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Extended Education for Academic Performance, Whole Person Development and Self-fulfilment: The case of Hong Kong

Atara Sivan & Gertrude Po Kwan Siu¹

Abstract: This paper examines the ways in which extended education is manifested in a place where schooling and academic achievement are of primary focus. Over the past few decades, the Hong Kong education system has undergone major reforms that have incorporated various forms of extended education to enhance students' all-round development. Despite these changes, Hong Kong people continue to put an emphasis on academic excellence resulting in parent-directed activities in a form of private supplementary tutoring. At the same time, extended education is also demonstrated through students' self-directed engagement in serious leisure activities that contribute to adolescents' growth. The paper portrays and examines the different activities directed by schools, parents and students within school and out-of-school settings in light of the sociocultural context of Hong Kong. References are made to school based initiatives and studies on outside classroom learning and serious leisure among children and adolescents.

Keywords: Hong Kong, Life-Wide Learning, Other Learning Experiences, tutoring, serious leisure

Introduction

Over the past few decades, Hong Kong has undergone major educational and curriculum reforms. Underpinned by the notions of whole person education, lifelong and life-wide learning, these reforms reinforced the initiatives and offerings of programmes and activities aiming to enhance students' all-round development. Even though these changes aim at academic, personal, social and emotional development of students, the academic area is perceived as the most significant of all and thus shapes the profile and implementation of extended education. This paper examines the ways in which extended education is manifested in Hong Kong within school and out-of-school contexts. Specifically, we refer to activities directed by the school, parents and students.

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International Forum on After-School Seoul, Korea, 14/7/17

School-directed activities: Whole person development

Following international and regional educational trends, Hong Kong has initiated a series of educational reforms over the last few decades (Cheng, 2009). These changes were underpinned by the move to a knowledge based society and the need to maintain educational competitiveness and develop students' independent learning capabilities (Chan, 2002). A major reform was implemented in 2000 to focus on student-centered approach, enhance quality education and introduce various mechanisms for preparation for life beyond academic development. A new curriculum framework which encompasses several key learning areas (KLA), some generic skills, values and attitudes was introduced. Subjects were no longer compartmentalized but grouped into eight KLA: Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics, Personal Social and Humanities, Science, Technology, Art and Physical Education. Schools were called to develop certain generic skills including communication, critical thinking, collaboration, information technology, numeracy, problem solving, self-management and study skills. Furthermore, a list of proposed values and attitudes to be imparted in schools was suggested. This reform aimed to fulfil the overall school aims of providing students with: "essential life-long learning experiences for whole-person development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physical development, social skills and aesthetics, according to individual potential, so that all students can become active, responsible and contributing members of society, the nation and the world" (Curriculum Development Council, 2001, p. 3). The new framework has demonstrated a move from a traditional teacher-centered curriculum based on study of academic disciplines to a progressive student-centered approach that emphasizes cross disciplinary themes. Of high relevance to the notion of extended education has been the shift in the concept of curriculum from *documents* to *learning experiences* which were defined as "the contexts of learning processes and learning contents, and the social environment in which students learn how to learn" (Curriculum Development Council, 2001, p. 20). Students were introduced to a range of learning experiences to ensure their whole person development.

Another major reform relevant to the concept of extended education took place in senior secondary and higher education with the system moving to a new academic structure. This structure allows all students to complete 6 years of secondary schooling and obtain an education diploma, and higher education study is extended from three to four years. A new senior secondary curriculum was introduced which includes career oriented and other learning experiences, both aim to extend beyond the mere academic development of students. The curriculum reforms have introduced two strategies that are pertinent to extended education: Life-wide Learning (LWL) and Other Learning Experiences (OLE).

The strategy of LWL aims to move student learning beyond the classroom to other contexts within the school and community. The term LWL refers to a range of school-organized activities which aims to extend and enrich students' experiences for whole person development and nurturing their life skills. Examples of such activities include field trips, museum visits, community service activities, and training of skills such as leadership and communication. These organized activities not only help extend and enrich students' knowledge, skills, and values acquired in the classroom, but also widen their horizons and perspectives in general.

Specifically, LWL emphasizes the following essential learning experiences: moral and civic education, community service, physical and aesthetic development, and career-related experiences. All the aforementioned forms of learning foster the development of five essential Chinese virtues: 'Ethics, Intellect, Physical Development, Social Skills, and Aesthetics' (德、智、體、羣、美) (Education Bureau, 2010). To best implement LWL, schools are required to make effective use of time and resources in providing students with pedagogically structured activities. Resources here refer to the use of internet and mass media, involvement of peers and family, collaboration with social service organizations and uniform groups, and utilization of the natural environment.

