

Cultural studies through education: moments of pedagogy and pragmatics

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ABSTRACT *Our main concern is to see if cultural studies can intervene more productively in the dominant educational processes, in ways that align with the sustainable interests of its critical project. As cynicism becomes the commonplace 'distinction' of our young graduates, we raise two questions: why should cultural studies be concerned with the spread of cynicism within our own institutional and pedagogic space? And what would be the implications of such critical reflection on our current practices, as scholar and teacher of this critical project? The paper draws on our continual engagement with the curriculum reform of secondary school subjects (Integrated Humanities and Liberal Studies) in Hong Kong, in an attempt to explore the limits and opportunities of education as social practice, as well as the effectivity of cultural studies within the contemporary contexts and crises of education. First we describe how taking part in the specific school reform projects has begun to change the critical and pedagogic orientation of cultural studies we do at the university. Then we discuss the implications of our recent experiments in doing cultural studies in and with the local schools. In all, we want to examine what brings us to our own search for a certain 'politics of hope', by re-thinking and re-mapping cultural studies as a collective, pragmatic programme in the local educational set-up. For, without a constructive pragmatics, the students of cultural studies cannot be expected to work effectively across diverse institutional settings. Thus, criticism and the production of critical knowledge in the contemporary academy would go on to foster a state of cynicism among its graduates and the 'stakeholders' concerned. Cultural studies, we believe, can make itself more useful through concrete ways of mediating its expertise in the complex processes of education. As such, we emphasize the contemporary relevance and uses of cultural studies for educational transformation.*

As Henry Giroux observed over a decade ago (Giroux 1997: 232), few scholarly efforts have been made to incorporate 'cultural studies into the language of educational reform, particularly as it applies to colleges and schools of education'. Although there are recent attempts in cultural studies to deal with issues of educational reform, Giroux's critical remark remains highly relevant, especially as it sheds light on local situations in the inter-Asia socio-cultural dynamics. Relative to the work on popular culture, media, identity or queer practices, it does seem that not many of us in the field are willing to commit to the kind of projects that Giroux and the journal *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* are single-mindedly engaged with.¹ In an interview

with Handel Wright, Larry Grossberg expressed critical alarm at such a lapse in our intellectual work, disappointed that 'people in cultural studies are not more interested in the battle over schools, curriculum, pedagogical goals and practices, standards, and all of the other policy debates' (Wright 2000: 16). The reasons for this, according to Giroux, have to do with the reluctance of both educators and cultural studies practitioner to engage in intellectual dialogues with each other. He believes that should its links with education be strengthened, cultural studies has the capacity to contribute significantly to the development of critical pedagogy. With expertise in the analysis of the production, reception, and use of texts, the interdisciplinary model of

cultural studies is equipped to move critical pedagogy beyond a limited emphasis on the mastery of textual operations; indeed, it can offer 'new theoretical models and methodologies' for examining the production and circulation of knowledge in education (Giroux 1996).

While accepting that there is a particular need to bring critical pedagogy – and education more generally – back in the field of cultural studies, we are quite convinced that cultural studies' contribution to education need not be restricted to the provision of theories and methodologies aimed at enhancing the analytical power of critical pedagogy. Cultural studies, in our view, can make itself useful by actually taking part in the search for possible and effective ways of operation in the educational process itself, in alignment with the critical goals and functions of the transformative, intellectual project that it aspires to be. In what follows, therefore, we intend to look at the contemporary relevance and uses of cultural studies *for* educational transformation in that broader context. In doing so, we try to address the prevailing situation on the ground in which messiness, despair and cynicism are commonly found in the contemporary, local fields of education, operating under the dominant global condition of *diminishing hope*. Problematizing moments of despair and hope as questions of pedagogy and pragmatics, we approach the issue contextually from two perspectives. First we would describe how taking part in the broader school educational reform in the Hong Kong context has informed and shaped the very teaching and critical practices of cultural studies we do at Lingnan University, our local site as scholars and researchers affiliated to a department of Cultural Studies. After this brief account, we want to focus on what brings us to our own search for a certain 'politics of hope', by drawing on our attempts in *doing* cultural studies through a collective, pragmatic programme in the Hong Kong educational set-up. In all, we want to argue that without the supplement, the intervention, of a critical pragmatics that facilitates

and prepares students of cultural studies to operate effectively in and across diverse institutional settings, the work of cultural criticism and the associated production of knowledge around 'the center of cultural studies' (Grossberg 2005) in any contemporary disciplinary space today might easily turn into the nurturing ground, against any will, for the spread of a messy state of despair and cynicism² among students, researchers, teachers, NGO workers and social activists.

