

**Applying critical pedagogy in  
the senior secondary Liberal Studies curriculum:  
An action research study in Hong Kong**  
by

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### **Statement of Originality**

I, LEUNG, Wing Tat, hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis and the material presented in this thesis is my original work except those indicated in the acknowledgement. I further declare that I have followed the University's policies and regulations on Academic Honesty, Copyright and Plagiarism in writing the thesis and no material in this thesis has been submitted for another degree in this or other universities.

## Abstract

This study aims to investigate, with an action research approach, the possibility of enhancing conscientization by applying critical pedagogy (CP) in the Liberal Studies (LS) curriculum of Hong Kong, in order to introduce a new paradigm of civic education that fosters learners' transformative actions in sociopolitical issues. Shor's (1992) model of "empowering education" was taken as the main framework in applying CP. In addition, Shor's (1992) "Paradigm of Four Domains" was adopted to investigate teachers' and students' obstacles and resources in the process. The study was conducted in a local secondary school for approximately 10 weeks, with a Secondary 5 class of 15 students as participants. The findings revealed that there were rich possibilities of conscientization, which means the development of critical consciousness, achieved through applying CP in the LS curriculum. However, some obstacles were found hindering the application of CP in the LS curriculum. Among them were the "teaching to the test" pressure on the teacher and the mentality of didacticism. On students' side, their weakness in literacy skills and the alienation caused by the authoritarian culture were the main obstacles. Yet, students' developing interest in experiential learning activities and their willingness for transformative practice were found to be resources that motivated them to learn in the new mode of CP. To complement students' resources, the willingness and proficiency to support students' transformative practice, the readiness to explore taboo issues, and an influential relationship with students were the resources that facilitated CP practice on the teacher's side. This study is significant and advocating in several ways. Throughout this study under the specific school conditions in Hong Kong, Shor's four-domain paradigm for the practice of CP is developed and enriched. Based on the findings, this study recommends the "Independent Enquiry Study" (IES) in the LS curriculum be expanded, and connections between the teachers' community and progressive civil society be strengthened. Moreover,

critical dialogues and researches about the myths and hidden agendas in textbooks and learning materials, as well as discussions and preparations for transformative actions, are suggested to be conducted intermittently in the LS classroom. It is expected that through the new paradigm of civic education nurtured by CP in the LS curriculum, the enthusiasm and competence of the young generation can become a sustainable force that promotes social change towards justice.

*Keywords:* civic education, conscientization, critical pedagogy, Liberal Studies curriculum, transformative actions

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## List of Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ASL	Advanced Supplementary Level
CDC	Curriculum Development Council
CP	Critical Pedagogy
DSS	Direct Subsidy Scheme
EDB	Education Bureau
HKALE	Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination
HKCEE	Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination
HKDSE	Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education
HKEAA	Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
IES	Independent Enquiry Study
LS	Liberal Studies
NET	Native English Teacher
NSS	New Senior Secondary
PE	Physical Education
PLHIV	Person/People living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus

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## Chapter 1: Introduction—Problem Identification and Possible Intervention

### 1.1 Research Problem

The history of Hong Kong has shaped its civic education into a didactic and conformist paradigm. Having been a British colony and subsequently a “Special Administrative Region” of the People’s Republic of China for more than one and a half centuries, Hong Kong has never been a fully autonomous or democratic political entity. Civic education has been treated as a tool of governance, rather than a medium to inspire a sense of civil rights and social agency. Until the implementation of the Senior Secondary Liberal Studies curriculum (hereafter referred to as “LS”) in 2009, no significant steps towards changing this official model of civic education had been attempted. Since 2009, however, a new orientation towards nurturing social intervention by citizens has emerged. The LS curriculum now provides a vision under which a cognition-oriented mode of learning in civic education can be transformed into a praxis-oriented one. This has the potential to bring about a new era of civic education that cultivates social change towards justice in Hong Kong.

The paradigm of critical pedagogy (hereinafter referred to as “CP”), emphasizing practice and reflection (as meant by the term “praxis”) and aiming at transformative actions, that is, actions that make changes in social conditions, can substantiate the vision towards a breakthrough in Hong Kong’s civic education. “Conscientization” (translated from “conscientização” in Portuguese), a core concept of CP which “represents the development of the awakening of critical awareness” (Freire, 2013, p.15) , is of particular interest to this study. It was advocated by the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1970, 2013), one of the major inaugurators of CP. The possibility of CP, juxtaposed with the potential of the LS curriculum, generates an exciting challenge to Hong Kong educators. As CP is still an unfamiliar paradigm for Hong Kong educators, its application in the LS curriculum can act as a guide for

conscientious exploration by researchers. Thus, this study aims to investigate the possibility of enhancing conscientization by applying CP in the LS curriculum of Hong Kong. It adopts an action research approach, referencing the eight-stage framework developed by Cohen et al. (2011):

1. Problem identification;
2. Possible interventions to address problem;
3. Decision on particular intervention;
4. Plan intervention, with success criteria;
5. Implementing the intervention;
6. Monitoring and recording implementation/effects;
7. Reviewing and evaluating intervention; and
8. Drawing inferences on how well intervention solved the problem.

The study was conducted in a local secondary school for approximately 10 weeks. It was performed on a Secondary 5 (second year of the high school stage) class of 15 students as participants. CP was applied in their LS lessons in order to pursue students' conscientization concerning social issues and public affairs.

## **1.2 Research Background and Significance**

### *1.2.1 Background of Hong Kong's Secondary Schooling*

The Hong Kong schooling system is mainly controlled by the government by means of resources and regulations. Most of Hong Kong's primary and secondary schools are operated under a single territory-wide public education system (Bray & Jiang, 2007). In the school year 2017/18, there were 1,087 daytime primary and secondary schools. Only 6.0% of these schools were directly run by the government, while 71.7% of them were aided schools (Education

Bureau, 2018) funded by the government but operated by religious and philanthropic organizations that depended on government subsidies. These government and aided schools form the major sector of Hong Kong's schooling, which is under extensive official control in terms of curriculum, financial arrangements, administrative routines, and so on. Apart from this public sector, there are international schools, local private schools, and schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) in which aided schools can convert into private institutions subsidized by government grants under specific terms and rules. As opposed to their counterparts in the public sector, these schools enjoy greater autonomy in their curriculum and other areas.

In addition to prescribed syllabi, related education regulations and ordinances, the government effectively regulates schools' curriculum via high-stake public examinations at the secondary education level, namely, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) under the previous system, and the Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination under the current system, which determines students' access to universities and other tertiary institutions. As public examinations remarkably affect students' prospects and schools' reputations, they play an important role that shapes school culture and pedagogic patterns (Berry, 2008; Chang, 2018; Deng, 2009). Owing to the overarching influence of public examinations, pedagogies in Hong Kong are dominated by a teacher-centered model (Chan & Yuen, 2014; Chang, 2018; Deng, 2009) which affects a great number of students and teachers. In the school year 2017/18, when the data collection for this research was conducted, there were 506 secondary schools in Hong Kong, accommodating 330,804 students, with 170,079 males and 160,725 females taught by 28,863 secondary school teachers (Education Bureau, 2018). Concerning the civic education in Hong Kong, it is not only its non-independent subject nature that has a negative impact on



its implementation (Leung & Ng, 2014). The didactic culture, coupled with the government's control, has weakened the implementation of civic education in Hong Kong.

### *1.2.2 Problem Identified: Weaknesses in Hong Kong's Civic Education*

The term “civic education” is usually used interchangeably with “citizenship education.” It was historically enacted to cultivate a common identity and foster loyalty to the nation (Green, 1990). Presently, civic education is designed mainly for “the promotion of a common set of shared values” that reflect the conception of “what it means to be a good citizen” (Johnson & Morris, 2010, p. 77). Although the conception on “good citizen” represents a common theme for civic education worldwide, the types of citizens valued by different societies vary in a wide range and are defined by societies' relationship with their governments (Johnson & Morris, 2010). This variation has been reflected by the history of civic education in Hong Kong. Leung and Yuen (2009a) summarized the civic education history of Hong Kong into three stages, namely depoliticization, politicization, and re-depoliticization with official affirmation of nationalistic education. By using the terms “depoliticization, politicization, and re-depoliticization”, the authors indicated the degree that discussion of political issues and political participation were allowed or encouraged in schooling by the government.

For most of the British colonial era, civic education in Hong Kong was in a state of depoliticization. It detached the young generation from local politics and fostered their identity as residents in a colony, rather than citizens in a nation-state (Lee, 1987). Through this notion of civic education, the colonial government tried to suppress political activities and maintain the stability of its colonial rule.

With the 1997 handover of sovereignty approaching, the colonial government commenced the development of representative democracy and civic education gradually entered the second stage, a stage of politicization. In 1985, after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the future of Hong Kong in 1984, the government released its guidelines on civic education and some reforms in the school curriculum to cope with the developing political system. This process of “decolonization” and “national reintegration” brought about the interest and active participation of many non-governmental and pro-democracy organizations in civic education. At the same time, organizations which upheld the interests of the Chinese government in Beijing were actively paving the way for a tight official ideological control over society (Lim & Apple, 2016). Consequently, two competing versions of civic education emerged: the official Chinese version oriented towards national education, personal virtues, cultural traditions, conformity; and the other local version emphasizing democracy, human rights, and global citizenship (Leung & Yuen, 2012; Tse, 2007). Such rivalry in the civic education field corresponds well with the opposition conflict between the two major powers in Hong Kong politics after the unification with China: the pro-establishment camp which was formed by groups representing the interests of the Beijing government, and the pro-democracy camp which consisted of political parties and non-governmental groups aiming for democracy in Hong Kong while resisting intervention from the Beijing government.

The third stage of Hong Kong’s civic education was a stage of re-depoliticization which began when the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (hereafter referred to as “HKSAR”) was established. This was the stage in which the political elements, such as representative democracy and civic participation, introduced to Hong Kong’s civic education in the last years of British colonial rule were undermined or replaced by the HKSAR government. Leung and Ng (2004) pointed out that the HKSAR government attempted to “re-depoliticize” civic

education by adding many non-political and moral elements into civic education. The most significant change could be found in the curriculum reform document where the theme “civic education” was replaced by “moral and civic education” (CDC, 2001). Under the task of moral and civic education, contents related to citizens’ political participation were greatly suppressed while national education for promoting patriotism and traditional Chinese culture was upheld. In this stage, there was a continuous disagreement between two versions of civic education, respectively supported by the pro-establishment camp and the pro-democracy camp. Nevertheless, the pro-democracy camp usually worked only as an “issue-based,” loose alliance instead of a stable, consolidated power, while the pro-establishment camp had dominant influence in the official civic education in schooling. According to Leung and Yuen’s (2009a) conclusive remarks for the post-1997 era, little was achieved in civic education of Hong Kong: insufficient attention was paid to political and human rights education as well as participatory citizenship; national education, although with a lot of attention, did not attain obvious effect due to negligence to the pluralistic cultural and social backgrounds of Hong Kong people.

In 2009, in the midst of the stagnant situation for civic education, the implementation of the new LS curriculum brought an opportunity for change. Under the New Senior Secondary (NSS) system introduced by the government, LS was changed from being an elective subject in the Advanced Supplementary Level (ASL) of the old system into a compulsory subject. Education and Manpower Bureau (2005) reported in the official document on the planning of the NSS system the benefits gained by students in the LS (ASL) curriculum, such as broadening students’ knowledge base and developing students’ multiple perspectives on contemporary issues. The public, particularly teachers who taught the subject in ASL, recognized the benefits. As a result, LS became a core subject in the NSS curriculum so to enable students “to connect

concepts and knowledge across different disciplines, to look at things from more than one single perspective” (p. 36).

Until now, empirical studies about the role of LS in civic education of Hong Kong have been limited in number. Leung and Yuen (2009a, 2009b, 2014, 2017), two major scholars interested in the issue, have noted that the possible influence of LS on Hong Kong’s civic education has been paradoxical. Facing the long stagnancy, both scholars made a forecast that LS would be a watershed for the civic education of Hong Kong, although they have also argued that the human rights education element in the curriculum was “action-poor” and was far from adequate for establishing a human rights culture in Hong Kong (Leung, 2008; Leung & Yuen, 2009a). On top of the three stages of Hong Kong’s civic education history, namely depoliticization, politicization, and re-depoliticization, Leung et al. (2014) later added a fourth stage, “civic education through liberal studies (LS) and moral and national education” (p. 286), showing the significance of LS in the chronicle of Hong Kong’s civic education. In the paper, they pointed out that the curriculum “allows for the first time all senior secondary students to study explicitly topics of political knowledge, though the political education elements may be limited in scope and conservative in tone can be useful for the cultivation of active citizens” (p. 286). Such viewpoint was echoed by Deng (2009) who claimed that “Liberal Studies was designed to overcome the constraints that typified many secondary academic subjects by providing a more contextualized and politicized curriculum” (p. 588). Recalling what they had discussed before the implementation of the curriculum, Leung and Yuen (2014), however, asserted again: “the overall approach of LS is rather ‘action poor’ and the focus is on the nurturing of thinking individuals rather than cultivating of transforming agents” (pp. 286-287).

### *1.2.3 In Search of a Possible Intervention: Calling for a New Paradigm in LS*

The difference between thinking individuals and transforming agents can be greatly distinct in the realm of civic education. The contrast between these two terms highlights the potential shortcomings of the LS curriculum in bringing a new more politicized and praxis-oriented civic education to Hong Kong. The official LS document states that the curriculum aims to foster “independent, critical thinkers” and “informed, responsible citizens” (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p. 13). In the literature, conceptions of critical thinking are mostly related to the application of logic and the ability to seek “sound” conclusions (Doddington, 2008, p. 109). Johnson and Morris (2010) pointed out that critical thinking does not necessarily call for critical action of citizens. They found that the ideal types of citizens upheld by scholars like Westheimer and Kahne (2004) and Veugelers (2007) are characterized by the defining features of being “cooperative, concerned for social justice [and] motivated to change society” (Johnson & Morris, 2010, pp. 84-85). Banks (2008) developed a similar model to illustrate different levels of citizenship, with its ideal type, the transformative citizen, as a citizen who takes action “to promote social justice even when their actions violate, challenge, or dismantle existing laws, conventions, or structures” (p. 136). Going through recent literature on civic education, one can find that “international civic education initiatives are adopting more action-oriented pedagogies for transforming social justice” (Leung & Yuen, 2009b, p. 283). For instance, scholars in the United Kingdom have been exploring the possibility of integrating service-learning programmes into the national curriculum in order to foster active citizenship and political awareness (Annette, 2008). Moreover, initiatives such as the “make community curricular” project have been attempted in Australia to connect community with curriculum to nurture justice-oriented citizenship (Zipin & Reid, 2008). Compared with initiatives around the world, the aim of the Hong Kong LS curriculum to merely foster “independent, critical thinkers” seems to fall behind the international trend.

In spite of the gap between the limited scope of LS and the international trend of action-oriented civic education, there is still an element in the curriculum that offers a great potential for developing transformative actions of students. The official curriculum and assessment document of LS explicitly promotes an issue-enquiry approach for learning and teaching LS (CDC & HKEAA, 2007). This approach is adopted as the major pedagogy to encourage students to “develop a capacity for independent learning in the pursuit of knowledge and openness to new possibilities” (p. 4). The approach can be practiced through “a great variety of learning and teaching activities, such as direct instruction, enquiry activities and interactive activities [according to] the objectives of individual lessons and the needs of students” (p. 93). This officially endorsed approach upholds the idea that issue-enquiry does not aim at developing a detached understanding of an issue, but at making practical judgements that may lead to students’ actions in response to the issue for improving society. Along the course of judgment and action, “students construct their practical knowledge via a dual process in which they both develop their understanding of issues and test this understanding in action” (pp. 89-91). This issue-enquiry approach is conceptually compatible with the international trend of action-oriented civic education mentioned above.

However, some scholars have reported that there are great discrepancies between the expectations and reality of the implementation of LS. For example, Fung (2016) tracked 50 students in Hong Kong over a five-year period (2007-2012) before and after the implementation of the New Senior Secondary LS curriculum. His findings revealed that students felt the curricular content was “stuffed with too much information” and thus they did not have enough time and space to reorganize their own learning materials and carry out their own exploration (pp. 637, 639). In another study, Fok (2016) identified the dominance of

examination culture as one of the main obstacles hindering LS from attaining its intended objectives. The related literature showed that LS, although having a milestone position in the development of Hong Kong's civic education, has been constrained by both the limited scope in its rationale and the impediments in real practice. As a result, it has failed to keep Hong Kong on the cutting edge of progressive trends in civic education. Nevertheless, its connection with the social movements in recent years has still attracted much attention in both the society and the academic field.

The outbreak of the Umbrella Movement (also known as the Occupy Movement) in 2014 aroused public attention to the effects of LS on political participation by Hong Kong's youth. According to the study by Yuen et al. (2016), conducted during the Umbrella Movement, LS contributed triggering factors such as a liberal ethos, open-minded teachers, pedagogies that facilitated discussion, and a public examination design that required the consideration of diverse viewpoints; all of these were viewed as important vehicles of civic education that enhanced social awareness, and nurtured civic virtues in support of democratic discussion. However, none of the respondents who took part in the Umbrella Movement rallies said that LS had a direct effect on their participation. Therefore, no relationship between LS and students' sociopolitical participation in real situations could be directly drawn. Fung and Su's study (2016) directly investigated the relationship between the Umbrella Movement and LS. They found that although LS aroused students' "social awareness and interest in civic engagement and political participation [and] provided background knowledge that informed students' socio-political participation" (p.101), it did not serve as a cause of the movement.

Regardless of the fact that both studies are fairly consistent in their conclusions about the relationship between LS and youth participation in the movement, potentials of the LS

curriculum are still worth exploring. Youngsters who experienced the Umbrella Movement have undergone a process of radicalization and politicization in which they developed strong aspirations for autonomy, freedom, non-conformity, and the mastery over their own fate (Hui & Lau, 2015). The influences on them differ individually. Some students believed that LS made them more analytical during their participation in the movement, while some asserted that the participation experience made them doubtful about the readiness of Hong Kong people for full democracy (Yuen et al., 2016). Some participants were empowered by the movement with their sense of autonomy greatly elevated, while others felt powerless and lost as the movement had not achieved any significant changes (Leung et al., 2017). It appears that helping “in the rebuilding of hopes and empowerment in students” becomes an important point to be considered in post-Umbrella Movement civic education (Leung, Chong & Yuen, 2017, p. 139).

The Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement in 2019 has further heightened the urgency for a new mode of civic education in supporting the young generation’s sociopolitical participation. From June 2019 onwards, a series of protests burst out against the Extradition Law Amendment Bill, which is considered a measure of control instigated by the Beijing authorities, put forward by the Hong Kong government. Among the most active protesters, young people are in the majority. Some of these young protesters have been suffering from great mental stress or even psychological crises due to the serious conflicts encountered during the movement (Su & Leung, 2019; Yu, 2019). The uprising shows that in the long run, as the young generation become more active in political and social affairs, they need to be equipped with better knowledge, skills and attitudes for sociopolitical participation. If there are new elements in civic education which can bring more reflection and self-empowerment to the young generation, will they be more positive and persistent in participation that aims to



transform sociopolitical realities with a social-justice orientation? Can LS serve as a medium to achieve this important goal? These questions are worth investigating.

From the literature discussed above, the potential of the LS curriculum as a medium of civic education has been well identified. Since the implementation of LS, some studies have been conducted to explore the functions and potential of the curriculum to enhance students' learning in critical thinking, media literacy, and gender awareness (Cheung, 2009; Fung & Howe, 2014; Kwan & Wong, 2014; Liu, 2015). As LS aims to nurture the logical reasoning ability and responsible attitude of students, it is also relevant for their critical intervention in social issues. In July 2019, Tung Chee-Hwa, a former Chief Executive of the HKSAR, together with other pro-Beijing supporters, claimed that the flare-up of the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement was related to the influence of the LS curriculum on youngsters. They claimed LS was “one of the reasons behind the youth’s problems today” (May & Qin, 2019) turning the young generation into rebels against the Beijing and HKSAR governments. This critique, in one sense, seems to confirm, although in a derogatory way, the effectiveness of LS in motivating youngsters to take part in sociopolitical actions. While the Principal Assistant Secretary for Education said there was no proof that LS had caused students to take radical actions (Su & Chan, 2019), some students and teachers tended to appreciate LS for making them into “better citizens who are more engaged with society” (May & Qin, 2019).

To take up the role as transforming agents for social change, youngsters not only need the motivation for action, but they also need to acquire qualities such as societal insight, a sense of autonomy and agency. Thus, LS may need a new paradigm of pedagogy to activate its full potential as a vehicle to support transformative actions of the new generation. It is reasonable to expect that CP, which represents a “set of principles tied to the radical belief in the historical

possibility of change and social transformation” (Darder et al., 2003, p.10), , when applied in the LS curriculum, can mean a great step forward to bring about a new mode of learning that fosters more in-depth reflections and greater agency for transformative actions in civic education of Hong Kong.

Considering CP as a possible intervention for addressing the problem of Hong Kong’s civic education, the central question to be answered in this study is: “What possibilities and constraints do students and teachers face in the current context of Hong Kong schooling when pursuing conscientization through the application of CP in the LS curriculum?” Under this central question, three sub-questions are raised as follows:

1. What are the possible manifestations of conscientization achieved through applying CP in the LS curriculum?
2. What are the resources and obstacles that affect students’ conscientization through applying CP in the LS curriculum?
3. What are the resources and obstacles that affect teachers’ pursuit of students’ conscientization through applying CP in the LS curriculum?

#### *1.2.4 Significance of the Study*

This study has the potential to enrich the literature on the role of LS in Hong Kong’s civic education by conducting an action research on the application of CP in the LS curriculum. Through this study, the underdeveloped research area on the pedagogic value of CP in Hong Kong schools is explored. There have been ongoing concerns about the development of CP in different cultural and social contexts (Gore, 1993; Lin, 2004; Sung, 2007). However, the practice, and even the possibility of CP in Hong Kong is seldom discussed or investigated (Lin,

2004, 2012; Soto Pineda, 2016). Attempts to apply CP in Hong Kong have been made by practitioners in higher education (Lin, 2004, 2012) and school teachers employed from abroad (Moorhouse, 2014; Soto Pineda, 2016). With reference to locally trained primary and secondary school teachers in Hong Kong, the literature on the practice of CP is extremely limited. There are teachers who have made trials in CP, consciously or unintentionally, in their own teaching practice; however, these attempts have been mostly done in a piecemeal way without institutional support (Lin, 2012; Soto Pineda, 2016). As a locally-trained secondary school teacher, by conducting, documenting, and evaluating a series of CP lessons with a class of mainstream ethnic Chinese students in a local school context of Hong Kong, my goal is to fill this research gap, while investigating the possibilities and constraints encountered in the process.

As discussed above, equipping young people with more competence in sociopolitical participation, empowering them and re-building their hopes are pressing issues to be considered in Hong Kong civic education. By exploring the possibility of applying CP in the LS curriculum, this study provides a response to the needs of civic education for the young generation of Hong Kong.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review on CP—A Possible Intervention

### 2.1 Basic Concepts of CP

The notion of critical pedagogy cannot be easily defined. However, all the various definitions or descriptions raised by critical educators and scholars bear a common factor: a dialectical relation between reflection (thinking) and action. For example, McLaren (2007) described CP as “a politics of understanding and action” (p. 11). Johnson and Morris (2010) interpreted the aim of CP as facilitating learners “to reflect more deeply upon their socio-economic circumstances and take action to improve the status quo” (p. 79). These definitions point to an idealized type of citizenship which is concerned for social justice and motivated to take action to change society. One can easily see that the equal stress on both reflection (thinking) and action in the CP tradition underscores the lack of action in Hong Kong’s LS curriculum.

The rise of CP represents educators’ struggle against the sociopolitical power structures that also extend into the classroom. Paulo Freire, one of the most significant founders of CP, asserted that education had become an instrument of oppression under which “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). In this power structure, teachers, representing the knowledgeable are the depositors who make deposits of knowledge, as defined by the knowledgeable for students to listen and memorize. This is the well-known “banking” concept of education presented by Freire to describe the situation of mainstream schooling in which students are silenced and become passive receivers, as is largely the case in Hong Kong. A CP of problem-posing and dialogue, in resistance to this power structure, provides an instrument of liberation (Apple & Au, 2009; Darder, 2018; Freire, 1970).

Through integrating the discussions by various scholars and practitioners (Darder et al., 2003; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Foley, Morris, Gounari & Agostinone-Wilson, 2015; Johnson & Morris, 2010; Shor, 1992), I summarize several distinctive criteria of a CP action or experience:

1. A CP action or experience seeks to transform and democratize the power structure of the existing curriculum and schooling process in designing and conducting learning experience, emphasizing dialogical interactions between learners and educators in the learning process.
2. It unmask the connections between objective knowledge and cultural norms, values, and standards produced by existing societal power structures.
3. It empowers marginalized groups and their cultures.
4. It promotes learners' social agency, that is, the capacity to take action to transform social realities, by enhancing praxis, that is, the alliance of theory and practice in the learning process (see Appendix A for this summary shown in the area highlighted by dotted lines, with other major concepts related to CP used in this study).

These criteria can be recapitulated by the concept of “conscientization” which refers to the development of a critical consciousness that perceives sociopolitical contradictions and initiates actions against the injustice in reality (Freire, 1970, 2013). When CP is practiced, it is expected that one or more of the above criteria will be actualized so that the development of a critical consciousness will be manifested. In this way, the actualization of the above criteria can be considered as manifestations of conscientization. To enrich the understanding of these manifestations of conscientization, it is desirable to investigate them in different contexts. In the case of this study, the LS classroom in Hong Kong schooling context was investigated. This is the focus that the first research question of this study seeks to pinpoint at.

In terms of its process in practice, a CP experience that brings about conscientization often involves a cyclical critical praxis process, that is, the steps of posing (identifying) a problem, researching and reflecting the problem, developing a collective plan of action to address the problem, implementing the plan, and finally, evaluating the efficacy of action and re-examining the problem, to breed further reflection and action (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992). The whole process is enhanced by collective work and dialogical interaction between students and the teacher and among students themselves. Usually, there is time for object-subject switch between the teacher and students in CP such that students' autonomy in learning can be nurtured. The CP process can be applied to studies across different disciplines and subjects. Codifications, that is, objects in various forms which mediate learners in their critical analysis of daily situations, are often used in the process to arouse students' attention to social and political problems. CP also encourages the expression of ideas by self-created media and texts (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1987; Wink, 2011). The practice of CP requires teachers to act as researchers for helping students to solve problems by framing them in a larger social, cultural, and political context (Kincheloe, 2008). It also positions teachers as transformative intellectuals who establish the possibility of transforming schooling into a force of emancipation (Giroux, 1997), and as social and moral agents who fashion a critical discourse that functions to "create a democratic community built upon a language of public association and a commitment to social transformation" (McLaren, 2007, p. 256). To help teachers to fulfill the above qualities and roles, it is sensible to investigate the facilitating and constraining factors that affect the process of CP practice.

To put the facilitating and constraining factors in an orderly framework, Shor (1992) constructed a "Paradigm of Four Domains." In this paradigm, all the main factors affecting the

effective implementation of CP are categorized into four domains: (1) student obstacles, (2) student resources, (3) teacher obstacles, and (4) teacher resources (pp. 217-236). The paradigm suggests that “learning is helped by the resources and hindered by the obstacles students and teachers carry into the classroom” such that “using the assets and overcoming the liabilities of both helps the critical class become a culture for democratic empowerment” (p. 211). This framework is utilized for the investigation of the second and third research questions. Since Shor published this useful framework in his work in 1992, there has not been any further studies on its application. It was expected that through this study, apart from the findings obtained for local interest, development and enrichment of this paradigm could also be attained upon its application in the Hong Kong context. Further elaborations about the paradigm are found in Section 3.2.5.

