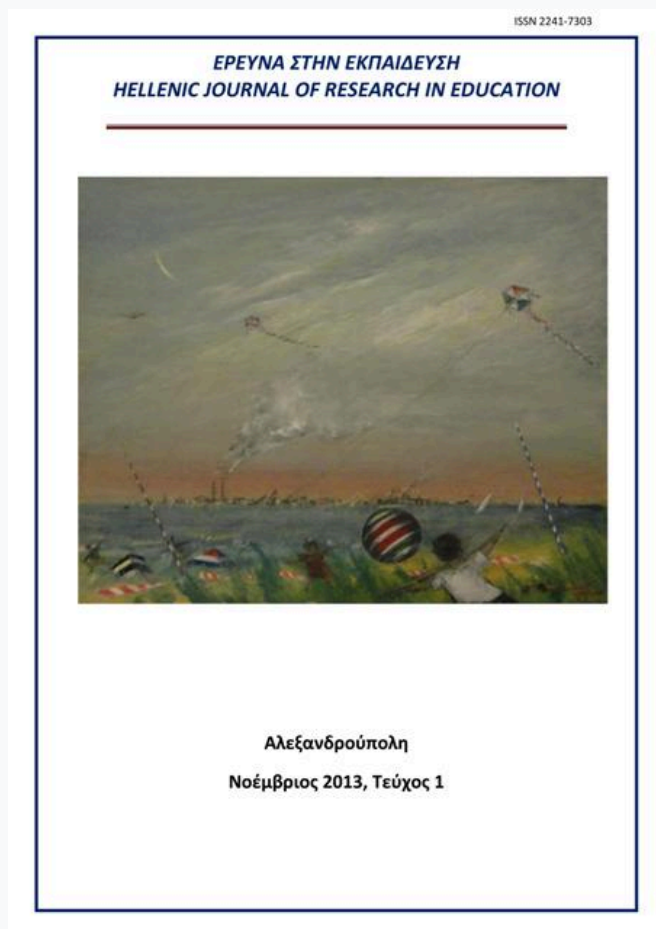


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### Pedagogy as Ritual: How Teachers use Rituals to foster their Mythical values in the Early Childhood Classrooms?

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## **Pedagogy as Ritual: How Teachers use Rituals to foster their Mythical values in the Early Childhood Classrooms?**

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**Abstract :** A lot of literature has been written about education as the transmission of cultural knowledge yet the way in which culture, as ritual action, constitutes and fosters religio-cultural ideological myth remains largely unexplored in the context of ritual pedagogies in school settings. In Hong Kong, the government had initiated an educational reform promoting the play-based child-centred approach to replace the traditional mode of teacher-centred approach aimed at meeting the changing world at the start of 21st century. However, there are great variations when these principles and approaches are implemented in classroom practice. Even though the school voucher scheme<sup>1</sup> providing support for parents to choose kindergartens that adopt the approach has been introduced in 2006, there is no significant impact in the field of early childhood education.

This study aimed to identify the extent to which how different ritual pedagogies had reflected the mythical values that the teachers held by examining the forms and practices of ritual in two early childhood classroom settings. Data was collected through observational records and interviews to examine how the mythical values of the two teachers concerned had underpinned their ritualistic practises. The findings suggested that teachers using different ritual pedagogies had reflected entirely different mythical values that they held respectively.

The implication for this study is that schools should not ignore the mythical values of their teachers if they are to realise their school missions and cultural values that they cherished. The study might give insight to early childhood practitioners and policy makers on how the ritualistic practises of the teachers could make a big difference to the realisation of their ideological goals. On the academic side, light might be shed for an understanding of the puzzled gap between the traditional teaching mode and the recommended approaches.

**Keywords:** Early years; ritual pedagogy; mythical values; formality; informality.

## **Introduction**

A great deal of literature has been written about education as the transmission of cultural knowledge yet the way in which culture, as ritual action, constitutes and fosters religio-cultural ideological myth remains largely unexplored in the context of ritual pedagogies in school settings. This paper aimed to identify the extent to how different ritual pedagogies had reflected the mythical values that the teachers held by examining the forms and practices of ritual in two early childhood classroom settings. The paper is compiled in a format which would unfold to the reader layer by layer the essence on how this is the case through an extensive review on literature and the report on the findings of the research.

## **Setting the scene in Hong Kong**

It is well documented that during the colonial era when Hong Kong was governed by Great Britain, there was little government intervention in preschool provision (Lau & Ho, 2010). In the colonial era, curriculum in Hong Kong was described as being based on the 'academic model', where teachers expected young children to learn through early academic instruction. Following the recommendation of the Llewellyn Report (1982), curriculum guidelines have placed child-centred, play-based pedagogy at the heart of early childhood education quality.

With the goal to further foster the child-centred play-based approach, the government had provided guidelines concerning new approaches to curriculum by using a less formal type of approach in teaching and learning (*Curriculum Development Council, 1996*). The government reiterated and reconfirmed the captioned early childhood education curriculum reform proposal started ten years ago by adopting play for facilitating the "child-centred" concept of children's learning. The basic principle of the curriculum guide is to ensure that the curriculum should be "child-centred" as it is stated, "Core value of pre-primary education is child-centredness" (Education Bureau, 2006, p. 8).

## **A play-based curriculum and pedagogy is recommended as an alternative to the traditional teacher-centred teaching approaches**

In this latest guide in 2006, **play** is recommended as a learning strategy to be incorporated into different learning areas in an integrated holistic manner (Education Bureau, 2006, p.41). The recommendation of the child-centered play-based curriculum is to

ensure young children will be given autonomy to learn holistically in an informal curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 2002, p.3). In such a way, children might be given a chance to acquire knowledge under the premise of 'happy learning'. This is a revert of the traditional classroom which the old societies have adopted before the initiation of the school reform in the later half of the 1990's. The aim to reform is thereby for increasing the competitiveness in the world arena (Curriculum Development Council, 2002; Lau, 2008b) since play is creative and autonomous.

As far as Hong Kong is concerned, traditional classes in the traditional mode of teaching approaches bear characteristics to those which Cuban (1993, p.37) had described.

*It is a classroom where teacher talk dominated verbal expressions;*

*Student recitations, textbook assignments, and teacher questions and explanations constituted the most common form of classroom activity. The teacher-centered classroom, the dominant form of the social organization in the schools, included 'students sitting in rows of bolted-down desks....rising to recite for the teacher;*

*The academic organization of the classroom hinged upon the whole class's moving as one though the course of study, text, recitation, and homework.*

To this end, early childhood teachers are often criticized for implementing overly formal programme that teach subject-based skills, such as reading, writing, and mathematics instead of implementing the informal approach through play as suggested in section 1.5.2 in the aforesaid curriculum guide (*Curriculum Development Council, 1996*).

### **The relationship between a play-based curriculum and pedagogy with those of the work-based curriculum and pedagogy.**

A play-based pedagogic approach, which emphasizes the autonomy learning of young children and is rooted in the child-centred humanistic ideology, is what the educational reform in 1996 and 2006 had successively emphasized for in the early childhood classroom. Accordingly, when we are to equate the play-based pedagogy with the humanistic ritualistic pedagogy, and the work-based pedagogy with the traditional religious

ritualistic pedagogy, the different learning outcomes emerge from these two ideological streams respectively could then be identified.

