

Education for Mobility – Factual or Fictional?

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Abstract

The role of education in society is highly contentious amongst sociologists: functionalists contend that education serves for social selection and enables social mobility, whilst conflict theorists assert that education effectuates social reproduction and disables social mobility. Making reference to the education system in Hong Kong, this paper aims at elucidating that the notion held by conflict theorists is more justifiable. In that education reproduces societal class structure in four ways: inequalities in access and participation, incorporation of middle-class attributes into curriculum and pedagogy, training of subservient workers, and biased definition of talent. Establishment of democratic schools and creation of a deschooling society have been put forward by sociologists as alternatives to formal education, yet both are infeasible in the context of Hong Kong.

Key Words

social reproduction, social mobility, conflict theorists, correspondence theory

It is a no-brainer that education can be approached from multifarious perspectives. Whilst being viewed as modification of people's behavior from educationalists' perspective (Tyler, 2009), education is construed as an indispensable segment fashioning societal systems from sociologists' point of view. All the same, for all a consensus on a notion that education primes the young generation for their future lives, the role that education plays in society has provoked controversies amongst sociologists (Giddens, 2001). Functionalists hold stratification principles and contend that education serves for social selection, enabling social mobility by allocating the most talented people to the most essential positions in society, whilst conflict theorists draw upon the correspondence theory and assert that education serves for social reproduction, hindering social mobility by making class background a determinant on which a person's level of attainment counts (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995). As a matter of fact, only is the picture of equitable opportunities for people from all walks of life delineated by functionalists a myth, but education unequivocally serves for social reproduction.

Two Contrasting Views

Views on education held by both functionalists and conflict theorists will first be briefly introduced prior to an elaborated deliberation about application of theories into genuine contexts. It is widely reckoned by people in society that qualifications are prerequisites for well-paid jobs, this entails that only by performing well in the education system in a bid to acquire qualifications can a person seek superior and prestigious occupations (Giddens, 2001). Such a contention concurs with functionalists' view on education. Davis and Moore (1981), two functionalist sociologists, have put forward the theory of social stratification: members of every society have to be allocated to distinct positions for the sake of performing myriads of societal functions. Being more challenging and requiring more specific skills or talents, certain positions are more rewarding than others in terms of prestige and esteem so that momentum will be provided for people to take up those positions; society is thereby stratified with people from distinct social classes arising from their positions (Davis and Moore, 1981). The social stratification theory may provide people with a percept that society is meritocratic, and the most qualified and talented can be rewarded.

In contrast, conflict theorists hold that education disables social mobility but serves for social reproduction; this is backed by the Marxist theory. Possessing essentially conflicting interests, disparate groups in society, be they racial, sexual, or religious groups, contest for power with the hope of creating a social system benefiting themselves most (Feinberg and Soltis, 2004). Placed at an advantageous and privileged position out of their wealth, power, and prestigious status, the ruling class, which chiefly denotes the rich in cases of capitalist societies, yearns for maintaining the current system of relations and power as well as their own interests in society. Building upon the Marxist theory,

Bowles and Gintis, two American sociologists as well as conflict theorists, put forward the correspondence theory: schools are replicas of society, and organization and social relationships in the educational system correspond to those in society (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995). Akin to other Ideological State Apparatuses such as the media, political parties, and cultural and religious institutions, schools serve the function of reproducing a class structure favouring hegemony of capitalists at the expense of the working class (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004). The phenomena of social inequality, class struggle, and even social problems such as the disparity between the rich and the poor will eventually deteriorate.

The present paper aims at arguing that situations of current education systems fit the correspondence theory in lieu of the social stratification theory. Reproduction of class structure is achieved by means of two avenues: enabling middle-class students to excel at school and gain qualifications more easily than working-class students do, and instilling into working-class students' minds a concept of "false consciousness", where some ideas and values espoused by the predominant class are blindly given credence to (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004). More specifically, social reproduction has been effectuated by education in four ways: creating inequalities in access and participation in schooling, embracing middle-class attributes in curriculum and pedagogy, reproducing subservient labour through the hidden curriculum, and judging talent in a way biased to the middle class. The present paper will draw upon instances from the education system in Hong Kong to deliberate upon each of the four aforementioned aspects at length. Attributed to pitfalls of the current education system, two alternatives to formal education have been put forward by sociologists; each of them will be critically evaluated and scrutinized toward the end of the paper.

Contextual Background

Not only the educational context in Hong Kong but the entire global context plays an indispensable role in formulation of educational policies and the entirety of the education system in Hong Kong.

Global Context

The global context is constituted by a multitude of globally shared concepts or values, two of which are applicable in the present analysis: neoliberalism and individualism.

Having been a prevalent and prominent concept since the 1980s, neoliberalism zeros in on several notions: competition, accountability, efficiency, and equality. Laying emphasis on deregulation of economy, trade liberalization, and dismantling of the public sector, neoliberalism originated from fields of economics and finance (Hursh, 2007).

