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A Project entitled

**Development of Critical Literacy among Primary Students in Hong Kong: an Inquiry of
a Disney animated film**

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Declaration

I declare that this honors project entitled “Development of Critical Literacy among Primary Students in Hong Kong: an Inquiry of a Disney animated film” is my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made. This work has not been submitted previously for examination to any tertiary institution.

Signature: _____

Date: 10.5.2018

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Abstract

This study examines a P.5 English class of vast cultural and ethnic backgrounds in Hong Kong and their development of critical literacy as they critically discuss the racial representations in *Mulan*, a Disney animated film which is often criticized for its racial stereotypes.

Representations in Disney animated films are often criticized for being overgeneralizing and stereotypical (McClure, 1998; England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011; Cheung 2016). It is also theorized that Disney animated films attribute to the reproduction of stereotypes among their children audience (Giroux, 1997; Giroux, 1999; Giroux, 2004). Meanwhile, critical literacy is a form of literacy aimed at reading beyond textual level and it extending to the critical examination of the meanings within texts, and subsequently to the connection between the texts and readers' personal experience in order to address inequality and injustice in gender, race, religion and the like (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe, 2005; Klenner & Sandretto, 2011).

This action research documents and analyzes the development of the students' critical literacy throughout five lessons of having discussions and generating outputs relevant to *Mulan*. The collected data includes field notes, classroom observation, researcher's journal entry, students' outputs, reflections and records of discussions. These data were analyzed under the framework of *Luke and Freebody's four resource model* to assess students' development of critical literacy with the outcome that critical literacy is strongly developed among the general participants.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Despite their popularity amongst young audiences, Disney animated films are often criticized for their reproduction of racial stereotypes and representations through characters who are often biased and overgeneralizing, and thus reproducing existing social justice issues in the area of race, gender, class, religion and the like (Giroux, 1997; McClure, 1998; Giroux, 1999; Giroux, 2004; England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011; Cheung 2016). For example, in *Aladdin*, the protagonist Aladdin speaks English with an American accent and does not have a beard while the antagonists speak English with an Arabic accent and have beards, which is typical among Arabic people.

Sociocultural learning theory conceptualizes learning as a social process and recognizes culture and society as the origination of human intelligence (Vygotsky, 1978). It also suggests human perception is mediated by cultural contexts (Anderson & Stillman, 2013). The theory's significance in this study is twofold. For one, it explains how racially stereotypical materials misguide audiences' perception on race issues. For two, under the theoretical framework of sociocultural learning theory, it is aimed that participants can develop mentality and practice of race equity through equitable discussion and actions.

Critical literacy (CL) is a widely researched area in many countries. This form of literacy promotes the ability to read beyond textual level and it extends to the critical examination of the meanings within texts, and subsequently to the connection between the texts and readers' personal experience in order to address inequality and injustice in gender, race, religion and the like (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe, 2005; Klenner & Sandretto, 2011). In these countries, tremendous research was done to study the development of CL among students of different levels and cultural backgrounds with a view to address certain social justice issues revolving

around race, class, gender and the like, and they all ended up with positive outcomes (McClure, 1998; Vasquez, 2000; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002).

In the facilitation of this study, it is aims that innovations and insights can be provided on developing students' CL to address social justice issues in Hong Kong context.

1.1 Purpose of the study

By addressing the racial stereotypes in *Mulan* in a P.5 English class of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, this action research provides insights on designing critical literacy and critical pedagogy curriculum. Ortmann (2015) suggests that as Hong Kong students continue to lead movements in education changes, critical education is an effective approach in fostering transformative mindset and practice among them. Therefore, it is also aimed that at the end of the study, participants can become effective students and citizens in addressing social justice issues as well as their CL.

1.2 Significance of the study

This study is significant as it serves as a contribution to the research of CL in the Hong Kong context. It raises the awareness of addressing social justice issues in classroom context and provides insights on developing CL among Primary students on both theoretical and practical levels.

On classroom level, the study addresses the issue of racial stereotypes in both Disney animated films and the reality. Through critical dialogue and discussions, students are empowered to address and combat racial stereotypes in school context. This offers pedagogical insights to school teachers in promoting social justice in schools.

