

Equality in Art Education and the Blind Students in Thailand.*

ความเสมอภาคและศิลปศึกษาแก้บัณฑิตศึกษาในประเทศไทย

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Abstract

Art education is considered essential for learning and developing skills in various fields, but, for blind students, it is hard to teach them and have them practice. In consequence, they have to experience difficulty and neglect in learning art, so art education for the blinds is typically found ineffective. Such limitations are generally derived from their visual impairment, as visual arts rely heavily on learners' vision. Alternatively, with enhanced teaching media, appropriate teaching plans for joined class, and learners' positive attitude towards learning, it is possible to strengthen society and provide educational opportunity for students with visual impairment and the other physical disability. As a result, the greater opportunity allows us to build up equity and equality in learning.

To examine, this project comprised of both qualitative and quantitative research, as the data was collected from an analysis and interpretation of the drawing made by a sample of students, including blind students and nearly blind students in upper-secondary level, and the information obtained from questionnaires surveying students' satisfaction level. According to the result, it is obvious that the sample was satisfied with their visual arts learning at excellent level. Moreover, the blind students felt that they received opportunity and equality in learning and were delighted when learning visual arts.

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บทคัดย่อ

ศิลปศึกษาเป็นวิชาที่มีความสำคัญต่อการเรียนรู้และพัฒนาการในด้านต่างๆ แต่นักเรียนตาบอดกลับไม่ได้เรียนวิชาทัศนศิลป์อย่างเต็มที่หรือถูกกล่าวเลย ยกตัวอย่างเช่น ให้เข้าใจและปฏิบัติได้ด้วยตนเอง เนื่องจากวิชาทัศนศิลป์ตั้งอยู่บนพื้นฐานของการมองเห็น อย่างไรก็ตาม หากมีการพัฒนาสื่อการเรียนรู้ให้มีมากขึ้น การสร้างแผนการสอนที่เหมาะสมต่อการเรียนร่วม และการมีทัศนคติที่ดีต่อการเรียนรู้ของนักเรียนตาบอด สิ่งเหล่านี้จะช่วยเสริมสร้างความเข้มแข็งให้สังคม การให้โอกาสทางด้านการศึกษาแก่นักเรียนตาบอดและคนพิการ อันก่อให้เกิดความเท่าเทียมและความเสมอภาค

โครงการนี้เป็นทั้งงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพโดยการวิเคราะห์และตีความจากภาพรวมของกลุ่มตัวอย่างซึ่งเป็นนักเรียนทั้งตาบอดสนิทและตาบอดเลือนราง ระดับมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลาย โดยเรียนร่วมกับนักเรียนปกติ และเชิงปริมาณโดยเก็บข้อมูลจากแบบสอบถามความพึงพอใจ จากการศึกษาพบว่า กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ได้เรียนร่วมมีความพึงพอใจในการเรียนวิชาทัศนศิลป์ในระดับดีมาก นักเรียนตาบอดรู้สึกว่าตนเองได้รับโอกาสและความเสมอภาคทางการศึกษา มีความสุขที่ได้เรียนวิชาทัศนศิลป์

คำสำคัญ: ศิลปศึกษา / ความเสมอภาค / คนตาบอด

Introduction

To administer art education in visual arts, it requires 4 major fields including art history, aesthetics, art criticism, and studio art (Supachai Singyabut, 2010: 7). Visual arts are vision-based learning; therefore, it is seen struggling for blind students in terms of content input and practice. Consequently, such limitations lead to the neglect of art education instructors, for it is difficult to teach blind students, and there is not particularly proper teaching approach for them. To be precise, students with visual impairment have to learn art from inflexible teaching approaches and plans, which are not different from the ones normal students learn, without any concerted customization, and it result in lacking of equity, equality, and educational opportunity.

This research has been conducted based on the attempt to offer blind students a springboard so that they can attain the knowledge, express their opinion, and expose their imagination in the creatively positive ways. Additionally, the research was projected to delight and satisfy the blind students when learning visual arts in both theoretical and practical parts. Apart from that, the research has assembled and modernized the course to cover all four areas in art education by creating the course and planning the lesson for the blind students. Accordingly, the designed course and plan have been expected to serve as a standardized

pattern, in accordance with The Basic Education Curriculum B.E. 2551 directed by the Ministry of Education, for joined classes and every school that has blind students.