Applied in the field of education, it suggests deregulation of the government of education and empowerment of schools as well as individuals in a bid to encourage competition and ultimately ameliorate educational quality (Ranson, 2008). By no means should education be treated as a commodity albeit existence of a diverse range of autonomous schools creating a quasi-market providing parents and students with choices (Ranson, 2008). Accountable to parents and students, all schools must raise teaching quality for the sake of enhancing their competitive edge and attracting more students. Meanwhile, not only schools but students also have to compete for their desirable schools in the market system by virtue of limited places in each school (Hursh, 2007); such a competition legitimizes standardized examinations, which serve as a quality indicator appearing the most objective information on which schools can lay basis in selection of students.

Another concept moulding the global policy context is individualism, which is acceptance and appreciation of each individual's uniqueness. Students possessing disparate social and cultural background as well as natural dispositions, barely can educators or policymakers expect one uniform policy, curriculum, or pedagogy to fit all students, but multicultural education, which enhances every student's cultural awareness and ensures that all students irrespective of their cultural background, are provided with an equal opportunity to excel academically, is advocated (Crain, 2000; Gay, 2004). Not only does individualism cope with individual variations amongst learners, it also cultivates an inclusive learning community and provides personal care for students (Ranson, 2008). Possessing a feeling of being cared, students can be more connected to their schools; this promotes students' healthy psychosocial development (Erikson, 1963; Smith, 2002). Teachers in contemporary classrooms are thereby characterized as facilitators in students' course of learning in lieu of authorities (Choudhury, 2011).

Local Context

Globalization was the driving force of the education reform in Hong Kong carried out in 2000, which aimed at priming students for becoming qualified citizens in the global village of the modern world.

Industrial and technological advancements paved way for massive changes in economic, social, and cultural aspects of the entire globe. With the advent of modern transport systems as well as telecommunication devices, physical distance had become negligible, and people's communication patterns had also been drastically revolutionized (Virilio, 1997). The special geographical location, political status, and hybrid culture of Hong Kong implied that citizens would enjoy numerous opportunities to meet and converse with people from all over the world. More importantly, having thrived into a knowledge-based metropolis, Hong Kong no longer required mechanical labourers but nimble and creative citizens who could engage in tertiary or quaternary industries instead

(Education Commission, 2000). Possession of merely academic knowledge was thereby insufficient, but students were expected to be equipped with a multicultural awareness, a wide world vision, and an ability to acquire the latest knowledge independently (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). Attributed to a vital role played by education in fashioning people's behavior, an education reform had to be carried out accordingly in response to the aforementioned changes in the world as well as novel demands on people.

One goal of the education reform was promotion of life-long learning, which was intended to be achieved through three avenues: enabling students to acquire basic knowledge in school education, assisting students in developing their potentials, and beefing up students' confidence in learning. Basic knowledge being the overarching prerequisite for students to engage in life-long learning, the reform aimed at raising the overall quality of students and providing them with requisite knowledge for life-long learning (Education Commission, 2000). Besides enabling students to acquire basic knowledge, the reform also hoped to assist students in developing their potentials through construction of a diverse school system. Should students manage to develop their potentials in certain aspects successfully, it would be more likely for them to carry out life-long learning in those particular aspects (Education Commission, 2000). Added to the above, the reform targeted on beefing up students' confidence in learning. Laying basis on the "student-centred" and "no-loser" principles, the reform hoped that students could become active learners and would not be given up by teachers in the course of learning (Education Commission, 2000).

Inequalities in Access and Participation

First and foremost, one of the roots of social reproduction is undoubtedly inequalities in access of and participation in education.

Inequality in Access

The social class of a person heavily contingent on his/her career as well as qualifications, an unequal opportunity to access education amongst students from different classes certainly deprives working-class students of chances to move upwards in the social hierarchy. Access to schools is considered the entrance to qualifications, and working-class students have been found to possess much fewer opportunities to access schools than middle-class students do. Despite provision of twelve years of free primary and secondary education for all children in Hong Kong, inequality in access to education exists in the level of post-secondary or tertiary education. University places in Hong Kong are so competitive that only can fewer than twenty percent of students who have completed senior secondary education enter universities for academic pursuit; the overwhelming majority of university students have been discovered to belong to more affluent families by

virtue of the expensive tuition fees (Post, 2004). Even though students who are financially challenged are eligible to apply for grants offered by the government in a bid to cover their tuition fees, only can those grants cover the entirety of students' tuition fees given that their family income falls below a certain threshold (Student Finance Office and Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency, 2015). As suggested by Wong (2011), working-class parents prefer their children to be financially independent and capable of making financial contribution to the family as soon as possible. Working-class students' inability to obtain full exemption from tuition fees through government grants may demotivate students from receiving tertiary education and provide an economic incentive for them to start working upon completion of secondary education. Students' opportunities of accessing education are thereby determined by their family resources to a certain extent; this creates a source of educational inequality.