To address the threat of *that* lapse, we must first ask: why should cultural studies be concerned about the spread of cynicism *within* our own institutional and pedagogic space? And what would be the implications of such critical reflection on our current practices as scholar and teacher of the particular critical project we identify ourselves with?

A messy effect of critique: cynicism

Last year one of us received an email from a former graduate of Lingnan's Cultural Studies Department. This came from someone who had been working at a local Chinese newspaper with mainly middle-class readers. In a message entitled 'Extremely Angry' (originally in Hong Kong Cantonese), he expressed his frustration and anger over a report published in his paper on the issue of the Hong Kong Government privatizing a substantial portion of its public housing properties. In his view, the report was totally biased against the social forces that resisted the privatization policy. Moreover, he found his editor extremely rude and biased in his account of the anti-privatization activists as 'naive, selfish and irrational'. Now the upset young man who had just graduated two years before with a BA degree in Cultural Studies (BACS) found himself drowned in futility and helplessness, as he realized that, at that point of his career, there was nothing he could do in the face of the verbal vulgarity and institutional violence he witnessed in the context of his practical cultural work at the media institute. For him, there was no hope of trying to alter the mainstream media

practices, not with what he had learnt from his undergraduate education in cultural studies anyway.

Anger, frustration and a deep sense of futility are not rare among the graduates of the BACS degree. Often provoked by what they see as ethically unacceptable stances adopted by the institutions they work for, the graduates find it hard to cope with their overall sense of powerlessness caused mainly by the perceived inability, by themselves as well as by others, to act or intervene with any pragmatic impact in the predominant institutional environments 'out there'. Many have little option except to live with the disturbing but demoralizing trap of the so-called TINA: 'There Is No Alternative'. It is pertinent to point out here that, for those working in such conservative institutional settings, not only are critical intellectual inputs and radical innovative ideas not often welcome, but even a serious attitude towards the tasks assigned at work may sometimes be deemed unwanted and subversive.³ Immersed in this kind of work environment, in which cynical reason easily dismisses any attempts of cultural critiques or alternative projects by representing them as either hypocritical or utopian (hence 'never practical'), the discourse and sentiment of cynicism spreads quickly and soon becomes the commonplace cultural 'distinction' for the cultural studies graduates, in particular those who tried to be intellectually honest and critical about their studies. As a result, in addition to a general 'reactive stance' (cf. Gibson-Graham 2006), deep-seated negative emotions such as 'reproach, defensiveness, blame, and resentment' begin to have their way in shaping the lost radical mentality of the young disillusioned critic.

Ironically, the deep sentiments experienced by these graduates underscore the success of cultural studies education in its own way, which had trained and led them to make a sharp, accentuated critique of the existing capitalist system along with all its hegemonic practices. However, perhaps their rage, frustration and despair could also serve as the very markers of the particular

limitation of cultural studies in providing effective ways (out) for young scholars as they leave university education to cope with the seemingly invincible hegemony outside. Clearly, the pedagogic process they have had with cultural studies cannot really help them to develop a firm sense of themselves as they move on to engage with the dominant socio-institutional condition of life in the 'real world', so to speak, in the hope of putting in place some alternative practices they might be able to imagine and offer under the system.

