

## Hannah Arendt's "*The Human Condition*" in the Realm of Early Childhood Education: Perceptions and Reality

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### Abstract

This article is an academic commentary on the concept of sociology of education. The authors have ventured through the lens of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* and discuss its impact might have had if the corresponding mode of education and pedagogy be carried out in reality according to what Arendt had inspired her readers. A cross reference has been made on the recent 2017 early childhood reform document in Hong Kong on Play with the anticipated forms of education which the authors have perceived in Arendt's *The Human Condition*, namely the 'labor', 'work' and 'action'. Since "free play" is highly promoted in the latest early childhood reform document and is tempered by the role of the teacher. As teacher is endorsed to perform the role of "feedback-giver" in the process of play, it has matched precisely with Arendt's perception of "works of art" and **eventually paving the way to** "action-vita-activa" as forms of education for the promotion of democratic collaborative learning. Since "Sociology" has an intimate connection with politics, it is anticipated that following the implementation of free play for young children in the early childhood classroom and by the tactic guide of the teachers, the educational landscape of the early years education in Hong Kong will be changed significantly. The impact of this on the society at large has yet to be examined in the long run.

**Key words:** Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, play, early childhood education, sociology of education

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## Introduction

When talking about Hannah Arendt and Education, many authors will base their discussion on Arendt's books, such as "*Hannah Arendt and education: Renewing our common world*" (2008), and "*The crises in education*" (1954). The authors of this article, however, have chosen Arendt's another famous book, "*The Human Condition*". Applying her socio-philosophical perceptions, with particular reference in the pedagogy of Play and its educational effect expected in the most recent educational reform in early childhood education in Hong Kong.

Arendt's (1958/1998) "*The Human Condition*" is regarded as the "founding" text of the sociology of knowledge which has reflected primarily the way it was taken up in Anglo-American sociological circles. By association with sociology, Arendt tried to identify the issue of loneliness as Riesman (1954), her friend did in America. Like Riesman, Arendt had a political thought in mind deep down in her heart while tackling the issue of loneliness.

### Loneliness as the consequence of *The Human Condition* in the modern world

It is a fact that "Loneliness" had been a normal part of the American landscape of dreams and reality for a long time (King, 2013, p. 36). Arendt seemed to sympathize with the condition of loneliness on which her friend Riesman did. Riesman lamented that "What is feared as failure in American society is, above all, aloneness." (Riesman, 1954)

### Thoughts of Arendt on the topic of loneliness

According to a letter written by Arendt to Riesman, Arendt asserted that the situation of mass-men in Europe would bear similarity with the situation in America. Arendt wrote, "What struck me in your paper is that people are not (even if they say so) satisfied with respect in their community, that they want more; they want here again the impossible, they want the active approval, amounting to friendship, of exactly everybody. And, of course, make friendship impossible because of this." (King, 2013, p. 37)

From what we could read about Arendt's letter to Riesman, we understand that Arendt did agree with Riesman's observation of the loneliness of people in the modern age. However, when we read Arendt's book *The Human Condition*, which was written a few years later, we might realize that deep down in Arendt's heart, she did not agree with the cause for loneliness as Riesman did.

### Causes of Loneliness according to Arendt

In the later section of "*The Human Condition*", Arendt talked of "world" and "earth alienation." She saw the former as arising, in part, from the "subjectivism of modern philosophy" including everyone from Descartes to existentialism to pragmatism. And pragmatism breeds material consumption. To go with the problem of indulgences in material consumption which manifest the pursuit of private interest rather than public interest, Arendt showed her concerns over the fate of the public world. Her fear on the fate of the public world basically stems from the deprivation of the intellectuals for an exchange of ideas in the public world, through the plurality effort of 'men' and making the participatory politics possible. The reborn power to start things afresh is similar to a new born (nativity) and could only be achieved by Arendt's notion of "action". The authors will deal with this issue later on in this article.

According to King (2013, p. 36), it is said that, at the heart of conflict between the political and social that ran throughout Arendt's thought were the warring impulses between the creation of the public world and the pursuit of private interests, especially its contemporary expression, the pursuit of

consumer happiness (King, 2013, p. 36) in the capitalist society. To Arendt therefore, she had an obvious choice for the creation of the public world where elites could have a ground to voice out their political opinions for the good of the polis as if in the olden days in the Greek culture.

Arendt, as an intellectual, lamented that the differentiation of ideologies with the common public might account for the lonely isolation situation in America. She wrote, “While ideology, with its logical deduction....prepares each individual in his lonely isolation” (Arendt, 1950, cited in King, 2013, p. 37). What Arendt mentioned here of “loneliness” could refer to those few intellectuals who wish to protest against the contamination of mass conformity “knowledge industry” in the academic circle. These few intellectuals (like Arendt) would inevitably felt the impact of loneliness because of their intellectual segregation from the rest in the crowd. But according to Arendt’s own writings, one could understand that she had related the cause of loneliness of people in the modern age to the “residual” effect under the totalitarian regime. The regime, as blamed by Arendt, is responsible to reduce the form of “work” to “labor”. The regime which has allowed the transgression of “labor” and “work” in the private realm to the public realm of “action”, causing the degradation of the later to the world of social (see Figure 1 for a visual representation of the three forms of activities in Arendt’s *The Human Condition*)