1.3 Research questions

1. How might students respond to pedagogy addressing racially stereotypical representations in Disney animated films?
2. How can students develop critical literacy through such pedagogy?

Under the framework of critical literacy and critical pedagogy, this study documents, explores and assesses the development of students' CL. Data include field notes, classroom observation, researcher's journal entry, students' outputs, reflections and records of discussions. The analysis on these data is to answer the above research questions.

2. Definition of terms

2.1 Critical literacy

Critical literacy has its ideological and historical root in social justice Freire's philosophy of power relations, which shed lights on the critical interrogation of social justice issues in various forms texts (Freire, 1970; Leland, Harste, & Smith, 2005). This form of literacy aims at unpacking distortions and myths in the texts and transform them into new ways of perceiving and acting upon the world (Luke, 2012).

Critical literacy is defined and operationalized in this study as a form of literacy to associate reading and writing skills with their underlying ideology and power relation, and to approach the text in a critical interrogative manner to address and deconstruct social justice issues (Luke, 1995; Lewison, Flint, & Sluys, 2002). Under the theoretical framework of Luke and Freebody's four resources model, critical literacy is comprised of four components namely code breaking (phonics, vocabulary), text participating (reading comprehension), text using (socialization with meanings created from texts), and text critiquing (critical reflection and analysis) (Joldersma,1999).

The concept and ideology of critical literacy is also applicable in the dimension of pop culture as a critical examination and interrogation of the power relation and underlying messages, if not distortion, in various forms of pop culture. For example, Duncan-Andrade (2002) studies the development of critical literacy among a class of high school students in the U.S. through the critical deconstruction of hip-hop songs and drawing relevance between these songs and various social justice issues.

2.2 Critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is ideologically associated with the principles of Critical Theory of the Frankfurt school with a view to transform the society as a whole by addressing its issues (Freire 1970; Darder, Baltodano & Torres 2009). These issues can be relevant to repressive capitalist, racist, classist and sexist ideology, and critical pedagogy serves as a means for educators and students to collectively expose and dismantle these pressing issues (Giroux, 1992; Darder, (1997) extends its conceptualization to the dimension of student empowerment and democratic education as a means to social transformation.

As a result of critical pedagogy's various underlying ideologies, its approach to education is equitable, transformative and values students' personal experience. As an opposition to the traditional 'banking method' of education, where students are passively disposed and imposed knowledge by teachers and the education system, critical pedagogy implements 'problem-posing education', through which students are empowered to address and transform existing social justice issues. In this study, the term critical pedagogy is operationalized as the practice to:

- approach learning through dialogues, where knowledge is grounded on the personal experience and perception of the teacher and students;

- make connections between students' own conditions and the conditions produced through the making of reality &
- transform existing social justice issues through addressing the underlying messages and power relations in the provided texts and engage this reality actively and critically (Shor, 1997).

2.3 Stereotype/ Racial Stereotype

Cardwell (1996) defines stereotype as a fixed, overgeneralized belief about a particular group of class of people. Racial stereotype is thus the fixed, overgeneralized belief about a particular racial group. Katz and Braly (1933) is the first classic study on racial stereotype which looks at various overgeneralizing attitudes of American towards different races.

2.4 Race

Race refers to the race, color, descent, national or ethnic origin of a person. A racial group then means a group of persons defined by reference to the aforementioned characteristics (Race Discrimination Ordinance, 2008).

3. Literature review

3.1 Racial stereotype in Disney animated films and its impact

Racial stereotypes are common in Disney animated films. Through the process of social learning, children who are exposed to these stereotypical representations are easily influenced and such racial stereotypes are then reinforced among the young generation (Giroux, 1997; Giroux 1999; Gill, 2007; McRobbie 2008). *Aladdin* is a typical paradigm. The story's background is set in the Middle East. The protagonist *Aladdin*, despite his Arabic ethnicity,

speaks American-accented English. His skin looks pale and is portrayed as a man without a beard. In contrast, most antagonists speak Arabic-accented English, have darker skin tones and have beard. Despite its long history, Disney animated films have become all time classics that are still popular among children of this generation, and the newly produced ones are prevalent as well (Orenstein, 2006). Given their popularity among children, Disney animated films become a direct channel for racial stereotypes to be reinforced and reproduced among the young generation.

