Media education practice

The Implementation of Media Education in Hong Kong's Secondary Curriculum: Reasons, Means, and Impact

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Abstract. This paper is based on different projects conducted by the author during the last few years to ascertain the reasons for the implementation of media education secondary schools in Hong Kong, how schools have integrated media education into the curriculum, and whether the implementation of media education has had any impact on students.

Key words: media education, liberal studies, inoculation, empowerment, Hong Kong secondary curriculum.

Introduction.

In Hong Kong, media education was introduced into schools in the late nineties, with teacher training courses being offered in the universities (Cheung, 2012). This paper aims to examine the reasons for the implementation of media education in secondary schools in Hong Kong, how schools have integrated media education into the curriculum and whether the implementation of media education in lessons has had any impact on students.

Reasons

Inoculation and empowerment

When media has become students' first curriculum and schooling has become the second, what can be done? Media Education is regarded as a tool to inoculate students against the effects of overexposure to media messages

In Hong Kong, Cheung (2004) examined the reasons for implementing media education in schools and noted that schools often take an inoculative approach to media education, with students being taught about the bad effects of the media. However, media education is more than a tool with which to warn students about the bad effects of the mass media; it can empower students to be more analytical, participative, and motivated to learn. While the inoculative approach was dominant in the early stages of media education, later stages have seen a shift in emphasis. Another study by Cheung (2006) noted that media education 'enables students to

construct knowledge and develop a global outlook to cope with the changing and interdependent world in the 21st century, and develops students' lifelong learning skills (to enjoy learning, to enhance effectiveness in communication, to develop creativity, and to develop a logical, critical, and analytical mind) as stipulated in the aims of current educational thought.'

Means

If media education is to be implemented, the essential questions are where, when and by whom. Should it be an independent subject, an integral part of language teaching, a cross-curricular subject, or as an extra-curricular activity? In Cheung's (2004) survey, when respondents were asked where in the curriculum media education could be introduced, the three favourite options chosen by primary teachers were Civic Education, General Studies (only offered in the primary curriculum), and as a cross-curricular subject. In the case of secondary teachers, the options were Civic Education, Liberal Studies (only offered in the secondary curriculum) and as a cross-curricular subject.

In Hong Kong schools, the timetable is tight and the curriculum is crowded, and it is very difficult to add a new subject. Besides, the examination driven syllabus has prevented the discussion of many 'meaningful' issues. Thus, it would be difficult for teachers to integrate media education into their existing examination-oriented subjects.

Moreover, many schools are afraid that once they commit to including media education (or indeed any other new subject) in the regular timetable, they will have to invest a significant amount of money and manpower to make it a success. It is therefore safer as a first step to implement media education on a small scale basis, devoting a few lessons to it in a subject where assessment in terms of examination is minimum. If the results are promising, the school might then consider launching it on a wider scale.

Civic education

In Hong Kong, the mass media is identified as an important factor in civic education (Cheung, 2005). Media education is crucial to helping students analyze media messages as 'it is the mass media which have taken the initiative in providing information about politics and government from their own perspectives, resulting in a rather varied presentation of the news' (Lee, 1999, p.332). In response, school practitioners, in particular, have emphasized the need for media education.

Many schools adopting media education try to implement it using civic education lessons. For one thing, the civic education syllabus is more flexible than other syllabuses and some of the goals of media education seem very similar to those of civic education. Besides, media education does not rely on a fixed textbook. As the teaching materials of media education usually relate to current

happenings on TV, in movies and in newspapers and magazines discussion of contemporary issues is a prerequisite in the teaching of civic education.

It is hoped that through media education, young people's awareness of economic, political, and social issues will be increased, as images they receive from the mass media will motivate them to discuss and learn, leading them to inquire into and understand issues in society in order to become better participative democratic citizens (Cheung & Dubey, 2012)

Moral Education and Religious Education

The strong influence of the mass media on students poses a challenge to educators in moral education. Instead of trying to prevent students from being exposed to the media, can media education be used to promote moral education? It is noted that many writers stress the importance of media education in implementing moral education (Browning, Miller-McLemore, Couture, Brynoff and Franklin 1997; Stout 2001). According to a survey by Cheung (2004), quite a number of teachers from both primary and secondary schools noted that media education could be introduced during moral education lessons.

Cheung (2006) used a study of two schools to provide evidence to support the implementation of media education in religious education. He noted the suitability of using media education in the teaching of religion as the aims of the two are similar and media education requires a teaching pedagogy that will motivate students to learn

Liberal Studies

Society now is very different from what it used to be 10 years ago, and in order to keep pace with the changing world and to nurture students so as to meet the needs of tomorrow's society, education reform is inevitable. The new wave of education reform in Hong Kong set new agendas in education: apart from the traditional emphases on ethics, intellect, physical fitness, social skills and aesthetics, schools in Hong Kong were expected to produce a new generation of students who could learn on their own, think for themselves, and explore new arenas of learning. These reforms have influenced, directly or indirectly, the development of media education in Hong Kong.

