

Practice Pathways for Rural School Aesthetic-Education Immersion Driven by Place Identity

Wenxiao Zhang

Guangxi Normal University, Guilin Guangxi, 541006

Abstract: Rural school aesthetic education cannot be improved sustainably by adding isolated performances, displays, or short-term visiting lessons. It requires a practical system that helps students perceive, interpret, create with, and care for the places in which they live. This article develops a place-identity-driven pathway for sustained aesthetic-education immersion. The proposed system contains seven connected actions: conduct ethical inquiry into local cultural and ecological resources; convert selected resources into coherent arts curricula; establish recurring learning across school time and space; use inquiry, embodiment, dialogue, creation, and public sharing; develop teachers through situated co-learning; establish school-family-community co-governance; and evaluate learning, identity, equity, and continuity. Digital materials are managed through provenance records, separate permissions, access levels, and offline alternatives. Implementation proceeds from preparation and a limited pilot to institutionalization, allowing schools with different capacities to begin with a manageable unit and expand only after teaching time, cultural consent, teacher support, and equitable participation are secured. The pathway is designed for adaptation across diverse rural school contexts. Its transferable value lies in the working procedures rather than in copying a fixed set of local cultural symbols.

Keywords: Place identity; Rural schools; Aesthetic education; China

DOI:10.12417/3029-2328.26.06.017

1. Introduction

China's School Aesthetic Education Immersion Action extends aesthetic education beyond individual lessons to students, teachers, and the school environment (General Office of the CPC Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2020; MOE, 2023). For rural schools, this means that improvement cannot be reduced to adding performances, murals, contests, or short-term visiting lessons. These activities may be useful, but they become educationally meaningful only when they are connected to regular curriculum, artistic techniques, student inquiry, teacher development, community participation, and continuing evaluation.

A place-identity orientation offers a practical way to make those connections (Proshansky et al., 1983; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Everyday landscapes, architecture, tools, craft processes, oral narratives, music, movement, local occupations, migration experience, and contemporary rural visual culture can become resources for attentive perception and artistic creation. The aim is not compulsory local pride. Students should be able to appreciate, question, reinterpret, and responsibly communicate different relationships to place.

2. Implementation Priorities

Place identity should be translated into school action through four learning aims. Students first learn to notice form, sound, movement, material, landscape, and historical change. They then develop the ability to interpret how different people understand a place. Artistic techniques enable them to transform observation into original work rather than copy local motifs. Finally, they learn responsible participation through collaboration, attribution, consent, environmental care, and public dialogue. These aims correspond to current expectations that aesthetic education should strengthen aesthetic perception, cultural understanding, artistic expression, and creative practice across lessons, teachers, campus life, and community relationships (MOE, 2022, 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

Schools should therefore allocate effort in the following order: protect regular arts lessons; select a small

number of teachable local resources; co-design one complete unit; prepare teachers and community partners; establish permissions and safeguards; collect process evidence; and revise before expansion. This order prevents visible events from consuming the time and resources needed for ordinary learning. It also keeps local culture connected to artistic concepts, techniques, critique, and revision rather than using it as decoration.

3. Operating Principles

Implementation should follow five rules. First, educational relevance takes priority over the number of cultural resources. A school needs a small set of age-appropriate, teachable, ethically available materials that can sustain repeated inquiry. Second, living culture takes priority over decorative symbols. Students should encounter practitioners, processes, changing meanings, and contemporary rural life. Third, participation must be reciprocal: community knowledge holders retain authorship, the right to set boundaries, and the right to withdraw permission. Fourth, continuity matters more than spectacle. A modest sequence taught every term is more immersive than a single festival. Fifth, procedures can be transferred, but cultural content cannot simply be copied. Each school should repeat the processes of mapping, permission, co-design, teaching, evaluation, and revision with its own local resources.