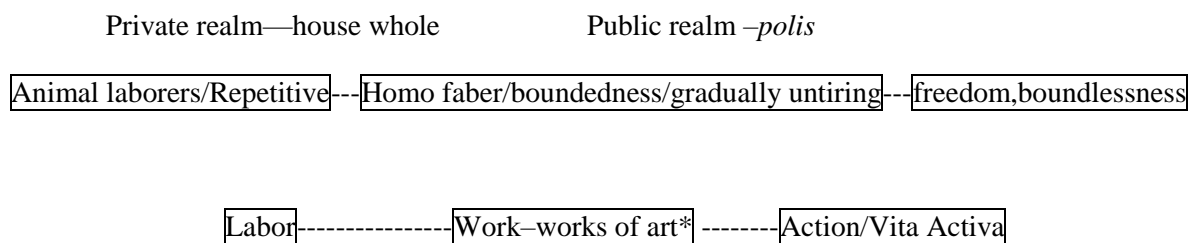


Figure 1. The demarcation of forms in the Human Activity

Explanation of Figure 1: Within the private realm, the human activities involve labor and work. Within the public realm, the human activities involve action. Together with labor, work, and action form the three forms of human activity.

Labor involves the producing what must be consumed for life, such as food or wages. Arendt had contempt towards labor since in her mind, labor is the form of human condition that was employed by the socialist, Karl Marx, who, according to Arendt, “[has defined] man as an animal laborers and then leads him into a society in which this greatest and most human power is no longer necessary.

Work involves the making of enduring objects;

Action involves the intervening in the flow of events, by which citizens display freedom and encourage by facing their world’s challenges (Clohesy, 2004).

Arendt warned that, ever since the rise of market society, work and especially labor would have dominated life with a corresponding eclipse of action, so that politics, even in democracies, would inexorably changing into economic administration while the shared public world, the space for action whereby individuals could appear, would threaten to vanish (Clohesy, 2004).

To further elaborate her ideas, Arendt, due to her hatred of the totalitarian regime, had related the cause of loneliness to the practice of animal laborers in spare time, which had boosted commercialized consumption, and this condition was inspired by Marx’s philosophy. Under this philosophy, Arendt (1958/1998) wrote,

labor power is assumed like any other energy, can never be lost, so that if it is not spent and exhausted in the drudgery of life it will automatically nourish other, “higher” activities. The guiding model of this hope in Marx was the Athens of Pericles which, in the future, with the help of the vastly increased productivity of human labor, would need no slaves to sustain itself but would become a reality for all (p.133).

Arendt pointed out the “wrongs” of Marx’s philosophical thinking on this assumption and practice as she wrote,

A hundred years after Marx we know the fallacy of this reasoning; the spare time of the *animal laborers* is never spent in anything but consumption, and the more time left to him, the greedier and more craving his appetites. That these appetites become more sophisticated, so that consumption is no longer restricted to the necessities but, on the contrary, mainly concentrates on the superfluities of life, does not change the character of this society, but harbors the grave danger that eventually no object of the world will be safe from consumption and annihilation through consumption....The rather uncomfortable truth of the matter is that the triumph the modern world has achieved over necessity is due to the emancipation of labor, that is, to the fact that the animal laborers was permitted to occupy the public realm; and yet, as long as the animal laborers remains in possession of it, there can be no true public realm, but only private activities displayed in the open. The outcome is what is euphemistically called mass culture, and its deep-rooted trouble is a universal unhappiness, due on one side to the troubled balance between laboring and consumption and, on the other, to the persistent demands of the animal laborers to obtain a happiness which can be achieved only where life’s processes of exhaustion and regeneration, of pain and release from pain, strike a perfect balance (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 133).

From this writings of Arendt, one might get an idea of how she understood the cause of loneliness.

### **Traces of Arendt’s background which led her to think differently from Riesman when identifying the cause of loneliness**

Arendt was a Jew who was born in Germany. She grew up in a middle-class Jewish family in Konigsberg, then part of East Prussia, attended the universities of Marburg and Heidelberg, studied with Heidegger and Jaspers, wrote a dissertation on the concept of love in Augustine and seemed on her way to a comfortable academic career as a philosopher (Berkowitz, 1999, p. 46).

All that changed on February 27, 1933, the day when Nazis burned the Reichstag. She explained, “I was no longer of the opinion that one can simply be a bystander”. Arendt fled Germany for France in 1933 and eventually arrived in the United States in 1940. Her subsequent work can be understood as an attempt to understand how and why the Holocaust could have happened and developed a response: from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) to *The Human Condition* (1958/1998) to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1964) to *The Life of the Mind* (1978). Arendt tried to work through such fundamental issues as the constitution of identity and the crises in understanding precipitated by the experiences of totalitarianism and the Holocaust. Democracy, freedom, totalitarianism, evil, plurality, natality, authority and responsibility are some of the subjects central to her writing. One might understand why Arendt had overtly declared her quest for political involvement in the public realm to yearn for the homo fiber of “action” than her friend Riesman did for his expectation of the “other-directed personality” (Lau & Ho, 2016) as a sure way to remedy loneliness.

