A Pedagogy of Inquiry: Toward Student-centered Media Education

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Abstract

Background: Almost three decades have passed since the Grunwald Declaration on Media Education was issued by the representatives of 19 nations at UNESCO's International Symposium on Media Education in Germany (UNESCO 1982). Cycles of information revolution and education reform over this period have led to significant changes in the sectors of media and education. The new media environment has seen the rise of "prosumers" who contribute to the proliferation of "user-generated content". In the education sector, policy makers have proposed various reforms to address the ills of the present schooling system, and learning theories have developed from behaviorism and cognitivism to social constructionism. Communication technologies now provide a more enabling environment for audiences to engage in media prosumption, and the shift in focus toward knowledge construction highlights the importance of learning motivation. With such dramatic changes on both sides, it is pertinent to examine how media education practices will be affected.

Aims: Armed with the same goal and a belief in the potential of a pedagogy of inquiry, this study started with the basic "ingredient" in any inquiry: the question. The aim was to determine what questions learners would most want to ask when assigned to conduct an independent inquiry study about a media issue.

Method: A self-administered semi-structured questionnaire on media use was distributed to 649 sixth-formers in 11 secondary schools in Hong Kong between December 2008 and February 2009.

Results: The findings identified a general concern about media ethics among young people, but also their inadequacy in the ability to formulate inquiry questions.

Conclusion: These findings have significant implications for both the media and education sectors. For the media sector, the credibility crisis has become an issue that requires substantial and serious attention; whilst educators must carefully consider the limits of inquiry learning.

Keywords: inquiry learning, media education, Hong Kong

探究學習與學生為本：變動中的傳媒教育

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摘要

近年，媒體和教育理論推陳出新，不約而同地關注到在急速轉變的傳播和教學環境中，「受眾」和「學生」再不如想像中那麼被動。在媒體方面，「產消合一者」（Prosumer）主動參與創製媒體內容，改變了昔日較為單向的傳播方式，而在連串教育改革中，知識建構論愈來愈得到認同，學生的學習動機、興趣和性向，跟學習效果有密切關係，教學要以「學生為本」的呼聲，漸成主流。

問題是，哪些媒體議題能引起學生興趣？學生又會否樂於看見這些議題變成學校課程？誰有權定斷最終的課程內容？教師和學生如何協調彼此不同的關注以至品味？

本研究直接探問青年人最有興趣研究的媒體議題。通過把問題歸納和分類，研究亦會分析他們如何建構媒體問題，從而推論他們提出批判性問題的能力。

Introduction

Almost three decades have passed since the Grunwald Declaration on Media Education was issued by the representatives of 19 nations at UNESCO's International Symposium on Media Education in Germany (UNESCO 1982). Over this period, the two interchangeable terms "media education" and "media literacy" have become common usage. Media education initiatives have flourished, along with continuous debates about their objectives, curriculum, pedagogy, and other issues (Brown 1998; Hart 1998; Lee 1997; Kubey 1998; Kubey and Baker 1999).

The widespread use of the terms "media education" or "media literacy" may at times obscure the fact that this is after all a combination of two words, that is, "media" and "education" or "literacy." Cycles of information revolution and education reform over this period have led to significant changes in the sectors of media and education. The new media environment has seen the emergence of terms like "prosumers" (Tapscott and Williams 2006) and pro-ams (Gee 2009), which place more emphases on the agency of media users. The proliferation of "user-generated content" (Bruns, 2008) has brought notable changes to the production, distribution and consumption of media content. In the education sector, policy makers have proposed various reforms to address the ills of the present schooling system, and learning theories have developed from behaviorism and cognitivism to social constructionism (Motschnig-Pitrik and Holzinger 2002). Coincidentally or not, both developments have generated a different understanding of the roles that audiences and learners assume.

These changes set the background for the present study. At a time when communication technologies provide a more enabling environment for audiences to engage in media prosumption, and the shift in focus toward knowledge construction highlights the importance of learning motivation, it is unlikely that media education practices will remain unaffected. A basic and highly relevant question will be: to what extent learners are prepared to take up these active new roles in both media and education?

