

1. Education Reform as an Agent of Change: The Development of Media Literacy in Hong Kong during the Last Decade

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ABSTRACT

Although media education is a comparatively new area of studies in Hong Kong, it is already flourishing. Why is this case? This contribution identifies education reform as an important factor in encouraging the development of media education in the last decade, and the three major forces of change in this reform have been: the emphasis on civic education since Hong Kong's return to China sovereignty, the introduction of information technology (ICT), and the recent review of the curriculum. The analysis confirms that five basic skills are developed via media education: communication, creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving and self-management. This development is especially fostered if the teaching materials are chosen from a wide array of media and if transversal modules are taught around student-centred strategies.

KEY WORDS

Media education, education reform, information technology, curriculum, student-centred learning, critical thinking.

1. Introduction

Media education has been around for quite some time in the West (Bazalgette & al., 1990), but only started to gain acceptance in Asia (Cheung, 2005), particularly in Hong Kong, in the last decade. During this time it has progressed from being an area about which little was known to being a subject which an increasing number of schools are adopting as part of their curriculum or extra-curricular activities. In Hong Kong, however, media education has not been the only «subject» with demands for curricular space. Over the last ten years, the importance of sex education, environmental education, and civic education have all been emphasized, but they have still not been able to gain much ground in the school timetable, and are considered as marginalized curriculum. What happened then to spur the development of media education in Hong Kong? Education reform in the last decade has facilitated the growth of media education in Hong Kong.

2. Education Reform

The development of media education has been rapid in Hong Kong. Although Hong Kong is a media-rich city, media education was a term unheard of until the nineties, when the University of Hong Kong offered it as an elective course to participants of its Postgraduate in Certificate of Education programme in 1996. Since 2003, «Media Education in the New Hong Kong Curriculum» has been offered as an elective to students taking the Master of Education programme at the University of Hong Kong. Publication-wise, the first academic article written about media education in Hong Kong appeared in 2001 (Cheung, 2001). Since then, the growth of media education in Hong Kong has become visible and among the many factors accounting for its growth, the most significant has been the reform in education.

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 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. Figure 1 depicts a chronology of change in educational reform and how media education fits in.

3. Promotion of Civic Education Since the Return of Sovereignty to China in 1997

In 1987, Lee (1987: 243) claimed that civic education had not been discussed in Hong Kong for some 30 years, and 10 years later, Fok (1997) asserted that civic education had never occupied an important place in the Hong Kong school curriculum. This is understandable as Hong Kong was still a British colony before 1997, and the