Critics of Arendt mention that the greatest contribution of Arendt is her ability to stir people to think, despite of her less than immaculate identification of labor to the construction of consumer market in the social world.

### **Arendt's attempt to deal with the issue of loneliness**

Arendt's attempt to deal with the issue of loneliness is perceived as a deeper layer of thinking than those of Riesman as her approach has exhibited explicitly **politics by nature**. A review of literature of Arendt suggested that she preferred her readers to gain an understanding in the realm of politics just as Berkowitz (1999, p.48) suggested, "in order to break free from the "world alienation"—loneliness, it is necessary **to understand politics properly**. For that one must study the ancients, especially the ancient Greek *polis* and those artists and thinkers who experienced politics in its original and authentic form, recorded its glories, and set down its principles." Accordingly, it is found that Arendt drew several crucial distinctions traceable to ancient Athens for understanding politics. People inhabit both a private realm as family members, where economic activities maintain life, and a **public realm** where they speak and act together as citizens (Clohesy, 2004, pp.24–26).

For Arendt, the ills of modern time—the focus on the satisfaction of material need, the quest for comfort, and the conformism and isolation bred by mass society will lead to loneliness and most of all will suppress the experiences that nourish the desire for a life in the **public realm** (Berkowitz, 1999, p. 47).

Constructively speaking, if modern society is to leave ground for the intellectuals to exchange cherished ideas in the public realm (as if the ancient Greeks did), **the boundary between public realm and private realm must be closed**. If the private realm (labor and work) is closed, there is no chance for them to cross the border and making the polis a social ground for commercial purpose. The private realm is the household that is described as "a space devoted to fulfilling the necessities of life and governed by the strictest inequality". This is a sharp contrast with the kind of activities took place in *polis*, which is a setting for free interaction among equals. In this way, *polis* in the public realm will become the breeding ground for politics. This understanding of the authors is confirmed by Berkowitz (1999, p.48) when he wrote, "The Greeks knew that politics consists in collective deliberation in the public realm, in the giving of speeches in the presence of one's fellow citizens, in persuading and being persuaded in turn". According to our understanding of Arendt's message, the public realm should be preserved so as to leave room for elites to interchange of ideas and thereby to construct knowledge of politically important, this could be a way to avoid loneliness.

The following quotation is taken from Arendt's (1958) words in *The Human Condition* to illustrate the situation.

For the Greeks, the experience of the significance of politics and of action was rooted in the separation of the household, a space devoted to fulfilling the necessities of life and governed by the strictest inequality, from the *polis*, a setting contrast, names, a constellation of developments—including the growth of large-scale markets and the commodification of labor; the corresponding preoccupation of nation-states with economic imperatives; and the growth of a spirit of conformism that helps reduce human activity to scientifically predicable and administratively tractable "behavior"—which, taken together, have broken down the old distinction between public and private, giving rise to a "new realm" in which the labor and the life process, once confined to the household, have become the focus of public concern. (p.32)

Arendt's emphasis on the expansive, transgressive qualities of the social realm, which she said has an "irresistible tendency to grow, to devour the older realms of the political and the private." (Markell, 2011, p.21)

Further on to the ideas in Arendt's message, one might understand that, to abide to the biological quest of self by conforming to the social is a degradation of self in a sense. Thereby, Kateb (1994) concluded Arendt's message by saying that, "there is a need for the modern society to resurrect and preserve the fragile and valuable experience of action".

In order to enable her readers to have a better understanding of how action is the most preferred form of *The Human Condition* in lieu of labor and work in the cause of political action, Arendt had carefully chosen the medieval diction of ‘vita activa’ —which referred to “all kinds of active engagement in the things of this world” (See Figure 1 presented earlier) in her choice of vocabulary and semiotic use of language in the second chapter of *The Human Condition*, “The Public and the Private Realm.”

### **Linking Plurality with Natality in Arendt’s concept for action**

As mentioned earlier, Arendt was much indebted to enforce her notion of “action” in the public realm than Riesman’s identification of the other-directed man (Lau & Ho, 2016), what the authors are going to do next is to explain how Arendt’s idea of “action” could be materialized for political act in such a way.

By echoing what have written earlier, “The Greeks knew that politics consisted in collective deliberation in the public realm, in the giving of speeches in the presence of one’s fellow citizens, in persuading and being persuaded in turn.” In here, one could apply Arendt’s notion of “natality” and “plurality” to explain the situation. In Arendt’s term, “plurality” means that human beings are alike in that each is unique and irreducible. This shared uniqueness and irreducibility—otherwise known as individuality—is connected to another feature of *The Human Condition*, which Arendt called “natality”. Natality, “the new beginning inherent in birth,” is, Arendt held, the ground of the distinctively human capacity, “the capacity of beginning something new, that is, of acting.”(Berkowitz, 1999, p. 54). Following on this explanation of terminology, one would then understand that each individual will deliver one’s specific speeches on one unique understanding of the political issue, the situation is like a new born introducing something new to the people in the polis. But since one cannot begin something new alone, and one cannot engage in action by oneself, hence, human beings must act with other human beings to see and to be seen, to speak and to listen, to disclose oneself and to witness the self-disclosure of others in order to realize an action. This is where the notion of plurality stands for.

