

# INCORPORATING SOCIAL EVENTS INTO SCHOOL CURRICULUM: HOW IT RELATES TO STUDENT GROWTH

DEHUA LIU

*Hunan Normal University*

XIANGHUA TAN

*Shu Ming College of Early Childhood Education*

## ABSTRACT

*Current events happening in society have direct impact on the physiological and psychological development of students in primary and secondary schools. Incorporating social events into primary and secondary school teaching could enhance student learning activities, increase their ability of social recognition, adaptation and contribution to society. Significant attention needs to be paid to selecting social events to fit into meaningful themes which are structured around a set of systematic concepts. Educational and psychological considerations need to be taken in incorporating social events in class activities. Students need to be prepared to assume their role recognition and critical thinking in their involvement of discussion in social events.*

## INTRODUCTION

The many social events happening everyday are causing uneasiness to many people particularly teachers and students in school. Social events such as kidnapping, campus bullying, school principal misbehaviors, toxic milk powder, food safety, city mismanagement, officer corruption, and international conflicts have called for wide public attention and will have direct and indirect influence over the physiological and psychological development of students. Some educators prefer to let students close their ears to what are happening in society while some only share news that carry positive impact and reject those with negative effect. These educators intend to present to students a superior social environment with purity. Other educators have attempted without success to turn negative social events into useful educational resources because there was no consideration given to their relationship to educational thoughts and applications. Professor Ye (2015) declared the two kinds of student activities as in-school and out-of-school. He claimed that the effects of these two kinds of student activities could cause complementary or conflicting outcomes to students' individual development. What he did not like to happen was the resulting split of the students' character and their loss of selfness leading to not knowing who they were, whom they wanted to be, whom they could possibly be and what they could do to become whom they wanted to be. Consequently, many people have wandered around aimlessly in their lives without success.

Education today has served as a function to influence human beings and society as a whole. Educational activities are developed in particular social environments and work in conjunction with many components in society. It is almost impossible to stop students from hearing what is happening in society today. In school, social events with negative association could possibly infiltrate students' mind more effectively than those with positive association. Therefore, educators need to examine the significant relationship between social events and educational activities, to retrieve the educational value of social happenings and to explore wise solutions to social conflicts.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL LIFE AND SCHOOL EDUCATION

The influence of social events on elementary and secondary school education is multiple. Dewey (1900) stated that an educational movement was based on a broad social concept. He claimed that education was like everyday life and that school education had to reflect the real social life. He further emphasized that the process of education was actually what was happening in society. If not, school education would become poor, dull and lifeless. Dewey recognized the serious consequences of closeness in educational policies and recommended the incorporation of social events into the educational activities of the students in school so they could understand the social significance of education. In discussing the social benefit of education, Dewey (1900) pointed out that knowledge acquisition was private and could become selfish in personal academic gains; and that education closeness and privacy in learning were related. He stressed that school education had to have a social motive to be beneficial to others and society in general. Dewey was interested in capturing the essence of real life and had them introduced into the students' school work to stimulate their enthusiasm in learning.

Dewey's main conceptual background of education is to get the students acquainted with society by making all school activities close to real life activities. He saw the function of education was to help social reform and improvement by not only educating the students as learners but also preparing them to contribute to social goodness. He also considered school education as a tool to implement the planning of a better society and counted on educators and many social activists to support and accomplish this important mission. Dewey (1900) paid special respects to teachers by honoring them as fighters for maintaining social order and continuous growth. Teachers need to prepare students to recognize their social responsibilities by playing their special contributing roles through learning in school. Dewey strongly urged educators to earn their professional dignity by helping students and society to serve just like "directors to heaven" and "God's representatives".

Influenced by Dewey, Chinese educator, Xingzhi Tao, claimed that school was society and education was life and that teaching, learning and acting should all be molded under the same theme (Dong, 1991). He advocated that life in society was like an imaginary university that we needed to recognize and take advantage of the opportunity to learn. He further emphasized that

"If it is life related, it is education; if it is not life related, it is not education.

If it is good life, it is good education; if it is bad life, it is bad education.

If it is serious life, it is serious education; if it is not serious life, it is not serious education.

