Theoretical Foundations of Contextual Teaching for the Cultivation of Subject Core Competencies of Fine Arts (SCCFA)

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s, many countries have begun to emphasize the cultivation of core competencies. China's education system also entered an era oriented toward core competencies in 2016. Regarding strategies for developing subject core competencies of fine arts (SCCFA), many scholars believe that contextual teaching, integrated with values, knowledge, and methods, is conducive to fostering SCCFA. However, no systematic review or discussion of this cultivation strategy has yet been conducted based on existing theories. This paper aims to integrate relevant theories to outline a framework for this cultivation strategy and establish its theoretical foundation. First, it reviews and synthesizes existing scholars' proposed effective strategies for developing SCCFA: employing contextual teaching, invoking and supplementing necessary values, knowledge, and methods, using values as motivation, and applying knowledge and methods to solve contextual problems, thereby advancing SCCFA. In this process, value, knowledge, method, and contextual teaching all contribute to SCCFA development. Moreover, contextual teaching facilitates the transformation of value, knowledge, and method into SCCFA. A training framework for SCCFA was constructed based on the articulated strategies for cultivating SCCFA. This framework was further elaborated upon in conjunction with relevant theoretical foundations. Applying SCCFA as instructional objectives in art education corresponds to the levels of applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating within Bloom's taxonomy. Therefore, setting SCCFA as a relatively advanced learning goal in art instruction is essential. Drawing on Bruner's cognitive development theory and the discipline-based art education influenced by it, this study demonstrates that the five components of SCCFA visual literacy, aesthetic judgment, cultural understanding, artistic expression, and creative practice encompass the fundamental structure of the art discipline, validating the rationale for establishing SCCFA. Finally, integrating Constructivism learning theory and its branch, sociocultural theory, along with the concepts and expressions of contextual teaching and learning a pedagogical approach grounded in Constructivism this discussion demonstrates that the value of art & design, art & design knowledge, and art & design methods collectively promote the cultivation of SCCFA. Contextual teaching promotes the development of SCCFA. Contextual teaching has a mediating effect on the relationship between the value of art and design, art and design knowledge, art and design methods, and SCCFA. Overall, the strategies proposed by scholars for cultivating SCCFA align with relevant theories. Future empirical research is needed to validate the validity of this SCCFA cultivation framework.

Key words: subject core competencies of fine arts; fine art education; contextual teaching

INTRODUCTION

In 1997, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development defined core competencies as follows: "A competence is more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context." Many countries, particularly developed nations, have placed significant emphasis on this concept and initiated corresponding reforms (Xiaobin, 2022). Since the late 1990s, Western countries have successively introduced the concepts of "key competences" and "key skills." While national formulations of core competencies vary,

they fundamentally encompass the integrated demonstration of students' knowledge, skills, emotions, attitudes, values, and other requirements. Specifically, they refer to learning abilities, character and attitudes, and the capacity to apply tools to solve practical problems (Qiong, 2024).

China released the core competencies and values for Chinese students' development in 2016 (Jiansheng, 2024). In 2017, Yin Shaochun et al. proposed the subject core competencies of fine arts (SCCFA): visual literacy, artistic expression, aesthetic judgment, creative practice, and cultural understanding. These correspond to visual literacy, artistic expression, aesthetic judgment, creative practice, and cultural understanding (Guangjian et al., 2022). Since then, the development of fine arts programs in Chinese higher normal institutions has entered a new era of curriculum reform centered on core competencies (Minzi, 2022). SCCFA represents not only the educational objectives of foundational art education but also the training goals for fine arts education majors in higher normal institutions competencies all students should possess (Feifei, 2022). However, traditional teaching models and assessment methods struggle to meet the demands of cultivating these core competencies in art education students. Institutions must comprehensively review and optimize their training strategies to enhance these competencies (Jingwen & Juan, 2025).

How to effectively integrate SCCFA principles into relevant curricula, transforming classrooms from "knowledge centered" to "competency centered" approaches, represents a critical research topic in contemporary art education (Hongli, 2022). Current art teaching reforms under the core competencies framework are in their nascent stages, with proposed pedagogical approaches and schemes largely undergoing validation and pilot testing (Xi'an & Meng, 2023).