In short, plurality and natality were Arendt’s weapons against the recurrence of the Holocaust, against the forms of organization that prevent the exercise of human freedom (Coulter, 2002, p. 200).

### **Action is only possible in the public realm in Arendt’s *The Human Condition***

In Arendt’s *The Human Condition*, action is only possible in the public realm. The public realm provides the place where human beings can meet together for the discussion of the drudgery of everyday life, the concern with production and reproduction, with labor and family, but also burst the chains of necessity. “Action can be judged only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and generic” (Berkowitz, 1999, p.48). Action is not some sort of individual right that government is obliged to protect, and it is not a good that can be promised equally to all. Action is accomplishment and a grand one. Arendt therefore suggested that people must act “plurality” for action.

The effective way to achieve this end is through education to people, and especially to the young. Arendt mentioned the need of applying the philosophy of existentialism, pragmatism in a socially constructed manner to education as a way of educating the young so as to keep them apart from the mainstream of “ill-practice” in the modern society on one hand. On the other hand, the politician may prepare the future generation for their political appetite through education. To Arendt, the approach of education which is underpinned by the existential-pragmatic ideology would be the perfect match of realizing politics collaboratively for action in the public realm. In here, the authors are of the opinion that Arendt had under-estimated the “destructive” power of this approach when she wrote in *The Human Condition*, “To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided

through words and persuasion and not through force and violence.” By thinking that each individual could voice out his unique opinion, which is endorsed by the concept of natality, and then by an exchange of opinions and persuasion in plurality (with people other than oneself), productive ideas could be formed. In such a way, Arendt mistakenly assumed that “violence” would not have its place whenever there was space and action since violence was silent. In our analysis, Arendt had underestimated the power (through words of political thought) that would be initiated by the collective opinions of the people in the public realm. She had not considered the effects of these political speeches being implanted in the mind of others, such was the case of Rousseau to the political leaders in the French Revolution in 1789.

Hence, to this suggestion of Arendt when applying the philosophy of existentialism and pragmatism to educate the young, the authors of this article have reservation about this contention as many parents of young children did in the realm of education.

**The paradoxical situation of the worker protruding the boundary in the private realm of the works of art to the public realm of action**

The paradoxical situation of the worker in the private realm of the “works of art” protruding the “wall or boundary” towards the public realm of “action” in Arendt’s description of *The Human Condition* (see Figure 2) is perplexed by standing in the middle-of-the-road situation, just like the situation of the other-directed type in Riesman’s terminology (Lau & Ho, 2016). The situation could lead to political change through the plurality of action.

Also, as with Riesman’s the other-directed type had got the potential for revolutionary action, Arendt’s plurality of action also got the potentiality of causing the action. If speaking in the contemporary societal human condition, the call for revolutionary action is made possible through the media devices. The silent nature of these devices might validate what Arendt meant it for violence in the semiotic term. It is because by location, they are (in mass) freely come and go or doing the mix and match, as if marching through the boundary from work to action under Arendt’s category of *vita active*.

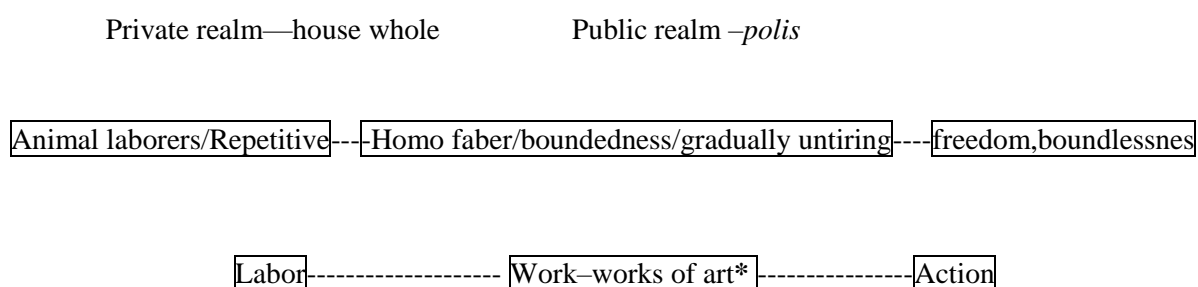


Figure 2

For Arendt and her *polis*, action is meant to be taken by intellectuals, by those elites who are capable to bring forth productive changes for the betterment of societies. These elites have derived their consent decisions by an exchange of ideas instead of blindness consent to the prevalent political agenda. This *polis* is a sacred place and must be reserved for those who are capable only. Hence, the wall between “work” and “action” and between “labor” and “work” must be bound.

