed that losing the competition would impact their self-confidence. A further 16% had been forced to compete and did not win a prize. These doubted the fairness of the competition and did not like to enter the competition. Students' opinions on competitions varied greatly.

Teachers' Guidance, Observations and Recommendations for Art Education

To reduce the impact on students from not winning an award, the teachers have adopted the following measures. 1. Recognize students' efforts and try to balance their feeling of loss and 2. Emphasize the subjectivity of the competition. 3. Re-emphasize the nature of creative art. 4. Point out how luck can be a factor. 5. Explain that practical exams in the future are more important.

On the positive side, teachers feel that art competitions may inspire students to greater heights. Teachers and students can identify problem areas together, and winning students may also gain self-confidence and become more interested in studying art. On the other hand, excessive instruction and guidance may defeat the purpose of student competitions. Students that do not win may lose interest in art and learning. Additionally, there is little that teachers can do if the results of the competition don't match their personal teaching philosophy. The teachers also criticized how the judging criteria of the art exhibition seemed to rely on the individual perception of the judges. In response, the teachers suggest that review standards should be transparent with more variety in competition formats, more prizes and give students more encouragement.

While teachers agreed that art competitions have a positive effect, they also revealed during the interviews that there is little they can do when administrators require them to enter students in the competition. Issues include excessive teacher interference in competitions and doubts about the fairness of the review process. They also pointed out problems such as competitions being merely a formality and an urban/rural divide in terms of prizes won. Though most students believe that they can take the competition results in their stride, some students said that competing affected their confidence and they were unhappy about being forced to participate.

Though teachers generally know that they should not intervene too much, the high proportion of students with their school and art teachers as instructors means that it is difficult for art competitions to avoid becoming a contest between art teachers. Whether art competitions really help to promote art education or serve to evaluate the effectiveness of art education is well worth further examination. Though the positive and negative effects of art competitions may ultimately be two sides of the same coin, this study presented the perspectives of both teachers and students in the hopes of encouraging a rethink and improvements.

Recommendations

As the popularity of the competitions may continue unabated, the following recommendations for schools, teachers, students, art competition organizers and other researchers are intended to lead to a more comprehensive development of art competitions.

For School

School administrators should return to the basics in education. They should also listen to and understand teachers' predicaments when faced with enrolment and administrative pressures. Schools will hopefully work with teachers to develop a direction for art education that is more beneficial for students. External factors such as enrolment pressure and school reputation will also not be allowed to interfere with the development of professional art education.

For Teachers

Teachers may be able to adopt the techniques used by the teachers interviewed in this study as a reference. For example, they can explain to students that art competitions should be about learning and development, not winning awards. Students that have lost interest in learning after entering competitions should also receive proper counseling. Use positive reinforcement to minimize the negative effects of art competition on art education as much as possible. Different student attitudes towards competitions should also be taken into account so they don't feel forced to compete or receive excessive instruction.

For Students

If art competitions can be treated as a part of art learning and there is not too much emphasis placed on the results, they may help students think about their own creative concepts and appreciate the true meaning of art competitions. Students should also communicate their view of art competitions to their teachers and parents through suitable channels to avoid being forced to take part.

Art Competition Organizers

During the study the interviewed teachers offered concrete suggestions such as defining clear judging criteria, adding more awards and more varied competition formats. All of these suggestions are well worth considering by organizers to make art competitions more meaningful. While art competitions are an important means of recognizing accomplishments in art education, this is not their primary purpose. If art competitions can take both the creative process and outcome (artwork) into account, it will be more in keeping with its original purpose of promoting art education.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study did not interview students, school administrators and parents. Future researchers may wish to incorporate the opinions or suggestions of students, school administrators and parents to gain a more complete picture of different stakeholders' perspectives and then use that to think about how

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to reduce the negative effects or problems of art competitions. Art studio teachers' perspective and actual involvement in art competitions need to be clarified as well.

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