

The Colors of Emotion: The Value and Role of Art Education in Children's Psychological Development

Feiran Li. Bing Wu*

College of Humanities, Arts and Education, Shandong Xiehe University, Shandong 250109, China

Email: lifeiran@sdxiehe.edu.cn

How to cite this paper: Li, F., & Wu, B. (2025). The Colors of Emotion: The Value and Role of Art Education in Children's Psychological Development. *International Journal of Social Science, Education and Humanities*, 1(2), 26-35. ISSN Print: 3104-4239; ISSN Online: 3104-4247. <https://doi.org/10.63313/IJSSEH.9014>

Published: 2025-10-16

Copyright © 2025 by author(s) and Erytis Publishing Limited.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Abstract

Emotional development is a core aspect of children's psychological growth, and art education, as an essential medium for emotional expression and aesthetic experience, holds unique value in promoting emotional regulation, empathy cultivation, and personality development. Based on the theoretical frameworks of developmental psychology and educational aesthetics, this study employs literature review and educational practice observation to explore the mechanisms and educational significance of art education in children's emotional development. Findings indicate that art education, through the process of "perception—expression—reflection," effectively stimulates emotional experience and self-awareness, facilitating the transition from external emotional expression to internal emotional understanding. Moreover, collaborative and open art learning environments contribute to the development of children's social-emotional skills, enhancing emotional resonance and value recognition. This study further emphasizes that, in curriculum design and instructional practice, teachers should integrate aesthetic experience with psychological support, constructing an art education system that combines creativity with emotional education, thereby achieving coordinated development of aesthetic education and emotional nurturing.

Keywords

art education; children's psychological development; emotional growth; aesthetic experience; educational psychology; emotional expression

Introduction

In contemporary educational systems, art education has long transcended the scope of technical training and artwork production, with its core value increasingly recognized in the deep nurturing of individual psychological and emotional growth. Childhood represents a critical stage for emotional and personality development; experiences of emotion, modes of emotional expression, and the formation of so-

cial-cognitive abilities during this period directly influence future psychological health and social adaptability. With the continued advancement of psychological and educational research, educators have come to understand that art education is not merely an aesthetic activity but also an important pathway for promoting psychological balance and emotional development in children.

The distinctiveness of art education lies in its use of figurative thinking and sensory experience, enabling children to express inner feelings through visual and symbolic language. In activities such as drawing, sculpture, or color experimentation, children can transform emotional energy into creative expression, thereby achieving both emotional release and psychological comfort. This process of “emotional externalization” not only alleviates psychological stress but also supports the formation of positive self-awareness and value experience. Consequently, the significance of art education extends beyond the classroom, serving as an essential psychological support system for children’s development [1].

However, in China’s basic education practice, art education is often marginalized, and its role in emotional education has not received sufficient attention. Some schools continue to focus primarily on “technical instruction,” neglecting the emotional education potential inherent in artistic activities. This imbalance results in children’s lack of genuine emotional engagement in art learning, impeding the formation of a complete aesthetic experience and a comprehensive path for psychological growth. Therefore, exploring the value and role of art education in children’s psychological development is not only conducive to deepening the connotation of aesthetic education but also has practical significance for implementing the fundamental educational goal of moral and character cultivation and promoting the improvement of quality-oriented education systems [2].

Based on this context, the present study, supported by developmental psychology and educational aesthetics, systematically analyzes the mechanisms through which art education contributes to emotional regulation, empathy cultivation, and personality construction from the perspective of children’s emotional growth. Through theoretical review and practical observation, this study aims to reveal the intrinsic logic by which art education promotes children’s psychological health and emotional maturity and to provide targeted educational strategies, offering both theoretical foundation and practical guidance for building an art education system that integrates aesthetic and psychological development.