3.2 Examining pop culture with critical literacy

Implementations of CP with pop culture in schools contexts have succeeded in identifying the myths of dominate discourse, engaging students in activities for transformation, and empowering students to develop critical literacy. In some cases, traditional academic outcomes are achieved as well. In this section, the operation of CP with pop culture will be distilled from a number of previous works.

In previous works (McClure, 1998; Vasquez, 2000; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002), it is identified a three-step approach, where 1) an age-appropriate cultural text is selected and viewed by the students and teachers, 2) a dialogue is engaged critically and equally by students and teachers and 3) a relevant product is produced. Here, two questions are raised. First, how is this dialogue conducted? Second, what product is qualified as ‘relevant’?

Summarizing from the three cases (McClure, 1998; Vasquez, 2000; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002), the dialogue is comprised of three components: 1) guided questions that guide students to thematize the cultural text, 2) connection and differentiation between the themes in the cultural text and reality and 3) an introduction to the themes by the teacher. In the example of Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2002), high school students finished reading the

literacy canon and song lyrics, thematized them and made connections to the reality during class discussions where an introduction to these themes were given by the teacher. This echoes with Luk (2012) who suggests that when adopting culture as mean-making resources, educators should engage dialogue with students in order to ‘understand how the reality is represented and shaped by discourse of cultural events’. Kalantzis and Cope (2000), on the other hand, proposes that in the operation of examining pop culture with critical literacy, the class should have a clear understanding on the relevant concepts and be equipped with the meta-language for productive discussion.

In the three cases (McClure, 1998; Vasquez, 2000; Morrell & Duncan Andrade, 2002), two types of relevant products were identified. One is in-school assignment and one is authentic works that act to transform the reality. In Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2002), students were assessed by two pieces of in-school assignment including a presentation and an essay which assessed the learning outcomes of the students’ critical literacy in a sense that students could make connection between the texts and reality, and of the students’ traditional academic outcomes. By contrast, McClure (1998) and Vasquez (2000) included authentic works such as actual letters that were mailed to The Walt Disney Company about ethnic stereotypes in the animated film Peter Pan and letters to Royal Canadian Mounted Police about a gender stereotypical recruitment poster respectively. In any case, a relevant product reflects students’ awareness on the cultural text, the themes within it and their connection with the reality.

Under this empirical framework, this action research also takes into the consideration of Hong Kong’s context and makes appropriate mediation and adaptation.

3.3 Luke and Freebody’s four resources model as an assessment on critical literacy

Luke and Freebody’s four resources model conceptualizes critical literacy into four domains:

- Coding practice: to understand the text by decoding the words, graphic symbols and conventions;
- Text-meaning practice: to make sense of the texts' schemata;
- Pragmatic practices: to apply the texts to certain social settings &
- Critical practice: pose questions and act on relevant problems of the texts (Leland & Harste, 2000).

Luke (2000) adds that the four domains are interdependent can be addressed at the same time, instead of the four being a developmental hierarchy at any sequence.

3.4 Potential Challenges in their application in Hong Kong context and solutions

Two challenges are identified, including 1) alignment with the official curriculum and assessments and 2) professional collaboration with parents and colleagues.

Luk (2012) documents the concerns on the alignment between cultural texts and the official curriculum and assessments. In the local primary school context, the Curriculum Development Council (2004) regulates the key learning areas and curriculum framework. Therefore, when implementing CP with pop culture in Hong Kong, integration between the use of cultural texts and these key learning areas and curriculum framework should be made for practical concerns. This is exactly the case in Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2002) where hip-hop songs are connected to the literary canon of similar themes in order to develop both students' critical literacy and official learning outcomes in a literature course.

While teacher professionalism promotes professional collaboration between colleagues and parents (Pang, 2004; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, & Thomas, 2006), this collaboration cannot be found in the studied cases (McClure, 1998; Vasquez, 2000; Morrell & Duncan Andrade, 2002).

