Teaching Creatively in Hong Kong Higher Education Sector: Transition from the Teacher-Centered Approach to the Creative Teaching Approach

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Abstract: The higher education sector in Hong Kong has been expanding tremendously in the past decade and educators of higher education strive to enhance personal teaching skills and strategies. This study aims to examine Hong Kong higher education educators' conceptions of "teaching creatively" and their creative engagement in teaching and learning. The main research question is "What are the experiences of educators of higher education in Hong Kong with teaching creatively?" and the research questions are shaped around the experiences of educators planning and conducting a creative lesson. To explain and understand the role and responsibilities of higher education educators, the teaching presence of Community of Inquiry (CoI) by Garrison, Anderson and Archer is used as the theoretical framework. Basic qualitative study is used to conduct the study and the participants comprise five educators from local universities in Hong Kong. Study findings reveal that Hong Kong higher education educators recognize the effectiveness of teaching creatively and they were adopting student-centered approach during the course. However, the lack of knowledge in teaching and the constrains by school policies were identified as obstacles affecting educators teaching creatively. The findings of this study provide new perspective in understanding the potential gap between belief and practices of Hong Kong higher education educators toward "teaching creatively" in class.

Keywords: Hong Kong, higher education, teaching creatively, effective teaching approach, student-centered approach, community of inquiry, teaching presence

1. Introduction

We are now in the 21st century when different innovative teaching approaches in higher education are being positioned (Lee, 2014). Traditional teacher-centered teaching approaches are becoming less effective and are less welcomed by students. Educators in higher education are therefore always seeking ways to put students at the center of learning and improve their overall learning outcomes. (Ferreri & O'Connor, 2013; Kay, MacDonald, & DiGiuseppe, 2019). In fact, many research studies have shown that student-centered teaching approaches such as inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, and

e-learning are effective in promoting problem solving, communication, creativity, and critical thinking across many disciplines (Ding & Helene, 2006; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2010; Kirschner et al., 2006). The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) of the United Kingdom (1999) defined "teaching creatively" as "using imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting and effective" (p. 89). Jeffrey and Craft (2001) added to this definition by emphasizing that teaching creatively may be interpreted as a greater concern for effective teaching. Educators in the higher education sector need to prepare their students for an uncertain future, as well as respond rapidly and flexibly to the necessity for new kinds of abilities in new ways and through creative practices (Barak & Levenberg, 2016; Vidergor & Sela, 2017). While previous research has focused on investigating the effectiveness of different teaching approaches from the students' perspective, the purpose of this study focuses on the views of higher education educators, investigating their conceptions of teaching creatively.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Higher Education in Hong Kong

Higher education institutions, including public universities, private universities, and self-financing schools, play an important role in contributing to education of Hong Kong (Lee, 2014). In the past decade, the local higher education sector has seen various expansions and changes (Lee, 2014); for instance, the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) and Hang Seng Management College (HSMC) were both awarded "university" status, becoming The Education University of Hong Kong (EduHK) and Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (HSUHK) respectively. Formed by the merger of five teacher training colleges in 1994, EduHK is the only University Grants Committee-funded (UGC) institution dedicated to professional teacher education in Hong Kong. On the other hand, HSUHK is a non-profit private university-level institution that was restructured in 2010 to pioneer post-secondary programmes in business and related areas. According to a Hong Kong government press release (2018), in order to obtain university status, tertiary institutions need to prove that they can achieve and excel in research capabilities, financial sustainability, programmes diversity, and most importantly quality assurance.

The quality of higher education is believed to not only affect students competitiveness but also world university rankings, which play a fundamental role in fuelling global competion among universities (Bikse, Rivza, & Ieva, 2013; West, 2012; Wit, 2016). According to Komotar (2019), university rankings have become a global phenomenon, with both students and institutional leaders using them as an informative tool for various purposes such as study programme selection and admission decisions. Many people perceive global university rankings simply as an indicator for assessing the level of internationalization achieved by higher education institutions, a phenomenon that has been observed in the higher education sector of Hong Kong. To actively construct an international network and compete for global university rankings (Lee, 2014), local tertiary institutions now have an growing preference for recruiting non-local students and teachers to enhance the proportion of internationalization. The renaming of HKIEd and HSMC as universities are two good examples that indicate the trend of internationalization and diversity among Hong Kong universities and colleges (Lee, 2014). As both publicly funded and self-financing tertiary institutions in Hong Kong strive to increase their reputation by competing for higher rankings, in addition to providing more programmes ranging from diploma certificates to doctoral degrees (Lee, 2014), it is essential that their teaching staff offer high quality teaching as well as a robust research output. Because of the tremendous expansion in the local higher education sector, it is worth further exploring how educators' teaching approaches meet student requirements and fit the current role that universities play today.