4.A Six-Part Practice Pathway

4.1 Map resources ethically and convert them into curriculum.

Schools can establish a compact place-and-arts resource map covering natural scenery, settlement patterns, architecture, tools, textiles, food presentation, festivals, songs, dances, narratives, local occupations, and contemporary visual culture. Each entry should record a source or knowledge holder, possible art forms, suitable age groups, seasonal access, safety requirements, intellectual-property or sacred-use restrictions, and curriculum connections. Teachers then select resources through four filters: aesthetic richness, curricular fit, feasibility, and ethical permission. The result is not an exhibition inventory but a teachable resource card with an inquiry question, perceptual focus, making process, vocabulary, community connection, and reflection prompt.

Locally identified music, dance, and festival practices may serve as prompts only after consultation with relevant cultural bearers. A dance, for example, should not be reduced to costume imitation. Learning may move from observing rhythm and spatial pattern, to documenting practitioners' explanations, to comparing historical and contemporary performance contexts, and finally to creating a clearly labeled student response. Where recording or adaptation is restricted, the restriction itself becomes an ethical lesson.

4.2 Translate place identity into assessable learning objectives.

Objectives should span four linked domains. Perceptual-cognitive objectives concern noticing form, sound, material, landscape, and historical layers. Affective-relational objectives concern curiosity, attachment, empathy, and respect without requiring students to profess pride. Expressive-creative objectives concern technique, interpretation, experimentation, and the ability to explain choices. Participatory-ethical objectives concern collaboration, attribution, cultural consent, environmental responsibility, and contribution to shared spaces. A unit should normally address all four, but assessment must allow ambivalence: a child who questions a local practice may demonstrate deeper identity work than one who repeats celebratory language.

4.3 Organize learning as an encounter-inquiry-making-sharing cycle.

Encounter begins with direct sensory attention: a walk, sound map, object study, practitioner demonstration, archival image, or observation of seasonal change. Inquiry asks students to gather multiple accounts, compare representations, and locate uncertainty. Making translates understanding into drawing, design, music, movement, drama, photography, craft, or mixed media, allowing shareable artifacts to connect creation, reflection, and public dialogue (Pepler et al., 2023). Sharing places work before a real audience through a small exhibition, performance, listening session, school publication, or community conversation. Reflection returns to the initial question: what

changed in how students see the place, and what responsibilities follow?

The cycle supports interdisciplinary planning without dissolving artistic rigor. Mathematics may illuminate symmetry or proportion; language study may support oral history and scripts; science may examine pigments, acoustics, or ecological materials; history may locate change. Art teachers remain responsible for artistic concepts and processes. Classroom teachers and community partners add knowledge rather than using art merely to decorate other subjects.

4.4 Build a whole-school aesthetic environment.

Immersion depends on ordinary time and space. Schools can create rotating student-curated displays, listening corners, material libraries, seasonal color or sound records, mapped walking routes, and spaces for rehearsal and making. Labels should credit sources and explain processes rather than presenting culture as anonymous decoration. Student work should be displayed selectively with curatorial commentary, revision dates, and opportunities for response. Procurement can privilege safe local or reusable materials where appropriate, while avoiding the claim that local materials are automatically sustainable. Morning assemblies, reading periods, clubs, and campus maintenance can offer recurring aesthetic encounters, but protected curriculum time must remain central.

4.5 Establish durable school-family-community co-education.

A partnership should specify roles, safeguards, and reciprocity. Schools coordinate curriculum, child protection, scheduling, and assessment. Teachers translate knowledge into developmentally appropriate learning. Cultural practitioners contribute expertise and retain the right to set boundaries. Families may provide objects, memories, language knowledge, or feedback without being treated as free labor. Cultural venues, universities, and arts organizations can offer training, documentation, and periodic specialist support. Students act as inquirers and makers, not passive recipients.

A simple annual agreement can define the activity, preparation, payment or recognition, consent for recording, ownership and future use of materials, accessibility, risk management, and evaluation. Remote mentoring can supplement scarce expertise, but it should support local capacity rather than replace embodied practice. A useful partnership leaves behind lesson plans, teacher confidence, documented permissions, and a schedule for continued work after external visitors depart.