### **The roadblocks for implementing child-centred play-based curriculum in Hong Kong early childhood classroom**

Since the implementation of the reforms in 1996, there have been on-going voices made by government officials as well as early childhood teacher educators in Hong Kong such as Li (2003), Cheng & Stimpson (2004) and Lau (2006) that all these reforms were less than satisfactory. They mentioned that challenges confronted the educational reform would be gaps between the work-centre, teacher-directed traditional teaching mode and the recommended play-based child-centred approaches

The usual opinionated blames, on the other hand, collected from the practitioners in the field laid mainly on the scarce resources provided by the schools, the parental demand for a content-based curriculum, the difficulties involved in transition for kindergarteners to primary one as well as the insufficient teacher training to foster the educational ideals in line with the advocated curriculum and its pedagogy. .

It was documented that between the years 2001-2007, six of the QAI Annual Reports announced with illustrations that the learning and teaching performance of most of the kindergartens visited were beyond satisfaction (Education Bureau, 2004-2007). The Reports revealed that almost 60% of the kindergartens performed merely at the “Acceptable” and even the “Unsatisfactory” levels in the “Curriculum Design” aspect in the first few years from 2001-2004. It mounted to a peak of over 70% in 2005-2007. In the “teaching strategies and skills” domain, similar percentages were also recorded which showed that kindergartens performed at the “Acceptable” and the “Unsatisfactory” levels were 65% in 2004-2005 and 72% in 2006-2007 respectively.

In order to tackle the funding issue and the seemingly less than satisfactory reform progress, the Government has taken the advice seriously from the field by introducing the school vouchers<sup>1</sup> scheme as a means to provide funding and resources to support the reform in 2007 (Wardlaw, 2006). Regulations are set to enforce the compulsory staff development for school administrators and teachers. Seminars and workshops, independent school support units were run and set up to provide all the possible means to ensure the

determined set goals to reach within 5 years. With all these support from the Government, researchers were surprised to find that the chance for the stakeholders to really implement the captioned curriculum was still dim <sup>2</sup> (So, 2008; Lau, 2008a).

Educators working in Hong Kong have tried to explain this phenomenon by lamenting on the difficulties of defining 'play' in the context of early childhood education, especially when it appears in different philosophical orientations. Cheng (2010) said that, "the nebulous nature of play makes it hard for practitioners to get a firm grip on the principles of learning through play". For example, Rubin et al (1983) argued that 'play is intrinsically motivational and that the participants are concerned more with activities than with goals, requiring their active engagement to be free from imposed rules.' King (1979) claimed that 'a lack of adult involvement is a necessary ingredient of the play experience'. On the other hand, Dewey proposed the concept of 'playfulness' as intrinsically motivated (as cited in Parker-Rees, 1999), which is similar to the 'optimal experience' proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1991, cited in Cheng, 2010). Many early childhood practitioners have tried to identify the key elements of play despite the fact that there is no consensus on the definition on play could be made. The commonly accepted key elements of play are that 'play is lack of adult involvement', 'play is fun', and 'play is spontaneous'.

Despite all these efforts to put the play-based curriculum into practise, it is still being reported that the realization of the play-based curriculum is less than satisfactory (Wong et al, 2011). This situation might well reflect the sayings of Bruner (1977, cited in Morris & Adamson, 2010, p.85),

*"A curriculum is more for teachers than it is for pupils. If it cannot change, move, perturb, inform teachers, it will have no effect on those whom they teach....If teachers are faced with changes that are imposed upon them for reasons that they might believe are not in the best interests of their pupils' education and, indeed, themselves."*

It follows then if teacher persists to practise a certain mode of curriculum and pedagogy which is based on the what he/she believes as 'true' or as the 'righteous' thing to do, the notion of **educational belief or educational ideology of the teachers** might well come into sight.

### **Would the Belief system of the teachers account for their choice of curriculum mode?**

Lewis (1990, cited in Pajares, 1992) has argued the nature of 'belief' in that, *the origin of all knowledge is rooted in belief, that ways of knowing are basically ways of choosing values. Belief is based on evaluation and judgement, whereas knowledge is based on objective fact. Sigel (1985) defined beliefs as "mental constructions of experience---often condensed and integrated into schemata or concepts (p.351) that are held to be true and that guide behaviour.*

*Dewey (1933) described belief as the third meaning of thought, "something beyond itself by which its value is tested; it makes an assertion about some matter of fact or some principle or law" (p.6).*

*He added that the importance of belief is crucial, for "it covers all the matters of which we have no sure knowledge and yet which we are sufficiently confident of to act upon and also the matters that we now accept as certainly true, as knowledge, but which nevertheless may be questioned in the future (p.6). Conceptualizing it thus, might not Descartes have concluded that we are, not so much because we think, but because we believe (or perhaps reflect)?*

Hence, to the question of whether the belief system of the teacher is accountable for a curriculum mode, this is the concern of this paper.

### **How myth is represented as ideological belief of the teacher in the early childhood classrooms?**

Due to the nature of what counts as an educational belief, if speaking from the ritual and mythology arena, educator could equate the seemingly unshakable nature of belief to the mythical entity of a religion. Both are deep-held ideology cherished by the believers.

In traditional societies, myth and ritual are two components of religious practice. The myth-ritualist theory holds that 'myth does not stand by itself but is tied to ritual. According to the scholars of the myth and ritual school, such as James Frazer, W. Robertson-

Smith, Jane Ellen Harrison and S.H. Hooke who supported the 'primacy of ritual' hypothesis, which claimed that 'every myth is derived from a particular ritual and that the syntagmatic quality of myth is a reproduction of the succession of ritual act.' (Wikipedia, author unknown), then, I would like to argue that if a myth is to be sustained and be flourished, the ritual practises would be the crucial partner to ally with. The notion that stresses, "Change of ritual, change of myth" would be of utmost importance as slogan to keep if the myth is to survive and pass on from generation to generation. (Wikipedia, author unknown).

The authors come to realize in the religio-philosophical sense that if one wishes to upkeep a particular myth, one needs to use the corresponding ritual respectively. When applying ritual in the realm of education, rituals are usually refer to the pedagogies that are used as a way of defining what is to be taught and how it is to be taught, reflecting the teacher's decisions about what is pedagogically sound in the narrow sense. Teacher has made his/her decision based on the mythical values in his/her belief system.

### **What are ritual and the work of ritualistic practises?**

Before discussing how ritual has enforced its strength in the early childhood classroom so as to help the teacher to achieve her mythical ends, the author may now explore the definition of ritual.

### **The definition of ritual**

As it is commonly taken by people that ritual has religious connotation, a search from the website on Teaching Ritual and Prayer, the definition of ritual is presented as:

*Ritual can be defined as part of a code used by society to communicate issues of importance. It usually involves actions or words performed or recited by various people in specific roles.*

For the others, like an essay presented by Gillespie & Petersen (2012) in *Young Children*, rituals can be defined as special actions that help us navigate emotionally



important event or transition in our lives as well as enhance aspects of our daily routines to deepen our connections and relationship.

When a community has involved in ritualistic practises, the members of such community will partake in so called the 'Social ritual". Studies say that social ritual is a part of everyday life. Most groups establish rituals to celebrate special events and to facilitate interaction between people and activities (Malone & Ryan, 1994).

