Original Article

ecsj

Education, Citizenship and Social Justice
1–15


Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/1746197920915601
journals.sagepub.com/home/esj
SAGE

Democratizing politics and politicizing education: Critical pedagogy for active citizenship in the Taiwanese Sunflower Movement

Spyros Themelis
University of East Anglia, UK

Tao-Chen Hsu
National Tsing Hua University

Abstract

This article is the first to employ a Freirean framework to discuss the Taiwanese Sunflower Student Movement and its political, pedagogical and social significance. We analyse lecturers' and students' perspectives and experiences of civic responsibility in order to explore the relationship between critical pedagogy and student participation in the movement. The latter is an important development in politics and student activism, as it touched the lives of an entire generation of young Taiwanese and highlighted the value of active citizenship in the fight to improve democracy as praxis for social justice. This article makes a threefold contribution: first, it adds to our understanding of the processes through which movement participants cultivate their critical consciousness; second, it offers a new angle on a politically significant moment in Taiwanese history; and third, it uses this movement to illuminate forms of oppression that exist in society and education and ways to transform it.

Keywords

active citizenship, critical pedagogy, democracy, Freire, praxis, social movements

Introduction

In this article, we take an original approach to critical pedagogy, as we employ it for the first time to examine the Sunflower Student Movement (SSM). Specifically, we explore the perspectives of

Corresponding author:
Spyros Themelis, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park, Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK.
Email: s.themelis@uea.ac.uk

and participation in the movement of students and staff from two Taiwanese universities. The movement broke out in the Spring of 2014 because the Taiwanese government signed a controversial trade agreement with China, namely, the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA). The agreement and the rushed procedure within which it was ratified compelled university students, staff and civic groups into action, which consisted of occupation of the legislature building in an act of civil disobedience. Students were the key protagonists in the movement, which succeeded in blocking the CSSTA (General Education Online, 2014).

By employing a Freirean framework to analyse the SSM and its political, pedagogical and social implications, we share Freire's emphasis on the need to understand oppression in society and education and the transformation of oppressive power relations. Freire (1970) conceptualized this process as involving the transformation of the oppressed from occupying the position of objects into becoming Subjects in their own lives. This echoes the processes many SSM participants underwent, whereby they felt oppressed by their government and in need to 'wage the struggle to resolve the contradiction in which they are caught' (Freire, 2000: 56).

This article starts by explicating its theoretical framework and the apropos of critical pedagogy in explaining participation in the SSM. It then offers a contextualisation of the movement and a brief appraisal of its contribution into the Taiwanese society's struggle for social justice. Finally, it presents findings drawing on interviews with movement participants and discusses the implications of their activism in fostering active citizenship. The contribution of this article is threefold, namely: (1) it adds to our understanding of the processes through which SSM participants cultivate their critical consciousness; (2) it offers a new angle on a politically significant moment in Taiwanese history; and (3) it uses this specific movement to explicate forms of oppression that exist in society and education and ways to transform it.

Critical pedagogy and the Student Sunflower Movement

Taiwan's 'Sunflower Student Movement' also known as 'the 318 student movement' was driven by a coalition of students and civic groups that occupied the national legislature building of Taiwan for 24 days in 2014. The term 'Sunflower Movement' arose from a florist's intervention who, when he found out that the students had occupied the national legislature building, sent them sunflowers to express his support for their struggle. With this act, he saw students resembling the sunflowers that follow the path of the sun towards the light.

The dispute started when the ruling party of Taiwan (the Kuomintang or KMT) prepared a trade deal, the so-called CSSTA. Prior to signing it, the government sent the CSSTA to the Legislative Committee for review. The legislative review process of this major piece of legislation took a mere 30 seconds (Smith, 2014). As a result, the CSSTA became extremely unpopular among young people, who questioned the transparency of the review system and feared that the trade agreement would help increase the inequalities between the rich and the poor.

Towards a renewed conception of citizenship

Seemingly, the SSM was sparked by the controversial signing of a trade agreement. However, beneath the surface, it reflected the disappointment of the young generation about transparency and social justice and their distrust of their government to safeguard the interests of all Taiwanese citizens. As we show in the remainder of this article, this situation and the way it was spoken about by many research participants echoed the way Freire (1970) spoke about escaping from oppression. For the Taiwanese youth who took part in the SSM, only by acting to change the perceived injustices, could lead them to true humanization, and only through this process, freedom could be

achieved. This study focuses on some aspects of Freire's critical pedagogy which can help us understand the SSM and assess its importance. First, our account focuses on processes of becoming a Subject who can act in and transform the world. Freire's (1993) discussion about the processes of 'humanization' and 'dehumanization' in relation to education is imbued with a deep concern about people who have been alienated by social and political processes. Furthermore, he emphasized the role of critical pedagogy as the means through which people can confront an unfair social system which objectifies them. In addition, he advocated transforming their role from passive to active so they become inspired to move from a position of objects into that of Subjects. Put simply, by becoming Subjects through critical pedagogy, people become aware of how social and political systems work and become conscious of themselves as agents who can then identify and critique domination (Freire, 1970).

Second, Freire (1985) advanced this thesis further by arguing that students might, through dialogue, enhance the potential of 'awakening awareness', that is to say of gaining a greater awareness of the power of their own ability to change society through their critical reflections. Freire argued that the most important purpose of education is to create and reform the culture of society (Freire, 1993). In other words, students, in a process of transformation and awakening, should try to understand their life and the world in which they live, which is full of contradictory values and meaning.