The offering of this experiential learning within a range of educational contexts is a significant component of extended education in Hong Kong. Learning is not limited to knowledge transmission in a classroom but takes places through students' structured involvement in life situations and contexts. Learning takes place when students interact with a relevant context (Lave & Wenger, 1990). During such interactions, students learn about others, becoming aware of their own and others' abilities and emotions. These experiences can enhance problem-solving skills, develop personal and social values and attitudes, and facilitate emotional growth. For example, one school arranged a *Chinese culture week* to strengthen students' understanding of the Chinese culture and cultivate cultural values. To achieve these goals, students were engaged in a series of structured activities like organizing a carnival around cultural themes, undertaking service learning actions (Furco, 2011) and participating in a guided visit to the museum of history. Service learning is an experiential learning which focuses on the community (Howard, 2012). Students are engaged in contributing to the community and the emphasis is on authentic issues and collaboration, with the aim to benefit both students and the recipients and to ensure equal focus on serving and learning (Hackar-Cam & Schmidt, 2014).

To ensure that learning took place, students were involved in reflection on their actions through essay writing and painting which also serve as channels for them to express feelings about their involvement in all these activities (Education Bureau, 2017).

Further examples of structured activities led by community organizations are: a training camp offered by the Correctional Services Department, adventure training by the Hong Kong Playground Association Services and a series of sharing sessions by the Women's Foundation Association. Comments of students and teachers attested to the benefits of these activities to the development of effective and self-regulated learning habits, enhancement of confidence, and acquisition of major life skills (Education Bureau, 2012).

The other strategy pertinent to extended education under the new senior secondary curriculum is the OLE. The provision of these learning experiences is guided by several principles. Taking into account students' choices and interests, their prior knowledge, learning needs, and motivation, a range of meaningful, coherent and flexible learning opportunities are provided for students to build their ability to learn in different contexts and interact with others outside the schools (Education Bureau, 2012a). The structured nature of OLE is demonstrated in allocation of time-tabled and non-time-tabled learning time. For example, structured time-tabled activities for the areas of moral and civic education and community service utilize morning assembly, life education lesson and class-teacher period while non-time-tabled activities include study trips, community service award scheme and community

leaders project (Education Bureau, 2013). One additional component of the OLE which illustrates its pedagogically based structure is the establishment of Student Learning Profile (SLP). This is the presentation of a student's learning experiences and reflection on the corresponding learning and whole person development. Students are encouraged to prepare SLP for application for tertiary institutions both locally and internationally (Education Bureau, 2012b).

Overall, both LWL and OLE aim at whole person development as illustrated by their offerings and underlying principles. At the same time, they emphasize the nurturing of good learning habits while facilitating students' lifelong learning abilities and preparing them for further academic studies.

Studies on the effect of school directed activities have highlighted their benefits to students' development. A field experiment study of Hui and Lau (2006) investigated the effect of drama education on the psychological development of primary school students in Hong Kong. A drama education programme was delivered to students with the assistance of school teachers after school. There was a control group taking part in other extracurricular activities. Students in the experimental group were found to be more fluent in their creative responses and their drawings were more elaborate, unconventional and boundary-breaking. They also produced more interesting and creative stories, and were more expressive in their story-telling.

A more recent study by Cheung (2011) examined the use of adventure-based programmes organized by secondary schools. After taking part in the programmes, participants rated themselves significantly higher in all aspects of development, especially social self-concept, general self-efficacy, learning climate, and spiritual dimension. Their sense of life purpose and life satisfaction was also rated high.

While the senior secondary curriculum has been reformed to facilitate whole-person development, initiatives are also taken at tertiary education along this direction. Universities have been providing undergraduates with learning programmes outside the classroom and in the form of internship. Apart from integrating students' knowledge with practical experience, these programmes aim at enhancing students' personal growth and social awareness, helping them achieve interdisciplinary learning which goes beyond their academic focus (Faculty of Social Sciences, 2015).

Programmes offered at Hong Kong universities include students' involvement in learning communities and their active participation in service learning activities. Students taking part in a service learning programme at one university in Hong Kong indicated that such experience heightened their self and social awareness, and enhanced confidence in taking up their future career (Ngai, 2006). Students at another university were empowered to establish a learning community together with the university academic staff, professionals, secondary school students and older adults (Sivan et al., 2015). Utilizing an action learning approach (Zuber-Skerritt & Teare, 2013), they planned and implemented a series of activities while working collaboratively on issues and problems related to healthy lifestyles and wellbeing. This form of extended education heightened students' awareness and understanding of diverse lifestyles and needs, inducing value changes and contributing to their social and emotional development (Sivan et al., 2015). Students' reflection on their participation in this learning community revealed increase in confidence, enhancement of ability to work in teams, and development of leadership skills (Sivan, 2017).