This potential problem manifests in the following example. A teacher integrating YouTube videos with official curriculum was complained by a parent for improperly spending the lesson time (Luk, 2012). In order to cultivate mutual understanding, the implementation will take a collaborative approach, consulting colleagues and parents before initiation.

4. Project design

Despite the effort by the Equal Opportunity Commission to promote the ideology of racial equity, it is yet to be a widely discussed or researched theme in Hong Kong school context. As discussed in the previous sections, CL and CP are effective tools and ideology in the combat against social injustice.

Under this premise, this study aims at investigating the development of CL, the implementation of CP and it endeavors to address social justice issues in primary school context. To reach these ends, the project is designed as below.

4.1 Sampling method and participants

Simple random sampling is used because there is a high probability that the subjects can represent the majority of population (Tomal, 2010). Since Disney animated films are part of the pop culture that Hong Kong children widely have access to, a sample that can represent the majority of the population is needed.

The participants come from a P.5 class of 20 students in a Hong Kong primary school from vastly different sociocultural and ethnic backgrounds I taught from September, 2017 to December, 2017. This diversity addresses the requirement of explicit engagement with cultural diversity in critical literacy (Norton & Toohey, 2004; Kubota & Lin, 2009)

4.2 Research method

This is an action research that implements critical pedagogy to develop students' critical literacy through the examination and interrogation on a Disney animated film *Mulan*. In the study, qualitative data is collected and analyzed to address the two research questions:

1. How might students respond to pedagogy addressing racially stereotypical representations in Disney animated films?
2. How can students develop critical literacy through such pedagogy?

In the four researched lessons, the class was first presented with the film *Mulan* with highlights on racially stereotypical scenes and characters. To align with the official curriculum, vocabulary and sentence structures relevant to the topic of fairy tale were the learning objectives and connections were made between these words and structures and the film *Mulan*. This is followed by an interactive session on the concepts and meta-languages of racial stereotypes and overgeneralization, where participants connect these concepts with their personal experience. The class then moved on to decode the plot, characters and settings to look for the film's underlying messages using the aforementioned concepts, vocabulary and sentence structures. In the end, the students were to either write a letter to a person or design a poster to address the issue of racial stereotype in personal life or in pop culture.

Data is collected from transcripts, field notes, and participants' works. Transcripts and field notes are analyzed under Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Participants' works are analyzed by document analysis so as to answer the research questions.

5. Findings

This section is divided by into two subsections, each of which answers one of the aforementioned research questions. For section 5.1, the discussion is based on the researcher's observation, field notes and partial transcript. In section 5.2, a formal assessment grounded on the solid theoretical framework *Luke and Freebody's four resources model* is utilized in answering the second research question. The findings in this section can be generalized into that:

1. as responses, students connected their personal experience to the topic and presented materials, engaged critical practices, aspired to transform the issue of racial stereotype and developed increased solidarity among the class &
2. students demonstrated well developed critical literacy under Luke and Freebody's four resources model.

Leland & Harste (2000) provides a dependable assessment of CL based on *Luke and Freebody's four resources model*, under which CL is classified into four domain, namely coding practice, text meaning practice, pragmatic practice and critical practice. Below is the operation of the four domains:

- Coding practice: to understand the text by decoding the words, graphic symbols and conventions;
- Text-meaning practice: to make sense of the texts' schemata;
- Pragmatic practice: to apply the texts to certain social settings &
- Critical practice: pose questions and act on relevant problems of the texts (Leland & Harste, 2000).

Based on the conceptualization and operationalization, participants' development of CL will be discussed in the latter subsection.

5.1 Responses to pedagogy addressing racially stereotypical representations

This section addresses RQ. 1 “*how might students respond to pedagogy addressing racially stereotypical representations in Disney animated films?*”. The three themes identified are connection connected to *personal experience, critical practice* and *aspiration for transformation, and solidarity among the class*.

5.1.1 Connection to personal experience

“People think every Australian loves beaches. Well, I don’t!” – Cherry

“Not every unicorn has a horn because some are broken.” - Anita

Cherry is an Australian born Chinese and she often receives stereotypical comments on how an Australian should enjoy going to beaches but she doesn’t. After discussing the concept of racial stereotype and the racially stereotypical representations in *Mulan*, she made the above comment connected to her personal experience in a class discussion.