Freire's (1970) proposition is that the real human nature is essential to understanding not only revolutionary action but also the ethical basis that makes human struggle necessary. Through reflecting in the community, people should act together upon their environment in order to critically reflect upon reality and transform it through action and critical reflection (Freire, 1993). In addition, thinking in a dialectical way stimulates people to think broadly, that is to say to consider each extreme opposite and to see problems by developing a dynamic point of view (Rowan, 2000). Consistent with Freire's (1985) emphasis 'in epistemological terms, the object of knowledge isn't a term of knowledge for the knowing subject, but mediation of knowledge' (p. 100). Knowledge, therefore, can be defined in different ways. For instance, a person who is good at farming could be an intellectual because he or she possesses the professional knowledge that no one else does. The notion of the dialectic extends the possibility of understanding the knowledge and the world. That is to say, people who combine their own knowledge and life experiences to produce their own values can become a source of knowledge themselves.

Freire's ideas are based on two kinds of possibilities. First, by creating a language that is both critical and hopeful, on the possibility of embodying the characteristics of critique as a political activity that analyses and criticizes the hidden ideology and hegemony underlying formal education (Giroux, 1985: xiv–xviii). This approach encourages people to struggle to become free Subjects and participate in the transformation of their education and, more broadly, society. It rests on the possibility of representing a particular politics of experience and self-consciousness in order to restore the autonomy of human beings (Lin, 2000: 17). This is how students can become Subjects and decide to speak out for themselves and act as members of a social movement. Freirean critical pedagogy, therefore, is not restricted to merely changing the individual, but it can identify new possibilities and offer solutions to combat inequalities and injustices (Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2011; Elias, 1994; Gibson, 1999; Lankshear, 1993). What is more, individuals are encouraged to reflect on their actual educational and cultural experiences, question the values that permeate their life and find their own voice. This can be an empowering process, as it has the potential to provide insights into the relationship between power and daily life and can practically bridge the distance between theory and practice (Sleeter and McLaren, 1995; Themelis, 2018).

Second, the other possibility upon which Freire's ideas are premised involves justice and equality as the basis for any kind of education. Accordingly, emancipation, liberation from oppression

and human suffering should be important dimensions in education. The primary goal of Freire's work is to change the power relationships by creating mechanisms of collective power across all structures. In order to attain this goal, it is necessary to construct a truly democratic society:

> The struggle for humanization, breaking the cycles of injustice, exploitation and oppression lies in the perpetuation of the oppressor versus the oppressed relationship [. . .]. To break the cycle, a revolution of ideas must take place, freedom can only occur when the oppressed eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. (Freire, 1998: 29)

For Freire, theory and practice are inseparable. Theory is part of practice and practice is born in theory. In becoming a Subject, transformative agents 'actively seek to unite acting with living, theory with practice and social justice with individual freedom' (Themelis, 2016). In this way, the theory returns to the practice to be changed and reformulated through it. In the context of neoliberal globalization, which has eroded traditional structures (e.g. nation states) and some of their key institutions (e.g. democracy), it is very important to integrate theory and praxis into daily situations of movement activism in order to identify the injustices, analyse them and act to transform them (Freire, 2000). To sum up, Freire gave us a conception of critical pedagogy that is both dynamic and timely. Specifically, critical pedagogy aims at creating the conditions that have the potential to enable the most oppressed, marginalized or disaffected to become active citizens, Subjects. Its core features that are of most relevance to this article are listed below. Specifically, critical pedagogy

(a) Creates a discourse that is critical of hegemony and oppression;
(b) Promotes participation in education and society;
(c) Advances democracy;
(d) Advances social justice;
(e) Enhances autonomy and self-reflection: from being a passive object to becoming a Subject;
(f) Is dialogic;
(g) Enhances critical consciousness;
(h) Promotes active citizenship;
(i) Promotes deep learning;
(j) Helps unearth contradictions.

The pedagogic dimension of the Student Sunflower Movement

Over the years, different aspects of the SSM have been discussed. For example, some scholars have paid attention to the economic motivations and underpinnings of the movement (Fan, 2014). This discourse is often framed in a discussion about globalization and relations with China. Qu (2016) proposed that those opposed to CSSTA are also opposed to an anti-Chinese rhetoric. In other words, they do not oppose globalization, but a potential subordination of Taiwan to China (Qu, 2016). This stance alludes to a prevalent contradiction among Taiwanese people. Namely, in case their country refuses to cooperate with China, it could be isolated in the international arena. Therefore, Chinese 'protectionism' is often approached as the antidote to 'isolationism'. However, close relations with China have often been questioned as a form domination of the former over Taiwan.

Other authors have highlighted the political dimension of the SSM by focusing on its effects on unity and movement strategies (Ho, 2015, 2019; Hsieh and Skelton, 2017; Ting, 2016), its participants' identity as a factor in the transformation of the private and public spheres (Yang, 2017), and

its significance in renewing the Taiwanese political landscape (Chou, 2016). According to these accounts, the SSM created a 'butterfly effect' that resulted in the unprecedented electoral defeats of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) in 2014 and 2016. Furthermore, and quite paradoxically, some commentators have argued that, owing to the SSM, a tighter relationship developed between Taiwan and China. In addition, other accounts have attributed to the SSM the increase in participation of young people in politics (Chen, 2014; Ting, 2016) and the strengthening of democracy (Chao, 2014; Citizen Journalism, 2014; Liu, 2016). Finally, other studies have focused on the importance of social media in the SSM and their importance as an instrument of political mobilization (Hsiao and Yang, 2018).

Despite the diversity of viewpoints from which researchers have approached the SSM, scant attention has been so far paid to the pedagogical dimension of the movement, that is to say to its significance in shaping its participants' critical consciousness as active citizens. Through an emphasis on this dimension, this article draws out the pertinent implications both for SSM participants as well as for education and society.