## 2.2 Criticisms of CP and Responses

Before going through the practical experience of critical pedagogues, it is prudent to discuss the major criticisms of CP; some of these are summarized under three main themes (Kanpol, 1998):

1. The question about the right of critical pedagogues to speak for the oppressed and the marginalized;
2. The opaque language used by critical pedagogues; and
3. The lack of practical tools for achieving its visions.

In response to the first criticism, the notion of “dialogue” provides the most substantial rebuttal. Dialogue is one of the key concepts proposed by Freire (1970) in his classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. It represents a horizontal process of communication through which each party exchange views and interact equally. CP is an approach that is “focused on dialogue” and

“structured to empower individuals and collectives as agents of social change” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2007, p. 183). In a CP experience, pedagogues do not speak for the oppressed and the marginalized. Instead, critical pedagogues set the stage for them to speak for themselves, have dialogue among themselves, with other parties (sometimes even including the oppressors who are willing to interact equally), and get empowered.

A CP-oriented classroom is a stage for dialogue and student empowerment. The focus of CP classroom practice rests on the transformation of the power relations in daily teaching. Shor is a keen scholar in developing classroom strategies of CP under the rationale of transforming teachers’ authority through power-sharing with students (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kincheloe, 2008). His work *Empowering Education* (Shor, 1992), proposed a paradigm of empowering, critical-democratic pedagogy that upholds such values as participation, problem-posing, dialogue, and researching. This pedagogy, in the form of classroom practice, aims to “relate personal growth to public life, by developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality, and change” (p. 15). In a later book, *When Students Have Power*, Shor (1996) shared with readers a profound account of practicing this critical-democratic pedagogy with a class of college students from a working-class community that empowered students in the learning process. This pedagogic practice can be considered a process of action research to pursue conscientization, that is, turning students’ indifference and resistance into rising learning expectation and participation, while keeping teacher commitment to critical teaching that meets the four criteria of CP mentioned in Section 2.1. The application of this critical-democratic pedagogy in my study will be discussed in Section 3.2.3.



Regarding the second and third criticisms, “opaque language” refers to the absence of a simple, comprehensible language for explaining the rationale of CP, while “the lack of practical tools” is related to the deficiency of feasible methods to actualize this rationale. Despite its emphasis on the dialectical relation between reflection and action, CP has been frequently criticized as being too idealistic and theoretical (Knight & Pearl, 2000; Ravitch, 2000). In the tradition of CP, however, “action” and “research” are actually two sides of the same coin. In a dialogue with Paulo Freire, Shor said that for a pedagogy to be critical, it “has to integrate the students and the teachers into a creation and re-creation of knowledge” (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 8). Therefore, a CP practice should not proceed under the guidance of a manual. In most cases, it should be a creative work and at the same time an action research “to generate new ‘action-guiding’ perspectives” that allow educators or cultural workers “to escape the still invisible logic of domination” (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995, p. 10) that restricts schooling to the norms prescribed by the ruling class or parties, aiming for a breakthrough of learning and teaching in a specific context. This dialectical nature of CP connects reflection and action, generates practical tools for specific contexts, and clearly defeats the criticism of “opaque academic language.”

### **2.3 Experience and Possibilities in CP Praxis**

Many educators around the world have extensively attempted to implement CP praxis. In the United States, although institutions formally devoted to the practice of CP are still limited in number, CP “has entered the mainstream” and is known in various sectors (Foley et al., 2015, p.110). As Foley et al. (2015) asserted, “Individual educators have increasingly embraced key tenets of critical theory and have incorporated them into K-12 and higher education classrooms” (p. 135). For example, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) conducted various pedagogic projects and derived their theoretical principles on CP for urban youth through a critical action

research approach. One of their attempts involved co-teaching an urban high school English class for three years in Oakland, California. They utilized youth popular culture to facilitate student learning in both academic and critical literacy skills. Throughout the teaching and learning process, massive data including “observational field notes, videotapes of classroom interactions, samples of student work, interviews, and academic achievement data” were collected (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 17). The value of different forms of art, such as drawing and hip-hop, in teaching the skills for socio-cultural practices in CP were well identified through data analysis. These cultural forms supported students to undergo conscientization and learn to express their own views on life issues, especially those against injustice. Finally, the project resulted in the publication of a magazine, initiated by students, through which they voiced their opinions on education and issues concerning injustice.

Unlike examples which focus on campus interactions in the US, there are CP practices that reach out to the community in other countries of Western cultures. Pedagogy concerning community issues can be transformed into an action-oriented mode if it is practiced with the idea of critical praxis, while including conscientious reflection and action. For instance, there was an education film-making programme, namely *Justice Citizens*, for students of a secondary school located in a low socio-economic, semi-urban area of Western Sydney, Australia. The programme drew heavily upon Freire, as claimed by Heggart (2015), the teacher-organizer. It entailed a process of conscientization through the form of problem-posing education: Students identified issues that were important to them and their local community, researched the issues, and made films to present to the community at a film festival. The issues that students chose included domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, road safety, bullying, racism, and refugee perspectives which were mostly sensitive issues that needed public concern and community action. By making films for public screening, students practiced their autonomy as community

members and made a great step towards transforming the community. Heggart (2015), as the teacher-organizer of the programme and an action researcher at the same time, developed “a framework that [could] be used to analyze how effectively programmes are developing active citizenship and activism amongst the participants” (p. 276).

While CP is gaining ground in Western countries, it has also been taken up in countries of other cultures. However, the manifestations of conscientization achieved through CP can differ greatly among cultures. For example, Kim and Pollard (2017) analyzed Kim’s PhD project (2002-2006) that applied CP in designing and teaching an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) course in a South Korean university. They found that it was difficult for students to adapt CP, and they resisted critical issues as well as group work due to long exposure to their previous teacher-centered English education. Despite these negative feelings, students were deeply engaged in writing journals that allowed them to express their reflections, have dialogue, and negotiate curriculum affairs with the teacher. In contrast with the aforesaid Western cases, in which students took active part in creative works, Korean students manifested conscientization in their own way to make changes in the existing power structure and pursue democratization of learning. In another case in Korea, Sung (2007), after evaluating his experience of implementing a critical English language teaching (CELT) programme for graduate students, concluded that practitioners in teaching English as a foreign language “need to localize and engage in context-specific critical teaching practices” (p. 164). Both cases portray a “glocalizing” dimension in which CP can be used to catalyze conscientization in response to issues in specific local social and cultural contexts. This gives an important footnote and reminder to practitioners who are attempting to bring CP into practice outside the English-speaking world.

Apart from the specificity in contextual manifestations of conscientization, the influence of institutional factors is another issue that is worth exploring in CP. For instance, Jeyaraj and Harland (2014) conducted a study on the CP experience of 13 academics teaching English language in higher education of different countries, including Canada, Malaysia, Turkey, Nepal, and Poland, among others. In their study, teachers reported that students' worldviews, as well as "the way they participated in the world and acted for social justice" were transformed. However, the transformation achieved "seemed to be dependent on the amount of freedom the teacher had in their respective institution and country, as well as the amount of risk they were willing to take" (p. 352). The risk that teachers encountered could come from repressive governments, parents' opposition, and student resistance. It shows that the conscientization achieved by CP can vary among different countries according to institutional settings and other factors. The manifestations and factors affecting conscientization are worth researching in different countries and, in conducting this research, the present study aims to work on these in the Hong Kong context.

## **2.4 CP in Hong Kong**

CP has been an unfamiliar concept for most Hong Kong teachers (Lin, 2004). Lin (2004) was one of the rare practitioners who was enthusiastic in exploring the possibility of CP practice in Hong Kong. She reflected on her own attempt to develop a course in a master's degree programme of English teaching, aiming at introducing CP to a group of local in-service primary and secondary school English teachers. In addition, Lin and Man (2011) organized a programme of after-school hip-hop rap and hip-hop dance workshops for secondary school students from working class families, attempting to transform youth identities by introducing CP on an extra-curricular basis. In the basic education sector, Moorhouse (2014), who was hired as a teacher in a Hong Kong primary school under the government-funded Native English

Teacher (NET) scheme in Hong Kong, conducted a critical action research by adopting the CP approach in a topical unit of an after-school English tutorial class. There was also a research attempt in the form of a critical ethnography conducted by Soto Pineda (2016), an educator who previously had professional training and work experience in the United States. He practiced CP with ethnic minority students from grassroots families in Hong Kong for four academic years. This research provided valuable insights into the possibilities of CP in local government-subsidized schools and highlighted the tensions that emerged during the process. For instance, he found that although CP made up “a powerful collection of theoretical and practical tools” (pp. 212-213), which led to new forms of critical praxis for responding to situations in specific contexts, it did not necessarily lead to structural changes and long term, extensive impact. For example, critical educators who committed to promote equitable educational opportunities for ethnic minority students, apart from the theoretical and practical tools of CP, needed the institutional space that upheld the value of cultural diversity so that they could collaborate to produce the momentum for cultural change.

The literature about worldwide experience shows that, in spite of the constraints encountered by educators, conscientization through the application of CP is possible within education institutions. Freire (2013) pointed out that conscientization “must grow out of a critical educational effort based on favorable historical conditions” (p. 15). The emergence of LS can be part of these “favorable historical conditions” for Hong Kong. However, the specific manifestations of conscientization that can be achieved by locally-trained teachers and mainstream ethnic Chinese students of Hong Kong in such practice need to be explored by further studies in the cultural and social context of local schooling, particularly in the routine pedagogies of the LS curriculum. Furthermore, the specific facilitating and constraining factors that are encountered by students and teachers when learning and teaching through CP in the

above-mentioned context are worth investigating. For example, while CP highlights the transformation of power relations in the classroom, characterized by students' autonomy in directing their own learning during the lessons, the mainstream Hong Kong classroom of mainly ethnic Chinese students has been significantly influenced for decades by certain Chinese cultural values. This influence is still reflected nowadays by phenomena such as hierarchical human relationships, collectivism, and conformity (Hue, 2008). When practicing and researching CP within the Hong Kong local schooling context in this study, these cultural factors are to be put into consideration. (They will be discussed in more detail in Sections 5.1.1 and 6.1.) These are the areas that I aimed to explore in this study, with the expectation to suggest changes that could be made for institutional settings and teachers' strategies in Hong Kong.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology—Plan for the Intervention

### 3.1 Researcher's Background and Positionality

I have been a secondary school teacher for more than 25 years. I had 21 years of experience serving as a member of the Moral and Civic Education Committee in the school and 10 years of experience teaching Liberal Studies, ever since its introduction as a compulsory senior secondary subject in 2009. Owing to such background, I had developed a profound understanding about the weaknesses of Hong Kong's school civic education, such as lack of critical perspectives and a superficial emphasis on conformity, as discussed in previous sections. From the perspective of a civic education worker, the need for new inputs to Hong Kong's school civic education was pressing. With the role as a subject teacher of LS, I believed that LS could make a suitable entry point or vehicle for these new inputs. This study was an attempt of mine, in the position as a practitioner, to explore the possibilities to bring a new paradigm of civic education in Hong Kong.

### 3.2 Research Methods

#### *3.2.1 Remarks on the Action Research Approach*

As this study concerned most about the possibilities of conscientization that could be created by applying CP in the LS curriculum, it was designed to focus on the processes that connected people, situations, and events, and emphasize descriptions instead of numbers. As informed in the previous chapter, practice of CP, in most cases, is simultaneously an action research project which usually depends greatly on all participants' actions. This participatory nature of action research echoes the vision of CP in the pursuit of social transformation and social agency. Furthermore, critical pedagogues usually adopt an action research approach to obtain thick, in-depth data that provide inspiring insights for further practice. Action research,

when adopted in CP, is always conceived in relation to practice – “it exists to improve practice” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 88). Since this study aimed to explore the possibility of pursuing conscientization through the application of CP from my perspective as an education practitioner, the action research method was considered a suitable choice for research work. Action research, as “a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level,” is a good way for teacher-researchers who attempt to “replace a traditional method by a discovery method” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 344). The previously mentioned eight-stage framework developed by Cohen et al. (2011) for action research offered me the main reference point for investigating the deficiency of Hong Kong’s civic education in political and human right aspects, as well as participatory citizenship. My study put forward the application of CP in the LS curriculum as a possible intervention to address the problem.

### 3.2.2 *Research Site, Participants, and Period*

This study was conducted in the school that I served. The school was in one of the districts with the lowest household income in Hong Kong (Census & Statistics Department, 2018, p. 25). Students of this school came mainly from low-income public housing estates and families. It was also known as a Band-3 school in which most students had relatively low academic achievements<sup>1</sup>. The school adopted Cantonese as the medium of instruction for most of the subjects including LS.

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<sup>1</sup> Under the Secondary School Places Allocation System operated by the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong government, all Primary 6 students are categorized into three bands according to their academic performance, with the academically strongest as Band One and the weakest as Band Three, to determine their order of priority in the secondary school places allocation process. In the allocation system, the Band-One students are the first group of students who are allocated according to their preference. That means they have the best opportunity to enter the schools which match their preference. As a result, the chance for Band-Three students to be admitted to schools of high achievement and good reputation are remote. Band-Three schools are those in which the majority are Band-Three students. They were usually considered low-achieving schools which mainly serve low achievers.



The research participants were recruited from a Secondary 5 class. I taught the participants in 2016-17 when they were in their Secondary 4 year. The school policy stipulated that two out of the four classes in the whole cohort were academically stronger and the remaining two weaker. The researched class belonged to the weaker sector. There were totally 15 students in the class, 12 boys and three girls. See Table 1 for student participants' personal information collected from the first questionnaire in the study:

Table 1: *Personal Information of Student Participants*

Student's Pseudonym	Gender	Place of Birth	Type of Housing	Examination Mark in LS (out of 50)	
				June, 2017	December, 2017
Chandler	Male	Hong Kong	Public Housing Estate	19.02	17.67
Chelsea	Female	Hong Kong	Public Housing Estate	13.04	15.35
James	Male	Hong Kong	Public Housing Estate	11.74	9.31
Fred	Male	Mainland China	Public Housing Estate	21.07	16.28
Greg	Male	Hong Kong	Public Housing Estate	9.87	9.55
Quincy	Female	Hong Kong	Public Housing Estate	4.29	2.08
Louie	Male	Hong Kong	Public Housing Estate	5.22	Absent
Lincoln	Male	Hong Kong	Public Housing Estate	Not accessible <sup>2</sup>	18.69

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln's marks in the school year 2016-17 were not accessible for me as he was in another class. He was transferred to the class that I taught in September 2017.

Landon	Male	Hong Kong	Public Housing Estate	17.90	18.61
Nicole	Female	Hong Kong	Public Housing Estate	7.46	13.38
Patrick	Male	Hong Kong	Private Housing Estate	1.12	2.08
Jerry	Male	Hong Kong	Public Housing Estate	16.03	13.92
Warren	Male	Hong Kong	Public Housing Estate	14.91	16.28
Evan	Male	Hong Kong	Private Housing Estate	5.40	3.47

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When I first planned this study, I intended to investigate my application of CP in the LS teaching for a Secondary 4 class from early September to mid-December 2017. A Secondary 4 class was preferred for the study because Secondary 4 was the beginning of the senior secondary stage in Hong Kong and students usually anticipated a new mode of learning in September, the starting point of a new school year. Therefore, it seemed natural to introduce CP as a new mode of learning with LS as a new subject for students. Also, according to the curricular arrangement of the subject panel in the school, “Quality of Life” was the first theme to be taught in Secondary 4. It was a theme closely related to students’ daily life experience and was eminently suitable for discussion and reflection in a CP-oriented classroom. In this regard, the research period could be aligned with the teaching period of the module. Furthermore, I had taught more than half of the students in the cohort in the recent two school years. Familiarity with the students would provide an advantage for me to carry out a new mode of pedagogy.

An unexpected change of teaching assignment occurred. Through the information released by the school management in August 2017, I learnt that, beyond my expectation and in spite of the request that I put forward to the school management months before, I would not teach any Secondary 4 classes in the school year of 2017-18. Under this arrangement, I had no choice but to select the Secondary 5 class whom I had taught since the previous school year as research participants instead.

With reference to the curricular arrangement of the subject panel, the two themes as stated in the official curriculum document under the “Public Hygiene” module, namely “Understanding of Public Health” and “Science, Technology and Public Health,” were to be taught in the research period. This required some modifications such as the materials used for codification, but the research design essentially remained the same as stated in the initial research proposal.

Owing to further complications in seeking research consent from the school, the data collection could not begin in September 2017 as originally planned. Finally, I was granted the approval by the school management to commence the data collection in early October 2017.

Since CP depends much on the consciousness of participants to aspire for change, I gave a briefing session to the students at the beginning of the research period to make sure that they all understood the objectives of the research and the meaning of their participation. As I adopted a mode of pedagogy which was different from the other classes of the same form, there could be discrepancies in lesson progress and learning outcomes between the researched class and other classes. This could have influenced the assessed performance of the researched class. In order to ensure that the student participants would not become disadvantaged in tests and

examinations, two lesson periods on average out of seven for LS each week were to be retained for practice in answering skills for examination-type questions. Students were also informed about their rights to decline to join or withdraw from participation once the research had started. The data of students who declined to join or withdrew from participation would not be included in any data collection process such as field notes and questionnaires. Special arrangements like classwork that stuck to the original mainstream pedagogy would be available for non-participants on request. As shown by the returned consent forms, only one of the students in the class refused to participate in the research, and he did not request any special arrangement that was different from the research participants.

Concerning confidentiality issues, pseudonyms were used for both the participants and the school site in all reports and presentations of the study. All the data provided by participants were kept confidential and restricted for use in this research, including all its related publications and presentations. Entered data was stored on a password-protected computer, while data in hard copies such as questionnaires and field notes were stored in a locked cabinet. Identifiable information was removed from the data file and stored separately, with the link between identifiable information and data made through codes only.

### 3.2.3 *Implementation Model for the Intervention*

Because of the nature of critical action research, the requirement of “success criteria” was treated in a special way. According to the action research framework by Cohen et al. (2011), the plan for intervention in an action research, in response to the identified problem, should be accompanied by “success criteria.” However, unlike research in a positivist paradigm, teachers’ action research under the umbrella of CP tends to transcend concerns about verifiability. It does not aim to verify the effectiveness of specific teaching practices. Instead, action research strives

to discover new possibilities (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kincheloe, 2002). Conscientization as the core goal of CP has been an ongoing process that should not be limited by any state of success as an end. Moreover, conscientization can be manifested in remarkably diverse ways. Although certain criteria can be used to identify the actualization of conscientization through CP, they should not be considered as “success criteria” in a narrow sense. Instead, they can be regarded as guidelines for the planning of CP in order to pursue conscientization. Thus, with reference to the discussion in Section 2.1, four criteria (see Table 2) were used for planning the intervention that put CP into practice in this research:

Table 2: *Guiding Criteria for Pursuing Conscientization through CP*

Criterion	Meaning
Democratization of Learning	The power structure of the learning and teaching process being transformed and democratized to facilitate dialogical interactions between students and the teacher
Unmasking Power Structures	The connections between objective knowledge and cultural norms, values, and standards produced by existing societal power structures being unmasked
Empowerment of Marginalized Groups	Marginalized groups, together with their cultures, being empowered
Promoting Social Agency	Learners’ social agency being promoted by enhancing praxis in the learning process

During the research period, pedagogic elements included in Shor’s (1992) model of “empowering education” or “critical-democratic pedagogy,” such as problem-posing, critical dialogue and transformative action, were practiced, in order to change the classroom power landscape to set the stage for pursuing conscientization in the researched class. According to Shor’s model, CP can be initiated using three kinds of themes, namely generative, topical, and academic. Generative themes are those generated from students’ conversations that grow out

of student culture and express problematic conditions in students' daily life. Topical themes are those derived from social issues of key importance locally, nationally, or globally but not generated directly from the students' conversation. Lastly, academic themes are those brought to the discussion by the teacher, with their roots in formal bodies of knowledge studied by specialists in a field.

Learning and teaching in the class were conducted based on the prescribed "Public Health" module. In order to break through the examination-oriented routine that directed pedagogies toward examination requirements, I intended to make students' daily life experience the momentum source for the lessons. By closely relating learning activities with students' daily life, CP would turn the LS lesson from a drill of examination skills into a genuine response to the social reality. To facilitate this transformation, in addition to the planned academic themes to be taught, generative themes were produced in culture circles (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992) where students shared and brainstormed their daily life experience with the help of codifications (various forms of presentation of this life experience) around the module topics introduced for class discussion. Topical themes were added in case there were related issues arising during the research period. The learning and teaching process under the module was meant to be directed by these generative and topical themes, in coordination with the academic themes prescribed by the syllabus, through critical dialogue among students to produce the effects of a "situated pedagogy" (Freire & Shor, 1987; Shor, 1992). A situated pedagogy is one that situates the learning process into the actual conditions of students (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 26). It was expected that through such situated pedagogy, issues encountered by the students in their life experience could be raised and studied to gradually *unmask* the power structures behind these daily life scenarios. Students were to be guided by the teacher to pose problems on the generative themes through dialogue, collect information about research on the posed

problems, and discuss while looking for solutions to the posed problems. The whole process of learning fueled by dialogue aimed to actualize a *democratization* of learning in which students could acquire the ability to work with others and take charge of their own learning. When consensus was reached, responsive actions could be initiated to address the problems. The discussion on collective responsive actions and the experience of implementing them, if any, established a form of praxis that strengthened students' *social agency*, and led to student *empowerment*. The guiding criteria listed in Table 2 were meant to be used for planning and evaluating the process of conscientization that would be actualized through applying CP. However, these criteria were not supposed to be exhaustive or fully portray all the possible outcomes by which conscientization can be manifested. I aspired to explore new possibilities as well as a more detailed portrait of these expected criteria in the study.

While the intervention in this study started with a prescribed learning and teaching model, I did not aim to stick to the model and concentrate on testing its effectiveness. As CP is an art of possibilities (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), Shor's (1992) model served to provide a starting point for lesson planning of CP and I planned to modify the pedagogy according to the real learning situation of the researched class and the data collected during the process in order to explore the possibilities of enhancing conscientization via the application of CP throughout the study. The methods of data collection throughout the whole intervention process are described in the following paragraphs.

### 3.2.4 Data Collection

#### 3.2.4.1 Field Notes and Reflection Notes

Field notes were written to record the observation and reflection throughout the whole research period. Field notes were taken during or after each lesson of the researched class,

either in a paper notebook or in Evernote, the document organization programme. Notes written on paper were put in chronological order and subsequently typed into Evernote. (Notes were recorded orally as sound clips by a recorder or smart phone when written notes could not be done conveniently and would be transcribed later as written notes in Evernote). The field notes focused on students' participation in the dialogical interactions during lessons and the attainment of conscientization, that is, the development of critical viewpoints or motivation for social change throughout the learning process. The overall learning atmosphere together with notable events and phenomena were noted. At the end of every week, I read the notes recorded through the whole week and occasionally wrote reflection entries for evaluation.

#### *3.2.4.2 Questionnaires*

Three questionnaires were issued to every participant in the researched class, one for each month from October to December 2017. All the three questionnaires were designed mainly for collecting qualitative data for investigating the possibilities related to the application of CP. Although some quantitative data were obtained through the questionnaires, they were considered as supportive information only. The first questionnaire was conducted within the first two teaching weeks of the research for collecting relevant background information of participants (see Appendix B for the original Chinese version of the first questionnaire). This questionnaire helped me obtain an overview of the researched class in terms of their personal background, learning experience and sociopolitical viewpoints. Such information was helpful for lesson planning in the forthcoming weeks. The second questionnaire was conducted in November as a mid-term evaluation for the CP practice (see Appendix C for the original Chinese version of the second questionnaire, and Appendix D for the English version with data). The third one was held in December as a final evaluation for students to further explore their viewpoints on sociopolitical participation (see Appendix E for the original Chinese



version of the third questionnaire, Appendix F for the English version with data from Question 2 of questionnaire, and Appendix G for the other data collected from the questionnaire).

#### *3.2.4.3 Students' Notes*

Students were required to write notes on worksheets or in notebooks for specific topics. These students' notes included reflections on readings, personal thoughts on discussed issues, and so on. They were collected biweekly on average and I read them thoroughly while marking and commenting. Samples of notes that revealed notable phenomena related to conscientization were scanned and filed with students' consent as a source of research data. For example, in response to a suicide case that happened in the neighborhood, some students suggested in their notes an initiative in taking actions to understand and reduce the problems faced by the elderly in the community. This could be considered a notable phenomenon which was related to conscientization.

#### *3.2.4.4 Cancelled Interviews and Recordings*

In the original research proposal, about four to five students from the researched class were to be selected as major participants in mid-September, after two weeks of teaching and observation, to make the data collected more in-depth and focused. These major student participants would be invited for individual and focus group interviews. The audio-recorded and transcribed interview data were to serve as an important basis for later lesson planning and data analysis of the research.

Meanwhile, video-recordings were planned for some learning activities. It was desirable to video-record at least one session of each type of learning activity, including students' sharing and brainstorming for generative themes, dialogical discussions on posed problems, responsive

and transformative actions (if any) for addressing the posed problems, and so on. This would make some learning activities retrievable as a secondary source of data for more in-depth review and a tool to facilitate the discussion in focus group interviews.

In September 2017, I was told by the principal that although the request for conducting the research at school had been accepted, no recordings and interviews were allowed. The school supervisor was concerned about the privacy issue of students and the school. Regarding the interviews, he showed concern about the possibility for some students and parents to suspect a problem of unfairness that I would favor those students who had accepted the invitation of interviews. Because I was prevented from conducting interviews, this part of the data collection was eliminated from the study.

#### 3.2.4.5 Summary for Types and Quantities of Data

The different types of data collected are summarized in Table 3:

Table 3: *Types of Data Collected*

Type of data / method of collection	Frequency and period of data collection	Quantity of data	Particular connections with specific research sub-questions (with relevant question numbers in brackets)
Field notes	Daily on school days with lesson of the researched class, early-October to mid-December, 2017	41 entries, 1/2 - 1 page each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recording students' manifestations of conscientization during lessons (1)</li> <li>➤ Exploring resources and obstacles encountered by students and teacher during lessons (2 &amp; 3)</li> </ul>

Reflection notes	Written irregularly, mid-October to mid-December, 2017	5 entries, 1/2 - 1 page each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Exploring resources and obstacles encountered by the teacher in the teaching process (3)</li> <li>➤ Exploring possible changes in institutional settings (4)</li> </ul>
Student notes	Collected biweekly on average, early-October to mid-December, 2017	18 notes filed as data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recording students' manifestations of conscientization through reflection (1)</li> <li>➤ Exploring resources and obstacles encountered by students and teacher throughout the learning process (2 &amp; 3)</li> </ul>
Questionnaires	Once monthly, mid-October to mid-December, 2017	34 completed questionnaires collected, 2 pages each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Collecting relevant background information of students to provide reference for inquiring students' conscientization (1) as well as resources and obstacles encountered by students and teacher throughout the learning process (2 &amp; 3)</li> </ul>

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### 3.2.5 Data Analysis

I performed data analysis along with the data collection process. The data collected was analyzed by two sets of codes: first, the criteria indicating conscientization through applying CP, and second, the resources and obstacles in applying CP.