## **Arendt's determination to reset the boundary for the separation of labor, work and action**

Arendt's notion of keeping *polis* intact for the political discussion is a lot better than Riesman's notion of allowing the transgression of boundaries for the same motive (Lau & Ho, 2016). When compare with what Arendt did in her book with those of Riesman, Arendt was obviously intelligent enough as to set firm the boundary for labor, work and action. This is to ensure the separation between the public and the private realm against its modern erosion.

### **The unique role of "works of art" in Arendt's *The Human Condition***

Arendt's concept of the work plays a unique role in her scheme, because it is the point at which her two pairs of concepts meet. In terms of the amount of weight it bears in the book, work and not action is the most important concepts in *The Human Condition* (Markell, 2011, pp.27–28).

The meaning of "work" itself changes over the course of the chapter that bears its name, as Arendt turned her attention from the distinction between labor and work to the articulation of "work" and "action"—a joint that she explored in the dense but crucial final section of that chapter, on the "works of art".

Work, the shift that takes place late in that chapter from an account of work centered on the production of useful objects, which occupies its first five sections, to an account of work centered on the production of "works of art", which appears rather abruptly in the final section of the chapter, and is strikingly different in tone from what precedes in it. In one sense, there is no discontinuity involved in this shift: what useful objects and works of art share is that they are durable, at least when compared to the stuffs consumed by the life process and the fragile webs spun out by speech and action (Markell, 2011, p. 27).

In the "works of art", Arendt's understanding of these "private" phenomena was significantly different. The very fact that the "works of art" is "the human capacity for thought, as man's propensity to truck and barter" is sufficient to enable us to understand that it bears the quality much resembling to that of "action". It is because thought will bring forth action. It becomes not difficult for us to understand the role played by the "works of art" designed by Arendt is served as a means to "transform" or "in-transition" to the public realm of action by its nature. It is through the "works of art" that "human capacity which by its very nature is world-open and communicative of action" (since thought will bring forth action). It is through the works of art that "human capacity which by its very nature is world-open and communicative transcends and releases into the world a passionate intensity from its imprisonment within the self." (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 168; Markell, 2011, p. 33)

The corresponding form of education to Arendt's *Human Condition* of "labor"

For Arendt, labor is about survival. Much of teaching involves "labor" and "work". Indeed, organizing children to learn is a form of "labor" and "work", that is, a continuous effort to keep children engaged.

The corresponding form of education to Arendt's *The Human Condition* of "labor" is the traditional educational mode. The traditional curriculum mode has typically involved a teacher conveying facts to students. The curriculum focuses on a specific body of knowledge to be transmitted to students and relies heavily on memorization and drilling of facts and formulas. Education systems founded on traditional curriculum focus on the subject matter being taught and favor measurement of educational objectives via a great deal of testing. Traditional curricula may include transmission of moral standards, social conduct and skills which educators consider important for students to learn. Students are typically expected to learn what they are taught without questioning it (Traditional



education, 2017). Following on this characteristic of traditional curriculum, Morris and Adamson (2010, p.49) wrote, “to some degree, all school curricula focus on teaching students about the aspects of their own society, including its culture, the nation’s history and geography, and its 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 with those of the prevailing orthodoxy”. In other words, the goal or final product of the traditional education is to expect a standardized product, be it is of knowledge, culture or of a given belief/ideology/orthodoxy manifested on the student on which the traditional education is to be bestowed on.

Morris and Adamson (2010, p. 49) continued to lament that, “Orthodoxies, by definition, believe in fixed answers to relevant questions and the task of the schools is to ensure that pupils know these answers. Pupils are not encouraged to consider alternatives”.

As such, one might see the close analogy between the operation of the traditional curriculum has had on the students for a fixed outcome of learning with those of the mass mechanical production (with standardized /homogeneous project) or of what Arendt said of in the “animal laborers” condition. Even should there be “play” element included in this type of traditional education, the activity will be teacher-planned game, with the teaching objectives in mind, and looking for homogenous, fixed learning outcomes.

Aligned with the traditional curriculum is the teacher-directed pedagogy. This teaching pedagogy involves a teacher lecturing students and students repeating what they have memorized, then being tested on it (Traditional education, 2017). 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 Hong Kong before the 1980s (Lau & Ho, 2013). But ironically speaking, most of the kindergartens which have religious affiliations in the colonial period have adopted this mode of education and could “produce” many good students excel both in academic results and in conduct. The possible explanation of this outcome of learning could be aligned with the teacher-directed pedagogy with the structured curriculum in a teacher-centered classroom, the teacher might be able to play a strong role in trying to induct the young into the beliefs of a given religion (including moral behaviors or politics) or to induct a political ideology (Morris & Adamson, 2010, p. 49).

With the understanding that the teacher-directed pedagogy and its structured curriculum in a teacher-centered classroom are responsible for inducing a political ideology in the minds of the young, Arendt would definitely snare at this form of education which has its element with the totalitarian form of “labor”. Hence, this kind of curriculum is the least preferred type of curriculum according to what Arendt has inspired her readers to think of in *The Human Condition*.