The Student Sunflower Movement as a subject

In this section, we explore the role of the SSM in defending and extending democracy in Taiwan as well as in fighting social justice. We discuss the dialectic of power relations that enabled the movement to enter processes of becoming a Subject through a selection of key events that relate to the accounts of our research participants that follow in section 'Findings'.

Defending and improving democracy

After decades of tense – even hostile – relations between China and Taiwan, things seemed to start improving. However, fresh concerns were raised when the SSM exposed the type of relationship Taiwan and China were enjoying. This exposure was realized through the CSSTA. The CSSTA was signed on 21 June 2013 and it was one of the follow-up agreements under the 2009 Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (CSECFA). The main remit of the CSECFA is to reduce tariffs and increase economic and trade exchanges between Taiwan and China and, by doing this, to help Taiwan avoid trade, economic and political marginalization (Cross-Strait Agreement on Trade in Services, 2013).

The CSSTA's aim was to reduce or eliminate the various trade restrictions on industries across the Taiwan Strait, in order to facilitate a more effective economic cooperation between China and Taiwan (Mainland Affairs Council, 2010). Specifically, the CSSTA would offer access to 64 sectors (e.g. wholesale and retail trade sectors, manufacturing of chemicals and optoelectronic materials and components, food, beverages and tobacco) for China to trade in Taiwan and 80 sectors for Taiwan to trade in China. Advocates of the agreement argued that, though some small and inward-looking companies would face potential competition with Chinese companies, the majority of Taiwanese firms would likely benefit. The CSSTA, according to its supporters, would help local businesses expand their market-share in the mainland Chinese market and contribute to the economic development of Taiwan (Chiang, 2018). However, if we examine closely the impact of CSECFA, CSSTA's precursor, on Taiwan's labour and agricultural industries, we note an increase in unemployment and a widened urban–rural gap (CCSTA, 2013). As a result, Taiwanese youth were concerned about the CSSTA and its implications on their lives (Ramzy, 2014).

Although the Taiwanese government organized 16 public debates to discuss the details of the trade agreement with academics, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and representatives from the trade sectors affected by the agreement (Cole, 2014), it was criticized for not engaging in

any substantive dialogue. For example, various academic groups criticized the secretive decision-making process pertaining to the ratification of the CSSTA.

In addition, civic groups and concerned academics alleged that the government never formally addressed their criticisms of the agreement and did not put in place any supporting measures for those industries that would be negatively affected by it. They feared that CSSTA would have devastating consequences on the life chances of ordinary people, which could result in considerable job losses and worsening working conditions in several industries. It was also feared that the CSSTA would pave the way for China to increase its dominance over the Taiwanese economy and politics (Kaiman, 2014).

Fighting for social justice

The SSM erupted when the ruling party (the KMT) reneged on its promise to conduct a clause-by-clause review of the CSSTA and passed it hastily through legislature review on 17 March 2014. In response, at midnight on 18 March 2014, activists from the Black Island Nation Youth Front occupied the National Legislature building. At the same time, they posted information on Facebook and other social media in an attempt to call for more people to support them (Chao, 2014). After the news about the event spread by social and traditional media, hundreds of students and civilians came to the National Legislature building spontaneously to express their dissatisfaction with the government and support the occupiers. The students argued that 'the court is for the people; we represent the people in reclaiming our court' (Liberty Times Net, 2014). They further argued that the function of the National Legislature is to inspect the proposed laws, and to protect the rights and interests of the people, rather than to serve political interests. During the occupation, Jin-Ping Wang, the President of the Legislative Committee, intervened in the matter so that the students were not evicted from the building. Some academics led or encouraged their students to participate in this protest and one of the opposition parties, namely, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which is a pro-Taiwanese independence party, stood by the students (Pai, 2014).

The students made four principal demands from the government: '(1) to revoke the CSSTA; (2) to enact the Cross-Strait Agreement Supervision (CSAS) Bill[1]; (3) to enact the CSAS Bill before the legal review of the CSSTA is introduced, and (4) to convene a citizens' constitutional conference' (Ho, 2015). In case their demands were not met, the students pledged to continue the occupation indefinitely. On 23 March 2014, the Taiwanese President Ying-Jeou Ma reacted to the events for the first time, but only to reaffirm that the advantages of the trade agreement outweighed the disadvantages. Although he claimed that the agreement could be reviewed clause-by-clause, he nevertheless refused to withdraw it. As a result, a group of students who were dissatisfied with this response occupied the National Executive building, which is the executive branch of the government. Subsequently, the riot police received orders to forcefully evict them. During a 10-hour confrontation, the government launched a violent campaign to reclaim the National Executive building and eventually managed to expel all those resisting with the use of batons and water cannons. According to the protesters, the violent action assumed by the government had a twofold effect. First, it was considered as damaging to the Taiwanese democracy and detrimental to the relationship between the Taiwanese people and their government (Ho, 2015). Second, it inflamed the situation further and galvanized the students to organize a big rally to publicly protest against the government.

On 30 March 2014, more than 350,000 Taiwanese staged a protest in the square outside the presidential office in Taipei to ask, among other things, for a full review of the trade agreement. The demands made by the protesters echoed the four principal demands made by the students who staged the occupation at the Legislature building a few days prior to the protest. At the same time,

the protest movement wanted to emphasize the distinct national identity of Taiwan and make a broader point about Taiwan's self-determination. Their position could be summarized as follows: 'The Taiwanese people are not rejecting cooperation with China, but we should be able to decide how this is done and be the masters of our own destiny' (The Standard Newspaper, 2014).