Like Cherry, most participants demonstrated thorough understanding and resistance towards racially stereotypical representations in the presented film *Mulan*, and they connected these understanding and resistance to their personal experience. This echoes with the previous researches where participants connected their personal experience to certain social justice issues discussed in the lessons and an engaging classroom atmosphere was fostered (Osumi, 2003; Lau, 2013).

Dear [REDACTED]

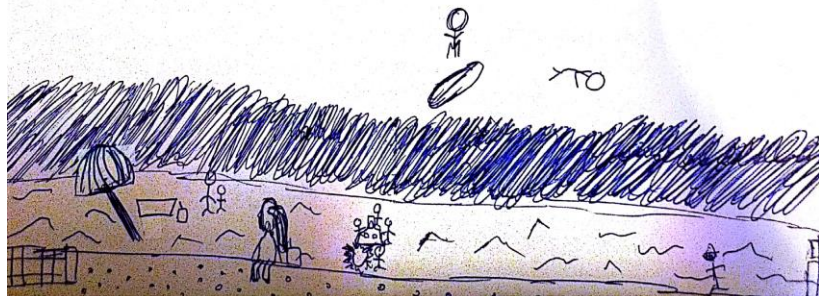
SOME AUSTRALIANS DO NOT LIKE BEACHES.

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MANY BEACHES IN AUSTRALIA.

AUSTRALIANS LIKE ME, MAYBE LIKE GOING SOMEWHERE ELSE.

FOR ME, I LIKE THE COLD WEATHER THAN THE HEAT.

SO, NOT ALL AUSTRALIANS LIKE GOING TO THE BEACH



Anita is a local Chinese. Her favorite mythical creature is unicorn. Since she never experienced any racial stereotype, she connected the concept of stereotype to the generalization that unicorns are necessarily associated with horns.

Although some students like Anita might not solidly connect the concept and stereotypical representations in the film to their personal experience, they still demonstrated basic understanding by providing a novel example. I discussed with Anita and participants of the

similar phenomenon, who were local Chinese students. They revealed that it was because they have never experienced any racial stereotype.

“Not all boys love blue. Some like pink!” – Berry

For some of those who did not have personal experience with racial stereotype, they extended the focus from race to gender.

In a comment by Dave, he attempted to raise awareness on gender stereotype based on his understanding on racial stereotype by writing a letter to his friend. This findings is similar to Vasquez (2000), where a class of kindergarten students addressed the issue of overgeneralization of the association between gender and color by drawing and writing a simple letter.

5.1.2 Critical practice and aspiration for transformation

“Can you find us the Huns side of the story?” - Amina

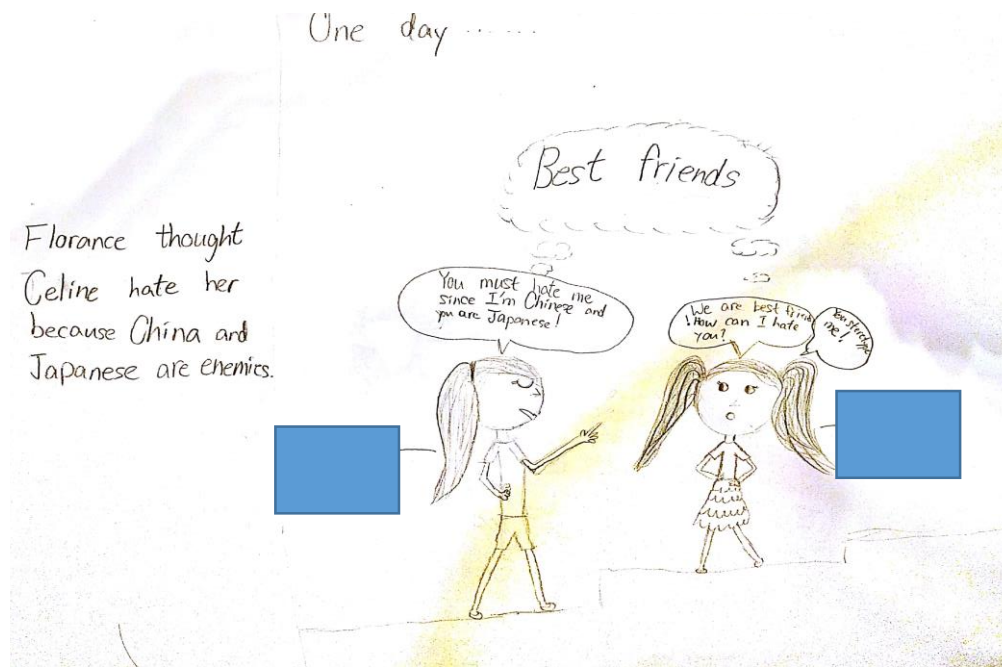
Mulan is adapted from the Chinese historical story, part of which is history documented by the Chinese. Therefore, the narration can be biased and caters to the Chinese’s interest.