Now for these young graduates to nurture a good sense of themselves amid the real constraints of social reality, they would need to have a firm hold of how the latter (Hong Kong, in this case) has become what it is today *culturally*. 'This isn't easy because we don't have ready-made answers'.⁴ Contextually conceived, culture would thus need to be taken beyond its usual aesthetic accentuation or identity-critique mode. Ideally, students of cultural studies ought to be able to understand its work as part of a concretely situated local project, whether it is shaped in literary, filmic, popular, political or any other socially significant modes of representation and mediation. Through specific material channels and diversely mediated socio-cultural experiences, new currents in organic intellectual practice and academic cultural studies were drawn to each other, creating uniquely overlapping discursive space for the growth of 'critique' as a significant social practice in late-colonial Hong Kong of the 1990s. While these discursive forms grew in influence through the respective phases of their early development, they became articulated to the lively forces of the emergent social movements at the time, as for instance in the particular case of the post-1989 *Tiananmen Review* journal project.⁵ Without going into details of this and other projects, let us stress that the critical nature of any such work in the contemporary cultural context can only be fully appreciated in specific institutional and socio-historical formations. Both the cultural critic and the academic reader would analyse

'texts' of one kind or another, against the material context of communication mediating everyday experiences during the 1990s. Critical work as targeted social practice can help to shape cultural studies into innovative and contextually pragmatic projects, with which academics need to engage in order to survive under the increasingly stringent work environment of the academy itself (Morris 2008). At a time when academic institutionalization of the young discipline had, not for a moment, been envisaged as a real possibility by scholars who did cultural studies in Hong Kong, the project evolved gradually through intellectual and pedagogic endeavours that have proven to be institutionally viable, methodologically sustainable, and contextually relevant.

From cultural studies to education reform

Almost two decades afterwards, the story of TINA passed on by our own cultural studies graduates urges us now to re-examine the BACS degree that we have been teaching at Lingnan since 1999. A quick look at the courses offered in the three-year curriculum⁶ would show that apart from providing students with basic training in critical writing and academic research, the undergraduate programme is designed to nurture students' critical awareness of the relation among power, culture and knowledge. Although this occupies a large proportion of the curriculum, a significant amount of our real time is spent typically on helping students to *un-learn* the premature bias and passive learning habits they carry over with them from their education prior to university. Joining the ambitious BACS degree programme that emphasizes 'dissent' and 'critique' after 13 continuous years of examination-oriented schooling, most undergraduate students we work with are incapable of making sense of the cultural-political forces they live with 'in the real world' when they first come to our course. They have little idea about the purpose and practice of any intellectual project; they find it very hard to formulate meaningful research questions, or

to set in alignment the diverse tasks they are asked to do in the critical work of the course. Furthermore, being students of the smallest and least prestigious university in Hong Kong does not help either, as their social background, motivation and self-esteem are not particularly strong on average.⁷ All these have made it extremely difficult for learning to take place in the cultural studies classroom, or outside of it for that matter.

So, under the circumstances, how have we been teaching cultural studies to our undergraduates? Although we do agree with Giroux that education must never be reduced to a series of instrumental techniques, examination and certification, we think that equipping students with the survival skills that are required of them in the new 'knowledge-based economy' is not an insignificant task. Many of our graduates entering the cultural fields to take up jobs as teachers, community/NGO workers, or managers of art and media institutions are often asked to perform independently in planning, organizing and evaluating a series of trade-specific tasks assigned to them – in short, to put a project in place. And if the cultural question for Hong Kong is indeed cultural development in its many-faceted dimensions, as some of us might want to argue, then the critical issue for cultural studies education today would not so much be cultural *critique* per se as its pedagogic *uses* and pragmatic *effects*. Now, in view of the previous schooling experience, the relatively thin academic background, and the diverse social backgrounds of our students, we have all found it immensely difficult, if not impossible, to develop their critical awareness effectively, while providing them with the foundation training on 'survival skills' they need during the three years they stay with us in our programme. This sense of bewilderment and urgency has given rise to the strong desire on our part as cultural studies professionals to step into the secondary school curriculum reform process, in the hope that we could understand better how our students are being made into learning what they learn. Hence, through our research and curricular work on the Integrated Humanities (IH) and Liberal

Studies (LS) subjects, we thought we might be able to bring into play, sooner rather than later, a touch of cultural studies pedagogy at the secondary curriculum level for the school students today. In short, we are tempted strongly by the possibility that a student might be able to start un-learning their hegemonic learning habits earlier in the schooling process, before they would come to us for a 'full' cultural studies education.