Following previous discussion on the aforesaid “criteria of CP” that should not be considered as “success criteria” in a narrow sense, they could still be used as themes for coding on the actualization of CP. According to the specific context of this research, some possible

examples could be raised for these themes. Table 2 on the “Guiding Criteria for Practicing CP” was further developed as the themes for coding as shown in Table 4:

Table 4: *Themes for Coding on Actualizing Conscientization through CP*

Theme for coding	Meaning and Possible Example in the Research Context
Democratization of Learning	The power structure of learning and teaching process being transformed and democratized to facilitate dialogical interactions between students and teacher. For example, it happens when students develop their interest and initiative in determining the issues to be discussed or the learning activities to be held in class.
Unmasking Power Structures	The connections between objective knowledge and cultural norms, values, and standards produced by existing societal power structures being unmasked. For example, it happens when students acquire a critical viewpoint about the power structure that exists behind certain misleading mass media or textbook contents.
Empowerment of Marginalized Groups	Marginalized groups, together with their cultures being empowered, and other marginalized groups being destigmatized. For example, it happens when students from low-income communities and families, themselves as a marginalized group, acquire a critical viewpoint on certain mainstream biased discourse about marginalized groups such as Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (the major social security scheme in Hong Kong) recipients.
Promoting Social Agency	Learners’ social agency being promoted by enhancing praxis in the learning process. For example, it happens when students develop interest and initiative in pursuing social changes through actions such as online petition or public demonstration.

It should be noted that although conscientization was identified under the four-theme framework, conscientization processes under these four themes could still be manifested in diverse and unexpected forms, ranging from public practices, such as participation in protests and petitions, to relatively private practices, such as expressing views in social media, online platforms, and creative works, or in individual talks with family members. The focus for data analysis within this four-theme framework was to identify the different forms, expected and

unexpected, of the manifestation of conscientization under the four themes. I paid special attention in the research process to avoid limiting the concept of conscientization within a narrow definition of sociopolitical actions.

Concurrently, I adopted the “Paradigm of Four Domains” by Shor (1992) mentioned in Section 2.1 as a starting list of themes for coding to analyze the resources and obstacles for conscientization in applying CP. Although this paradigm was derived from his specific teaching experience at a college with a majority of white post-high-school youths and adults in the United States, Shor claimed that some of these students’ conditions and behaviors would be “familiar and applicable to students elsewhere” (p. 216). Some characteristics of Shor’s students, such as their fondness for middle-class identity, limited exposure to critical materials that led to imagination for alternative ways of life, coincided with the mainstream culture that brought up the young generation of Hong Kong. Meanwhile, teachers in the college, as many of their counterparts in Hong Kong secondary schools and colleges, mostly adopted traditional pedagogies which were dominated by teacher-talk and one-way transfer of knowledge. Therefore, most of the factors in Shor’s paradigm were also readily suitable for analyzing the situation of teaching and learning in a Hong Kong secondary class of ethnic Chinese students. They needed only some modifications before applying. In order to better adapt the paradigm for use in the research context, I had conducted an informal, exploratory study from February until June, 2017 by dispersedly applying CP elements, for example, determining topics for study by students’ sharing and brainstorming, selecting topics through group work, reflecting issues by dialogue in class, and exploring the possibilities of transformative actions, such as online petitions, in the LS lessons of my Secondary 5 class. Experience from these exploratory observations were used to supplement and modify the “Paradigm of Four Domains” by Shor (1992) and provide a more comprehensive and reliable framework for data analysis. For

example, in the exploratory study, I unexpectedly found that students encountered much difficulty when searching information for their enquiry topics on the internet. Thus, I added the item “information literacy” to the domain of “student obstacles”.

I performed the coding of the data collected initially by a concept-driven or deductive approach, guided by the modified list of themes for the four domains mentioned above (Shor, 1992, pp. 217-236). All the field notes and selected samples of student notes were filed in Evernote and became searchable. I read them thoroughly at least three times and tagged them with the codes in Evernote. I collected and studied written questionnaires and tagged notable responses with codes manually. Along the analysis process, new codes were generated in a data-driven or inductive approach to cater for the specific local situation of the research (Gibbs, 2007; Miles et al., 2014). Table 5 shows the adapted version of the list of themes for coding:

Table 5: *List of Themes for Coding on the Resources and Obstacles in Applying CP*

	Students	Teacher(s)
<b>Obstacles</b>	Acceleration/Amplification in Mass Culture/ Mass Media/Internet Activities*	
	Alienation under Authoritarian Culture++	
	Assignment Mentality++	
	Bad Interpersonal Relationship among Peers++	Curricular Limits*
	Exposure to Regressive Ideologies	Fear of Freedom
	Faux Learning++	Rushed Schedules*
	Health and Rest*	Teacher Burnout
	Information Literacy+	Traditional Training /
	Lack of Social Exposure++	Didacticism*
	Low Expectation/Motivation for Learning+	
	Resistance	
	Thinking Skills+	
	Uneven Levels of Development	
	Vocationalism	
	Weak Literacy Skills*	

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<b>Resources</b>	Business Attitudes	Articulateness
	Creativity++	Authority
	Curiosity	Community Network++
	Democratic Attitudes	Conviviality
	Desire for Self-Esteem	Deviance Credits
	Extra Abilities Hidden by Performance	Familiarity with Popular Culture++
	Strike	Good Relationship with Students
	Humor and Emotional Tone	++
	Interest in Experiential Learning++	Institutional Clout
	Life and Work Experience	Love of Learning
	Sense of Autonomy++	Taboo Breaking++
	Speech	Thinking Skills
	Willingness for Transformative	Training in Research
	Practice++	Willingness and Proficiency in
		Supporting Transformative
		Practice++

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(Modified items are denoted by \*, items supplemented in the research proposal denoted by + and items generated in the analysis process denoted by ++)

During the data analysis, I recognized the viewpoint that “schools and classrooms are complex webs of interactions, codes, and signifiers in which both teachers and students are interlaced” (Kincheloe, 2002, p. 151). When analyzing the manifestations of conscientization and the factors affecting the CP experience, I did not expect to work out interpretations by simple linear cause-effect relationships. However, the data analysis process turned out to provide insights which allowed me to delve deeply into the complex webs of interactions among the various factors and agents and draw compelling and constructive inferences for enhancing CP practice.

By mid-November, when all the major types of data had been partly collected, a matrix was constructed to identify patterns of contiguity-based relations (Maxwell, 2013), that is, the relations among resources and obstacles in different domains. Through this mid-term analytic work, the lesson planning for the subsequent topics and the data collection tools, such as the

contents of questionnaires, could be modified to focus more on noteworthy questions that had emerged during the research process. By the end of the data collection period, I carried out pattern coding (Miles et al., 2014). By pattern coding, the initial codes, together with the newly generated ones, were integrated into more focused themes based on similarity relations (Maxwell, 2013) under the four domains. For example, the obstacles encountered by teachers such as curricular limits and rushed schedule could be grouped as examination-oriented factors under the theme of “teaching to the test.” Such pattern coding was integrated with the contiguity-based relation analysis to provide more comprehensive insights. Finally, after the data collection period, the frequency statistics from various data sources were also taken into account for assessing the importance of different resources and obstacles in applying CP.

By analyzing all the collected data, the potential possibilities of pursuing conscientization through applying CP in the LS curriculum were assessed. The resources that favored conscientization through the application of CP and the obstacles that hindered it, under different themes in the various domains, were identified and evaluated. As a result, inferences concerning the research questions were drawn and possible alterations were suggested for enhancing the possibility of conscientization through CP in the LS curriculum.

### *3.2.6 Measures to Cope with Subjectivity and Power Difference Issues*

Since CP is the mode of learning and teaching proposed by the researcher as the key to construct a new paradigm for Hong Kong’s civic education, there is an issue of bias favoring its application and efficacy. Facing this issue, I would like to emphasize my stance as a critical researcher as well as a practitioner, whose research work can be considered as a political action that aims to confront the injustice found in the field of study (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Instead of claiming my study as a neutral, objective description of reality, I acknowledge and



make great effort to be aware of “the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions” that inform my study (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011, p. 301) throughout the research process. With my assumptions visible to readers, all the findings attained in this study can be evaluated in a more equitable manner, that is, without being criticized as a concealed propaganda.

On top of the dual role of researcher and teacher, the power difference between students and the teacher might influence students’ opinions and behaviors being recorded as data in the research period. To cope with this issue, as shown in Section 3.2.4, different types of data (e.g., non-verbal, verbal and written) were collected in different ways (e.g., questionnaires, written recordings, students’ notes, etc.), and views from both the student participants and the teacher researcher in different settings (e.g., classroom learning, co-curricular activities, informal conversations, etc.) were included. These different data involved multiple perspectives to the CP process: students’ immediate responses to different CP experiences, their reflection on these learning experiences, their learning outcomes, my immediate observations and feelings in the lessons, and my reflection on the CP practice. Moreover, the data analysis was done concurrently with the CP practice so that it provided opportunities for me to reflect on the intervention continuously. As a large proportion of the data were field notes that involved immediate reflection after the intervention, the data analysis could serve as a process of meta-reflection, that is, “reflecting on my reflection from a scholarly point of view” (Du Toit, 2018, p. 425), which helped to overcome subjective bias. The data analysis process was assisted by occasional member-checking (at least three times along the analysis process) with student participants. Through member-checking, I intended to share with students the power of interpreting the phenomena that emerged in the CP practice, so to reduce the teacher-student power difference. The data analysis process was also supported occasionally by peer debriefing

(at least three times during the analysis process), without revealing data from individual participants on some findings concerning students' performances and responses in CP lessons with LS colleagues who were teaching other classes in the same form of the school. It was expected that by the above measures, sufficient triangulation, power sharing, and meta-reflection were attained, to ensure the validity of the research findings and to fulfill the values upheld by CP. The outcomes of these measures will be discussed in Section 6.4.2.2.

## Chapter 4: CP in Practice—Implementing the Intervention

### 4.1 CP in a Prescribed Syllabus

Due to some unexpected complications in the documents for obtaining the consent of the management of my researched school, the data collection could not formally start in September 2017 as initially planned. However, to make the learning and teaching of the module consistent, I commenced my practice of CP in September in spite of the delay in data collection.

My practice of CP, as mentioned before, basically adopted the pedagogic elements such as problem-posing, critical dialogue, and transformative action, in line with Shor's (1992) model of "Empowering Education" or "Critical-Democratic Pedagogy." In Shor's view, a key idea for critical and democratic teaching was that the curriculum should be co-developed by students and the teacher. In the case of a senior secondary class in Hong Kong, a teacher could hardly ignore the pressure of the public examination and the prescribed syllabus. In order to practice CP without causing much anxiety for students and the school management, I planned to follow the curriculum in terms of the main topics in the syllabus and the textbook, but to explore these topics through CP.

As said before, "Public Health" had unexpectedly become the module to be taught in the research period. This led to some modifications, for example, the themes to be introduced in the pedagogy and the materials used for codification. The "Public Health" module consisted of only two themes according to the curriculum document, but the textbook (Mak & Tam, 2016) used by the school further separated the module into four chapters:

1. Understanding of diseases and public health
2. Science, technology and public health

3. Promoting public health development in Hong Kong
4. Promoting regional and international co-operation in public health

Although the topics introduced in the module were closely related to human life, they were different from the “Quality of Life” module in such a way that students could not depend much on common knowledge when discussing these topics; in other words, students needed a good basis of specialized background knowledge beforehand. Some topics, such as science and technology related to public health, could be distant from some students’ personal knowledge. As a result, more time was required for exploring the specialized background knowledge in the field. As elaborated in Section 3.2.3, CP can be initiated by three kinds of themes, namely generative, topical, and academic. In the case of the “Public Health” module, not all the themes adopted in the pedagogy could be generated from students’ conversation. Some topical and academic themes had to be employed to ensure a comprehensive discussion of the topics developed; therefore, a mixed mode of different types of themes was adopted in this study.

Yet, the “Public Health” module was similar to other areas of “Quality of Life” in its relations to power structures of society. Thus, the theme could illustrate the difficult situations of marginalized groups like the poor, the mentally ill, and patients of rare diseases when facing health problems. It was expected that by exploring public health issues, students could develop their awareness of power structures behind the issues and provide a motive for transformative actions.

By integrating the above analysis with the conceptual framework of CP, several objectives were formulated for my practice of CP in teaching the “Public Health” module:

1. *Democratization of learning*: enabling students to take charge of their own learning by expressing their concerns in the area of public health through critical dialogue with classmates and teachers, and making these concerns the issues of inquiry.
2. *Unmasking power structures*: exploring with students the power structures behind public health issues, particularly the unfavorable situations of marginalized groups to unmask the origins of injustice or discrimination in these issues.
3. *Empowerment of marginalized groups*: empowering students and the marginalized groups revealed in public health issues, by providing connections between them, and developing students' critical viewpoints and actions in support of marginalized groups.
4. *Promoting social agency*: fostering students' social agency and civic engagement through the reflection and transformative actions aroused in public health issues.

## 4.2 CP in Changing Classroom Situations

Under the objective of democratization, generative themes were given priority as themes of learning, at least in the initial stage of the module. At the beginning of the school term, I tried to guide the students into the module by collecting generative themes of their interest and concern within the broad area of “public health” from their own brainstorming. Given a prescribed syllabus to follow, my idea was to arrange the generative themes collected from students and match them with the prescribed topics of several textbook chapters, such as “impacts of outbreaks of epidemic diseases on the development of public health,” “public health problems and socio-ethical disputes induced by medical development,” and so on. For prescribed topics which were not related to the generative themes, I would introduce topical themes and academic themes.

For generative themes collected from students' brainstorming, arrangements were made for students to search information and do presentations in groups. It was expected that further critical issues and dialogue could be engendered and some transformative actions might be aroused. After three weeks of research, presentations and class dialogue, some knowledge and viewpoints on the themes were achieved. However, students' motivation for further inquiry was lacking. At the same time, pressure from the prescribed syllabus on the teaching schedule was great. (These issues will be discussed in later chapters). Starting from October when the formal data collection began, there was limited space for student-centered research work. Based on the generative themes established from students' brainstorming and research, as well as the ideas developed from dialogue on these themes, I arranged learning activities, including a movie discussion, a "human library," sharing sessions, and a visit to a non-governmental organization to facilitate further thinking on the generative themes and led the way to the topical themes and academic themes that were fruitful for learning, while keeping in line with the prescribed syllabus. I also tried to bring in current social and school issues through routine newspaper reading and classroom dialogue in order to enrich the existing learning themes or to create space for developing new learning themes. For instance, a "son killed sick mother" case and news on suicides that happened in the neighborhood were introduced to supplement the discussion on the theme on mental illness. The Student Union's school affairs consultation provided a medium for deepening the learning on social participation. All these echoed Shor (1992) in the way I introduced topics by using "the student-centered base as the foundation for integrating themes less discussed in their experience" (p. 61).

On a different note, there were other topical and academic themes to be introduced through textbook assignments or to be assessed through tests and examinations as prescribed by the syllabus or teachers' lesson planning meetings. These themes could hardly be brought to

students in a generative way. To avoid the pedagogy from being reduced to a “banking” process and to sharpen the critical edge of the themes, some elements were added into the pedagogy on these themes. For example:

1. Media materials, e.g., Oct. 16: Television advertisement clips on Herpes Zoster were used as codifications to arouse dialogue on the issue of health information so that students could unmask the underlying commercial interests.
2. Critical reading materials: e.g., Nov. 1-3: Supplementary reading materials on the issue of antibiotic abuse in China were provided on top of the limited information provided by the textbook exercise to illustrate a more in-depth picture and bring about reflection on the power structure related to the issue.
3. Suggestion for action e.g., Dec. 5: In response to the dialogue on the issue of organ donation conducted on November 15 and 20, the government website on organ donation was introduced to the students so that an opportunity of taking a transformative action to respond to the issue was put forward to them.

Table 6 below provides a timeline of the CP activities practiced from the beginning of the school term till the end of the research period. The column of “CP Elements Involved and Issues Inquired” indicates the linkage between Shor’s model of “Critical-Democratic Pedagogy” and the pedagogic activities in real practice, with the specific issues inquired shown in *italics*. Meanwhile, the column “CP Activities” provides a brief description of the pedagogic activities. As the researched class had a fairly small size of 15 students and also a high absence rate (two to three absentees daily), more than half of the pedagogic activities were conducted with the whole class in a large group format. All the activities stated in the “CP Activities” column can be understood as being conducted as a whole class unless otherwise stated. To be concise, the table includes only normal school days, skipping all school holidays and days of special

functions such as School Sports Days and School Picnic. Moreover, there were other lessons that were not directly related to or extended from the progress of CP in the “Public Health” module. These lessons were not closely studied in the research and are shown in shaded rows in the table.

Table 6: *Timeline of CP Activities*

Date	CP Elements Involved and Issues Inquired	CP Activities	Specific Media/Tools Involved	Noteworthy Participants / Specific Persons Involved <sup>3</sup>	Remarks
Sept. 4		<b>Recalled</b> with students the most impressive terms, topics or episodes in last school year's LS lessons.			
Sept. 5-6	Problem-posing	<b>Brainstormed</b> about topics and concepts of "public health."			
Sept. 7		<b>Debriefed</b> on students' ideas about topics and concepts of "public health."			
Sept. 11	Problem-posing	<b>Brainstormed in small groups</b> about the public health problems in Hong Kong, starting from			The school supervisor gave a talk to the teaching staff on Sept. 8, the staff

<sup>3</sup> This column shows the student participants and external partners who played an active part in specific CP activities.



unhappy  
personal  
experience of  
students.

development  
day, stressing  
on the  
importance of  
exam-oriented  
drilling. He said  
that's how  
teachers were  
held  
responsible for  
students'  
prospects.

Sept.  
12-13     **Discussed** the EdUHK democracy wall incident. Revised with the class for the quiz to be held on Sept. 15

Sept.  
14     Problem-  
posing:  
*mental  
illness,  
insomnia,  
allergies,  
pollution,  
student  
health*

**Debriefed** on  
students' ideas  
about the public  
health problems  
in Hong Kong.

Mental illness  
was found one  
of the most  
concerned  
problems raised  
by students.

Sept.  
15     Quiz on some textbook pages.

Sept.  
18     **Arranged  
groups of 4-5  
students** each  
for online  
research on  
generative  
themes collected  
from  
brainstorming.

Sept.  
19-21     **Searched**  
information  
online **in groups**     Internet  
as arranged the  
day before.

Sept. 22	Critical Dialogue: <i>mental illness, insomnia, allergies</i>	<b>Group presentations</b> on data collected in front of the whole class.	
Sept. 23		Started <b>arranging</b> a “human library” sharing session by ex-mentally ill patients through an ex- cooperation partner.	Mr. P (ex- cooperation partner)
Sept. 25-26	Critical Dialogue: <i>mental illness, insomnia, allergies</i>	<b>Follow-up dialogue</b> on some issues raised in the presentations.	
Sept. 27-28	Introduced the controversy on central slaughtering of poultry in Hong Kong to the class and instructed them on the textbook exercise about this issue.		
Sept. 29	Teacher joined the Secondary 2 classes for an education camp. Researched class went on with the textbook exercise.		
Oct. 3-4	Followed up the textbook exercise on the “central slaughtering of poultry” issue, providing individual guidance for students with difficulty in essay writing.		
Oct. 6		Formally <b>introduced</b> the <b>research plan</b> and distributed the parents’ and students’ consent forms.	

Oct. 9-11	Problem- posing, Critical Dialogue: <i>situation and mental health of caregivers</i>	Distributed <b>Questionnaire 1</b> to the class.	Newspaper	Evan, Chandler, Louie	Consent forms signed by parents and students were collected. The data collection period formally started.
		Whole-class <b>dialogue</b> and individual news clipping classwork on the “son killed sick mother” case.			Teacher thought of and mentioned the movie <i>Mad World</i> in class discussion on Oct. 10.
Oct. 11-13		<b>Dialogue</b> for IES <sup>4</sup> topics. Teacher suggested topics on public health for IES but was not echoed by students.			Some students showed interest in AIDS but finally did not take it as an IES topic.
Oct. 14		Teacher wrote <b>reflection notes</b> .			
Oct. 16	Problem- posing, Critical Dialogue: <i>health information</i>	<b>Dialogued</b> about the textbook topic of “health information.”	Textbook, TV advertisement clips on Herpes Zoster	Greg	
Oct 17	Followed up students' IES plans with individual guidance.				
Oct 18	Special "Gospel Week" assembly. No LS lesson.				

<sup>4</sup> Independent Enquiry Study is an individual project required by the Liberal Studies curriculum as a DSE assessment item.

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Oct. 19	Problem- posing, Critical Dialogue: <i>mental illness</i>	<b>Watched and dialogued</b> on several clips from the movie <i>Mad World</i> with the class.	Online video clips from the movie <i>Mad World</i>	Fred, Greg, Louie
Oct. 20	Critical Dialogue: <i>mental illness</i>	On-campus <b>“human library” sharing</b> with the whole form (altogether four Secondary 5 classes) by ex- mentally ill patients. Speakers talked to the whole audience first and sharing in smaller groups followed, the whole researched class as one group.  <b>Follow-up dialogue</b> in WhatsApp group <sup>5</sup> .	WhatsApp	Human Library Hong Kong, Ex- mentally ill patients and social workers from Concord Mutual-Aid Club Alliance.  Chandler, Greg, Lincoln, Jerry, Warren, Patrick
Oct. 23	Critical Dialogue: <i>mental illness</i>	<b>Followed up</b> the <b>dialogue</b> on <i>Mad World</i> .	Online video clip about the director of the movie <i>Mad World</i>	Greg

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<sup>5</sup> The WhatsApp group included 14 students out of 15 in the class. The excluded one did not consent to participate the research and exited the WhatsApp group on his own will.

	Transformative Action: <i>situation and mental health of caregivers</i>	<p><b>Introduced</b> to students the <b>petition</b> requesting policy changes to support caregivers. A hard copy of the online petition with a form for signing was circulated in the class. Eleven finally signed the petition.</p>	Hard copy of online petition with a form for signing		
Oct. 24		Started <b>arranging</b> the <b>visit</b> to AIDS Concern.			
Oct. 29		Teacher wrote <b>reflection notes</b> .			
Oct. 30	Critical Dialogue: <i>governments' reliability, credibility of textbook contents</i>	<p><b>Responded</b> to <b>students' opinion</b> about governments' reliability to stimulate reflection about credibility of textbook contents.</p>	Textbook	Chandler	The textbook categorized "governments" as reliable sources of health information, but Chandler expressed his great doubt about it.
Oct. 31	Problem-posing: <i>health information</i>	<p><b>Read</b> some paragraphs with the class on the story about the deceiving propaganda by the Nestle Group on Third World mothers and babies in</p>	Online passages		

		1970s, which caused baby health problems and deaths.			
Nov. 1-2	Problem-posing: <i>health information</i>	<b>Introduced</b> some interesting <b>issues</b> to arouse students' interest in health information. Mentioned these issues in the lesson and shared related articles in the WhatsApp group.	WhatsApp	Warren, Lincoln	Issues raised: semen as antidepressant, brain death in organ donation, and breakfast as a dangerous meal. Few (including Warren) seemed to have read the articles.
Nov. 1-3	Problem-posing, Critical Dialogue: <i>health information and antibiotic abuse</i>	<b>Dialogued</b> with <b>small group discussion</b> on the textbook exercise question, with the help of supplementary reading materials, on antibiotic abuse in China. Students managed to unmask the commercial interests behind the issue.	Textbook and supplementary reading materials on antibiotic abuse in China		In the evening on Nov. 3 there was a quarrel in the WhatsApp group between Lincoln and Chandler.
Nov. 6-7	Problem-posing, Critical Dialogue: <i>health information, HIV infection</i>	<b>Read and dialogued</b> about a newspaper advertisement of a target drug disguised as news on newspaper.	Newspaper	Greg, Evan	Shared my views on the weekend quarrel between Chandler and Lincoln in class on Nov. 6.

Issues about medical cost and wealth gap were raised through dialogue.

**Reported on** Nov. 7 to the class about the arrangement of the visit to AIDS Concern. Preliminary dialogue on HIV infection.

Patrick,  
Lincoln

Nov. 8-9 Followed up the textbook exercise question on antibiotic abuse in China, mainly dealing with students' essay writing skill issues individually.

Nov. 10 First Term Uniform Test of Liberal Studies for Secondary 5.

Nov. 13 Problem-posing, Critical Dialogue: *situation and mental health of chronic patients and caregivers.*

**Dialogued on** the suicide case that happened at the nearby public housing building on Nov. 9. Tried to arouse some ideas for responsive actions concerning the incident.

Note sheet  
with news clip

Greg

It was reported that the suicide had been a chronic cancer patient. Students were not active in making suggestions. Some students expressed reservations about doing actions of support to the wife of the deceased elder, without any concrete reason.

Nov. 14	Critical Dialogue: <i>situation and mental health of chronic patients and caregivers</i>	Students <b>completed</b> individually the <b>note sheet</b> distributed the day before they expressed their views on the suicide case, particularly the part on suggesting our responsive actions	Note sheet with news clip		Some of them just suggested some actions that could be done by the government or NGOs, as usually written in assignments or tests. Only few expressed a sense of community.
Nov. 15, 20	Problem- posing, Critical Dialogue: <i>organ donation</i>	<b>Dialogued</b> on the issue of organ donation, as prescribed by the textbook and the lesson planning meeting. Tried to generate some suggestions to improve the proposal of a presumed- consent policy.	Textbook	Evan, Greg, Lincoln, Fred	Example of good suggestion: Lincoln said the government could ask for the consent of every citizen when he or she obtained the ID card. I expressed my appreciation for his idea.
Nov. 17		Teacher wrote <b>reflection notes</b> .			
Nov. 21	Critical Dialogue: <i>student health enhancement</i>	Distributed <b>Questionnaire 2</b> to the class.  Quoting their past suggestion of increasing the number of water dispensers on campus in the brainstorming in September, I <b>suggested</b> to the	Questionnaire		Most of them agreed to the need to voice the opinion, but no one promised to be the speaker.



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		class that they could voice this idea in the Student Union's consultation on school affairs on November 24.		
Nov. 22-23	Problem-posing, Critical Dialogue: <i>student health enhancement, other improvements for school</i>	<b>Dialogued</b> and <b>prepared</b> for the Student Union's school affairs consultation.	Lincoln, Chandler	Lincoln said he would voice the problem about the photo taking service.
Nov. 24	Transformative Action, Reflection on Action: <i>improvements for school</i>	<b>Lincoln</b> , as planned, <b>took the floor</b> in the whole-school assembly of Student Union's school affairs consultation.  <b>Debriefed</b> with the class after the consultation and talked with Lincoln individually in WhatsApp.	WhatsApp	Lincoln, Ms. C (teacher)
Nov. 25		Teacher wrote <b>reflection notes</b> .		
Nov. 27	Problem-posing: <i>situation of people living with HIV (PLHIV)</i>	<b>Visited</b> the AIDS Concern. Listened to the sharing by one of their staff members who		Staff of AIDS Concern, including a PLHIV.

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		<p>was a PLHIV (person/people living with HIV). Had tea with some of the students after the visit. Encouraged them to share with family and friends about the knowledge and insight acquired in the visit.</p>	<p>Lincoln, Jerry</p>	
Nov. 28	<p>Problem-posing: <i>situation of people living with HIV (PLHIV)</i></p>	<p><b>Sharing</b> by Winky, a former student of the school, about her experience as a part-time assistant of AIDS Concern with the class.</p>	<p>Winky (part-time assistant of AIDS Concern)</p>	
Nov. 29-30	<p>Critical Dialogue: <i>situation of people living with HIV (PLHIV)</i></p>	<p><b>Dialogued</b> with the class on the topics learnt in the past two days.</p>	<p>Lincoln, Evan, Warren, Greg, Jerry, Patrick</p>	<p>A few students said that they had shared the knowledge learned in these few days about issues concerning AIDS with somebody.</p>

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Dec. 4	Problem- posing, Critical Dialogue: <i>engagement in school life, social participation</i>	<b>Dialogued</b> on the news, during newspaper reading session, about Vera Lui who disclosed her past experience as victim of sexual assault by athletic coach. (Shared with the class in WhatsApp a link of petition about sexual assaults.)	Lincoln	
		<b>Dialogued</b> with the class about engagement in school life and social participation.	Lincoln, Landon, Fred, Chelsea, Greg, Chandler	
Dec. 5	Transforma- tive Action: <i>organ donation</i>	Went with the class to the computer room to <b>browse</b> the government <b>website</b> on organ donation and, in response to the need of patients for organ transplantation, they could do the <b>registration</b> if they wanted.	Government website on organ donation	Chandler, in response to my question, showed that he had signed the petition about sexual assaults that I had shared in WhatsApp the day before. 5 students revealed to me that they had decided to

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		<b>Dialogued</b> on the motivation in joining petition.	Chandler, Lincoln	register as organ donors.
	Reflection on Action: <i>organ donation</i>	Short <b>debriefing</b> on the lesson about organ donation conducted the day before.	Chandler, Greg	
Dec. 6	Problem-posing: <i>doctor shortage</i>	<b>Watched</b> video clip and <b>dialogued</b> with the class on the issue of "doctor shortage" prescribed by the lesson planning meeting.	Video clip extracted from a RTHK documentary	Most were empathetic about doctors' difficult situation in the public sector, after watching the video clip.
Dec. 7	Read through and elaborated on the key concept list of the recent chapter with the class as revision.			
Dec. 10		Teacher wrote <b>reflection notes</b> .		
Dec. 11-15	Revised for First Term Examination and started the "Globalization" module.			
Dec. 18		Distributed <b>Questionnaire 3</b> to the class.	Questionnaire	Dialogued with Greg and Fred after school on some issues related to the questionnaire.