Harris (1992, pp9-10) analysed the Australian ritual of the barbecue in which a person from another culture questions the roles taken by men and women and the meaning and values attached to these roles and their reflection of the early history of this country. Harris made the statement that:

*Rituals then, express and pass on values. New rituals are devised for new values and become popular as new values develop. But the ritual, with its taken for granted quality, has something of a conservative function, it tends to pass on what has 'always' been held dear, what is obviously "to be done" (1992, p.11).*

As far as young children in a school community is concerned, a review of literature in relating ritual with the passing on of values (school culture) said that,

*A school usually follows a range of rituals associated with events like the beginning of the day, change of lessons, and the celebration of special days and festivals. The school or at least the class, should take the opportunity to ritualise events that are important and significant to students.*

Grimes (1996, p.232) wrote that,

*Ritual is not an adult-only exercise. Children both engage in it as they play and are put through it by adults. Not only does education employ ritual, some would say that it is ritual, a protracted rite of passage in which children are transformed into socially acceptable adults*

A further review of the literature on ritual suggests that the extent to which features presented in any ritual will depend to a great extent on the context in which ritual is enacted. Broadly speaking, ritual embodies the following properties:

Many rituals may be termed secular and exhibit the formal qualities of repetition, 'special behaviour' or stylization, order and evocative presentational style or staging (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977; Turner, 1982). Rituals embody a repertoire of choices or 'tokens' which surround specific rules or 'types' (Lewis, 1980). A ritual has a distinct form in which its medium (morphological characteristics) is part of its message. The form gives the social structure as subjunctive or 'as if' quality (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977; Myerhoff and Metzger, 1980; Rappaport, 1979; Van Gennep, 1960).

### **Using the notion of ritual to explain the pedagogical phenomenon exhibited in the classrooms of kindergartens in Hong Kong**

From what have been reviewed above, rituals could pass on values under the premise of the repetitive routine- like exercises in a school day.

Teacher who chooses to apply the same/ definite form of pedagogy is aimed to look for repetitive result from his/her teaching. By its repetitive character of pedagogical practices, ritual works to provide a message of pattern and predictability (Myerhoff, 1984).

According to a web essay entitled, "Supporting infants and toddlers and their families" by Gillespie & Petersen (2012), routines and ritual are sometimes used interchangeably. However, according to the author of this essay, there are some important differences,

Routines are repeated, predictable events that provide a foundation for the daily tasks in a child's life. Teachers can create a predictable routine in early childhood settings for infants and toddlers, and they can individualise these routines to match children's needs for sleeping and eating and to support children's development of self-regulation. Individualizing a routine means that the sequence is the same but the actions and timing may vary to accommodate the needs of individual children....

For this author, routine and ritual are not exactly the same. If taken the definition of this author, ritualistic practises in the classroom will be limited to a narrowly defined sense as the daily routine work will be excluded.

In this paper, the exploration on ritualistic practices will not be the narrowly defined term as those mentioned by Gillespie & Petersen (2012), that is to define ritual as 'special actions that help us navigate emotionally important events or transition in our lives as well as enhance aspects of our daily routines to deepen our connections and relationship. Speaking in this way, for adults as if for children, rituals are not only associated with events like holidays, religious practice, mimic weddings, funerals, birthday party...etc. Ritualistic practices will also include pedagogies used by the teacher as well as the power relationship between the students and the teacher, the list is far more reaching.

### **Ritual does not necessarily refer to some festive events**

Ritualistic practises in the early childhood classroom could be extended so as to include the pedagogic used by the teachers, the curriculum design, the classroom organization, the evaluation method, personal style exercising the pedagogy. These are the five themes we have used to deal with the ritual issue in this paper. To substantiate our inclusion of these as ritualistic practices, a quotation from a renowned academic in curriculum and pedagogy, (Alexander, 2000 cited in Morris and Adamson, 2010, p.103-104) is suffice to tell. In order to analyze the pedagogy that he observed, Alexander focused on:

*Lesson structure and form: This analysis includes the time allocated for a lesson, and how a lesson is structured as well as the length of the lesson. In other systems, the teacher can determine how long the lesson is spent on a particular lesson.....the flexibility depends, on the teacher's function. In some systems, the primary school teacher is a generalist, responsible for the same class for most of the school day. This teacher has more flexibility in determining the length of a lesson than a specialist teacher who is responsible for teaching a particular subject to different classes in a primary school. In short, the structure of a lesson and its form, classroom organization and the nature of tasks and activities, judgments, routines, rules and rituals, interactions, timing and pacing; and the learning discourse all count.*

### **How ritual and myth are related in an early childhood classroom?**

While the relationship between the belief system and the notion of myth could be established, it is not difficult to understand the allied relationship between ritualistic pedagogies and mythical values held in the belief system of the teacher in an early childhood classroom.

Same as ritual which has its alignment with the supernatural realm, myths also represent the language of the sacred in symbols put into a narrative form. According to a prominent Romanian thinker (in the study of linguistics, literature, etymology, religions, philosophy of history, cultural life, oriental studies, ethnological studies, playwright studies) and memoirs author, Micea Eliade, indicated that myth was not just one image or sign; it was a sequence of images put into the shape of a story. It told a tale of the gods, of the ancestors or heroes, and their world of the supernatural (Livia & Eliade, 2007).

As to the archaic peoples, mythical values provide the very ideological framework of the early childhood education teachers within which they think, the values which they admire, and the models they choose to follow whenever they act.

Following this argument, a change of the ritualistic practises of the teacher has implied a change in the underlying mythical agenda of the teacher concerned. To speak in an understandable way, it means a change in the pedagogic practises of the teacher has implied a change of value in his/her belief system.

If spoken in a wider sense, when a school has changed its form of pedagogies from a traditional direct instruction one to a communicative one, it has signal a change in the underlying philosophy/ideology of the school concerned. It might have serious implications for a faith school to such an extent that the cherished long-held religious belief might be uprooted.

The author has thereby devised an important slogan to bear with, "Where there is a Change of Ritual, there is a Change of Myth. The underlying assumption of this slogan, however is devised upon the priori assumption of the 'myth and ritual school in stating that, 'every myth is derived from a particular ritual and that the syntagmatic quality of myth is a reproduction of the succession of ritual act.'"(Meletinsky, year unknown). Prominent scholars in the myth and ritual school include W. Robertson-Smith, James Frazer, Jane Ellen Harrison and S.H. Hooke. Smith, who was Bible scholar, in particular, argued that ancients tended to be conservative with regard to rituals, making sure to pass them down faithfully.

In contrast, the myths that justified those rituals could change. Their studies in myth and ritual differed to a great extent many of the 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists who denied the say that myth and religious doctrine result from ritual (Meletinsky, year unknown).

### **How different ritual pedagogies created different learning outcomes?**

By echoing what has been discussed earlier in this paper, when we equate the play-based pedagogy with the child-centred humanistic ritualistic pedagogy, and the work-based pedagogy with the traditional religious ritualistic pedagogy, the different learning outcomes emerge from these two ideological streams respectively could then be identified.

Let us now come back to the question of “how the ritual pedagogy created different learning outcomes?” Similar to the ritualistic practises with religious ideological/ theological orientation, the child-centred ideology is fostered through the ritualistic pedagogic practises. The learning outcomes resulted from the exercise of the child-centred pedagogy is very different from the traditional thinking of what is counted as learning outcomes though.

To deepen the understanding of the relationship between the child-centred play-based pedagogy and its learning outcome, the Guardian report on 12 April 1990 quoted below might help to explain.