Many Chinese scholars now advocate that cultivating SCCFA should actively incorporate authentic task based learning, enabling students to apply acquired knowledge and skills in real life contexts (Hongda, 2024). However, existing research has not systematically discussed the cultivation strategy of integrating value, knowledge, and method through contextual teaching to foster SCCFA in conjunction with relevant theories. This paper will organize the framework of this cultivation strategy based on relevant theories and establish its theoretical foundation.

Description of SCCFA Cultivation Strategy

Scholars define core competencies as the integrated qualities demonstrated by individuals when analyzing situations, posing questions, solving problems, and communicating outcomes. These qualities emerge from a dynamic system encompassing: Inter-disciplinary concepts, thinking patterns, and inquiry skills cultivated through specific learning approaches; Structured interdisciplinary knowledge and skills; World views, perspectives on life, and values; All applied to navigate complex, uncertain real world environments (Xiangdong, 2017). Identifying problems within contextual scenarios and applying knowledge and skills to resolve them. The value attitudes, thinking methods, behavioral characteristics, and integrated problem solving states demonstrated by students during this process constitute "subject core competencies" (Shaochun, 2017). Thus, core competencies are cultivated through the process of selecting and applying knowledge and methods to solve contextual problems, driven by value within real world contexts.

Scholars contend that art education grounded in subject core competencies involves guiding students to identify problems and define tasks within real world contexts. Students then acquire knowledge and skills through autonomous, collaborative, and research based approaches, applying these competencies to solve problems and fulfill objectives. This constitutes a fundamental pedagogical pathway (Shaochun et al., 2019; Hongda & Fang, 2022). Firstly, contextual teaching facilitates SCCFA development. Scholars argue that core competencies objectives require educators to actively explore connections between curriculum and students' lived experiences (Jiansheng, 2024). Contextual learning should replace linear approaches to teaching artistic skills and theory (Yang, 2023). Secondly, essential value, knowledge, and method contribute to SCCFA development. Scholars contend that core competencies objectives require integrating knowledge transmission, competency development, and value formation across all educational levels (Jiansheng, 2024), emphasizing holistic unity the integration of knowledge, ability, method, and value (Qiong, 2024). Finally, incorporating contextual teaching into instruction facilitates the transformation of values, knowledge, and methods into SCCFA. Scholars indicate that subject core competencies based art education involves guiding students to identify problems and clarify

tasks within real world contexts. Students then acquire knowledge and skills through autonomous, collaborative, and research based approaches, applying these to solve problems and complete tasks (Hongda & Fang, 2022). Authentic task based learning should be actively implemented, enabling students to apply acquired knowledge and skills within real life contexts (Hongda, 2024).

In summary, scholars propose that an effective strategy for cultivating SCCFA involves employing contextual teaching to mobilize and supplement essential values, knowledge, and methods. Values serve as the driving force, while knowledge and methods are applied to resolve contextual problems, thereby developing SCCFA. Throughout this process, values, knowledge, methods, and contextual teaching all contribute to fostering SCCFA. Moreover, contextual teaching facilitates the transformation of values, knowledge, and methods into SCCFA.

The Theoretical Rationale of Cultivating SCCFA

The Chinese 'subject core competencies of fine arts' are the five core competencies of the art subject, including visual literacy, artistic expression, aesthetic judgment, creative practice and cultural understanding each of which has its own meaning but also intersects with the other. According to the SCCFA definitions, the core competencies being discussed are stated as follows:

i.   Visual literacy refers to observing, recognizing, and interpreting art works, graphics, images, and other visual symbols.

ii.   Artistic expression refers to the use of traditional and modern media, technologies, and art languages to create visual images.

iii.   Aesthetic judgment refers to the perception, evaluation, judgment and expression of aesthetic objects in art works or real life.

iv.   Creative practice refers to the formation of innovative consciousness and use of creative thinking and creative methods in artistic activities.

v.   Cultural understanding refers to observing and understanding art works, artistic phenomena, and concepts from the perspective of culture (Shaochun, 2018).

The necessity of establishing SCCFA as a learning objective in art education can be discussed by reference to Bloom's taxonomy. Benjamin Bloom and his colleagues released The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives in 1956 as a tool for analyzing learning goals. The theory of Bloom's taxonomy has offered a set of three hierarchical models for cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains that are used for the classification of educational learning objectives into levels of complexity and specificity (Momen et al., 2022). In the cognitive domain, there are two dimensions in Bloom's Taxonomy Revision, namely the dimension of cognitive processes consisting of remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating, while the knowledge dimension consists of factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge (Adijaya et al., 2023). The framework of Bloom's Taxonomy suggests a sequential learning process in which the foundational theoretical knowledge moves on to more complex forms of practical learning (Nurmatova & Altun, 2023). It's used to determine whether stages of thinking skills are covered by existing instructional content such as learning objectives, curriculum plans, lessons, and evaluations (Momen et al., 2022).