## Chapter 5: Findings from the Intervention

This chapter reports the findings by integrating the various types of data, including field notes, reflection notes, students' notes, and questionnaires, for answering the three research questions:

1. What are the possible manifestations of conscientization achieved through applying CP in the LS curriculum?
2. What are the resources and obstacles that affect students' conscientization through applying CP in the LS curriculum?
3. What are the resources and obstacles that affect teachers' pursuit for conscientization through applying CP in the LS curriculum?

Section 5.1 of this chapter responds to the first research question about the possible manifestations of conscientization achieved through applying CP in the LS curriculum. Section 5.2 aims to answer the second and third research questions about the resources and obstacles that affect students' conscientization and teacher's pursuit of such through CP practices.

### 5.1 Manifestations of Conscientization

After the practice of CP for one school term in the school setting of this study, with ten weeks' data collected, the manifestations of conscientization, together with the limitations in conscientization, were assessed amongst the four criteria of CP:

1. Democratization of learning
2. Unmasking power structures;
3. Empowerment of marginalized groups; and
4. Promoting social agency.

These four criteria were summarized from the discussions by various scholars and practitioners in Section 2.1. They can be considered as the forms of conscientization in different aspects. They can also be connected to the cyclical critical praxis process that brings about conscientization (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1970). The “democratization of learning” is manifested when students start to develop the belief that they can initiate their own process of learning by posing problems that they have encountered in daily life. After the problem posing process and some further research, they can hopefully acquire a critical viewpoint that unmask the power structures behind the problems which have been posed. Through dialogue and reflections on the power structure issues that bring about the problems, students should be able to recognize the needs and strengths of the marginalized so to develop the consciousness that destigmatizes and identifies with the marginalized. This manifests the criterion of “empowerment of marginalized groups.” Finally, the above-mentioned developments of consciousness can lead to an initiative to pursue social changes through actions, such that promoting social agency criterion can be attained. The sections below illustrate the manifestations of conscientization with respect to the four criteria through the elaboration of data collected during the research period.

### *5.1.1 Democratization of Learning*

The “democratization of learning” is manifested when the power structure of the existing curriculum or the schooling process is transformed and democratized to facilitate dialogical interactions between learners and educators. It was supposed that the practice of CP could enhance students’ dialogue both with classmates and the teacher and bring about democratization that would enable students to take charge of their own learning. When asked about the strengths of CP in LS, students really showed their appreciation on the openness that

CP provided them to express opinions and give suggestions for learning and teaching during the lessons:

[Brainstorming and discussing learning topics with the teacher] can let us learn actively, to tell our own opinions. (Jerry, Questionnaire 2, November 21, 2017)

Newfangled, because we always listened to teachers' teaching in the past, could not raise issues by ourselves. Now more relaxed than the past. (Fred, Questionnaire 2, November 21, 2017)

Students [can] have [our] own views. Teacher is willing to listen, and to talk about extra-curricular knowledge. (Landon, Questionnaire 2, November 21, 2017)

These excerpts showed that students' intention to express opinions and raise issues of interest in the learning process was enhanced. This could be considered a possible manifestation of conscientization achieved through applying CP.

In spite of their enhanced motivation in giving suggestions for learning topics, when further initiatives for learning were requested, students did not show a strong sense of leading the learning process by themselves. In the first month of the school term, before the data collection period of this study, at my request the class suggested some topics for studying. Data searches and group presentations were done on the topics, and I found that some issues raised in the discussions, including mental illness, alternative modes of learning/working, lifestyle diseases/sickness, and breastfeeding were worthy of further study. Thus, I suggested to the class that these topics could be explored by some activities such as field studies or visits to be held

during the lessons in the following weeks. However, no specific opinion was received from students.

Students' silence in the discussion of learning activities might be interpreted in terms of Chinese cultural characteristics as mentioned in Section 2.4, such as collectivism and hierarchical human relationships, which were still salient in Hong Kong classrooms (Hue, 2008). These cultural values might bring about students' conformity to collective will and teacher's authority, so that they were discouraged from putting forward their personal views for directing the learning activities of the class. However, in a later episode, another possible factor that affected students' motivation was found. I tentatively name this factor as an "assignment mentality." After the data collection period of this study commenced, some students showed interest in the topic of AIDS. I tried to propose that this topic, together with those raised in the earlier group presentation process, could be developed into topics of their "Independent Enquiry Study"<sup>6</sup> (hereafter referred to as "IES"), the individual project required by the LS curriculum as a HKDSE assessment item. I expected that the linkage with IES would lead to greater motivation for students to initiate related learning activities. Finally, in the discussion on IES, none of these topics was selected. Students preferred topics such as cigarette smoking and e-sports which they found themselves more closely related to and familiar with. Gathering sufficient information was another main factor that affected their choice (Field Notes, October 12 & 13, 2017). Their responses in the discussion on IES topics reflected that they were concerned about the interest and the feasibility of IES as a personal assignment. They seemed to show reluctance to connect this assignment with their other lessons in LS as I

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<sup>6</sup> The "Independent Enquiry Study" (IES) is "a self-directed learning experience in which the student takes up the major responsibility for learning." Students "choose their title, the scope, the methods of their investigative study, and the ways of presenting the findings and products of the study" (CDC & HKEAA, 2014, p. 57).



suggested. The arrangement of learning activities during LS lessons for facilitating their work in IES did not appear to be a significant concern for them.

The above episode, regarding the effort in achieving the objective of democratization in the pedagogy, illustrated the possible influence of the “assignment mentality” of students (reflection note, October 14, 2018). They tended to consider all learning activities as tasks assigned by the teacher, so that all they needed to do was to finish these assignments to fulfill the teacher’s requirements or at least to avoid punishment. This mentality could weaken their readiness to take up the full right and responsibility in directing the learning process by their own will or consensus.

### *5.1.2 Unmasking Power Structures*

Raising students’ awareness of the power structures behind social issues was a main goal of the pedagogy that I adopted in LS teaching. Without sufficient dialogical interactions, however, such pedagogy could have been reduced to didacticism or even “banking” (Freire, 1970) (see the analysis in Section 5.2.1.2.). The rigorous application of CP fueled by dialogue better ensured the genuine effect of students’ conscientization. For instance, there was an episode in which I dialogued with students about the textbook topic of “health information”:

I raised some examples of the political stances of different media to set a background for discussion. Greg responded, “Are there any really objective media or sources of information then?” I replied, “I would say ‘no’. That’s why we need to obtain information from different sources before we make any judgment.” To provide a codification that led to the “health information” topic, I played to them a series of TV advertisements that could be found online on the subject of Herpes Zoster that they often saw on TV during that

couple of months and asked them to guess the sponsor of the advertisements. As expected, many students guessed they were produced by the government or some public health organizations. After a close look at the logo of the sponsor shown at the end of the advertisements, we used the classroom computer to search for information about the sponsoring organization together. More than half of the class, by my observation, showed their surprise about the commercial background of the advertisements' sponsor and this discovery became a new insight for them. (Field Note, October 16, 2017)

This awareness on the commercial interests behind public health issues was further manifested in a later discussion in other issues related to health information:

I tried to elaborate some points from the article on “semen as an antidepressant.” I suggested that there would be some problems brought about by this discourse and asked the class what they thought the problems were. Warren was among the few who had read the article. He said that might involve some monetary interests, but he found it difficult to explain further. Lincoln said some corporations might use semen to manufacture products for making profits. I said that was a creative idea that I had never thought of. (Field Note, November 2, 2017)

The original intention of using this article was to raise the feminist concern on the possible motive of avoiding the use of condoms brought about by this discussion. This feminist concern on males' exploitation of females' interests was not a familiar line of thought adopted by students. It was expected that they needed the teacher's guidance to enter any serious discussion of such sex-related issues. However, it was out of my expectation that students managed to use their prior knowledge on commercial interests discussed in previous topics to interpret the issue.

This could be understood as a manifestation of their critical view developed by CP. Such a critical view was manifested again in another issue discussed subsequently in the same lesson:

[W]e went back to the textbook question on abuse of antibiotics in China. I asked what they thought are the causes of the abuse. Some said it was due to an abundance of germs in China. Evan said it was due to money but he found it difficult to explain further. After some guidance from me, at least half of the student participants in the class managed to voice the cause verbally: “It is due to the economic interest.” (“Whose economic interest?” I asked.) “Doctors in China.” “Drug corporations.” (Field Note, November 2, 2017)

As shown in this case, students in the class were still not proficient in articulating the critical viewpoints with more precise vocabulary, such as “economic interest,” “commercial interest” or “vested interest.” In spite of this, their consciousness for unmasking the commercial interests behind public health affairs was budding under the dialogical interaction in CP, as illustrated in the above scene where at least half of the class could point out commercial factors with the teacher’s guidance.

Increasing awareness on the unfavorable situations of marginalized groups was another aim of applying CP. Due to the class dialogue about an incident that broke out on October 8, 2017, in which a middle-aged man committed suicide after killing his chronically ill mother, I thought of and mentioned the Hong Kong movie *Mad World* (《一念無明》). Some students also showed interest in the movie. I therefore arranged several online clips from the movie to be played in the class. The movie was about a middle-aged man who suffered from bipolar disorder. This main character had undergone serious family misfortunes, such as losing his job, and he and his fiancée were living with his father in a sub-divided flat of poor conditions. All

their adversities were closely related to his mental illness. I used the movie storyline as codification, with a note sheet given to each student that listed out different possible factors to initiate a dialogue. The following Field Note recorded only the significant fragments of the dialogue:

Me: "What are the factors behind the difficulties faced by the main character and his father in the movie?"

*Personal lifestyle and life orientation?*

Some<sup>7</sup>: "He doesn't have any direction."

Me: "He does. He wants to find a job."

Fred: "He can't find one."

Some: "His friend offers him a job."

Me: "But he doesn't want a freelance job. He'd like a formal one and fails to find one."

...

*Economic condition?*

Some: "Of course! ... [If he had a better economic condition,] at least the living environment can be improved."

Me: "What good would a better living environment do to him?"

Greg, "It's not so easy to get mad in a better living environment."

...

*Government policies and governing orientation?*

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<sup>7</sup> 'Some' denotes that at least two students spoke out at almost the same time, expressing similar viewpoints or contents.

Three raised hands for, and three against the effect of government factors on the main character's situation.

Greg: "The government should offer him a public housing flat."

Me: "Why should the government offer that?"

Louie: "Because he needs more space."

Me: "Why does he need more space? ...Because he's got..."

Some: (more than half of the class): "Mental illness."

Louie: "Mental patients need more space to get recovered."

(Field Note, October 19, 2017)

I tried to draw students' attention to the economic and political factors, such as wealth disparity and failure of government policies, behind personal health problems in the above dialogue. At first two to three students still blamed the main character's personal weaknesses. Through the on-going dialogue on some fragmented ideas from the class, more than half of the students became aware that the living environment was a crucial cause behind the main character's mental health condition, and his living environment was greatly determined by economic resources and the government housing policy. Students finally related the main character's situation to people's economic needs and the role of government.

It should be noted that the "unmasking" process was mainly dominated by the teacher. For instance, the classroom discussions greatly depended on reading and video materials provided by the teacher. As mentioned in the discussion on "democratization", students were not assertive enough to take charge of the learning process. Their limited information skills also weakened their motivation and effectiveness in handling the "unmasking" process. Lastly,

since the teaching schedule was tight due to curricular demands, there was not sufficient time for students to search for information and construct critical views by themselves.

### *5.1.3 Empowerment of Marginalized Groups*

Through CP, there was a relatively active learning process in which students put forward the issues that interested them. Through problem posing, researching, dialogue and some experiential learning activities or actions, students came face-to-face with the issues and developed new insights. In this study, the empowerment achieved through CP was manifested mainly by the connections built between students and the marginalized groups, which were revealed in public health issues. Such connections had the potential to further develop students' critical viewpoints and actions in support of these marginalized groups.

At the early stage of the research period, students raised the issues of mental illness and AIDS. Throughout the course of exploration, they learnt more and more about the situations of people living with mental illness and PLHIV (or AIDS patients). Finally, under the arrangement of some experiential learning activities, they had opportunities to encounter them in person.

There was an on-campus “human library” sharing with the whole form (altogether four Secondary 5 classes) by people living with mental illness (some still on medication). In the small-group sharing part of the activity, the class formed their own circle and talked with a female patient in her thirties who had a history of depression from her secondary school years. In the session, Chandler, Greg, Lincoln, Jerry, and Warren dared to break their silence and asked the lady some questions, though the questions were mostly short and factual ones (Field Note, October 20, 2017). After school on that day, in the WhatsApp group of the class with me,

I invited the class to share some reflections or feelings about the “human library” session. Four students joined the dialogue:

Patrick: “Previously I thought mentally ill people were dangerous ones who behaved in weird ways. Through the experience I know that I was mistaken.”

Jerry: “I learned some knowledge about mental illness in this LS talk. The experience and [life] processes of some ex-mental patients. Also learned that mental patients need concern by more people. For example, giving them some support and aid. As long as people join with each other, there won’t be more mental patients in this society.”

Chandler: “Pity that it can only be a utopia.”

Me: “A perfect utopia may not be achievable, but we can go towards that direction!”

Chandler: “Agree.”

Lincoln: “Only today that I know mental patients cannot be identified by appearance, if they don’t tell, really nothing different from normal people.”

(Field Note, October 20, 2017)

It was surprising that Patrick, who had been passive in LS lessons and academically weak with failing scores in LS assignments and examinations, was the first one to respond. By observing his performance in other experiential learning activities in this module, I found that his interest in learning seemed to have been activated, though this interest was not equally reflected in his written works. Above all, students who spoke up in the “human library” sharing and the WhatsApp dialogue all manifested a common positive change in attitude towards people living with mental illness. In particular, the reflection shared by Jerry showed empathy and transformative motivation for their situation.

Compared to their previous attitude on people living with mental illness, some students' initial views about PLHIV were even more seriously biased, as shown in their notes on their own perception and knowledge about PLHIV (Table 7). They could not properly distinguish PLHIV from AIDS patients and considered AIDS as an easily transmitted disease such that all PLHIV were perceived as dangerous or even untouchable, weird ones who caused trouble to people around them.

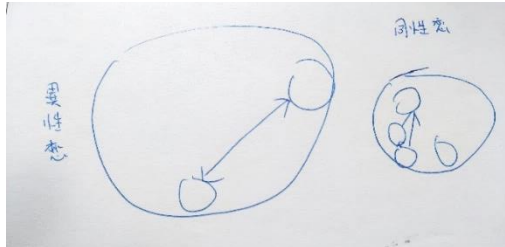
Table 7: *Students' Perception and Knowledge about PLHIV Before and After Visiting AIDS Concern*<sup>8</sup>

Student	Gender	Initial perception and knowledge about PLHIV <sup>9</sup>	New perception and knowledge about PLHIV after visiting AIDS Concern (in words or diagrams)
Chandler	Male	A kind of venereal disease, not easily transmitted; fatal, because of the gradual decline of immunity.	Normal sex intercourses do not lead to AIDS infection.
Chelsea	Female	Easy to transmit.	PLHIV can be even healthier than those without AIDS.
Fred	Male	Untouchable, horrible.	AIDS patients will not die easily if they accept treatment. They are the same as normal people, for example, they are not extraordinarily thin.
Greg	Male	Living a hard life; infected through sex and blood.	Patients are same as normal people, leading a normal life, without pain.

<sup>8</sup> In order to retain the original state of the data, all students' notes were translated literally, though some sentences or expressions appear to be illogical or ungrammatical. Out of the 14 participants, only 10 completed note sheets were collected. James and Louie were absent on the day of visit. Quincy and Lincoln failed to submit it after two days' grace period. Absence from school and failure in submitting assignments were frequent in this class.

<sup>9</sup> Although some students seemed to mix up the perception about PLHIV with that about AIDS, all their opinions were relevant in evaluating their conscientization and thus worth archiving.



Landon	Male	Easy to transmit; with lumps on the body; infected from sex intercourse; vulnerable to discrimination.	It turns out that AIDS is more probably infected through man-man [sex]. AIDS can be controlled. Patients appear not different from normal people.
Nicole	Female	Can infect others, but not through saliva; impossible to recover; causing troubles to people around.	 <p>(This diagram seems to reflect the one drawn by Winky, a former student of the school who was a part-time assistant of AIDS Concern, in her visit to the class, explaining the cause of the apparently greater frequency of HIV infection in the gay community.)</p>
Patrick	Male	Dangerous.	Have learnt more about AIDS. Have learnt more about things.
Jerry	Male	Gay men; with weird acts and clothing.	[Have] learnt about knowledge, concepts and some influences about AIDS, for example, a HIV-infected can have a relationship with a female friend, but have sex with a male friend.
Warren	Male	Not different from normal people; don't have blood contact [with them]; need to take medicine frequently?	AIDS people are not much different from normal people, provided that they have regular medication, so that both can live together without any problem.
Evan	Male	Danger.	Don't discriminate against people with AIDS; not dangerous any more.

(Students' Notes, November 24 & 29, 2017)

After some classroom dialogue and, most importantly, a visit to the non-governmental organization, AIDS Concern, in which they had a dialogue with a PLHIV, most students in the class acquired a new understanding of the situation of PLHIV. Before the dialogue, students

considered PLHIV as “abnormal” people who were dangerous and weird. The dialogic experience helped students understand that PLHIV could live a “normal” life as others in society without producing any hazard to other people. Individual students like Jerry and Warren might still have some misunderstanding in the probability of HIV infection and the sex life of the gay or LGBT community (Students’ notes, November 29, 2017; Field Note, November 29, 2017). Most students in the class showed more accurate understanding and accepting attitudes towards PLHIV. Among them, Greg and Patrick manifested more explicit conscientization by expressing their intention to share the new insights with their family or friends (Field Note, November 27, 2017).

The whole pedagogic processes on the topics of mental illness and AIDS, fueled by dialogue, enhanced students’ empathetic understanding of the life situations of marginalized groups. These processes not only reduced their prejudice against the underprivileged, but also cultivated some notions of transformative actions against the problematic status quo. While widening their own horizons by more active participation in the learning process, and by entering the real scenes of social issues through field studies or meeting people involved in the issues, students themselves were empowered in a way that gave them greater motivation to take one step forward to discover new knowledge and insights, such as talking with people living with mental illness, and to influence other people by what they had experienced and learnt, such as giving family and friends a more appropriate understanding on AIDS and PLHIV. Due to the examination-oriented curricular requirements and thereafter a tight teaching schedule, there was very limited room for the teacher to involve students in the arrangement of learning activities. For example, the human library and visit as pedagogic activities were mainly organized by the teacher and could be regarded as spoon-feeding by the teacher to students. This spoon-feeding pedagogy, if conducted continually, may be considered a form of

“banking” which undermines students’ initiative to take charge of their own learning, and weakens the strength of CP in achieving democratization of learning.

#### *5.1.4 Promoting Social Agency*

The rationale of CP is to bring about conscientization through which learners not only acquire critical insights into the reality, but also develop greater initiative and capacity to transform the social reality. This is what it means to promote social agency by CP. It had been a challenging task to motivate the researched class act on any social issue, as students’ initial social agency was generally weak. This was shown in the data of the first questionnaire survey: eight respondents out of 12 stated that they did not have any experience of sociopolitical participation and two simply left the question blank (Questionnaire 1, October 9, 2017). As expected, through the practice of CP in the module, students’ civic engagement and social agency appeared to be fostered through the learning process in public health issues:

Students were quite ready to sign the petition, without much hesitation, requesting for more government aids for caregivers. Because of the growing conscientization? Due to the teacher's pressure? To show support to the teacher?

(Field Note, October 23, 2017)

However, I should be vigilant against the possibility of faux learning. Students' interest in mental illness was probably real. However, their supportive attitude and action towards mental patients and caregivers may be partly due to pressure from the teacher, peers and learning setting.

(Field Note, October 29, 2017)

I questioned in the Field Note about the motives behind students' action of signing the petition because there was not much time for dialogue in the lesson about the action of the petition itself before the students circulated the signing form. There was a possibility of "faux learning" (Shor, 1996, p. 51) in which students played with the unauthentic or even manipulative discourse that they thought would help them get by in the classroom or school setting. To further explore the motives behind students' actions, I tried to put forward probing questions to students on subsequent occasions:

In supplement to the questionnaire distributed yesterday, I asked them whether they felt the pressure from me when they signed the petition in support of the caregivers. Warren said, "Really not any." Five to six others voiced out with similar wordings that they had felt no pressure when signing.

(Field Note, November 22, 2017)

While most of the students had finished reading the webpages and doing the registration [as organ donors] (if willing), I asked whether anyone had signed the petition about sexual assaults<sup>10</sup> that I shared yesterday. Only Chandler raised his hand. I thanked him for the support and asked why most of them were willing to sign the petition about caregivers some weeks ago. No one answered promptly. I tried to suggest some possibilities: Teacher's pressure? Convenient chance when a form was placed in front of you? After

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<sup>10</sup> This was a petition initiated by Vera Lui and 70 other Elite Athletes in December 2017, urging the public and the government to face up to the problem of sexual assaults on athletes. The website of the petition is as follows: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1yvu97AhYv9\\_wCq7Fj0pwkC51gvb8F4uXzAX2R5ByREo/viewform?edit\\_requested=true](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1yvu97AhYv9_wCq7Fj0pwkC51gvb8F4uXzAX2R5ByREo/viewform?edit_requested=true)

some time, Lincoln said that it was probably due to the latter reason, as most of them were lazy and resistant to reading long paragraphs.

(Field Note, December 5, 2017)

Another similar outcome occurred when I arranged the class to go to the computer room to browse the government website on organ donation and encouraged them to register as a donor according to their own will. On the worksheet in that lesson, five students revealed to me that they had decided to register as organ donors.

Compared to the above relatively laborious process of encouraging students' actions on various social issues, the initiative concerning the Student Union's school affair consultation went more smoothly (Field Note, November 22, 2017). After going through the topics on mental illness, caregivers, organ donation, and so on, I intended to add some momentum to students' social agency by revisiting more daily-life-related issues they had raised earlier. As the Student Union's school affair consultation was approaching in late November, I reminded the class that they had expressed the need of increasing the number of water dispensers on campus in September. I suggested that they could voice this idea in the consultation where all the students, teachers, and the principal would be present, and some concrete changes could be made. At first, most of them agreed with the need, but no one promised to speak up. The day after, I shared with the class a news video clip about the three young Occupy Movement leaders who protested against the abusive treatment experienced in prison. I asked whether their appeals were reasonable. Most in the class expressed that they agreed with their stance. I tried to take the young leaders' example to encourage them to take the floor in the consultation. Although there was still no volunteer to speak up for the water dispenser issue, Lincoln raised

another complaint on the school management about the quality of the student photo-taking service in September. Many classmates echoed his opinion.

Students' initiative for action continued to grow (Field Note, November 23, 2017). Lincoln finally took up the role to voice the problem about the photo-taking service. Chandler said he could be the one to raise the issue about water dispensers if needed. Others, including Patrick and Warren, mentioned additional problems like the damage to the classroom door and some cubicle doors of male toilets that had not been fixed for a long time, and Lincoln said he could talk about that too. He asked me about the appropriate wordings for raising the issues in the consultation assembly because he seldom spoke in front of a large audience about a formal issue. I gave him some suggestions and other students joined the discussion in the class. Lincoln seriously jotted the script for his statement and questions. Finally, Lincoln, as planned, took the floor in the consultation assembly in front of the whole-school audience and the event marked a milestone of his sociopolitical experience.

Lincoln's short speech about the unsatisfactory quality of the photo-taking service in September won a big applause from the audience. It may have been due to an agreement among many schoolmates or some funny wordings that he used. One of the vice-principals on stage, in response, told him to give details about the issue to the SU committee so that the school management could follow up. (Field Note, November 24, 2017)

As the issue about the deficiency of water dispensers had already been raised by the Student Union committee members in the first part of the consultation, Chandler did not speak up in the floor question part.

In Lincoln's response to the second questionnaire of the study, some possible connection could be found between the learning experience in LS lessons and his motivation to express an opinion on school affairs. In the questionnaire, he admitted that the LS lessons in this school year (from September until he responded to the questionnaire in November) inspired him with the new idea of "caring more about the issues/affairs that happen around," and he started feeling interested in social participation in forms of signing petitions and discussions in social media/occasions. Four students had a similar response in the questionnaire (Lincoln and others, Questionnaire 2, November 21, 2017). These data show that the CP in the research period aroused some of the students' attention on issues that happened around them in daily life. This may have become a catalyst for them to take one more step forward to participate in some mild actions in response to daily-life-related issues.

## 5.2 Significant Obstacles and Resources

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the "Paradigm of Four Domains" by Shor (1992) was adopted to analyze the resources and obstacles for conscientization in applying CP. This paradigm categorizes the main factors affecting the effective implementation of CP into four domains: student obstacles, student resources, teacher obstacles, and teacher resources. Initially, a list of themes was set for the four domains with reference to the factors in the paradigm provided by Shor and my exploratory study done before this research. During the analysis, new themes were generated in a data-driven approach (Table 5) while some closely related themes were integrated based on similarity relations. To make discussions more focused, significant factors have been selected from these themes and are to be elaborated in this section (see Appendix H). These factors were selected through the following considerations:

1. Their general influence on the whole impact of CP practice in this study as I have assessed with reference to the data.

2. Their impact exhibited on individual participants or in specific situations during the CP practice.
3. Their frequencies of occurrence as shown in the data (see Appendix I).

As discussed in Section 3.2.1, this study was a qualitative research that explored the possibilities of applying CP in the LS curriculum, focusing on processes and descriptions instead of numbers. Some factors have not been directly selected for discussion in this section, despite their frequent occurrence as shown in the data. As mentioned above, some of them were integrated with other factors so to provide a more focused discussion. Some of them were undermined by other factors and did not make determining impact in the CP practice. For example, the factor “exposure to regressive ideologies” had a high rate of occurrence in the data. However, these ideologies were liable to be transformed through the experiential learning activities in CP (see the discussions in Sections 5.1.3 and 5.2.3.1). They did not cause much hinderance to CP unless they were related to students’ alienation under authoritarian culture which affected their mentality when participating CP activities. As a result, the factor “exposure to regressive ideologies” was not considered as a significant obstacle. The “alienation under authoritarian culture” has been selected instead. Above all, among the above three considerations in the selection of significant factors, the first and second are to be prioritized and the third one is taken as an additional reference.