I. Theoretical Foundations of Art Education and Children’s Emotional Development

(A) The Psychological Attributes of Art Education

Art education is not merely a form of aesthetic instruction; it is a psychological process centered on sensory experience. Unlike subjects such as language or mathematics, which primarily rely on logical thinking, art learning depends on the interac-

tive mechanisms of visual perception, emotional experience, and creative expression, activating children's latent psychological energy. Jung's (C. G. Jung) psychoanalytic theory suggests that artistic creation is a process of "externalizing the unconscious" and "self-integration," through which individuals can express inner emotional conflicts and psychological desires via symbolic imagery. For children, the use of drawing, modeling, and color is not only skill acquisition but also an essential psychological channel for exploring the self and understanding the world [3].

Educational psychology research indicates that art activities can effectively enhance children's emotional regulation and self-expression abilities. Piaget's (J. Piaget) cognitive development theory posits that children's thinking evolves from concrete to abstract, and the figurative thinking training embedded in art education aligns well with the perception-dominated cognitive stage of children [4]. Through artistic activities, children establish emotional connections between perception and expression, gradually forming a "cognition driven by emotion" thinking pattern. This process not only supports emotional stability but also lays the psychological foundation for healthy personality development.

(B) Psychological Mechanisms of Children's Emotional Development

Emotional development is a key dimension of children's psychological growth, encompassing emotional experience, emotional regulation, and social-emotional skills. Erikson's (E. Erikson) psychosocial development theory emphasizes that children, at different developmental stages, require positive psychological traits such as trust, autonomy, initiative, and diligence; the formation of these traits relies on emotional support and opportunities for expression. Art education provides an ideal symbolic medium for these psychological needs, allowing children to express emotions non-verbally during creative processes and enhancing emotional awareness and regulatory abilities [5].

Additionally, Vygotsky's (L. Vygotsky) sociocultural theory stresses that children's development is inseparable from social interaction and cultural context. The group creation and aesthetic exchange environment fostered by art education offers multi-layered emotional learning opportunities: children learn to understand others' emotional experiences through collaborative creation and appreciation, gradually developing empathy and a sense of social responsibility (Li, 2022). Therefore, children's emotional development is not an isolated psychological process but the result of the combined effects of cognition, social interaction, and aesthetic experience.

(C) The Integration Mechanism of Art Education and Emotional Development

From a psychological perspective, the process by which art education promotes children's emotional development can be conceptualized as a "perception—expression—reflection" cycle. First, artistic perception triggers emotional resonance, allowing children to experience emotional energy through color, line, and form. Second, artistic expression provides a safe channel for externalizing emotions, helping children symbolically process complex feelings such as anxiety, anger,

and fear. Finally, aesthetic reflection enables children to achieve emotional sublimation and personality integration through re-cognition of their works. This mechanism demonstrates the dual function of art education in children's psychological growth: it serves both as a medium for emotional education and as a driving force for psychological development [6].

Art education, with its unique sensory structure and aesthetic characteristics, serves as an essential psychological support for children's emotional development. It not only helps children form stable and positive emotional experiences but also subtly shapes psychological resilience and social-emotional abilities. Future research and practice in art education should place greater emphasis on its psychological connotations, constructing a theoretical system in which emotional education and aesthetic education mutually reinforce each other, thereby providing scientific support for children's mental health and personality development.

II. Pathways and Mechanisms of Art Education in Promoting Children's Emotional Growth

The impact of art education on children's emotional development is not the result of a single factor; rather, it arises from the interaction of cognitive, emotional, and social mechanisms. Through visual experience and creative activity, art education establishes an integrated learning system encompassing emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions, enabling children to perceive, express, and regulate emotions within artistic contexts. The main pathways are outlined below [7].

(A) Emotional Arousal through Aesthetic Experience

Aesthetic experience serves as the starting point for children's emotional growth. Art education, using sensory materials as a medium, stimulates children's emotional responses to color, imagery, and form. Studies show that children naturally experience positive emotions such as pleasure, surprise, and curiosity when observing or creating artworks. This perception-driven emotional experience enhances their sensitivity to external stimuli and their ability to recognize emotions.

In classroom settings, exposure to different artistic styles and color combinations activates children's emotional systems, triggering the mapping and projection of their own emotions. For example, warm colors can evoke feelings of safety and joy, while cool tones may induce tranquility or reflective states. With teacher guidance, children learn to transform these subjective emotional experiences into conscious emotional cognition, thereby improving emotional awareness and psychological expression. Art education thus acts as a "trigger point" for emotional education, laying the psychological foundation for subsequent emotional expression and reflection.

