

The Study of Education, Knowledge and Power

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Abstract

One of the primary strategies for national government in China is the policy of building the country through talent. In this setting, educational changes have increased the importance of talent development, but this emphasis has also increased student learning pressure. This study examines the process of knowledge screening brought about by the load reduction strategy and how this influences the outcome of load reduction from the standpoint of the relationship between knowledge and power. It also examines how the allure of dominant ideologies and talent discourses may be a source of stress for students, drawing on Foucault (1980), Bourdieu (1973), and Kant (2007) theories of knowledge and power. It finishes with a vision of the load reduction goals and execution strategy in three directions.

Keywords

Educational Change; Learning; Power; Power Theory.

1. The Context of China's Talent Strategy and the Creation of Coursework Burden

Because education is primarily concerned with the formation and management of human subject types as human capital (Popkewitz, 2007), each country's vision and mission are distinct. The significance of talent development for national government in China is expressed first and foremost in national policy. The Hu Jintao government (2003–2013) established National Talent Development Plan (Central Committee, State Council, 2003) which clearly specified the guidelines and objectives for the growth of China's talent force in the current and future periods. Following that, President Xi (2013, 2016, 2018) reiterated his appeal for talent as a valued human resource to strengthen China's worldwide competitiveness, emphasizing the importance of talent capital in boosting the country's overall strength. Furthermore, China Education Plan for 2010 to 2020 calls for the training of billions of highly skilled employees, millions of talents in various sectors, and a big number of top-tier innovators.

Every three years, National Curriculum Reform (NCR) is held in response to the needs of the country's development, with the goal of making the educational process more favorable to the development of students' skills. The most recent NCR (2016) has resulted in more stringent standards, a broader range of courses, greater course loads, and higher expectations of student success, all of which require students to commit a significant amount of time and effort to repeated practice of course content and to perform well in examinations. As a result, students are subjected to a significantly increased coursework load than previously. The coursework burden refers to the duties that must be completed in terms of coursework (mostly paper and pencil examination results) and the resulting physical and psychological difficulties in education. According to the National Survey of Primary and Secondary School Children' Learning Stress, 28.7 percent of Chinese primary school students spend four hours a day on homework, three times as much as in France, four times as much as in Japan, and six times as much as in South Korea. These "extra" long hours of schoolwork are "squeezed" out of kids'

sleep time, which is typically less than 7 hours. Of the students who stayed up till 23:00 for coursework exercise, 18.2 percent of elementary school pupils. In grades 4 and 8, the detection rates of impaired eyesight were 36.5 percent and 65.3 percent, respectively. Another relevant data is that Chinese youngsters are top in terms of suicide causes (45.5 percent), followed by early love (22.7 percent) and parental divorce (13.6 percent). The graph below depicts the percentage of kids in primary school who have a significant academic load.

