Understanding civic education in Hong Kong: a Bernsteinian approach

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This paper draws on Basil Bernstein's theory of pedagogic discourse and practice to explain the controversy surrounding civic education in Hong Kong, through the case of a compulsory secondary school subject called Liberal Studies (LS). The distinct advantage of a Bernsteinian approach is that its conceptual grammar cogently captures the contentious nature of LS and locates the structural autonomy of teachers. This article highlights the fragmented nature of the LS curriculum, which attests to a historical legacy of the Hong Kong education system that favours a subject-based curriculum in practice and a managerialist approach to teacher staffing. These institutional parameters exert profound influences on LS teachers' modalities of practice. This study contributes to the burgeoning interest in applying Bernsteinian scholarship to the East-Asian region by nuancing the role of teachers in mediating the contentious LS curriculum and implementing civic education. Finally, further implications of the Bernsteinian approach will be discussed.

Keywords: Liberal Studies; civic education; Basil Bernstein; Hong Kong; pedagogic discourse; pedagogic practice

Introduction

This paper examines the controversy surrounding civic education in Hong Kong through Liberal Studies (LS), a cross-disciplinary and exam-oriented school subject introduced under the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum. Although aims to promote critical thinking and increase social awareness among secondary school students, in recent years certain politicians have portrayed the subject as one of the major causes of youth political activism (Chung, 2017; Ip, 2015); more specifically, LS teachers have been accused of encouraging students to participate in social movements. This judgment has been especially prevalent amid the outbreak of a series of political controversies involving students, including the Anti-Moral and National education campaign in 2012, the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and, most recently, the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill protests in 2019.

Hong Kong is an instructive case of civic education in the East-Asian region in that the politics of civic education are intertwined with the colonial history of the city and the socio-political development that occurred after political transition. The controversial nature of civic education in Hong Kong can be understood at least through two perspectives – identity politics, and curriculum reform. Regarding the

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former, civic education involves a fundamental tension between the national and local identities of Hong Kong people. Following the handover to Chinese sovereignty on 1 July 1997, the Chinese regime has sought to strengthen national identity among Hong Kong students (Tse, 2007) through promoting patriotic sentiments and subsequently downplaying the British colonial elements that are part and parcel of Hong Kong's local identity and global appeal (Chong, 2018). Regarding the latter, it primarily conceives changes to the schooling system as a response to global trends of education development, which are then appropriated by policy-makers of states or regional governments and, subsequently, implemented by front-line teachers. Researchers adapting this perspective are interested in understanding the potential discrepancies between rhetoric and reality of implementing reform measures (Fok, 2016; Fung, 2016). Against this backdrop, the introduction of LS in 2009 can be understood as one of the major reform measures in senior secondary education, which has prompted discussions on new modes of implementing civic education within a compulsory school subject. This study nuances these two major perspectives by drawing on Basil Bernstein's concepts to shed light on the role that subject teachers assume in implementing civic education.

A Bernsteinian approach to analysing civic education has the benefit of not assuming a direct correspondence between ideology and student learning outcomes in schooling; instead, it pinpoints the mechanisms by which dominant values and interests are imbued in the distribution and regulation of educational knowledge (Bernstein, 2000). The theory also holds that educational knowledge is relayed by a number of pedagogic agents – such as school management, teachers, and education officers – when the school curriculum is implemented in localised contexts. In short, Bernstein's conceptual grammar is capable of delineating the devices of social control; at the same time, his lexicons are able to locate the structural autonomy that teachers have in accommodating policies delegated by the state and in implementing the reformed school curriculum in accordance with particular school settings.

This paper proceeds as follows: an introduction of Bernstein's notions of pedagogic discourse and practice, followed by a brief review of civic education in Hong Kong and the introduction of LS. Thereafter, an analysis of subject teachers' struggles with the reformed curriculum and their modalities of practice is presented. Lastly, a discussion of the results and their implications for further studies on civic education using Bernsteinian scholarship are dealt with in turn.