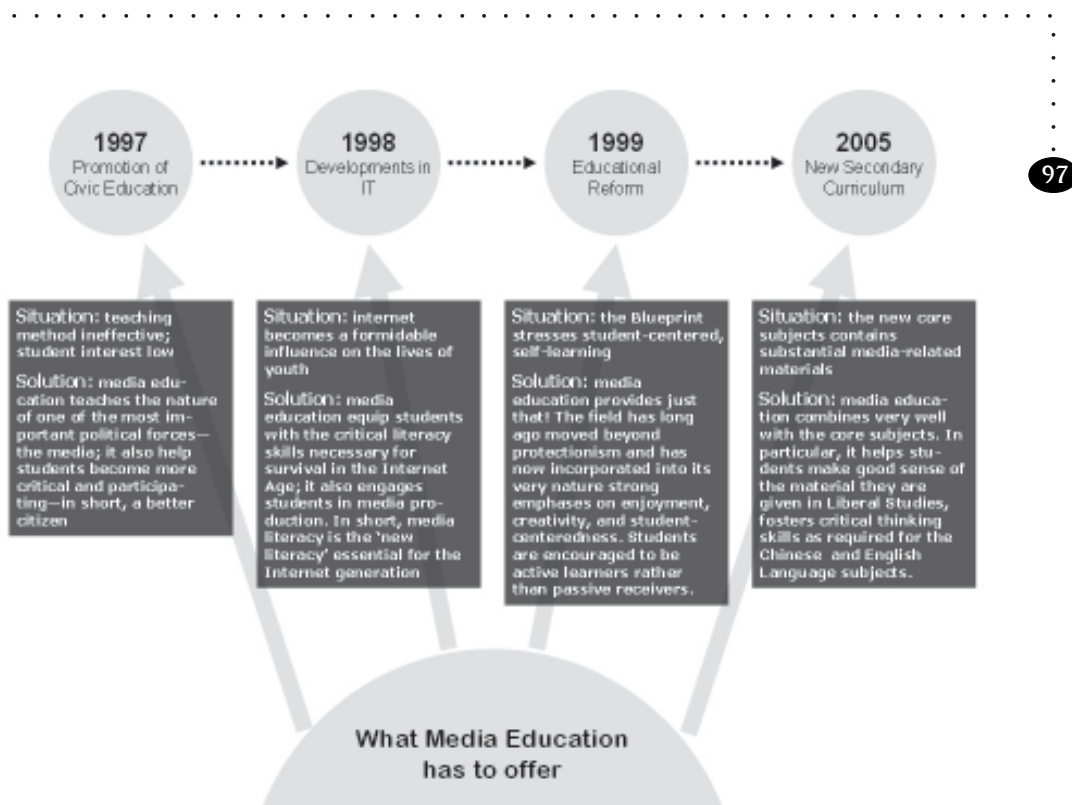


FIGURE 1. A Chronology of Change in Educational Reform

cultivation of the love of one's own motherland would not be the priority then. However, after the signing of the Sino-British Declaration in 1984, and with the political reform towards representative government in 1984 and the 1997 issue, there was an upsurge of interest in, and concern for, civic education. In 1985, the Education Department issued the «Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools» (hereafter referred to as the «Guidelines 85», CDC, 1985), in which schools were encouraged to implement civic education through formal, informal and hidden curricula. Then, a decade later, another set of guidelines were produced, and the direction of the curriculum in the «Guidelines 96» is clearly stated in the foreword (CDC, 1996): «As Hong Kong prepares to be the Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China in 1997 and meets the challenges of the twenty-first century, the schools in Hong Kong have the mission to equip our young people with the attitudes, values, beliefs and competences which help them become contributing citizens to society, the country and the world».

The «Guidelines 96» set the tone for greater emphasis on civic education and more schools were prepared to accommodate civic education in their timetable as well as extra-curricular activities. Two years later, another set of guidelines «Civic Education—Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary Schools (Form 1 to Form 3)» (CDC, 1998)— were produced, which stated that students should be taught to make critical analyses of, and to judge the reliability of, the news and the suitability of ways of

reporting used by the mass media. With these sets of guidelines, the components related to media education were now present.

Although civic education is regarded as an important area to be taught, especially since Hong Kong's return of sovereignty to mainland China, teachers have expressed difficulties in teaching it (Cheung & Leung, 1998). In the West, research shows that traditional expository strategies are dominant but ineffective in the teaching of civic education (Dynesson, 1992; Sears, 1994), and unfortunately, this traditional way of teaching strategy is still a dominant method of teaching civic education across Asian countries (Han, 2000; Lee, 1999; Liu, 1999; Otsu, 2000). What is more, when it comes to discussing the structure of the government and various legal and social policies, students show little interest as they are not familiar with the contents taught and these issues bear no relevance to their daily lives. What students need is a kind of participative, active learning about civics and citizenship (Hahn, 1996; Patrick, 1999; Print & Smith, 2000). The logic is obvious. When students participate actively in the learning of civic education in schools, they will have the habit of participating actively as citizens when they become adults.

Cheung (2004) believes that this difficulty could be resolved by using media education to teach civic education. The relationship between media education and civic education is clear. Aufderheide & Firestone (1993: 1) argue that the purposes of media education are to develop «citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and expression, social advocacy, self-esteem, and consumer competence». Ahonen & Virta (1999: 248) assert: «Citizens actions and critical thinking in the information society are linked with communication skills and the capacity to influence others. Media education can therefore be considered as a key area in civics». In 1999, a study of civic education across twenty-four countries was conducted and the term «mass media» and «media education» appeared very frequently in nearly almost every case (Torney-Purta, Schwille & Amadeo, 1999). The connection between media education and civic education is thus acknowledged. Media education either appears as a topic discussed in the civics curriculum, as in Romania (Bunescu & al., 1999) and the Netherlands (Dekker, 1999); or in relation to other subjects that have strong links with civics, such as language, history and social studies, as in Belgium (Blondin & Schillings, 1999). In Finland, media education is regarded as a part of civics. Ahonen and Virta (1999: 248) states: «Through media education, the students have an opportunity to practice active and analytical information acquisition and also how to have influence through different media. In addition to media education oriented to social criticism, emphasis has been placed on students' skills in using the media. Media education no longer sees students as passive receivers but as communicators with an active role... Schools include elements of media education in the syllabi of mother tongue or history and social studies».