This is an exploratory study that attempts to tackle the above issue with a basic ingredient in active learning, that is, question. The aim was to determine what questions learners would most want to ask when assigned to conduct an independent inquiry study about a media issue. In total, 439 questions about media were collected and analyzed from a sample of 649 sixth-formers in 11 secondary schools in Hong Kong. The main findings and their implications are reported and discussed, while the changing meanings of "learning" and "media", as well as the implications on media education, will first be revisited.

Changing Roles of Audiences and Learners

To begin, what follows is an account of two emergent trends in media and learning that have converged into a single phenomenon, that is, the recognition of the active role of audiences and learners.

In the field of communication, new technologies now allow greater flexibility in the production, distribution, manipulation, and consumption of data, which has given rise to a new category of "prosumers" who proliferate a great many creative, cultural, and social practices on the Internet. The term "prosumer" was first coined by Alvin Toffler in 1980 (Toffler 1980: 275-288), but with the advent of user-friendly communication technologies in the new media landscape it has taken on a new meaning (Quinion

1999; Humphreys and Kent 2008). New terms like "produsage" (Bruns, 2008), "co-creation" (Banks and Deuze, 2009) and "peer production" (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006) are coined to account for the shifting nature of media production and consumption. "User-generated content" abounds in the new media landscape, for example, blogging (Kim 2005; Dvorak 2006; Blog Statistics 2007), mash-up videos (Norris 2002), and viral videos (Allossery 2000; Kiss 2006; Sender 2007; Bachrach 2008). Social media such as Facebook and MySpace also promote new forms of networking and greater convergence (Jenkins 2006; Boyd 2008). These developments have prompted researchers to probe various questions relating to civic participation in the new media age (e.g., Kahn and Kellner 2004). Calls for participatory journalism and community media have been made by those who envision a new media culture that is by the people and for the people (Jankowski 2002; Gillmore 2004), but skeptics lament the emerging "cult of the amateur" (Keen 2007) and the increasing commercialization and trivialization of the Internet (Dahlgren 2005).

Although no conclusions can yet be drawn about prosumption and participation, there is a growing consensus that audiences are far from passive dupes or helpless victims in the sea of media messages. Rather, our media environments are increasingly a product of constant interactions between various players. The boundaries that once demarcated producers from consumers have become blurred (Buckingham and Willett 2006; Buckingham 2008).

Jenkins (2009) discussed the challenges that participatory culture poses for media education, and raised three concerns for policy makers and educators to consider: the participation gap, the transparency problem, and the ethical challenges. The ethical challenges are particularly relevant to this discussion, as young people are nowadays pressed into making judgments in the capacity of media producers. Given that "credibility problems" already existed in eras in which media was heavily managed (Blumer and Kavanagh 1999), the new media environment demands an even higher level of awareness on the part of media consumers.

A similar shift in emphasis has also occurred in the field of education. There have been waves of education reforms across the world, all of which have aspired to meet the changing demands of changing societies (Education Commission 2000). Several new forms of literacy have been proposed (Mackey 2002; Livingstone 2004), and in this vein a strategy that most media education advocates have adopted to promote their cause is the concept of "media literacy." By co-opting the term "literacy," these advocates have attempted to associate the movement with the positive attributes of literacy. This strategy stresses the need to equip learners with a set of generic capabilities and skills, rather than knowledge alone, in a fast changing society in which static knowledge may at times be considered obsolete (Heinle 1999). Motivating learners to embark on life-long learning is seen to be more relevant and important, and as such, there is growing awareness that students' interests in specific areas should be taken into account in education reforms (Kellner 2002).

As noted earlier, learning theories have undergone notable changes in the last few decades. Motschnig-Pitrik and Andreas (2002) claimed that the latest didactic mainstream theory is constructivism, which takes learning to be a highly individualistic active knowledge construction process. According to this theory, knowledge cannot be simply imparted or delivered, but must be actively processed by learners. How well a student learns not only depends on how

well a teacher teaches, but also on how ready he or she is to participate in the knowledge construction process.