(B) Emotional Regulation through Artistic Expression

Artistic expression is the core stage of children's emotional growth. In activities such as drawing, sculpture, or collage, children use lines, composition, and color choices to express latent emotional conflicts and psychological needs. Psychological re-

search indicates that artistic creation functions similarly to projection and emotional release. Children often struggle to verbally articulate complex emotions, whereas artistic media provide a nonverbal “psychological outlet,” helping them release anxiety, reduce stress, and restore psychological balance.

Moreover, the process of artistic expression is constructive. As children externalize their internal experiences into visual forms, they continuously adjust composition and color relationships, achieving self-reflection and emotional reorganization. Positive feedback from teachers and peer interactions further reinforces these experiences, aiding the development of self-regulatory mechanisms for emotion. This “create—feedback—recreate” cycle constitutes the intrinsic motivational mechanism through which art education fosters emotional growth [8].

(C) Social-Emotional Development through Artistic Interaction

Children’s emotional growth extends beyond internal emotional regulation to include emotional recognition and empathy in social contexts. Art education, through collaborative learning and artistic exchange, creates a socially shared emotional environment. When children jointly complete projects or participate in exhibitions, they learn to understand others’ emotional experiences, gradually developing empathy and cooperative awareness.

Group art activities promote the socialization of emotion, allowing children to experience understanding and acceptance, which contributes to healthy interpersonal patterns, social belonging, and value recognition. The emphasis on respecting differences and diverse expressions in art education also helps children cultivate open and inclusive emotional attitudes in multicultural contexts.

(D) Teacher Emotional Guidance as a Support Mechanism

Teacher emotional guidance is a key factor influencing children’s emotional development in art education. Teachers serve not only as knowledge transmitters but also as facilitators of emotional learning. Gentle tone, positive feedback, and empathetic communication enhance students’ sense of safety and trust. By attending to emotional imagery in student work, teachers can guide the expression of latent emotions, promoting self-awareness and adaptive emotional adjustment [9].

Teachers can intentionally incorporate emotional themes into lesson design, such as “My Day,” “My Favorite Color,” or “My Family,” guiding students to transform personal life experiences into artistic content. In this way, the classroom becomes a space that integrates psychological experience and emotional education, creating a “teaching—psychological—emotional” interactive ecosystem that provides continuous support for children’s emotional growth.

III. Educational Practice and Implications of Art Education in Promoting Children’s Emotional Growth

Art education’s role in children’s emotional development is not limited to theoretical or psychological mechanisms; it requires validation and deepening through educa-

tional practice. Educational practice provides a real context in which theoretical value manifests and where emotional growth occurs. By systematically analyzing teaching content, classroom interactions, assessment methods, and learning environments, the practical pathways and pedagogical implications of art education for children's emotional development can be further elucidated.

(A) Emotion-Oriented Curriculum Design

Emotion-oriented curriculum content is the prerequisite for art education to promote emotional growth. Traditional art teaching often emphasizes technical skills and imitation of works, neglecting students' emotional experiences and individual differences. Current curriculum reforms should prioritize "emotional experience" as the core, emphasizing life experiences and guiding children to use personal emotions as the theme of creation.

Curriculum themes may revolve around emotional imagery such as "A Happy Day," "Someone I Miss," or "My Secret Garden," allowing students to freely express emotions and psychological states through creation. Teachers can stimulate children's emotional associations and psychological resonance through questions, dialogues, and sharing of artworks, making art activities a process of emotional expression and psychological adjustment. Emotion-oriented curriculum design can enhance student engagement, psychological satisfaction, and promote positive emotional experiences and self-cognitive growth [10].

(B) Experiential Teaching and Art Therapy Integration

Experiential teaching is a crucial pathway for promoting children's emotional growth. Art classrooms should move beyond "product-oriented" instruction and emphasize process-oriented experiences and emotional participation. Through gamified learning, sensory exploration, and collaborative creation, children can achieve emotional release and psychological construction in a free and joyful environment.