2.2 Teaching Approaches in Higher Education

2.2.1 Teaching Approaches in Higher Education

Apart from institutional changes in the higher education sector, teaching approaches have also been transforming with the times (Mishra & Henriksen, 2013). One major purpose of higher education

teaching is imparting academic knowledge and pragmatic skills to students, enabling them to engage with our dynamic world (Lee, 2014). The traditional teaching approach focuses on recitation by memorizing hard-core course content, including activities such as lectures, tutorials, essay writing, and examinations (Graeme, 2003). This approach unilaterally instils knowledge in students, ignoring the interactions present in teacher-student communication. Some evidence even indicates that traditional teaching approaches are now generally viewed as antiquated and associated with numerous detriments, such as students rapidly losing attention and forgetting materials when placed in a passive situation (Schwerdt & Wuppermann, 2011). Although different approaches are being promoted and adopted in higher education, various studies have confirmed that higher educator teaching remains teacher-centred (Charlton, 2006; Ferreri & O'Connor, 2013; Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006). This teacher-centred approach is based on the teacher's input and assessment of how well students learned the material; it is thus commonly referred to as an outcome-based approach, given that it expresses what students are expected to achieve at the end of the scheduled learning period (Schreurs & Dumbraveanu, 2014). Under the teacher-centred approach, the educator exercises full control of the classroom in a unidirectional means, whereas students remain silent and have fewer opportunities to develop their team building and critical reasoning abilities. According to Kompa (2012), teacher-centred approaches neither encourage nor reinforce a student's self-ruling study aptitudes and later learning abilities. Lecturers may even ignore differences in student abilities, subconsciously presuming that the capabilities of each student are all the same

2.2.2 Modern Teaching Approaches

Modern teaching approaches focus on interactivity by adopting activity-based strategies and using technology, which include role-play, group discussion, mobile phone audience response systems, and augmented reality (AR), among others (Branch, Hayes, Horsted, & Nygaard, 2017). According to Schwerdt and Wuppermann (2011), the modern, interactive approaches focus more on problem solving by adopting interactive teaching methods, which can positively influence student performance in learning outcomes. In recent years, modern teaching approaches have been more readily adopted in higher education classrooms because of their emphasis on critical thinking. Furthermore, these approaches emphasize improving students' skills all around, not just testing their memory as an ultimate purpose (Boumová, 2008). The exploration of alternative teaching approaches, such as the flipped classroom, and active learning approaches in the higher education sector has already begun, with educators seeking ways to improve their teaching practice in order to assist students in achieving learning objectives (Kay et al., 2019).

Teaching creatively, as well as discussions regarding effective and creative teaching approaches, has rapidly emerged as a significant issue in the higher education sector in recent years (Mishra & Henriksen, 2013). In Hong Kong, recent social movements and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly affected learning and teaching at local institutions, profoundly transforming established norms of higher education teaching. Lecturers have been expected to adapt to these changes and completely adjust to online teaching modes, which complicates the implementation of creative teaching strategies. Unlike face-to-face classes, lecturers cannot observe students' immediate responses in online classes, making it challenging for them to promptly adjust their teaching approaches (Dumford & Miller, 2018). This challenge is compounded by a lack of concentration and a reduced degree of collaborative learning in online classes (Dumford & Miller, 2018). Higher education educators are hence striving to learn strategies in order to make teaching and learning effective. The study of teaching creatively in high education thus becomes essential in the current era of online learning

2.3 Concepts and Definitions of "Teaching Creatively"

Different people may understand the concepts and definitions of "teaching creatively" differently. In the following discussion, it is worth focusing on how educators can teach creatively, which includes cultivating student innovation and enhancing student critical thinking skills—thereby preparing them to become future global citizens—rather than just focusing on how to make students themselves creative

(Cardoso de Sousa, 2011). Considerable research has been devoted to the theories of creative teaching in higher education institutions. For instance, Torrance (1995) stated that teachers who like to manipulate students through creative self-expression may not necessary produce significant development in student creativity and overall achievement. Likewise Stein (1994) observed that student achievement remained largely the same regardless of whether they had creative teachers. Stein (1994) also suggested that a creative person may not necessarily learn from a creative teacher, and that maintaining a good student-teacher relationship is even more likely to promote learning.