Student-centered Media Education

These shifting trends in media and learning theories have led to calls for a student-centered media education. Media education advocates have for years debated the needs to include media literacy in formal curriculum (Alvarado 1987; Considine 1994; Lusted 1994; Lee 1997; Kubey and Baker 1999; McBrien 1999). Media literacy is considered as a principal component of democratic education (Tyner 1992), and is believed to be more political than any other form of education (Bazalgette 1992; Ferguson 1994). Educators have worked hard to challenge the impression that media constitutes "common knowledge" and is not worthy of serious attention (Duncan 1992; Gripsrud 1999). However, as soon as media education finds a foothold in schools, educators are presented with the practical problems of curriculum and pedagogy. The questions of "what to teach" and "how to teach" in media education are inevitably associated with the educators' understanding of the media in the first instance, and their conception of learning in the second.

Over the past few decades, the remarkable changes in both the media and learning have further stimulated debates about the merits and limitations of various teaching approaches (Sholle and Denski 1994; Buckingham 1996, 1998). Each of these approaches makes certain assumptions about what constitutes media and the aspects of it that students should learn. The inoculatory approach, for example, tends to see media messages as being as powerful as magic bullets (cf. Baran and Davis 2006), and

holds that it is thus essential to equip students with protective vaccines against their negative influences. At the other end of the spectrum, educators argue that media is neither good nor bad, and that it is most important to empower students to become competent readers, and better still, participants in the meaning-making process.

Although direct instruction appears to fit the former approach, there are diverse views as to how to attain the goal of empowerment. Critical pedagogy was once hailed as an option, yet doubts have been raised about whether students will actually apply what they criticize in the classroom in their everyday lives (Buckingham 1996; McLaren 2000). Advocates of learning by doing propose engaging students in various kinds of media production, but this has generated concerns about "technicist traps" and "inferiority complexes" (Masterman 1985), or other practicalities such as the amount of time and effort involved and the changing interaction between teachers and students (Grace and Tobin 1998).

In hindsight, media education advocates have long stressed the importance of understanding the media knowledge and experience that young people bring with them to school (Alvarado and Boyd-Barrett 1992). As early as the 1970s, Murdock and Phelps (1973) urged teachers to be open to students' cultural experiences so that bridges could be built between school and their everyday lives. That the tastes and preferences of students should not be dismissed or discarded is a common understanding in most educational approaches (Silverblatt 2008). In this regard, it is not too far-fetched to conclude that media education has always striven to be student-centered.

Despite the goodwill, it is hard to determine what really interests students about the media, and

whether they would wish to see those interests becoming curriculum (Buckingham 2000). Other problems include the diverse definitions that teachers employ of commonly used terms such as "critical understanding" (Burn and Durran 2007), and the fact that students may be uncomfortable with having teachers and classes centered on their own media.

Furthermore, the assumptions held about young people determine how certain issues are framed and pursued. Bennett and Wells (2009) used Coleman's division of "managed environments" and "autonomous environments" to categorize these assumptions. Media creators in the former category tend to see young people as citizens who have yet to become fully developed. Creators in the latter category, in contrast, believe that young people are able to speak for themselves. These two sets of assumptions result in different dynamics and interactions in the new media.

Regardless of these often fruitful exchanges of views about young people and media literacy, the voices of young people themselves in relation to the content and pedagogy of media education and their responses to intervention in their cultural experiences are rarely reported. In a comprehensive review of media literacy education in the United States, Hobbs and Jensen (2009) urged that it is vital to encourage students' motivation and engagement through an exploration of issues that are perceived to be relevant and meaningful. Hobbs (1998) similarly argued that a pedagogy of inquiry should be implemented if we want "to make "asking critical questions about what you watch, see, and read" stand at the center of what it means to be media literate." This suggests that by exploring what motivates students to learn, what students want to ask about the media, and whether students are capable of asking critical questions, more

informed actions in future media education may be formulated.

Education Reforms in Hong Kong

These calls for more proactive and inquiry-based learning appear to fit in the wider picture in Hong Kong. Hong Kong has undergone successive education reforms since 1984 (Tsang 1998), yet despite this "hyperactivity" (Morris et al. 2000), the system is cast in constant doubt. In 1999, the Education Commission stated that

> common criticisms of our present education system are that there are many subjects, the homework is heavy, and the examination pressure is intense. Students prepare for examinations through rote-learning and memorisation, without sufficient freedom to give free rein to their creativity and imagination, and to develop an interest in self-learning. The language proficiency of students has deteriorated (Education Commission 1999: 11).