In light of blind students, there has been continuous development and invention in the customization of classroom for them; conversely, most of the development is not specifically oriented to art education. Besides that, the developed teaching media and teaching techniques are not appropriately designed for profoundly enhancing blind students' theoretical art learning. To emphasize, if there are the proper teaching media and teaching techniques for art education of blind students, it is possible to originate development in terms of emotional growth, intellectual growth, physical growth, perceptual growth, social growth, aesthetic growth, and creativity growth (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987: 60-70; Wirun Tangcharoen, 1996: 69-75)

According to the interview of blind students and their teachers, it is revealed that the currently used activities were not indeed supportive of blind students' learning development as they were accomplished merely as recreational activities. In addition, there is evidence collaborating the notion that there is lack of research and advancement in the field of art education for blind students, and this leads to students' boredom and discouragement in participating the activities. In consequence, such condition obstructs learners from being satisfied with their learning and being well developed in each area required from art education learners.

In this study, effort was made in order to examine whether the sample can express their thought, attitude, and imagination creatively during the class, and whether the activities can contribute happiness and satisfaction in learning both theoretical and studio art to the students. The result was reflected by the extent to which the sample has developed.

Methodology

This research is qualitative and quantitative research, comprised of case study and applied research, based on the information collected from note, interview, observation, sound records, photos, videos, evaluation forms, drawing tests of a sample and those related to this study.

In this study, the volunteers, recruited by self-selecting sampling, included both blind and nearly-blind students in the upper-secondary level at Khon Kaen School for the Blinds. During the manipulation, the volunteers were closely and carefully ministered by school staff.

The questionnaires utilized in this study aimed to survey satisfaction and happiness levels of the participants when attending the activities with 5-level interval scale (Narong Phopruegsanun, 2008: 212-213). The scaling bands of satisfaction and happiness levels were between 5 to 1 which referred to most satisfied or happiest (5) , very satisfied or very happy (4) , satisfied or happy (3), somewhat satisfied or somewhat happy (2), and least satisfied or least happy (1) respectively. However, the sample size was considerably small, so the quantitative analysis of the collected data was based on a measure of central tendency (mean) and a percentage (Kullaya Wanichbuncha, 2010: 46-54).

During the stage of taking the learning media and lesson plan into the class, the classroom context of visual arts learning and activity was set up. There were 3 groups of volunteers, including 7 blind students, 4 nearly blind students, and 8 normal students, in which there were 19 students in total. All of them have joined the same class as if it was a visual arts classroom at their school. With Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, every participant decided to be included in this study by self-volunteering.

Table 1: The qualification of upper-secondary-level volunteering students in joined class

Name (Aliases)	Age (years old)	Level (Mattayom)	Details (visual condition and school)
Student A	20	6	Blind since birth, School D
Student B	20	6	Blind since birth, School C
Student C	17	5	Blind since birth, School A
Student D	17	5	Blind since birth, School C
Student E	16	4	Blind since birth, School C
Student F	20	4	Blind since birth (with light perception), School D
Student G	18	4	Blind since birth (with light perception), School D
Student H	17	6	Nearly blind since birth, School A
Student I	16	5	Nearly blind since birth, School C
Student J	17	5	Nearly blind since birth, School D
Student K	16	5	Nearly blind since birth, School C
Student L	16	5	Normal vision, School A
Student M	16	5	Normal vision, School A

Name (Aliases)	Age (years old)	Level (Mattayom)	Details (visual condition and school)
Student N	16	5	Normal vision, School A
Student O	16	5	Normal vision, School A
Student P	17	5	Normal vision, School B
Student Q	17	5	Normal vision, School B
Student R	17	5	Normal vision, School B
Student S	15	4	Normal vision, School B

Result

In this research, the activities, which took 3 hours each, were developed based on the lesson plan covering 4 areas including art history, aesthetics, art criticism, and studio art, and the staff providing ministration included a main instructor, an assistant instructor, and 2 sitters facilitating the activities. Since the experimental period, the plan has been revised and developed in order to concisely conceptualize the content and to add more interesting activities. Moreover, the volunteers learnt art as is it was the real joined class.