Education reform in Hong Kong nowadays opens up a new space for cultural studies to intervene into the field of education at large (Hui and Chan 2006). Making use of this opportunity, we ran a series of research projects in the past three to four years to evaluate the effectiveness of IH teaching and learning in local secondary schools. Our tentative finding suggests that the current reform, as revealed in the implementation of the new subject, is a complexly dis-oriented process in which the mission, objectives and practices of the various 'stake-holders' are very diversely materialized. As a result, the ambitious reform has produced messy, if not conflicting, outcomes, often generating chains of un-intended consequences shaped by tactical actions taken with a wide range of interests on the part of the various 'stake-holders' concerned in the schooling process.

From our engagement in the IH curricular reform, we learn that the reform measures initiated by the government are often rather short-lived and superficially regarded by the local schools. As for the government officials responsible for education, likewise, the last thing they want to do is to question whether their work aligns with the vision of the education reform. Indeed, what they try to accomplish is to 'do the thing right', rather than to 'do the right thing.' Teachers and students also know tacitly that the reform objectives are not meant to be taken too seriously. 'Learning to learn' – the mission slogan of the current education reform – remains at best the rhetoric of a symbolic policy in the face of the hegemonic rule by public examination results. In spite of this, teachers still actively design new pedagogical approaches for their students, packing their class schedules

with such busy routines as group discussions, role-plays, debates, drama, visits and 'enquiry' projects. Likewise, while students do generally like to take part in such activities, it is not unusual for them to ask their teachers, towards the end of the class, to provide them with the 'final and correct answers' to put down on the worksheets and examinations. In other words, teachers, students and curriculum development officers all work hard to accomplish their own 'assignments' on time, regardless of whether their respective tasks are in alignment with the reform objectives. This is to say, in effect, that cynical reasons and behaviours will always prevail under such kinds of set-up in the process, in which it becomes substantially difficult for educators at all levels to take for real the idealized curricular reform objectives, policies and practices. As a consequence, the energies that the diverse social forces have drawn into the reform process would gradually and largely be washed out, including those driven by the most earnest individuals in any relevant role who want to bring innovative and critical practices as pedagogy into the system (see Hui 2008).

From the perspective of academic researchers who look at the pedagogic situation and the curricular reform circuit from the outside, it is abundantly clear that the dis-oriented nature of the implementation of education reform in the local contexts is the crucial issue to raise and address. We witness with clarity in the schooling process the discrepancies between the vision, mission, curriculum design, assessment and the actual ways in which teaching and learning take place at the local level. Given this, one might logically argue that the 'messiness' of the education reform and its associated practices could be read as either a symptom of failure or a sign of possibility. While many secondary teachers and students tend to accept the first position (as a stance of 'critique'), thus contributing to the already widespread sentiments of cynicism we refer to above, we prefer to take the second position, and attempt to examine critically substantive signs of *the possible*.

Cultural studies as an educational project?

The lessons we learn from our research in the secondary schools have subsequently made us realize that, seen in the very context of education reform, the mere introduction of critical ideas and pedagogies by cultural studies to the secondary school students are far from useful in helping them to un-learn the hegemonic learning habits they had acquired before university. Instead, more pragmatic and effective interventions *on location* are needed so as to articulate the diverse social energies available and re-connect the situated critical ideas with deliverable alternative practices in the relevant institutional setting.