### **The corresponding form of education to Arendt’s *Human Condition* of “work” and “works of art”**

On the better level than “labor” in the eyes of Arendt is “work”. “Work” involves more autonomy as far as teaching is concerned. It involves the very arrangement of the furniture in classrooms and owes much to the teacher’s sense of what he or she believes to be the appropriate environment for good teaching.

The “work” together with the “works of art” under the private realm of “work” in *The Human Condition* (see Figure 1 and 3), is a hybrid mode which allows room for the young children to study in the traditional subject-based curriculum while at times would allow young children to play autonomously after the main subjects have been taught, though in play, children might receive some minimal guidance from the teacher (in the works of art region).

Theoretically speaking, this hybrid mode (see Figure 3), due to its flexibility and its boundless-mobile nature, is accountable to causing action for a change. The hybrid mode is identified in Arendt’s (1958/1998) book as the “works of art” in the private realm of “work” and transgressing towards the public realm of “action”. The corresponding mode of education for this hybrid mode is the different combination of the traditional work curriculum and play curriculum, allowing within which different degree of autonomy to foster action.

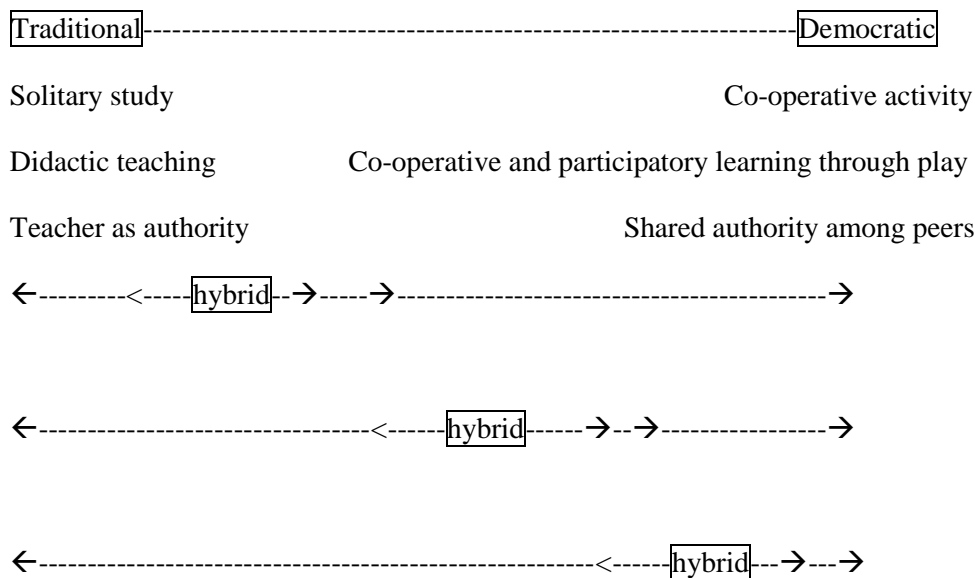


Figure 3. Different forms of hybrid mode (Lau & Ho, 2016)

If speaking more precisely, it is under the condition of “works of art”, teacher will have the authority to guide and to set the path for the young children to democratizing via the activities of play, apart from asking the young children to fulfill their obligatory duty of work before they are allowed to play. This hybrid mode of educational design allows teacher to take control of what is to be taught (curriculum content) and can exercise his/her authority of how it is to be taught (pedagogy) on one hand. On the other hand, at times, the teacher could lessen her control over what is to be taught and how it is to be taught and have the young children taken over the control of learning by themselves in varying degree within the same lesson. The teacher might seize the opportunities to teach and/or to be the feedback provider to young children knowledge or behaviors on the spot while the young children are playing.

**The similarity between Arendt’s forms of play and the newly advocated play curriculum in the 2017 reformed document in Hong Kong**

In the recent early childhood educational reform in Hong Kong, the authors have found from the reform document published by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC, 2016), the similarities with Arendt’s hybrid mode of curriculum under the category of “work” and “works of arts” in her “*The Human Condition*”. For example, the document has carried the slogan, the “Joyful Learning through Play: Balanced Development All the Way”. It has listed in detail the newest requirement of the curriculum and pedagogic practices (which is Play) in 2017, following the implementation of the 15 years free education in Hong Kong, is self-explanatory of the situation.

On page 27, section 4.5 of the captioned document, for example, the document has stressed the need to strengthen the element of free exploration of play by giving its reader the rationales and the proposals for implementation. Under 4.5.1.3, it is written that, “as one of the key elements in play, free

exploration is a catalyst for children's effective learning, enabling them to maintain or even enhance their concentration on and interest in learning".

These sections seem to encourage young children to explore freely in their play so that they might learn effectively. One might realize that it is unquestionable that "free play" is highly promoted in the latest early childhood reform document. The requirement on free play has matched precisely with Arendt's perception of "action-vita-activa" as forms of education for the promotion of democratic collaborative learning. The application of which will be discussed later on in this section.

On the other hand, however, as could be seen on page 28 of the reform document (CDC, 2016), it is written under section 4.5.2.3 about the role of the teachers,

"In addition to the roles of 'provider' and 'participant', teachers should also perform the role as 'feedback-giver' in the process of play. After play, teachers should invite children to share their experiences, feelings and the new knowledge and skills learnt; and provide timely and positive feedback to children."