The reason to choose this piece to quote is of two folds. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, Hong Kong was once the colony of Great Britain and the education approach of her paternal country in the early 1990s would still leave an impact to Hong Kong. Secondly, an understanding of the child-centred ideology, an ideology which stresses the self-autonomy of young children in their learning, would suggest the linkage of learning with play. Samuelsson & Carlsson (2008) wrote,

*From children’s own perspective, play and learning are not always separate in practices during early years. Since learning and play is seen as inseparable, the writings of Edward Pikington in Great Britain in the excerpt quoted below might provide the reader a holistic understanding how the new approach has facilitated children’ s learning through ‘play’—how children can learn at their own pace and according to their unique developmental needs.*

Accordingly, the learning outcomes gained in the child-centred approach might not be the same type of ‘learning outcome’ when perceived in the tradition mode of education approaches. As Dewey might well explain that ‘learning through practice and discovery

rather than through laid-down programmes of knowledge to be mastered is the key learning results'. To the traditionalist, this kind of learning result is far from satisfactory.

In response to Dewey's idea on the play-based curriculum and the like, O'Hear (1991) seems not to satisfy with what is regarded as learning result, he writes, "for hasn't Dewey told us that childish spontaneity and experiment is of far greater experiential and educational worth than the absorption of information and solutions provided by others, teachers and the like?". To O' Hear, who is a contemporary philosopher and the educational advisor during the Tory party era of the then prime minister Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair in England, is not convinced of the learning outcome emerges from the child-centred ideology.

If one has taken seriously what a belief stands for and its influences in education, one will accept prima facie the face value of the learning outcome that emerges from it. In other words, one will take the learning outcome as they are and without much hesitation, as long as it is the result obtained from one's deep-held belief.

### **The learning outcome from a play-based pedagogy**

When the following phenomenon/characteristics could be observed in a play-based classroom (author and year unknown, 21st Century Education vs. 20th Century Education), one would realize that the learning outcomes have duly been achieved.

- a. Kindling the fire to learn (children have self-initiated motivation to learn);
- b. Young children learn by discovery;
- c. Young children are keen to learn through learning (learning to learn);
- d. The learning of the young children could be measured in different respect, and not according to what the teachers have taught (outcome based);
- e. Young children as students know and what they can do;
- f. Learning is gained through research findings (research-based);
- g. Young children are seen as active learners (active learning);
- h. Young children work collaboratively with others in everything that came across them (interested in everything);

- i. Young children could transfer their knowledge gained in the learning environment, such as from the classroom to real life situations;
- j. Young children will regard their teachers as facilitators rather than teachers;
- k. In the child-centred classroom, young children are given a great deal of freedom to do things. Young children know how to use that freedom to achieve what they desire;
- l. There are very few disciplines problems;
- m. Young children have manifested to have high expectations on themselves;
- n. Since the curriculum is being connected to the young children's interest experiences and talents, young children have no difficulties in coping with the learning task (of their choice).

The ritual pedagogy responsible for achieving the aforesaid learning outcomes is the child-centred play-based pedagogy, such as:

*A play-based pedagogy asks the teacher to return the authority to the children and be a facilitator. In the process, the facilitator will make sure that she/he will enhance children's learning which will enable them to become what the child desires and without adult influence.*

In the work-based classroom, learning outcome could be shown as :

- a. Good acquisition of the meaning in the text level as at the word and sentence levels (Biggs, 1996, p.156). The rationale of this is that: if students are to learn by memorizing, they could install and acquire the meaning at the text level as well as the word and sentence levels in a better way as in-depth learning of such is secured by repetitive learning.
- b. Repetition may also be used to provide access to material that is already meaningfully learned (Tang, 1991, cited in Biggs, 1996, p.156). When students committed those knowledge which they have learnt to memory, they could ensure it to later access in exam. In the West, the misconception has arisen that rote and meaningful are not complementary but mutually exclusive, a conception possibly sharpened by over generalizing Ausubel's (1968) classic distinction.
- c. Building of a good character (character building)



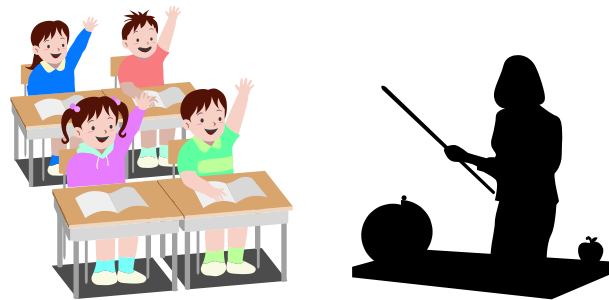
d. Formation of the will and virtues

The tradition way of Eastern education ideology, such as those with root in the Confucius , Taoist, Buddhist’ s ideology/ or the Christian education philosophy are said to be able to train the will and develop good habits of the young children. Virtues like obedience, sincerity, orderliness, prudence, flexibility, understanding, loyalty, audacity, humility and optimism could be formed via the traditional curriculum and ritualistic pedagogy employed.

e. Virtues like endurance and humbleness could be enhanced through the classroom ritual.

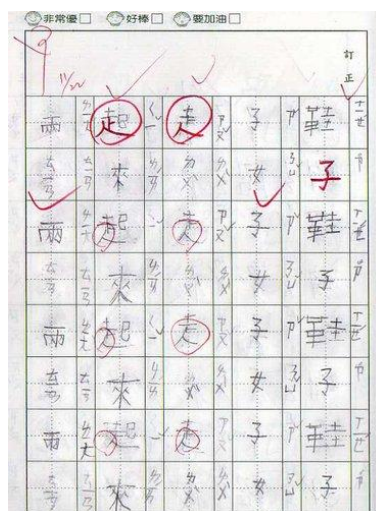
**Examples**

To require young children to raise their hands before their teacher signals a child to answer her question is a kind of guiding ritual to enforce the teacher-centred classroom management framework. In this ritual, children are taught to behave as required, virtue like endurance could be fostered.



f. Perseverance to learn

When children are asked to write the Chinese character onto a sheet of paper within a definite size of boxes, they are being taught of the virtue of ‘perseverance’. They need to exercise good care when writing so that the character will be written within the box.



(source: Google picture)

g. Formation of the virtue of orderliness

Chinese hand-writing exercises which place emphasis in the order of strokes when compiling the character. When students are asked by teachers to follow the order of writing the Chinese strokes, they could learn the good order to do things as passed on by their teachers/parents. In such a way, good cultural virtue could be passed on from one generation to another generation.

h. Learning outcome is the manifestation of obedience to parents, teachers and people of authority (filial piety). They are outcome fostered in a traditional teacher-centred classroom. These ritual practices are being reinforced in the classroom by the teacher in the following ways. Young children are required to

- take turn to speak and to play toys;
- fulfil the duty to restore the toys to its original position after playing;
- make sure to sit properly in chairs;
- obligate to stop an activity whenever the teacher;
- claps her hands for a change of activity;
- keep quiet when the teacher is talking;
- take turn to speak to peers;

-stand up properly and say a prayer before eating snacks in snack time.

One might be eager to ask why such rituals in the form of classroom routines are taken as the norm for practise in the traditional faith school (religious school), like those in the Christian schools. To explain this phenomenon, a search from the literature on this respect might provide an answer.

### **The traditional education in a faith school (religious school)**

Traditional education is based on the teaching of religious belief/doctrine: believing that it is the search for certitude, determined “basic metaphysics” and led to the presupposition that “only the completely fixed and unchanging can be real” (Simpson and Jackson, 1997, p.233).

It enjoys the advantage of being in place, familiar and accepted, according to Dewey’s observation, the traditional education, see themselves do what they always did, nothing strikes them as odd, nothing needs an explanation.

The following categories conceptualize learning as acquiring an eternal body of knowledge.