If it is reasonable life, it is reasonable education; if it is not reasonable life, it is not reasonable education." (Dong, 1991, p. 292)

It is obvious that Tao took the relationship between life and education to the extreme to indicate that life was education. He overlooked the differences that existed between life and education in reality. However, it can be generalized that both Dewey and Tao agreed on the significant relationship between school and society and education and life. Both of them liked to work on improving society by preparing a new generation of students who were conscientious of social events and could learn through social experiences and were aware of what they learned could contribute to a better society. The educational concepts of Dewey and Tao have provided strong implications to current educators that social life is a valuable component of school education. Social events are good indications of the continuous development of a society and turn out to be great assets for educational use.

Professor Ye (2016) considered that people, time, places and businesses in society have hidden educational value and potential that could be summarized and best be developed for good

educational purposes. Back in the 1980's, Ye disclosed that previous educational research only focused on the impact of micro-environment on education and the impact of macro-environment was ignored. This is not causing a whole lot of confusion in a slow developing society. However, in a rapidly developing society today, ignoring the impact of macro-environment could cause confusion to future educational development. Rapid social development not only demand for human adaptation but also for educational reform with challenging requirements. For example, the speedy development of social communication with pressing demand for new technology has significant impact on the learning approach of the youngsters. Ye (2016) urged educators today not to lean themselves toward old and conservative paradigms that would only lead astray to inability of addressing new issues. Conservatism would divert people's attention to conveying personal beliefs as standard measures rather than responding to reality of social needs. In his reiteration of the relationship between school and society, Ye brought the impact of macro-environment on human development to the highest. He could foresee the rapid development of technology that penetrates into human lives. He further reminded educators not to freeze their acknowledged concepts and pass them onto their students, or else, the process of education would fall behind time and social problems would not be resolved. In general, Ye has reviewed the social development of China in recent years and previewed the intensive relationship between school education and social life with the hope that educators could lead educational reforms by exploring a new path through social experiences.

### **PLANNING TO INCORPORATE SOCIAL EVENTS INTO ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Social events as important records of social life have become live educational resources to enact as forces to improve students' educational development. It is important to recognize how we could possibly incorporate social events into elementary and secondary school curriculum to enhance students' social development. We would initially ask educators to learn and to understand their teaching resources, their students and the current society they live in. On this basis of understanding, the authors would like to make recommendations to review the path to connect school and society in three different perspectives.

#### **(1) Theme Selection and Systematic Academic Design**

Theme selection relates to particularly how the nature of social events could best fit into the specialization of academic disciplines. Themes of social events can be selected in alignment with curriculum standards and the requirements of different disciplines. The systematic design of theme selection basically starts with the academic discipline as base. The requirements of disciplines will determine the criteria for selecting social events to support the discipline delivery. Through the employment of social events, social life can be reflected in school curricular activities allowing the two worlds of school and society be well connected.

## Social Events as Themes in Elementary and Secondary School Curriculum

Level	Self Protection	Human Relations	Science & Technology
Primary School	Children kidnap Sexual harassment Corporal punishment Drown in swimming Campus bullying Safety in traffic, fire, And earthquake	Conflicts among students and students' siblings Conflicts in families Conflicts between teachers and students Conflicts between students and strangers Conflicts between groups and individuals	Unsafe toys Diminishing animals Diminishing plants Food poison Toxic food in market Environmental issues in house remodel
Junior Secondary School	Fire and gas poison Hand phone explosion Disorder in school Disorder in shopping Student kidnap Group fighting	Suicide behaviors Gender relationship Neighborhood disputes Gang conflicts and fights Parents hurting children Children hurting parents	Toxic milk powder Superstition activities China-US plane crash Nobel Price - Science Research plagiarizing Safety in scientific experiments
Senior Secondary School	Student drowned dead Girl student attacked Student dropped dead running on campus Student get hurt or died at video game bar Student suicide for self closeness Drunk and reckless Driving	Campus violence Committing crime and self-defense Cases of misjudgment Racial conflicts Cases of corruption Under-society gangs Presidential election	Contamination of natural environment Group poisoning US bombing Chinese embassy International effort of peace maintenance Installing the missile defense in Korea Military competition Regional wars