The post-colonial government has been determined to set a new agenda in education. After several rounds of consultation, it defined the aims of education in Hong Kong in the following terms.

> To enable everyone to develop to their full and individual potential in all areas covering ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics, so that each individual is ready for continuous self-learning, thinking, exploring, innovating and adapting to changes throughout life; filled with self-confidence and team spirit; and willing to strive incessantly for the prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of the society, and to contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large (Education Commission 1999: 15).

According to this new agenda, in addition to the traditional emphasis on ethics, intellect, physique, social skills, and aesthetics, schools in Hong Kong are expected to produce a new generation of students who can learn on their own, think for themselves, and explore new arenas of learning. In this way, they will learn to be citizens in a free and democratic society. To achieve these aims, full curriculum reform was set in motion. The Curriculum Development Council published a consultation document entitled *Learning to Learn* in November 2000 in which it was proposed that existing subject boundaries should be replaced by more flexible key learning areas in junior secondary school. In 2009, the education authorities introduced the New Senior Secondary Curriculum (NSSC), as part of which all senior secondary students will be required to take the new core subject Liberal Studies. One of the aims of this addition is "to enable students to develop multiple perspectives on perennial and contemporary issues in different contexts (e.g., cultural, social, economic, political and technological contexts)" (Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority 2007).

It is explicitly stated that the new subject adopts an issue-inquiry approach to the selection of content for, and the pedagogy used to deliver, the curriculum. Part of the assessment of the subject requires students to engage in independent inquiry studies during the three secondary school years. A chief aim is to provide an opportunity for students to learn to become self-directed learners responsible for their own learning (Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority 2007). Through this pedagogy of inquiry, "students will learn to see the connection among different themes and disciplines, and appreciate the complexities and organization of knowledge.

Teachers are advised to take a developmental approach and employ various learning and teaching strategies to help students acquire a relatively comprehensive understanding of the issues, master related facts, analyze the core of the questions, give balanced considerations to different views and make reasoned judgments" (http://ls.edb.hkedcity.net/Includes/GetPage.aspx?url=%2fcmsContent%2f24&template=%2fhome%2fnavtemplate).

When the new curriculum was first tabled in 2004, the "mass media" was cited as one of the six areas for independent inquiry studies. In later surveys among teachers, it was found that the majority of the respondents believed that their students would conduct an independent inquiry study related to a mass media issue. Although this element was not included in the finalized version of the curriculum, the survey results show that studying the media appears to be a popular option.

Liberal Studies and its emphasis on a pedagogy of inquiry have sparked much controversy and debate in Hong Kong, yet the new curriculum was implemented in September 2009 despite this uncertainty. Although the actual challenges and opportunities offered by an inquiry-based pedagogy have yet to be identified, the new opening creates a space in which the goals of media literacy education and education reforms converge, and in which student-centeredness is heavily emphasized. These developments connect media and learning in a way that places the motivation of students at the very center. It thus provides a unique opportunity to capture the voices of young people in relation to media and learning.

Formulating Questions

This study focuses on an empirical question in

media literacy education, namely, the kind of media issues or questions that young people most want to explore in independent inquiry studies. The study also aims to find out how young people frame media questions by sorting such questions into categories.

A self-administered semi-structured questionnaire on media use was distributed to 649 sixth-formers in 11 secondary schools in Hong Kong between December 2008 and February 2009. Due to resource constraints, it was not possible to conduct a probability sampling of all 503 secondary schools in Hong Kong. Purposive sampling was instead used that included all of the main types of local schools in Hong Kong. All of the sixth-formers in these schools were included in the study.

Sixth-formers were chosen for this study for two reasons. First, most current sixth-formers were born around 1991 and 1992, just before the first commercial Internet Service Providers (ISPs) emerged in Hong Kong in 1993 (HKTDC 2007). Since then, the media environment has undergone constant and rapid change, and these sixth-formers have literally grown up digitally. How these digital natives relate to the mass media should thus be of high relevance to this study. Second, under the present education system in Hong Kong, secondary school students must sit the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in Form 5, and about 30% secure places for further study in Form 6. Hence, sixth-formers are a select group of young people with proven academic abilities.