- a. Learning as memorizing: Learning is storing information that can be reproduced;
- b. Learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge;
- c. Learning is acquiring information or ‘knowing a fact’;
- d. Learning as acquiring;
- e. Learning is retaining facts, skills and methods that can be used as necessary (Morris & Adamson, 2010, p.110).

Accordingly, students are required to memorize fact by heart. Repetitive studies are regarded as a sure way to gain in cultural and factual knowledge. A cross reference on learning of this type could be found in a section earlier. The ritualistic origin of the foresaid traditional classroom practices could be traced back to what the anthropologists have defined.

A review in literature suggests that anthropologists have defined ritual as an analytical category that helps us deal with the chaos of human experience and put it into a coherent framework. In such a way, ritual is regarded as practices which are culturally standardized, repetitive activity, primarily symbolic in character, aimed at influencing human affairs, and involving the supernatural realm (Kertzer, 1988, p.339). Further studies showed that people who participated in [instructional] ritual forms most often had nothing to do with creating (Ibid, p.340). What they are doing only concerned with repetitive routine work. The ritualistic practices of drilling and repetitive study would then foster the cumulative of factual/cultural knowledge and then passing on from generation to generation. This understanding on the nature of learning in the traditional teacher-directed classroom could thus be traced back to ritualistic practice as its root.

It is said that because of the repetitiveness nature of ritual, it is used as a way of transmitting cultural knowledge in schools as well as reinforcement of belief systems operative in schools (Lutz & Ramsey, 1973).

In Hong Kong, when teacher in a traditional teacher-centred classroom wish to make the transmission of knowledge possible and efficient, teacher will perform the rite of teaching pedagogy in a teacher-directed way as it best served in a domain of work with highly emphasis on academic subjects and con-committing work habits. This rite of pedagogic practice stems from the premise of traditional education and is based on the teaching of religious belief system. In the way as Freire (1970, p.54) written as the “banking method”,

- (a) The teacher teaches and the students are taught. This is to assume that the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing. It is the teacher (who) thinks and the students are thought about;
- (b) The teacher talks and the students listen---meekly ;
- (c) The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (d) The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (e) The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (f) The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (g) The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the students are mere

objects.

This teaching pedagogy could best be represented in the highly structured, academically oriented classes as observed and being criticized in many of the kindergartens most commonly found before the educational reform in 2000 in Hong Kong.

Regarding the curriculum construction, it is the teacher who chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it. What have been discussed so far are the ritual pedagogies used in the traditional teacher-centred classroom that aimed at destined to achieve a predetermined goal and transmitting the fixed cultural values are regarded as a contrast to the pedagogies used in a child-centred play-based classroom.

Due to the religious connotation of the ritual pedagogic practices in the religious school (faith school), protagonist of the child-centred play-based critiques the ritualistic transmission model, which include the curriculum mode and thereby implicitly its allied ritual pedagogic practises for its political orientation, aimed to transmit the cultural value of a destined religion, such as the Catholic faith. Morris & Adamson (2010, p.49) wrote that,

*The school curriculum has often been used to play a very strong role in trying to create a sense of national identity and patriotism. To some degree, all school curricula focus on teaching pupils about aspects of their own society, including its culture, the nation's history and geography, and its language. The extreme form of this view involves schools being used to induct the young into the beliefs of a given religion (e.g. Catholicism or Islam) or of a political ideology (e.g. Nazism or Communism). The goal is to shape the views of the young so that they match those of the prevailing orthodoxy. Orthodoxies, by definition, believe in fixed answers to relevant questions and the task of schools is to ensure that pupils know those answers. Pupils are not encouraged to consider alternatives...The primary aim is to shape the view of children so that they match the prevailing or orthodox views in society. As Eisner (1992) explains, orthodoxies are not essentially about doubts, but about certainties. Indeed, to become orthodox is to become a true believer*

McLaren (1999) seek to convince educators to recognize and understand the cultural politics of ritual performance in the classroom. Aligning the teacher-directed pedagogy with the structured curriculum in a teacher-centred classroom, the teacher might be able to play a strong role in trying to induct a political ideology or to quote from what Morris & Adamson (2010) suggested, "to induct the young into the beliefs of a given religion."

Since rituals transmit societal, cultural as well as religious ideologies, we can discover a lot about how ideologies work by examining the key symbols and root paradigms of the ritual system of school [through the pedagogy used in the classroom]. The following is a reported study to explain the concept of ritual and how ritualistic practises in the form of teaching pedagogies in the classroom have impacted on the young children and thereby validate what scholars like McLaren (1999) claimed.

### **The Study**

This study aimed at identifying how different ritual pedagogies had reflected the mythical values that the teachers held by examining the forms and practices of ritual in two early childhood classroom settings. Based on what has been reviewed in literature, the authors have tried to investigate the link of informal education with ritualistic practises as well as how ritualistic formal (traditional) education is regarded as a tool for the transmission of values and henceforth to succeed the controlling power of authority.

Through the ritualistic form that the teachers employed, implications could be drawn to explain why teachers were found not practising what they espoused in their teaching theory, to the extent that it has jeopardized the realization of the child-centred play-based curriculum and pedagogy in the educational reform started since the 1990's. If the faith school gain an understanding on the essential match between pedagogy and their school mission (mythical ideology), they might able to justify their stance when applying their corresponding pedagogy and curriculum design. Faith school means those schools that are run by or sponsored by religious organization/with religious affiliation in Hong Kong. This application is feasible as the deputy secretary for Education mentioned, "KGs have freedom over pedagogy and admissions within an open and flexible curriculum framework (Wardlaw, 2006). It is anticipated that an 'authentic' democracy could be fostered henceforth by providing parents and children the preferred kind of meaningful and quality education. On the academic side, light might be shed for an understanding of the puzzled gap between the traditional teaching mode and the recommended approaches.

## Method

The research used case study enquiry because it is an ideal method to investigate the link between teachers' practical knowledge and the actions to be taken (Shulman, 1988). The research was conducted on a friendly and informal basis in a Catholic kindergarten in Hong Kong. The two participants were teachers from the same kindergarten and were former colleagues of one of the authors of this paper. They participated in this research as staff development at the request of the school principal. Data were collected during four visits to the school. All the visits were conducted on Fridays.

The two participants of this research were co-teaching in the same classroom, each was responsible for teaching a group of 15 children in the same K1 class. Hence, basically these were two classroom settings conducted by two teachers who shared the same classroom. Since the principal of the kindergarten was quite open for the class teacher to decide the teaching pedagogy on their own as a token to respond to the educational reform, so long as the teachers followed to the same topic set by the school. These two teachers were free to use their pedagogies in their respective group teaching.

In each of the visit, three hours were spent to collect data. Among which, thirty minutes were spent respectively with the participants before conducting the lesson. The following one and a half hour was spent on actual classroom observation. The remaining one hour was spent in post-lesson conference with the two participants.

Teaching episodes were videotaped to capture the decision making and actions of the two teachers during the interplay of teaching activities. As the research aimed at finding how different rituals affected children's learning as well as on the ideological myths of the teachers, classroom observations focused on the curriculum, pedagogy, organization, evaluation and personal style of the teachers were made. Field notes were written and descriptive accounts of the teachers on realizing the classroom ritualistic practices were collected.

The researcher had identified the ritualistic pedagogies during these lesson episodes by means of a check list compiled on ritualistic practices drawn from literature. Tape-recorded interviews were conducted in the post-observation conferences.