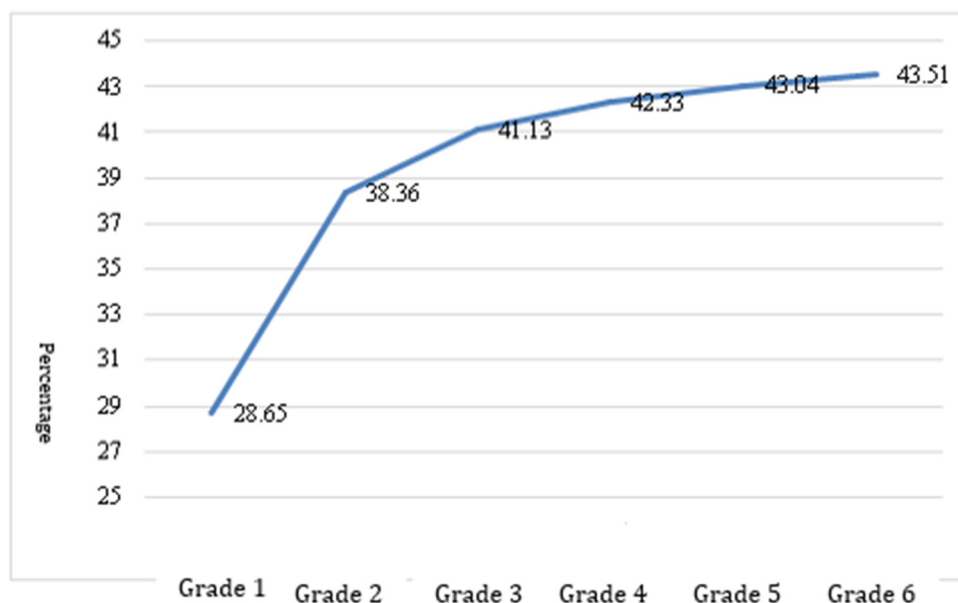


Figure 1. Students with a heavy academic load at each grade level

After the examination of these data, the Ministry of Education recognizes the heaviness of the burden on pupils at school and believes that this is antithetical to the concept of training human resources, as stated in Muller & Young (2019). Such a tendency could jeopardize the long-term growth of education. In 2018, the government responded by issuing the Circular on Measures to Reduce the Burden of Primary and Secondary School Students (MRB), which emphasizes the importance of primary and secondary school students' physical and mental health, as well as the concept of supporting students' whole development. It is true that MRB emphasizes the concern for the principles of teaching and learning in education, however, it also resulted in the selection and empowerment of knowledge, both of which challenged the purpose of the MRB: enable students to grow up as democratically empowered, thoughtful, free-willed human beings.

2. Implementation Rationale and Tension of the Load Reduction Policy

2.1. Reduce the Curricular Burden

One term in MRB is lowering the amount of hours students spend in school, including no more than three afternoon courses and no earlier than 8 a.m. in the morning, with the goal of reducing class time to lessen the disturbance that course activities cause to students' time and energy. It may appear that this has lowered the amount of schoolwork at its core, but it is vital to observe how it has influenced all aspects of the teaching system: curriculum material and teaching tasks have not been lowered concurrently, and in this case, the reduction in class time has necessitated a parallel rise in teaching efficiency. Teachers must make a choice in terms of knowledge as they face a more demanding workload and a more stringent quality evaluation system: classroom teaching would base on what will be assessed in the examinations, with less

extension and application of information outside the curriculum. In this situation, the MRB makes the knowledge gaining more beneficial for exams than for people. According to Constructivism Learning Theory in Bada& Olusegun (2015), meaningful learning results from the learner's active selection and processing of external information, during which the learner actively develops the meaning of the knowledge. If the process of knowledge discovery is skipped, students may wonder, "Why do we study this knowledge?" and "How will we put this information to use?"

2.2. A Greater Emphasis on Extracurricular Activities

Another objective in MRB is to encourage extracurricular reading and social programs to extend the intellect and broaden horizons. As a resource, the Ministry of Education has compiled a list of books for this purpose, which includes titles such as "Top 10 Books for the Soul" and "Designated Inspirational Books for Primary and Secondary School Students," and others. However, both the mandatory terms and the adjectives in the list's title communicate a request for specific knowledge and ideas, implying that extracurricular information students obtained must also conformed the socially acceptable requirements for character development, skill progression, and life success. Thus, extra-curricular reading becomes the activity of selecting reading material that is not relevant to classroom topic within the context of social and aesthetic judgments. How can such a denial of choice freedom in information acquisition serve the objective of enhancing the spiritual realm and fostering free will, paradoxically?

3. Power Perspectives behind Knowledge Filtration and the Implications for the Burden Reduction Process

3.1. Power in the Commodification of Knowledge

The filtering of in-class knowledge addresses the topic of whether type of knowledge is more deserving of being preserved and empowered. Young (2014) argues that this is because determining what is officially recognized is sometimes fraught with dispute over class, ethnicity, gender, and religion. In this context, many institutions will focus very closely on the examination system and the criteria. This indicates that exam-related knowledge will be preserved throughout the teaching and learning process, which removes knowledge from its original conceptual and contextual framework in order to serve a specific function. The filtered out knowledge possesses the power to reflect the quality of learning, which exists through the ability to negate other knowledge, and exclusivity is also a source of power as Bada& Olusegun (2015) suggested. Schools claim that having immediate access to principled information shortens the learning chain and allows pupils to learn more effectively rather than spending time investigating and investigating. Clearly, this misses the relationship between the basic transmission of curricular content and knowledge development. Ryle (1945) famously found that just transferring course content does not always imply knowledge transfer. He goes on to say that if one can repeat facts without knowing what they mean, it lacks something. The ability to negotiate conceptual connections, according to Ryle, is what brings the curriculum to life and makes the subject meaningful. This dynamic conceptual or reasoning power is referred to by him as 'knowing how.' Without the process of meaning-making, knowledge devolves into a commodity that is handed from one person to the next. 'Power in the broad sense is analogous to the capacity for change in human behavior,' writes Giddens (1979, p. 348). A person may be qualified to do so, but this is not the same as exercising power. In other words, a student may be powerful after obtaining this filtered knowledge, but if he does not know how to use and relate to it in practice, he does not become powerful by having it.