Explaining SCCFA with Bloom's taxonomy framework reveals that SCCFA incorporate art education with the teaching objectives based on the levels of applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Setting advanced learning objectives for art education aligns with Bloom's taxonomy, which promotes higher forms of thinking (Nurmatova & Altun, 2023). Therefore, establishing relatively advanced learning objectives such as SCCFA in art education is necessary. Besides, the rationale for establishing SCCFA as a higher-level art education objective can be supported by the Bruner's cognitive development theory and the discipline-based art education (DBAE) developed under its influence. Bruner's cognitive development theory posits that people represent knowledge in three developmental sequence that are enactive, iconic and symbolic (Williams, 2004). As the

individual develops to a certain stage, the three representations coexist in individual cognitive structure, complement each other and work together on cognitive activities. knowledge learning is to form certain knowledge structure in the minds of students. This knowledge structure is made up of the basic concepts, basic ideas or principles of subject knowledge. The structural form of knowledge structure is made up of human coding system. "No matter what subject we choose to teach, we must make sure that students understand or master the basic structure of the subject," Bruner said (Wen, 2018). Therefore, the structural components as stated above were developed according to the needs of the students in the monolithic high culture context of China.

Furthermore, DBAE attempts to achieve balance and integration in these four areas in a sequential program (Basak, 2017). By understanding the basic subject structure, students can better grasp the specific content of the course, facilitate memory, and promote the transfer of their learning motivation and interests (Mao et al., 2024). DBAE proposes that art education should focus on four disciplines within the arts: aesthetics, art criticism, art history, and art production. Comparing SCCFA with DBAE, the three disciplines within the arts aesthetics, art criticism, and art history are all related to art appreciation activities, corresponding to visual literacy, aesthetic judgment, and cultural understanding in SCCFA. Another discipline within the arts in DBAE, namely art production, delivers instruction through visual arts expression, artistic creation, and design practice. This corresponds to artistic expression and creative practice in SCCFA. Thus, DBAE theory provides a rationale for the validity of the five SCCFA components: visual literacy, aesthetic judgment, cultural understanding, artistic expression, and creative practice. These five SCCFA elements encompass the fundamental structure of the visual arts discipline. They form an organic structure where each competency is interdependent. When addressing specific problems, they require mutual collaboration, with different elements supporting one another to apply integrated competencies in solving practical issues (Guangjian et al., 2022).

Contextual Teaching and Learning in SCCFA

In term of teaching and learning, the strategies proposed by scholars for cultivating SCCFA through contextual teaching can be discussed using relevant constructivist theories and pedagogical strategies. Below is a brief introduction to these related theories and teaching strategies. Constructivism learning theory is a framework in education that emphasises the active role of students in constructing their knowledge through experience, reflection and interaction with learning materials. This theory highlights student centered learning and an emphasis on deep understanding. Constructivism emphasises that learning should not just be the delivery of information from lecturer to student but involve students actively (Angraini et al., 2024). According to constructivism learning theory, the learner constructs new knowledge as part of a group or independently, based on prior knowledge and experiences, by participating in a situation rather than passively absorbing information. Based on Piaget, learners develop their own knowledge of the world through their experiences and interactions with their environment. In this view, learning is not just about acquiring information but also constructing meaning and understanding through exploration and discovery (Marougkas et al., 2023).

As a branch of constructivist learning theory, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which highlights the importance of social interaction and guided instruction in cognitive development (Axrorova, 2025). According to Vygotsky's theory, human development is primarily determined by the interplay of interpersonal (social), cultural historical, and individual elements. In Vygotsky's view, all higher order cognitive work in humans has its origins in the social interactions of each individual in a particular cultural context. Cognition is the internalization of social interaction. Human development occurs through cultural tools (language and symbols) which are then passed on from one person to another or are often referred to as the transmission of cultural tools. there are two stages to an individual's ability growth: the actual development stage and the potential development stage. The ability to finish activities or find solutions to different difficulties on one's own is a good indicator of someone's true developmental stage. Potential development is demonstrated by a person's capacity to finish activities and find solutions under adult supervision or in cooperation with more experienced peers. The zone of proximal development, or ZPD for short, is the distance between the two, that is, the level of current development and the level of potential development (Wibowo et al., 2025).Scaffolding is the technique of providing changing levels of support over the course of a teaching session by the more skilled individual such as teacher or more advanced peer of learners. It provides the guidance to fit the students' current performance. It is effective strategies to access the ZPD (Sarmiento Campos et al., 2022).

Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) is a teaching strategy based on constructivism. It helps students relate subject matter content to real world situations and motivate students to make connections between knowledge and its applications to their lives as family members, citizens, and workers and engage in the hard work that learning requires (Utami et al., 2023). Contextual Teaching and Learning involves seven main components of effective learning, namely constructivism, questioning, inquiry, learning community, modeling, reflection and actual research. authentic assessment (Sabarudin et al., 2023).

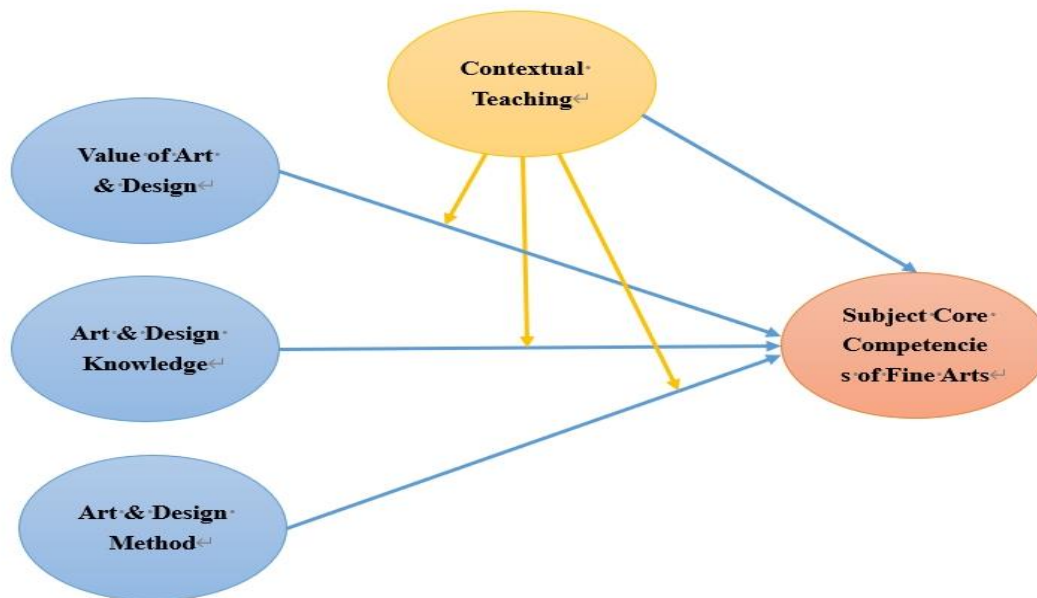**The Conceptual Framework of SCCFA Cultivation**

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of SCCFA Cultivation

Based on scholars' statements in existing research, the conceptual framework of SCCFA cultivation is summarized in Figure 1. Among these, the value of art & design, art & design knowledge, and art & design method serve as independent variables which is the essential cognitive foundations for students to solve contextual problems. Subject core competencies of fine arts constitute the dependent variable, representing the advanced teaching objectives of fine arts education aimed at developing the ability to address complex contextual problems. Contextual teaching functions as the moderating variable. This framework demonstrates how contextual teaching assists students in accessing and supplementing essential values, knowledge, and methods. It enables students to leverage values as motivation, apply knowledge and methods to solve contextual problems, thereby developing SCCFA. Contextual teaching facilitates the transformation of values, knowledge, and methods into SCCFA. The relationships among these variables are elaborated below with reference to relevant theories.

The three independent variables in the SCCFA cultivation framework include the value of art & design, which pertains to the meaning and role of art and design. It represents the belief system that provides the basis for value judgments in art and design activities. Art & design knowledge encompasses foundational artistic language knowledge within the field of art, as well as cultural background knowledge related to artworks. Art & design method refers to the fundamental approaches, procedures, and methods followed when engaging in art practice activities. The value of art & design, art & design knowledge, and art & design method all fall under the category of knowledge in Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002), each corresponding to specific knowledge categories. The value of art & design corresponds to knowledge of criteria. Art & design knowledge corresponds to knowledge of specifics and knowledge of universals and abstractions in a field. Art & design method corresponds to knowledge of ways and means of dealing with specifics.