The concept of creativity is subjective, as people tend to have their own definitions that may not align with the literature (Mishra & Henriksen, 2013). Nevertheless, it is possible to seek criteria related to "teaching creatively" with different approaches. For instance, Mayer (1989) referred to creative teaching as instructional techniques that can help students learn new knowledge effectively. On the other hand, Bozik (1990) emphasized the classroom environment, claiming that creative teaching relates to how teachers create a learning atmosphere that is stimulating and inspiring. Other scholars have mentioned that teaching creatively implies the adoption of innovative, fascinating, attractive engagements in teaching and learning (Cardoso de Sousa, 2011; Hui et al., 2015; Kay et al., 2019). Regarding creativity itself, still other scholars describe it as a visionary behaviour designed to generate outcomes that are novel or valuable, including seeing, thinking, and innovating (Mishra & Henriksen, 2013; Saebø, McCammon, & O'Farrell, 2007). Being creative in teaching can also mean helping students have a better learning experience and enjoyment for an advance to accomplish both the learning objectives and learning outcomes (Mishra & Henriksen, 2013). Compared to a teacher-centred approach, students should be more interested and motivated to learn in creative lessons because of the interactive atmosphere in either the physical or the virtual classroom (Hui et al., 2015). Sometimes, creative teaching can be objective-based by adopting a purpose to delivering messages, perhaps about the teaching materials, which can promote more concentration and the accomplishment teaching objectives by drawing attention from the students (Hui et al., 2015). Still, Ramsden (2010) suggests that teaching creatively usually refer to student-centred approaches and that teachers in higher education should consider students' needs and ideas while adopting various interactive teaching approaches. Yet Ramsden (2010) argues that unfortunately, teaching in higher education classrooms is still dominated by outdated theories that focus on the teacher's perspective. For instance, many university teachers still define teaching as the transmission of authoritative content or the demonstration of procedures, while some perceive it as strategies used to make the transmission of concepts possible. These outdated perspectives prevent university teachers from viewing teaching as making learning possible, hindering them from thinking about how to teach creatively and effectively (Ramsden, 2010).

3. Conceptual Framework

Research has shown that a relationship exists between how lecturers teach and how students perceived their own learning in higher education (Arbaugh et al., 2008; Richardson et al., 2017). Given that the present study only focuses on the teacher's perspective, the teaching presence aspect of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework is adopted to understand how higher education educators evaluate the design of their teaching (Garrison et al., 2010). Within the CoI framework, an educational community of inquiry is "a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding" (Garrison, 2011, p.2). The community aims to create conditions to encourage higher-order cognitive processing. The CoI framework thus represents a process of creating a collaborative-constructivist learning experience through the development of three interdependent elements—social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. Here "presence" means a sense of being, which is created through interpersonal communication (Akyol & Garrison, 2008). Among these three elements, teaching presence forms the main framework of this study. Teaching presence is defined as the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the realization of meaningful learning. This involves the instructional design and organization of the course and its activities, the facilitation of the course and its activities, and direct instruction by the lecturer (Garrison et al., 2010).

4. Methodology

Research has shown that higher education educators strive to search for ways to enhance their personal teaching skills and strategies; however, they experience challenges when trying to teach creatively and effectively (Ramsden, 2010). This study therefore aims to examine conceptions of "teaching creatively" that educators have in the Hong Kong higher education sector, in addition to their creative engagement in teaching and learning.

To understand how educators interpret their teaching experiences and what meanings they attribute to these experiences, the present study employs the basic qualitative research approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016); after collecting qualitative data, the investigator performs data analysis and merges the results into different themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study collected qualitative data through participant interviews and a review of the course progressions that participants provided. Participants were teachers in Hong Kong working at self-financed or publicly funded local universities. The study recruited teachers from different academic disciplines to obtain diverse views. Five subjects took part in the study; their experience in higher education teaching ranged from 6 to 9 years.

4.1 Data Collection

Basic qualitative research requires a data collection approach that encourages participants to provide detailed first-person accounts of their experiences and self-perceptions of phenomena. Interviews can gather direct quotations from participants about their experiences and opinions; the present study therefore conducted one-on-one, in-depth interviews with each participant. A semi-structured interview approach was chosen as on one hand, the approach is considered suitable for in-depth personal discussions, and on the other hand, the investigator can easily manage questioning while also giving participants space to think, speak, and be heard (Creswell, 2013). Interview questions were focused on obtaining information regarding participant conceptions of "teaching creatively" and investigate how they create creative lessons. A set of interview questions was drafted prior to conducting the interviews to keep the research focused on the research questions (see the Appendix). Additional follow-up questions were asked according to participant responses during the interviews to obtain more information.

The present study also reviewed five course progressions provided by the participants. Through reviewing such documents, the investigator can collect data regarding events that are no longer observable, as well as details that participants may not have recalled during interviews (Bowen, 2009; Patton, 2015). These course progressions provided background information and evidence supporting the participants' interview responses, as they show how participants organized their respective course content and what teaching strategies they adopted for each lesson. For instance, participants specified the use of lectures, video viewings, role-play, discussions, and many other strategies in their course progressions. In other words, reviewing course progressions can help us understand how creative the participants were when they were teaching. Using both interviews and document analysis therefore helps to ensure that the present qualitative research is comprehensive and critical.

The investigators first transcribed all the raw data from the interviews and the course progressions. Then, the investigators listened back to the audio recordings of each interview to recall the interview process, which helped to generate a more complete analysis. Afterwards, the investigators made initial notes and developed emergent themes. Following exploratory coding, the investigators found connections, patterns, and interrelationships between the notes; and relevant themes began to emerge. The investigators repeated this process for each of the five interviews. Lastly, the investigators examined the five course progressions, which provided the data needed to understand how the participants planned their respective lessons and what elements they included in each lesson.