Whilst expensive tuition fees are overriding obstacles to working students' access to tertiary education, the disparity between primary and secondary education received by middle-class and working-class students also places working-class students at a disadvantageous position in competition for university places. Hong Kong students can enjoy twelve years of free primary and secondary education in government schools or aided schools albeit availability of Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools for students from families that are prosperous enough to afford tuition fees. Under the Direct Subsidy Scheme launched by the government, DSS schools receive fewer financial subsidies from the government than government or aided schools do; they are nevertheless provided with freedom to obtain additional income through collection of tuition fees from students, which government or aided schools do not enjoy (Education Bureau and Hong Kong Direct Subsidy Scheme Schools, 2013). Possessing more funds, not only can DSS schools provide economic incentives to attract quality teachers to join the schools by employing them at a higher pay scale, they can also employ more teachers and detract from class size, making it plausible for teachers to spend more time on and cater for each individual's needs (Working Group on Direct Subsidy Scheme, 2011). Both measures manage to ameliorate teaching quality in DSS schools. Students opting for such an alternative educational option, who are likely to be middle-class students, can thereby secure for university places more easily on account of more quality education in DSS schools. In spite of provision of financial assistance in terms of scholarships for economically challenged children, Tse (2008) argues that DSS schools are largely choices of certain in lieu of all families in Hong Kong.

Being more capable of affording tuition fees and entering DSS schools, middle-class students possess more chances of receiving tertiary education than their working-class counterparts do. Even if some middle-class students fail to compete for a local university place, possessing a handsome amount of economic capital that can be converted to other forms of capital, their parents can make use of their social capital, which is associated with

their social network, to be informed of alternative study options. They can subsequently send their children to local community colleges or overseas universities for further studies (Bourdieu, 1997; Wong, 2011). In contrast, lacking both economic and social capitals, neither can parents of working-class students obtain much information of alternative study options nor afford expensive costs of those options (Wong, 2011). It is thereby revealed that middle-class students possess many an opportunity to access education, however their academic performance is, whilst middle-class students enjoy much fewer choices; this hinders them from obtaining qualifications or moving up the social hierarchy.

Inequality in Participation

Besides inequality in access, inequality in participation, which largely stems from tracking and streaming, definitely results in social reproduction. Notwithstanding originally intending to assign students to different groups in accordance with their abilities with a hope of facilitating learning, tracking often founders in that students of similar abilities may be allocated to discrepant ability groups owing to certain factors (Arum & Beattie, 2000; Pallas et al., 1994). A concrete instance is that it is more likely for impoverished students to be allocated to less prominent schools, which are predominantly regarded as low-track schools, yet they do not necessarily perform worse than rich students do academically (Arum and Beattie, 2000). Such a phenomenon is probably accounted for by the fact that richer families possess a higher competitive power to purchase dwellings in neighbourhood where prominent schools are situated, so they have higher chances to enter those schools (Johnson, 2008).

In Hong Kong, primary and secondary schools students enter are inextricable from districts where their dwellings are situated. The Hong Kong Professional Education Press, a non-government educational organization in Hong Kong, assesses educational input, pedagogical process, and pedagogical efficacy of every secondary school and releases a list of fifty schools possessing the most competitive edge in Hong Kong every year; schools on the list are generally perceived by parents and the public to be prestigious schools. Amongst those fifty schools on the list of year 2015, ten of them were situated in the Central and Western District and the Wan Chai District, which were overwhelmed by rich or middle-class families (Census and Statistics Department [CSD], 2012; Hong Kong Professional Education Press [HKPEP], 2014). In contrast, only did the list embody four schools from the Sham Shui Po District and the Kwun Tong District, which are densely populated by poor or working-class families (CSD, 2012; HKPEP, 2014). Such figures appear to imply that disproportional distribution of prestigious schools in distinct districts in Hong Kong effectuates unequal chances of entering those schools shared by students from varying social classes.

The overarching discrepancies between high-tracked and low-tracked schools lie in teachers' instructional practices and their expectations on students, which pose far-reaching impacts on students' psychology, behavior, and academic performance. A positive correlation exists between quantity as well as quality of instruction and the level of the track; this implies that teachers are disposed to incorporate more challenging and advanced instructional content into their lessons and conduct their teaching at a faster pace in high-track schools and classes whilst both the depth of knowledge taught and the teaching progress are relatively low in low-track schools or classes (Arum and Beattie, 2000). Moreover, however students' academic performances are, teachers possess a tendency to have lower expectations on students allocated to low-track schools or classes (Pallas et al., 1994). Teachers' expectations being highly influential in the ways student perceive themselves as suggested by the self-fulfilling prophecy, students in low-track schools or classes may possess a low self-esteem on themselves and lack impetus to excel academically (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968; Schunk, 1991). A combination of inferior teaching quality and teachers' low expectations on students creates unequal chances of participation as well as academic outcomes between students from high-track and low-track schools. For all not necessarily being academically weaker than others, poor students in Hong Kong are more likely to be affiliated to low-track schools out of locations of their dwellings; they are thereby most likely to suffer from the practice of tracking.

Confronting inequality in both access to schools and the learning process, working-class students or poor students are rendered much fewer chances to excel academically and obtain qualifications for the sake of upward mobility than middle-class students do.