Based on the students' daily lives and survival needs, the authors can attempt to identify three major themes of social events to be incorporated into school curriculum. First is the theme on student self-protection which include students learning to protect their physical bodies from being hurt and personal properties from getting lost or stolen. The second theme is on human relations which include the relationship between individuals and groups. These individual and group relationships can be elaborated to indicate generation relations: children, parents and grand-parents. Peer relations could involve classmates and neighbors. Other relations could include acquaintances and non-acquaintances, good guys and bad guys, and public and private spatial configuration. Typical social events are disserted children, non-filiality to parents, persecution of relatives, noise disturbance in the public, and pre-marriage pregnancy. The third theme of social events is related to science and technology. Examples of these social events could include natural disasters,

formaldehyde above standard allowance, animals and plants coming to distinction, toxic food, and mistake in bombing Chinese embassy. The above table on incorporating social events into school curriculum can be used as practice references. It is a clear indication that the effort of incorporating social events into school curriculum needs to be highly structured to demonstrate how the selected events are related to the value of knowledge acquisition. The themes in the structured series need to cope with the intellectual, physiological and psychological development of children. The selected social events need to possess educational values and different social events could emerge the same theme for educational use.

## **(2) Rework of Social Events in Educational and Psychological Perspectives**

When social events are selected for incorporating into school curriculum, they are not ready to be used for instructional purposes. They need to be trimmed by teachers into different formats to show the best of their hidden values to suit the educational and psychological needs of the students. In this reformatting process, social events grouped by essential themes could best generate positive reinforcement in support of education.

Some social events contain a large amount of information extending to a long process. Some are circled around with rumors that need substantial clarifications. By nature of the social events, some are positive and constructive while some are negative and destructive. Both types of social events could have great potential for hidden educational values and strengths. When immersing into school instructional activities through careful reformatting, these social events could become valuable educational resources. In other words, both positive and negative social events need to be turned into positive reinforcements to support education. In fact, not only positive social events have educational value, but negative social events may even be more effective in education values.

In reworking the social events, two aspects need to be explored: the educational aspect and the psychological aspect. The educational aspect deals with how social events could best be retrieved as educational resources for their educational values. The purpose is to make sure that through the inclusion of social events, students could have a better understanding of the reality of social happenings, including the complexity, stability and flexibility of human character, the fostering of harmonious human relationship and the co-existence of human beings and natural environment. Selected social events will be judged together with other aspects of educational considerations and will be reconstructed to facilitate their application with existing teaching resources. Positive social events could generate positive educational outcomes as well as negative educational outcomes. Negative social events could also generate negative education outcomes as well as positive educational outcomes. Considering positive social events to only generate positive outcomes and negative social events to only generate negative outcomes is over simplifying the in-depth nature of society. If only positive social events are considered for inclusion into school curriculum and negative social events are not, students could be presented with the impression of a society with absolute blind spots and will be totally confused in the practical real world. As Dewey (1900) said that things happening in society were so complex that it was impossible for students not to be perplexed in their initial social contacts. The reworking of social events is to attempt to present to students the many aspects of a complex society for discussion so they can be prepared to face social reality with the use of high value educational resources such as social events.

The psychological aspect of reworking social events is to focus on the essentials of children psychology such as age and its associated characteristics to shape and present social events to them in such a way that could be easily acceptable. Students are encouraged through the employment of

social events to understand and discuss the reality of social happenings. Basing on the educational psychology philosophies, educators need to work hard to prepare for some fundamental work:

First, we need to acknowledge the psychological needs of children. For example, children at age 12 or under may have special needs for personal safety. Thus, social events could include student safety concerns, kidnapping and sexual assault, car accidents and drowning events. However, care has to be taken not to over exaggerate the seriousness of on and off campus happenings so they could get scared. Students in junior secondary schools are commonly mistaken as youngsters of rioting age. In fact, students at this special age are beginning to be active in independent thoughts and behaviors in conflict with the older generation. Including social events of generation gaps and differences as educational resources could help them resolve many mysteries in mind. Students in senior secondary schools are both under the pressure of serious studies as well as attraction of the opposite sex. They are a responsible group of youngsters most sensitive to social events and their consequences. The inclusion of social events to indicate existence of social class differences is most interesting to them.

Second, social events can be simplified by deleting details of violence and sexuality, and social complexity beyond children's understanding at their ages. In principle, social events of violence and sexuality should not be presented to students of lower grade and younger age. Junior secondary students need to learn more about human relations particularly working with peers. Therefore, they should be presented with social events more dealing with generation conflicts while events to indicate violence and brutality should be avoided. Senior secondary students need to be presented with more cases of corruption. However, details of corruptive behaviors and mistress relationship could be deleted.