The 30 March rally also attracted students from other cities who wore black masks and clothes to express their opposition to what they felt was an under-the-table deal with China. The protesters carried banners and placards calling for the 'safeguarding of freedom and democracy and opposition to violent law enforcement' (The Standard Newspaper, 2014). Markedly, this was seen as one of the largest civic spontaneous protests in the recent history of Taiwan.

The occupation of the National Legislature building continued until 6 April 2014. On that day, the Head of the National Legislature, Jin-Ping Wang, visited the students and intervened again by promising that 'before the Cross-Strait Agreement Supervision Regulations legislation draft was completed, a Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement consultative conference between all related parties would be held' (Li, 2016). After that, the Sunflower Movement leaders declared that they had accomplished their mission. Four days later, the students and their allies evacuated the National Legislature building, thus concluding the dramatic standoff that had drawn national as well as international attention. It can be argued that the SSM had had a significant impact on the development of Taiwanese democracy for years to come as well on its participants' development as active citizens and social justice activists (Ho, 2015).

Research paradigm-critical paradigm

Drawing on Freire's critical pedagogy, this study utilized the critical paradigm. The latter aims 'to transform society and individuals' (Cohen et al., 2011: 26; Habermas, 1984) so that people can take actions to change injustices through insights generated by critical research. In our case, critical research can help us link 'research with politics and policy-making' (Cohen et al., 2011: 22). Furthermore, the purpose of critical research is to support certain political agendas which seek to bring about changes by challenging the interpretation as well as the values that exist within society. The critical paradigm relates to the 'political agenda and the task of the researchers is not to be dispassionate, disinterested, and objective' (Morrison, 1995, cited in Cohen, et al., 2011: 28).

In short, the critical research paradigm is based on equality and democracy for all its members, which in turn can lead to changes to social, political, cultural, economic and ethical aspects of societies and systems (Cohen et al., 2011: 26–27). In this study, the critical paradigm offers us the opportunity to understand the SSM and, through its action, evolving aspects of contemporary citizenship in Taiwan. This approach is closely related to critical pedagogy as advanced by Freire and his focus on issues of power and justice. We apply these Freirean ideas throughout our research, as indicated by our commitment to the values of critical pedagogy, such as equality (e.g. we interviewed an equal number of male and female participants and, importantly, we placed equal weight to their accounts and experiences) and freedom (e.g. we ensured there was not only freedom to discuss any issue our participants thought of as important but also freedom to shape the research process, for example, by suggesting a different line or focus of exploration to that suggested by the researchers). In addition, we adopted an ethics framework that went beyond merely respecting anonymity and confidentiality and harm avoidance, to requesting participant feedback on the research process throughout all its stages.

The starting point for our research is to critique subjective rationality in order to highlight the forms of oppression that exist in society and more specifically, in education. As a result of the SSM, young people do not want to be oppressed. They aim to lead different lives, to become

Subjects. In order to capture the transformation of the movement participants, we collected data through semi-structured interviews. The latter not only give participants ample time and space to express diverse views (Nohl, 2009) but also allow the researcher to follow-up on emerging ideas and unfolding events (Taylor and Cranton, 2013). They also allow for power differentials between researchers and researched to be addressed and for the inclusion of different viewpoints, freedom of expression and commitment to diversity. We adopted a convenience sampling strategy and interviewed five lecturers and five students from two state-funded universities in Taiwan. The sample of lecturers consisted of two males and three females, all of whom had a background in social sciences or humanities.[2] They were all experienced academics (aged between 53 and 68 years old) with teaching experience ranging from 18 to 21 years.

From our student participants, three were males and two females. From them, three were Year 1 students, one Year 3 and one Year 2[3] and they also had a background in social sciences or humanities.[4] The selection bias in favour of participants with social sciences and humanities background is evident, and it is expected to have shaped the findings obtained. However, according to these and other SSM participants, the majority of the latter had academic background similar to that of our participants. This is not surprising given that in these disciplines, academics are closer to social movements and students often receive some form of liberal training either as part of the curriculum or through informal interaction with their tutors. This was the case with four out of the five students in our sample, who said that they had received some input on critical thinking, democracy and/or freedom. Finally, we adopted a thematic approach to the data analysis. Here, we are only presenting themes that seemed to matter the most to our research participants and address the aims of this article.

Findings

This section presents findings relating to lecturers' and students' understanding of civic responsibility and active citizenship. It does so by exploring the relationship between critical pedagogy and participation in the SSM.

Consciousness and active citizenship: lecturers' perspectives

The majority of lecturers interviewed highlighted the role of consciousness in promoting active citizenship and some key factors that facilitate or hinder this type of citizenship from being achieved. For example, some of them stated that capitalism and democracy are the most important systems of the time, which are, though, linked by a fundamental contradiction. On one hand, democratic politics offers people the opportunity to express their opinions to the government and even get involved in it. On the other hand, lecturers argued that these operational mechanisms require resources and that citizens and governments have limited economic means. Therefore, capitalists have the opportunity to control politics as they have access to large economic resources. In order to explore these contradictions, in line with our focus on the role of critical pedagogy, we divided the research into two parts. In the first, we asked lecturers and students to discuss the role of dialogue as an everyday practice but also in the pursuit of critical consciousness. In the second part, we explored the role of critical pedagogy in relation to active citizenship.

