The Role of Education and Social Justice By Critically Evaluating Diane Reay's Article

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教育の役割と社会公正
― Dian Reay の論評とともに ―

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Introduction

Critically considering the article presented by Reay (2012), ʻWhat would a socially just education system look like?ʼ, this paper aims to point out some of the crucial issues in the article. Firstly, the paper is concerned with the role of education in a society and problematises Reay's view of education as an end in itself. Secondly, it focuses on exploitative power structure separating the privileged and the subordinated and blindness of race and ethnicity of her article as they legitimise the subordination of the people of the lowest categorisation. Thus, the paper examines value of education and implications of neglecting issues of race and ethnicity in education since such an attitude may lead to legitimatisation of social injustice. The paper was prepared as part of the PhD in Education and Social Justice in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University in the U.K. I am pleased to acknowledge the contribution of tutors and peers in supporting the development of this study as an assignment paper.

Overview of the article presented by D. Reay and its contradictions

In her article, Reay reconsiders various forms of inequality in the U.K., specifically in England, and stresses to focus on injustice brought by social class ʻas a fundamental division in British education that requires urgent far-reaching actionʼ (Reay, 2012, 588). Drawing on the argument of Tawney (1964b), one of the most notable English scholars in the early twentieth century who claimed for equality and social justice based on human dignity and wrote to realise them through education, Reay argues that education should be considered as an end in itself rather than as an instrument for attaining economic or political goals. She points out that divisions created by social class tend to be overlooked in the contemporary political discourse of the U.K. Furthermore, behaviorist individualism and neoliberal thinking attribute social injustices in education to the responsibility of the individual rather than responsibility of the society. She further indicates that such a discursive trend often blame personal

actions of how to spend the money and disregard how much they have to spend. She alerts that the economic globalisation has contributed to spread the virtue of competitive individualism, which influences on the discourse of educational injustice as well as remedies for it. Thus, Reay proposes a fundamental philosophical transformation to construct a more just educational system by examining Tawney's political claims.

Based on the Tawney's argument that considers various social inequalities as obstacles for liberty, Reay continues to claim that the extent of liberty among the working class is dependent on the economic restraint permitted by the middle and upper class. For this reason, Reay states, Tawney supports elimination of any forms of privilege, including private schooling as it strengthens prestigious views and encourages 'social snobbery' (Tawney, 1942, 4). Simultaneously, Reay indicates that Tawney appeals for universal university education as education itself has value, not as an instrument of human resource development or maintaining hierarchal political structure in a society, which needs to be recognized as one of the goals of education yet far from implementation.

However, her urge of deconstructing the existing institutions seem to appear when she proposes 'a much flatter hierarchy of schooling' (Reay 2012, 590) by abolishing the private schools in England as they contribute to elitism and social divisions. Here, her argument gives a rather radical impression and seems to neglect the fact that utilising existing social facilities may be much more useful and constructive than abolishing them. In Japan as a case, for instance, the High School Tuition Support Fund has been started in 2010 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology to offer free education in public high schools in addition to public elementary and junior high schools. From 2020, tuition fees for students of private high schools will also be free of charge, although families with higher household income will be excluded due to income limits. The individual educational expenses in Japan are still relatively high compared to the other OECD countries. Yet, such public funding or educational assistance may contribute to preserve diversity in education while restricting enlargement of social class divisions as a consequence of educational classifications based on economic affluence. Although it is significant to note that flatter educational system will surely contribute to increase social mobility, feasibility of Reay's argument is yet largely questionable about how to completely abolish private schooling.

Simultaneously, however, it is essentially true when Reay argues that the current tendency of valorising choice fails to sufficiently admit that 'choice comes with resources' (Reay 2012, 591). It is meaningful to remark that the choice is always accompanied with unequal distributions of resources, even if every individual is able to choose what to learn in which institutions. For example, limited distributions of financial resources restrict certain groups of people from paying the tuition, thus, may result in educational classifications based on economic affluency. Therefore, Reay stresses that choice cannot be made alone and that choice is rather contextually made, considering the amount of resources

necessary for making the choice.

