

# THE INESTIMABLE POWER OF STUDENTS

Taking the Lead in Hong Kong's General Education Programmes



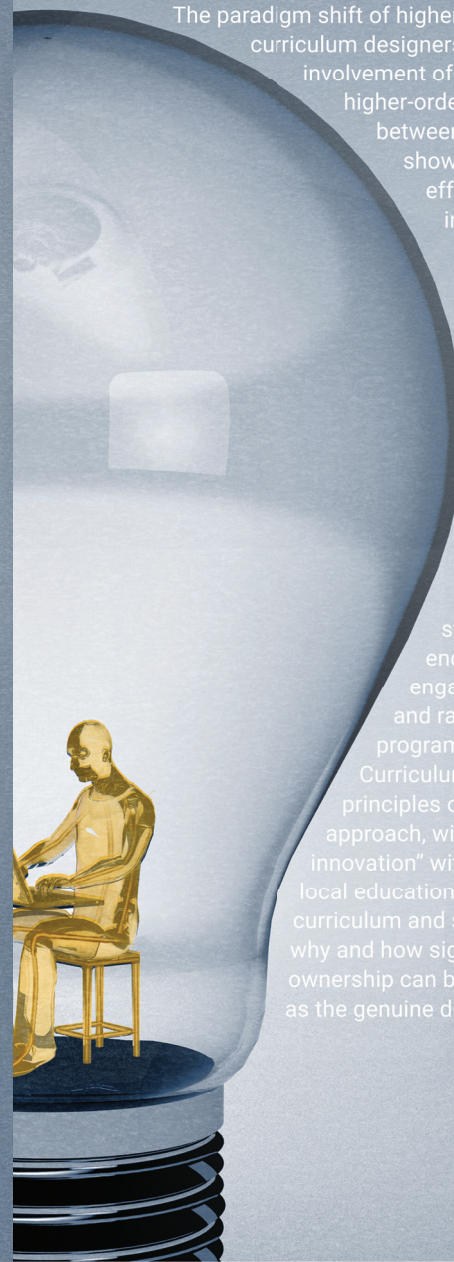
**JUNE 2017**

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

2017 Institute on General Education Curriculum Teacher and Student Conference

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The paradigm shift of higher education in the 21st century is motivating different curriculum designers to create a learning environment aligning with the active involvement of student creators with cross-disciplinary collaboration and higher-order thinking skills. However, large discrepancies still exist between the perceptions of teachers and concerns of students as shown by the continuing difficulties in developing flexible and effective General Education programmes both worldwide and in Hong Kong. Through contextualising both the pragmatic needs and idealistic concerns of the Common Core Curriculum of The University of Hong Kong, this paper will argue for the active engagement of students in the curriculum design and pedagogical decision-making from a bottom-up approach that would help narrow the existing teacher-student relationship from a top-down perspective. By applying the democratic innovations theory, this article will first evaluate the conventional institutional channels of involving students at The University of Hong Kong, such as student-student workshops, student learning festivals, transdisciplinary undergraduate research exchange, student ambassador programmes, course and teacher feedback, and staff-student consultative committee meeting. To further encourage comprehensive, coherent, and coordinated student engagement, this article will then suggest an even more drastic and radical transformation in developing General Education programmes in Hong Kong, including the Common Core Curriculum at The University of Hong Kong. Under the guiding principles of creating a constructivist learning environment, a pioneer approach, with students actively shaping the curriculum as an "open innovation" with facilitation from the professors, could be adopted by the local educational system, which is currently dominated by mandated curriculum and standardised assessment. All these issues shed light on why and how significant learning with self-empowerment, motivation, and ownership can be achieved when the roles of students are really positioned as the genuine designers, users, and learners.