Table 2: The learning outcome contributed by the learning media for art history

<i>Model</i>	<i>Result obtained from the volunteers</i>
	Name: Venus of Willendorf The volunteers perceived the figure of a fat lady representing fruitfulness during the prehistoric ages.
	Name: Venus de Milo The volunteers easily perceived and understood the details of a woman figurine because it was similar to the real ratio of human figure.
	Name: Reclining Woman The volunteers perceived history of modern art from the example provided with the content by the instructor.
	Name: Cleopatra VII The volunteers perceived the feature of the model, imitating the relief on the wall of temple at Dandera in Egypt. On the relief, there were the standing man and woman that were Caesaron, the son of Julius Caesar, and Cleopatra VII respectively.

Model	Result obtained from the volunteers
	Name: Les Demoiselles d' Avignon Although, the volunteers were not able to perceive the details of this media, they managed to understand the content provided by the instructor.
	Name: Arch of Constantine When receiving the input about history from the instructor, the volunteers were able to understand the content as the shape was not too complex.
	Name: The Starry Night It is the bizarre-shaped tree with the spiral linear cloud above.
	Name: Sleep It is a human face with a balloon-like body.

Additionally, after learning art criticism, some of the volunteers were interested in touching the low relief and drawing picture based on their sense of touching.



Figure 1: Learning media for art history and art criticism



Figure 2: Learning media for aesthetics through touching and smelling

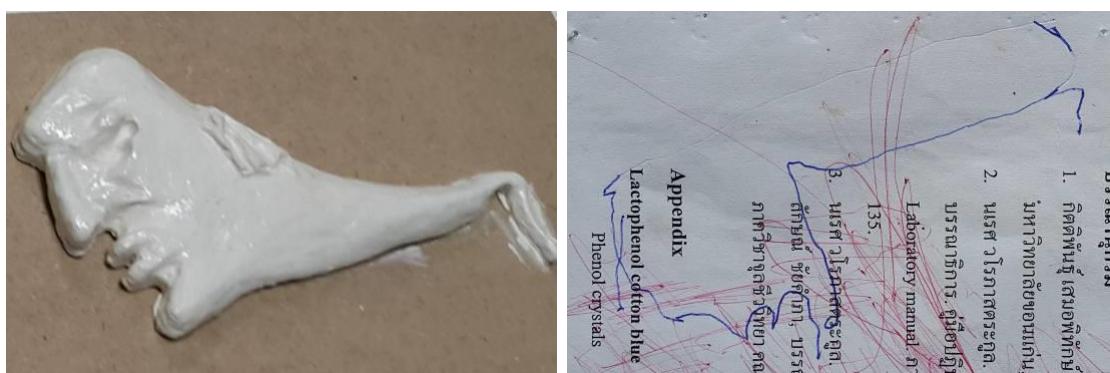


Figure 3: Student C's doodle after touching the low relief "Sleep"

Table 3: Volunteers' drawings responding to instrumental song

<i>Drawing</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Student A, who has been blind since birth, drew a sinuous line to the music, aesthetically expressing his/her feeling.
	Student B, who has been blind since birth, vertically and horizontally drew a straight line, somewhat showing his/her lack of confidence.

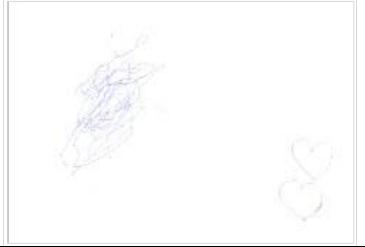
	Student C, who has been blind since birth, drew a long winding line with some discontinuation of the line in accordance with the rhythm of the music.
	Student D, who has been blind since birth, drew a winding line tufting at the right of the paper and ended with a heart-shaped line conveying a shape to the others.
	Student E, who has been blind since birth, drew a continuous repetitive line in the horizontal direction by attempting to control the movement of his/her hand.
	Student F, who has been blind since birth (with light reception), drew a looping line with the noticeable attempt to write Thai alphabet to convince the others.

Table 4: The collaborative paintings under the topic “When My Dream Has Gone Freak”

<i>Painting (Pair work)</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Student A, M, and N collaboratively drew faces of 3 sleeping people dreaming and added balloons showing dreams above each one.
	Student C and O divided the paper into 2 sides, left and right, in order to distinguish their dream in which one was about the beloved man, and the other was about a terrifying story respectively.