Bernstein's conceptual grammar: pedagogic discourse and modalities of practice

Central to Bernstein's conceptual grammar is the pedagogic relations in the process of schooling (Bernstein, 2000). As Bernstein (1990), in his earlier works, argues,

> While there is a wealth of research that seeks to determine what is relayed, we nevertheless know very little about the medium – the relay itself – which makes the relaying possible. (p. 169)

Bernstein's theoretical position implies that delineating mechanisms by which educational knowledge is distributed and regulated is the prerequisite of understanding the dynamics of education reform. For Bernstein, schooling is essentially a form of social control that operates through the regulation and distribution of educational knowledge within the school curriculum (Bernstein, 2000). It follows that the curriculum is a crucial arena of symbolic control, in which

pedagogic agents such as curriculum developers, education officers, educational scholars, and school teachers compete over who designates and what is included in the curriculum, how curricular contents are delivered, and what constitutes legitimate acquisition of curricular knowledge.

Hence, a Bernsteinian framework is primarily concerned with the changing pedagogic relations imbued within the pedagogic discourse of the school curriculum when education reform takes place. More specifically, it focuses on the interplay of pedagogic agents within this field of symbolic control. Fundamental to this analytical focus is a conceptualisation of power relations that is not invested in individual agents, but rather a relational system of specific positions occupied by specific categories (Singh, 2017). In other words, curriculum reform – the promotion of new pedagogic means – underlies a reconfiguration of the boundaries and roles as inscribed in official curriculum documents. Pedagogic agents, who assume various positions within the schooling system, are equipped with a range of resources at their disposal that enable them to negotiate their boundaries among one another and to engage in various modalities of practice.

Pedagogic discourse and the re-contextualising fields

According to Bernstein (1986), pedagogic discourse denotes the aggregate relations of contents and competencies to be transmitted to learners; it concerns how curricular knowledge is transmitted and acquired in the teaching process. He further states that the pedagogic discourse is guided by the pedagogic device, which is the fundamental logic that regulates the reproduction of culture and identity in pedagogical communication. Such a conception is consistent with the aim of this study in that LS, as a proxy for civic education, has been criticised for subverting the cultivation of patriotic sentiments and national identity among secondary school students. As Clarke (2005) points out, pedagogic discourse does not have a discourse of its own; rather, it de-locates or draws from other discourses and relocates them within itself. These processes of de-location and relocation correspond to what Bernstein (1986) refers to as re-contextualisation, which denotes a principle 'by which other discourses are appropriated as brought into a special relationship with each other' (p. 47). When this notion is applied to LS, it corresponds to how policy rhetoric – strengthening the importance of cultivating national identity among students – is transposed by education sector stakeholders (education officers, schools and teachers) to the school curriculum. During this process of re-contextualisation, the revamped school curriculum is then re-configured with new pedagogic relations – new modes of implementing civic education.

Bernstein (2000) further posits that the process of re-contextualisation produces two sub-fields, namely, the Official Re-contextualising Field (ORF) and the Pedagogic Re-contextualising Field (PRF). ORF is the field in which the state produces and legitimizes official pedagogic discourse, involving actors such as educators, educational consultants, and local educational authorities working together to produce the official curriculum documents; whereas PRF is the field in which agents create localised pedagogic discourse by implementing the delegated curriculum documents in accordance with school settings and individual teacher preferences. The dynamics between ORF and PRF thus constitute the aggregate pedagogic discourse, defined as 'a principle for appropriating other discourses and bringing them into

special relation with each other for the purposes of their selective transmission and acquisition' (p. 181).

Modalities of practice: visible and invisible pedagogies

When the re-contextualised curriculum is brought to school settings, its modes of implementation by teachers differ in two major dimensions, namely the classification and framing of educational knowledge (Bernstein, 2000). Classification refers to 'the nature of the differentiation between contents' (p. 49). Framing refers to 'the form of context in which knowledge is transmitted and received' (p. 50). When classification is strong, curricular contents are insulated from each other by strong boundaries. For instance, a school curriculum characterised by strong classification has clear and rigid subject boundaries with little areas of overlap; whereas one characterised by weak classification has amorphous and flexible subject boundaries that permit a cross-disciplinary approach to studying topics. Conversely, strong framing of educational knowledge denotes a teacher's tendency to maintain a strong grip on the structure and pacing of lesson flow; while weak framing suggests a teacher's tendency to improvise the structure of lesson proceedings according to student responses.