Part of the notion of CL is to recognize and question the text’s power relation and to study how the cultural material is produced and used (Shor, 2009). By posing questions like Amina’s, participants engage, in Luke and Freebody’s four resources model’s term, critical practice.

“We can change this bit by bit, maybe.” – Andy

Upon recognizing the issue of racial stereotypes, participants like Andy proposed to transform this social justice issue. Following Andy’s aspiring comment, the class discussion transited from how this is an issue to how this issue can be addressed. This echoes with the concept with CP, the ultimate goal of which is to foster academic pursuit, social transformation and social movement (Cummings, 2001; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

To address the issue and align the researched lessons with the official curriculum, participants either designed a poster or wrote a letter to a person to resolve the myth of racial stereotype. This transformative action resonates with McClure (1998) and Vasquez (2000), both of which concluded their critical literacy curriculum with transformative actions to address the discussed social justice issues.



5.1.3 Solidarity among the class

“I feel you. I heard the same thing and it disgusted me.” – Amina

Like Amina, participants could often associate their affection and resilience to each other. This constitutes a sense of solidarity among the class. As Chang (2018) suggests, the three pedagogical areas effective in promoting social justice in TESOL are the recognition, collaboration and solidarity.

Under increased student-centered dialogue and a topic that the class could easily associate their personal experience with, the class atmosphere was supportive and empathetic as participants identified themselves with each other’s situation.

This collective sense of empathy and solidarity is a significant cornerstone to bring people together towards social justice issues (Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004).

5.2 Students' development of critical literacy through such pedagogy

This section addresses RQ. 2 “*how can students develop critical literacy through such pedagogy?*”.

Under the theoretical framework of *Luke and Freebody's four resources model* as operationalized at the beginning of this section, participants' development of CL through the researched pedagogy is discussed as below.

While the researched lessons covered the four domains of *Luke and Freebody's four resources model*, more emphasis was placed on text-meaning practices, pragmatic practices and critical practices but less on coding practice as this class of proficient English speakers needed more conceptual, social and critical inputs than literal ones.

Coding practice is focused on because participants are already well developed in this area, given their language proficiency. When the students first approached the film *Mulan*, they already had a clear understanding on the plot, setting and characters by decoding the words, graphic symbols and conventions. From classroom discussion, they demonstrated thorough comprehension on these areas by discussing on the list of questions below,

- What is the relationship between the Huns and the Chinese?
- Why did Mulan join the army?
- How are the Huns like in the film?
- How are the Chinese like in the film?
- How did the story end for the Chinese?
- How did the story end for the Huns?

This set of questions were discussed in thought about individually by students, then in small groups and eventually as a whole class. Through the discussion, it is aimed that the students understand the textual meaning of the story and that it also opens room for further discussions on racial stereotypes in the film and in real life.

In the area of text-meaning practice, students were taught the concept and meta-languages on racial stereotype, which they could thoroughly use for the analysis and discussion of the film. For example, the class revisited the questions on how the Huns and the Chinese are depicted in *Mulan* and students could quickly draw the conclusion that both ethnic groups were racially stereotyped in the story. Meta-languages and concepts like equity, race, biased, racial stereotype and injustice were used by the students to express their understanding and disapproval of the film.