5. Research Questions

The principal research question of the present study is: "What are the experiences of educators of higher education in Hong Kong with teaching creatively?" The present study also explores the following four subsidiary research questions:
- What are the conceptions of "teaching creatively" as understood by the educators?
- How do the educators design and organize creative lessons?
- How do the educators execute creative lessons?
- What are the educators' perceptions of the challenges/obstacles of adopting a creative teaching approach in their classrooms?

6. Results

Each of the five participants provided detailed information through three semi-structured interviews regarding their perceptions of and experiences with teaching creatively. They also provided a total of five course progressions for review. Table 1 lists general information about the participants.

Table 1. Participant Information

Pseudonym	Teaching experience (years)	Institution type	Academic discipline	Courses taught per academic year
Adam	7	Self-financed	Accounting	5
Betty	7	Publicly funded	Early Childhood Education	8
Carlos	9	Self-financed	Language	8
Daisy	6	Publicly funded	Psychology	4
Eliza	9	Publicly funded	Counselling	9

Based on the analyses of the interview transcripts and the course progression samples, four superordinate themes and nine sub-themes emerged. These themes represent how the participants view "teaching creatively" and how they conduct a lesson creatively. Table 2 presents the emergent themes from each of their accounts.

Table 2. Themes of Qualitative Data

Superordinate Themes			
#1: Educators' conception of teaching creatively	#2: Lesson design and organization	#3: Execution of creative lessons	#4: Factors affecting creative teaching
Sub-Themes			
Teaching creatively is similar to teaching effectively	School policies and norms provide guidelines on lesson design and organization	Educators' own learning experiences in higher education institutions affect their execution of creative lessons	Lack of knowledge and training in teaching creatively in the higher education field
Teaching creatively is related to a student-centred approach	Effects of peer consultation	Educators solidify the conception of teaching creatively through actual practice	Educators are limited by school policies
Teaching creatively is not related to the use of technology			

These superordinate themes and sub-themes will be elaborated and summarized in the following sections. The findings were supported by verbal quotations from the interview transcripts and the information obtained from the course progressions provided by the participants.

6.1 Educators' Conception of Teaching Creatively

To understand how higher education educators in this study view and define "teaching creatively," all participants were asked to describe and define what it means to teach creatively at the beginning of their respective interviews.

6.1.1 Teaching Creatively is Similar to Teaching Effectively

All participants related teaching creatively to teaching effectively, stating that it was important to achieve course objectives, as they were an indicator that showed whether students were learning well and that their teaching was effective. They all thus expected that students would focus on lesson content and that the lesson objectives should be achieved; teaching creatively was perceived as helping the latter aim. Betty shared, "In order to achieve the course objectives, I have to apply some innovative and creative teaching strategies in my class such as making use of drama and group games." Eliza expressed a similar notion, "I found that students learn best when I use some creative methods to teach." Participants also shared some of their experiences that showed creative teaching leading to effective learning. For instance, Adam recalled using Facebook Live to review accounting examinations with his students. He realized that students asked many meaningful questions during the live chat, a phenomenon that he had never seen before. Every participant also mentioned that teaching creatively is similar to teaching effectively and that adopting creative strategies helps to achieve learning objectives. The course progressions they provided supported this focus on achieving learning objectives, as every document stated three to five clear learning objectives for the respective course.

6.1.2 Teaching Creatively is Related to a Student-Centred Approach

Not only all participants related teaching creatively to effectiveness of teaching, they all believed that those who apply creative teaching skills in class are actually adopting student-centered approach. Adam shared, "It is easy for me to just talk, talk and talk in class. I can then finished teaching everything on time; however, this is not creative teaching as that is very much teacher-centred." Carlos emphasized in his interview:

> "*When I decided to conduct the lesson creatively, I have to think constantly about what students like and what I can do to attract them. For example, I am sure that students hate it when I just talk for good three hours; therefore, I would think what I can do in order to draw their attention.*"

Betty realized that without understanding students' concerns and needs, it would be difficult to teach creatively. She believed that she was a creative teacher as she used a lot of creative and effective strategies in class. Betty did interim evaluations with students in order to understand what they liked and what they needed.

Whereas all participants reflected that it was essential to hear student views, their course progressions did not reflect how they would obtain these views. Although Betty stated that she did interim evaluations with students, her document did not list a specific date and time for doing the evaluations. Of the five course progressions, only three of them indicated that students would do course evaluations at the end of the course; however, obtaining student views at the end of the course would not help the educators adjust their teaching practices in time

6.1.3 Teaching Creatively is not Related to the Use of Technology

The course progression documents mentioned the use of technology, with all the documents mentioning online learning time. Conversely, although all the participants constantly mentioned the use of technology in their interviews, some specifically stated that it was not a must-have item for teaching creatively. For instance, Eliza said:

> "*My department encourages the staff to incorporate more technology in class. For example, we have workshops on using Padlet, Minimeters, Edpuzzle and many others. I attended some workshops but still find them very difficult to use. Plus, I think using technology does not [necessarily mean] that I am teaching creatively.*"