In recent years, the concept of "art therapy" has been increasingly applied in educational settings. Teachers can incorporate art-therapeutic thinking into classroom activities, focusing on nonjudgmental emotional expression. For example, activities such as "Color Mood Cards," "Music Painting," and "Dream Re-creation" encourage students to express inner feelings through colors and imagery. This approach not only increases creative freedom but also helps children establish psychological safety and emotional trust. When art education is integrated with psychological support, its emotional nurturing function is maximized.

(C) Creating a Multi-Dimensional Interactive Classroom Atmosphere

A conducive classroom atmosphere is essential for children's emotional growth. Open, inclusive, and interactive learning environments facilitate emotional resonance and social-emotional learning among children. Teachers should encourage free expression of ideas, respect diverse artistic approaches and aesthetic preferences, and enhance participation and belonging through group work, exhibitions,

and peer evaluations.

Teacher emotional attitudes play a key role in this process. Positive and gentle teacher behaviors influence students via emotional transmission mechanisms, fostering a sense of psychological safety. Encouraging language, smiling responses, and appropriate body language can reduce children's emotional defenses, promoting open expression of emotions and ideas. Consequently, the art classroom becomes a social arena for children to learn to understand, respect, and express emotions [11].

(D) Multi-Dimensional and Developmental Emotional Assessment

Scientific evaluation mechanisms directly impact children's emotional experience and psychological growth. Traditional art teaching often overemphasizes "technical standards," neglecting emotional investment and psychological development. Educational practice should shift toward integrating "developmental assessment" with "emotional assessment," using multi-dimensional methods such as process observation, emotional expression records, and student self-narratives to comprehensively reflect children's psychological development trajectories.

Teachers should focus on students' emotional responses, thematic content, and self-expression throughout the creative process, rather than merely judging the quality of the artwork. Encouraging feedback and individualized guidance help children recognize the relationship between emotion and artistic expression, enhancing self-efficacy and a sense of accomplishment. An assessment system centered on emotional growth effectively guides students' positive psychological expectations, promoting sustained emotional and personality development [12].

(E) Pedagogical Implications

Educational practice suggests three major implications of art education for children's emotional growth:

1. Shift from "skill-oriented teaching" to "mindful education," leveraging art's psychological regulation function to create safe spaces for emotional development.
2. Establish a coordinated "aesthetic education—psychological education—moral education" framework, integrating emotional education into the overall school curriculum to harmonize aesthetic and psychological development.
3. Teachers should participate as both researchers and facilitators, attending to students' emotional feedback and psychological changes, constructing a student-centered teaching ecosystem.

These implications provide practical guidance for art education in primary and secondary schools and support theoretical and applied research on integrating educational psychology and aesthetic education.

IV. Conclusion and Educational Recommendations

(A) Conclusion

Art education serves as a critical pathway for children's emotional development, providing irreplaceable emotional nourishment and personality shaping functions.

Analysis of theoretical foundations, mechanisms, and educational practice reveals that art education is not only a process for cultivating aesthetic competence but also a core domain for children's emotional cognition, psychological regulation, and social-emotional development.

First, art education uses visual experience as a medium, activating children's emotional perception systems to elicit positive emotional arousal. Second, through artistic expression and creation, children externalize latent emotions, achieving psychological self-adjustment and integration. Third, group art activities and teacher-student interactions provide opportunities for social-emotional learning, fostering empathy, belonging, and value recognition. The inherent logic of art education's promotion of emotional growth lies in the systematic pathway of "aesthetic experience—artistic expression—social interaction," achieving the organic unity of emotional experience, psychological reflection, and personality development. This highlights that art education should be recognized as an essential component of emotional and psychological education rather than a supplementary cultural course.