3.2. Functionality of Knowledge

Different attitudes can be identified in the school's concept of extra-curricular and intra-curricular knowledge, which serves as a metaphor for the school's perspective of intra-curricular knowledge as burdensome knowledge and extra-curricular knowledge as moderating knowledge. However, such divisions are not inherent in knowledge (Bada & Olusegun, 2015); rather, they are given diverse functions and capacities in order to serve different objectives. According to Foucault (1980), power and knowledge are inextricably linked; there cannot be a power connection without a corresponding building of a field of knowledge, and there cannot be knowledge without also presupposing and building a power connection. While in-class knowledge serves examinations and so puts pressure on students, the scope of extra-curricular knowledge is still defined by the books designated by the Ministry of Education, so this knowledge can be seen as serving the specific purpose of developing competencies beyond academic examinations, and although the two serve different functions, the source of authority is the same. This echoes with Foucault's theory in the power of knowledge, knowledge is established by examinations and meanwhile it also reinforced the power of the examination system. The functional view of extra-curricular knowledge, on the other hand, confines it to the boundaries of extra-curricular knowledge. In this circumstance, students are unable to create their own reading schedules that correspond to the knowledge they are interested in, and therefore developing extracurricular knowledge becomes just another type of information input, a task similar to a school project.

While the process of load reduction aims to reduce the burden on students in terms of both in-class and extra-curricular knowledge, from a power standpoint, it most likely ends up making students less powerful in the educational process. This prompts us to delve further into the true roots of the load in the context of social and political institutions.

4. So Where does the Real Burden Come From?

4.1. The Lure of the Talent Discourse

To understand the primary reasons why students' obligations are not being alleviated, we must return to the source of the responsibilities, beginning with China's talent system. Almost everyone in China is familiar with the concept "everyone can be a talent," which states that everyone has the potential to be a talent. Simultaneously, the state establishes rules for what and who is deemed talented, and these norms push individuals to continually adjust and control their traits and potential to be regarded talented. This allure stems from the labeling impact of talent (Selwyn, 2015, p. 6). As China's talent segmentation grows, titles such as domestic/international talent, leadership cadre talent, entrepreneurial talent, and so on arise, each with particular capabilities or attributes that set these individuals apart. In labeling certain persons as talents, Hecking's dynamic nominalism (1986) refers to the creation of new and unique persons. To have a talent implies to have distinctive qualities that set one apart from others, and this serves as motivation for pupils to prepare for diagnostic testing.

At the same time, China, as a large population country, must constantly update and extend its talent pool in order to enhance it. As a result, skill is employed as a classification tool, and the boundary between skill and non-talent is constantly rewritten to differentiate the talented few from the untalented mass (Zhao, 2017a). As a result, students must constantly validate and analyze themselves through examinations in order to maintain their talent identity. However, as the population rises and screening standards become more severe (Zhao, 2017a), it becomes increasingly difficult to cross over to fulfill the talent requirements, explaining why assessments can produce a growing academic burden and psychological stress for pupils.

4.2. Mainstream Mind Control

Dominant societal ideologies frequently lead to the formation of deep-seated prejudices or beliefs, and these impressions go unchallenged (Houston & Paewai, 2013). In other words, hegemony is immediately detected when it is violent, but when it is submerged in common sense or shared value, we typically underestimate the consequences of this authority. In an age of information multiplication, the individual's desire to seek the truth weakens, and his or her reliance on information grows (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Following are some specific examples: When they see other parents' children get good jobs after graduating from prestigious schools, they believe that good schools are the key to determining the success of their students' education; when teachers discover that students' test scores improve after other classroom teachers assign more after-school tasks, they believe that more after-school tasks are a means of improving teaching and learning... Building one's belief system by referring to the success of others gives less and less possibility for reconceptualization and critical thought. Furthermore, the dominant ideas of society progressively affect one's own behavior, resulting in a subtle reproduction of prevailing cultural and social beliefs and behaviors (Gallagher, 2008). This is immediately manifested in the educational environment, where students, parents, instructors, and schools believe that it is legitimate to utilize the power of decision in the educational process of students in line with social orientations, thereby laying a reasonable load on them, without ever questioning the rationality of this authority. As educational participants, if unable to identify and reflect on the knowledge and information they receive, will ultimately serve as transmitters of the dominating hegemon and turn students into victims.