The survey was conducted in class on a regular school day. Teachers distributed and collected the questionnaires within the same class period. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part 2 contained questions that targeted the media use of young people, which findings are presented in another paper (Chu, 2010). In Part 1, the respondents were presented with the following short paragraph.

From 2009 onwards, all senior secondary school students will take Liberal Studies as a core subject. Students will have to conduct an independent inquiry study project, which requires them to identify a meaningful issue, to formulate a feasible research question, and to develop possible approaches to answer the question. "Media" is proposed by some to be a suitable area of study. If you were to ask a question about a media issue that would eventually lead to the independent inquiry study project, what question would you most want to ask?

The responses were reviewed and a coding scheme was developed. Each response was assigned to one of 12 question types. The coders also classified the nature of the inquiry according to the most identifiable question word, which included "what," "why," "how," and "whether." The coding was conducted by the author and another coder trained in the coding system. The inter-coder reliability for the Part 1 question was 0.83, and for the Part 2 questions was 0.81. This indicates a high level of agreement between the two coders.

Findings
Issues and Topics

The survey aimed to identify the types of issues and topics that students most want to deal with in an inquiry-based learning project. In addition to the mention of "media," no further hints were given. It can thus be reasonably assumed that the responses were spontaneous and reflected the kinds of topics deemed most worthy of further inquiry.

Table 1 presents an overview of the frequency with which different issues and topics were mentioned by the respondents.

Table 1

Issues and topics

No.	Issues and topics	Frequency	Percent
1	History or development of the media	8	1.2
2	Definition/functions of the media	54	8.3
(I)	*Factual questions*	*(62)*	*(9.5)*
3	Technical/technological/operational aspects	23	3.5
4	Vocational/career aspects	18	2.8
(II)	*Technical questions*	*(41)*	*(6.3)*
5	Ethical practices/professional conduct	150	23.1
6	Press freedom/media responsibilities	37	5.7
7	Media influence/effects	36	5.5
(III)	*Evaluative questions*	*(223)*	*(34.3)*
8	Questions with mixed elements	50	7.7
9	Incomplete questions	26	4
(IV)	*Mixed questions*	*(76)*	*(11.7)*
10	"I have no interest/no question about the media"	17	2.6
11	No answer	210	32.4
12	Other	20	3.1
	Total	649	100

Some of the issues were regrouped into the broader categories of I) Factual questions (original categories 1 and 2); II) Technical questions (original categories 3 and 4); III) Evaluative questions (original categories 5 to 7); and IV) Mixed questions (original categories 8 to 9).

Under this grouping, the category of evaluative questions outnumbers that of "no answer." If the "no answer" responses are excluded from the total valid responses (N=439), then evaluative questions account for 50.7% of the total. In both instances, questions about ethical practices, professional conduct, press freedom, media responsibilities, and media influences were most frequently cited by the secondary school students in this study. Mixed questions (11.7%) and questions that center around factual information about the media (9.5%) tended to contain several issues in one statement.

On examining the individual questions posed by the respondents in greater detail, several keywords repeatedly turned up that indicate the presence of some common concerns among the respondents. As many as 150 students raised questions about the "ethics" of the media. Typical questions of this kind included "Should the media follow certain ethical standards?" and "Are media outlets that engage in unethical practices professional?" In addition to "ethical" and "professional," two of the most frequently mentioned terms, there were recurring questions about the extent to which the media should invade the privacy of celebrities, whether the media should enjoy absolute freedom, the responsibilities of the media, and whether certain media are credible. Value-laden adjectives such as "sensational," "shameful," and "untrustworthy" often occurred. The term "paparazzi" was often used in questions about the limits of press freedom, as if the paparazzi were synonymous with the media. Taken together, these

keywords convey a strong sense of distrust of the media.