In the document *Education blueprint for the 21ˢᵗ century: review of the academic system* published in 1999, words such as student-centered, self-learning, and motivation were mentioned frequently. Moreover, the document questioned whether the media were 'aware of their powerful influence on the formation of values and learning of language by young people', and asked whether the media should 'disseminate information to the public, and help young people develop positive values, distinguish right from wrong and broaden their horizons' (Education Commission, 1999, p.28). That set the scene for media education, which aims to help students develop logical and creative thinking through critical

analysis of the media messages that they are exposed to every day. The nature of media education is student-centered, and students are more motivated to learn through discussing the contents they enjoy. Furthermore, they can engage in producing media products in the form of campus newspapers, radio, and TV creatively at a later stage.

Another suggestion in the document was the introduction of key learning areas to replace the fixed subject boundaries. One of these key learning areas was Personal, Social and Humanities Education (PSHE). Media education, a relatively new concept, which had not previously been covered in the Education Department's official guidelines, was here described as an element in cross-curricular programs and a possible component of this key learning area in the consultative document. This was an indication of a growing awareness of the importance of media education on the part of policy makers. Media education was finally on the official agenda.

As part of the education reform that took place in Hong Kong in the 21st century, a core subject, Liberal Studies was introduced, some of whose components are closely related to media education (CDC, 2006):

As the coverage of Liberal Studies includes contemporary issues, the media become one of the important sources of information apart from teachers' handouts and other learning and teaching materials. Students will learn to critically evaluate information, phenomena, and ideas presented in the media, so that they can distinguish between facts, opinions and biases. It is expected that, with due care, teachers will often select media materials for use in discussion, and that students will base their conclusions on sound evidence and other relevant sources of information, and not on ignorance and biases' (p.4).

Moreover, students are required to conduct an Independent Enquiry Study, with Media being one of the six suggested themes. In order to facilitate the implementation of Liberal Studies, a series of teaching training courses are offered, some of which are conducted by the Hong Kong Association of Media Education, focusing on the use of media education to teach Liberal Studies.

Media production

In Hong Kong, besides including media education as part of the curriculum, a number of schools make use of student media production as part of media education. The reasons for this are many. The Asian economic crisis in late 1997 and advances in technology have made Hong Kong people aware of the significance of creativity as opposed to simply copying what others have done**,** and media production is an appropriate means through which to learn creativity. Media production gives students a sense of satisfaction when products are created. In addition, the recent curriculum reform emphasizes the importance of project-based learning, and part of the assessment criteria is the evaluation of students' creativity,

which is where media production may have a role. Furthermore, the traditional mode of learning whereby teachers deliver knowledge in a didactic manner has changed; now, students, while holding a digital camera, or sitting in the control room operating the control panel, feel that they have some control over what they want to learn.

Impact

Cheung's (2004) survey indicated that students were enthusiastic about media education; their learning motivation increased and the lessons of media education in such a way as to achieve their objectives. The results were confirmed by respondents in the follow-up interviews. Every teacher interviewed claimed that students were more enthusiastic in media education lessons. Even those who did not pay attention in other lessons were motivated.

Many teachers claimed in the interviews that, freed from the pressure of covering the syllabus and drilling students with endless exercises, they could really enjoy teaching. Some came to acknowledge the different types of potential of students. Most, with little background in media education, learnt a lot themselves in the process of preparing lessons. Another by-product, noted by many, was an improvement in teacher-student relationships.

A further study by Cheung (2011) noted that media education was able to raise students' media analysis skills. Cheung acknowledged that the media education curriculum could enable students to construct knowledge, develop a global outlook to cope with the changing and interdependent world in the 2lst century, and develop lifelong learning skills (to enjoy learning, to enhance effectiveness in communication, to develop creativity, and to develop a logical, critical, and analytical mind) as stipulated in the aims of education.

Conclusion

Media is everywhere, from printed media to e-media, and now, social media. It exerts an influence on students, and schools are now dealing with students moulded by media, with the emphasis on visual, imagery and immediacy. The mass media has become the most influential force shaping students' world-view and values. In fact, we are all immersed in a world full of meanings created by the media. This media world continues to embrace us before, during and after our days of receiving school education.

From the experience of Hong Kong, media education has come a long way, from being an unknown subject to being a welcoming one, able to be implemented in the curriculum through various subjects. Furthermore, through media education, students can become better informed citizens, and a critical view of the media will stimulate critical thinking.

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