The IEA Civic Education Study indicated that the media play an important role in developing high school students' civic knowledge and engagement skills (Amadeo, Torney-Purta, & Barber, 2004). Research shows that students do watch the news, but not news which are presented in a traditional way. A study by Kwak et al. (2004)

showed that late night entertainment talk shows were an important source for young people's political engagement. Another study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center (2004) produced similar findings, noting that viewers of late-night comedy programmes, especially «The Daily Show» with Jon Stewart on the cable channel Comedy Central, were more likely to know the issue positions and backgrounds of presidential candidates than people who did not watch late-night comedy. Jon Stewart's book «America: A Citizen's Guide to Democracy Inaction», a fake text book about U.S. history, became a bestseller in 2005. Young people like the way news is presented by Jon Stewart and in order to attract a younger audience to the Oscar Awards show, with its declining ratings, Stewart was made the host of the show in 2006.

Other researchers (Bennett, 2004; Pew Research Center, 2004) have also noted the increasing role of the Internet and comedy programmes as a source of news for younger Americans as they continue to turn away from more traditional news sources. This echoes what Jon Katz, a media critic, wrote in Rolling Stone magazine, that young people prefer the «informal» and «ironic» style of reporting of some cable TV channels to the «monotonously reassuring voice» of mainstream news journalism (1993). There is evidence that the new media environment may play an integral role in fostering active and informed engagement among e-savvy youth, who are increasingly turning away from mainstream media in favour of Web, wireless, and other alternative information sources (The Kaiser Family Foundation, Key Facts: Media, Youth, and Civic Engagement, Fall 2004).

Media education can empower individuals to be more critical and participating (Hobbs, 1998; Messaris, 1998). Aufderheide & Firestone (1993: 26) argue that media education empowers a young person with «the ability to analyze, argument and influence active reading (i.e., viewing) of media in order to be a more effective citizen». Lewis & Hally (1998) noted the important relationship between media education, politics and society, and that the potential of media education to transform society lies in the fact that a media literate person would be motivated to take a more active role in participating in a changing society, making it more democratic. In the U.S., media education is seen as a strategy for participatory democratic citizenship (Tyner, 1998). The argument is: «If an informed electorate is the cornerstone of a democratic society, and if the polls that report that most North Americans get their news and information from electronic media are correct, then it is imperative that students must learn to read and write electronic media, as well as print, in order to participate fully in a democratic society» (Tyner, 1998: 162).

In Hong Kong, the mass media has been identified as an important factor in civic education (Lee, 1999: 332-338). Media education is crucial in helping students to 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». In response, «the school practitioners in particular emphasized the need for media education». Cheung (2005: 41) traced the development of civic education in Hong Kong, examining the civic education guidelines in various years, and concluded that «Global change is shaping

the future direction of education in Hong Kong. In the past twenty years, the place of media education in civic education has gradually changed. From serving as factual examples it has developed into discussion, and from a very small part in the curriculum it has expanded to certain major parts of key learning areas, and has become increasingly important as a part of civic and moral education». His other research (2004) shows that civic education lessons are most appropriately taught in the context of media education.

The teaching of media education adopts an interactive approach where students have to analyze critically the messages conveyed by the media. Through media education, young people's awareness of economic, political as well as social issues will be increased, as images received 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 (Law, 1999; Buckingham, 2000; Kubey, 2004; Cheung, 2006).

4. The Introduction of Information Technology (IT)

With the rapid development of the Internet and World Wide Web since the 1990s, the world has become flat (Friedman, 2005). The introduction of IT has had a strong influence on education in Hong Kong as well. In 1997, in his Inaugural Policy Address, Mr. C.H. Tung, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, pledged to make Hong Kong «a leader, not a follower, in the information world of tomorrow». To realize this vision, students, both primary and secondary, need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to meet the challenges of the information age. In 1998, a document entitled «Information Technology For Learning in a New Era: Five-Year Strategy 1998/99 to 2002/03» was released which provided a blueprint for the implementation of IT in education at school level.