	Student E and Q collaborative drew a dream combining a spider, a ghost, and another planet.
	Student F and L divided the paper into 2 side, left and right, and drew 2 separated dreams. One was about a snake carrying a camera, and other was named “Once upon a Time” respectively.
	Student G and S collaboratively drew a picture and named it “We Dream”.
	Student H and P collaboratively drew a dream about a scenario under the sea in which there were a sinking ship, different sea creatures, and a ghost.
	Student K and R collaboratively drew a picture combining varieties of dream.

Concerning aesthetics, the instructor started the lesson with the explanation of beauty by showing contrasting or conflicting pairs of objects or ideas. The pairs, such as beauty and ugliness, goodness and badness, smoothness and roughness, and scent and stink, were presented through a set of papers which was the same set of learning media used in the experimental stage. Coming with different smells and textures, the papers were supplementary media effectively enhancing the introductory part of the class. The instructor assigned the students to draw a line on their paper with a pen while listening to an instrumental song. When drawing, they were not allowed to look at their paper and raise their pens from the papers before the song ended.

Table 5: The result from the questionnaires showing the mean score of satisfaction

<i>Satisfaction</i>	<i>Score (out of 5)</i>
In terms of instructor	
Clearly explained and easy-to-follow activities	4.58 
Provided advice, suggestion, and opportunity to ask	4.79 
Encouragement for keeping students focused and enthusiastic about learning	4.58 
In terms of content	
The content and experience provided as the overview of the activities	4.32 
Art history learning	4.05 
Drawing, painting, and sculpture practice	4.79 
In terms of learning	
Knowledge and experience attained from the activities of art history	4.16 
Knowledge and experience attained from the activities of aesthetics	4.11 
Knowledge and experience attained from the activities of art criticism	4.05 
Knowledge and experience attained from the activities of studio art	4.63 
In terms of the reflection on learning	
Equality and equity	4.63 
Participation	4.89 
In terms of the benefit from the learning media	
Understanding of the content presented by the media	4.47 
Patterns of the media utilized in learning	4.68 

According to the Table 4, the drawing made by pairs of volunteers revealed the narrated story as a result of volunteers' collaboration in expressing their opinion. Although the actual drawing was done solely by the normal students, the idea and content was from the creativity of both the blind and the normal students. Therefore, this collaboration equally enhanced the opportunity to express one's self in terms of art.

According to the result obtained from the questionnaires, the learning media, the teaching technique, and the lesson plan are capable of enhancing art education in the area of visual arts for the blind students. Indeed, they are able to generate development and growth in various points, in terms of art education, including knowledge, experience, imagination, and satisfaction. The result is shown in the Table 5.

Considering pairing the blind students with the normal students, it facilitated the activities effectually. In spite of some periodical call for additional explanation closely provided by the instructor, the instructor managed to continue the class smoothly.

On the one hand, the blind students, who are able to perceive light but unable to see picture, have the similar characteristics with the totally blind students, so they need the specific media for learning. On the other hand, the nearly blind students can share the learning media with the normal students, as they are able to see the picture. The normal students needed to provide assistance to their blind classmates by explaining the input after listening to the instructor. From the interview, providing help during the activities had the normal students review the content and recheck their understanding; nevertheless, they had to learn with the slower pace than usual. However, art education lesson planning was oriented to the learning processes along with the practice of art. Another, the interaction among the students is considered one of the purposes of art education activities which did not solely focus on the outcome. In other words, the activities have attempted to generate the opportunity in learning how to help, understand, and live with one another delightfully.

Table 6: The result from the questionnaires showing the mean score of happiness

<i>Happiness in Learning</i>	<i>Score (out of 5)</i>	
Excitement and delight in the upcoming art education class	4.11	😊
Enjoyment in learning art	4.47	😊
Pleasantness during learning art	4.53	😊
Attention in art education	4.05	😊
Priority over the content taught by the instructor	4.42	😊
Fondness for the activities	4.37	😊
Inquiry and opinion expressed during the class	4.32	😊
Satisfaction in team-based activities	4.68	😊
Discussion and opinion exchange among classmates	4.74	😊
Attention in learning theoretical art	4.00	😊
Eagerness in accomplishing the activities of studio art	4.37	😊
Satisfaction in the learning outcome	4.47	😊
Emotion toward equality and equity	4.58	😊
Happiness in learning art history	4.32	😊
Happiness in learning aesthetics	4.26	😊