4.6 Use developmental evaluation and iterative governance.

Evaluation should ask whether the program is coherent, equitable, ethically sound, and educationally meaningful. Evidence may include student process portfolios, observation notes, artist statements, performances, peer dialogue, teacher planning records, partner feedback, participation patterns, and periodic student interviews. Rubrics can examine perceptual detail, contextual understanding, technical and expressive development, reflection, collaboration, attribution, and care. Self-report place-identity scales may be used only when age-appropriate and validated; they should not substitute for qualitative evidence or be interpreted as proof of causal impact without a suitable research design, especially given the limitations of current experimental arts-education evidence (Schneider & Rohmann, 2021).

At program level, schools can review reach, continuity, quality, partnership health, teacher learning, resource demands, and unintended effects. Disaggregated participation checks can reveal whether disability, boarding status, gender, language, cost, or transport limits access. A small steering group including students, teachers, administrators, families, and cultural partners should review evidence each term and decide what to retain, revise, stop, or expand.

5.A Scalable Implementation Model

The pathway can be adapted through three provision levels, following the place-based principle that local community and environment can serve as starting points for curriculum (Sobel, 2013). Minimum provision requires one carefully designed local unit per grade band, a resource-and-permission register, a student process portfolio, and

one structured community contribution each year. Developmental provision adds a cross-disciplinary sequence, teacher learning community, rotating campus curation, paid practitioner sessions, and annual program review. Networked provision connects several schools with shared specialist teachers, mobile material kits, digital archives governed by permissions, university or cultural-institution support, and public showcases that preserve each school's authorship.

Implementation can proceed in four phases. During preparation, a school audits existing curriculum, staff strengths, timetable, cultural contacts, and participation barriers. During co-design, teachers and partners develop one pilot unit and agree on ethics and evidence. During enactment, the school protects teaching time, documents process, and holds brief review meetings. During consolidation, it revises the unit, trains additional staff, budgets recurring costs, and decides whether expansion is justified. Scaling should occur only after the minimum cycle is stable. This prevents schools from accumulating activities that depend on one enthusiastic teacher or short-term project funding.

Teacher development is the principal enabling condition. Training should be practice-based: jointly analyze a local artifact or performance, model an encounter-inquiry-making-sharing sequence, rehearse questioning and feedback, discuss cultural permissions, and adapt assessment rubrics. Cluster-based rural networks can distribute expertise through lesson observation, shared planning, and rotating specialists. The goal is not to turn every teacher into a professional artist, but to build collective capacity to notice aesthetic possibilities, protect artistic quality, and collaborate responsibly.

6. Digital Resource Management and Phased Implementation

Digital tools should extend direct observation, making, and interpersonal learning rather than replace them. Every digital item should record its creator, date, provenance, permission status, access level, and conditions of reuse. Permission to learn from a cultural practice does not automatically include permission to record, upload, adapt, or distribute it. Schools should separate these decisions and provide a withdrawal procedure. Restricted or sensitive materials should remain offline, and printable or device-free alternatives should be available where connectivity is unequal. Student privacy, copyright, storage responsibility, deletion schedules, and the use of generative AI should be included in school rules. AI-generated content must never be presented as evidence of local culture.

Implementation should proceed in three stages. Preparation establishes protected arts time, a resource-and-rights register, a teacher team, basic participation information, and a community advisory group. The pilot stage develops one or two complete units, records workload and access barriers, and revises the design through student and partner feedback. Institutionalization connects successful units across grades, includes teacher learning and partnership costs in the budget, assigns responsibility for digital maintenance, and reviews evidence annually. Expansion should pause whenever artistic quality, consent, safety, teacher workload, or equitable access cannot be maintained.