For pragmatic practices, not only did the students from different ethnic groups draw from their personal experiences of being racially stereotyped, the class discussion extended from personal level to social level, where the class addressed racial stereotypes in other media and pop cultures. For example, a local Chinese student complained that Indians often play the role of security guard in Hong Kong's pop culture, which is untruthful and misleading as he pointed out that his parents had Indian friends who worked in various industries.

Students' critical practices were observed from their actions against racial stereotypes in real life. They were asked to either draft a letter to a person or design a poster to address the issue. Generally, students could articulate the misleadingness and untruthfulness of racial stereotype and moved on to promote the idea of equity among different ethnic groups. On the other hand, several students went off topic but, to a certain extent, demonstrated criticality towards the issue of stereotypes. For example, a unicorn lover designed a poster to promote the idea that

not all unicorns have a horn. However, no further questions were posed. This could attribute to the limited class time or students were not interested in pursuing further on this topic.

By and large, students' critical literacy was generally well developed in the area of text-meaning practice, pragmatic practice and critical practice but under the conceptual framework of Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model as a result of the researched lessons. Such results resonate with Lau (2013), where through the participatory action research on critical literacy, the participants from a middle school in Canada developed both language competence and aspiration to address social justice issues.

6. Implications

This section begins with the issues of Hong Kong's education system, based on which the latter subsections discuss on how CL and CP can address and, at the same time, be constrained by these issues. Along with such propositions, other suggestions on HK's education system are made based on the findings of this research.

6.1 Context of Hong Kong's education system

Issues with Hong Kong's education system are interrelated. Berry (2008) and Chan & Yuen (2014) argue that the core of the matter is the overarching paradigm of high-stakes exams, particularly the DSE (Diploma of Secondary Education), which is the root cause of the second issue – direct-instruction pedagogy. Yeung (2012) details the prevalence of such pedagogy in Hong Kong's primary and secondary schools, which reduces learners' autonomy and is insensitive to social justice issues of poverty, culture, race and the like (Ryder, Burton & Silberg, 2006). Under this system, the development of leadership, creativity and critical thinking among the students are lacking (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Luk, 2012).

While these issues can be addressed by the use of CP and CL, their institutionalization also hinders the development of CP and CL, which will be discussed below.

6.2 Changes called for

To address the aforementioned issues in Hong Kong's education system, the utilization of CP with pop culture in classrooms is called for.

The operation of CP begins with equitable dialogues and critical interrogation of texts to develop students' critical practice and the traditional form of literacy, through which collective action is coordinated to address and transform social justice issues (Kincheloe, 2005; Shor, 2009; Klenner & Sandretto, 2011). This therefore addresses the lack of development of HK students' leadership, creativity and critical thinking as discussed. Dialogues and coordination amongst students and teachers also provide a more student-centered pedagogy, instead of direct-instruction.

As the findings of this research suggest, the use of CP and development of students' CL provide students with a platform for more equitable dialogues where they can connect the presented texts with their personal experience with a view to interrogate and address existing social justice issues. Through this, students' critical thinking and solidarity can be built up.

Engagement of collective actions for social transformation also fosters students' leadership. For example, Osumi (2003) documents a class of elementary students working collectively with their teacher to address a series of issues at school and community level, through which they demonstrated autonomy and leadership in coordination and execution.

However, the Hong Kong's official curriculum is exam-oriented and overarched by high-stakes exams constrains the utilization of CL and CP in the HK context, which will be discussed in section 6.4.

6.3 Sustainability of Critical Pedagogy with pop culture in Hong Kong's context

This research developed students' critical literacy through the implementation of critical pedagogy with pop culture. Despite its success, its sustainability and compatibility in the Hong Kong context remains questionable.

Luk (2012) highlights the incompatibility of critical pedagogy with pop culture with Hong Kong's exam-oriented education system, where only traditional academic knowledge is emphasized in both the official and school-based curriculum because it is assessed in examinations, leaving no room for other forms of literacy.