The investigation of the amount to which dominant ideologies and social discourses impact thinking provides a clear direction for lessening the load, which must be accomplished by taking a comprehensive approach to the curriculum, students, and other stakeholders.

5. How to Achieve the Aim of Reducing the Burden?

5.1. What Kind of Courses should We Pursue

Schools' principal objective is to give equal access to knowledge for all pupils, which is evident in the professionals they hire and in their curricular (Cigman, 2012). Curriculum, Cigman viewed as a social fact that limits what students can learn, not merely through the borders or lack thereof between subjects and between the curriculum and students' experiences outside of school. These boundaries, however, are not just constraints; they also represent a spectrum of options, not only for what students may learn, but also for how they might grow in their learning. According to Wheelahan (2012), the curriculum should deliver powerful information, allowing students of all ages to move beyond their experiences to learn knowledge that is unconnected to that experience knowledge that helps students to think about the inconceivable and the unthought of. Load reduction in this conceptual sense, should not be about shortening course length or altering the curriculum, because this information does not describe how teachers should integrate these concepts and subjects with their students' experiences. Rather, the curriculum should become an institution or a tool through which knowledge and subjects become the medium, empowering all students to carry out their distinctive human cognitive functions and develop the ability to construct knowledge.

5.2. How Pupils are Empowered by Their Learning

The realism sociology of knowledge, as Moore (2011) clarified in his article, is committed to the unreliability of knowledge rather than its certainty. He says that all knowledge, no matter how reliable, is always challenging since it is simply the greatest attempt at the time to grasp the world outside. As a result, we cannot show what is eternally true, as the frequently saying that truth is always dynamic. The only way to appreciate the power of knowledge is to constantly

understand, explore, and use it, rather than through rote memorization. Similarly, Popkewitz and Brennan (1998) regard schooling knowledge as a historical practice entailing power relations from a social epistemological standpoint. Knowledge is not considered as independent in this setting; rather, it reflects the social and historical environment in which it is formed. Similarly, the term "learning" does not exist in isolation, but rather combines beliefs and values into the process of acquisition in a way that frequently symbolizes the dominant societal perspective. Young (2012) stated that if individuals are fully dependent on the curriculum or discipline, they tend to create knowledge in ways that are congruent with dominant societal ideologies and also risk losing sight of the necessity of questioning, which is a sort of disempowerment. According to the description of Bada & Olusegun (2015) of constructivism, the only way to continuously shape, enrich, and adapt one's cognitive structures and produce meaning is to construct new experiences from pre-existing experiences and to incorporate new knowledge into existing cognitive structures.

5.3. Avoiding the Influence of Dominant Ideology on the Educational Process

Young (2012) believes that knowledge is built on popular cultural and social values, beliefs, and ideals, emphasizing the intertwining of power and society in knowledge. According to Foucault (1980), power is a mode of control that exploits social institutions to reveal a truth and therefore impose its own purposes on society. Even though Bourdieu focuses on the independence of knowledge, he recognizes that knowledge cannot be independent as a mental activity devoid of political and economic influences. This observation is significant because it reminds us that the relationship between information and social power should be thoroughly investigated, and that everybody involved in the educational process should investigate and judge knowledge, asking why it is the way it is, rather than simply accepting and believing it. According to Kant (2007), 'conscientization' should be at the center of the educational process in schools and institutions, which, is a time when man realizes that everything should be done by himself and not by any outside authority, therefore the concept of conscientization is frequently equated with liberation. In keeping with the concept of conscientization, educators should cultivate an open teaching atmosphere and build a responsibility that focuses on living in the present moment, which can liberate the mind from illogical systems of authority and lead to a more transcendent realm.

6. Conclusion

On the one hand, the load stems from the enduring pressure of students' need to keep themselves in the dynamic process of attaining talent status; on the other hand, the load stems from individuals involved in education's dominance of dominant beliefs that interfere with education. These sources are policy aspects that are not addressed, which can result in an undesirable shoulder effect. To really liberate students from academic burdens, educational process partners should work together to develop an effective curriculum that provides an open space for students to shape, reform, and organize information rather than rote learning or.

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