Elsewhere, we have discussed the critical and pragmatic implications of cultural studies for education today by emphasizing the need to understand better the complexity of education as a cultural process (Hui and Chan 2006; Chan and Law 2008). Our work as cultural researchers underscores the very attempt to mediate teachers' pedagogic process at the level of school curricular practice and classroom pedagogic development. In the last few years, we have drawn on our experience in providing to school teachers both action-research opportunities and programme-based and school-based training courses in order to study the cultural dynamics of pedagogy and the politics of education under the dominant 'knowledge-based' economy. Through all the intensive engagements with curricular reform at the school and classroom level, our task is to explore the limits and opportunities of cultural education in process. Significantly, this is being done through school-based action research experiments (Hui and Pang 2008). And yet, with our own intellectual-scholarly project in re-aligning the work of research with that of pedagogy, we also want, precisely, to test and improve the effectiveness of doing cultural studies in a *pragmatic* way under the same educational setting of Hong Kong. While continuing to teach cultural studies at Lingnan as we serve as researchers/facilitators in the school education project, we seriously want to

know at this stage of our own tertiary education work the extent to which we have been able to deliver for our BACS students the gist of what, in the case of secondary schooling, we have tried to offer as a 'critique' – with focused pedagogic intervention crossed over with instituted critical mediation.

Put differently, as our initial puzzle for cultural studies has led us to step into a pragmatic engagement with education reform at the local schools, so the lessons of schooling have in turn brought critical insight and ethical questions to us in view of the school-leavers who have since come to study with us in a different, though no less challenging, pedagogical context in the classroom of the BACS degree. We want therefore to suggest how our participation in educational reform may indeed inform and transform our practices of cultural studies back at the university. Our participation in the reform process may well serve as a mirror through which we could identify the effects and limits of the cultural studies project we undertake in our own institutional set-up. Thus, looking at the Lingnan programme from an integrated teaching and research perspective, a pressing question comes through to us: if we should conduct an evaluation on our own education project in a manner similar to what we did for the secondary schools, what would we find?

Hence, we feel that this might be an appropriate moment to ask ourselves what precisely the cultural studies educational project means for us.⁸ In what context is our project situated? Has the project been effectively planned and implemented? From our experience in the education reform, a series of questions like these have emerged for our critical reflection if we want to take hold of cultural studies firmly as an educational project. Such questions can be organized under the three conceptual categories of *project*, *context* and *articulation*, which Grossberg considers central for the work of cultural studies (Grossberg 1997). Specifically, to analyse the nature and operation of our educational project, we ask the questions of constituency ('Who needs cultural research?'; 'On whose behalf

do we speak?'), as well as those of vision and objective ('Why do we do what we do?'; 'What are the expected effects of our teaching and research outcomes?'). To know the limits and possibilities of our project, we must raise the question of context, and ask: 'What is the institutional and intellectual context in which our project is situated and with which we attempt to engage productively?' And to evaluate the actual impacts of our teaching and research (from process to output), we must be prepared to address the question of articulation, thus: 'How could we effectively mobilize and align diverse social forces in order to re-shape and transform existing power structures and relations for the better?'; 'Have we planned and put in operation effectively what we want to achieve?'; and 'Have all the planning, implementation and evaluation tasks aligned well with our vision and objective?'

Finally, the chain of reflexive issues must logically lead all of us to ask of our cultural studies project (however one may want to see that) the question: 'How do we identify the effects of our actions, and assess if they are desirable outcomes consistent with our vision?' All these have concerned us in a different context through our research on secondary schooling. Some of them have actually been put forth on different occasions to address contextual questions in various cultural studies projects by our collaborators and colleagues in the field, such as Ien Ang, Jeannie Martin, Tejaswini Naranjana, and Xiaoming Wang, to name just a few. Now, bringing these chains of issues together forces us to think through critically what we have been doing all this time as teachers and researchers in cultural studies.

The pragmatic turn of cultural studies: toward a project of hope

We need not rehearse here the significance of the search for a politics of hope in the local cultural context of cynicism, itself a plausible variation of the global condition of 'hope-scarcity' (cf. Hage 2001; Probyn 2001).