In terms of dialogue, one of the lecturers explained its role in the classroom, in a way that closely resembles feature (f) of critical pedagogy (see section 'Towards a renewed conception of citizenship')[5]: 'The opportunity for dialogue is much easier to apply to small classes and it is increasing the opportunities for participation through students' rapport and discussion in the class' (Participant B). However, the majority of lecturers considered that they still need to teach and

follow the curriculum, so the opportunity for dialogue and discussion is limited to final reports or presentations. Therefore, dialogue in the classroom is relatively limited (Participant C). By contrast, other lecturers gave dialogue a more prominent role: 'the aim of our department is seeking for the students' multiple knowledge developments and their adaptability in dealing with social change as well. Hence, dialogue is a very important thing here' (Participant A; f in section 'Towards a renewed conception of citizenship'). Dialogue for this respondent was elevated to a key pedagogic mechanism, whereby 'different kinds of issues and mutual discussions were the processes of dialogue which cultivates students' critical abilities' (Participant A; a, f).

In relation to the development of students' civic responsibilities and citizenship, most lecturers stated that the main duty of lecturers is to impart knowledge: 'Students might take part in different kinds of societies/clubs in universities through which they can learn social skills for citizenship' (Participant C; h). Other lecturers, though, felt that their role was more far-reaching as they could help shape their students' development of critical consciousness (g):

> Consciousness is the extension of the dimensionality and depth in the learning process. It is a neutral process without bias, based on the concrete experience of students' everyday lives. I believe that the purpose of critical consciousness is to make your life more meaningful. Therefore, this is the thing that lecturers and students could be exploring together. So, if we extend this view, students will slowly understand what kind of responsibilities they have as citizens.

Furthermore, some lecturers described two different dimensions of citizenship: first, defending democracy (c) and, second, the promotion of a new sense of identity (e). Concerning defending democracy, the majority of lecturers felt that the students protested about the improper legislative procedures. More than that, it seemed to them that they were pursuing social justice and democratic progress (c):

> there are multiple reasons which caused the Sunflower Student Movement to happen and which brought the students together to occupy the legislature building. But for most of my students who took part in this movement, the main reason was to defend democracy. They are not rejecting cooperation with China, but the young Taiwanese should be able to decide how [cooperation] is pursued and be part of this process. (Participant B)

As another lecturer noted,

> With Taiwan's social, political, economic developments, rapid changes caused by globalisation and the transformation of society into a capitalist one, which has increased the gap between the rich and the poor, young people cannot see hope. Therefore, the pursuit of civic justice seems to be the only thing they can do to try to protect their country. (Participant E)

The idea of 'civic justice' can be understood here as sitting at the crossroads of active citizenship (h) and social justice (d).

Participation in the SSM also shaped the way in which participants identified themselves. That is to say, after the abolition of the Martial Law in 1987, there has been a question about Taiwanese sovereignty and independence from China. This process resulted in the development of two distinct identities and an intergenerational 'identity gap' between older and younger Taiwanese people. One of the lecturers explained: 'There is a subtle relationship between identity and democracy. A large proportion of students do not want to be Chinese because students do not want to lose their democracy' (Participant A; a). Another participant elaborated: 'Students seem to pay more attention to civic responsibilities and citizenship [than the older generations]' (Participant D; e, h).

Finally, most lecturers argued that students who participated in the SSM had a positive outlook because, through their participation, they were able to build their self-consciousness (g) and explore civic responsibilities (h) through 'active and deep learning' (i).

In terms of the place of critical pedagogy in the processes discussed above, most lecturers agreed that students ought to develop the ability to care for society (b). In doing so, the students can obtain diverse ideas from the Internet, depending on their interests. However, the lecturers were divided over whether they themselves should discuss these issues with their students. These viewpoints revealed a contradiction in the lecturers' accounts, which is symptomatic of the dialectic nature of the issues the student movement brought to the forefront (j). Specifically, while most lecturers agreed that their students did well to leave the campus in order to participate in the SSM, they also recognized the need to teach them 'practical skills' they will need in the labour market. As some of them said, this is a clear contradiction inherent in neoliberal capitalism, whereby the same people care for the social good, while simultaneously they engage in practices that might not serve those interests (j).

Defining dialogue for active citizenship: students' perspectives

In the student accounts that follow the focus is on the role of dialogue in active citizenship. The process of dialogue in the classroom was discussed in three different ways. First, as student-initiated, that is to say students only discussed with their lecturers topics in which they were interested. Second, some students did not want to dialogue with their lecturers in the classroom, because they were afraid that this might be inappropriate or it might delay curriculum delivery. Finally, students' willingness to contribute to discussions and dialogue in the classroom was viewed as contingent on their lecturers' attitudes and openness.

This threefold conception of dialogue is mirrored in the next accounts. According to the first student, there was no much space for dialogue: 'A small number of lecturers have a long teaching experience, so their teaching method is hard to change. It is also difficult to get feedback from them, so, in the learning process, there is relatively little dialogue' (Participant J). However, another student had a different experience: 'Our department emphasizes discussion and dialogue. It exists, therefore, regardless of which lecturers take seriously the need for dialogue. Lecturers will also provide office hours during which students have an opportunity to discuss with them individually' (Participant G). These differences, though, might occur because of the existence of different interpretations of the meaning of dialogue. For example, when asked about it, most students responded that dialogue is about asking questions. There were a number of students, though, for whom dialogue cuts across power structures and arrangements:

> In the discussion of different topics or discourses everyone should be equal. Your argument should not be limited to your identity or social status. In this light, dialogue becomes objective regardless of individual differences. But in Taiwan there is room for improvement. (Participant J; f)

Regarding citizenship (h), two students thought that lecturers do not need to help students become active citizens (Participants H and I). They argued that becoming active citizens is not the lecturers' duty or responsibility, because everyone has different opinions. However, other students felt that lecturers should help students actively participate in civic affairs (Participants F, G and J).