Incorporation of Middle-Class Attributes into Curriculum and Pedagogy

Apart from inequalities in access and participation, another contributing factor of social reproduction is undeniably incorporation of middle-class attributes and values into the curriculum and instructional design.

Middle-Class Attributes in Curriculum

Attributed to an infinite amount of knowledge in the world, by no means can curricula encompass all knowledge, but selection of knowledge ought to be carried out (Poincare, 2001). Barely should ideal education confine children's learning scope, which complies with Rousseau's tenet that every child possesses his/her own natural disposition (Crain, 2000; Holt, 1981). All the same, such an ideal case is easier said than done, for the reality is that the ruling class, which mainly comprises people from the upper classes in society, is entitled to design curricula, so some so-called "official knowledge" is selected and incorporated into the curriculum (Apple, 2000a). Belonging to the ruling class,

curriculum planners may deliberately select content or values more familiar to middle-class students as the “official-knowledge”; this benefits middle-class students and assists them in excelling in the education system.

In Hong Kong, the intended curriculum of senior secondary English Language education requires students to “discuss critically ideas...and attitudes in spoken and written texts”, which demands some higher levels of cognitive abilities depicted in the Bloom’s Taxonomy, videlicet analysis and evaluation (CDC & Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority [HKEAA], 2007, p.11; Krathwoh, 2002). Designed on the basis of the curriculum document, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination, the standardized university entrance examination in Hong Kong, assesses candidates’ high-order cognitive abilities such as abilities to “distinguish and evaluate views, attitudes or arguments in fairly complex texts” and “express ... evaluative remarks ... with suitable elaboration” (HKEAA, 2013, p.2). In the practice paper of the HKDSE Examination, students are asked to “discuss which [of the two opposing views presented in the text they] find most convincing” in the reading paper and orally present their views on the issue of “[whether it is] worth spending money on trying to locate alien life in the universe” in the speaking paper (HKEAA, 2012, pp.7, 73). In the two questions cited, cognitive abilities such as evaluation, making judgments, and even imagination are assessed; they are surely perceived to be biased to middle-class students inasmuch as working-class students appear to perform better in mechanical work in lieu of high-order thinking and critical analysis.

The curriculum is also sprinkled with elective modules correlated with debate, drama, and short stories, which appear to be more relevant to everyday life experiences of middle-class students (CDC & HKEAA, 2007). Even though the official curriculum document opens the floodgate for students to take two to three of the eight elective modules of their own choices so that working-class students can select modules with which they are familiar, barely do most secondary schools in Hong Kong follow the curriculum guide and provide students with freedom to select modules at will, but they tend to assign several modules to all their students instead (Ng, 2014). In such a vein, working-class students may still be required to take modules that they find unfamiliar with and have no confidence in excelling at given that those modules are selected by their schools. More importantly, life experiences more familiar to middle-class students also appear in questions of the HKDSE Examination; this disadvantages working-class students lacking such experiences. For instance, Paper 1 (Reading) of the English Language practice paper requires students to read an excerpt of a short story and answer an array of comprehension questions (HKEAA, 2012). Encountering a literary genre not commonly found in their everyday life, working-class students may possess more difficulty in interpreting the text and working out answers of examination questions than middle-class students, whose parents have managed to afford purchasing English story books for them since they were small, do. Required to learn and be assessed on knowledge that they are neither familiar with nor

fascinated by, working-class students are presumed to possess much difficulty getting through such an education system, let alone to perform well and gain qualifications.

Despite being regarded as professionals who ought to possess authority and professional judgments, teachers are assuredly incapable of precluding instructional content from being biased to middle-class students. It may be argued that teachers are professionals possessing autonomy to decide instructional content in class, but curriculum documents proposed by government officials are not just there to provide guidance for teachers. Instead, barely is it plausible for teachers' instruction in class to deviate from those official curricula when standardized testing, of which questions stick closely to the curricula proposed, exists in the education system. Teachers have no choice but to treat the "official knowledge" as a universal framework (Giddens, 2001). In addition, under the pervasive phenomenon of out-of-field teaching, in which teachers are assigned to teach subjects beyond their field of specificity, lacking professional subject knowledge, teachers are forced to hinge merely on curriculum documents while conducting lessons (Ingersoll and Perda, 2008). Teachers subsequently become estranged labourers, who are alienated in the sense that they cannot consciously decide what to teach but are somehow forced to teach "official knowledge" stated in the curricula (Marx, 1995). Heavy workload caused by loads of administrative work, which has been a pitfall encountered by teachers for long, even aggravates the entirety of the situation (Apple, 2000b). Not possessing autonomy to decide instructional content, teachers are incapable of precluding the bias of the curriculum proposed by the ruling class; social reproduction is thereby an inevitable outcome.