Based on these concepts of classification and framing, Bernstein (1990, 2000) further distinguishes two modalities of practice, namely visible and invisible pedagogies. Visible pedagogy 'places the emphasis on the performance of the child, upon the text the child is creating and the extent to which the text is meeting the criteria' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 201); that is, it denotes a modality of practice that emphasises students' acquisition of curricular knowledge as designated by assessment requirements. Visible pedagogy is 'visible' in the sense that the teacher's pedagogical decisions exhibit a clear structure of assessment-oriented teaching. On the other hand, invisible pedagogy tends to emphasise student experiences brought to the lesson proceedings over the designated content knowledge prescribed by the curriculum. It refers to a modality of practice that underscores connections between everyday experiences and codified school knowledge. Invisible pedagogy is 'invisible' in the sense that lesson proceedings tend to be semi-structured in order to cater for provisional ideas derived from student discussions.

Applying Bernstein's concepts to the case of LS, the pedagogic discourse denotes the relations between the cross-disciplinary subject and elements of civic education, while classification and framing indicate respectively the spatial and temporal dimensions of teachers' modalities of practice. When visible pedagogy is adopted, teachers tend to foreground their lesson proceedings with the essential knowledge and skills to be transmitted to students; when invisible pedagogy is adopted, they are inclined to delegate to students some freedom to dictate the flow of lessons. It should be noted that both visible and invisible pedagogies are opposing modalities of practice (Moss, 2002); they can both fulfil the learning outcomes of civic education, but employ different approaches.

Civic education and the politics of school curricula in Hong Kong

The controversy surrounding civic education in Hong Kong can be traced back to the development of the school curriculum during the British colonial period and the political transition to Chinese sovereignty after 1 July 1997, implying that education

policy-making in Hong Kong has been profoundly influenced by socio-political conditions. As Morris and Chan (1997) pointed out, civic education during the British colonial period was effectively de-politicised to preserve government legitimacy and fend off ideological influence from the Chinese Communist Party during the 1960s. Consequently, civic education was limited to the transmission of factual knowledge regarding Hong Kong society; contentious topics such as labour disputes, police corruption, and Hong Kong's political status were largely avoided (Fok, 2001).

In light of the anticipated return to Chinese sovereignty following the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, civic education was oriented towards greater inclusion of China-related elements to facilitate students' acquaintance with traditional Chinese culture and China's socio-political development (Tse, 2007). Shortly after the 1997 handover, the Chinese government endeavoured to strengthen the national identity among Hong Kong residents through promoting national education (Yuen, 2016); however, such efforts were met with resistance owing to the strong presence of the local identity which prides itself on the city's cosmopolitan outlook while it maintains a certain psychological distance from the political elements of China (Chong, 2018). The heightened sense of local identity is reflected in civic education, with scholarly studies conducted by Fairbrother (2005) and Kennedy (2010) noting a marked increase of civic awareness among students, especially in the espousal of rule of law, democracy, and human rights as the core values of Hong Kong society.

More recently, the introduction of LS as a compulsory and exam-oriented subject in 2009 has prompted discussions on the methods for implementing civic education. Previously offered as an Advanced Supplementary Level elective subject in 1992, the revamped version is a core subject that aims to cultivate students' critical thinking and increase their social awareness through the discussion of socio-political issues (CDC & HKEAA, 2007). As distinct from the other core subjects of language and mathematics, LS adopts a flexible curriculum design consisting of six interrelated modules, which allow subject teachers to select emergent socio-political issues for teaching purposes. Both the modular curriculum structure and focus on issue-based inquiry claim to cultivate critical thinking and increase social awareness among secondary school students, which resonate with the core values emphasised in civic education – perseverance, respect for others, responsibility, national identity, and commitment (CDC & HKEAA, 2007). Yet amid the outbreak of various political controversies during the 2010s, LS teachers find themselves in a dilemma, being charged with the responsibility of cultivating critical thinking among students on the one hand; being accused of radicalising students on the other. Although studies carried out by Fung and Su (2016) and Lee and Chiu (2017) have shown that Liberal Studies has limited politicising effect on students' socio-political participation, the public perception of subject teachers radicalising students remains prevalent. Moreover, these two empirical studies sit uneasily with the aforementioned works that document the increased civic awareness among students. Juxtaposing these two strands of studies thus creates a gap in the role of teachers in implementing civic education through Liberal Studies. This article sets out to address this gap by drawing on Bernstein's conceptual grammar to locate the structural autonomy of teachers.