Data was organized according to the five themes emerged from the process of the research and by drawing data recorded in the check list. The researcher could then be able to classify the data collected by the themes emerged according to Blyth (1988). They were respectively, informality of pedagogy versus formality of pedagogy, informality in curriculum versus formality in curriculum, informality in organization versus formality in organisation, informality in evaluation versus formality in evaluation, formality in personal style versus formality in style.

As this study aims to identify the ritualistic practises of the teachers so as to reflect the underlying mystical values of the two participating teachers, data collection and data analysis mainly based on observing teachers in this arena rather than reporting on what the young children have said or learnt.

### **General Findings**

The findings suggested that both teachers in the research surprisingly claimed that their children enjoyed going to school, with increased motivation to learn and thereby could justify their choice of pedagogies as the most effective one. Case A teacher used the constructivist and humanistic pedagogic rituals (developmentally appropriate practise) as her teaching mode and had further claimed that her children were creative thinkers, active learners, went to introductory part socially responsive and could acquire a more balanced liberal knowledge by their desire to learn. Case B teacher used the teacher-centred pedagogic rituals as her teaching mode and claimed that her children were polite, good manner, disciplined, more willing to accept their wrongs and to correct themselves in the direction suggested by their teachers, obedient and most of all could achieve better academic results in their studies. The justification made by each of the two teachers as good teachings could be interpreted as the mystical values that the teacher held.

### **Case A teacher (Viola)**

Viola was a former colleague of one of the researchers in some 14 years ago. The researcher had the impression that she was hesitant to respond to the trendy child-centred play-based mode of curriculum practice. Viola used the teacher-centred mode during teaching practice. For example, Viola would use a cassette tape from the market to tell story



to children instead of using the shared book approach as her colleague did with the children. Although Viola had no religious belief, she was observed as a typical Chinese who upheld the Confucius cultural teaching of piety and obedient. She expected children to respect her authoritative figure. This could be observed from her teaching practise.

Then, Viola studied a Certificate of Education course in early childhood education. She had the opportunity to try out new approaches based on contemporary educational research and theories. Viola gradually changed to believe that children should be treated as equals like adults, she espoused to adopt the 'child-friendly' approaches. The teaching pedagogy she adopted was basically from Rousseau, Froebel, Pestalozzi and Dewey. Those were essentially child-centred approaches that based on leading rather than on driving, and on a loving yet progressive introduction to the natural and moral worlds, by means appropriate for young children.

The child-centred approach of Viola was developmentally appropriate during teaching practise. The findings are recorded under their respective themes below. In the post-lesson conference with the researcher, Viola explained why she performed her pedagogy in the ritualistic manner as observed.

### **Theme One: Teaching pedagogy**

This theme concerns the way in which children were taught.

#### **Informality in pedagogy observed in Viola's classroom**

Children were expected to choose what they wanted to do, and to work individually in centres, using materials in individualistic and creative ways. In here, it means Viola encouraged autonomy of learning to the young children. She would give freedom to the young children to the extent that children were 'encouraged' or 'expected' to do things at their own discretion, children were allowed to play with materials of their choice. Children could play with the materials in a creative way. It was not necessarily for children to play with the other children if they prefer to.

#### **Viola's justification**

Viola thought that teacher should ban memorization and should not ask children to spell words and to do copying work. (No drilling of any forms are encouraged)

She discouraged rote-learning and direct-instructional method, in what Paulo Freire called the 'banking method'

She had indeed promoted the idea of "critical thinking" and "situational ethics", children were led to believe that they could decide for themselves whether an idea or action was right or wrong, depending on the situation or their feelings.

Viola thought that teacher should not pay too much attention to discipline as it would impede creativity and critical thinking.

### **Interpretation by the researcher**

This practice reflects a culture (rooted in humanistic ideology) that reflects the social system which stresses freedom, self expression, and self determination.

On the other hand, teacher teaches, students listen is regarded as symbol of oppression, control, intolerance, covert racism and extremely boredom.

In an art lesson, children were expected to create a bold and innovative style, and then moved toward traditional compositions like those of the masters. Gardner calls this the contrast between the Eastern "evolutionary" view of creativity and the Western "revolutionary" one (Gardner, 1989, p.55).

In other words, what had been advocated was to ask children to explore and to learn from life environment before 'scaffolding' them to learn.

### **Projected Outcome claimed by Viola:**

Self-actualized children acted for the good of themselves and society. This teaching practise is essential for the upkeep of a democratic society when religion is not the answer for man to seek for "truth".

### **Understanding gained by the researcher on how ritualistic practise was realized in Viola's classroom.**

Although ritual is defined as culturally standardized, repetitive activity, the researcher would argue that the consistency of having no standardized format of teaching pedagogy is suffice to justify the humanistic pedagogy as ritual/ routine in another extreme of the pendulum.

The uphold ideology and strategy of promoting self-enhancement, fulfilment of self is already a gesture of the ritualistic practice of non-conformity.

Since symbols could be regarded as myths, the enactment of freedom for children could well represented as rituals.

### **Theme Two: Informality in Curriculum--A broaden curriculum**

This theme concerns the conditions that could foster the informality of pedagogy to take place.

#### **Informality in Curriculum observed in Viola's classroom**

A well balanced and broad curriculum is conceived in Early Mathematics, Language, Science and Technology, Arts, Self and Society, Physical Fitness and Health. "Pre-primary institutions should develop children's learning abilities and potential through informal learning which is integrated, open, flexible and appropriate to catering for children's developmental needs and interests" (Education Bureau, 2006, p.13). It is therefore recommended that the informal play activities should be fostered to enhance children's development in the aforesaid domains.

#### **Viola's justification**

By making a reference to Froebel who emphasized on active learning and on the nature and significance of play, Viola took a further step by echoing Blyth's view (1988). For play is not a subject at all. It is a form of activity. To regard play as curriculum is to assert that the terminology of curricular discourse transpose from the object of the verb 'to learn' to its (grammatical) subject.

Viola was of the opinion that the arrangement in curriculum if made in this way was crucial as the practise had opposed to the established view. The most important learning must belong to the older children who came nearest to the frontiers of human intellectual advance.

### **Understanding gained by the researcher on how ritualistic practise is realized in Viola's classroom**

Non-conformist practise of the ritual of free play and directed play (game) could be observed. Since there are explicit rules to be observed for the game activity, the aspect of ritual is justified. As for free play, as long as there is mutual agreement made by peers to be observed in the activity, it is justifiable to name the activity as ritual.

### **Theme Three: Classroom organization, An Enriched classroom**

This theme refers to the conditions that could foster the informality of pedagogy to take place.

### **Informality in organization observed in Viola's classroom**

Viola was apt to foster individualism and the importance of personal possessions (Gonzalex-Mena, 1993). This belief is highlighted by the ways we interact with children and how people make decisions about classroom environments. Hence, humanistic classrooms would opt for an enriched learning environment, many activity-based materials. Viola would provide duplicate of the most popular materials for children so as to foster their development.

### **Viola's justification**

Viola was of the opinion that the following Practises could enhance the informal education to take place. These included the expectation of children to move around, to explore in the immediate environment and to talk on their initiatives, to encourage small

group learning or to work individually, to plan activities so children can help each other and to expect a noisy classroom.

### **Understanding gained by the researcher on how ritualistic practise is realized in Viola's classroom**

As long as the daily 'activities' took the same pattern every day (though the content could be different), the researcher would argue that the ritualistic aspect did take place in the 'mind' of the participants instead of manifesting outwardly by the organization of the classroom.