<i>Happiness in Learning</i>	<i>Score (out of 5)</i>	
Happiness in learning art criticism	3.84	
Happiness in learning theoretical art	4.47	
Happiness in learning studio art	4.63	

Conclusion

As reported in the result obtained from the questionnaires, the fully provided activities of visual arts generated equality and equity for the blind students. Specifically, they had more educational opportunity allowing them to have more access to the content and lesson of art education, which made art education no longer a subject relying solely on vision. In consequence, with the prioritized activities for joined class, and the blind students gained the greater role and importance in learning, and this inspired them and fulfilled their happiness and satisfaction. Even though some of the work produced by the students was not absolutely complete, it could reflect their thought, emotion, and feeling effectively. Furthermore, those pieces of work were able to truly communicate and express themselves as much as were those of the normal students.

In addition, the result of this study is consistent with the theory of the blinds according to the hypothesis. Precisely, there was adjustment of the blind students in order to solve their problems about learning from the teaching media and about their progress in making their artwork. Such adjustment occurred through metaphor such as explaining in terms of the comparison, exemplifying to give more details, or using tangible things in explaining the intangible ones. As a result of their success in creating pieces of work and to communicating with the others, they were satisfied with the activities, and this led to happiness, positive attitude encouraging them to participate more in art education activities, and equality and equity. These three factors initiated development, which is needed in art education, including emotional growth, intellectual growth, physical growth, perceptual growth, social growth, aesthetic growth, and creativity growth. According to Niyomthum (Sriya Niyomthum, 2007: 140), “the visual arts activities for the blinds are constructive in developing students’ skills, stimulating students’ awareness, and building the context suitable for creating artwork. With these activities, students are allowed to express themselves by playing, touching, and practicing; these resources are considered essential in promoting their learning individually. Similarly, the cheerfully relaxingly expressed artwork serves in the same way as art therapy, for

it develops students' emotion to be suitable for the stage of being satisfied". Thus, such approaches have saturated the theory of studio art which relies exclusively on vision.

All in all, it is possible to draw a conclusion that once both blind and nearly blind students were able to express their opinion and attitude and to possess the creatively positive imagination, the happiness and satisfaction in learning visual arts were formed. Moreover, the obtained data is in good agreement with the theory of art called "art as experience", proposed by John Dewey, saying that "experience as experience; experience is art" (Rader, 1960: 170).

So far, the important implementation of the result is that the integration of subjects and the development of the educational system can collaboratively contribute a model promoting our nation to be one of the leading countries providing equal opportunity and equity for blind students. These students need the specific treatment from educational institutions both in and out of the school system in terms of basic education.

The research findings obtained from the interviews and the observations revealed that the activity that the blind students did during attending the art class was sitting in the back of the classroom since most of the teaching materials were slides: Power Point. When class was over, the instructors would assign the students to do reports. This made the blind students feel alienated from the group as they cannot discuss with the classmates in the same topic. Finally, they felt lonely.

Generally, most blind students try to help themselves and often do not ask for help from others. They do not want to burden anyone, for they think that everyone has his or her own burden. So, the blind students do not need pity. Understanding is what they want. They also want everyone to recognize them as equal to everyone in society. But, they only have limitations that differ from other.

Recommendations

The research results indicated the factors contributing to the success of the integration of the blind students with the normal students in the visual arts class as follows.

- 1) A variety of learning materials that are consistent with the lesson plan is needed.
- 2) The lesson plan with the content and the instructional process facilitating the class with the integration of the blind students and the normal students should be constructed.

3) Learning activities appropriate for students with visual impairment, such as having a buddy and a teacher assistant should be organized when practicing visual arts so that blind students can participate in the activities.

4) Learning management guidelines for teachers teaching visual arts should be prepared in order to allow the teachers to understand and be able to organize activities in the classroom and handle the classroom with the integration of blind students and normal students. These include the lesson plan of both theory and practice of arts for blind students, teaching techniques and methods for creating learning materials and the ways to use art learning materials to integrate arts with other subjects for blind students in the upper-secondary level.

5) Students should be assigned with the right assignments and homework. Grading must be flexible, and the scoring of blind students and normal students must also be separated. Appropriate criteria for each activity should be employed. This is not applied only to blind students, but also students with other disabilities.

6) Providing education and learning opportunities for the blind is the way to build social dimension for true equality and equity, resulting in universal design in arts.

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