Research question and design

This study is guided by the following research question: How do LS teachers implement civic education amid the subject's controversy? This study adopts a qualitative approach and relies on lesson observations and semi-structured interviews to capture teacher-student interactions and subject teachers' perceptions of the school subject. Research participants were recruited by purposive and snowball sampling. The sampling method is purposive since only in-service LS teachers are selected; it is snowball because it is more of a practical approach to increase sample size through collegial referral. Data collection typically involved establishing first contact through school-university partnerships office in a local teacher education institute. After confirming interest in joining this study, the researcher first approached the LS chair at the selected school in person to discuss the interview dates and schedules for lesson observations. Then, the LS chair would recruit other colleagues on behalf of the researcher. A total of nine interviews and twelve lesson observations from three schools were conducted, with their real names anonymised. The transcribed interview data and the jotted notes from lesson observations were coded in accordance with Bernstein's concepts.

Research findings

The fragmented nature of the liberal studies pedagogic discourse

Research findings identify two major tensions within the re-contextualising field – tension between ORF and PRF, in addition to tension within the PRF itself. Unravelling these tensions is crucial to understanding the contentious nature of the LS curriculum and the process of teaching the subject.

In this particular case, the tension between ORF and PRF corresponds to the incompatibility of LS as a cross-disciplinary subject with the subject-based curriculum practised in local schools. The stagnation of this curriculum is traced back to a historical settlement between the British colonial government and local schools – of which the majority were operated by a range of school-sponsoring bodies such as religious groups and charitable organisations – whereby the government maintained a strong grip on curriculum planning while local schools enjoyed the autonomy to implement the curriculum in accordance with their own settings (Morris, Kan & Morris, 2000).

Yet, such a sharp division of labour between curriculum planning and implementation had profound implications for subsequent senior secondary curriculum reform. As Morris and Chan (1997) point out, the promotion of cross-disciplinary subjects has not been well received by local schools as they were mostly non-exam-oriented; implementing this content will reduce lesson time for public examination subjects. This reluctance is further reinforced by a managerialist approach to staff allocation, whereby students' public examination performance is a key determinant of job security and career prospects. Consequently, the promotion of cross-disciplinary teaching through curriculum reform generates little impact. In Bernsteinian terms, the PRF – comprised by local schools – enjoys a great deal of autonomy that enables them to neutralise the reform measures delegated by the ORF – of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government.

On the other hand, the tension within the PRF itself pertains to the subject status of LS, which refers to the importance of a school subject in the curriculum and routine instruction (Morris, 1998). Subject status is determined by factors including the

proportion of lesson time per teaching cycle, relevance for public examinations, and amount of departmental resources allocated for teaching. At the policy level, Liberal Studies is introduced as a compulsory and exam-oriented subject of the NSS Curriculum (EMB, 2005), enjoying equal status with the other compulsory subjects, namely Chinese Language, English Language, and Mathematics; however, at the school level, the subject has been marginalised in various aspects.

As the majority of interviewees recalled, school management was reluctant to regard LS as a subject requiring specialist teaching, partly because the subject has relatively loose knowledge boundaries, and partly because the NSS Curriculum involved a restructuring of elective subjects that produced 'surplus teachers' who were not qualified for subjects that demand specialist training, including Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics, and science; these surplus teachers were reassigned to the newly established LS department for budgetary purposes. Furthermore, when asked about their current teaching workloads, most participants reported that they were handling elective subjects such as Economics, History, and Geography, on top of teaching LS to maintain their titles as full-time teachers. Managing both LS and an extra elective subject thus prevented them from devoting time and effort to implementing civic education, given the greater priorities of transmitting academic knowledge and preparing students for public examinations.