### *5.2.1 Teacher Obstacles*

On the teacher’s side, the pressure brought about by the examination-oriented curriculum is one of the most significant obstacles blocking the application of CP in the LS curriculum in Hong Kong. According to the data collected, the “teaching to the test” orientation created considerable restrictions on the available time and feasible pedagogies for LS lessons. This in



turn greatly limited the opportunities for applying CP. The examination-oriented curriculum can also trigger a teacher's didactic mentality which emerges even when teacher is teaching critical issues and viewpoints by means of CP.

#### *5.2.1.1 Teaching to the Test*

Concerning the application of pedagogies, in order to enable students, particularly those who are weak in literary skills, to sit for the DSE examination, teachers need to do a lot of “banking” and drilling in lessons. Students are required to grasp many concepts and much background information (though not fully understood) in each learning unit to answer examination questions. The delivery of curricular contents to students is monitored by prescribed assignments and tests (Berry, 2008; Chang & McLaren, 2018). When teachers try to carry out CP on top of prescribed curricular requirements, they may be under continuous conflicts concerning their role and value. For instance, there was a lesson recorded by a field note, in which I was greatly frustrated:

Went over with the class the chapter summaries that are related to the coming uniform test. Hard to get rid of the pressure of banking under the current assessment format. Read some paragraphs with the class on the story about the deceiving propaganda by the Nestle Group on Third World mothers and babies in 1970s, which caused baby health problems and deaths. Lesson ended just upon the end of the story. Time is always limited for in-depth discussion. (Field Note, October 31, 2017)

As mentioned in another field note, I found that “there were some potential topics worth discussing raised from class dialogue but hadn't been developed in lessons” (Field Note, November 17, 2017). This was mainly due to the teaching schedule prescribed by the annual

scheme of work and lesson planning meetings showing that lesson time for each topic was limited. As a result, no matter whether the topic was raised by critical dialogue or introduced by the teacher, it could not be completely detached from the prescribed arrangement. The example raised above illustrates the situation well. The deceiving propaganda by multinational corporations in developing countries was a significant issue that had frequently caused public health problems in grassroots populations in these countries. However, the topic could only be brought in as supplementary information for the discussion on health information, and introduced for dialogue with students based on my professional judgement. It was not mentioned in the textbook and was not made into a main issue in the curriculum or included in examination questions. Therefore, I could not integrate it into the already long list of mandatory topics and failed to spend enough time for an in-depth discussion on it.

Another example was the discussion on the suspected suicide case of an elderly man that happened in the research period at the building next to the school. The incident drew much attention of the students and was closely related to the issues of care for chronic patients, mental health, and community support. In fact, it had great potential for developing students' transformative actions in caring for their neighborhood. Unfortunately, while inviting students to think of responsive actions to the incident, I needed to talk with them individually on their performance in the previous test; the test results were far from satisfactory, with only two students attaining a passing score (Field Notes, November 13-14, 2017). Without an intensive and conscientious dialogue to engage the class, the outcomes were fragmented or even irrelevant. For example, some students expressed reservations about giving support to the wife of the deceased elder, without any concrete reason. As a result, no consensus could be reached to produce any practicable action.

As shown from the experience of the whole research period, the LS was a “more contextualized and politicized” curriculum (Deng, 2009, p. 58) than a conventional one, which was more closely related to current social and political issues, and one that could be “useful for the cultivation of active citizens” (Leung et al., 2014, p. 286). However, there was a continuous struggle between pursuing students’ conscientization and “teaching to the test” when the teacher tried to apply CP in the current senior secondary school setting.

#### 5.2.1.2 Didacticism

In his “Paradigm of Four Domains,” Shor (1992) put “traditional training,” characterized by “teacher-talk, teacher centered syllabi, unilateral authority, short-answer questions and standardized tests, commercial textbooks, correct usage as the only idiom,” (p. 232) as the first teacher obstacle hindering the empowerment of education and critical thought in the college setting that he faced. In the case of LS teaching in Hong Kong, the influence of traditional training or pedagogic culture remains obvious. According to the official *Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide*, “[a] variety of learning and teaching activities, such as direct instruction, enquiry activities and interactive activities, can be deployed to meet the objectives of individual lessons and the needs of students.” (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p. 93). Yet, direct instruction by teacher-talk in a didactic manner that aims for teaching desirable values and examination answering skills, as discussed in Section 5.2.1.1, seems to dominate in real practice (Berry, 2008; Chang & McLaren, 2018).

In my practice of CP in the data collection period, I found myself occasionally affected by such didacticism due to my concern over the need to aim for the target of conscientization. Instead of using genuine dialogue between students and the teacher to bring about critical consciousness, I sometimes felt anxious about putting forward “critical” issues or perspectives

to direct the dialogue towards a “critical” direction. For example, I requested the students to use the “son killed sick mother” case for their news clipping classwork, hoping that the case would stimulate critical reflection:

Some, including Fred, Patrick, and Warren, asked whether they could choose another piece of news for the classwork. I insisted that they should use the assigned piece. I failed to follow the democratic rule of choosing topics for discussion in critical pedagogy. I thought that the news made a good codification for critical themes. However, I should at least try to discuss with them and explain the reason for my suggestion.

(Field Note, October 9, 2017)

Without being aware of my assumed “all-knowing positionality”, I tended to guide students towards a prescribed destination of critical consciousness along a predetermined path. Prescribed topics for discussion can be adopted in CP practices. Nonetheless, they should not be imposed by the teacher without open and equal dialogues with students. By open and equal dialogues, the teacher could put forward the proposal of the prescribed topic, as well as the related plan of learning, for discussion in the classroom, and to determine with the students whether to adopt the proposal in the class. This could enhance the democratization of learning in the classroom, rather than intensifying the teacher’s domination in the learning process.

Another lesson spoiled by didacticism was one about health information. There were discussions in the textbook about the reliability of various stakeholders who provided health information (Mak & Tam, 2016, p. 79), including the government, business sectors, and health care organizations, etc.:

Recapitulated the textbook framework of stakeholders about health information and added inter-governmental organizations as an additional stakeholder. Tried to introduce the idea that even IGOs sometimes provided fake information. However, too anxious to let the class read the text paragraph on the swine flu scandal of WHO as an example of IGO's fake information. Should have let them think about the reason first, so to know their keenness on discovering the commercial interests behind issues.

(Field Note, November 1, 2017)

Such a didactic attitude, contrary to the original aim of CP for conscientization, is liable to turn a critical dialogue into another form of “banking.” Facing the pressure created by the teacher’s didacticism, students may respond by performing “faux learning” (Shor, 1996, p. 51), as mentioned in Section 5.1.4, in order to please the teacher and get by in the lesson. In the long run, the teacher’s didacticism may build up an authoritarian culture in the classroom and intensify a “culture of silence” among students. The following sections look into these students’ factors in more detail and the interplay between the teacher’s didacticism and the students’ submission to authoritarian culture is discussed specifically in Section 5.2.2.2.

### *5.2.2 Student Obstacles*

In spite of the efforts made by teachers who attempt to transform the mode of students’ learning by CP, there are obstacles that may hinder students’ conscientization through this new mode of learning, and lead to a “culture of silence,” as discussed by Freire and Shor (1987). Under this culture, “students are silent because they no longer expect education to include theory of learning, moments of passion or inspiration or comedy, or even that education will speak to the real conditions of their lives” (p. 122). When these students’ obstacles are juxtaposed with those of the teachers discussed in the previous section, some possible linkages

between them can be found. According to the data collected, when facing the requirement of the examination-oriented curriculum, students' inferiority in literacy skills greatly undermined their expectations for learning, including in CP. This showed that both the teacher's and students' conscientization was hindered by the public examination factor. Students developed an alienated mentality under the authoritarian culture in the Hong Kong schooling context. This authoritarian culture also included such components as didacticism that impeded the teacher's application of CP in the classroom.

#### *5.2.2.1 Weakness in Literacy Skills*

As mentioned in Section 3.2.2, students of the researched school were mainly from low-income communities and families. The literature reveals that students from low-income backgrounds are usually disadvantaged in their development of literacy skills and academic identities (Colyar & Stich, 2011; Roseberry-McKibbin, 2008). In the context of the examination-oriented curriculum in Hong Kong's schooling as shown in this study, the situation becomes more problematic. Mirroring the pressure from the examination-oriented curriculum faced by teachers, on the students' side, such curriculum usually makes the learning process of those who are weaker in literacy skills an experience of low achievement or even failure. The banking and drilling in lessons, which are brought about by the examination-oriented culture, further lowers students' expectation of learning.

Evan was a typical example who was often silenced by the drilling of examination-type exercises. In the whole research period, he became one of the most active speakers in class dialogue. However, his morale in learning declined significantly whenever he was asked to write paragraphs in class or as home assignments, even when the class work or assignments were the extension of some critical class dialogue. A field note recorded his typical response:

Followed up the textbook exercise question on antibiotic abuse in China, mainly dealing with the writing skill issues individually.

Evan expressed that he was not willing to write. He said it would be better for him to write by computer than by hand. I promised to contact the related teacher and explore the possibility of such arrangement for him in tests and exams. (Field Note, November 8, 2017)

Evan's request was finally turned down as the teacher in charge of the Special Educational Needs Committee of the school asserted that no special arrangement could be made unless there was strong evidence that Evan had special difficulty in writing. Actually, even Evan himself knew well that his own problem was the lack of motivation in writing rather than special difficulty. Therefore, his request was bound to be rejected. By the end of the research period, I finally obtained a clearer idea on his low motivation to write in LS lessons:

I took the chance to talk with Evan about his reluctance in writing for LS assignments. I asked whether he encountered the same problem in Chinese Language compositions. He said he could write better in compositions because he could write more freely under the composition topics. However, LS assignments required more accurate answers within limited areas so he found it more difficult. (Field Note, December 18, 2017)

As known by many teachers and students who are involved in or preparing for the LS examination of DSE, the examination favors answers in quite a standardized format of paragraph structure (Lin, 2018). Especially for students with lower competency in writing, it is risky to go beyond this standardized format. To familiarize students with this standardized

format by repeated drilling has become a main task in LS lessons and assignments. The emphasis on writing work unavoidably lowers some students' expectation and motivation in daily school learning and has become an obstacle blocking the pursuit of students' conscientization through applying CP.

Weakness in literacy skills can further hinder the development of students' interest in social issues and make them silent, as they lack the motivation to learn more through assigned or casual reading, even though the issues may be interesting to them. For instance, in the research period, I tried to introduce some interesting issues found on the internet to arouse students' interest in the topic on health information: “semen as antidepressant,” “organ donation before brain death,” “breakfast as a dangerous meal,” and so on. I mentioned them in the lesson and shared links of related online articles in the WhatsApp group (Field Note, November 2, 2017). However, it turned out that only three students could give responses on the issues raised by these articles. It showed that few students were motivated to read the articles. As a result, my attempts to use these issues to pose problems about health information for pursuing students' conscientization failed.

#### *5.2.2.2 Alienation under Authoritarian Culture*

Besides students' weakness in literacy skills, there were also regressive ideologies that might impede their imagination and development of critical consciousness. The concept of “exposure to regressive ideologies” is found in the “Paradigm of Four Domains” by Shor (1992) as one of the student obstacles. Among the examples of “regressive ideologies” raised by Shor, there is “authority dependence” which means the inclination for “subordinates” to put forward the “tell us what to do” requests to those with authority (p. 219). In the Hong Kong schooling context, the a “tell us what to do” mentality, accompanied by an authoritarian culture in a



broader sense that emphasizes discipline, obedience, and conformity, has long been upheld by the management of most local schools and internalized by most students (Walker, 2004). This can lead to another obstacle that hinders the pursuit of students' conscientization in applying CP.

As discussed in Section 5.1, I found the possible influence of an “assignment mentality” (Reflection Note, October 14, 2018) that weakened students' readiness to take up the full right and responsibility in directing the learning process by their own will or consensus under CP. This “assignment mentality” could undermine students' potential passion in critical learning. Once students considered a lesson or learning task as an assignment, they would not completely focus on the knowledge and insights that they could get from it. They became inclined to finish the tasks assigned by the teacher and to escape from the anxiety brought about by possible punishments. As a result, students could lose interest, curiosity, passion, and conscientiousness in the learning process. This mentality might originate from the authoritarian culture in the Hong Kong schooling setting, particularly if teachers in their past school life failed to avoid the tone of didacticism. Under the authoritarian culture, CP could be considered by some students as just another new official requirement prescribed by the teacher. They tended to speculate on the teacher's expectations and show some “critical” viewpoints in their class work or assignments without in-depth reflection. For example, in the discussion on the "son killed sick mother" case mentioned in Section 5.1.2, when I asked students to do a news clipping exercise, requesting their suggestions on stakeholders that could have prevented the tragedy, they tended to finish the task as soon as possible by putting forward answers like "government" and "social workers" who were commonly criticized in many social issues. They thought it was “critical” enough to point out the dereliction of government or the increasing demand for social

workers (Field Note, October 14, 2017). Hence, their “assignment mentality” might have greatly limited the possibility that could have been generated by CP.

CP aims to develop a new mode of learning that goes beyond textbooks and addresses real life situations by transformative actions. However, where the authoritarian culture is influential, it can discourage students’ pursuit of this new mode of learning. Sometimes, even when the teacher shows them the possibility of a transformative action, students may not consider it as genuinely achievable. For example, in the episode of the Student Union’s school affair consultation mentioned in Section 5.1.4, only Lincoln stepped forward to voice his opinion about the photo-taking service in the consultation. There were probably others who were hindered by the authoritarian culture and not willing to speak up. Jerry offered an example:

Apart from the photo issue, I said no one had mentioned the need for fixing the classroom door, although another student from S5 had asked about the cubicle doors of male toilets. Jerry and some students said the teacher in charge of school facilities would probably answer that the students who did not care about facilities properly were to be blamed (instead of the school management). (Field Note, November 24, 2017)

The potential effects of authoritarian culture became more apparent when I analyzed their responses in the last questionnaire. While agreeing to the statement “I think it is of no use for students to attempt to influence school policies or measures by any speech or action,” some students showed their helplessness when facing the authority of the school management:

I think they [the school management] just listen and will do nothing. (Fred, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017)

Don't know whether the school [will] really improve policies or measures. (Nicole, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017)

Have asked them [the school management] to fix facilities and they didn't do it. (Jerry, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017)

I had a dialogue with the class concerning the issue that the government “encouraged” the speech by Li Fei, Deputy Secretary General of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, to be broadcast live on November 2017 in local secondary schools, and finally some 50 schools responded by doing the broadcasting as suggested by the Education Bureau (hereinafter referred to as “EDB”) of the HKSAR Government. I asked the class to express their thoughts on it:

Me: If you were forced to watch the speech by Li Fei (Deputy Secretary General of the National People's Congress Standing Committee) as in some other schools, what would you do?

Greg: I'd go away and refuse to watch.

Me: Why wouldn't you just stand up and tell the school management (before the event), "I don't want it."

Fred: The school would still do it.

Me: The school would still do it, but you could still tell the management that you objected such arrangement.

Fred: It's useless when I'm the only one who object.

(Field Note, December 4, 2017)

The words by Greg and Fred showed that some students might have the will to resist undesirable measures imposed by the school management. However, being immersed in the authoritarian culture for years, they were likely to be aware of the power difference between individuals and structures of power. Keeping silent was sometimes a way to avoid failure and risk in resisting such power difference.

### *5.2.3 Student Resources*

Despite the various obstacles that constrain students' conscientization through CP, this study has also found some resources that can be utilized to enhance students' critical learning. When contrasted with the elaborations above, these resources were found to be the key conditions that allow students to overcome the obstacles that lie in their way to attain conscientization through CP. Students' interest in experiential learning represented their urge for a more vivid mode of learning that exceeded the scope of the examination-oriented curriculum. Students' willingness for transformative practice marked their great eagerness to make change to their daily life. Such eagerness had the potential to make a breakthrough against the authoritarian culture that suppressed their pursuit for conscientization. Below I elaborate on these facilitating factors.

#### *5.2.3.1 Developing Interest in Experiential Learning*

While regressive ideologies can wear down the connections between individuals and their community, opportunities can be provided for students to re-establish these connections through experiential learning. Experiential learning is the type of active pedagogies that emphasize the integration of concrete experience with abstract conceptualization (Kolb, 1984; Scogin et al., 2017). For instance, students' knowledge in certain social issues and empathy with specific disadvantaged groups can be fostered by providing related concrete experience.

Field studies or sharing sessions by members of disadvantaged groups can be arranged for students to have firsthand encounters with places and people involved in specific social issues, so that they can have direct dialogue on these issues and develop their own attitudes and viewpoints. Such experience helps to overcome cultures of silence and indifference. This can be illustrated by students' responses to the "human library" sharing by people with mental illness. For example, Jerry selected this activity as the most impressive event in the school term's LS lessons up to late November 2017 (Jerry, Questionnaire 2, November 21, 2017). Landon commented the "human library" sharing as a "very genuine" experience in which students "can contact ex-mental patients at a close distance" (Landon, Questionnaire 2, November 21, 2017). According to the data collected in this study, experiential learning activities including "human library" sharing and visits to non-governmental organizations (see Sections 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 for more details) provided great opportunities for students to develop empathetic understandings about the real situations of disadvantaged groups, and they became more ready to make connections with them.

After all, a more diversified school learning life, involving more active participation and diversified possibilities in the learning process, contrary to passive reception in the banking of curricular materials and the monotonous drilling in examination questions, can help students become more engaged (Martin & Furr, 2010). Students were particularly interested in learning activities that involved concrete experience, such as their particular interests in Physical Education (PE) lessons in which they could learn by active motions and vivid interactions among learners, instead of passive listening and writing in prescribed patterns.

In the final questionnaire, six student respondents out of 12 pointed out that more diversified lessons would make them more involved in school learning life. Fred and Patrick

asked for more PE lessons. Patrick stated he would like to have PE lessons for the whole day. Landon would like to have PE as one of the DSE elective subjects in the school. Fred and Greg requested more diversified activities either within or outside the formal curriculum. Chelsea wanted to have more entertaining lessons. Evan hoped that the school could implement more comprehensive e-teaching. (Data of Question 4, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017). More diversified school learning life, including rich experiential learning activities, would raise their expectation for school life and make them more ready to learn in the new mode of CP which required more active participation in learning.

#### *5.2.3.2 Willingness for Transformative Practice*

Regardless of the influence of the authoritarian culture, students demonstrated great eagerness for change and autonomy in their daily life. It was interesting to find a common thought among the students:

One of the factors that he [Greg] raised to bring about more students' involvement in school learning life was to allow students to keep their mobile phones during school hours (instead of handing in them to be kept by the school). I was curious about the idea, wondering why most in the class were eager for this right. Greg said that many other schools allowed that, and he did not understand why it could not be allowed in this school. This was one of the reasons why students did not have much sense of belonging to the school. At that time, Fred was in the classroom too and he was in agreement with Greg. (Field Note, December 18, 2017)

As revealed by the data of the final questionnaire, eight out of the 12 respondents in the class shared the same thought that the school should allow students to keep their mobile phones

during school hours. They believed that students would be more involved in school learning life, even though there might still be rules prohibiting the use of mobile phones in lessons (Data of Question 4, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017). In fact, all 12 student respondents suggested that the modification of certain school regulations would make them more involved in school learning life. In addition to the mobile phone regulation, they requested the cancellation of examinations, holiday homework, school uniform, and the “757 rule”<sup>11</sup> of the school, and they proposed the change of school time. They tried to express that certain undesirable restrictions hindered their wholehearted participation in school life.

Although students have a great aspiration for change, as discussed in section 5.2.2.2, under the authoritarian culture in Hong Kong schooling, students often tend to assume failure before taking any transformative action and may therefore be restricted to act. If CP is to be a learning process for enhancing students’ social agency, this problem for transformative action must be tackled.

In this study, there were episodes when the silent and authoritarian cultures were occasionally overcome. The Student Union’s school affair consultation was doubtless the most remarkable one. Apparently, the relevance of the issues to students’ immediate interest was the crucial factor that aroused their concern in this event. The episode reveals that students’ motivation in participating in CP activities and further actions can be strengthened if they are provided with some opportunities for transformative practice in issues closely related to their daily life. Some students’ responses in the last questionnaire of the study revealed this attitude:

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<sup>11</sup> The “757 rule” of the school is a rule which demands that students arrive at school before 07:57 in the morning, although the actual school time begins at 8:00. Students who arrive at a time between 7:57 and 8:00 are not counted as latecomers, but are put on record and will be punished if they break the rule again.

If some issues which are more closely related to myself arise, I would be more involved in participating in social and public affairs. (Greg, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017)

If [some issues] happen beside me, I would be more involved in participating in social and public affairs. (Landon, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017)

While the immediacy of issues is critical, the platform for action also matters. At the end of the research, in the final questionnaire, four out of 12 student respondents gave suggestions on providing more platforms and opportunities that would enhance their involvement in participating in school management affairs:

If the Student Union Council [the present monitoring agency of the Student Union] is dissolved and all people can monitor the Student Union Committee, I would be more involved in participating in school management. (Chandler, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017)

If there are more school affair consultations to give the management greater pressure, I would be more involved in participating in school management. (Fred and Greg, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017)

If there is a “democracy wall,” I would be more involved in participating in school management. (Greg, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017)

If there is electronic questionnaire, I would be more involved in participating in school management. (Evan, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017)



Just as Lincoln who found his suitable platform in the consultation, some students were willing to express their own thoughts and take part in some transformative actions when provided with some accessible and effective platforms.

#### *5.2.4 Teacher Resources*

The idea about student resources as the key conditions for overcoming students' obstacles in the process of conscientization applies to teachers' resources and obstacles in a similar fashion. In this study, teachers' mentalities of "teaching to the test" and didacticism were found to be students' main obstacles undermining the possibility of pursuing conscientization. Data collected in this study showed that to break through the obstacle of the "teaching to the test" mentality, teachers could explore taboo issues with students using CP to go beyond the scope of the examination-oriented curriculum into an area of students' interest. To overcome the obstacle of didacticism, teachers could utilize their influential relationship with students and exert their willingness and proficiency to support transformative practice through CP while addressing the specific problems that students faced.

##### *5.2.4.1 Taboo Breaking*

As some issues in the "Public Health" module were distant from students due to the requirement of specialized, technical background knowledge, the learning in the module depends much on students' curiosity as a source of momentum. From the experience of teaching in the data collection period, taboo topics seemed to arouse great curiosity of the students and thus boosted their motivation towards learning. Taboo topics mean those that may be forbidden or de-emphasized due to teachers' perceptions or beliefs concerning the sensitivity of the topics (Evans et al., 2000). In Hong Kong, taboo topics may include the issues

of mental illness, AIDS, and sexual minorities that have long been neglected or considered as morally sensitive in the local culture. For example, Greg showed his agreement in the questionnaire by stating: “Dialoging on AIDS and homosexuality with teachers and classmates in class has given me a new understanding of these topics.” He elaborated: “We could talk on issues that we seldom talked about” (Greg, Questionnaire 3, December 18, 2017). Exploring issues that were previously “seldom talked about” could sometimes make lowly motivated students active in learning again. For instance, in a class dialogue on PLHIV and sexual minorities, the atmosphere appeared to be freer and more comfortable. This atmosphere had encouraged not only Lincoln, Evan, Warren, Greg, and Jerry who often actively participated in LS lessons, but also Quincy who moved away from her detached mode to become more involved in class:

Me: What do you think PLHIV need most from the society and us?

Someone said money. I responded that provided the government could subsidize the necessary medication, money might not be the most remarkable need.

Quincy: No discrimination—just like Greg who said, "I don't object but don't agree." (She said that in a friendly and smiling manner.)

Me: I think he is only thinking and tuning up his thoughts.

Quincy’s participation surprised me. She showed tiredness at first in this lesson. Yesterday she told me and Winky that she did not have much feeling about the issue. After all, she was thinking and learning.

(Field Note, November 29, 2017)

In light of the silent and authoritarian cultures that tend to suppress students’ motivation for learning, teachers who are willing to explore taboo topics with students can help facilitate

their curiosity and turn it into moments of conscientization. Evans et al. (2000) asserted that explorations of taboo topics was “an important exercise of free expression” that provided students with “powerful lessons on living in a democratic society” (p. 301). The data in this section show that when I was willing to discuss taboo topics, students could readily observe an opportunity to express freely on topics that they seldom talked about. This would help to release the pressure of the authoritarian culture on students and thus enhance their expectation and participation in CP activities.

#### *5.2.4.2 Influential Relationship with Students*

As for any kind of pedagogy, the teacher-student relationship that produced a positive influence on students’ engagement in school life and learning was found to facilitate the application of CP. This is particularly important when the teacher tried to connect CP with students’ personal issues. Claessens et al. (2017) pointed out that a teacher’s positive relationships and interactions with students usually had their influence extended to areas beyond the classroom. Moreover, teachers were found to have a significant impact on students’ belief systems and psychological engagement at school (Jiang et al, 2018). These research findings echo the data collected in this study. For example, there was an incident in which a personal issue between students was related to some critical values:

In the evening there was a quarrel in the WhatsApp group between Lincoln and Chandler. Lincoln accused that Chandler always bothered him (I wondered how) and said nonconstructive stuff in class. He even insulted him by calling him "buck-toothed dog" in the group. (Chandler was often teased in the class due to his appearance.) Chandler unwillingly apologized to Lincoln. In a private dialogue with me, Chandler revealed the fear that Lincoln might beat him if he did not apologize. Finally, in the WhatsApp group,

I showed my disapproval on Lincoln's words and requested respect for one another in the class.

I think that such acts of disrespect or even bullying are opposed to the critical values such as equity and resistance to oppression that CP is promoting.

(Field Note, November 3, 2017)

Shared my views on the quarrel between Chandler and Lincoln. Reminded them with the lesson that we learnt about people with mental illness. Reaffirmed the importance of tolerance, inclusion, acceptance... Some, such as Evan and Greg, said that it's difficult to accept those you found disgusting. I responded that it's a process of learning and growth. Lincoln didn't speak up, but I found from his facial expression that he was quite acceptive to my views.

(Field Note, November 6, 2017)

Due to the friendly teacher-student relationship for months, I was confident that students had trust in my impartiality and would not think I sided with Chandler against Lincoln. Besides, I was also confident that Lincoln understood my good will for his well-being and relationship with classmates. Thus, in dealing with this incident, the influential relationship with students based on mutual trust and understanding enabled me to stop the disrespectful words promptly, and transform the incident into an opportunity for dialogue and reflection on critical values. With the influential relationship, my advice and reminder on tolerance and acceptance were convincing enough to promote improvement for peer relationships and to enhance an inclusive attitude towards marginalized groups.

In other episodes, my influential relationship with the students facilitated more personal dialogue, such as the informal talk at a restaurant after the AIDS Concern visit:

I then turned to the question about school life. I asked whether any aspect of school life interested them besides lessons. Warren said there was nothing that he was interested to join and take part. Evan said that after school they either played online games or went to bed. There were no other things that they found interesting other than these two things. I asked whether the girls spent their time after school in the same way. They said girls usually hanged around after school. Although slightly different, both boys and girls were not much interested in staying at school and participate school activities after lesson time. (Field Note, November 27, 2017)

Through this casual talk, I learnt more about students' attitude towards school life. They expressed the lack of motivation to be involved in school life. The talk urged me to arrange lessons for dialogue on the school life engagement issue and delve deeper into it through the last questionnaire distributed by the end of the data collection period. In this case, the influential relationship with students allowed me to make more in-depth explorations into students' individual experience and feelings, and further enrich the process of CP.

#### *5.2.4.3 Willingness and Proficiency in Supporting Transformative Practice*

It has been discussed that some students were willing to voice their own thoughts and take part in some transformative actions if they were provided with opportunities for transformative practice in issues closely related to their daily life and a suitable platform for action. In the episode of the Student Union's consultation assembly, the LS classroom of CP seemed to provide this platform for posing the problems in students' daily life and developing their

responsive actions. Lincoln mentioned that on the day before the consultation assembly, he had asked me about the appropriate wordings for raising the issues in the assembly, and I had given him some suggestions while other- students in the class joined the discussion. Lincoln jotted the script for his statement and questions in that lesson (Field Note, November 23, 2017). Finally, he managed to actualize his action with a satisfactory outcome, earning an affirmative response from one of the vice-principals that the school management would follow up on the issue (Field Note, November 24, 2017).