However, every coin has two sides. While the introduction of IT helps transform learning and teaching, the growth of the internet also gives rise to many problems. A study of young people in 12 countries by Livingstone & Bovill (2001) showed that the media shape the meanings and practices of young people's everyday lives, although not very often in a good sense. An issue of «Newsweek» reported the results of a survey that had been conducted among young people throughout the world. It was found that they spent most of their leisure time with the media (Guterl, 2003). In Hong Kong, a study showed that television has now been joined by the attractions of the Internet, which is increasingly used by young people for communication, enjoyment, and obtaining information (Breakthrough, 2003). Students do not only need the training of IT skills, but also the critical literacy skills to help them survive in cyberspace. Media education is about the encoding and decoding of media messages, nurturing students to be more critical in the reception of messages, and to «read» in a critical manner (Frechette, 2002).

Besides equipping our students with the necessary skills for the future workplace, IT has a profound impact on teaching and learning. Students can now explore and

learn information by themselves in their own time and space. With the implementation of IT in education, there will be a «paradigm shift» from a largely textbook-based and teacher-centred approach to a more interactive and learner-centred approach. The teaching of media education fits in with this, as it requires an approach very different from the traditional «chalk and talk» method: students are encouraged to find out information through the encoding and decoding of media messages, and by engaging actively in media production to become critical viewers of the media. In media education, the main focus is on student-centred learning, which requires a media pedagogy that encourages investigation and critical and reflective thinking on the part of students. Children learn how materials and knowledge are selected and constructed for media texts, and they have to ask questions to help them clarify issues that have value implications. This echoes the description of an emerging paradigm by Pelgrum and Anderson (1999), where students become more active in setting their own learning paths and teachers become helpers in the students' process of learning.

Learning by doing is important. Students are encouraged to explore learning at a deep and meaningful level. With IT having been fully implemented in the last few years, students are now able to be engaged in media production, providing a platform for immersing themselves and learning through exploring and doing. Frechette (2002: 114) states that media production is vital to all pedagogy: «Just as it is necessary for pupils to learn to write as well as to read, it is invaluable for teachers to allow pupils to «produce» media texts as well as deconstruct them through their own voice, ideas, and perspective (realizing of course the partial subjectivity from which these voices emanate)». Buckingham et al. (1995: 28) envisaged the significance of IT in facilitating media production. They asserted: «More significantly perhaps, along with information technology, media education has become a prominent part of a much more far-reaching argument about the need for «new literacies» that will be appropriate to the changing social and cultural landscape of the next century. Crucially, this new literacy is defined not merely as a form of defensive 'critical' reading, but also as an ability to write or produce in the new communications media».

In the past, it was difficult for students to participate in media production as equipment was expensive and required a high level of skill to operate. This is no longer the case, as advances in communication technologies have made the cost of purchasing equipment more affordable and the skills needed to operate equipment more easily acquired. Today, even primary school pupils are able to produce a video on their own (Gauntlett, 1996).

The idea of media production is consistent with the aims of UNESCO's Declaration on Media Education (quoted in OCR, 2002): «The school and family share the responsibility of preparing the young person for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds. Children and adults need to be literate in all three of these symbolic systems. [We need] to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes which will encourage the growth of critical awareness... and should include the analysis of media products, the use of media as means of creative expression, and effective use of and participation in available media channels».

Media educators believe that media production is a desirable form of media education (Buckingham & al., 1995; Eiermann, 1997). For example, Quin (2003) points out that media production has been a core element in Australian schools since the introduction of media studies into school curricula in the 1970s. In the UK, media production is included in the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance Examinations (AQA), and is also a module in the syllabus of media studies both in Oxford, Cambridge and the RSA Examinations (OCR). Its aims are stated as follows: «The purpose of production work is for candidates to put theory into practice, by demonstrating knowledge and understanding of technical skills in their own media production, as well as to engage them in creative, imaginative and aesthetic activity» (OCR, 2002: 1).