Nevertheless, to nurture hope in these contexts we do want to clear up any confusion between *what is possible* and *what is inevitable*, and to work out the problems of the dis-articulation and re-articulation of a diverse array of discourses and practices as we go about looking for a *project of hope* in what we do. This approach would allow us to turn to cultural studies again and re-examine its social relevance and uses as a critical intellectual project, in light of the recognized crisis in education we face. Thus, in the particular kinds of cultural studies work we have committed ourselves to in research, education, and community interface, we make persistent attempts to tie cultural critiques with contextually-formed strategies for the re-tooling and re-constitution of cultural studies as sustainable social practices. These pragmatic strategies, as we should know, are all put in place to engage with the existing regimes of power that dominates the mainstream institutions, to which many of our graduates go for a career sooner or later. This is precisely why we would like to ask how cultural studies as a transforming and transformative pedagogical project can learn from the lessons of our local school educational reform. In the very re-alignment of our critical apparatuses, we are concerned about the pragmatic effectiveness of the discipline as a *programme* of intervention. This is because, in the face of institutionalization, cultural studies has apparently survived and developed. It is understandable why we consider it imperative now for us to re-articulate our programmes, crucially, as a project of hope, with reference to the range of alternative designs and functions in doing cultural studies that we have committed to for the last decade or so.

Lingnan's BACS course (since 1999) is the first such degree in the Chinese-speaking world. Established in 2000, the Cultural Studies Department has a small faculty of staff devoted primarily to undergraduate teaching and interdisciplinary research in cultural studies. Consisting of 11 faculty members, the department admits around 33 students to the BACS degree annually. It

also plays a key role in the teaching of the university General Education (GE) courses, contributing about 40% to 45% of its teaching resources to GE in terms of the overall student load. The Lingnan programme has since developed linkages involving community, media and professional organizations as partner institutions (e.g. see Hui and Chan 2006); built a small but select postgraduate research degree programme; established in 2003 a unique Master of Cultural Studies (MCS) taught course (2-year part-time, self-financed); joined the academic market again in 2005 with a teacher-training Postgraduate Diploma in Liberal Studies (PDLS); and played a major role in developing an applied humanities project focusing on cultural research and development (the Kwan Fong Cultural Research and Development Programme headed by Meaghan Morris).

One expected outcome of our teaching and research is to enable students to perform their tasks critically and effectively, on location, in their future work sites. On the other hand, as Morris points out, doing research has increasingly become a part of the routine work of today's cultural institutions (where our graduates will go for a career) (Morris 2008). As a corollary, it is unmistakable that our pedagogic project has to facilitate students to acquire the competence and confidence in conducting cultural research, in its pragmatic contexts. This explains why the Lingnan BACS has increasingly involved students taking up supervised research tasks, by adding the Directed Research Project as a compulsory component of the curriculum, and by encouraging students to join internships that provide them with opportunities to work in the 'real world', thus allowing them to learn to solve concrete and practical problems through various kinds of action research.

It now becomes clear that the key constituency of our pedagogic project is undoubtedly the cultural studies students. And our main objective is to articulate all the teaching and research tasks we undertake so as to produce the most desirable and pragmatic effects for them, i.e. to equip

them with the critical and analytical tools for a better understanding of the 'culture' in which we live. In addition to providing students with the practical survival skills to cope under the changing social environment of the 'knowledge-based economy', the faculty are surely concerned with transmitting various critical theories to the class. However, an equally important part of their new role is to create the institutional and intellectual conditions that would best facilitate students with different abilities and motivations to acquire the critical consciousness and capacity to work on, and work with, the existing power structures and relations. For that, we have to increase the flexibility and re-configure the capacity of our undergraduate programme, in terms of the contents, modes of teaching and learning, as well as methods of assessment, so that it may become more effective in nurturing a wider range of critical minds and talents in the students.

The learning of cultural studies: context and articulation

It is here that we need to bring into perspective the issue of student learning and reconsider the pragmatic question of (student) subjectivity from the vantage point of pedagogy, beyond the approach adopted by the usual teacher-centred mode of exposition through exemplary forms of cultural critique. For us at Lingnan, cultural studies as a 9-year old degree programme is indeed realized, as Tony Bennett would have it, in 'an always-institutionalised set of practices', whose functioning must be assessed 'in terms of their role in organizing a new set of relations between educational institutions and new generations of students who have either lacked, or been unreceptive to the value of, traditional forms of cultural capital' (Bennett 1998: 224). Addressing, in context, the social formations of modernity and postmodernity, cultural studies in Asia has concerned itself with understanding the complex ways in which local subjectivities are constructed for and mapped onto the future, as projects of remembering and

representing the local histories or popular memories people in the communities grow up with. Organized as a set of critical practices grounded in a discursive, material and sociohistorical context, contemporary cultural studies is precisely productive in its shaping of the practitioners – here the cultural studies students – and their understanding of self, identity, community and the contexts of their cultural significance.