Aside from having teachers teach multiple subjects, the newly established LS inevitably intensified departmental competition for resources and lesson time; on many occasions, LS teachers did not obtain their equal share of both. Charmaine and Lawrence recalled that only six lessons per teaching cycle were allocated for LS, two lessons short of the time designated for a compulsory subject. Both teachers complained that having fewer lessons per cycle significantly affected the teaching progress. This impact became more salient when students' public examination results were a significant determinant of their performance evaluation and job security. When asked about any attempts to redress this biased treatment, interviewees replied that the language departments adopted a number of strategies to defend their subject status and assert superiority over the LS department. For instance, language department chairs often cited the higher grade requirements for university admission – Level 3 (equivalent to Grade C) for Chinese and English, compared to Level 2 (Grade D) for Liberal Studies and Mathematics (EMB, 2005) – as grounds for obtaining more resources and lesson time. These institutional parameters, together with the intense competition among subject departments, largely restricts LS teachers from implementing civic education through the subject. In sum, the two axes of tension within the re-contextualising field reflect the fragmented nature of LS pedagogic discourse, as respectively exemplified by the sharp division of labour between curriculum planning and implementation, and the low subject status of LS at the school level.

Visible pedagogy: exam-oriented approaches

In response to the tensions within the LS pedagogic discourse, interviewees adopted a range of teaching approaches for civic education that were principally differentiated by the structural factor of departmental solidarity. Subject teachers who adopted visible pedagogy were those situated in a school environment that lacked a collaborative work culture, which compelled them to adopt teacher-centred and exam-oriented approaches to LS teaching. According to Bernstein (2000), visible pedagogy

is characterised by strong classification and framing of curricular knowledge, meaning that teachers establish clear boundaries on what is legitimate school knowledge and maintain strong control over the pacing of lessons. The pedagogical decisions made by these teachers were mainly guided by the need to prepare students for public examinations. Although some degree of critical thinking was involved, student discussion of emergent socio-political issues rarely took place owing to time constraints. The implementation of civic education was therefore largely subsumed under examination drills.

Among the interviewees, Lawrence, Yvonne, Charles, and Horace adopted visible pedagogies in teaching civic education, ranging from direct teaching, past paper examination drills to guided newspaper reading and skill-based writing practices. All four shared the perception that these approaches were the safest methods for covering the entire examination syllabus on time and ensuring that they were accountable to student examination results – a key criterion for teacher performance evaluations. Yet these approaches, most of these teachers alluded to a sense of frustration when they reflected on their pedagogical decisions. This was most apparent in Lawrence's struggles over his current teaching approaches:

> 'The discussions [of emergent socio-political issues] rarely took place; most of the lessons retained the traditional lecturing approach. It is not that I do not want to have discussions – sometimes they help to prevent students from dozing off during lessons, but I think it is a vicious cycle. If you let them speak, they will soon drift off to discussing something unrelated, and it would cost me enormous efforts to put the lesson back on track. If I don't [let the students discuss], I may cover the lesson on time, but my students might find it extremely boring and would soon doze off.'

Consequently, this group of interviewees relied heavily on their individual wisdom and experience to formulate their modalities of practice. In this regard, Lawrence and Horace observed that the work culture at their schools were dominated by a 'Do-It-Yourself' mentality: seeking help from colleagues was permissible at the beginning, but doing so again came to imply personal incompetence. Charles remarked that his LS department strongly emphasised seniority rather than collaboration, deterring him from adopting alternative approaches to civic education owing to his junior title. Moreover, Charles learned from his colleagues that the department chair was reluctant to alter the exam-oriented teaching approach, fearing that it would affect student examination results and subsequently reduce their bargaining power for more departmental resources. These research findings suggest that secondary school teachers' modalities of practice are largely contingent upon their affiliated subject departments and pressure regarding public examinations, which then affect the extent to which civic education is incorporated into routine instruction.