At present, media education in Hong Kong is practiced in a number of ways. Some schools have introduced media education lessons into the school curriculum, while others make use of campus radio or campus TV as a kind of media education. The latter is particularly popular with the social service sector, local media production groups, and individual practitioners. The reasons for this are simple. Media production gives students a sense of satisfaction when products are created. The traditional mode of learning, in which teachers delivered knowledge in a didactic manner, has changed, and students can now hold the digital camera, or sit in the control room to operate the panel, and feel that they have some control over what they want to learn. Furthermore, as the syllabus does not set limits to the scope of media education, students have the flexibility to explore, thereby discovering further learning opportunities.

5. Education Blueprint for the 21st Century: Review of the Academic System

In the document «Education Blueprint For the 21st Century: Review of the Academic System», published in 1999, words like «student-centred», «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: 28). That set the scene for media education, which aims to help students develop logical and creative thinking, through the critical analysis of the media messages that they are exposed to every day. The nature of media education is student-centred 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 newspaper, radio, and TV 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 programmes, and a possible component of this key learning area in the consultative document.

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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.

6. The New Senior Secondary Curriculum

The Education Department in Hong Kong is now conducting a review of the academic structure of senior secondary education (EMB, 2004), and has proposed a restructuring in subjects available to students. Among them, liberal studies, Chinese, English, and mathematics are core subjects to be taken by students, and the first three have components closely related to media education.

- **Liberal Studies.** Liberal Studies is a subject which developed in the early nineties, and although not many schools have adopted it in their curricula, the situation will change as the «334 Report» (EMB, 2005: 1) stipulated that Liberal Studies will be a core subject with the following aims: Liberal Studies aims to broaden students' knowledge base and enhance their social awareness through the study of a wide range of issues. The modules selected for the curriculum focus on the themes of significance to students, society and the world; and they can help students to connect different fields of knowledge and broaden their horizons. The learning experience provided fosters students' capacity for life-long learning so that they can face the challenges of the future with confidence.

The component of media education is recognized as stated in the document (CDC, 2006a: 4): «As the coverage of Liberal Studies includes contemporary issues, the media become one of the important sources of information apart from teachers», together with handouts and other learning and teaching materials. Students will learn to evaluate critically 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».

Moreover, students are required to conduct an Independent Enquiry Study with media being one of the six suggested themes. In order to facilitate the teaching and learning 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.

- **Chinese Language.** The new Chinese Language syllabus contents are more contemporary, and relevant to students' daily experiences. Among the nine generic skills mentioned in the Guide (CDC, 2006b: 21), the critical thinking skills are especially related to mass media. Indeed, the Guide explicitly cites as examples of activities that foster critical thinking, «reading newspapers and magazines, listening to radios and watching televisions, comparing and contrasting how different media cover the same event, and evaluating information for authenticity». For these media-related activities to be effective, some forms of media education are essential, and such education may take the form of introducing and elaborating on the central concepts of media education

(e.g. constructed reality, meaning negotiation, and media bias), or it may take the form of student-centred analysis and production.

With some elective subjects mentioned in the Guide –in particular, Literature and Film Adaptations, Drama Workshop, News and Reporting, Multimedia and Applied Writing– the relevance of, and need for, media education is even clearer. For example, one of the central aspects of media education is the study of the creative techniques involved in different forms of communication. Students enrolled in either of the four subjects mentioned will benefit immensely from a knowledge of the grammar and syntax of the medium they are engaged in, a knowledge that answers questions like «What do big headlines signify?»; «What do camera close-ups convey?»; and «Why is this music genre used in this part of the film?».

- English Language. Media education is widely taught in Language Arts in many countries (Hart, Hammett & Barrell, 2002; Krueger & Christel, 2001) and research indicates that after receiving media education training, students perform better in reading, writing and listening skills (Hobbs & Frost, 1998).

The Guide recommends several types of activities for developing the generic skill of Creativity (CDC, 2006c: 52), many of which may be combined with some form of media education. For instance, it was suggested that students' creativity be strengthened through «reading and listening to a broad range of imaginative texts including poems, novels, short stories, plays, films, jokes, advertisements, songs, radio, and television programmes, and demonstrating sensitivity in their critical appreciation of these texts (ibid.)». Most of these «imaginative texts», however, are not print-based and thus have a different grammar which students may not find familiar. The «reading of» and «listening to» of these texts will be greatly facilitated if students are equipped with the skills required to appreciate and make sense of such non-traditional texts, and this is exactly what media education is designed to achieve.