In a field where high value is placed on the interaction between an intellectual programme, social world and critical intervention through the self, *context* becomes crucial for learning and subject-formation, as it is much more than *what* (body of knowledge) one learns that matters. Context emerges as an issue of crucial theoretical significance in all cultural studies projects. As Meaghan Morris argues in 'A Question of Cultural Studies':

For cultural studies, the theoretical is a response to ... specific practices and contexts. To say that the relationship between people and power generates a field of questions is to say that the practice of cultural studies involves the production of theories; it is not a matter of 'applying' a pre-existing theory to a given empirical field, nor of 'doing theory' as a literary genre. (Morris 1997: 43)

Indeed, the question of contextual analysis and knowledge-formation is crucial in cultural studies in its identification of the specific condition and shaping of the relevant framework under which, alone, any effective learning could take place, within and around the self. Hence, any context can be pedagogically useful – whether it relates the individual learner (the novice scholar) to the cultural industry, cultural policy, or community dynamics; or to school, family or popular culture as a social platform for subject-formation – to name just a few familiar instances of context-formation in our field. With a context-specific pedagogy, the Lingnan programme's adoption of a student-centred approach to doing cultural studies is therefore strategic. As strategy, its significance is indeed *both* pragmatic and

theoretical. At a time when community and business leaders worldwide are calling for undergraduate education to do more to equip students to prepare for productive life in a world of continuous and often rapid cultural changes, where adaptability, independence, and critical initiative are regarded as the *sine qua non* of pragmatic worldly engagement, we have been trying within the liberal arts context of Lingnan to build effective pedagogical measures for inculcating these qualities in students through a collective set of critical and pragmatic practices.

It is significant that, after cultural studies is institutionalized as an academic discipline, the number of its students and teachers has increased steadily. With this, the mode of teaching and learning has also transformed. After an 'expansion' phase, when cultural studies seems to be fully operative within a normal and normalized disciplinary machinery, the practices of teaching and learning are indeed comparable to the educational reform process we work on in our school research project. There, the multiplicity of agencies and voices has generated complex dynamics and a good mix of totally unintended consequences, some of which are surely more desirable than others. At this point, what we try to argue is very simple: to facilitate hope, cultural studies must supplement critique with pragmatics, by developing practical strategies in putting forth institutional initiatives, by re-organizing the latter for transformative purposes, and by bringing out their potential for critical intervention in various social conditions in which 'messiness' has become a resultant condition of life.

Perhaps a substantial portion of the local cultural critiques in our context did add up to 'a declaration of *dissent* against any official discourse of "success" (ill-)promised for Hong Kong by both the departing colonialists, the coming nationalists, and the circling globalists', as John Erni points out. Indeed it might be the case that the challenge for our project was to identify a 'shared secular idealism that pulsates critique and hope at

the same time' (Erni 2001: 406). In his vision of culture as a reformer's science, Bennett has observed that there is every reason to take 'resisting resistance' as 'an intelligible generalised goal for cultural studies pedagogy'; for, he argues, 'it is when it seems to be most transgressive and radical by flaunting its resistive credentials as a theory of pedagogy that cultural studies reveals itself to be in the grip of the most conservative and normalising of pedagogic machineries' (Bennett 1998: 217–218). As we all know, it is pedagogically very challenging, if not impossible, to find ways to integrate effective training in cultural studies methodology with a proper coverage of the relevant intellectual trajectories and critical perspectives concerned. In the pedagogic machinery, even 'critique' must be based on the familiarity with a body of theoretical knowledge and analytical tools. Lingnan's method of course delivery, for one thing, currently weighs heavily towards an intensive lecture-tutorial mode of teaching, which has obvious benefits to students in terms of building confidence, competence, communicative skills, and a depth of understanding. The constant adjustment in pedagogy towards better classroom interaction and coursework quality would in turn have an impact, one way or another, on the effective delivery of the contents of our programme. In this perspective, what the moment of pedagogy has presented for our cultural studies project is as much a pragmatic as a theoretical question.