What have been requested in the latest curriculum reform guide of having play as curriculum and the role of teacher in children's play is beyond doubt that it bears a lot of similarities with the model set by Arendt in the "work" and "works of arts" in *The Human Condition*. In other words, play, on one hand, is highly esteemed in young children's learning; play, is nevertheless, has to be facilitated by the teachers so as to ensure it has reached some pre-determined outcomes expected by the teacher. Curriculum and its aligned pedagogy in education, if designed in such a way, will fit well with Arendt's purpose of preparing the way for realizing politics for action in the public realm ultimately in the "vita activa" region.

To confirm the above findings of the authors, it was found in a review of literatures, that Arendt did prefer a certain degree of authority exercised by the teacher while doing activities with the young children (Fonseca, 2016, p. 505).

Carvalho (2002, cited in Fonseca 2016, p. 505) also highlights the influence of teachers have had on education in an academic paper talking about Arendt and education, "the best form of cultivating and transmitting democratic values and also of taking part in citizens ethical formation is to be present not only in words, but also in our actions as teachers and education professional".

### **The Role of Teachers in Applying the Concept of Sociology in Early Childhood**

#### **Education**

According to Goldfarb (2015), "Sociology" has an intimate connection with politics and to that extent, the term of political sociology is used. According to the understanding and observation of the authors of this paper, very often, this concept of sociology can be fostered via the teaching pedagogy of the teachers in the early childhood classroom.

Arendt's suggestions of retaining the authority of the teacher at children's play, though are found different from what the humanistic scholar like Dewey has advocated, has a purpose on which her contemporary might not realize nor understand. Her purpose is to ensure that the teacher will safeguard her students by providing them an environment to socialize among with peers. By doing so, the teacher can facilitate children to express their social concerns over issues which are different from their peers. By providing an opportunity for young children to exchange their ideas with one another, teachers have set up an initial breeding ground for the young children as if to live in a democratic society and to acquire political concepts. Authors like De Melendex, Beck and Fletcher (2000) in "*Teaching Social Studies in Early Education*" have mentioned that,

Political socialization begins in childhood and focuses on building knowledge about the role of government and its relationship to the individual in a democracy. Political socialization—development of an understanding about power, rules, and the role of government as an authority—is grounded in politics, not in partisan politics, but rather in politics as a framework for implementing the rules of democracy. Politics is a broad field and describes the activities and behaviors that people exhibit in relation to the power structure and the governing processes. Political activities with peers or adults take place in all the settings where children interact: at home, in the classroom, and around the neighborhood (p. 197).

During the socializing moment, according to research documentation, young children’s progressive acquisition of the concept of politics can be made (De Melendex, Beck & Fletcher, 2000, Following the requirement of the 2017 Curriculum Guide in Early Childhood Education (ECE) that advocates free play and by giving power for the teachers to “provide feedback” to children so as to legitimize the exchange of ideas among the young children when they are at play, the Guide has essentially provided the good ground for nurturing the political minds of the children in the ECE classroom when these children are at their most receptive stage of learning through the role of the teachers.

Under the “*work*” category, the teacher can exercise many of her authority, teacher could “select” those students whom she thinks have got the best qualities both in character, aptitude and intellectual capacity to be the future leaders in the political field. The situation bears much similarities with those in the Platonic times when only the elites with good moral conducts, good dispositions and intellectual capability could debate in the polis (that is society in the modern sense).

But in order not to allow all the students under the “work” category enter into the “*vita activa*” stage of *The Human Condition*, the gateway between “work” and “*vita activa*” must be closed and will momentarily open via the “works of arts” only. The teacher in the “work” category, would therefore closely observed her class of young children and then identify those who have the potential to be future leaders of the society during the “play” activities arranged by herself/himself and then “select” them to join a specially arranged group as if they are the elites in the polis for democratic political discussion.

### **The corresponding form of education to Arendt’s *The Human Condition* of “action” –the *vita activa***

The best form of education, according to Arendt, is an active classroom where autonomous or free play is promoted. In here, children are given a free choice to do any activities they preferred. This form of curriculum is considered as a play-based curriculum which foster “genuine” play for young children. In this genuine play activity, teacher should exercise minimal control or direction over the children. If teacher exercises her authority over the planning of the activities or making use of the opportunities to teach children while they were playing is already reverted to work or labor.

Same as what Dewey (1916/1944) thought of, it is understandable that if Arendt is to instill the political spirit for future elite citizens, she must start preparing the mind of the children when they are still young. There is no wonder she had shown concern for creating a democratic classroom by interweaving John Dewey’s ideas and certain fundamental existential preoccupations, particularly those of Merleau-Ponty (1964) for play.

As with the play activity under Arendt’s “work” and “works of art”, play activity in the “action” realm has found its ally in the 2017 Hong Kong educational reform document (CDC, 2017). For example, on page 28 of the reform document (CDC, 2016), under section 4.5.2.3, it is stated that “teachers should encourage children to participate in ‘free play’ and allow them to arrange play on their own, such as choosing playmates and making rules.....”.