Parent-directed activities: Enhancing academic performance

While people identify strongly with capitalist culture, meritocracy and credentialism, competition is encouraged in the Hong Kong society (Ho, 2010). This competitive atmosphere is further intensified by the limited university places and the well-accepted Confucian obligation of making efforts to improve the self (Bray & Lykins, 2012; Yung, 2015). Indoctrinated with the Chinese idea that emphasizes the role of examination results as indicators of learning and achievement (Careless, 2011), academic performance has remained a major concern of parents and schoolchildren. Parents enroll their children in after school tutorial classes to better prepare them for school and public examinations. Sending their children to tutorial classes is perceived by parents as an educational investment and means to climb the social ladder (Bray & Lykins, 2012; Ho, 2010).

Several studies indicated the popularity of after school activities in Hong Kong and especially those that could contribute to students' academic development. A survey conducted by the UNICEF among primary and secondary students and their parents revealed that most of the parents enrolled their children to after school extracurricular activities to utilize their potentials and enhance their competitive edge for admission to better schools (Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF, 2014). It is not unlikely to see children filling the swimming pools in competitive swimming lessons after school or during weekends as an attempt to build their profile beyond academic performance. At the same time, as children grow up and enter higher grades, they involve less in non-academic activities such as playing a musical instrument. Parents expect them to study more and harder to achieve good grades in examinations (Ho, 2011). There has been an increase in undertaking tutorials with increasing age of students. For example, during 2010 about 72 percentages of lower secondary students, 82 percent in middle school and 85 in senior school received tutoring (Kwo & Bray, 2010).

The pressure exerted on children to join after school activities comes as early as their kindergarten age. A recent study among parents of kindergarten students pointed out that many children are involved in at least one after school activity in midweek and one at the weekend (Lau & Cheng, 2014). As the children grow, they are loaded with more extracurricular activities. Though parents realize the importance of physical health and fitness in child development, most of them still prefer enrolling their children in English language-related activities as means to get them prepared for primary education (Lau & Cheng, 2014). Parents believe that these structured activities are more beneficial and can help with all round education, cultivation of talent, diminishing weaknesses and enhancing social interaction (Lau & Cheng, 2014).

Bray's study (2013) revealed that about half of the middle grade of secondary school students and the majority of the upper grades students received private supplementary tutoring about one to two hours per week and there would be increased duration during the examination season. Private tutorial of the English subject is particularly popular among students since proficiency in English can open the door to better schooling either locally or abroad. Secondary school students also undertook tutorials in other core subjects like Chinese and Mathematics (Bray, 2013). Many students found private tuitions more effective than regular schools in helping them get prepared for examinations and obtain higher

grades (Zhan, Bray, Wang, Lykins, & Kwo, 2013). Students' accounts showed that they learned from private tuitions knowledge and skills in tackling examinations as contrast to acquiring all-round development in school education. Zhan and colleagues (2013) found that when students grew older, they internalized the need to perform well in their studies and actually did well in examinations too. Bray (1999) identified private tutorials as *shadow education*, asserting that they only exist at the shadow of the mainstream education. From the government perspective, there have been regulations related to tutorials and at the same time it has been emphasized that there is no need for this mechanism since the educational system is providing the adequate education for youngsters (Kwo & Bray, 2010). As long as the need to perform well in examinations remains prevalent among parents and schoolchildren, private tutoring will continue to serve as an important form of extended education in Hong Kong.

Student-directed activities: Leisure pursuits for self-fulfillment

Hong Kong students are portrayed as diligent and their lives are dominated by schoolwork both in and out of school. As revealed in the previous sections, even if they have activities other than studies, those activities are predominately arranged by their parents and geared towards complementing their academic portfolio. At the same time, experiences of school-age adolescents are not limited to schoolwork and there is another significant domain in their life which is leisure. A study examining the role of leisure in school life of Hong Kong higher education students revealed that leisure provided them a channel for rejuvenation and revitalization so that they could again embark on their studies after all (Sivan, 2003). Leisure activities that students engaged in also broadened knowledge and developed skills that could be utilized in their studies, such as some thinking skills and presentation tricks. Students' organized leisure activities facilitated the development of their strong social bonding, enabling them to have someone to turn to when they needed help, and providing them with strong social and emotional support.