7. Risks and Safeguards

Place-oriented work carries predictable risks. Folklorization freezes living culture into costumes and festivals; the safeguard is historical context, practitioner voice, and attention to contemporary change. Tokenism inserts motifs without sustained learning; the safeguard is repeated inquiry and reflection. Cultural appropriation occurs when schools record, adapt, or circulate protected knowledge without consent; the safeguard is documented permission, attribution, and limits on reuse. Romanticization ignores hardship or disagreement; the safeguard is multiple perspectives and critical questions informed by a critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003). Local closure presents belonging as opposition to mobility or difference; the safeguard is comparison across places and recognition of hybrid identities. Workload transfer relies on unpaid teachers, families, or practitioners; the safeguard is realistic scope, compensation where possible, and scheduled planning time. Finally, evaluation inflation converts ordinary participation into claims of transformation; the safeguard is modest language, transparent evidence, and explicit

separation of program monitoring from causal research.

8.Implementation Coordination and Continuous Improvement

The seven pathways should be managed as one implementation chain rather than as separate projects. Resource inquiry must lead to curriculum plans; curriculum plans require protected time and suitable spaces; co-creative teaching depends on teacher preparation; community participation requires written governance; and evaluation must feed directly into revision and budgeting. A school should assign a small coordinating group to review these connections each term. Its decisions should be concrete: which unit will continue, which permission must be renewed, which students are being excluded, which teacher needs support, which digital item requires restricted access, and which activity should be stopped.

Continuous improvement should rely on student work and implementation records rather than publicity counts. Schools can compare early and revised drafts, student explanations, observation notes, partner feedback, attendance patterns, workload, material costs, and accessibility barriers. Expansion is justified only when the existing cycle has stable teaching time, appropriate artistic challenge, documented cultural consent, manageable workload, and broad participation. Claims about effectiveness should be made only after appropriate evidence has been collected and evaluated. Any future field study should report actual procedures and evidence transparently and distinguish local experience from conclusions that may be generalized.

9.Conclusion

Rural aesthetic education becomes locally meaningful when place is treated as a living field of perception, memory, practice, and debate. A place-identity approach offers a mechanism for moving from episodic arts activities toward sustained immersion: ethically select local resources, formulate multidimensional objectives, organize recurring cycles of encounter and creation, shape the whole-school environment, govern reciprocal partnerships, and evaluate development without exaggeration. The transferable object is not a fixed set of local cultural symbols but a disciplined method through which any rural school can work with its own people, materials, histories, and futures. When implemented with artistic rigor and critical openness, this approach can support students in learning not only about a place, but also how to see it, question it, create within it, and care for it.

References:

- [1] General Office of the CPC Central Committee,&General Office of the State Council.(2020,October 15). Opinions on comprehensively strengthening and improving school aesthetic education in the new era.https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2020-10/15/content_5551609.htm.
- [2] Gruenewald,D.A.(2003).The best of both worlds:A critical pedagogy of place.Educational Researcher,32(4),3–12.
- [3] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.(2022,March 25).Compulsory education curriculum plan and curriculum standards(2022 edition).https://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/202204/t20220420_619921.html.
- [4] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.(2023,December 22).Notice on comprehensively implementing the school aesthetic education immersion action(Jiao Ti Yi[2023]No.5).https://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A17/moe_794/moe_628/202401/t20240102_1097467.html.
- [5] Peppler,K.,Davis-Soylu,H.J.,&Dahn,M.(2023).Artifact-oriented learning:A theoretical review of the impact of the arts on learning.Arts Education Policy Review,124(1),61–77.
- [6] Proshansky,H.M.,Fabian,A.K.,&Kaminoff,R.(1983).Place-identity:Physical world socialization of the self. Journal of Environmental Psychology,3(1),57–83.
- [7] Scannell,L.,&Gifford,R.(2010).Defining place attachment:A tripartite organizing framework.Journal of Environmental Psychology,30(1),1–10.
- [8] Schneider,V.,&Rohmann,A.(2021).Arts in education:A systematic review of competency outcomes in quasi-experimental and experimental studies.Frontiers in Psychology,12,Article 623935.
- [9] Sobel,D.(2013).Place-based education:Connecting classrooms and communities(2nd ed.).Orion Society.ISBN 978-1-935713-05-0.
- [10] UNESCO.(2024).UNESCO framework for culture and arts education.https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/02/WCCAE_UNESCO%20Framework_EN_0.pdf.