Nature of Inquiry

Considering that the questions posed by the students would supposedly lead to further inquiry, the coders used the key question word used to judge the nature of the inquiry implied in each case. The question words were taken as "what," "why," "how," and "whether." The "what" type questions were framed in a way that made them more descriptive in tone, and they appeared to expect more direct and straightforward answers. Examples include "What are the functions of the media?" "What are the ethical standards that the media should observe?" and "What influence do the media have on society?" The "why" type questions looked for explanations and casual relationships, for example, "Why do the paparazzi run after celebrities?" The "how" type questions showed more interest in prescriptive measures, such as "How can we stop the media from invading others' privacy?" Finally, the "whether" questions were concerned with making connections between, or among, various phenomenon. Unlike the "why" questions, the "whether" type questions were generally more open-ended and interested in weighing a host of factors in a complex scenario, for example, "In the face of ethical concerns and profit, which factors should the media consider?" and "When there is a matter of grave concern, is it definitely wrong to conduct secret filming?"

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the frequency of the different question types.

Table 2

Nature of Inquiry

Key Question Word	Frequency	Percent
What	179	27.6
Why	26	4
How	69	10.6
Whether	92	14.2
No answer	283	43.6
Total	649	100

Despite the high percentage of invalid responses (43.6%) in this part, it is clear that the "what" type of question prevailed (27.6%). If only the valid responses are considered, then the figure for the "what" questions increases to 48%. This suggests that of those who bothered to construct a question for further inquiry, most tended to frame it in a descriptive manner. The next most frequent was the "whether" question (14.2%), which were more concerned with finding relationships and making evaluations of a host of factors. The "how" questions, which were likely to generate prescriptive measures, ranked third in frequency (10.6%). In this particular sample, only 4% of the respondents framed their questions with the question word "why."

Discussion

Ethical Challenges

Contrary to the ideas of those who argue that popular culture will be a favorite topic among students in media classes, this study found no mention of popular culture topics. There are two

possible explanations for this. First, it may be that the importance of popular culture has long been overestimated in the media education curriculum. That is not to say that popular culture is not important to young people, but rather that despite its centrality in the lives of many young people, popular culture is not deemed to be worthy of further inquiry in the eyes of students. Second, it may be that the students were unwilling to bring their tastes and preferences into the school setting and turn them into a subject for inquiry. These explanations require further testing, but nevertheless the absence of popular culture in the findings challenges some of the conventional thinking on media education.

Interestingly, the study found that a large majority of the respondents touched on the notion of "media ethics". The frequent use of keywords such as "ethical," "professional," "privacy," "freedom," and "responsibilities" indicate overt doubts about current media standards and queries about the rules that the media employs in everyday practices. Also implied in the evaluative questions was a strong sense of distrust and even disgust. Again, similar explanations suggest themselves. It may be that we have long underestimated such concerns among young people. Alternatively, students may believe that evaluative questions make better questions, both intellectually and morally, in the eyes of teachers. More broadly speaking, they may feel that these questions are more legitimate and politically correct in the school setting.

When Jenkins (2009) mentioned the "ethical challenges" of participatory culture, he was referring to the challenges faced by the younger generation who are assuming the dual roles of media producers and consumers. The straightforward definition of "ethics" given in an online dictionary is "the rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or the members of a profession: medical ethics" (http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ethics). Young people must make choices and judgments about rules or standards that will have implications for their conduct. To put it in even simpler terms, ethics are about right and wrong. Regardless of the specific reasons why our respondents picked this issue for inquiry, the findings suggest that the young are aware of the presence or absence of standards of right and wrong in the media. The many questions that targeted the relationships between freedom and responsibilities and privacy and public interest also reflect that the young are able to articulate the delicate balances involved in these areas.

Media education is often culturally specific (Lemish 2003), and its goals and implementation are affected by social conditions and cultural values. The dominant ethical concerns in this study must thus be understood in the specific context of Hong Kong. Before 1997, freedom of speech was one of the greatest concerns for Hong Kong society as a whole, as were worries that free speech would be curbed when Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule (Martin and Wilson 1997). Ironically, just two years after the handover of sovereignty, a 1999 poll found that "half of the respondents supported a proposal by the government's Law Reform Commission's Sub-Committee on Privacy to establish a Press Council that could penalize journalists - even though they think such a move would affect press freedom" (Social Sciences Research Center 1999). In the same survey, it was found that the public's perception of the credibility of Hong Kong's news media had sunk to a new low compared with previous surveys conducted by the same research center (c.f. Chung 1995). Another credibility rating survey conducted at regular intervals by the Chinese University of Hong

Kong showed the same trend. In particular, there was a marked decrease in credibility ratings in 1997 and 1998, with 62% of respondents believing that the problems faced by the news media were not about political intervention, but rather the media's own ethical practices (Chan, So and Lee 1999). There are few signs that these problems have been solved in the intervening decade, and the lingering sentiments are likely to have been translated into the inquiry questions suggested by the student respondents in this study.