Middle-Class Attributes in Pedagogy

Not only the curriculum but pedagogy employed by teachers also favours middle-class students. Pedagogy is absolutely as crucial as curriculum. Should content of the curriculum be metaphorically compared to ingredients of a dish, pedagogy is the way by which the dish is cooked. For such a reason, pedagogy adopted by teachers also plays a significant role in determining whether students can learn well and excel academically. In traditional classrooms, teachers were expected to employ the explicit instruction pedagogical approach by teaching and explaining meanings directly as well as asking learners to reiterate learnt knowledge (CDC, 2017). All the same, with a booming body of educational research, some novel percepts of and insights into learning have been brought up by numerous scholars: learning has been investigated by constructivists to be a process of knowledge exploration and meaning construction (Alesandrini and Larson, 2002).

It is thereby not uncommon to see that pedagogical methodologies adopted by teachers in contemporary classrooms no longer lay emphasis on direct instruction or robotic drills but stress communications and exploration of knowledge instead. For

instance, co-construction and inquiry-based approaches, in which learners “contribute collectively to creation of knowledge” and “[engage] in enquiry”, are advocated in the English Language education in Hong Kong (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p.71). These pedagogical approaches are in sync with some general learning goals expected by the government to be attained by students within the twelve years of compulsory education; those goals involve possession of a breadth of knowledge by recognizing their own responsibilities for learning as well as developing self-learning skills, cultivation of a habit of reading extensively and independently, and acquisition of a biliteral and trilingual competence (Education Bureau, 2012). Furthermore, the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, which emphasizes provision of “purposeful contexts” and “learning to communicate through purposeful interaction”, takes the place of the conservative grammar-translation method, which zeros in on memorization of vocabulary and grammatical rules, and audiolingual method, which places emphasis on oral repetition of language items (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p.73; Yule, 2014).

With advocacy of constructivism as well as the advent of the CLT approach, the pedagogical paradigm experiences a radical transformation from being teacher-centred to student-centred; such a transformation is accompanied by a change in the style of learning activities from lecturing to meaningful and communicative tasks, videlicet group projects, portfolios, and process writing activities (CDC & HKEAA, 2007). Teachers’ roles in the course of students’ learning accordingly shift from authoritative controllers, who transmit knowledge, to facilitators, who provide expert scaffolding for learners (Choudhury, 2011): contemporary teachers are expected to work closely with students and promote students’ active learning through strategies of collaborative learning, problem-solving, experimental learning, ongoing reflection, and perpetual feedback (CDC & HKEAA, 2007). Such changes in pedagogy, learning activities, and teachers’ roles are favourable to middle-class students, who are prevalently portrayed to be creative, critical, initiative, and open-minded, but disfavours working-class students, who probably prefer mechanical pedagogy requiring solely diligence, determination, and perseverance.

It can be summarized from the above analysis that working-class students are destined to be underprivileged in the contemporary education system in that they are less familiar with the content of as well as values embraced by the curriculum, and the pedagogy adopted is incommensurate with their learning styles.

Training of Subservient Workers

Added to inequalities in access and participation as well as incorporation of middle-class culture and values into curriculum and pedagogy, training of subservient workers through the hidden curriculum is unquestionably a reason why education serves for social reproduction.

Scarcely does the hidden curriculum involve explicitly taught knowledge, but it refers to values or attitudes unconsciously acquired by students through their experience at school such as discovery of the setup of the entire school as well as interactions with different people at school (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995). Attitudes and dispositions transmitted through the hidden curriculum at present such as diligence, obedience, and high motivation are those required for nurturing labourers deferring to the authority of the seniors and so in favour of dominance of the privileged class (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004; Haralambos & Holborn, 1995). Stressing the hierarchical structure at school, schools reward students who obey teachers' orders and punish those who disobey or even challenge teachers (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995). In spite of abandonment of the pedagogical approach of direct instruction, students are still expected to be obedient to a certain extent by following teachers' instructions and obeying classroom rules. In Hong Kong, not only do report cards of primary and secondary students uncover students' academic results, they also unveil students' conduct. Criteria for assessing students' conduct are personal traits such as discipline, diligence, politeness, and sense of responsibility; only can students possessing these desired personalities obtain outstanding grades or positive comments for their conduct. Better grades or comments in conduct enable students to stand out amongst the multitude of candidates while seeking education or career opportunities; such positive reinforcement provides motivation for students to accept values and attitudes conveyed by the hidden curriculum in a bid to grade higher or obtain better comments for their conduct (Corps, 2008). Inducing students to accept the hierarchical structure of society, the hidden curriculum can bestow a sense of "false consciousness" upon working-class students and preclude the working class from challenging the authority or possessing an aspiration of moving upwards in terms of social class (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004); this obviously paves way for social reproduction.