Invisible pedagogy: experiential approaches

In contrast, LS teachers who adopted invisible pedagogy generally benefited from relatively strong departmental solidarity despite the low subject status of LS. Through the pooling of collective wisdom and collaborative problem-solving, this group of interviewees was able to grapple with the general principles of cross-disciplinary teaching and issue-based inquiry. According to Bernstein (2000), invisible pedagogy is characterised by weak classification and framing of curricular knowledge, meaning that teachers are able to articulate students' everyday experiences using subject

knowledge, and tend to loosen control over the pacing of lessons. Such a modality of practice thus allowed students to express and reflect regarding their perspectives on emergent socio-political issues under teacher facilitation.

Among the interviewees, Chris, Wendy, Charmaine, Frederick, and Chester adopted invisible pedagogies in teaching civic education, ranging from rhetorical questioning to role-playing activities. A salient feature of these approaches is the primary concern of the teacher with soliciting student perspectives before relating them to codified subject knowledge and examination practices. Chris recalled that when the Umbrella Movement began in September 2014, he spent most of his teaching time calming students who were emotionally chanting anti-China slogans. Benefiting from strong departmental solidarity, Chris learned from his senior colleagues that bringing students back to a rational discussion was the priority in handling such a scenario. Using his own experience as a university debate team member, Chris adopted the strategy of rhetorical questioning in the face of heightened student responses to the Umbrella Movement. Defined as a teaching method in which teachers ask follow-up questions to interrogate the validity and soundness of arguments (Hursh & Ross, 2014), Chris found rhetorical questioning to be especially effective when the majority of students realised that most of the claims they made were based on a lopsided understanding of mainland China.

Wendy adopted role-playing as her preferred approach to civic education. Given her students' strong resentment towards the Chinese political regime, she deliberately began her lesson with a series of stories, for instance, about a hypothetical country that was facing poverty and shortage of food. She then asked her students: 'If you were the leaders of that country, what would you do?' These stories succeeded in circumventing heightened student sentiments and subsequently returning the lesson to a more rational and pragmatic discussion. Reflecting in the staff room on the lesson she just delivered, Wendy said:

> Some students said 'Let's develop the economy first, as the people are poor'. That is exactly what I want. Then I continued with another story and presented them with new sets of challenges, such as limited resources for the whole country to develop and the lack of diplomatic ties with the foreign world. At this stage, some students were bright enough to realize that these challenges were related to the key measures in China's reform and opening up policies, including the establishment of Special Economic Zones in the coastal regions to attract foreign investment.

Similar to Chris' rhetorical questioning, the role-playing activity illustrates how Wendy incorporated student input into her teaching of relevant subject knowledge – namely China's reform and opening up policies – which compelled certain students to reflect on their impressions of the Chinese political regime and realise that several present-day social problems were consequences of the compromises made by the late Chinese Communist Party leader Deng Xiaoping. While these invisible pedagogies may not have promoted patriotic sentiments, as the Chinese regime strived to achieve, these teachers' modalities of practice managed to increase social awareness and cultivate critical thinking by challenging students' taken-for-granted beliefs and prompting reflection.

Discussion and implications

The distinct advantage of adopting a Bernsteinian approach to understanding civic education in Hong Kong is that it does not assume a direct correspondence between political ideologies and students' socio-political participation. Bernstein (2000) instead contends that these ideologies are mediated and disseminated by pedagogic discourse, referring to the aggregate pedagogic relations as construed in both official documents and school practice. Furthermore, Bernstein's (2000) two-tiered conceptualisation of the re-contextualising field – the ORF and PRF – cogently captures the contentious nature of the LS curriculum and makes sense of teachers' modalities of practice amid a highly politicised environment.