Despite students acknowledging the racial stereotype issue and feeling empowered to battle against this social injustice through the lessons, these learning objectives are not aligned with the official curriculum laid down by the Education Bureau and thus school administrations do not have incentives to support programs like these which do not meet the official assessment requirements (Luk, 2012).

There are also questions on what the relevant and appropriate pop culture is. Luk (2012) and Chik (2011) share the same concern that incongruity between the pop culture of the teacher and the one of the students may exist and thus become an obstacle for establishing a common ground of interaction.

In this study, the selected Disney animated film is culturally relevant to both the teacher and the students because of its popularity as a classic. However, a girl with a strong sense of abhorrence towards fairy tale declared that she would not participate in the lessons because of the selected piece of pop culture. Therefore, to select for a relevant and appropriate piece of pop culture remains a vexed question. Without addressing these issues, sustainability for critical pedagogy with pop culture is in doubt.

7. Limitation of the study and Ethical Consideration

For one, the findings are hardly generalizable. The researched lessons drew from the students' personal experience as this is the essence of critical pedagogy and critical literacy. Since personal experience varies among different individuals and sociocultural groups, participants' responses to stereotypical representations and development of critical literacy cannot be generalized to other individuals or sociocultural groups.

Secondly, the study does not involve pretest-posttest design and thus does not investigate on how the researched lessons contribute to participants' critical literacy development. Which is why it is possible that the participants' critical literacy practices can be attributed to their past learning and experience, instead of as a result of the researched lessons.

Thirdly, there is potential subjectivity in this action research, where the researcher is, at the same time, the participants' teacher.

However, instead of providing generalizable findings or measuring how the researched lessons attribute to the participants' critical literacy development, the purposes of this study are as mentioned in the previous section.

Privacy, consent and autonomy are three principles governing the ethical considerations of this research.

Privacy is a significant concern of this action research since the data collection involves children aged below 18. To protect their identity and interest, confidentiality is the study's priority. Thus, pseudo names are adopted and no personal information is recorded nor reported.

The study emphasizes consent from the participants. All participants are given the consent form and information sheet before participation, on which their rights and details of the research are

clearly explained. Similar documents are issued to the participants' parents and school principal since they are underage.

Participants' autonomy is well protected. They are clearly explained in spoken and written manner that they have rights to withdraw from the research at any time and they can choose not to participate and engage in other learning activities instead.

This study is also of non-maleficence. No risk or harm is brought to any participants.

8. Conclusion

This action research studies two research questions 1) How might students respond to pedagogy addressing racially stereotypical representations in Disney animated films? 2) How can students develop critical literacy through such pedagogy? By answering these questions, this study offers insight for future practice and research of critical education, particularly with pop culture. This study also aims at fostering transformative mindset and practice among the participants through sociocultural learning.

The study is grounded on the concept of critical literacy and critical pedagogy, both of which aim at addressing social justice issue through equitable education and transformative actions by students and teachers (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe, 2005; Klenner & Sandretto, 2011). Based on this theoretical ground, participants went through four lessons of equitable and student-centered discussion on the racially stereotypical representations, and race equity issues on personal and community level, followed by transformative actions. Meanwhile, these learning activities are designed to be aligned with the official curriculum.

The study finds out that as responses to the researched pedagogy, students demonstrate connection to personal experience, critical practice, aspiration for transformation and solidarity

among each other. For participants' development of critical literacy, under the theoretical framework of *Luke and Freebody's four resources model*, there is a significant growth for participants' text-meaning practice, pragmatic practice and critical practice. However, since participants were not taught as intensively on coding practice because of their prior language proficiency, this area does not see a significant growth.

This study offers insight for Hong Kong education system, which is criticized for its exam-orientation, direct-instruction pedagogy and lack of development in creativity, leadership and critical thinking (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Berry, 2008; Luk, 2012; Yeung, 2012; Chan & Yuen, 2014). The notion of equity, criticality and social transformation in critical pedagogy and in the critical interrogation of pop culture materials are suggested to address these issues in Hong Kong's education. Meanwhile, under this system, the advocacy of CP is also restrained. Alignment between the official curriculum and critical education contents is therefore of significant importance in the sustainability of CP and CL's future development in Hong Kong.

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