Another avenue through which the hidden curriculum at school trains students to become subservient workers in the future is provision of motivation through extrinsic rewards. "Official knowledge" selected by curriculum planners and incorporated into official curricula being uninteresting to most learners and incommensurate with what students are curious about, students possess a tendency to lack motivation to learn knowledge taught at school (Apple, 2000a; Holt, 1969). Examinations nonetheless motivate students to learn the dull knowledge by heart since students understand that only by taking in the dull knowledge can they obtain desirable results in examinations. Students receiving formal education at school are thereby motivated to work hard and excel academically by external rewards in lieu of their intrinsic curiosity; such an educational setting is compatible with the working setting that students will encounter after they have grown up, where work may be intrinsically unsatisfying, but hard work can be rewarded extrinsically (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995). Even though Hong Kong has thrived into an international metropolis where tertiary industry prevails, a vast number of subservient working-class labourers are still required in disparate service industries. Notwithstanding

not necessarily being fond of such monotonous work, those workers are still willing to engage in their career and perform their assigned duties for the sake of livelihood of themselves and their families; their motivation to work thereby originates from extrinsic rewards. Nurturing workers who are motivated by external rewards, the hidden curriculum in the schooling context provides the ruling class with a conformist workforce that is merely concerned about rewards like salaries or wages, favouring replication of the class structure and social systems.

Biased Definition of Talent

Last but surely not the least, meritocracy is meant to reward people with talents, yet the definition of “talent” in contemporary society is biased and misleading; this doubtlessly impedes meritocracy and contributes to social reproduction. A person’s talent is directly proportional to importance of the position that s/he obtains in society under stratification principles (Davis and Moore, 1981). Hence, only by measuring the talent of a person comprehensively can s/he be matched with a position that suits his/her talent most and can mismatch between talent and position be shunned. A person’s talent is usually measured in terms of qualifications obtained by him/her, and what makes the situation problematic is that qualifications cannot holistically and efficaciously reveal a person’s talent.

Dissociation between Intelligence and Qualifications

To begin with, the correlation between a person’s intelligence and his/her qualifications has been found out to be insignificant. A person’s intelligence is viewed as his/her adaptability to unfamiliar scenarios; this implies that an intelligent person, when encountering intractable pitfalls or difficulties, keeps an open mind and is bold enough to get them over (Holt, 1969). Attributed to the ever-changing nature of society, occupations and positions of paramount importance in society ought to be assigned to the most intelligent people, who can adapt to new environments and handle pressing crises at ease, in a bid to cater for societal needs and yield profitable effects on society. However, not tantamount to a knowledgeable person, an intelligent person is not necessarily capable of excelling academically and performing well in standardized examinations. As manifested from some research findings, only does the intelligence coefficient (IQ) of a person exert negligible influence on his/her educational attainment (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995). In other words, it is not the case that the more intelligent a person is, the higher educational attainment or qualifications s/he obtains. This piece of research finding thereby suggests that qualifications or educational attainment appear not to be accurate yardsticks of a person’s talent or appropriate avenues of matching people with right positions. Measuring people’s talent and selecting people in such a way, the current education system and even the entire society are apparently not meritocratic in nature, and talented people are not guaranteed an opportunity to achieve social mobility.

Ignorance of Multiple Intelligences

Another piece of evidence suggesting that measurement of a person's talent using qualifications or educational attainment is biased and inappropriate is that people possess some talents that cannot be represented in terms of qualifications. For all being the commonest means through which qualifications can be obtained, standardized examinations are indeed insufficient to comprehensively tell students' talents. Each person possesses seven disparate intelligences in accordance with the theory of multiple intelligences, yet only do most examinations in the world assess students' linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). Most examinations are conducted in the written form and require students to write essays on certain topics even for some practical subjects such as music and visual arts. They subsequently merely assess students' linguistic ability while keeping other aspects of students' abilities such as musical and spatial abilities out of consideration (Gardner & Hatch, 1989).

Results of two international assessments, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIPLS), are capable of providing empirical evidence corroborating that middle-class students possess a propensity to possess higher linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences than working-class students do. PISA aims at assessing the extent to which fifteen-year-old students have acquired principal knowledge and skills required by modern societies (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012) whilst PIPILS aims at assessing fourth grade students' reading comprehension skills (Mullis et al., 2012). Statistical analyses have discovered that nearly fifteen percent of discrepancies in students' mathematics, reading, and science performance in PISA 2012 arose from disparities in students' socio-economic status (OECD, 2012). Even though socio-economic status appears not to be a determinant of students' linguistic and logical-mathematical performances, the impact exerted by such a factor ought not to be kept out of consideration. The report of PIPILS 2011 further elucidates that socio-economically advantaged and more educated parents are usually capable of cultivating a supportive home environment at an early stage of their children's intellectual development through provision of learning resources and opportunities as well as engagement in literacy activities with their children (Mullis et al., 2012). Nurturing students enjoying literacy and possessing a solid foundation in literacy, these acts enable socially-economically advantaged students to outperform their socio-economically disadvantaged counterparts in linguistic and logical-mathematical aspects. Should standardized examinations measure talent and ability solely in terms of these two aspects of students' abilities, a student's class background manifestly positively pertains to his/her educational attainment.