Most importantly, nonetheless, there is a fundamental philosophical question of education as to whether it is possible to consider education as an end in itself as proposed by Reay. Since education can be considered as a process of socialisation whether it is offered at school or at home, disconnecting education from social relations is likely to be fundamentally impossible. Educational motivations when people try to learn something, for instance, are often primarily not for the sake of education but for attaining a better social status or more control over their social environments. Freire, for instance, considers education as a means of developing critical attitudes among people to resist oppressive domination of elites in the society 'to attain their full humanity' (Freire, 2013, 4). For Freire, education has a role to teach people to employ scientific methods and reasoning, to resort to their rationales, 'to perceive themselves in dialectical relationship with their social reality' (ibid, 30) ultimately to view the world critically and to transform it. According to Rosen (2005), Plato also examines rather direct influence of education for the ruler of the society. To describe the philosophical education, Plato gives explanations of two divisions of the intelligible realm, the visible physical domain and the invisible intelligible domain, and further divides these two domains into two subsegments, *eikasia* (illusion or image) and *pistis* (trust, belief, or reflection) in the lower visible domain and *dianoia* (where enquiries are made hypothetically) and *noesis* (where a phenomenon is philosophically understood, being ready to achieve pure intellect) in the higher intelligible domain (Rosen, 2005, 266). In the lowest domain of *eikasia*, learners use imagination or an image to understand. By learning further, they become able to reflect on the image to extract (often personal) meanings of the image in the second domain of *pistis*. In the third domain of *dianoia*, mathematical theorem or hypothesis shall be employed to reach conclusions. In the highest domain of *noesis*, however, such hypothetical reasoning become unnecessary as the learner will understand by, what Plato calls, 'Ideas alone' (ibid, 264). Defining the four divisions of the divided line, Plato discusses philosophical education to 'become a full-fledged king' (ibid, 301), the ruler of the society. For Plato, moving up such subsegments of the intelligible domains and reaching the highest domain shall be the goal of the philosophical education for potential philosophers to become the ruler of the society. Here, Plato clearly recognises that education has a role in the society to develop and train its ruler and that education needs to be offered for potential philosophers to attain the highest subsegment of the intelligible domains and to govern the society. Thus, it is more appropriate to consider education in relation to the social settings, rather than regarding education as an end in itself.

In summary, Reay intends to describe complexities of the educational system the U.K. and alerts hazardous trends of globalisation and widening economic inequalities as obstacles for liberty and equitable educational opportunities for the people of the lowest social class. While her argument is powerful to point out the restricted range of choice based on financial resources, it is inevitable to point out that her argument largely lacks concrete views of education as an institution with a crucial role to

play in a society.

Absence of race and color-blindness of the article of D. Reay

Although it is understandable that the aim of her article is to present a broad view of the issues in education in the U.K., her obsession with the class disparity as the central concern fails to explore some significant issues in education such as race, ethnicity, and other minoritised groups of people. Particularly, it is somewhat astonishing to note the almost complete absence of race and ethnicity in her article, even though racial and ethnic issues have become more prominent in the education in the U.K. Researching about the intersectionality of race and class, Vincent et al. explore changing nature of racism in the U.K. and conclude that racism 'still retains the potential to undermine, to marginalize and to threaten.' (Vincent et al., 2013, 943) It is discussed that racism and classism intersect and functions concurrently in reality.