Carlos made a similar comment, stating that technology is not the most important for his teaching:

> "*I can use technology in my class, but I don't want to. It just takes me a lot of time just to do all the preparation work. I think my teaching style is attractive and creative enough, and I do not need to use technology to draw students' attention. The key to teaching creatively is the teacher himself, not technology.*"

Although all the participants did not consider the use of technology as a must, some stated that using technology helped boost student interest in learning certain topics. Daisy especially appreciated technology, sharing her positive experiences of using technology in class:

> "*I think it is a trend of using technology in class and, actually, students like it. I use Minimeters to draw students' opinions and views, and I always draw a lot more feedback. I think the use of technology can help those who are shy to voice out, which is good.*".

6.2 Lesson Design and Organization

Adopting the teaching presence element from the CoI framework, the participants were asked about how they design and organize a creative lesson when beginning a course. The course progressions provided clear explanations on how their respective courses were organized and what teaching strategies they used for each lesson. All the progressions clearly stated the course objectives, topics of discussion, and teaching modes for every week. Three out of five progressions also listed assessment deadlines and relevant grading criteria, while two progressions listed examination dates. In general, students could obtain information about the course objectives, weekly course plans, dates, and expectations for assessments or examinations by just looking at the course progressions.

6.2.1 School Policies and Norms Provide Guidelines on Lesson Design and Organization

All participants stated that they got their course progression documents ready before their courses started. All of them also emphasized that they could make changes to the progressions. Three of them stated that submitting a detailed progression was a departmental requirement; however they would just use templates and previous course outlines provided by the department to design their own courses. Two stated that their departments provided a general outline on what to cover in specific courses, and that lecturers were free to make changes. As the course progressions indicate what content is included, as well as what teaching strategies the lecturers would employ for each class, school policies and norms for developing course progressions would affect how creative lecturers would be during the planning stage. Regarding the writing and planning of course progressions, Adam shared the following opinion:

> "*I revise my progression based on whatever the previous lecturer provided me. As long as I get to achieve the objectives, I can add on or cut out anything. Regarding all the important dates like examination date, I just like to give students a heads up so that they can prep ahead. Of course, if I need to make adjustment, I can do so.*"

Aligning with Adam's opinion, Carlos said:

> "*I am glad that I have control over my overall course planning. I never experience any difficulties changing my progression and plan. Sometimes I would make revisions based on the student feedback in class. Of course, my bottom-line is that I need to make sure the course objectives are achieved.*"

Although all the participants had at least some freedom to revise and redesign their courses and lessons, four of them emphasized that they did not have adequate time and energy to put a lot of effort on planning, often passing over the planning stage because of the heavy workload at their respective institutions.

6.2.2 Effects of Peer Consultation

While most of the participants stated that the department provided them with a template on how to organize a course, all of them said that they did not design their course by themselves. Four participants said that they asked for course progressions from previous lecturers, or even the course coordinator, and then made revisions to the existing version to produce their own progressions. Betty even collected all the PowerPoints and teaching materials from the lecturer of a previous iteration of her course:

> "*My colleague was so nice. She shared everything with me and that saved me a lot of preparation time. I only need to update some data in the PowerPoints and then I am all good to go. I think it is really helpful, especially for those who first teach the course.*"

Adam recalled that when he first taught his course, he sought help from a colleague, who let him conduct class observations a couple of times. Alex found this to be really helpful, given that he was a new staff member then. Getting peer comments enabled him to feel more confident when making changes to existing course outlines and progressions.

6.3 Execution of Creative Lessons

Aside from instructional design and organization, the other elements of teaching presence include facilitating discourse and direct instruction. Understanding how higher education educators executed a creative lesson would therefore provide insights into how they facilitate student discussions and keep such discussions on track. Of the five course progressions, three included details on what strategies the educators would adopt for each lesson. Lecture time was the primary strategy used in all courses, appearing in the plans for every single class. Other strategies that were used often included discussions, online forums, role-play, video viewings, and online learning activities.

6.3.1 Educators' Own Learning Experiences in Higher Education Institutions Affect Their Execution of Creative Lessons

While all the participants were born and raised in Hong Kong, they all obtained their higher education qualifications overseas. Given their learning experiences both in Hong Kong and overseas, they were able to compare and contrast the educational experiences of different cultures. The participants stated that learning experiences in Western countries differed greatly from those in from Hong Kong, and the more interactive learning approach they experienced abroad were suitable for higher education students. Eliza mentioned that she intentionally included a lot of discussion time in class, as she took part in many discussions while studying in the United Kingdom, finding it to be a meaningful activity. Daisy also mentioned one unforgettable learning experience in Australia that she wanted to adopt so that her students could have the same learning experiences that she did. Interestingly, Carlos had unsatisfactory experiences while studying in Hong Kong; he stated that he would not let his students go through the same experiences:

> "*I remember that the professor always asked me to do referencing and jotting notes. I seldom had any time to digest the knowledge and express my thoughts. I also found that professor very controlling and I did not really enjoy his class. I promised myself at that time. If I got a chance to teach, I would not do anything like him.*"

Ultimately, all the participants were able to recall an episode when their teachers taught creatively. The general consensus was that creative teaching strategies involve a more interactive approach rather than a teacher-centred one.