Overemphasis on the Primacy of English

The last piece of evidence for inappropriateness of the measurement of people's

talent adopted in the contemporary world is overemphasis on the primacy of the English language in the global village. Being the most popular and pervasive lingua franca in the globe, the English Language has been designated as a mandatory subject in curricula of a multiplicity of countries and even one of official languages of places where inhabitants do not acquire the English Language as their mother tongue. English proficiency has thereby become one of the yardsticks for people's talent and so one of the prime criteria for selection of people. Consequently, a positive correlation has been discovered between a person's English proficiency and his/her income, ease of doing business, and quality of life (EF Education First, 2014). This concurs with findings of a local study conducted by Tsang (2011), which suggests that the English language serves as cultural capital for educational advancement in Hong Kong.

Should people from all social classes possess equitable opportunities to attain a high English proficiency, use of English proficiency as a measurement of talent as well as a tool for social selection will be deemed appropriate; such a description is however far from reality. In Hong Kong, only is the English Language a foreign language in society; this implies that barely is it the mother tongue of most citizens, and people learn the language chiefly for academic or workplace purposes in lieu of for the sake of everyday communications. Encountering the English Language merely at school, most students in Hong Kong possess very few chances to practise listening to and speaking English. Middle-class parents are nevertheless capable of affording and investing in some after-school English classes or English Language self-learning resources (EF Education First, 2014). What is more, unlike working-class parents, most of whom are poorly educated and can barely speak English, middle-class parents can deliberately communicate with their children in English at home in a bid to provide them with an authentic context to develop their communicative competence. Students from a middle-class background thereby possess an advantage when English proficiency is adopted as measurement of people's talent and competency as well as a tool for selecting people.

From the three pieces of evidence, it is evident that educational attainment does not reveal students' talents on a holistic basis, and social reproduction is likely to take place given that positions in society are allocated on the basis of educational attainment.

Alternatives

By and large, it is in evidence that education irrefutably serves for social reproduction in the sense that the education system creates inequalities amongst students of different classes, favours middle-class students, shapes subservient labour through the hidden curriculum, and measures talent and ability in a biased manner. Under the current system, middle-class students can obtain qualifications, prestigious jobs, and high social status more easily than working-class students do. Extending free education to the lower

social classes, the ruling class however attempts to legitimize the status quo by offering an illusion of objectivity, neutrality, and opportunity, misleading people into blaming themselves for their own failure (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004; Haralambos & Holborn, 1995). Two recommendations aiming at providing a way out for the current situation and facilitating social mobility have been proposed by sociologists; both are however infeasible in the context of Hong Kong.

Democratic Schools

Characterized by the notion of democracy, which denotes a mode of governance involving consent of the governed as well as equitable opportunity, democratic schools proposed by Apple and Beane (1995) possess two essential attributes: democratic structures and democratic curricula. Not only professional educators but students from whatever social class, along with their parents, are involved in decision-making processes in democratic schools; all stakeholders collaborate to create an educational context that values diversity and cares about the common good of students from distinct backgrounds (Apple and Beane, 1995). Opinions of disparate parties being put into consideration, neither can unfair tracking systems nor hidden curriculum serving for interests of the ruling class exist; on the contrary, all students enjoy equitable opportunities of participation in learning, and the hidden curriculum embraces values serving for the common good such as democracy and justice (Apple and Beane, 1995). Additionally, teachers in democratic schools design the curricula with students in accordance with students' interests in lieu of blindly following official curriculum documents proposed by the government and teaching the "official knowledge" selected by curriculum planners; they also respect students' multiple intelligences by assessing students' abilities through diverse avenues in lieu of biased and standardized written examinations (Apple and Beane, 1995). In these ways, working-class students will no longer be required to learn knowledge that they are neither interested in nor familiar with, and their abilities can be assessed and revealed comprehensively. Such curricula, pedagogy, and assessments are reckoned to be genuinely capable of piquing working-class students' interests in acquiring knowledge and facilitating their learning; working-class students are thereby more likely to excel academically, gain qualifications, and achieve social mobility.

Unfortunately, hardly can the two attributes of democratic schools be found in mainstream schools in Hong Kong. Concerning the school structure, schools in Hong Kong have attempted to reflect democracy in policy-formulating processes but failed to engage every stakeholder involved. Education policies of local schools are enacted and formulated by the incorporated management committees, which comprise the principal, staff members, parents, alumni, representatives from the sponsoring body of the school, and independent members (Department of Justice, 2005a, 2005b). Even though some parents are entitled to enter the incorporated management committee so that voices from

distinct social classes can be heard and taken into account in policy-making processes, students, upon whom education at school exerts the most impact, are incapable of speaking out or partaking in formulation of school policies; the incorporated management committee thereby fails to represent a democratic structure. Regarding the curricula, hardly can the curricula of both mainstream and international schools deviate from curriculum guides. Under supervision and inspection of the government, mainstream schools are obliged to devise their curricula in accordance with the official curriculum documents provided by the government. Moreover, schools will be incapable of assisting their students in performing well in standardized examinations without covering all content of curriculum guides.