As Critical Race Theory claims, color-blindness leads to misrecognition of the power structure in the society that maintains the control of the dominant groups and subordination of the minorities (Delgado, 2017, 27). Criticising the hierarchal structure preserved by classism, discriminative attitudes based on social class, Reay still largely neglects racism even though both classism and racism are forms of discrimination that are socially produced and rooted in capitalism as a means of distinguishing the privileged groups and the others as targets of exploitation. Furthermore, neglecting racial issues can make her article less persuasive because it demonstrates her personal obsessions with the issues related to class and rather shallow understandings of hierarchal power structure in the society that constantly seeks to create a group of people of subordination, whether it is based on class, race, gender, or other forms of categorisations. The structure of the society consistently seeks subordinate groups of people who provide cheap labor, which has even been accelerated by the spread of contemporary neoliberalism and globalisation that Reay is concerned about. Thus, it is crucial to note the blindness of color and ethnicity in the article presented by Reay, which poses a great concern about her understandings of the deeply embedded social power structure to force subordinations of certain groups of people.

Furthermore, the absence of race in the article of Reay implies that issues of race and ethnicity are reduced into class categorisation by 'othering' such issues (Gillborn, 2005, 488). The dominant group of the society, the whites, tend to exclude the rest of minoritised groups of people by 'othering' their racial and ethnical identities and by taking over the normalised conceptions and values, according to Gillborn. Furthermore, he states that the most dangerous form of white supremacy is embedded in the taken-for-granted routine of everyday life that privileges the interests of the white (Gillborn, 2005, 485). He also claims that when white people fail to identify how their actions can include values and beliefs of white supremacists, they often reinforce the social structure of racist domination, whether they are conscious

of it or not. Gillborn continues to discuss that the educational policy in the U.K. centres race injustice and not race equity, thus, results in extending white supremacy. Therefore, reducing various complexities of actual lives of people into plain class categorisations may lead to extending racial discriminations.

Personally, I believe that race and ethnicity tend to be deeply embedded in the society and are often difficult to be reached out by the ethnic outsiders, thus, especially need to be actively investigated. I have also been unaware of the racial issues in the society since I believed that my home country, Japan, largely maintained rather homogeneous society with fewer ethnic issues. Yet, my belief was turned over when I started investigating about ethnic issues in education, visiting various ethnic schools in the nation that offer ethnic education for the students of foreign descents. There I encountered numerous personal accounts of cultural marginalisation by those who had no choice but to keep silence about their personal struggles and sufferings. As it is revealed by Critical Race Theory, race is not a biological definition but constructed socially through the process of cultural identification, differentiation, and marginalisation, which lead to exploitation. Those who are culturally marginalised and silenced may not feel as a part of the group, thus, become hesitant to speak out unless others in more powerful positions come to listen sincerely. Because issues of race and ethnicity tend to be hidden in the society, they can be easily disregarded. To increase mutual respect and understandings among different groups of people in a society, Sen recognises an instrumental value of education; '[e]ducation is also an instrument for understanding both difference and the potential for fault-lines to descend into conflict and violence' (Sen, 2007, 106) particularly in the world where extremism spreads violence across religious, racial, ethnic, and territorial boundaries. For this reason, it is expected for the researchers and practitioners in the field of educational sociology to proactively engage in such accounts of racial and ethnical marginalisation as well as social class oppression.

Conclusion

In this paper I have critically considered the article presented by Reay and some of the crucial issues in education that are neglected in her article. In overview, it seems that Reay's article is based on her personal obsession with social class inequality and largely neglects other forms of social oppressions that constantly seek subordination of certain groups of people in order to exploit them under the social mechanism of power. In addition, it is doubtful if her claim of 'education as an end in itself' is truly achievable in reality, considering the writings of Freire, Plato, and Sen that claim to investigate the constructive role of education in a society. The absence of race and ethnicity, moreover, is problematic because such an attitude of one of the top educational sociologists can be the very cause of reproducing racial inequality by marginalising the minoritised and the disadvantaged. Although Reay intends to claim for a fundamental change in education, it is less persuasive because the mindset of the majority

group still controls the vast power in the society and Reay herself fails to advocate the voice of the powerless. Therefore, drawing on both an understanding of the key literature and my own experience, I have argued that Reay has to critically examine her viewpoint as well as her obsession with classism and to objectively evaluate her normalised conceptions in relation to race and ethnicity.

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