(B) Educational Recommendations

1. Strengthen Emotion-Oriented Curriculum Design: Develop art curricula emphasizing life experiences and psychological themes, using thematic creation, narrative painting, and perceptual exploration to foster emotional experience, expression, and self-understanding.
2. Enhance Teacher Emotional Competence: Incorporate educational psychology and art-therapy training into professional development, improving teachers' emotional recognition, empathetic communication, and emotional guidance skills.
3. Optimize Assessment Systems: Establish multi-dimensional assessment frameworks centered on emotional experience, creative thinking, and psychological growth, using observations, self-reports, and interviews to support developmental outcomes.
4. Integrate Art Education and Mental Health Education: Promote interdisciplinary collaboration through "art + psychology" and "art + counseling" models, combining aesthetic experiences with psychological adjustment to provide sustained emotional support.
5. Strengthen Policy Support and Social Resources: Educational authorities should enhance policy prioritization, funding, and teacher resources for art education while encouraging family and community participation to build a comprehensive, supportive emotional growth environment.

(C) Research Outlook

Although current studies have acknowledged the positive effects of art education on children's emotional growth, further theoretical and practical development is needed. Future research may focus on:

1. Developing empirical emotional growth assessment systems: Quantifying children's emotional changes, expression, and social-emotional skills using psychomet-

ric tools and physiological data (e.g., facial expression recognition, EEG).

2.Exploring cultural differences in art education’s emotional function: Comparative studies across urban-rural, regional, and cross-cultural contexts to establish a localized yet internationally informed theoretical framework.

3.Investigating digital media art in emotional cultivation: Assessing the potential of AI, virtual reality, and interactive digital art to enhance immersive emotional experiences and safe emotional expression.

4.Deepening interdisciplinary integration of art and mental health education: Building “art—psychology—education” models to study emotion regulation mechanisms and intervention effects in school mental health systems.

5.Conducting action research on teacher emotional practice: Longitudinal studies analyzing teacher emotional guidance effectiveness and the interaction between teacher emotions and student emotional development.

6.Expanding research on family and community involvement: Examining parental art literacy, family emotional atmosphere, and community art resources in fostering children’s emotional development, constructing multi-dimensional emotional support networks.

Future research should integrate interdisciplinary approaches, technological innovation, and cultural comparison, deepening understanding of the relationship between art education and children’s emotional growth across psychological, pedagogical, and social dimensions. Sustained interaction between theory and practice is essential for fully realizing the emotional value of art education and providing robust support for the integration of mental health education and aesthetic education in contemporary childhood development.

References

- [1] Zhou, K. (2022). The value of emotion in ecological art education. *Art Education Research*, (08), 45–48.
- [2] Primary school art color teaching and emotional cultivation. (2023). *Primary Education Research*, 2023(09), 30–34.
- [3] Fang, Z. (2018). Preliminary exploration of life-oriented early childhood art education guided by the Guidelines for Learning and Development of 3–6-Year-Old Children. *Vocational Education*, (09), 56–59.
- [4] Wei, Y. (2020). Text analysis of aesthetic emotion representation in preschool children’s art works (Master’s thesis). CNKI.
- [5] Chu, N. (2021). Strategies for cultivating students’ color perception in primary school art teaching. *Journal of Art and Education Research*, 12(4), 22–27.
- [6] Zhao, L. (2023). Construction of intelligent art education evaluation platform and experimental classroom. *Higher Education & Educational Technology Journal*, 2023.
- [7] Cui, Y., & colleagues. (2022). The research focus and development trend of art therapy in education: A bibliometric analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 1002504.
- [8] Xing, W. (2024). Comparative analysis of art therapy in education: China vs. other countries. *Education & Art Therapy Reviews*.
- [9] Zhou, T. (2023). The impact of group art activities on children’s social-emotional development. *Contemporary Education Research Journal*, 2023(5), 78–85.

- [10] National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). (2019). How arts education supports social-emotional development: A theory of action.
- [11] Research on creativity and emotional development of preschool children (Collection of empirical studies). Representative studies on emotional expression and psychological construction in early childhood art activities.
- [12] Art education as a healing method helps sensitive adolescents... (2024). Journal of Education and Practice. "Art Education as a Healing Method Helps Sensitive Adolescents..." (2024). Journal of Education and Practice.