As such, the reform document seems to employ “play” to create the possibility for democratic praxis as with Arendt did. For Arendt, she wished to have the democratic praxis installed in a hostile world and deemed that as valuable for herself and for those interested in democratic education. Her concern for creating the possibility for democratic praxis in a hostile world is especially valuable for those interested in democratic education.

With reference to Arendt’s teaching, action must be initiated in plurality. Hence, a corresponding form of education would be an application of Dewey’s “learning by doing” (Dewey, 1916/1944, p.324) as pedagogic practices in a socially constructed classroom. At times, Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist form of scaffolding technique could be used as supplement to the learning by doing pedagogy. A socially constructed classroom is a kind of classroom which could foster the shared culture of peers and is relevant to Arendt’s *vita activa* of action in the public realm.

It is anticipated that the intention of Arendt to enforce a kind of curriculum which is proactive “with action” and thereby to equip young children to engage in political exchange of ideas as if they are in the ancient *polis*. The best form of such curriculum would be through the co-operative play among the young children. De Melendez et al. (2000, p. 198) are of the opinion that young children could exhibit their political sense through engaging in the co-operative play. Examples of such expressions could be through the positions the young children have assumed; by the views that the young children have expressed and many more expressions cited below.

By inquiring about things that happened;

When they participate in making decisions;

When making choices;

By acknowledging the existence of a governing source;

By supporting the ideas of others;

By participating in class and group activities;

By showing preferences;

By taking the initiative;

By promoting change.

An example of this kind of play is facilitated in the following manner:

In order to foster the free exchange of thoughts as if the elites in the *polis* in ancient Greece did, teacher who fosters Arendt’s form of Human Condition of “action” will facilitate a play environment whereby young children could play collaboratively. To form a band, for example, get tires up a ladder, or work in an office, children need the support of at least one like-minded partner.

Hohmann & Weikart (1995, p. 399), however, reminds these teachers that forming and sustaining play partnerships is not a simple task. It depends on young children’s emerging social competence, intentionality, desire for friendship, and ability to sustain the idea of “we” over “me”. Psychologists Rubin and Everett (1982) observe that,

“Such egalitarian relationships give children opportunities to assert themselves, to present their own views of the world, and to argue freely with peers concerning different social-cognitive viewpoints. Such conflicts and interactions may ultimately help children to understand that others may have different thoughts, feelings, and perspectives than their own.”(p.106)

In their study of four to six year olds, developmental psychologists Das and Berndt (1992) found that young children seek playmates based on positive social criteria, including,

- (a) Lack of aggressive behavior (He is never mean to me);
- (b) Similarity (We both like dinosaurs);
- (c) Sociability (He plays with me);
- (d) Perceptions of being liked by the peer (She likes me);
- (e) Prior association (I have known him for many years).

But will this kind of collaborative shared culture educating young children the true meaning of friendship? Or has it inculcating in the mind of the young the negative spirit of compromise at the expense of genuine friendship that the ancient great philosopher Aristotle has espoused?

The second associated query is that, will collaborative peer learning bring forth other issues that would challenge the teacher and her authority? A review of literature in Corsaro (2011), suggests a response to the question raised. It is said that a universal aspect of children's peer culture is children's tendency to challenge adult authority. Schwartzman (1978) argues that children not only experiment with and refines aspects of the adult world in play but also use play as an "arena for comment and criticism" (Lau & Ho, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

### **Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* has inspired her readers for further thoughts on the educational issue**

The perception of the authors is that what works well in the ancient Greece for a democratic exchange of political ideas in Polis among the adult elites is not applicable to young children via the form of education they receive to achieve these ends. To do so is to instill in the minds of the young children with some pre-maturely political thoughts while they are still very young, which is not appropriate. The overly proactive character so trained while they are at a tender age right through their adult years will eventually bring harm to the society. The way to implant such pre-mature socio-political thoughts in the mind of the young children is, inevitably, done by unsuitable form of education, and in this case, the free play curriculum associated with the "works of arts" and "vita activa" advocated by Arendt in her conceptual thought in *The Human Condition*. Following the determination of the policy enforcers and their protagonists, it is anticipated that the educational landscape of the early years education in Hong Kong will be changed significantly in not too distant a future.

But on the other side of the coin, if we are to reduce Arendt's ascendancy to the spirit of the times would also do an injustice to her powerful scintillating mind and to the sweep of her accomplishments (Berkowitz, 1999, pp. 57–58). Our discussion will temporary end here due to the limitation of space, but will re-open again, as we consider the inspiration gained through analyzing Arendt's book *The Human Condition* is by no means exhaustive.

After all, in the study on Arendt's *The Human Condition*, the authors of this article have found that Arendt's book is a good one in terms of clarity and in her identification and application. Eventually, we agree with the reviewers of the Arendt's book "*The Human Condition*" that the popularity of the book rests in inspiring its reader to think rather than to read them literally.

To the thought-provoking question, “Will action bring forth goodness to society? Or will it bring forth changes to the society that will turn the society upside down and its original orderliness? The question is still open to debate.

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