### **Theme Four: Informality in evaluation**

This theme concerned with the conditions that could foster the informality of pedagogy to take place.

### **Informality in evaluation observed in Viola's classroom**

When pedagogy and curriculum were genuinely informal, to the extent of permitting each child to pace and even to select his or her own learning experiences, the demands of evaluation became an informal one. They required something like the trained observation to enable teacher to monitor and assess children's progress that would allow for an alternation of diagnosis, matching and learning for each child (Blyth, 1988).

Discourage examination and direct testing, such as dictation. Teachers needed to write extensive performance records of children through daily observation.

### **Viola's justification**

In order to follow the ideology of "child-centre' loyalty, Viola was willing to evaluate children's learning informally for she agreed that this mode of evaluation would reduce stress while the children were being evaluated.

### **Understanding gained by the researcher on how ritualistic practise was realized in Viola's classroom**

Un-pressurized continuous assessment could be regarded as a non-conformist way of evaluation aiming to pave the way for establishing a new order of teaching and learning.

The researcher could therefore argue that the practise of 'non-conformist' way of evaluation could be regarded as ritualistic practise as it has a purpose (goal) in mind to

achieve. Hence the definition of ritual could be broadened to include those activities aiming to achieve an end/ends provided that it/they are deviated from the ethically based 'norm'.

In here, the teachings of John Dewey might perhaps fit into this category of ritualistic practise as he taught children to arrive at different ends with the sole purpose of providing more chances for children to deviate from the original ethically based end.

Dewey's idea was further elaborated by Coulter (2002) when he applied Aristotle's concept of *Praxis* to explain the notion. *Praxis* is different from *poiesis* since the former is concerned with a different kind of end: ethical end. The end is not an end in the usual sense, but some morally worthwhile good that cannot be determined in advance, but must be discovered in particular contexts and situations (Coulter, 2002, p.191).

### **Theme Five: Informality in personal style, the role of teacher has changed to become peer of the young children**

This theme concerns with the conditions that could foster the informality of pedagogy to take place.

#### **Informality in personal style observed in Viola's classroom**

Teacher would mix freely with their students rather than maintaining what was then considered a normal social distance from them. In the informal child-centred play-based classroom, the concept of the teacher has to be a facilitator, friend, observer, non-influential, as partners in learning (Gonzalez-Mena, 1993). Since teachers have no more authority, children's peer group shapes one's morals. Individual is submitted to the majority pressure group (who has self-interest). In other words, peer pressure will be the teacher if no absolutes are taught.

#### **Viola's justification**

The mythical value of Viola in this area made her to think that to stress conformity was symbol of oppression, dull, boredom, lack of non-motivation and progress. Viola sneered at this idea for impeding children's creativity. Viola preferred children to feel good of themselves.

Without the influence of the teacher, children could be able to search for significant values adhere to self, which is good for enhancement of dignity and self-actualization. Viola thought that if without the influence of the teacher, children could be able to search for significant values adhere to self, which is good for enhancement of dignity and self-actualization.

### **Understanding gained by the researcher on how ritualistic practise was realized in Viola's classroom**

The consistency in enhancing the informality in personal style was suffice to qualify the practise of ritual which aim at diversified end results other than the accepted norm.

### **Case B teacher (Olivia)**

One of the authors of this paper had her first acquaintance with Olivia as a former colleague 14 years ago. Coincidentally, when the researcher did her PhD research in a Catholic kindergarten, Olivia was one of the participants in that research. As recorded in the thesis, Olivia constantly evaluated her practice in order to improve the quality of children's learning. She followed closely the direction of Cinderella, a devoted Catholic and the principal of the school, who worked diligently for the benefit of the students. We could say Olivia's practice was subject to the cultural philosophical influence. As could be seen, this exerted a greater influence on Olivia than the 'empirical evidence' on the merits of 'play' [the play-based curriculum advocated by the humanistic approach].

The traditional teacher-directed practise of Olivia was developmentally inappropriate for students. The findings were recorded under their respective themes below. In the post-lesson conference with the researcher, Olivia explained why she performed her pedagogy in the ritualistic manner as observed.

### **Theme One: Teaching pedagogy**

This theme concerns the way in which children were taught.

#### **Formality of pedagogy as observed in Olivia's classroom**

Basically, what have been observed in Olivia's classroom match with those formality of pedagogy identified in Freire (1970, p.54) in what he described as 'banking method'



### **Olivia's justification**

Olivia thought that there was nothing wrong for teachers to perform her role in teaching and not as facilitator in children's learning. Olivia regarded that while teacher taught, students were there to listen. This was a kind of Virtues, namely patience, self-denial, obedient and good for preserving values and cultures.

To all the adversaries cited by McLaren (1999) regarding the Christian ritualistic practice of the Catholic school, Olivia responded that there was nothing wrong of teaching children to acquire the habits of virtue like punctuality, well-mannered through the ritualistic teachings. Olivia further commented that to do what was opposite to this Christian ritualistic practise was teaching children to disobey and enhance their self-centeredness.

Olivia thought that through direct teaching to children, they could achieve better academic results as expected as objectives of teaching by the teacher.

Olivia held that non-directive education was obviously successful in enabling children to break with their parents' traditional religious values, a necessary prerequisite for accepting the values of the new world order.

### **Understanding gained by the researcher on how ritualistic practise was realized in Olivia's classroom**

What had been observed in Olivia's classroom reflected what McLaren (1999, p.187) said about the ritualistic practices that the academic objectives nested in the instructional rituals (i.e. the behavioural objectives of the lessons) were directed- and for the most part were successful- at creating student behaviour that were most concordant with the manifest or 'official' doctrines of the suite (embodied in the formal academic aims of the school and ultimately in the curriculum guidelines of the school management board).

McLaren (1999) continued to argue that the rituals succeeded in building authoritative structures which dispensed rewards to those students who were the most passive, pliable, straightforward, predictable and well-mannered, and who exhibited compliance toward adult authority, punctuality, dependability and acceptance of the daily routines and rituals.

## **Theme Two: Informality in curriculum, a broaden curriculum**

This theme concerns the conditions that could foster the formality of pedagogy to take place.

### **Formality in curriculum observed in Olivia's classroom**

An academic curriculum which stresses the study of Chinese language, early maths and science, English is enforced. Children should refrain from being expressive in their feelings while at work

### **Olivia's justification**

Olivia was of the opinion that children at this young age were like sponge to absorb knowledge taught by the teacher. If left for themselves at this young and tender age to explore and acquire knowledge in an informal way, children were bound to commit many mistakes and acquired 'wrong' concepts, which could be extremely difficult and took time to correct their understanding of the world.

### **Understanding gained by the researcher on how ritualistic practise was realized in Olivia's classroom**

McLaren (1999, pp.187-189) lamented that the ritualistic Catholic teaching had adopted the highly valued domain of work with its emphasis on academic subjects and concomitant work habits. The spiritual values of Christianity stressing sorrow and suffering were linked with this ritualistic pattern of work-based curriculum in fact, reified- through the day-to-day secular drudgery of the school-work. Catholic values such as denial of the body, endurance, deference to the authority of the priest and Church, hard work and struggle paralleled the secular values inherent in the ritualized instruction (e.g. hard work, endurance, sticking to the task, deference to the authority of the teacher). Together, these value domains simply mirrored each other at different symbolic junctures, or in different tacit dimensions of meaning.

### **Theme Three: Classroom organization, an enriched classroom**

This theme refers to the conditions that could foster the formality of pedagogy to take place.