Present research findings identified the fragmented nature of LS pedagogic discourse, to manifest in the tension between cross-disciplinary subject and the subject-based approach to school curricula, an incompatibility arising from sharp division of labour between the curriculum planning role of state and the curriculum implementation role of the school-sponsoring bodies. This produced two distinct effects in the PRF. The first effect is that the centralised method of curriculum planning during the colonial period subsequently fostered a highly academic and subject-based curriculum in practice that privileged examinable knowledge; as a consequence, curricular topics not directly related to the high-stakes examinations are given much lower priority in routine instruction. This explains the limited effect on LS teaching arrangements at local school despite efforts from the HKSAR Government to promote national education and pressure from the Chinese regime. The second effect is that the sharp division of labour between the state and local schools meant that as pedagogic agent within the PRF, local schools were largely insulated from the ORF when curriculum reform occurred, retaining a relatively high degree of autonomy in determining the modes for implementing civic education.

Granted this internal freedom at the school level, LS suffered from low subject status, and the success of implementing civic education in a cross-disciplinary and an issue-based manner thus became contingent upon departmental solidarity. Bernstein's concepts of visible and invisible pedagogies aptly capture LS teachers' modalities of practice; the former group maintained strong boundaries and control over lesson proceedings, indicating strong classification and framing of educational knowledge; whereas the latter group maintained weak boundaries and control over pedagogical arrangements, indicating the opposite for both parameters. Participating teachers in this study who adopted visible pedagogies prioritised examination preparation in routine instruction as they suffered from a lack of departmental solidarity, resulting in civic education being largely subsumed under highly structured lectures and past paper drills. In contrast, the teachers who adopted invisible pedagogies were able to do so as a benefit of strong departmental solidarity even without support from school management, which promoted the frequent exchange of ideas and facilitated the grappling of the key principles of LS teaching. This effect was particularly evident from their experiential approaches to cultivating critical thinking and increasing social awareness among students, which consequently gave students opportunities to express their views and reflect on their judgments regarding emergent political controversies.

As Singh (2017) elaborates, Bernstein's conceptual framework is concerned with the social division of labour for the production, distribution, and transmission of discourses; as well as how conflict and competition within this division of labour produces different configurations of pedagogic practices. For Bernstein, changes to such division of labour has to be understood as a field of symbolic control, guided by particular mechanisms by which ideology and consciousness are shaped and relayed (Bernstein, 2000). Subsequently, the construing of new pedagogic relations denotes

new affordances and new constraints for pedagogic agents situated within the field (Moss, 2002).

As in the case of LS as a whole, although the structural autonomy within the PRF largely offsets ORF pressures from the both the HKSAR Government and the Chinese regime to strengthen national identity, the implementation of civic education faced other internal constraints such as preferential scheduling and the prioritisation of public examination preparations. Moreover, within the structural autonomy of the PRF, the modalities of practice implemented among LS teachers were dependent on the factor of departmental solidarity. By emphasising the roles of the curriculum and schools in understanding the politics of civic education in Hong Kong, a Bernsteinian analysis resolves the gap in the existing literature regarding the limited politicising effect of LS (Fung & Su, 2016; Lee & Chiu, 2017) and increasing civic awareness among students (Fairbrother, 2005; Kennedy, 2010). The former is explained by the fragmented LS pedagogic discourse, whereas the latter can be attributed to variation in LS teachers' pedagogic modalities enabled by the structural autonomy of local schools.

This study contributes to the burgeoning interest in applying Bernsteinian scholarship to East-Asian contexts. For instance, Lee (2017) draws on the concept of pedagogic practice to examine the impact of curriculum reform in Hong Kong on student academic achievement across social class. More recently, Tan (2019) uses Bernstein's modalities of practice to explain the tensions incurred between rhetoric and practice during the promotion of assessment for learning under the Basic Competency Assessment programme for Hong Kong schools. As Chong, Yuen and Leung (2015) point out, civic education has been focused on the nurturing of attitudes and values with little attention to content knowledge. Bernstein's conceptual grammar helps to redress this shortcoming by taking into account the internal relations of schooling. More specifically, it construes teachers as pedagogic agents who are subject to the constraining effects of school structure and, at the same time, are capable of disrupting these effects by formulating their modalities of practice, facilitated by other structural factors such as collegial collaboration. Further research may focus on the role of other pedagogic agents, such as education officers, as well as the forms of teacher collaboration in constructing the curriculum.

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