One even more pragmatic issue is to cultivate a sense of ownership of the programme by all members of the young department, through efforts in collective educational work such as organizing the Student Internship, an innovative initiative involving community, media and professional organizations as partner institutions; on-going review of teaching and learning issues (on curriculum, pedagogy, learning difficulties, language of instruction, and assessment methods etc); responses to budget cuts, education reform, and cultural policy; and active participation in the self-financed degrees (MCS, PDLs). There is no

doubt much room for improvement in the provision of productive interfaces that would make learning more critical, and critically useful, through cultural studies. The Lingnan programme has derived its strength in part from the solid links with the community and professional networks that it has built up over the past decade through various pedagogic initiatives and other community-based research and development projects. Still, it cannot be denied that our students have much more to learn (about cultures, about themselves) through these interfaces with the real-world contexts of cultural practice. At the same time, we can learn a great deal ourselves from this experience about the pragmatic demands of our times on cultural studies as an educational project. Finally, through many thought-provoking moments of pedagogy, we have something to look forward to in terms of our attempt to reconcile the oppositional tendencies between the intellectual concerns for critique on the one hand, and the pragmatic worldly demands for more productive, contextually-relevant teaching and learning on the other. For sure, this would require new cultural mediations and technologies, in which the reformed institutional frameworks and mechanisms capable of articulating concrete critical practices with alternative cultural possibilities have to be created and sustained. The tensions between moralistic concerns and worldly efficiency, between educational ethics and economic values, are often understood to be oppositional and irreconcilable. Such rigid understanding has to change before any effective educational reform can materialize, not least for cultural studies as a pedagogic project *in practice*.

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Notes

1. And even in that journal only a small proportion of the articles published so far (e.g. Teasley 2004; Watkins 2000) are concerned with the interface between cultural studies and educational reform at the college or school level.
2. Cynicism here is used in Zizek's sense – 'they know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it' (Zizek 1989).
3. For instance, at a consultation meeting organized by the government bureau for the preparation of a new curriculum, one of us complained to the chairman of the meeting that it was inappropriate to discuss a particular agenda item since the related document had not been circulated before, another member, a school principal, responded in a frivolous manner: 'Isn't that nice then: we don't have to read the documents?'
4. Stephen Chan, as quoted in an interview with reporter Wendy Kan (*South China Morning Post* 1997).
5. *Tiananmen Review* (1990–1992), a periodical released by the Youth Literary Books in Hong Kong, was the publication of the project entitled 'Tiananmen University of Democracy (Hong Kong Planning Committee)', conceived outside of mainland China after the tragic events in Beijing in June 1989. As stated in its mission statement, the journal project emphasized 'local initiative' and 'alternative scholarship' in the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre. Quite a few of the authors who wrote for the project later become core advocates of Cultural Studies as an intellectual project cum academic discipline in Hong Kong.
6. At website <http://jupiter.ln.edu.hk/cultural/programme/undergraduate-90.shtml>.
7. Lingnan University, with a student size of just over 2000, distinguished itself uniquely in Hong Kong as a small 'liberal arts university with Hong Kong characteristics'. Although it has the longest history among the eight universities in the territory, Lingnan's origin went back to 1888 in Guangzhou (Canton), China. It had subsequently been re-built, since 1968, in colonial Hong Kong as a private arts and business post-secondary school. With Hong Kong, the small college grew and was formally re-established as a public university in 1999. This accounts for its relatively short history as a modern liberal arts institution in the local educational setting.

8. In early 2008, the BA Cultural Studies programme went through an external peer-review evaluation process in which, for the more bureaucratic purpose of 'quality assurance', tentative analysis of some of the issues implied here was made in a semi-formal fashion.

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