

Exploring the Role of Cultural and Social Capital in Inequalities of Children's Arts Education: A Comparative Study in the Greater Bay Area

Equity is crucial in education, but educational inequality perpetuates social disparities and limits individual potential, widening gaps between privileged and disadvantaged groups. It reinforces poverty cycles and systemic injustices, undermining society. While education has the potential to address inequality, it can unintentionally perpetuate existing disparities.

Drawing upon the alarming wealth disparity in Hong Kong and mainland China, this underscores the urgent need to address educational inequality and its role in perpetuating systemic injustices. Schools inadvertently foster inequality, particularly in arts learning, which is seen as a symbol of middle-class privilege, exacerbating the gap between privileged and marginalized groups.

In the context of the pervasive “education fever”, this comparative study examines the cultural and social capital in the Greater Bay Area (GBA), to understand how capital is transmitted across generations through out-of-school arts activities. Data will be drawn from 1,600 questionnaires and 80 interviews involving parents of children aged three to eight years old residing in four cities within the GBA—Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Dongguan, and Foshan.

The study aims to uncover the transmission of cultural capital through arts activities, exploring parental involvement and support across social classes. It also examines the interplay between social and cultural capital and the experiences and barriers faced by disadvantaged families with high aspirations for their children's arts education. By delving into these aspects, the study aims to advance our understanding of the inequalities in arts education and beyond.

At a macro level, a comparative analysis across GBA cities will be conducted to examine the cultural and social capital theory in the context of social reproduction in China. It considers the dynamic cultural, social, and political contexts at the national level. The study explores how political and cultural factors influence parental attitudes towards arts education, considering the “One country, two systems” policy and its impact on parental decision-making.

By uncovering the connections between national policies, cultural influences, and parental choices regarding arts education, this research provides insights into the role of parental cultural and social capital in children's arts learning in the Chinese context. It identifies culturally significant forms of cultural capital in arts learning and assesses the effectiveness of leveraging social capital influenced by cultural norms. The study aims to advance theoretical understanding and stimulate policy discussions to address educational inequality and examine the impact of state educational policies on reinforcing or mitigating educational inequality.