In terms of the role of lecturers as critical pedagogues with a responsibility to develop their students' critical consciousness while at university (g), most students felt that this was desirable but hard to achieve. The main reason behind this conundrum was power inequality as students felt that their lecturers were more powerful than them: 'Lecturers should provide some information and

then discuss it with us without their subjective intervention' (Participant F; f). The onus, though, also fell onto the universities to change this situation: 'Universities should provide some relevant citizenship curriculum to cultivate the ability to be socially engaged' (Participant I; b, h).

While encouragement from their lecturers supported those students who took part in the SSM, students also identified another two key reasons behind their involvement, namely, the impact of the Internet and self-fulfilment. While the impact of the Internet falls outside the remit of this study, it is worthwhile considering a perspective about how the Internet compensated for lack of political encouragement by the lecturers and was felt to be extending democracy (c): 'Young people in this generation absorb different information from the internet. The majority of information about the Sunflower Student Movement came from the internet. Our lecturers never mentioned this event during our lectures' (Participant F).

For those students, though, who found support from their lecturers, this was often the catalyst for their participation in the SSM: 'Some of the lecturers encouraged their students to participate in the Sunflower Student Movement. They even bought tickets for students [to get to the sites of protests] because our university is not in Taipei' (Participant G; b). Another participant framed her lecturers' encouragement around the importance of creating the conditions that enable students to make informed decisions:

> The role of educators should not be to influence their students, whether they participate in the Sunflower Student Movement or not, but to give them a choice. You can choose to go to school or participate in the movement, but you are responsible for your choice. (Participant H; e)

With respect to self-fulfilment, some students connected it to their role as students and critical citizens (e): 'I think that the students' willingness to take the initiative to participate in their society is a good thing. It means that students begin to link citizenship with society' (Participant G). Similarly, another participant stated as follows:

> For me, the participation in the Sunflower Student Movement is a learning practice. At that time, I heard the strange argument that the students who took part in the Sunflower Student Movement were brainwashed by the opposition party. I do not deny there are multiple reasons why students took part in this movement. But I believe that, if I was brainwashed, it means that I did not practice what I had learned because I did not engage in critical thinking [which is not the case]. (Participant J; e, i)

In the account of the next participant, self-fulfilment was discussed as a break from previous generations' expectations regarding political participation:

> I do not understand why he [a friend of his] feels that only politics causes opposition. It echoes the view of the previous generations. In the past, if you touched on politics, you might have 'disappeared'. Politics [in the past] used to be seen as unable to solve any problems, only leading to quarrels and arguments among people. Therefore, people still are reluctant to give their opinions as long as the social issue is classified as political. (Participant H; a, c)

However, has this abstention from politics shifted after the SSM and, crucially, have student participants in it taken any action(s) to sustain their active citizenship? The majority of our participants agreed that, after the movement, their political involvement increased (b, h). Notably, they also highlighted their increased awareness of and active interest in issues cutting across political, social and educational affairs (a, b, c, d). Such issues range from marriage equality to educational participation. In the recent years, they have also included global social justice issues, such as climate change and citizen's rights, as is evident in the next account:

> After the Sunflower Movement, I started to focus on wider social justice issues and I found out that there is a lot of state and corporate corruption. [In Taiwan] we have experienced many political party changes, but we have not been able to deal with the problems of land ownership and environmental protection. Therefore, (after I joined the SSM] I joined civil society organizations which, through civic action, try to make the government pay attention to land justice issues. (Participant G; b, d)

To sum up, all the students believed that the SSM increased their awareness of civic responsibilities and active citizenship, though, understandably, it did not influence everyone in the same way.

Conclusion

As already noted, the SSM is one of the most important developments in democratic politics and student activism in recent years in Taiwan. Despite a 'no politics' attitude prevalent in Taiwanese education and society, which postulates that education should be kept out of politics and politics out of education (Wei, 2014), the SSM touched the lives of an entire generation of Taiwanese students who began to raise their voices, act to improve their society and intervene in its political affairs.

As a result, participation in the SSM has had three main effects: first, students and civic groups acquired critical consciousness, which they used to enact an active form of citizenship. Second, the SSM changed politics in Taiwan for good as well as the expectations of many Taiwanese about what is permissible and desirable form of political engagement. Third, and perhaps most crucially, the SSM renewed the discussion in Taiwan about citizenship, democracy and social justice. Through this discussion, the pedagogic potential of the SSM shone a light on the country's capacity to defend and renew its democracy and attendant institutions. Among the latter, the university occupies a prominent place, as it was university students who were the main protagonists of the SSM and often acted in dialogue with their lecturers and other civic groups. Their actions were in line with the aims of critical pedagogy, which are to co-construct knowledge from own experiences and to enable people to take part in societal affairs as active citizens or Subjects.

In this respect, Boyce (1996) proposed that a politics of ethics, difference and democracy are the foundations of the practice of critical pedagogy. Central to it is 'an ethic that recognizes humanity and struggles overtly against oppression and injustice' (Boyce, 1996: 1). Through critical pedagogy, student activists in the SSM came to a new awareness of themselves and began to look critically at the world around them. As such, they acted to transform society that denied them the opportunity to participate in democratic processes. In light of this, the SSM seems to have been successful in stimulating students to reflect on their position in society. As Giroux (in Polychroniou, 2008) reminds us, critical pedagogy is the vehicle through which to help people develop critical consciousness and recognize the negative impact of oppression. From the participants' accounts, there is modest evidence to suggest that the SSM was a gateway at creating a fertile ground for the rise of Freirean critical pedagogy in the participating institutions and, more broadly, in society. However, this process is neither complete nor absolute. As we showed in sections 'Consciousness and active citizenship: lecturers' perspectives' and 'Defining dialogue for active citizenship: students' perspectives', some participants were hesitant about making any grand statements regarding their participation in the SSM, and some lecturers felt that their practices did not change as a result of the events surrounding the SSM, while some students did not expect their lecturers to adopt fully the principles of critical pedagogy. This somewhat limited generalizability of the effects of the SSM, though, ought not to take away from its importance. For critical pedagogy is neither a totalising ideology nor a coherent political movement, but a gradual process of transformation.