### **(3) Role Playing and Critique of Social Events in Education**

Role playing is to lead students to think through the roles of people involved in the social events and to role play these characters to get a better understanding of their motives, their thoughts and behaviors at the time of the events. Students can interact and learn among themselves through their role-playing experiences. The critique is based on the acts of the characters in the social events to critically discuss how these characters acted the way they did. Through their thorough discussion, students begin to understand the background of what happened and ask what we could do together to construct a better society for the future.

Characters in social events are involved in cultural, personal, political and financial conflicts which cannot be resolved by straightly going by political theories or ethical codes. Even though personal political instinct and ethical conduct could help address some of the conflicts among the characters in the social events, however, primary and secondary students simply cannot have a good understanding of the essence of social events by mere memory of political and ethical regulations. They could not grasp hold of the wisdom of resolving social conflicts through such memorization approach. If students are allowed to play different roles as characters in the social events, they will have first-hand experiences and better feel of what each character's individual perspective is. The role-playing approach will help students examine ways to resolve social conflicts with attachment of personal feelings. It is not the amount of accumulated experience that counts. It is role playing that creates the opportunity for students to get involved and to have direct contact with inside stories. They learn from comparative roles, thoughts and behaviors of characters and acknowledge socially acceptable behaviors as their ways to follow.

Students are encouraged to collect related information of similar social events to draft their own plays to act. They can alternatively play different roles to demonstrate what actually happened

during the events and better understand the background of the conflicts. In going through this role-playing process, students will comprehend what could possibly lead to the social events and what they could do in the future to address such happenings. As an event of children kidnapping, the roles of people involved could be the children and their peers, their parents, their grandparents, their uncles and aunts, their neighbors, their teachers, the kidnappers and their families, the police, the judge, government employees, the media and concerned people in society. For the many roles involved in one case, everyone in class could have a chance to participate to play a role. Inviting students for role playing in social events encourages students to collect related information about the events so they can have an-depth understanding of what actually happened in the real events. Playing different roles allows them the opportunities to enlighten their viewpoints in different perspectives, directs them the possible approach to systematically organize the information in hand, and leads them to the process of offering potential solutions to social problems.

Social events are embedded in complex backgrounds, continuous changing process and multiple reasoning environments with some anticipated consequences. If students treat social events with their traditional stagnant concepts, then, their recognition of social events will become stereotyped. As Alfred North Whitehead (1929) said that, in helping children in their thinking process, we need to avoid the stagnant conceptualization which only stays in the brain unused and unexperienced with the challenges of new ideas. To fully develop the educational values of social events, we need to leave behind the conservative paradigm. For example, students need to understand the seriousness of corruption behaviors and to explore the background of their complications. Students need to be directed to consider sensibly that things are not always in absolute black or white. In the open reform movement of our country, attention needs to be paid to the interweaving of rules by law and by common sense. The recent television series “In the Name of the People” will serve as an excellent resource of learning about corruption by inviting students for sensible discussions. Topics for discussion about corruption can include but not limited to the following: Why and how do government officials get involved in corruption? To what extent are government officials act corruptively? Do government officials corrupt because of greediness or under bad social influence? Why do government officials still have the courage to commit corruption even knowing that they could face death penalty? How effective are the campaigns for anti-corruption in society? As a government official, could you possibly resist the temptation of dollars? Why is corruption more active in some countries than others? How does corruption affect the development of a society? What are some of the strategies to social integrity? Through this series of questions, teachers can lead students to think in the sensible path and explore some potential solutions to address these social issues. In other words, there are many interpretations to social events even though these events are connected to official instincts or people’s arguments. In critically discussing social events in different perspectives, students have a chance to challenge current conceptualization and traditional conclusion to these events and to analyze the reasoning, interpretations and limitations of social happenings behind the scene. What students learn through these experiences would carry great social and educational values.

## **CONCLUSION**

From mere memorization of basic knowledge to role playing of social events and from total acceptance of conservative traditions to critically discussing complex social issues, students have gone through a significant process of socialization. As Rousseau (1762) claimed that if we did not teach the children to take advantage of their best potentials to seek a fruitful life, these children would enter society with psychological weakness, stupidity, arrogance and awful behaviors and we

would be sorry to witness the pain and evilness of mankind. Incorporating social events into school education is the best utilization of social resources to allow students to better understand the society they live in so they will be in a position to adapt to and reform the society for a better future.

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