6.3.2 Educators Solidify the Conception of Teaching Creatively Through Actual Practice

All the participants mentioned that they continually refined their teaching through actual practice. They then gained better understandings of what their students liked and what creative strategies could lead to effective teaching. For instance, Carlos said:

> "*Making use of technology is so popular these days and I tried in my class too. From students' reaction in class, I knew my [attempt] was not a successful one. What students like most in my class is my teaching style. They like it when I adopt a more friend-like approach.*"

Daisy agreed that her actual teaching practices enabled her to think about what creative teaching meant to her, as well as realize that she needed to adjust her teaching style for every class:

> "*There is no one size fits all. Depend[ing] on the characteristics of different classes and students, I have to adjust my teaching style constantly.*"

6.4 Factors Affecting Creative Teaching

All the participants held positive attitudes toward the creative teaching approach, as they believed that creative teaching equalled effective learning. They tried to teach creatively in higher education classrooms. In order to explore the factors that prevented them from incorporating creative elements into their teaching, they were asked about the challenges they experienced when trying to teach creatively.

6.4.1 Lack of Knowledge and Training in Teaching Creatively in the Higher Education Field

All participants obtained doctoral degrees in their respective disciplines and had at least six years of experience teaching in higher education; however, none of them had received formal training in teaching. Adam, Betty, and Daisy stated that their institutions provided training and workshops to teaching staff, but it was not compulsory; whereas Carlos and Eliza said that their institutions did not provide any training at all. Eliza said that she would love to gain new suggestions on teaching, but sometimes she was too busy to attend training sessions. Since none of the participants received proper training in teaching, all of them agreed that they lacked knowledge on teaching creatively and effectively when they began teaching. They believed that they knew more about creative teaching when they accumulated more teaching experience. Daisy recognized the importance of adopting the "right" strategies when teaching higher education students; however, she thought that the amount of training provided by her institution was insufficient and its content was irrelevant.

6.4.2 Educators are Limited by School Policies

Four participants reported that students were required to accomplish a lot of learning tasks in courses; they thus lacked time to do creative activities with students. In addition, they said that they had to follow the template and outlines provided by the department. Regarding the freedom to change the design and the organization of her course, Daisy said:

> "*Yes, I can make changes to everything but the procedure is annoying. I have to submit [a] relevant request with evidence in advance for departmental approval. All these extra paper work has stopped me from making big changes to the progression.*"

Eliza shared a similar notion sentiment:

> "*I have no control with the deadlines of the assessments. All dates need to be approved by the department. Also, if I want to make any changes, I have to submit the request ahead of time. When the course was in progress, I cannot make big changes. Therefore, I don't think I have full control of the design of the course.*"

Although all the participants stated that they could changes their course progressions, complicated procedures discouraged them from making timely revisions. Moreover, even though the general consensus was that creative teaching approaches had positive effects in teaching and the achievement of curriculum objectives, Adam and Carlos mentioned that such approaches were not an effective tool for teaching certain academic contents, such as their respective subjects of accounting and Chinese language. Eliza also agreed that it was difficult to incorporate creative elements in teaching every single subject

7. Discussion

7.1 Key Findings

The findings of this study provided insights into the perceptions of teaching creatively that educators have in the Hong Kong higher education sector, as well as on their actual teaching practice. The participants expressed their views on how to teach creatively in order to support and enhance student learning outcomes. Likewise, the participants mentioned the challenges they encountered in reconciling their perceived role in teaching in higher education with the reality of Hong Kong society.

7.1.1 Educators' Conception of Teaching Creatively

The results above suggest that the higher education educators who participated in this study agreed that teaching creatively can help students to learn effectively and that a student-centred approach should be adopted. Educators should then take responsibility to ensure that students achieve the best learning outcomes. The participants' descriptions of teaching creatively matched with what other investigators had found from their research. In general, people agree that effective learning and a student-centred approach are characteristics attached to teaching creatively (Boumová, 2008; Branch et al., 2017; Cardoso de Sousa, 2011; Ding & Helene, 2006). The results also aligned with research by Cardoso de Sousa (2011), which found that while college students focused on how creative the educators were, educators focused more on effectiveness. As Mayer (1989) mentioned, it is impossible to entirely agree on what "creative" or "effective" teaching means. A more commonly understood definition therefore rests on listing a series of behaviours, strategies, and approaches that characterize creative teaching.