The SSM inspired young people to become active citizens. It reflected the oppressive and contradictory social relations and facets of daily life experienced by the younger generations of Taiwanese; it highlighted the value of democracy in society and created the conditions that can foster social transformation. Likewise, Freire's critical pedagogy aims to enable people to cultivate their critical consciousness and support 'a process of learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality' (ActionAid, 1996; Thomas, 1992).

Freire's suggestion that the revolution must be educational lies in the belief that education is a 'necessary engagement in the struggle for liberation' (Freire, 1970). As such, Taiwanese students with their participation in the SSM did not only ask their government to listen to their voices, but they themselves revisited the essence of education, which enabled many of them to understand the necessity of the struggle for liberation. Understanding the real meaning of liberation is important because the aim of any movement is not only to force the government to respect diverse voices but also to educate its members to become critical citizens so they can pursue liberty, democracy and active citizenship. This article explicated some of the processes through which SSM participants enhanced their critical consciousness. As such, it added not only to our understanding of a momentous event in Taiwan's recent political and social history but also to the importance of active citizenship in transforming oppression in education and society.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Spyros Themelis https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6681-4643

Notes

1. The CSAS postulates that the monitoring and participation of the Congress and citizen groups are necessary when Taiwan and China engage in any agreement signing.
2. Specifically, their academic background was as follows: Humanities and Social Sciences, Education, Political Science, Development and Journalism.
3. In Taiwan, basic degree education normally lasts 4 years.
4. Specifically, they studied in one of the following programmes (the numbers in the brackets indicate the number of students who studied in each programme): Interdisciplinary Programme of Humanities and Social Sciences (1); Education and Learning Technology (1); Political Science (1); Law (1); and Philosophy (1).
5. Hereafter, when a feature from those listed at the end of section 'Towards a renewed conception of citizenship' is mentioned, we refer to it by its position in that list, for example, (f).

References

ActionAid (1996) *The Reflect Mother Manual – A New Approach to Adult Literacy*. London: ActionAid.

Boyce ME (1996) Teaching critically as an act of praxis and resistance. *Electronic Journal of Radical Organization Theory* 2(2). Available at: https://www.mngt.waikato.ac.nz/ejrot/EJROT(newdesign)Vol2_2_front.asp (accessed 10 December 2019).

Chao V (2014) How technology revolutionized Taiwan's Sunflower Movement. *The Diplomat*. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2014/04/how-technology-revolutionized-taiwans-sunflower-movement/ (accessed 10 December 2019).

Chen W (2014) Who take part in the Sunflower Student Movement. *Taiwan Street Corner*. Available at: https://twstreetcorner.org/ (accessed 13 December 2019).

Chiang M-H (2018) *China-Taiwan Rapprochement: The Political Economy of Cross-Straits Relations*. London: Routledge.

Chou Y (2016) The formation and development of rising parties in Taiwan after the Sunflower Student Movement: case studies on the new power party and social democratic party. Taiwan. Available at: http://handle.ncl.edu.tw/11296/ndltd/14674320042971722664 (accessed 14 December 2019).

Citizen Journalism (2014) The revolution of the Internet age: a million people respond to the Sunflower Movement. Available at: https://www.peopo.org/news/241645 (accessed 6 December 2019).

Cohen L, Manion L and Morrison K (2011) *Research Methods in Education*, 7th edn. London: Routledge.

Cole M (2014) Taiwanese occupy legislature over China pact. *The Diplomat*. Available at: http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/taiwanese-occupy-legislature-over-china-pact/ (accessed 14 March 2019).

Cross-Strait Agreement on Trade in Services (2013) *Ministry of Economic Affairs, R.O.C.*, 1st edn. Available at: http://www.mac.gov.tw/public/Data/3859414471.pdf (accessed 18 February 2019).

Dale J and Hyslop-Margison EJ (2011) *Paulo Freire: Teaching for Freedom and Transformation: The Philosophical Influences on the Work of Paulo Freire*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Elias J (1994) *Paulo Freire: Pedagogy of Liberation*. Malabar, FL: Kreiger.

Fan J (2014) *The economics of the cross-strait services agreement. The Diplomat*. Available at: http://thediplomat.com/2014/04/the-economics-of-the-cross-strait-services-agreement/ (accessed 17 December 2019).

Freire P (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum.

Freire P (1985) *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation* (D. Macedo, Trans.). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc.

Freire P (1993) *Pedagogy of the City*. New York: Continuum.

Freire P (1998) *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* (D. Macedo and O. A. Koike Trans.). Oxford: Westview.

Freire P (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary edn. New York: Continuum.

General Education Online (2014) Civic education and student movement in universities. Available at: http://www.chinesege.org.tw/geonline/html/page4/publish_pub.php?Pub_Sn=118&Sn=1686 (accessed 10 December 2019).

Gibson R (1999) Paulo Freire and pedagogy for social justice. *Theory and Research in Social Education* 2(27): 129–159. Available at: http://richgibson.com/freireTRSSE.htm (accessed 10 December 2019).