Moreover, among the nine recommended compulsory modules for senior secondary level (Ibid.: 17), the module «Communicating» provides an excellent opportunity for carrying out media literacy-related teaching activities. Even the textbook itself –insofar as it involves the nature of the mass media, the Internet and communication technology– may use existing teaching materials of media education and incorporate such key concepts as media text, construction, and creative techniques. The same may also be said of the unit on show business, contained in the module on «Leisure and Entertainment».

7. In Summary

While media education is not a formal subject in the Hong Kong curriculum, there are arguments to support its inclusion in light of current educational reforms. In fact education reform has provided a platform for the development of media education in the last decade.

Since the return of sovereignty to China, civic education has been more prominent in the Hong Kong curriculum. Research shows the relationship between

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civic education and media education, with the latter supporting the creation of informed and participatory citizens through necessitating them to become critical of the messages with which they are surrounded (Cheung, 2004: 49).

The introduction of IT is also significant. The media age is having an impact on our students and shaping the types of learners they are becoming. The heavy use of IT could make students addicted to net surfing, but not necessarily help them become critical users of IT. Current students are highly competent in accessing information, being as they are, the Internet generation. However, are students self-directed in their learning? Can they originate ideas or can they merely imitate or reproduce them? In other words, how actively engaged in their learning processes are Hong Kong students and are educators in Hong Kong faced with the situation that Giroux (1988) claims to be the case, that the mass media are turning our populations into receptive spectators rather than active participants? If we want our students to become active or critical thinkers, and more than that, to become empowered learners, the introduction of media education can be useful, and media production could be a useful means to start.

The development of media education is further enhanced by the education reform. Schools are advised to: «help their students develop, through teaching and learning in different key learning areas (KLA), the nine generic skills of collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, information technology, numeracy, problem-solving, self-management and study» (EMB, 2003: 13).

The key terms in this proposal that support media education are «communication, creativity, critical thinking... problem-solving [and] self-management», and these five skills can be developed effectively using media education. The critical apparatus for media education is threefold: observation, interpretation and analysis. The source materials to choose from are wide and varied, and most importantly, current and fluid; they are rich repositories in the search for meaning. Depending on the types of activities used to analyze the media, problem-solving and critical thinking skills can be developed from inquiry into the media. Media education not only helps to motivate students to learn, but can add to its legitimacy in developing critical thinkers, a point which is a central tenet of the proposed curriculum reforms suggested by the EMB.

Most recently, the New Senior Secondary Curriculum has paved the way for the inclusion of more media education as its components appear in the core subjects. Hong Kong is a particularly media-rich city, and students, as the foci of a significant proportion of media messaging, are particularly well positioned to launch into a critical investigation of the media: more simply put, the media are already part of Hong Kong students' daily «curriculum». Integrating them into the classroom as part of students' daily studies, then, seems an organic curricular process.

8. Future Research Possibilities

Discussion of media education has been on the rise in recent years, both in a local and an international perspective. More and more countries have adopted me-

dia education in their curricula in one way or another and research has been, and is being, conducted to further examine different aspects of media education. Media education in Asia is a relatively young, but rapidly developing part of the curriculum. Research has been conducted and papers written on various issues concerning media education in Asia. The dominant models of media education in the world are broadly Western and more particularly, drawn from English-speaking countries; the question is whether a similar pattern exists in Asia, where there may be differences in culture, heritage, beliefs, values, education policy, as well as curriculum and pedagogy. Are educators in Asia following the Western model in developing and implementing media education, or are they devising their own models? Media education cannot stand by itself, independent of societal development, technological advancement, cultural values, and media environment, and so it is justifiable to expect different modes of development in different societies. In many Asian countries, there seems to be an increasing official recognition of media education by policy-makers and recent education reforms have provided a platform for the emergence of media education. However, although the significance of media education is noted, media education, as a curriculum, is far from well established, and much still needs to be done. Increased concerted actions are necessary if it is to become a more widespread movement (Cheung, 2008). Cheung is eager to find out the similarities and differences of the development and implementation of media education in different Asian societies and noted that there is considerable variation among Asian societies in terms of the level of development of media education, the degree to which it is integrated across the curriculum, and more generally, the social, economic, educational and political circumstances relevant to its implementation. Such diversity certainly calls for each society to face its own unique challenges and find solutions for itself (Cheung, 2009).

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