Attributed to these two concerns, it is implausible for mainstream schools in Hong Kong to devise democratic curricula merely on the basis of students' interests and inclinations. Despite possession of a larger degree of autonomy and flexibility in devising their own curricula, international schools in Hong Kong cannot fully incorporate the concept of democratic curricula into their curriculum design either. For instance, even though barely do schools operated by the English Schools Foundation adopt the local curricula, priming students for the IB Diploma, teachers have to ensure that all students have acquired certain knowledge and mastered certain skills prior to promotion to the next grade so that students have sufficient knowledge and skills to take standardized examinations of the IB Diploma eventually (English Schools Foundation, n.d.). As a consequence, students cannot be given the full autonomy to plan the curricula in accordance with what they desire discovering and exploring.

All in all, should universities take students' results in public examinations as predominant criteria in selection of candidates, and employers in society adhere to taking qualification as the only criterion when hiring employees, hardly can democratic schools, which do not prime students for public examinations, thrive in Hong Kong and assist working-class students in achieving social mobility.

Deschooling

A recommendation much more radical than democratic schools is creation of a deschooling society proposed by Illich (2008), who believes that only by abolishing the schooling system can social mobility be achieved. In accordance with Illich (2008), learning ought to be segregated from both qualifications and instruction; this implies that people do not learn for the sake of gaining qualifications or seeking better occupations, and learning does not necessarily take place in a formal schooling context. Being incapable of accurately and comprehensively revealing people's talent, qualifications ought not to be merged with both education and learning, and students should not be disqualified from any education opportunities solely on account of lack of qualifications. In addition, planned

and structured learning, which is the learning mode in formal schooling settings, can facilitate learning albeit unplanned and casual learning such as observations and practices, which are learning modes of apprenticeship, can also be efficacious; learning thereby needs not be confined to education at school (Illich, 2008). Should schools no longer be institutionalized places for learning, but people can learn whenever and wherever they prefer, education opportunities can be more equitably distributed amongst distinct social classes.

In a deschooling society, learning occurs through two avenues: skill drills with masters and liberal education through discussions (Illich, 2008). Entailing mastery of certain behaviors, acquisition of skills counts heavily on intensive and mechanical drills, so anybody competent and skillful in certain skills or abilities is good enough a tutor of those particular skills (Illich, 2008). When instructors of skills are no longer confined to licensed teachers but embody masters of certain skills as well, more tutors of various skills are available in the market, enabling more interested people to be instructed in discrepant skills. Unlike skill training, liberation education is concerned with intellectual development; to be more precise, it places stress on exploration of application of theories or skills in practice (Illich, 2008). Liberal education can be conducted through discussions amongst small groups of people possessing similar interests or pitfalls to be resolved, and intellectual development is presumed to be promoted through such a kind of learning. A combination of skill drills and liberal education taking the place of the present schooling system, a deschooling society, where education opportunities become popularized, and people can learn whatever they like in lieu of taking in merely the “official knowledge”, is created; it is subsequently less likely for social reproduction to take place through education.

Such a recommendation is however not feasible in the contemporary society of Hong Kong inasmuch as qualification, which possesses an inextricable relationship with the present schooling system, is one of the overriding, if not the only, criteria in social selection. Judging and selecting people through a comparison between their education and professional qualifications is perceived by many to be objective and convenient in that only can qualifications be obtained after having gone through certain standardized tests, and even mild discrepancies in qualifications can be easily identified. Should the schooling system be abolished, a fixed curriculum applying to all will no longer exist, and students will no longer be evaluated by standardized examinations. In such a vein, hardly can employees be selected in accordance with qualifications, but people have to be selected based on applicants’ interests and potentials, which is rather cumbersome and time-consuming. More importantly, the reason why the ruling class moulds the education system in a way that is extremely unfair to and intends to bestow a sense of false consciousness upon working-class students is that it desires precluding working-class students from excelling academically and obtaining qualifications at ease in a bid

to shun social mobility. A class structure favouring the status quo as well as dominance of capitalists can subsequently be replicated as intended by the ruling class. It is thereby almost implausible to completely collapse the schooling system and create a deschooling society proposed by Illich (2008) under capitalists' rule.

All said and done, encouraging social mobility and impeding social reproduction, the two alternatives to formal schooling presented above deprive the ruling class of its own interests and so are easier said and done given that the current societal and political conditions of Hong Kong remain unchanged. It is expected that only by radically revolutionizing the entire social and political systems can education genuinely serve for social mobility as suggested by functionalists and can an utterly impartial society, which does not favour any social groups in particular, be created.

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論教育與社會流動

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摘要

不同社會學家對教育於社會之角色意見迥異：結構主義認為教育用作社會篩選，促進社會流動；衝突理論則謂教育導致社會再製，阻礙社會流動。本文透過香港教育制度闡明衝突理論較貼切，並指出教育從下列四方面促成社會階級結構再製：學生不平等參與、課程與教學法傾向中層特質、訓練恭順員工及才華衡量欠中立。一些社會學家提出以民主學校或去學校化社會取代傳統學校教育，但這兩建議於香港均不大可行。

關鍵詞

社會再製，社會流動，衝突理論，符應理論