Below, we discuss the relationships among the variables within the SCCFA cultivation framework based on relevant theories. First, the value of art and design, art and design knowledge, and art and design methods play

a promotional role in SCCFA training. The "scaffolding" terminology from sociocultural theory the "scaffolding" terminology has been used so widely in instructional research and now refers to any kind of assistance that teachers provide to their pupils. The relevance of scaffolding has grown to the point where it is no longer relevant to ask ''who'' supplies scaffolding since the emphasis is shifting to "expertise" rather than "experts" (Sarmiento Campos et al., 2022). According to sociocultural theory, achieving educational objectives necessitates helping learners recall relevant values, knowledge, and methods they have already mastered, while supplementing necessary new values, knowledge, and methods to jointly construct scaffolding. Therefore, the values of art & design, art & design knowledge, and art & design methods, functioning as scaffolding, can effectively promote the cultivation of SCCFA. Furthermore, due to its constructivist nature, CTL encourages students to associate their knowledge with its application in their daily lives as family members and as a community (Sabarudin et al., 2023). Thus, CTL also demonstrates that values, knowledge, and methods as categories within knowledge can enhance the ability to solve real world problems, thereby fostering SCCFA development.

Secondly, contextual teaching promotes the development of SCCFA. Constructivist learning theory emphasizes that learning should by participating in a situation rather than passively absorbing information (Marougkas et al., 2023). Furthermore, CTL prioritizes Learning with the CTL method prioritizes real knowledge and experience, to be able to think at a higher level or High Order Thinking Skills, to be able to solve problems (Sabarudin et al., 2023). This demonstrates that contextual teaching enhances real world problem solving capabilities, thereby advancing SCCFA development.

Finally, contextual teaching plays a moderating role in the relationship between the value of art and design, art and design knowledge, art and design methods, and SCCFA. Constructivist learning theory posits that only by experiencing the world directly can the learner derive meaning from them. By grounding learning activities in an authentic, real world context, constructivism stimulates and engages students. The students are more likely to retain and transfer the new knowledge to real life (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). CTL, a learning method grounded in constructivism, encourages students to be able to logically connect the material studied with concrete examples that exist in real world everyday life (Nurlinda et al., 2024). It can help teachers relate the material being taught to real life and encourage students to make connections between priority knowledge and application in their daily lives (Afni, 2020). According to Constructivism learning theory and CTL principles, Contextual Teaching facilitates the application of the value of art & design, art & design knowledge, and art & design methods within real world contexts. This enables their transformation into the ability to solve real world problems, known as SCCFA. In other words, Contextual Teaching promotes the process of converting the value of art & design, art & design knowledge, and art & design methods into SCCFA. Therefore, Contextual Teaching plays a mediating role in this transformation process.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this paper reviews and synthesizes existing scholars' proposed effective strategies for developing SCCFA through employing contextual teaching, invoking and supplementing necessary values, knowledge, and methods; using values as motivation, applying knowledge and methods to solve contextual problems, thereby advancing SCCFA. In this process, value, knowledge, method, and contextual teaching all contribute to SCCFA development. Moreover, contextual teaching facilitates the transformation of value, knowledge, and method into SCCFA. A training framework for SCCFA was constructed based on the articulated strategies for cultivating SCCFA. This framework was further elaborated upon in conjunction with relevant theoretical foundations. Applying SCCFA as instructional objectives in art education corresponds to the levels of applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating within Bloom's taxonomy. Therefore, setting SCCFA as a relatively advanced learning goal in art instruction is essential. Drawing on Bruner's cognitive development theory and the discipline based art education influenced by it, this study demonstrates that the five components of SCCFA visual literacy, aesthetic judgment, cultural understanding, artistic expression, and creative practice encompass the fundamental structure of the art discipline, validating the rationale for establishing SCCFA. Finally, integrating Constructivism learning theory and its branch, sociocultural theory, along with the concepts and expressions of contextual teaching and learning a pedagogical approach grounded in Constructivism this discussion demonstrates that the value of art & design, art & design knowledge, and art & design methods collectively

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