Of high relevance to the concept of extended education is the construct of serious leisure (Stebbins, 2007). Serious leisure is defined as "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity sufficiently substantial, interesting, and fulfilling in nature for the participants to find a career there acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience" (Stebbins, 2007, p. 5). The adjective *serious* represents qualities such as earnestness, sincerity, importance, and carefulness. It connotes the importance of activity pursuit, which eventually brings to the participants self-fulfillment. Serious leisure is characterized by six distinctive qualities: perseverance, leisure career, knowledge and skills, durable benefits, unique ethos and identities (Stebbins, 1992). Perseverance refers to the need to endure in the activity, and leisure career implies that the activity may develop into a career in either leisure or work. Serious leisure participants need to make an effort to gain skill and knowledge and their leisure pursuit will bring them personal and social benefits. Serious leisure also leads to the development of a unique ethos around the activity, and as a result of all the above qualities, participants tend to develop certain identities with their chosen pursuits.

Serious leisure is a form of self-directed learning which is intentional and self-planned where the individual participant is clearly in control of this learning process (Belanger, 2015; Merriam & Bierema, 2013). The learner controls the start, direction, and termination of learning which is pedagogically structured so that learning is systematic and hierarchical. The meaning of serious leisure for those who pursue it is obtaining rewards of personal fulfillment which in return becomes their motivation for further activity pursuit. Self-fulfillment is experienced when participants engage themselves in the process of developing their capacity, particularly their gifts and characters (Stebbins, 2012).

Of the scarce studies on serious leisure about adolescents, two were conducted in Hong Kong, highlighting the pursuit pattern and outcomes of such involvement. The first one was a phenomenological study (Siu, 2013) on fifteen adolescents taking part in the three forms of serious leisure: amateur (Chinese-dance, stage-play, basketball-playing, football-playing), hobbyist (equestrian, being an NBA fan, taekwondo, guitar-playing with a band, photography, piano-playing, painting, street-dancing, canoeing), and volunteer (church voluntary service) (Stebbins, 2012). Serious leisure experiences of the participants in this study were the key elements that both incited their interests and consolidated them. The participants' single-minded pursuits of excellence in their special fields were achieved largely through self-disciplined search for knowledge and engagement in those related activities. Their initial interest in the activities was consolidated by their achievements in their own special fields, the resultant sense of fulfillment and the recognition of their effort and talent by others. Through engagement in their serious leisure, the participants developed insights into themselves and their surroundings, gaining motivation to explore and discover their strengths and accept their limitations. Furthermore, all participants desired to keep their serious leisure activities to continue meeting their current needs, including stress-reduction, life-fulfillment and -enrichment, and getting together with friends. Some also expressed their wish to develop further in their leisure pursuit such as becoming a taekwondo or dance teacher or having own painting collection and first exhibition.

The second study was conducted on a sample of senior secondary school students from ten schools of different academic levels and geographically located around Hong Kong (Sivan, Tam, Siu, Chan & Stebbins, 2017). This study revealed a higher frequency and longer duration of participation in the students' serious leisure pursuits. This phenomenon was especially marked among those engaging themselves in performance and fine arts activities. Furthermore, it was found that activities that required effort and dedication such as learning how to play a musical instrument or master certain dancing skills in performing arts became a serious leisure of those who took part in them. In turn, students spent more time undertaking these activities.

Results of these two studies illustrated the importance of self-directed extended education that could be structured by the participants themselves with resultant development.

Conclusion

Education is a lifelong and all-encompassing process that involves both formal and non-formal learning. It differs from schooling which is structured, time-bounded and formal (El-

lis, Cogan, & Howey, 1991). Learning can take place throughout life, and formal, credentialing education is only the visible part of the educational iceberg (Livingstone, 2012). References are made to extended education as activities that are structured, held outside the classroom and geared towards students' development. Since education could take different forms, it is important to refer to all domains in the lives of children and young people to see where and how extended education takes place. Our examination was underpinned by this premise.

Extended education is manifested in Hong Kong through activities directed by the school, parents and students. School- and parent-directed activities aim to enhance students' learning and contribute to their whole person development. The practices of extended education are also highly influenced by the Chinese sociocultural context of Hong Kong as well as by its educational and curriculum reforms. A unique form of extended education in Hong Kong is found in students' self-directed serious leisure involvement. There, extended education brings participants numerous benefits which go beyond their academic achievement. Further examination of this form of extended education may help understand more its role in child and adolescent development. Efforts could also be made to facilitate students' participation in all three forms of extended education for their all-round development.

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