To further understand how higher education educators define "teaching creatively," the present study reviewed five course progressions, focusing on the activities, delivery mode, and content of each lesson in these planning documents. Interestingly, while all participants include some use of technology when delivering course content, certain participants mentioned that the use of technology was not as important when teaching creatively. They admitted that if students enjoyed their lesson, then they would consider such lessons to be creative, effective, and successful. Mayer (1989) proposed that "creative teaching refers to instructional techniques that are intended to help the students learn new material in ways that will enable them to transfer what they learned to new problems" (p. 205). This perspective aligned with what the participants believed: teaching strategies received more weight than the use of technology. Ultimately, creativity lies not only in the educators themselves, but in the interaction between students and educators. It is then logical to assume that examining what the role of

an educator entails, as well as how an educator interacts with students, is more important than exploring creative strategies or ways to present subject matter to learners (Cardoso de Sousa, 2011).

Knowing how educators organized their courses provided understandings of their conceptions regarding teaching creatively. The use of discussions, roleplay, and other interactive strategies showed that these educators employed a student-centred approach, which they believed to be creative and effective. Although the progressions showed that technology was constantly used to enrich the lesson, the participants stated that it was not the most important. These perceptions match with research studies that find the teacher to be the key when conducting creative lessons (Charlton, 2006; Hui et. al., 2015).

7.1.2 Lesson Design and Organization

This study adopts the teaching presence element of the CoI framework, which refers to the shared responsibilities of all participants, and not just the educator, in the educational community to promote meaningful learning (Garrison, 2011). Teaching presence therefore encompasses more than just the role of educator in front of a class. The participants in this study were asked about how they decided the content, activities, and timelines of their courses. Understanding how they designed and organized their courses would provide understandings on current teaching practice in Hong Kong higher education.

According to Garrison (2011), the design and the organization of courses have to be flexible and open to change over time. Yet most of the participants stated that institutional policies restricted them and they therefore could not obtain student input before planning their course progressions. Furthermore, as the course progression pretty much framed what should be taught and done, there was limited room for the educators to be creative and include students in the design and organization stage. This finding aligned with Dumford and Miller's (2018) observations that although Hong Kong higher education is changing tremendously, sometimes school policies make it hard for educators to make adjustments promptly. Moreover, when participants were making teaching plans, their peers were valuable resources to them, serving as resources providers and consultants. In line with what Garrison (2011) proposes, teaching presence is never just about an individual educator; students and all other stakeholders should also be involved throughout the entire planning stage. The various strategies that participants adopted in their courses aligned with Cardoso de Sousa's (2011) findings that educators who could plan for establishing a teaching presence were those who could embed personal insights into course material and provide a framework on how the course structure helps the learners.

7.1.3 Execution of Creative Lessons

Investigating how educators conducted a creative lesson provided understandings on the two components of teaching presence–facilitation and direct instruction–in the higher education field. The facilitative responsibilities of teaching presence include encouraging discussions between students, in which educators should not be too involved. For direct instruction teaching component, educators should assume the role of keeping the discussion on track and making sure that they are achieving the course objectives (Garrison et al., 2010). The course progressions indicated participants included interactive activities in every lesson. The participants also stated that both their past learning experiences at higher education institutions and their current teaching experience impacted their beliefs and actual practice in teaching creatively. The participants claimed that they adjusted their teaching approaches every day to meet the responsibilities of facilitating discussion and providing feedback to students. This confirms the research by Richardson et al. (2010), which argues that an educator's role as a facilitator involves diagnosing misconceptions, providing information, and confirming understandings. Furthermore, the participants felt the need to review student comments and move discussions forward. As they had experience as both learners and teachers, they developed ideas on how to create an effective and creative lesson. The participants believed that students learned better and more effectively when educators adopted a more student-centred approach and respected student needs. As such, the participants' feedback actually contradicted certain literature that claimed many higher education educators are still only concerned with lecture delivery (Boumová, 2008; Charlton, 2006; Schreurs & Dumbraveanu, 2014; Schwerdt & Wuppermann, 2011). The participants' reflections in interviews and their course progressions showed that they were learning and employing certain new

teaching styles, and they were moving forward to create a creative classroom where students could produce better work.

7.1.4 Factors Affecting Creative Teaching

All participants claimed that they faced various significant challenges when incorporating creative elements into their lessons. One critical factor that affected their practice was their knowledge and training. They claimed that because they had not majored in teaching; they had knowledge in their respective subject areas, but not in making teaching effective and creative. Although they could obtain some training from their institutions, such training was not compulsory and often outside of their schedules. This finding echoes Schreurs and Dumbraveanu's (2014) claim that higher education educators lack opportunities to put theories into practices, preventing them from shifting to a learner-centred approach. The participants were not completely satisfied with the voluntary training workshops and seminars that their departments or institutions provided; aside from the fact that they were sometimes unable to attend those training sessions, they felt that they lacked opportunities to apply the techniques they learned to real classroom settings.