In Section 5.2.2.1, I argued that the weakness in literacy may have hindered the development of students' interest in social issues and turned them silent. Other than the difficulty of exploring the issues through reading, the weakness in literacy may have also led to the difficulty of practicing transformative actions in the process of conscientization. In the above episode, I played a role to strengthen the student's confidence in his upcoming action by helping him to explain the message to be delivered. The episode reveals that teachers' willingness and proficiency to equip students with attitude, knowledge, and skills in sociopolitical participation may be crucial for them to overcome the influence of the silent and authoritarian cultures and take part in transformative actions, heading for conscientization.

### 5.3 Summary

In response to the first research question about the possible manifestations of conscientization achieved through applying CP in the LS curriculum, the research data reveal rich possibilities of conscientization regardless of the relatively weak socio-economic and academic backgrounds of students. With dialogical interactions in CP, students' consciousness for unmasking power structures was budding so that they were aware of the vested interests of dominant groups behind public health issues. The dialogical interactions facilitated by CP

provided a favorable condition for the conscientization of students such that they took greater initiative to delve into the situation of marginalized people and uncover the perspectives neglected by the mainstream. CP also helped to build connections between students and marginalized groups through which students' critical viewpoints and actions in support of these marginalized groups could be developed. Students themselves were empowered in a way that they started to realize the possibility of stepping out of their comfort zone to explore new knowledge and insights, to influence other people by what they had experienced and learnt, and to transform the social reality in their daily life. In this way, their civic engagement and social agency could be enhanced.

With respect to the democratization of learning, students really showed their appreciation for the openness in CP such that their intentions to express opinions and raise issues of interest in the learning process of LS were encouraged. It should be noted that in the case of this study, students did not show a strong sense of leading the learning process by themselves, although they were supposed to have been provided such an opportunity in CP. The entire CP process ended up being mainly dominated by the teacher.

In respect of the second and third research questions about the resources and obstacles that affect students' conscientization and teacher's pursuit of such through CP practices, it was found that the students' and teacher's factors were interrelated. Regarding the obstacles for the application of CP in LS, it was found that the examination-oriented curriculum was an overwhelming obstacle encountered by both the students and me. In order to prepare students to sit for the DSE examination, I could not completely resist the "teaching to the test" principle and abstain from banking and drilling in LS lessons. When carrying out CP on top of prescribed curricular requirements, I experienced a continuous struggle of role and value conflicts. On the

students' side, those who were weak in literacy skills often encounter failure in LS learning. Their morale could decline significantly when facing intensive banking and drilling in LS lessons, although CP may provide exciting learning experience on other occasions.

Moreover, this study identified ideological factors that hindered the application of CP in the LS curriculum. Under the influence of traditional training and pedagogic culture, even determined to conduct CP, I felt affected by didacticism due to the anxiety to aim for the target of conscientization. For students, under the influence of authoritarian culture, CP could be considered by some students as just another new official requirement prescribed by the teacher. They may tend to speculate on the teacher's expectations and show some "critical" viewpoints in their class work or assignments without in-depth reflection. Being immersed in the authoritarian culture for years, even when the teacher showed them the possibilities of autonomy in learning and transformation for social reality through CP, students may not consider them as genuinely achievable. Such mentality might lead to a culture of silence under which students stayed quiet at school due to the lack of expectations in schooling.

While the above-mentioned obstacles restricted the possibility for conscientization, there were resources from students and the teacher through which the application of CP in the LS curriculum was favored. For instance, students' interest in experiential activities, with their eagerness to have a more diversified school learning life, made them ready to learn in the new mode of CP which required more active participation in learning. The data collected in this study also showed the willingness of students to express their own thoughts and participate in transformative actions on issues closely related to their daily life when provided with some accessible and effective platforms. To complement these qualities of students, according to my CP practice in this study, the teacher's willingness and proficiency to equip them with



knowledge and skills in transformative practice were crucial. My willingness to explore taboo issues with students also helped to release the pressure of authoritarian culture on students and catalyze their curiosity to enhance their expectations and participation in CP activities. Furthermore, an influential relationship with students could facilitate the application of CP, particularly when I tried to connect CP with students' personal experience and feelings. All these resources from the teacher assisted students in resisting the influence of silent and authoritarian cultures and making their way for conscientization.

## Chapter 6: Reviewing and Drawing Inferences on the Intervention

### 6.1 Reviewing CP as a Key to the New Paradigm of Civic Education in the Local Context

This action research represents my effort, with more than 24 years' experience of service as a Hong Kong school civic education teacher, to explore the possibility of introducing a new paradigm of civic education for Hong Kong, hoping to overcome the prevailing emphasis on conformity and foster learners' transformative actions, which make changes in social conditions, in sociopolitical issues. In light of a previous study on the needs for civic education in the Post-Umbrella Movement (2014) era (Leung et al., 2017), it is high time for civic education to take on a new paradigm to rebuild youth's hopes and empower them for further sociopolitical participation. The LS curriculum, with its orientation towards critical thinking and learning with real life social issues using an issue-enquiry approach, is expected to provide a suitable vehicle for enculturating a desirable new paradigm of civic education. Using action and reflection in learning and teaching, CP can be applied to capture the full potential of LS to substantiate this new paradigm.

A CP action or experience, as summarized by various scholars and practitioners (Darder et al., 2003; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Johnson & Morris, 2010; Foley et al., 2015; Shor, 1992), should involve one or more of the four criteria, namely the democratization of learning, unmasking power structures, empowerment of marginalized groups, and promoting social agency. Although the practice of CP can take a great diversity of forms, its orientation can be recapitulated by Freire's concept of "conscientization" (1970, 2013), which refers to the development of critical consciousness that perceives sociopolitical contradictions and formulates actions against injustice.

As mentioned before, CP is gaining ground in worldwide contexts. The manifestations of conscientization, that is, the observable development of critical consciousness, attained through CP, as well as the facilitating and constraining factors that affect such attainment, can differ greatly among cultures and institutional settings. In this study, I applied CP in the LS curriculum for students with relatively low academic achievement in the school that I have been serving. This practice, in the form of an action research, marks an attempt in the undeveloped research area of CP in Hong Kong schooling, especially for local ethnic Chinese students mainly from low-income communities and families in a daily classroom context. Through this study, I aimed to explore the possibilities and constraints encountered by students and teachers when pursuing conscientization through the application of CP in the LS curriculum. With the intention to bring a relatively compatible model of CP to a Hong Kong classroom, I adopted Ira Shor's (1992) model of "empowering education" or "critical-democratic pedagogy," purposefully crafting a practical direction of applying CP elements, that is, problem-posing, critical dialogue, and transformative action, in daily classroom teaching to inform my CP practice in the LS curriculum.

In the first half of the school year 2014-2015, when the Umbrella Movement broke out, the participants in this research were junior secondary students. As far as I learnt from personal contact and classroom interactions in the school years which I went through with them, they all witnessed the movement through the media and individual experience. Hui and Lau (2015) asserted that youngsters experienced a process of radicalization and politicization through the Umbrella Movement. Although the research participants in my study were not directly involved with the movement, traces of radicalization and politicization on them were found. For example, an episode reported in Section 5.2.2.2 illustrated the resistance of some of the students to watch the speech of a Beijing official. The data elaborated in Section 5.2.3.2 showed students' great

eagerness for transforming their daily life, especially in terms of school routines and regulations. All these revealed that they had a considerable intention to resist authority and to attain autonomy. However, as reported in Section 5.1.4, most of them had limited experience of sociopolitical participation before the commencement of the research. Whether they had inadequate opportunities for actions, or they lacked the awareness or skills to take actions, this research put forward the practice of CP as a medium of empowerment in paving their way towards sociopolitical participation.

In response to the largely Western scholarship on CP, this study has illustrated a possible pattern of Hong Kong students' conscientization through CP in a local grassroots context. This study has shown that in such context, notwithstanding students' unprivileged status, conscientization could be attained in various aspects through the application of CP in the LS curriculum. As discussed in Section 2.4, the mainstream Hong Kong classroom of mainly ethnic Chinese students was still influenced by the Chinese culture in terms of collectivism, hierarchical human relationships, and so on. In spite of the emphasis by CP on the democratization of the schooling process and the dialogical interaction between learners and educators, students and teachers in Hong Kong might be less keen to pursue these transformations. In this study, students in the researched class, possibly under such cultural influence, tended to conform to the arrangement of curricular activities by the teacher during the CP process. Despite my ardent effort to invite their participation in planning the learning activities, the students did not take much initiative in directing the learning process by themselves. However, although under prescribed and restricted curricular conditions, as long as students were given opportunities to construct critical viewpoints and actions under the teacher's arrangements, the development of critical consciousness was still possible. In the case of this study, under my teaching plan with CP elements, students were active to explore the

situations of marginalized groups in the society and became aware of the possibility of sociopolitical participation in their daily life.

The manifestations of conscientization identified in this study reflect the strengths of CP in equipping the young generation for future sociopolitical participation. Studies about the implications of the Umbrella Movement on social movements and civic education (Hui & Lau, 2015; Leung et al., 2017) and recent articles about the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement in 2019 (Su & Leung, 2019; Yu, 2019) revealed that some of the participants suffered greatly from mental stress or even psychological crises due to a feeling of powerlessness. In spite of their enthusiastic pursuit for a democratic society and greatly elevated social agency, after the Umbrella Movement was over, some young protesters “felt frustrated, powerless, hopeless and lost [because] apparently it seemed that nothing had changed” (Leung, Chong & Yuen, 2017, p. 137). In the CP practice of this research, one of the manifestations of conscientization was that students began to develop their awareness for unmasking the existing power structures and the situations of marginalized groups in society. This awareness, if further developed, can create an important strength for young participants of mass social movements. Young people can be inspired to discover different possibilities of social transformation, enabling them to become more capable to find their way out when facing the “frustrated, powerless, hopeless and lost” feeling owing to setbacks in mass movements. From the findings in this research, CP can help to build connections between students and marginalized groups through which community solidarity can be developed. The knowledge, skills, and attitude involved in these connections are all beneficial for youngsters’ sociopolitical participation.

In addition, the resources and obstacles identified from both students' and teacher's sides under the "Paradigm of Four Domains" by Shor (1992) for the pursuit of conscientization can offer action-guiding insights for enhancing and improving CP practice in contexts similar to the research site. As implied by the findings of this study, some structural and cultural changes need to be promoted in order to create long-term impact and scale. Thus, the following sections will explore, from both theoretical and practical perspectives, the inferences drawn from the findings that have been reported here. On the theoretical side, I compare the findings of this study with the original paradigm provided by Shor (1992) based on his experience with community college students in the United States. Through this comparison, the paradigm will be enriched and thus can be better adjusted for the local context. On the practical side, I discuss the implications of this study for reforming the LS curriculum and adjusting other elements of Hong Kong school settings to build better platforms for the application of CP in the LS curriculum.

## **6.2 Enriching Shor's Paradigm and Adapting It for Local Context**

The "Paradigm of Four Domains" adopted in this research was constructed by Shor (1992) from his teaching experience at a college with a majority of white post-high-school youths and adults in the United States. Though Shor asserted that some of the conditions and behaviors of his mainly white students would be "applicable and familiar to students elsewhere" (p. 216), the contents of the paradigm is context-dependent. Apparently, the factors listed in the paradigm cannot be totally applicable in a Hong Kong secondary school context. As the data collection and analysis proceeded, some factors that differed from Shor's original list of resources and obstacles were found. They were related to the specific cultural, social, and school conditions such as the heavy examination-oriented culture. This in turn shows that the practice of CP needs context-specific considerations. Both cultural and institutional differences

between countries or regions influence the actual operation of CP and its effects. Therefore, it is meaningful to contrast the findings of this study with Shor's paradigm, particularly targeting the differences found under the two contexts so that a more comprehensive picture for the application of CP can be illustrated. According to the idea of CP, theories are subject to revision and change during repeated practice and reflection (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2013). As such, the original contribution by Shor can be and should be further enriched and refined by practice and reflection of later practitioners. In the discussion below, I do not detail every new factor generated, but rather pinpoint the major implications from this study that can inspire further context-specific practice of CP.

First, when adopting Shor's (1992) paradigm of four domains, I noticed there was significant interplay among some factors within the same domain, and this interplay was worth further exploration. Shor's paradigm, as explained in the "Methodology" chapter, attempts to present a great variety of factors that affect teachers' practice and students' participation in CP. Teachers' obstacles include factors from their working conditions, academic culture, and traditional training, while students' obstacles are mostly related to community and mass culture (pp. 216-217). Among these factors, many are interrelated. For example, among the students' obstacles raised in the paradigm, factors such as "vocationalism," "family life," and "health and nutrition" are closely related to low-income class background; factors such as "acceleration/amplification in mass culture/mass media," "literacy," and "exposure to regressive ideologies" are closely related to mass culture; "uneven levels of development" and "short time in class and on campus in an unattractive setting" are institutional factors which are common in community colleges in the United States.

Besides the connections among factors in the same domain, there is significant interplay between students' and teachers' factors. For example, students' "resistance" is said to be one of the obstacles to empowering education (Shor, 1992). It is not hard to realize that such resistance is greatly correlated to teachers' obstacles of "traditional training," "teaching to the tests," "large classes," and "rushed schedules." Further grouping of these factors and analysis of their interplay can definitely provide a more clarified picture for the paradigm. Although Shor (1992) pointed out the importance of mutuality, that is, "teachers and students alike possess knowledge, language, and attitudes which contribute to the success or failure of empowerment [and] both develop through the process" (p. 236), he did not delve deeply into the mutual influence of these teacher and student factors.

Regarding my study in the Hong Kong secondary school setting, the interplay among various factors is significant. Moreover, some factors conspicuously stand out above others. In the previous Section 5.2, I have tried to explain the dialectical relationship in which the obstacles and the resources are mutually restraining each other. In this section, I will focus on the interplay of factors in the same domain and between the teachers' and students' factors of the four-domain paradigm. In the case discussed by Shor (1992), as the faculty of community colleges "is not policed in its classroom practice [and] there are no standard syllabi and required tests of the sort faced by many school teachers" (p. 233), teachers who face many constraints at work can still enjoy relatively great freedom in determining the contents to be taught and the pedagogy to be applied in their classes. Vastly different from this context in the United States, the public examination in the Hong Kong context overwhelmingly dominates the learning and teaching in secondary schools.



In this study, the examination-related factors do dominate other factors and constrain the possibility of CP. According to the findings in Section 5.2.1, teachers face various obstacles including the rushed teaching schedule and the requirement to teach contents prescribed by the curriculum. However, through tracing the origin of the rushed schedule and curricular prescriptions, I can see the overwhelming influence of DSE, which is the public examination that determines students' entry to universities and their career paths. When teachers intend to pursue students' conscientization through CP, they need to spend much time and effort to fulfill the fully packed requirements on prescribed learning topics and examination skill drilling to ensure that students are ready to face the public examination. This heavy burden of the examination-oriented curriculum and culture can easily interfere with teachers' pedagogic decisions and undermine their resources for applying CP, such as their willingness and proficiency in breaking taboos and supporting students' transformative practice. Likewise, teachers' "teaching to the test" mentality, in addition to its influence on teachers' capacity to apply CP, imposes great impact on students' learning attitude and their readiness for CP. For instance, the emphasis on examination skill drilling further highlights the inferior status of students with weak literacy skills. The more teachers conform to the examination-oriented curriculum and didacticism in the pedagogy, the lower their students' expectations and motivation are in learning, especially for those who are weak in literacy skills. As a result, students tend to stay in an alienated passive role and abstain from participation in class.

On the positive side, student resources which enhance conscientization through CP are interrelated. Students' interest in experiential learning can produce the motivation for them to take part in transformative actions. On the other hand, these factors can be developed or strengthened by a teacher who is willing to break taboos and support students' transformative

actions. After all, the interaction of teachers and students, with their respective resources, plays an important role in the practice of CP.

The above discussion aims to put forward some examples that show the interplay of factors that contribute to the success or failure of the pursuit for conscientization in CP (see Appendix H for a matrix to illustrate the significant relations among factors in Shor's four-domain paradigm that can be discovered by this study). With respect to Shor's (1992) four-domain paradigm, the overall insight gained from this study is that the factors affecting the possibility of conscientization are highly interrelated. (Some relations between specific factors are worth more in-depth investigation that could not be done comprehensively in this study). Nevertheless, there is also the notable phenomenon that some factors, particularly institutional factors related to public examinations, are more dominating than the others. These examination-related factors make substantial influence on the impact brought about by other factors. For example, the teacher's "teaching to the test" orientation greatly suppresses students' willingness for transformative practice and the teacher's own willingness to support it, usually not the other way round. This is because the examination-related factors have a strong and rigid basis on the institution. It echoes Shor's (1992) assertion that "education is cultural politics deeply connected to conditions in the community and society" (p. 236). It is the world surrounding the classroom that influences what teachers and students can achieve. Although "teachers have Promethean roles as change agents and leaders of empowering education [who] initiate a democratic learning process, promote critical perspectives on knowledge and society," they cannot actualize the vision of students' (and their own) conscientization by CP just inside the classrooms (p. 236). They need to "observe and illuminate the environment for learning, to reveal which conditions help or hinder transformative education" in the sociopolitical context

(p. 236). After revealing the conditions, it is necessary to figure out some directions and proposals that can enhance the actualization of the vision.

### **6.3 Making LS Curriculum a Better Vehicle of CP**

#### *6.3.1 Revitalizing the Issue-Enquiry Approach in LS*

This study reveals that senior secondary students, even those with relatively low academic achievements, possess resources, such as their interest in experiential learning and willingness for transformative actions, which facilitate the pursuit for conscientization through CP. Nonetheless, the overwhelming influence of the public examination significantly hinders the possibility of CP in the LS curriculum. In order to pave the way for the effective application of CP, it is necessary to evaluate the assessment format and the corresponding curricular structure of LS to make it a better vehicle for CP and conscientization.

##### *6.3.1.1 Revisiting the Original Emphasis of Issue-Enquiry Approach in LS*

The original rationale of the LS curriculum was not meant to be examination oriented. It is explicitly stated in the official curriculum and assessment document (CDC & HKEAA, 2007): “An issue-enquiry approach is adopted for learning and teaching Liberal Studies. This approach aims to encourage students to “develop a capacity for independent learning in the pursuit of knowledge and openness to new possibilities” (p. 4).

The issue-enquiry approach is compatible with the orientation of CP. The official curricular document of LS puts forward an example of systematic enquiry for students to investigate an issue characterized by a process that starts with students’ exploration instead of direct input from the teacher. This process “enhances students’ ownership of the enquiry by engaging them in exploring their own ideas before the teacher introduces new information” (p.

91). The suggested procedure echoes the pattern of CP that emphasizes a critical praxis process that addresses the daily life experience of students by their own input. Moreover, the officially endorsed approach upholds the idea that issue-enquiry does not aim at developing a detached understanding of an issue, but at making practical judgements that may lead to students' actions in response to the issue for improving society. Along the course of judgment and action, "students construct their practical knowledge via a dual process in which they both develop their understanding of issues and test this understanding in action" (pp. 89). This approach matches the CP principle that points to students' transformative actions which proceed dialectically with reflection. In addition to its elaboration in theory, the official document gives an example of a local secondary school which extended students' learning in LS to transformative actions in the community, by organizing a "Green School Campaign" for primary schools in the neighborhood (pp. 178-179).

Great discrepancies between the expectations and reality of frontline practice in LS, however, are reflected by the findings reported in Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 on the obstacles to the application of CP in the LS curriculum, as well as researches by other local scholars (Fok, 2016; Fung, 2016). According to these findings, contrary to the original emphasis of the issue-enquiry approach, the real practice of LS is dominated by examination and drilling cultures. Under the DSE, the assessment of students' academic performance in LS includes two components: 80% for public examination and 20% for IES (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p. 130). The dominating influence of the public examination due to the predominant proportion has been well elaborated in the previous section. Obviously, if the LS curriculum is to fulfill its original rationale of enhancing issue-enquiry or further adopt CP to pursue students' (and teachers') conscientization, some fundamental changes are necessary.

### 6.3.1.2 *Suggesting the Expansion of IES*

To enhance students' conscientization through the application of CP, teachers need to make good use of the resources that students possess, such as providing room for experiential learning and transformative actions so to give full play to their eagerness for autonomy. In the existing structure of the LS curriculum, IES provides good terrain for these purposes. It allows students to break away from the constraints of prescribed curricular contents and take the initiative in raising enquiry questions, planning, implementing, and evaluating enquiry processes. Despite its title as an "independent" project, peer collaboration and sharing among students are encouraged (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, pp. 43-44; 2014, pp. 57-58). Therefore, under teachers' facilitation, the pedagogic elements of CP such as problem-posing and critical dialogue are feasible under the framework of IES. These CP elements lay the groundwork for students to reflect and to act upon their interested issues. It may only take one step forward for teachers or students to further develop the enquiry process by carrying out transformative actions as responses to the issues, in addition to the cognitive enquiry study. For instance, the CP activities on the topic of PLHIV in the study, if conducted under the framework of IES, can result in IES reports about the life situation of PLHIV or the discrimination issue against them. Of course, if provided more lesson time, students and teachers could further develop the project by organizing actions that promote the message of anti-discrimination in school or community. In the same way, disadvantaged students from low-income communities and families can explore the issues related to their disadvantaged situations, such as the housing problem and the digital divide, and unmask the power structures behind these issues. The learning activities brought about by IES would particularly empower students who are weak in literacy skills because they can gain the opportunities to put aside the textbooks, learn by lively experiences and present their ideas in non-written forms. According to the official curricular document, teachers should allocate one third of the lesson time in the three-year course of the curriculum

to IES (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p. 48; 2014, p. 64). In reality, most schools do not spare this proportion for IES as they prefer to give more time for drilling examination questions. As a result, the issue-enquiry approach does not work as intended by the original curriculum design, in both the module studies and IES.

Under the New Academic Structure medium-term review (2012-2015), the EDB (2014) conducted a review of the LS curriculum. In a statement on the review, the EDB expressed its satisfaction with the outcomes of LS in developing students' critical thinking skills, knowledge base, modes using multi-perspective thinking, and awareness to contemporary issues. Unfortunately, the deficiency in issue-enquiry and IES did not draw much public attention, even in the education sector. Chiu and Hui (2015), respectively the Chairman of the CDC-HKEAA Committee on LS and the Chairman of HKEAA Subject Committee during the review, both sitting on the review committee pointed out that, based on the opinions raised by teachers and other stakeholders, the focus of the mid-term review was to reduce the burden on teachers and students, and to rationalize the relationship between the various modules in the curriculum. Finally, the review resulted in some reorganization of topics in the various modules and a more "structured enquiry approach with clear guidelines" (EDB, 2014) for IES to be adopted from the cohort of 2017 HKDSE. Whereas the original guidelines of IES allowed a more open choice for the format of presentation and had a greater emphasis on the assessment of the enquiry process (HKEAA, 2014), the new "structured enquiry approach" strictly requires the IES report to be presented in four parts: "Problem Definition," "Relevant Concepts and Knowledge/ Facts/ Data," "In-depth Explanation of the Issue," and "Judgement and Justification" (HKEAA, 2015), and the assessment is more focused in the report as the final product. Under this new structured approach, the freedom for students to choose their enquiry topics has become more limited because only argumentative topics can fit into the required format in which a problem with

related judgement and justification are essential. Descriptive, reflective, and creative projects, such as a report to illustrate the daily life of a homeless, or a blueprint for constructing an animal-friendly community in Hong Kong, without making a discrete judgement, can be very inspiring learning experiences for students. However, they can hardly meet the requirements of the official assessment. Furthermore, student choice in the form of expression is also restricted because non-written forms of presentation such as photo album and model making can hardly present the four-part structure. As a result, students, including those who are weak in writing, are more bound to adopt the written form, although non-written forms are still nominally allowed. These unnecessary restrictions on the diversity of content and form in fact contradict the rationale of IES for encouraging students to become self-directed learners (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p. 43).

In June 2019, the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum set up by the EDB put forward a series of suggestions on school curriculum for public consultation. Regarding IES, the consultation document suggested that schools or students be allowed to opt out of IES (EDB, 2019). For candidates who opt out, attempting the public examination papers alone can offer at the highest Level 4 in the HKDSE Examination. Based on the findings of this study, I strongly object this suggestion. Contrarily, I suggest the expansion of IES in the LS curriculum in terms of lesson hours and proportion in assessment to achieve the original emphasis on the issue-enquiry approach and thus enhance the possibility of applying CP and pursuing students' (and teachers') conscientization. Tsang (2014), a member of Hong Kong Education Concern Group, a civil society organization set up in 2013 to defend the autonomy of education in Hong Kong in response to pro-establishment politicians' pressure, put forward a proposal for reforming the LS curriculum. He proposed to change the proportion of public examination in DSE LS assessment to 30% in the form of a multiple-choice paper that focuses on the

understanding of basic concepts and facts in the topics prescribed by the syllabus. The remaining 70% would be in the form of issue-enquiry-based assessment to be made up of 30% for essays on prescribed topics and 40% in IES. This proposal was a unique and courageous one that dared to thoroughly change the LS assessment towards a more issue-enquiry-oriented paradigm. I basically agree with this direction but suggest some adjustments on Tsang's proposal. Since the essay form is an assessment that favors learners with strong writing ability, I propose that it be integrated with IES so that 70% of the public assessment is to consist of five IES projects on different modules or domains to be done in the five school terms of the three-year senior secondary LS curriculum. The restriction of the four-part structure in the existing "structured enquiry approach" of IES should be removed to allow more diversified enquiry approaches and forms of expression, provided that they involve the components of problem-posing, data gathering, and analysis.

Taking a more liberal enquiry-project-based format of public assessment brings the LS curriculum closer to its original intention of promoting issue-enquiry learning on the one hand, and makes the curriculum more compatible with the application of CP on the other hand. This liberal format of IES enables students and teachers to break away from the restriction of prescribed subject materials and examination pressure. They can work in groups or individually with respect to the needs at different stages, to investigate the issues that arise from their daily life experience, and have critical dialogue within the class and with different community stakeholders related to the issues. Additionally, some ideas of transformative actions in response to the issues can be generated and put into practice as extended learning activities. Such a framework of pedagogy would provide abundant space and possibilities for students to satisfy their thirst for autonomy and interest in experiential learning so that they can pursue conscientization with full motivation and sufficient vitality.



It can be expected that there would be doubts from stakeholders about the feasibility and rationale for the expansion of IES and the new paradigm established. On the one hand, complaints would be made about students' and teachers' increased workloads. On the other, the proposal would be criticized for weakening students' knowledge base. Concerning the workload issue, it should be clarified that the teacher-directed part of the reformed curriculum would only include basic concepts and facts in specific topics, most lesson time can be used for the IES projects. Thus, the reformed LS curriculum is feasible and manageable for both students and teachers. The proposal only turns the existing operation of IES into the main routine so to transform LS into a student-directed project-learning curriculum. In response to the criticism about the knowledge content, explanation should be made on the nature of IES that it is a more in-depth process of knowledge acquisition, compared with direct instruction. The expansion of IES in fact can be considered as a step forward to fulfill the originally intended issue-enquiry approach of the curriculum. In order to reduce the tension caused by the reform, the proposal can be implemented in phases. The above-mentioned Tsang's (2014) proposal can be used as an intermediate phase of transition, so to avoid a drastic impact upon stakeholders.