#### **Formality in organization observed in Olivia's classroom**

Children are arranged by teachers to sit in rows facing the teacher. Tables, desk and chairs were arranged orderly to discipline children in an expected orderly manner. Children were trained to raise their hands before teacher signal them to answer her questions. Children were trained to line up in pairs for transition from one area to another area.

#### **Olivia's justification**

Children if trained in this way tend to become more patient and disciplined when they grow up. Olivia further explained that parents might not accept that their children did not have seats in the classroom.

#### **Understanding gained by the researcher on how ritualistic practise was realized in Olivia's classroom**

The orderly seating arrangement, lining up in pairs, raising hands before answering questions were manifestation of ritualistic practise in classroom organisation in Olivia's classroom.

### **Theme Four: Formality in Evaluation**

This theme concerns with the conditions that could foster the formality of pedagogy to take place.

#### **Formality in Evaluation observed in Olivia's classroom**

Children were drilled to practise spelling, writing Chinese characters and rote-learning by memorisation.

### **Olivia's justification**

If children are not taught to held responsible for their learning through some external pressure exercised by the teachers, given the belief that human nature is born good, but is subjected to the bad influence of the environment, children should be taught directly by teachers for safe.

### **Understanding gained by the researcher on how ritualistic practise was realized in Olivia's classroom**

The practise of memorization, rote-learning, drilling, all suggested the ritualistic pattern of repetition.

### **Theme Five: Formality in personal style, the role of teacher had changed to become peer of the young children.**

This theme concerns with the conditions that could foster the formality of pedagogy to take place.

### **Formality in personal style observed in Olivia's classroom**

Teacher had authority over the children. The role and duty of teacher was to teach, to impart information and to discipline children

### **Olivia's justification**

Viola treasured the concept of teacher as being the facilitator, friend, observer, being non-influential and as partners in learning (Gonzalez-Mena, 1993). However, Olivia would prefer the concept of teacher as model, disciples and imparts information.

Olivia was of the opinion that if teacher and student are treated as equal, teacher could no longer transmit values to students and students would no longer show respect for teacher. The whole idea had upset the hierarchy of what the Catholic Church and Confucius had taught. Olivia explained that when teachers had no more authority, children's peer

group shaped one's morals. Individual would be submitted to the majority pressure group (who had self-interest). In other words, peer pressure would be the teacher if no absolutes were taught. By not stressing individual distinctiveness, children would acquire the virtue of humbleness.

Contrastingly, to stress individuality is a symbol of non-conformity, rejection of authority. This would provide opportunity for children to rebel against authority.

### **Understanding gained by the researcher on how ritualistic practise was realized in Olivia's classroom**

The stress on collective practise instead of individualistic practise was a conformed behavioural practise aiming at standardized outcome. Hence, the ritual element was quite obvious through this practice. The learning outcome of good virtue reiterated to what had been discussed in the literature review section earlier.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The main findings of this research suggested that teachers with different religious and personal ideological beliefs had unknowingly exercised the ritualistic pedagogy in their daily teaching which had impacted on children's learning and development. Since the two informants of this research were both working in schools with the orientation of Catholic religious ideology. The two entirely different ritualistic practises of the teachers concerned would have the consequential effect to the extent of either flourishing the belief of the school or to dilute it.

As suggested in the findings, ritualistic practises in the classroom do not limit to the religious school in fostering their religious value or what the opponents takes it as an agent to transmit the prevailing orthodox views in society. What has been found in this research paper is far more enlightening. It suggests that the assertion on such is equally applicable to teacher who practises the child-centred play-based pedagogy.

In such a way, what McLaren (1999) purported in his understanding of the 'ills' of the Catholic religious school might well equally apply to the child-centred play-based curriculum and ritual pedagogical practises. The difference between the two rests on their contrasting ideologies underpinned, one being the Christian orthodox ideologies and the other being the humanistic ideologies<sup>3</sup>

Another subsidiary finding of this research confirmed by the literature review that ritual is not confined to merely define as culturally standardized, repetitive activity, primarily symbolic in character, aimed at influencing human affairs, and involving the supernatural realm (Kertzer, 1988, p.339). It could be broaden to refer to those activities aiming at 'determined' diversified ends so as to deliberately provide more chances for children to deviate from the taught 'norm' of the teachers. The root of the two polar opposite ritualistic practises stemmed on the worldview choice between "maintenance" or "deviation"; "obedience" or "rebellion"; "conformity" or "non-conformity".

The practise behind this pedagogy/methodology of teaching was found not value-free. Teachers would gradually modify their ways of thinking and geared towards a similar kind of worldview in the way as they had adopted the newest methodology. To quote an example from a biography review on John Childs (1889-1985) by Dennis (1992), telling how a person with a strong Christian faith changed to adopt an atheist stance by sided with the non-conformist ritualistic practise. By this life experience of Dewey's student, we could perhaps validate what has been found in this research to a larger extent.

Further research is deemed necessary to help school administrators to identify the effect of the ritualistic practises adopted in the early childhood classroom. It is anticipated that schools with different missions will be further benefited by being able to identify matching pedagogies so as to gear with their school missions. This is important for the faith school to uphold their religious school mission.

The implication is that schools should design their school-based curriculum which could well represent their missions. Then follow the matching pedagogic rituals to achieve these ends. In such a way, the study might give insight to early childhood practitioners and policy makers on how the ritualistic practises of the teachers could make a big difference to the realisation of their ideological goals. The understanding of the consequential match between ritual and myth by the early childhood teachers and stakeholders in Hong Kong is of utmost importance as this will shed light to the on-going educational reform in the early childhood arena for its perfect destiny.

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## Endnote

<sup>(1)</sup>School voucher scheme

The school voucher scheme is also called the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (hereafter referred to as “PEVS”). “PEVS” provides fee subsidy for parents/legal guardians/registered custodians to meet towards school fees for pre-primary education of their children in the form of pre-primary education vouchers. Eligible children who attend nursery, lower or upper classes in eligible local non-profit-making kindergartens or Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres (hereafter collectively referred to as kindergartens) may benefit from PEVS. The Hong Kong government has launched the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) since 2007/08 school year. The voucher can only be redeemed by local Non Profit-Making (NPM) kindergartens (KGs) charging an annual school fee below \$24,000 per student for half-day service or below \$48,000 per student for whole-day service (Education Commission, 2010). PEVS aims to all children of the relevant age with affordable and quality pre-primary education (Education Commission, 2010). In 2010/2011 school year, the voucher system generated \$2 billion of benefits for a total of 120,000 school children.

Source: <http://www.sfaa.gov.hk/eng/schemes/pevs.htm#a1>

<http://maryandmusic.wordpress.com/2012/04/03/hong-kong-pre-primary-school-voucher-system/>

<sup>(2)</sup>Looking for replacement of the school voucher scheme

In 2012, there are campaigns in the field to abolish the school voucher scheme. Stakeholders ask for a replacement of the scheme for a free 15 years education. Under the advocated scheme, children entering these registered schools in early childhood education will be included for the first time in history as an area for free education alongside with the Primary school education sector and the Secondary school education sector.

<sup>(3)</sup> Humanistic ideology

The first *Humanist Manifesto*, formalised at the **University of Chicago** in 1933, identified **secular humanism** as an ideology that espouses **reason**, **ethics**, and **justice**, while

specifically rejecting **supernatural** and **religious** ideas as a basis of **morality** and decision-making (Wikipedia).

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanism> Humanism, the paper was last modified on 10 September 2013.