Anther constraint was that certain school policies prevented staff from proactively making changes. Some participants stated that complicated procedures discouraged them from making revisions after drawing from student ideas. In their opinion, the management cared much about accomplishing learning objectives, not providing enough time for staff to adjust their teaching approaches to help students to learn more effectively. This reaffirmed Ramsden's (2010) idea that educators need to constantly learn how to teach in higher education. Vidergor and Sela (2017) also support this stance, arguing that all stakeholders, including management staff, should support each other in using innovative strategies to promote lifelong learning in higher education.

7.2 Conclusions and Implications

Students perceive their studies in higher education institutions as a time uplifting their overall learning experience and efficacy. The continued use of teacher-centered pedagogical approaches that stress academic skills is becoming a critical concern in higher education. Different factors such as institutional and student expectations, along with course outlines that stress academic content, can create a pressurized atmosphere that affects educators' practices (Bligh, 2000; Brown & Race, 2005). Although educators who are creative may not necessarily influence students to be creative themselves, teaching creatively at any level can maintain the interest of educators in their teaching, as well as the attention of their students. For educators, there is always a need for devising novel ways to accomplish teaching goals; at the same time, it is essential to leave room for developing unplanned and unpredictable goals when teaching creatively.

By exploring and identifying how Hong Kong higher education educators perceive "teaching creatively" and their practice, we gain a better understanding of the current phenomena in Hong Kong higher education. Through this research, investigators can help to raise awareness for improving current higher education teaching practices to fit student needs. Management staff can better understand the difficulties that front-line educators face and can help by revising existing policies related to the development of course online. Management staff are also expected to be more understanding, sensitive, and supportive when front-line educators encounter issues. Front-line educators can recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, and make adjustments in their teaching accordingly.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

Although the use of a basic qualitative research design facilitated the exploration of participants' lived experiences, there are several limitations attached to this study. First, the investigators' presence in the data collection process is unavoidable and influences participant responses. Moreover, investigator bias is a potential major limitation given that the investigators of this study are also currently lecturers in higher education. Second, the rather small sample size limits the generalizability and external validity

of the findings. Third, the absence of students' voice in this study makes it challenging to understand the complete picture of teaching approaches in higher education. Lastly, data was only gathered from interviews and the participants' lesson plans. Missing observations may affect how the investigators evaluated the educators' actual practices in their classrooms. Field observation is therefore recommended for future research.

While the present study focused on higher education educators' perceptions and actual practice with "teaching creatively," it provided answers to the central research questions and suggested possible directions for future research in the higher education sector. First, students' comment on higher educators' teaching approaches and their achievement in class are worth investigating, as students play an active role in their own learning. Student perspectives on how the class is being arranged may influence how educators adjust their teaching approaches (Cardoso de Sousa, 2011). Second, this study revealed the need for higher education educators to receive more training and support from their institutions, implying an urgent need for reviewing and revising the current support and training provided. Additional research can investigate the effectiveness of existing higher education training policies and workshops. Lastly, the participants of this study identified various teaching approaches they adopted as creative; however, the study only explored "teaching creatively" in a broad sense. Future research should therefore focus on specific types of teaching approaches in order to investigate the pragmatic use of creative elements in higher education classes.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

General Questions:

What are the experiences of educators of higher education in Hong Kong with teaching creatively?

> Sub Question #1: What is the conception of "teaching creatively" as understood by educators of higher education in Hong Kong?
>
> Sub Question #2: How do Hong Kong higher education educators design and organize creative lesson?
>
> Sub Question #3: How do Hong Kong higher education educators conduct a creative lesson
>
> Sub Question #4: What are Hong Kong higher education educators' perceptions of the challenges/obstacles of adopting creative teaching approach in their classrooms?

Interviewee Background Questions (5-10 minutes)

- Where were you born?

- How long have you been living in Hong Kong?

- What kind of higher education institution did you attend?
- Why did you enter the field of education, especially higher education?
- Please describe your training in teaching in higher education field.
- How long have you been teaching in higher education?

Creative Teaching Approach Questions

The Conception of "teaching creatively":

- In your own words, how would you describe your understanding of what "teaching creatively" is?
- In your classroom, can you describe what creative teaching and learning look like?
- How students look like and learn when creative teaching approach is adopted?

The Planning of a Class When the Educator Adopted Creative Teaching Approach:

How do you structure your class by adopting creative teaching approach?

- Recall one time when you really felt you incorporate creative elements in your classroom.
    - Describe what exactly happened.
    - Describe what you did to prepare the lesson.
    - Describe what you were doing.
    - Describe what students were doing.

Benefits/Opportunities Questions:

- What do you think how students learn from creative classroom?
- How do you think adopting creative teaching approach promote…
    - Students' learning? Examples?
    - Students' engagement in class? Examples?

Challenges/Obstacles Questions:

- How does your lesson look like when you adopt a "Teacher-centred approach" and a "Creative teaching approach"?
- Can you describe how you adjust your teaching approach over time?
- Why do you need to make such adjustments?
- Describe any additional experiences that impact on how you adopt the "creative approach" in your lesson/classroom.

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