### *6.3.2 Connecting LS Learning with Community Groups to Enhance CP*

In pursuance of conscientization through CP, apart from revitalizing the issue-enquiry approach, empowering teachers for their transition towards the CP-oriented paradigm is also essential. Teachers' didacticism from traditional training, as informed by this study, is one of the main obstacles to the application of CP in the LS curriculum, while teachers' willingness and proficiency in breaking taboos and to support students' transformative practice are great resources for that. Fung (2016) indicated that LS teachers had little confidence even in

conducting the inquiry-based pedagogy suggested by the official curriculum document. It is difficult to expect their readiness to encourage taboo breaking and support students' transformative actions in their teaching practice. Another study attributed the difficulties in the implementation of LS to the dominant examination culture and insufficient professional development for teachers (Fok, 2016).

From my experience in the research period, collaboration with civic society organizations, apart from being a way to facilitate the process of problem-posing and critical dialogue in CP, can be a fruitful format of professional development for guiding teachers towards an orientation of CP. In the teaching process of the topics on mental illness, AIDS, and PLHIV, I sought the help from civil society organizations including the Human Library Hong Kong, which brought people living with mental illness and social workers from Concord Mutual-Aid Club Alliance and AIDS Concern to the school. These groups can be considered as part of progressive movements that pursue the removal of discrimination and empower the underprivileged. The collaboration with these groups therefore made the process of CP connected to progressive social movements that in turn support and enrich the process of CP (Chang, 2015; Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2006). For example, the encounter with a PLHIV in the visit to AIDS Concern gave me new knowledge and insights on the issue of AIDS and HIV. Previously, I had the perception that PLHIV were facing continuous deterioration of health and were gradually approaching death. The function of medication was only to slow down the speed of deterioration. However, I, together with the students, learnt from the visit that PLHIV could live a normal, healthy, productive life as others if they were under prompt and regular medication (Field Note, November 27, 2017). Such a new understanding about the life of PLHIV led to my reflection on the discourse about the AIDS and HIV issue that I should adopt in the classroom. I realized that instead of teaching the attitude of protecting and having

sympathy for a fragile group, fostering a sense of companionship and respect for the PLHIV community may be more appropriate. I was greatly excited about the experience that the shift of my role from the one who gave teaching instructions to a co-learner who shared the learning experience with students.

The example of collaborating with AIDS Concern reflects the importance for LS teachers to make connections with the community. As Giroux (2015) asserts, through these connections, teachers can open their schools to the “diverse resources offered by the community [which are] submerged or discredited within the dominant school culture” (p. 153). In this case, by the connection with the PLHIV and their supporters’ community, I managed to bring to the class the real picture of PLHIV’s life which had long been distorted by the dominant social and school cultures. Also significant was that this connection challenged and refreshed my own knowledge and attitude about the AIDS and HIV issue. This could help to rectify my inclination towards didacticism, if any, as an educator and reposition myself as a learning companion and facilitator of students. In this way of connecting with the community, teachers can get on to the path of pursuing conscientization side by side with students, in a critical supporting role.

In the current school settings of Hong Kong, it is not difficult for LS teachers to make connections with the community, since “life-wide learning” has been an important aspect recognized by the government official discourse for years with increasing support of funding. Teachers are encouraged and even required to provide experiential learning opportunities for student in real contexts and authentic settings. For teachers who intend to attempt CP through experiential learning activities, provided that they can ensure a diversity of voices to be heard by students in the learning process, and also keep an open mind to the potential impact brought about by different voices on the students and themselves, these experiential learning activities

can facilitate the pursuit of conscientization. Experienced teachers, who want to promote the application of CP, should strive to build connections between the teaching community and progressive civil society organizations so that more teachers can gain access to experiential learning activities in which progressive or marginalized voices can be heard.

Other than classroom pedagogies, community connections help to create public spheres in which members of the community, including students, teachers, civil society organizations, and marginalized groups, can exchange their views on social issues and are increasingly prepared to act on these issues collectively “in a political fashion” whenever necessary (Giroux, 2015, p. 152). To aim for a more strategic and sustainable mode of CP in Hong Kong, the direction of community reorganizing (Chang, 2015) that goes beyond school walls and expands the classroom community, with the scope of pedagogies, to the local neighborhood, families (particularly students’ own parents and family members), organizations, and other community members is desirable, although it takes time for local teachers to change their mindset. By thinking and acting like community organizers and at times, linking their pedagogies with the community, teachers can build a broader, long-term support network, particularly when they are determined to work within a CP orientation.

### *6.3.3 Reframing the CP Practice with the “Fields of Discourse” Framework*

After analyzing the data obtained from the study, issues across a wide range, from students’ cultural experiences on campus and the interpretation of textbook contents, to institutional factors such as official requirements of public assessment for the subject, were found concerning the application of CP. As mentioned above, I used Shor’s (1992) paradigm of empowering, critical-democratic pedagogy as a major reference model of CP practice for my study. This model emphasizes the transformation of power relations between teachers and

students in daily teaching and offers essential values and operational principles to be applied in the classroom (Shor, 1992). Thus, it opens possibilities for CP to be practical and assessable in the Hong Kong schooling context. However, in order to reflect more comprehensively on the various issues related to the CP practice, it is necessary to introduce a framework with wider scope for discussion. Among the works of critical pedagogues in recent years, Giroux's (2015) "fields of discourse" framework offers additional insights for me to interpret my findings in this study and provide useful ideas for the future application of CP in the LS curriculum (see Appendix A for the major concepts related to CP used in this study).

Giroux (2015) argues that CP, as a form of cultural politics, must examine the production and transformation of cultural processes in three fields of discourse: the discourse of production, the discourse of text analysis, and the discourse of lived cultures. The discourse of production "evaluates the relationship between schools and wider structural forces" (p. 181). The findings in this study show that the "wider structural forces" beyond the school, mainly from institutional factors including the public examination and the related curricular arrangements, are seriously constraining CP practice in the LS curriculum. In Section 6.2.1, I suggest a reform on the formats and proportional structure of the official DSE assessment for the LS curriculum, proposing a radical expansion of IES to replace the dominant position of the public examination. This aims to alter the most significant structural force that shapes the pedagogic practice of the subject. However, due to the conservative culture of Hong Kong's EDB and the teacher community, the possibility of accomplishing such a drastic change is remote. In the short run, for teachers who intend to apply CP in the current LS curriculum, it seems more practical to focus on the fields of text analysis and lived cultures.

According to Giroux (2015), the discourse of textual analysis refers to the critical analysis of the text and materials used in specific classrooms. Under this form of analysis, students and teachers can turn classroom materials into objects of intellectual inquiry. Through such process, students and teachers are empowered to become active producers of meanings, instead of passive consumers (pp. 181-182). Through textual analysis, students and teachers can unmask the cultural hegemony that is distributed through different kinds of institutions (such as schools) and media (such as textbooks) to strengthen dominant groups' viewpoints and interests (Giroux, 1997).

In this study, limited lesson time is identified as one of the key factors hindering the application of CP in the LS curriculum. Time limits are usually due to the planned teaching progress prescribed by the official scheme of work, which must cover all the topics and answering skills required for taking the public examination. Under such time limits, teachers face great difficulty in arranging issue-enquiry activities for students to research on their own interested topics. However, when teachers and students turn their attention to the discourse of textual analysis, they can discover a great area of interest. On top of the prescribed topics and exercises that stick to the text, critical dialogue about the myths and hidden agendas implied by the text can be carried out in the lesson or brief periods of research can be conducted individually at home. For example, the textbook of the "Public Health" module used in by the researched class claimed that governments are reliable sources of health information (Field Note, October 30, 2017). This claim aroused objection in the class. To follow up the discussion on this issue, I could arrange some data collection on relevant cases as classwork or home assignments, so that arguments and evidence for and against the claim could be discovered and examined. In such a way, students could investigate the occasions when governments provided inaccurate or even misleading health information and unmask the operation of power

embedded in the text. This kind of textual analysis can be extended to different modules in the LS curriculum. CP practices in such a “piecemeal” format can be performed more frequently so that the application of CP becomes more feasible and the deadlock due to the fully packed curriculum and schedule can be broken.

While CP done in a piecemeal format becomes a continual practice in the field of textual analysis, attention can also be paid to link the routine LS learning to the discourse of lived cultures. The discourse of lived cultures refers to “an understanding of how teachers and students give meaning to their lives through the complex historical, cultural, and political forms that they both embody and produce” (Giroux, 2015, p. 185). In this study, through the discussion on the insufficiency of water dispensers on campus, students expressed their general dissatisfaction on the boring school life and the lack of students’ participation in school management. The LS lesson thus occasionally became a platform for students to discuss their issues of concern in school life, and finally, to prepare their transformative actions. Consequently, the critical dialogue developed in the LS classroom led to students’ participation, by contributing opinions and directly taking the floor in the consultation assembly in school affairs. This case reflects the possibility that the application of CP in LS lessons, with the process of problem-posing, critical dialogue and transformative action whenever feasible, can foster a lived culture of active sociopolitical participation on the school campus and further in community. Of course, the application of CP is still constrained by time limits under the prescribed schedule of teaching. This constraint can be remedied by the available space in IES. After raising an issue of concern through problem-posing and critical dialogue, teachers can encourage students to continue working on the issue in IES, where students can further enquire about the issue individually or in groups and respond to the issues with transformative actions.

By considering the discourse of lived cultures, teachers can more readily explore the different factors that shape students' perception on the daily happenings in their lives. As discussed in Sections 2.4, 5.1.1, and 6.1, Hong Kong teachers and students have been profoundly influenced by the Chinese culture which is exhibited in schooling as hierarchical human relationships, collectivism, and conformity. This manifestation of Chinese culture, as a discourse, can affect the way in which teachers and students give meaning to their lives within and outside the school. There may be tension between these cultural values and the values highlighted by CP, such as democracy and social agency. When aware of the significance of the discourse of lived cultures, teachers can be more alert to the tension among different cultural elements. They can be more conscientious in adopting suitable CP arrangements, so to deal with the cultural issues and to nurture students' critical consciousness.

Above are some ideas on applying CP in the LS curriculum that arise from the findings of this study, based on Giroux's "fields of discourse" framework. Nevertheless, practitioners should bear in mind that there are no "recipe lesson plans" for CP (Darder, 2002, p. 161). There is always room in every specific context or situation for new strategies and methods through which educators and learners can make their own path towards conscientization and liberation.

## 6.4 Limitations

Every attempt of CP by any practitioner, with its specific context or situation, has its unique value in the ongoing project of CP (Giroux, 2013). However, it is also important to be aware of the limitations of the attempt before it can be further explored. Below I discuss the limitations faced by this study and reflect on the thought-provoking points behind them.



#### *6.4.1 Unexpected School Arrangement and Limited Themes in the Pedagogy*

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I experienced an unexpected school arrangement that remarkably affect the planning of my study. In this study, I investigated the application of CP in my LS teaching for a Secondary 5 class from October to mid-December 2017 in the school that I am currently serving. This arrangement was the result of an unexpected reallocation of teaching work by the school management. Under the institutional settings of Hong Kong schooling, the school management has the absolute power in allocating the teaching work. Though dissatisfied with the arrangement, I was not in a position to negotiate with the school management. Instead of utilizing a more favorable timing to introduce a new mode of learning to a Secondary 4 class who had just entered their senior secondary stage, I needed to change my research plan to have it conducted in a Secondary 5 class. Due to the change of the participants' cohort, the module to be taught in the research period was also changed from "Quality of Life," which was closely related to students' daily life, diversified in scope and greatly suitable for discussion and reflection in CP, to the "Public Health" module which was more specified and knowledge-demanding. This required some modifications in lesson planning such as in the materials used for codification. Because of this situation, the time to prepare the CP curriculum to work with this Secondary 5 module was limited.

As another institutional feature of Hong Kong schooling, pedagogies are greatly restricted by the official curriculum. During the study, I tried to direct the pedagogy according to generative themes produced by students' sharing and brainstorming. However, because of the limited topics specified by the curriculum, most themes discussed in the class were bound within the prescribed framework and might not have been those which were of most concern to the students.

## *6.4.2 Limitations in Methodology*

### *6.4.2.1 Limitations in Time and Data*

Owing to some complications in seeking research consent from the serving school, the data collection could not begin until October 2017. This made the time for collecting data even more constrained. Since the length of the research period was limited, some factors affecting the pursuit of conscientization through applying CP may not have been clearly identified within the research period.

Other constraints also affected the diversity of data collected. Since individual and focus group interviews, as well as video and sound recording were all not allowed by the school supervisor, sources of data were greatly reduced. This could only be remedied by more detailed field note recording, particularly of conversations with students inside and outside the classroom. Due to my busy routine work at school, field notes usually could not be recorded immediately after lessons and this may have affected the accuracy of the notes. Moreover, the researched class was a small one of 15 students, with one of them refusing to participate in the study. Among the 14 participants, there were only three girls. Both the class size and the gender ratio limited the diversity of data collected.

The specific setting of the school in which the researcher is serving can be regarded as a well-defined case for researching the application of CP. This study can provide some useful insights for applying CP in schools mainly serving students from low-income communities and families with relatively lower academic achievements, as mentioned above. However, it must be admitted that the research findings are never generalizable for schools with different student backgrounds.

#### 6.4.2.2 *Subjectivity and Power Difference Issues*

As elaborated in Section 3.2.6, my dual role of researcher and practitioner, as well as the power difference between students and the teacher, might impose significant limitations that undermined the value of this study. In order to cope with these limitations, there were measures that helped to consolidate and widen the scope of my research findings. For example, I did peer debriefing with my colleagues who were teaching LS in the same form of the school, concerning students' performances and responses in CP lessons. A colleague, who did not have any previous knowledge about CP, pointed out that students' request for keeping their own mobile phones during lesson time, together with other demands for changes in school regulations, could be understood as their eagerness to transform the entire mode of school life. This idea was helpful in my analysis on students' resources for pursuing conscientization in CP and has been discussed in Section 5.2.3.2.

Apart from peer debriefing, I did occasional member-checking with student participants, so to understand in depth about their views on specific issues. Although there were multiple types of data collected in multiple ways from multiple settings, this diversity of data did not readily resolve the power difference issue between students and the teacher. For instance, as discussed in Section 5.1.4, I reflected on the possibility of "faux learning" concerning students' participation in a petition for supporting caregivers. To explore students' motives behind the participation, I raised some probing questions with them. They mostly responded that there had been no pressure from me that urged them to take part in the petition. However, their responses did not completely settle my query about the possibility of "faux learning." My gesture of putting forward probing questions, by itself, might have intensified the teacher-student power difference and create another kind of pressure that requested an answer favorable to the teacher.

After all, these limitations due to subjectivity and teacher-student power difference could not be absolutely ruled out. They could only be minimized by the researcher's continuous reflection and meta-reflection along the research process.

#### *6.4.3 Limitations in the Application of CP Conceptual Framework*

In Chapter 2, I responded to the major challenges made by critics of CP. After reporting my experience and findings from this study, it is still meaningful to reconsider possible limitations in the application of the conceptual framework in order to pave the way for more fruitful CP practices in future.

Although I have asserted that CP can set the stage for the oppressed and the marginalized to speak for themselves and get empowered, the question about the influence of critical pedagogues on them is still debatable. Despite its emphasis on dialogue and empowerment, CP has been criticized for its risk of turning into a regime of oppressive power, similar to what it aims to resist when it is enacted in the classroom (Gore, 1993; Ellsworth, 2013). Critical pedagogues tend to claim or assume that the nature, needs, and thoughts of learners are knowable, even when learners are silent. However, such an assumption neglects the fact that “a multiplicity of knowledges are present in the classroom as a result of the way difference has been used to structure social relations inside and outside the classroom” (Ellsworth, 2013, p. 208). Consequently, the diverse, changing, or mutually contradictory voices of learners may be generalized as an over-simplified and distorted totality by the pedagogues. CP in this way can hardly mean any progress for social transformation and might even be exploitative in itself.

In the CP practice conducted in my research, much effort was made to arouse the concern of students, as members of the same society or community, on the injustice revealed through

social and school issues. Although I kept myself vigilant in the pedagogic process to avoid generalizing students' voices, more attention has been paid to the convergence rather than the divergence of opinions and behaviors among students. For instance, among the 14 student participants, the three girls, being the minority, were usually silent in the class. The possible issues of gender inferiority, cultural hegemony, or silence as “a language of its own” (Ellsworth, 2013, p. 208) was not explored. Further, although all participants speak fluent Cantonese, some of them had their childhood in mainland China. No specific endeavor was made to investigate the effect of childhood experience in the mainland regarding their reception of CP, particularly concerning the authoritarian culture. Inadequate attention to these aspects of divergence has limited the scope of both the CP practice and the research.

As Luke (2018) suggests, “the critical” can be interpreted in two ways – as an intellectual, deconstructive, textual and cognitive analytic task – and as a form of embodied political anger, alienation and alterity” (p. 221), which is related to emotions and feelings of students and teachers when applied to educational issues. To conduct a comprehensive practice or research of CP, a practitioner should take account of both the analytic task and embodied alterity notions. When thinking through Shor's (1992) paradigm of four domains, I have focused mostly on the analytic task that delves into the situation of students and teachers as general social agents who need resources to struggle with obstacles posed by dominating institutions and ideologies in order to attain conscientization. Less attention has been paid to their specific embodied experience of political anger, alienation, and alterity. It was not until the episode in the Student Union's school affairs consultation, which happened in the later part of the study that I tried to attend to students' voices that expressed their individual experience and feelings. Regretfully, as interviews were not allowed by the school management, such exploration could not go much more in depth. It can be expected that with a more mindful balance on both aspects of “the

critical” and more thorough investigation in the embodied experience of students and teachers within and beyond the CP practice, more fruitful and insightful findings in the aspects of individual experience and emotions can be harvested in future studies.

## 6.5 Conclusion

In this action research project, the application of CP in the LS curriculum was introduced as an intervention for the problems of civic education in Hong Kong. From the findings reported in Chapter 5, the rich possibilities of conscientization produced by CP were well recognized. Moreover, the application of CP can be enhanced through some structural changes in the LS curriculum and cultural changes in teachers’ practices.

### 6.5.1 Inferences on the CP Practice

Through this study, Shor’s four-domain paradigm on teachers’ and students’ resources and obstacles for the practice of CP has been developed and enriched. Under the specific cultural, social, and school conditions in Hong Kong, some factors which differ from Shor’s original list of resources and obstacles were discovered. Further, the interplay of different factors, within and across the four domains, which contribute to the success or failure of the pursuit for conscientization in CP were discussed. For example, examination-related factors were found to exert an overwhelming influence on other factors and constrain the possibility of CP.

While the dominating influence of the public examination hinders the practice of CP, the issue-enquiry approach stated in the official curriculum and assessment document of the LS curriculum is compatible with the orientation of CP. It echoes the pattern of CP that emphasizes a critical praxis process which addresses the daily life experience of students. Under the

existing structure of the LS curriculum, IES provides room for the pedagogic elements of CP, such as problem-posing and critical dialogue. It only takes one step forward for teachers or students to further develop the enquiry process by carrying out transformative actions in response to the issues enquired.

Based on the findings of this study, I suggest IES in the LS curriculum to be expanded in terms of lesson hours and proportion in assessment, replacing the dominant position of the public examination in order to better fulfill the original emphasis on the issue-enquiry approach, and to provide greater room for the application of CP. I also propose the restriction of the four-part structure in the existing “structured enquiry approach” of IES to be removed to allow for more diversified enquiry approaches and forms of expression.

In my research experience, the collaboration with civic society organizations provided great momentum for the process of problem-posing and critical dialogue in CP, and made a fruitful format of professional development for guiding teachers towards an orientation of CP. In this way of connecting with the community, teachers can build a broader supporting network of their work, particularly when they are determined to apply CP-oriented teaching. As a long-term strategy to promote the application of CP in the LS curriculum, teachers should strive to build connections between the teacher community and progressive civil society organizations, so that more teachers can gain access to experiential learning activities in which progressive or marginalized voices can be heard.

### *6.5.2 Evaluations on the CP Practice*

In order to open new possibilities for the practice of CP’s praxis in the LS curriculum, Giroux’s (2015) “fields of discourse” framework can be utilized. The above-mentioned

proposal for a radical expansion of IES to eliminate the dominance of the public examination can be considered as a significant reform in the discourse of production. For the discourse of text analysis, critical dialogue and research about the myths and hidden agendas implied by textbooks and learning materials can be carried out frequently, to foster students' conscientization over longer periods. With respect to the discourse of lived cultures, as shown in this study, the LS lessons can occasionally become a platform for students to discuss issues of concern in their daily life, and finally, to prepare them for transformative actions.

This study has limitations in various aspects. Due to some unexpected school arrangements and complications in documentation, this study encountered more limitations than expected in terms of the topics discussed, the time for collecting data, and the diversity of data collected. Concerning the specific setting of the researched school and class, despite the value provided by insights based on the application of CP in a school mainly serving students from low-income communities and families with relatively lower academic achievements, the research findings of this study cannot be generalized to schools with different student backgrounds.

Instead of claiming my study as a neutral, objective description of reality, I acknowledge and made great effort to be aware of my stance as a critical researcher and practitioner, whose research can be considered a political action.

Lastly, there were limitations in my interpretation and application of the CP conceptual framework. Although I kept myself cautious in the pedagogic process to avoid generalization on students' voices, more attention was paid to the convergence of opinions and behaviors among students rather than the divergence, such as in terms of gender and place of birth. Less



attention was given to their specific embodied experience and feelings of alienation and alterity. Future studies focusing on these divergent and individual aspects will be meaningful for the future development of CP.

### *6.5.3 CP Practice as a Response to Recent Social Movements in Hong Kong*

In response to the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the recent outbreak of the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement in 2019, the need for CP as a new paradigm of civic education has become more and more urgent. In these movements, many youngsters have become active protesters who play particularly important roles on the frontlines of protests. Facing the authoritarian state in Hong Kong (Tai et al., 2019), while the young generation has acquired strong motivation and skills for sociopolitical participation, they need a more comprehensive civic education, which emphasizes the integration of action and reflection, to support their endeavors. CP brings about the process of conscientization that leads to democratization of learning, unmasking of power structures, empowerment of marginalized groups, and promotion of social agency. With this process of conscientization, youngsters' transformative actions can be backed up by a substantial foundation of critical viewpoints and reflections. It is expected that through the new paradigm of civic education nurtured by CP, the enthusiasm and competence of the young generation can become a sustainable force which promotes social change towards justice.

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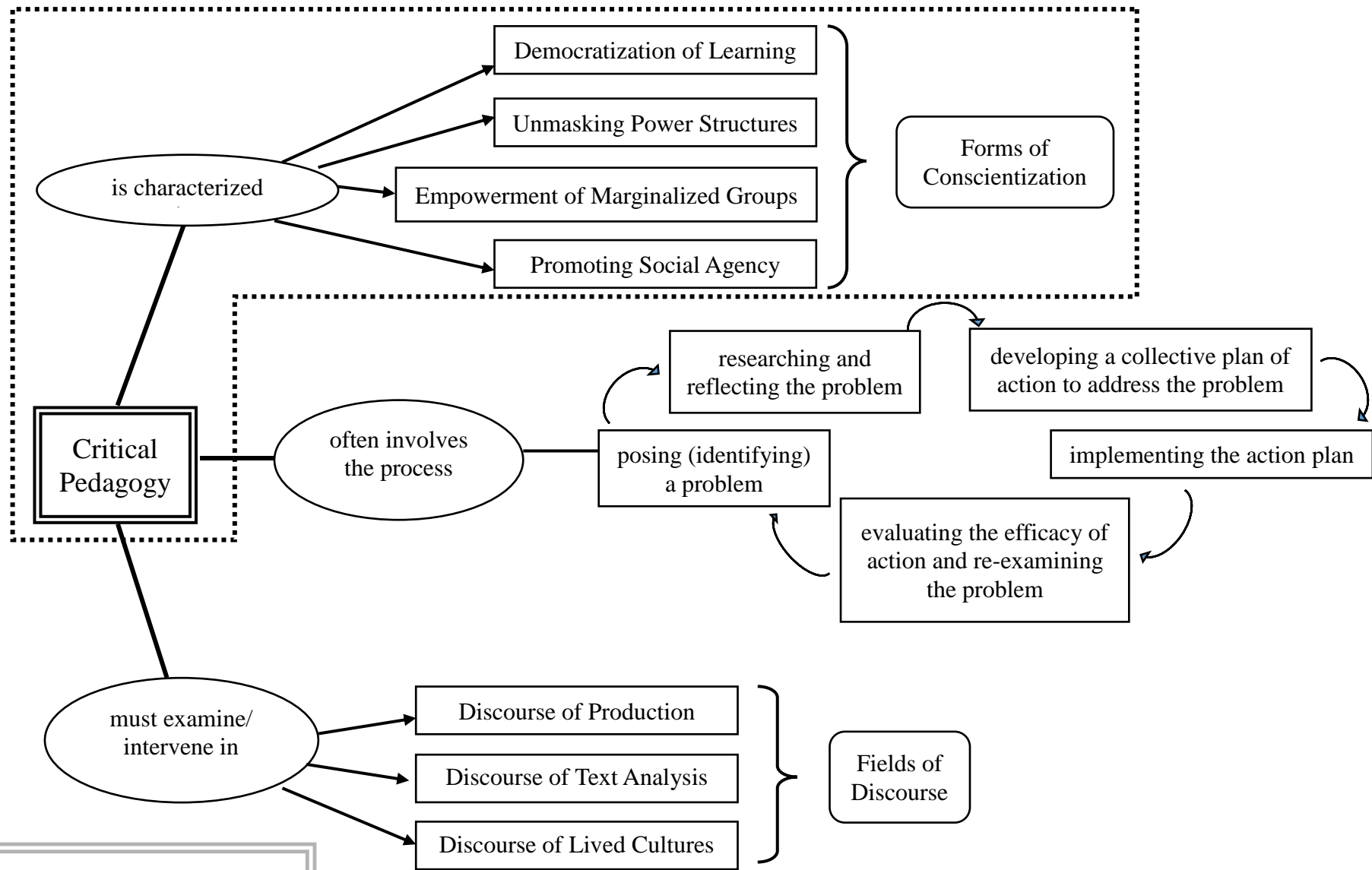
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### Appendix A: Major Concepts Related to CP Adopted in this Study





## Appendix B: Questionnaire 1 (Original Chinese Version)

### 5C 班通識科教學研究問卷

姓名：\_\_\_\_\_

出生地：(請用「✓」號表示)

( ) 香港 ( ) 中國內地 ( ) 其他 (請註明：\_\_\_\_\_)

(如非於香港出生) 移居香港年份：\_\_\_\_\_

住址：(可省略樓層及單位門牌)\_\_\_\_\_

上學年在全級中的名次：\_\_\_\_\_ 全班中的名次：\_\_\_\_\_

你認為以你個人來說，通過以下哪種方式可以更有效地學習通識科？

(請在各項前面的括弧填上適當數字：以 1 表示最有效的方法，10 或 11 表示效果最差的方法。)

- |                   |                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| ( ) 聽老師講課         | ( ) 閱讀老師指定的課本、文字資料         |
| ( ) 做練習題          | ( ) 觀看老師指定的影片              |
| ( ) 自己寫筆記         | ( ) 和相關持份者對話               |
| ( ) 實地觀察          | ( ) 親身體驗 (例如：參與社區服務、體驗農耕等) |
| ( ) 參與課堂口頭討論      | ( ) 自行 (上網或在圖書館) 搜尋資料      |
| ( ) 其他 (如有)：_____ |                            |

以下哪一項是你**最滿意和最不滿意**的學校生活範疇？請說明原因。

- |         |                  |
|---------|------------------|
| A. 學業   | B. 課外活動或服務       |
| C. 人際關係 | D. 其他 (如有)：_____ |

	範疇英文代號	原因
最滿意		
最不滿意		

近來你**最關注**的一項時事是什麼？\_\_\_\_\_

為什麼你認為這件事值得關注？\_\_\_\_\_

你認為香港是一個公義的城市嗎？（大概意思是：在這裡生活的人都得到公平、合理的待遇嗎？）若要為香港的公義程度評分，以 10 分為滿分，你會給香港多少分？\_\_\_\_\_

為什麼給這個分數？\_\_\_\_\_

你認為以下哪些因素對人的健康有較大的影響？（請在各項前面的括弧填上適當數字：以 1 表示最重要的因素，10 或 11 表示最不重要的因素。）

- ☐ 個人生活習慣                      ☐ 家庭關係、社交和社區網絡  
☐ 經濟條件                              ☐ 居住環境及工作環境質素  
☐ 政府政策和管治取向      ☐ 社會文化  
☐ 其他（如有）：\_\_\_\_\_

你個人曾經有過哪些社會政治參與經驗？（請用「✓」號表示，可選多項）

參與形式	有關主題（例如：「反對設立國民教育科」）
<input type="checkbox"/> 參與聯署	
<input type="checkbox"/> 在社交媒體發表對時事的見解，或參與討論	
<input type="checkbox"/> 參加有關社會議題的論壇	
<input type="checkbox"/> 參加有關社會議題的遊行、集會	
<input type="checkbox"/> 其他（如有）：_____ _____	

## Appendix C: Questionnaire 2 (Original Chinese Version)

### 5C 班通識科教學研究問卷 2

姓名：\_\_\_\_\_

本學年我在學校參與過的課外活動、服務包括：\_\_\_\_\_

開學以來，我們採用了「批判式教學法」來學習通識科。以下是這種教學法在過去兩個多月的一些應用例子，試通過下表，表達你對這些學習經歷的意見：

學習經歷	評分 (0 - 5， 5 表示最欣賞)	評分理由
和老師商討在通識課堂 討論什麼課題		
小組合作在電腦室為課 題搜集資料		
小組輪流匯報搜尋到的 資料，全班討論		
觀看《一念無明》電影 片段，討論其中反映的 議題		
和精神病康復者對談， 聽他們分享患病經歷		
參與民間組織聯署，爭 取政府正視長期病患者 或長者照顧者的需要		
討論新聞（如「子殺病 母」事件）或社區事件 （如長者輕生事件），探 究其中的啟示		
在 WhatsApp 群組和通 識老師及同學分享資 訊，及討論有趣的通識 議題（例如有學者發表 有關早餐的健康理論）		

➤ 以下各題可用**文字**或**圖畫**作答：

開學以來的通識課堂裡， 令我 <b>印象最深刻的片段</b> 是…	
我認為開學以來的通識課 堂，跟（過去、現在）其 他課堂的最大分別是…	
我認為開學以來的通識課 堂教學最主要的 <b>優點</b> 是…	
我認為開學以來的通識課 堂教學最主要的 <b>缺點</b> 是…	
開學以來的通識課堂令我 有了 <b>這些新的想法</b> …	

➤ 以下各題請用✓號選取答案，可選多項：

開學以來的通識課堂 令我 <b>開始留意這些社 會議題</b> …	<input type="checkbox"/> 精神病患者/康復者的處境 <input type="checkbox"/> 長期病患者的處境 <input type="checkbox"/> 照顧者的處境 <input type="checkbox"/> 健康資訊受企業的商業活動影響 <input type="checkbox"/> 民眾健康受政府管治影響 <input type="checkbox"/> 民眾健康受經濟條件影響 <input type="checkbox"/> 其他：_____
開學以來的通識課堂 令我 <b>開始對這些社會 參與形式產生興趣</b> （可 選多項）…	<input type="checkbox"/> 聯署 <input type="checkbox"/> 在社交媒體/場合就社會議題表達意見、參與討論 <input type="checkbox"/> 向一些社區機構（如學生會、區議會）表達意見 <input type="checkbox"/> 其他：_____

## Appendix D: Questionnaire 2 with Data

We have adopted a mode of learning and teaching which is known as critical pedagogy in the Liberal Studies lessons since the beginning of this school year.