Pedagogical Challenges

In an era in which both media and learning are undergoing rapid changes and more emphasis is being placed on the active roles of audiences and learners, calls for "student-centered media education" have become more pertinent. However, although such calls are strongly justified, it is also legitimate to ponder the question of how to start. It is first necessary to determine what is meant by "student-centered," given that "students" are never a unified entity but are diverse in age, gender, socio-economic background, and media preferences.

Hobbs (1998) suggested the use of a pedagogy of inquiry. Luke (2003), in her discussion of collaborative, constructivist theories of pedagogy, and problem-based learning, pointed out that changes in approaches to learning indicate the reconceptualization of knowledge. In inquiry-based learning, students inform their own learning with questions that they initiate and want answered. In this conceptualization, knowledge is not something that can be delivered or passed on. Rather, learners are expected to take on a far more active role in knowledge construction. Initial interests and learning motivations thus play crucial roles in the learning process.

It is against this background that this study invited sixth-formers to formulate a question about a media issue or topic that would eventually lead to inquiry-based learning. Although it would be hasty to make definitive conclusions based on data collected over such a short period of time, the framing of questions provides some tentative and useful clues about the abilities and potential of students to engage in inquiry-based learning. The predominance of "what" type of questions does not appear to be a good indicator. Although this predominance may be due to a lack of understanding of the requirement of "inquiry-based learning" in the question statement, the ways in which the respondents framed their questions suggests that they assumed that there were standardized and model answers. In other words, they appeared to believe in the existence of static and fixed knowledge about the media, which contradicts the basic premises of the constructivist theory of learning. The reconceptualization of knowledge and its acquisition was not identified among the students. One possible explanation is that the respondents were still schooled in more "traditional" ways in which direct instruction was still the norm, and hence they were not used to formulating questions for their own inquiry. It would also be due to the fact that they were yet to receive the necessary training regarding "asking questions". In short, this finding indicates that serious pedagogical challenges remain for education reform in general, and for application of a pedagogy of inquiry in particular.

Conclusion

Proponents of media education have long argued its benefits and the importance of teaching various key concepts and principles (cf. National Association of Media Literacy Education http://namle.net/).

These tireless efforts have finally led to the forging of a consensus that media education is far more than a "Mickey Mouse subject" (Bazalgette 1992). However, in actual classroom practice, problems relating to curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment continue to generate new debates. These debates are often related to classroom dynamics and power relations between teachers and students, which somehow reflect worries about the effectiveness of media education programs. The problem was eloquently discussed by Buckingham (1996), who questioned the limits of critical discourse and whether students criticize media performance because they genuinely believe that it merits criticism or only because they know that this will please their teachers. These critical reflections have helped media educators to move on to different pedagogies, with the goal of achieving "genuine" student-centered media education. However, with the recent developments in the new media and learning theories, the time is now ripe for more solid experiments.

Armed with the same goal and a belief in the potential of a pedagogy of inquiry, this study started with the basic "ingredient" in any inquiry: the question. By collecting questions from 649 sixth-formers in Hong Kong, it identified a general concern about media ethics among young people, but also their inadequacy in the ability to formulate inquiry questions. Although the study was based on a limited non-random sample, and participating students were given little time to refine their questions, these findings have some serious implications for both the media and education sectors. The implication for the media sector is that the credibility crisis has become an issue that requires substantial and serious attention. The implications for the education sector are that students actually share some of our gravest concerns, but that educators must carefully consider the limits of inquiry learning.

The most important implication, however, is for media education. This study, although limited in scope and scale, recognizes the changing role of audiences and learners and sets out to address the essence of student-centered media education by going back to the very first step. The simple exercise of asking students for questions is a good opportunity for educators to examine their assumptions about young people and to consider the topics and issues that are of relevance and importance to them. More research is definitely needed to design a feasible pedagogy of inquiry, but this study has at least set out a student-centered agenda on which to base further action.

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