Giroux HA (1985) Teachers as transformative intellectuals. *Social Education* 38(2): 33–39.

Habermas J (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (T. Mccarthy, Trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon.

Ho M-S (2015) Occupy congress in Taiwan: political opportunity, threat, and the sunflower movement. *Journal of East Asian Studies* 15: 69–97. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1598240800004173 (accessed 3 December 2019).

Ho M-S (2019) *Challenging Beijing's Mandate of Heaven: Taiwan's Sunflower Movement and Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement*. Philadelphia, PA; Rome; Tokyo: Temple University Press.

Hsiao Y and Yang Y (2018) Commitment in the cloud? Social media participation in the sunflower movement. *Information, Communication & Society* 21(7): 996–1013.

Hsieh Y-C and Skelton T (2017) Sunflowers, youthful protestors and political achievements: lessons from Taiwan. *Children's Geographies* 161: 105–113.

Kaiman J (2014) Taiwan protesters to end occupation of legislature. *The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/08/taiwan-protesters-end-occupation-legislature-china-trade (accessed 4 December 2019).

Lankshear C (1993) *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*. London: Routledge.

Li Y (2016) Internal democracy in emerging social movement organizations in Taiwan in the 2014 Sunflower Movement Era, 1st edn. Taiwan. Available at: http://handle.ncl.edu.tw/11296/ndltd/71924198933648179210 (accessed 3 December 2019).

Liberty Times Net (2014) The exit of the sunflower student movement. Available at: http://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/983576 (accessed 1 December 2019).

Lin Y (2000) The development and difficulties of critical pedagogy in Taiwan. *Chinese Journal of Science Education*, 1–25. Available at: http://www.nhu.edu.tw/~yuhsuan/critical%20pedagogy.pdf.pdf (accessed 11 December 2019).

Liu C (2016) Why civil disobedience? Its implications and reflections for civic society. Available at: http://handle.ncl.edu.tw/11296/ndltd/36786085048097287323 (accessed 13 December 2019).

Mainland Affairs Council (2010) Explanation concerning the signing of the cross-strait economic cooperation framework agreement. Available at: http://www.mac.gov.tw/en/News_Content.aspx?n=C9BE71C3DC9EB8C6&sms=3E25961B493A668D&s=C1F3AB1E274B1D6E (accessed 27 December 2019).

Morrison KRB (1995) Dewey, habermas and reflective practice. *Curriculum* 16(2): 82–94.

Nohl AM (2009) *Interview und Dokumentarische Methode: Anleitungen für die Forschungspraxis*, 3rd edn. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Pai H (2014) Taiwan's protesters are fighting for the very democracy of the Island. *The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/25/taiwans-protesters-democracy-china-taiwan-strait (accessed 14 December 2019).

Polychroniou CJ (2008) Henry Giroux: rethinking the promise of critical education. *Truth-out.org*. Available at: https://truthout.org/articles/henry-giroux-rethinking-promise-critical-education/ (accessed 3 December 2019).

Qu W (2016) Learn from the sunflower student movement: anti-globalisation and anti-China. *Working Hard*. Available at: http://www.coolloud.org.tw/node/84806 (accessed 26 December 2019).

Ramzy A (2014) Concession offered, Taiwan Group to end protest of China trade pact. *The New York Times*. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2014/04/08/world/asia/concession-offered-taiwan-group-to-end-protest-of-china-trade-pact.html (accessed 10 December 2019).

Rowan J (2000) Dialectical thinking and humanistic psychology. *Practical Philosophy*. Available at: http://www.society-for-philosophy-in-practice.org/journal/pdf/3-2%2020%20Rowan%20-%20Humanistic%20Psychology.pdf (accessed 10 December 2019).

Sleeter C and McLaren P (1995) *Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Smith G (2014) Taiwan's Sunflower Movement. *Foreign Policy in Focus*. Available at: http://fpif.org/taiwans-sunflower-movement/ (accessed 2 April 2019).

Taylor E and Cranton P (2013) *The Handbook of Transformative Learning*, 1st edn. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

The Standard Newspaper (2014) Half a million take to Taipei streets to protest trade deal. *The Standard Newspaper*. Available at: http://archive.is/KSjv4 (accessed 14 December 2019).

Themelis S (2016) 'Dialogue and Praxis in the Pursuit of Utopia' (Dialogo e prassi nel perseguimento dell'utopia). In: Vittoria P (ed.) *Dialogo, Luogo Dell'utopia: Saggi, Proposte, Divergenze Dalla Pedagogia Critica* (Dialogue, Place of Utopia: Essays, Proposals, Divergence from Critical Pedagogy). Genova: Quintadicopertina.

Themelis S (2018) Learning from and with the education movements in Greece and Brazil: knowledge, action and alternatives. *Educação e Realidade* 43(3): 799–816. Available at: www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2175-62362018000300799 (accessed 14 December 2019).

Thomas A (1992) *Ngos and the Limits to Empowerment. Development Action and Public Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ting W (2016) *Social Movement and Political Deadlock in Sunflower Movement*, 1st edn. Taiwan. Available at: http://handle.ncl.edu.tw/11296/ndltd/66806379943114302268 (accessed 3 December 2019).

Wei C (2014) *Civic Education and Student Movement in University*, 1st edn. Taipei: General Education Online. Available at: http://www.chinesege.org.tw/geonline/html/page4/publish_pub.php?Pub_Sn=118&Sn=1686 (accessed 14 December 2018).

Yang C-L (2017) The political is the personal: women's participation in Taiwan's Sunflower Movement. *Social Movement Studies* 166: 660–671.