- The learning experience in the past months is presented in the table below. Please express your opinions on this experience by completing the following table:

Learning Experience	Rating (0-5, 5 as the most appreciative)	Reasons for the rating
Brainstorming and discussing learning topics with teacher		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Can let us learn actively, to tell our own opinions. {<b>SR-dem-att</b>}</li> <li>➤ Students can freely discuss. {<b>SR-dem-att</b>}</li> <li>➤ Teacher is willing to accept our opinions. {<b>TR- t-s-rel</b>}</li> </ul>
Researching the learning topics and activities in small groups at the computer room		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Can easily get more information online, can help you with your analytic power. Sometimes you can't get complete information in class!</li> </ul>
Group presentation and class discussion on researched topics		
Watching video clips of the movie "Mad World" and discussing issues reflected		
Sharing session (human library) of ex-mental patients, listening to their experience of sickness		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Very genuine, we can contact the ex-mental patients at a close distance {<b>SR-int-exp</b>}</li> <li>➤ My schooling experience is similar to her, but I'm not as serious as her</li> </ul>
Signing petition to request for government policy in support of caregivers of		

chronic illness patients and elders		
Discussing news (e.g., family tragedies) and community incidents (e.g., the suicidal case at nearby building) and issues reflected		
Sharing information and discussing current affairs and LS-related issues (e.g., about different views by scholars on breakfast) in WhatsApp group		

- What is/are the most impressive event(s) for you in the past months' Liberal Studies lessons in this school year?
  - Can chat with ex-mental patients {SR-int-exp}
- In what ways is this mode of learning and teaching, as shown by the examples in the above table, different from your school experience in the past?
  - Can freely explore issues.
- What, do you think, are the strengths of this mode of learning and teaching in Liberal Studies?
  - Fred: *Newfangled, because we always listened to teachers' teaching in the past, could not raise issues by ourselves. Now more relaxed than the past.* {SR-dem-att}
  - Lincoln: *Teacher leads us to seek for the answers, instead of giving the answers always.*
  - Landon: *Students [can] have [our] own views. The teacher is willing to listen, and to talk about extra-curricular knowledge.* {TR-t-s-rel}{SR-curio}
- Is there any new thoughts that you have developed in the past 2 months' learning in Liberal Studies?
  - Teaching in different formats

- Learn that some people do something against the law because of economic problems, (or) unwilling to implicate others; make me learn more about sick people's experience
- Has the past 2 months' learning in Liberal Studies developed your interest or concern in any social issue? (Numbers of students choosing respective options shown below, out of the 9 questionnaires collected up till Nov 28)
  - Situation of (ex-)mental patients: 5
  - Situation of chronic disease patients: 4
  - Situation of caregivers: 3
  - Health information affected by commercial activities of corporations: 1
  - People's health affected by economic conditions: 1
- Has the past 2 months' learning in Liberal Studies developed your interest or concern in any kind of socio-political participation (e.g., signing petition, discussing social issues in social media, attending forum on social issues, joining rally or demonstration)? (Numbers of students choosing respective options shown below, out of the 9 questionnaires collected up till Nov 28)
  - Signing petitions: 1
  - Expressing opinion, participating discussion in social media/occasions: 4
  - No such influence on me up to this moment: 4

### Appendix E: Questionnaire 3 (Original Chinese Version)

#### 5C 班通識科教學研究問卷 3

學號：\_\_\_\_\_

1. 自 9 月以來，最令我關注、投入的事情或活動依次序是： i. \_\_\_\_\_ ii. \_\_\_\_\_ iii. \_\_\_\_\_
2. 你同意以下關於本學期通識科學習或此刻你個人觀點的陳述嗎？請圈選適當的數字來表示，並請就你選取的數字給予簡單的原因以作說明：

學習經歷	極不同意 0 1 2 3 4 5 極同意	說明原因
和愛滋病感染者會面和聆聽他的分享，改變了我對愛滋病感染者的觀感。	0 1 2 3 4 5	
我會跟其他人分享我獲得有關愛滋病的新知識或新體會。	0 1 2 3 4 5	
假如要和一位愛滋病感染者握手，我或會有所猶疑。	0 1 2 3 4 5	
我不介意和一位男同性戀者在學習或工作上合作。	0 1 2 3 4 5	



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在課堂上和老師、同學 <b>交流</b> 有關愛滋病和同性戀的 <b>看法</b> ，令我對這些議題 <b>有新的體會</b> 。	0   1   2   3   4   5	
在課堂上和老師、同學 <b>交流</b> 有關學校生活和社會參與的 <b>看法</b> ，對我 <b>沒有什麼啟發</b> 。	0   1   2   3   4   5	
我認為學生以 <b>發言或行動</b> ，嘗試影響學校的政策或措施，是 <b>沒有任何作用的</b> 。	0   1   2   3   4   5	
有關器官捐贈的課堂， <b>令我體會</b> 到以 <b>實際行動</b> 回應社會需要的 <b>重要性</b> 。	0   1   2   3   4   5	

3. 你認為以下**哪些因素**對人的**健康有較大的影響**？（請在各項前面的括弧填上適當數字：以 1 表示最重要的因素，6 或 7 表示最不重要的因素。）

(   ) A. 個人生活習慣	(   ) B. 家庭關係、社交和社區網絡	我選取_____為 <b>最重要</b> 因素，原因是_____
(   ) C. 經濟條件	(   ) D. 居住環境及工作環境質素	



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( ) E. 政府政策和管 治取向	( ) F. 社會文化	我選取_____為 <b>最不重要</b> 因素, 原因是_____
( ) G. 其他(如有): _____		

請以你的個人想法，構想各種不同的可能性，填寫以下各題。例如題 5，你可以說：如果學生會擁有更大的校政參與權力，我會更加投入參與校政。

4. 如果：	➤ _____	➤ _____	} 我會更加投入 學校的學習生 活。
	➤ _____	➤ _____	
5. 如果：	➤ _____	➤ _____	} 我會更加投 入 <b>參與校政</b> (例如向校 方或學生會 表達意見)。
	➤ _____	➤ _____	



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6. 如果：




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我會更加投  
入參與社會  
及公共事  
務。



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### Appendix F: Questionnaire 3 with Data for Question 2

1. Since September, the matters or activities that I've been most involved in and concerned about were :

i. \_\_\_\_\_ ii. \_\_\_\_\_ iii. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you agree with the following statements about LS learning in this school term or your own viewpoints at this moments? Please circle the appropriate number to show your answer, and please give simple reason(s) to elaborate:

Statement	Strongly disagree 0 1 2 3 4 5	Strongly agree 0 1 2 3 4 5	Reason(s)
Meeting a HIV carrier and listening to his sharing has changed my impression on HIV carriers	0 1 2 3 4 5		Because previously thought that HIV carriers appear differently. (4) {UNMASKING} {EMPOWERPOINT} Learnt in depth about the ways of AIDS transmission. (5) {UNMASKING} Can let me have contact HIV carrier at a close distance. (4) {EMPATHY} Even dislike homosexuals more. (5) {SO-reg-ide}
I'll share the new knowledge and new experience that I've acquired about AIDS with others.	0 1 2 3 4 5		Let more people know. (5) {SOC_AGENCY} Not good at sharing. (3) Keep neutral attitude. (0) {SO- reg-ide} Nobody wants to know. (1) {SO- reg-ide} Lazy. (2)
I would hesitate if I am to shake hands with a HIV carrier.	0 1 2 3 4 5		Because I slightly mind, not knowing whether [I] should shake hands with HIV carriers. (3) Avoid body contact as far as possible. (3) {SO-reg-ide}
I do not mind cooperating with a gay man while studying or working.	0 1 2 3 4 5		Because it's only a cooperative relationship, I won't refuse to work with homosexuals due to discrimination. (4) {EMPATHY} Because [they are] too stupid in sex. (1) {SO-reg-ide} I don't like gay men. (1) {SO-reg-ide}



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Dialoging on AIDS and homosexuality with teachers and classmates in class has given me a new understanding of these topics.	0 1 2 3 4 5	We could talk on issues that we seldom talked about. (4) { <b>SR-curio</b> } { <b>TR-bk-taboo</b> }
I was not inspired by dialoging with my teacher and classmates about school life and social participation in class.	0 1 2 3 4 5	[We can make] teachers know what we need. (2) { <b>DEMOCRATIZATION</b> }
I think it is of no use for students to attempt to influence school policies or measures by any speech or action.	0 1 2 3 4 5	Fred: Thought that they just listen and will do nothing. (3) { <b>SO-auth-cult</b> } Because I've never tried. (2) { <b>SOC_AGENCY</b> } { <b>SR-will-t-p</b> } At least I can learn how the others think. (1) { <b>DEMOCRATIZATION</b> } { <b>SR-dem-att</b> } Doing activities can give students more chances to speak up. (1) Nicole: Don't know whether the school really improve policies or measures. (5) { <b>SO-auth-cult</b> } Jerry: Have asked them to fix facilities and they didn't do it. (4) { <b>SO-auth-cult</b> }
The lessons on organ donation made me realize the importance of taking concrete actions to respond to the needs of society.	0 1 2 3 4 5	If nobody takes concrete actions to respond, the society will not change. (5) { <b>SOC_AGENCY</b> } { <b>SR-will-t-p</b> } Thought of donating before. (4) { <b>SOC_AGENCY</b> } { <b>SR-will-t-p</b> } Know more about what the society's present needs are. (2?) Now there are many urgent patients who need our help. (5) { <b>SOC_AGENCY</b> } Need taking action most practical. (3) { <b>SOC_AGENCY</b> }



3. What factors do you think have greater influence on people's health? (Please fill in the brackets by appropriate numbers: 1 as the most important factor; 6 or 7 as the least important.)

( ) A. personal living habits	( ) B. family, social and community network	I choose _____ as the most important factor, and the reason is _____ _____
( ) C. economic conditions	( ) D. qualities of living and working environments	
( ) E. government policies and governing orientation	( ) F. social culture	I choose _____ as the least important factor, and the reason is _____ _____
( ) G. others (if any): _____		

Please complete the following by considering different possibilities by your own idea. For example, for question 5, you may say: If **the SU have greater power in participating school policy decision**, I would be more involved in participating school management.

4. If :
- |         |         |   |
|---------|---------|---|
| ➤ _____ | ➤ _____ | } I would be more involved in school learning life. |
| ➤ _____ | ➤ _____ |   |



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5. If:



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_



I would be more involved in participating school management . (e.g., voicing opinions to the school management or the SU.)

6. If :



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_



I would be more involved in participating social and public affairs.



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### Appendix G: Data for Questionnaire 3

student number		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	14	15	average		
		Chandler	Chelsea	James	Fred	Greg	Quincy	Louie	Lincoln	Landon	Nicole	Patrick	Jerry	Warren	Evan			
<b>Most involved/concerned matters/activities</b>	i	e-sports	home affairs		electronic games	electronic games	sleeping			Accompanying girl friend	current affairs?		playing mobile phones	AIDS	electronic games			
	ii	street workout	hanging out		playing drums	<b>political issues</b>	playing with chocolate (my dog)			soccer information	Knowledge about AIDS?		sleeping	electronic games	watching movies			
	iii	hitting on girls	playing mobile phones		playing soccer					electronic games (PS4)	obesity problem?		hanging out		sleeping			
<b>Meeting a HIV carrier and listening to his sharing has changed my impression on HIV carriers</b>		5	4		3	5			5	5	3	3	4	5	2	4.0		
<b>I'll share the new knowledge and new understanding/experience that I've acquired about AIDS with others.</b>		5	3		2	4			5	3	0	3	1	2	3	2.8		
<b>I would hesitate if I am to shake hands with a HIV carrier.</b>		0	3		1	3			5	3	3	3	3	0	3	2.5		
<b>I do not mind cooperating with a gay man while studying or working.</b>		5	4		5	3			1	3	4	3	4	1	5	3.5		



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student number		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	14	15	average		
		Chandler	Chelsea	James	Fred	Greg	Quincy	Louie	Lincoln	Landon	Nicole	Patrick	Jerry	Warren	Evan			
<b>Dialoging on AIDS and homosexuality with teachers and classmates in class has given me a new understanding of these topics.</b>		5	4		3	4			5	3	5	0	3	0	5	3.4		
<b>I was not inspired by dialoging with my teacher and classmates about school life and social participation in class.</b>		3	3		1	1			0	2	0		3	4	3	2.0		
<b>I think it is of no use for students to attempt to influence school policies or measures by any speech or action.</b>		2	2		3	1			1	1	5		4	1	2	2.2		
<b>The lessons on organ donation made me realize the importance of taking concrete actions to respond to the needs of society.</b>		5	4		3	3			5	2	5	3	4	2	1	3.4		
<b>factors influencing people's health</b>																3rd question-naire	1st question-naire	difference
<b>personal living habits</b>		3	2		6	6	2		2	1	2	3	3	1	1	2.67	2.09	0.58
<b>family, social and community network</b>		5	1		1	3	4		3	2	4	1	1	2	4	2.58	2.91	-0.33
<b>economic conditions</b>		1	3		3	4	1		1	4	3	2	2	3	3	2.50	3.00	-0.50
<b>qualities of living and working environments</b>		2	4		2	5	3		4	3	1	4	4	4	2	3.17	3.00	0.17



student number		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	14	15	average		
		Chandler	Chelsea	James	Fred	Greg	Quincy	Louie	Lincoln	Landon	Nicole	Patrick	Jerry	Warren	Evan			
<b>government policies and governing orientation</b>		4	6		4	1	5		5	6	5	6	5	6	6	4.92	5.09	-0.17
<b>social culture</b>		6	5		5	2	6		6	5	6	5	6	5	5	5.17	4.91	0.26

student number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	14	15
	Chandler	Chelsea	James	Fred	Greg	Quincy	Louie	Lincoln	Landon	Nicole	Patrick	Jerry	Warren	Evan
reason behind most important factor	without money you're doomed to die, money can change everything.	[I] pay much attention on family relationship.		A person has a family from childhood to adulthood.	This affects the whole territory.			Personally I pay much attention to money and think that economic conditions can change many things.	People with higher self-controlling ability are more healthy.	Environment can easily affect my health e.g., winter.	When you have very good relationship with family, you can talk even bad things with them.			
reason behind least important factor	can be ignored.	Even I don't know why.			Other factors are more important.			No explanation.	There won't any welfare from the government for us.	I never care about social culture and they have nothing to do with my health.	[I] don't understand much about government policies.			
If..., I would be more involved in school learning life.	there is no exam	[I can] have mobile phone in hand [at school]		more diversified activities are added to lessons	[we can] use mobile phone at school (most of other schools allow that!)	I play with mobile phone and [the phone] won't be confiscated and [I won't be] scolded by Miss (the teacher)		the "757" attendance system is cancelled	the school allow [students to] use mobile phones [at school]	[we can] have mobile phone [in hand at school]	[we can] have [mobile] phone [in hand at school]	there is sleeping time [at school]	the school use more electronic products in class	there is comprehensive e-teaching



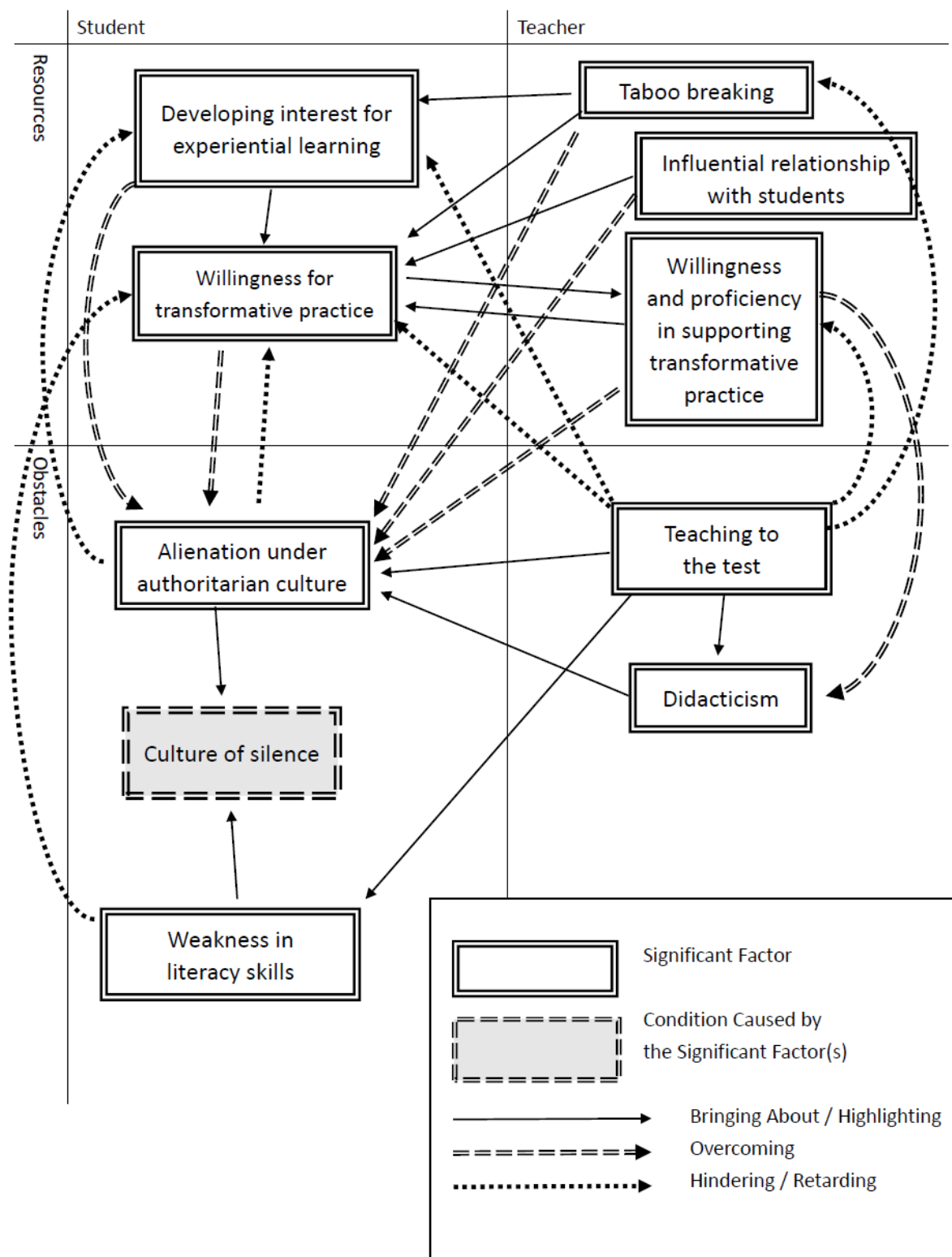
student number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	14	15
	Chandler	Chelsea	James	Fred	Greg	Quincy	Louie	Lincoln	Landon	Nicole	Patrick	Jerry	Warren	Evan
	freer (more elastic) school time	classes are more entertaining		amend the "757" rule (a rule related to school attendance)	school activities are more diversified				set PE as a [DSE] elective subject	there is no Bible [-related] activities	[we] have PE lessons for the whole day	casual wear is allowed [at school]	[we] need not go to school so early	can play with mobile phone in class
				the school add more PE lessons						the school doesn't have any [rules on students'] uniform and appearance	[we can] have computer [for use in class]	[we] can use mobile phone [at school]	there are holidays without homework	[we can] be wear casual clothes
If..., I would be more involved in school learning life.										[we] don't need to be given a demerit and penalized to do copying after four times of failing to bring textbooks	there is no Religious Education period			
If..., I would be more involved in participating school management.	the structure of SU can be reconstructed			there are more school affair consultation to give the management greater pressure	the school management gives more response to students' opinions	[I] need not go to school		the school management seriously treat the opinions raised by students	the school management really listen to our opinions	[the school] adds an air heater [to each classroom]	[we] don't need to wear school uniform at school	school time starts later	the school management agree with students' opinions	there is electronic questionnaire



student number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	14	15
	Chandler	Chelsea	James	Fred	Greg	Quincy	Louie	Lincoln	Landon	Nicole	Patrick	Jerry	Warren	Evan
	the SU Council is dissolved and all people can monitor the SU Committee				there are more school affair consultation to give the management greater pressure				[the school management] consider our opinions and not the school's	[the school] can cut 2-3 lesson periods [for every school day]	there is no morning assembly	teachers do [their job] better		SU actively consult [us]
					there is a "democracy wall"				[the school] can count only [those later than] 8:00 a.m. as late attendants		[we] don't need to arrive at school at 7:57, but at 9:00			
									there is no morning assembly					
If..., I would be more involved in participat-ing social and public affairs.	the laws and punishments can be rewritten in			the age limit for voting is lowered	some issues which are more closely related to myself arise	[I] can do whatever I like at school		I have a suitable wage	[the matter is] beneficial to my family			[I can] take part in [certain] social activities	the school arrange blood donation	killing people is not against the law
	the government official posts can be reassigned								[the matter] happens beside me					there is no law
	we change to a monarchical system													(pity that there is no "if")



## Appendix H: Matrix Diagram on the Interplay among the Factors Found in this Study with Shor's Four-Domain Paradigm



### Appendix I: Frequency Statistics on the Resources and Obstacles in Applying CP

Category	Code	Abbreviation	Frequency of Occurrence	
			Field/Reflection Notes	Questionnaires
Teacher Obstacles	Traditional Training / Didacticism*	TO-didact	3	0
	Curricular Limits*	TO-curr-lim	2	0
	Rushed Schedules*	TO-ru-schd	2	0
	Fear of Freedom	TO-fear-free	0	0
	Teacher Burnout	TO-burn	0	0
Student Obstacles	Exposure to Regressive Ideologies	SO-reg-ide	7	6
	Weak Literacy Skills*	SO-lit	8	0
	Alienation under Authoritarian Culture++	SO-auth-cult	2	3
	Lack of Social Exposure++	SO-lack-soc	5	0
	Low Expectation/Motivation for Learning+	SO-lo-exp	3	0
	Health and Rest*	SO-heal-rest	3	0
	“Assignment Mentality”++	SO-assign	2	0
	Faux Learning++	SO-faux	2	0
	Acceleration/Amplification in Mass Culture/ Mass Media/Internet Activities*	SO-acc-am	2	0
	Bad Interpersonal Relationship among Peers++	SO-s-s-rel	2	0
	Information Literacy+	SO-info-lit	2	0
	Thinking Skills+	SO-think	2	0
	Vocationalism	SO-voc	1	0
	Resistance	SO-res	0	0
	Uneven Levels of Development	SO-l-dev	0	0
	Prior Schooling	SO-pri-sch	0	0
	Unattractive Campus Setting*	SO-camp	0	0
	Language/Discourse	SO-lang	0	0
	Family Life	SO-fam-life	0	0



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Category	Themes for Coding	Abbreviation	Frequency of Occurrence	
			Field/Reflection Notes	Questionnaires
Student Resources	Willingness for Transformative Practice++	SR-will-t-p	4	10
	Sense of Autonomy++	SR-auto	1	12
	Interest in Experiential Learning++	SR-int-exp	0	7
	Curiosity	SR-curio	2	2
	Democratic Attitudes	SR-dem-att	0	4
	Creativity++	SR-creat	1	0
	Life and Work Experience	SR-l&w	1	0
	Desire for Self-Esteem	SR-sf-est	1	0
	Business Attitudes	SR-busi-att	0	0
	Extra Abilities Hidden by Performance Strike	SR-ex-ab	0	0
	Speech	SR-sp	0	0
	Humor and Emotional Tone	SR-hum	0	0
Teacher Resources	Willingness and Proficiency in Supporting Transformative Practice++	TR-will-t-p	6	0
	Good Relationship with Students ++	TR-t-s-rel	4	2
	Taboo Breaking++	TR-bk-taboo	5	1
	Community Network++	TR-netwk	2	0
	Authority	TR-auth	2	0
	Articulateness	TR-artic	1	0
	Familiarity with Popular Culture++	TR-pop	1	0
	Love of Learning	TR-learn	1	0
	Conviviality	TR-conv	0	0
	Training in Research	TR-res	0	0



	Deviance Credits	TR-dev-cred	0	0
	Institutional Clout	TR-inst	0	0
	Thinking Skills	TR-think	0	0



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