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<td>Ho, Hang-yin; 何杏研</td>
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Strategies of Moral Education practiced in a Hong Kong secondary school

by

Renee Ho Hang Yin

May 2013

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Bachelor of Education (Language Education) at The University of Hong Kong
Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation represents my own work and that it has not been previously submitted to this University or any other institution in application for admission to a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

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May 2013
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Chapter 1- Introduction

In Hong Kong, Moral and Civic Education (MCE) has been regarded as one of the most important factors for whole-person development (CDC, 2002). The aim of it is to develop positive attitudes and values that provide the 'affective basis for effective learning'. It was one of the four key tasks in the curriculum reform proposal undertaken by the Education Commission in the year 2000. The proposal suggests that the government should play a 'supporting role' in promoting moral and civic education. As Tse (2006) suggests, 'the government gives the schools a free hand and proposes a school-based approach to promote civic and moral education' without making it a compulsory subject.

With the autonomy and flexibility given to schools, there are differences between the intended curriculum and the experienced curriculum. This gap causes skepticism on the effectiveness of MCE in Hong Kong (Tse, 2006; Lo, 2006). A comprehensive assessment was essential to sustain the development of the subject. However, in the Progress Report of the Education Reform issued by the Education Commission in year 2006, the government only focused on the 'input' of resources, (such as training programmes, websites provisions) rather than the actual outcomes of the subject. The report did not assess the subject's effectiveness through examining actual schools' practices. Also, the report put much emphasis on the organization of national education courses, which was more related to 'civic' education, but did not mention any observations on the implementation of 'moral' education in schools.

In 2010, the government proposed to replace MCE with a new subject--- Moral and National Education (MNE). MNE was proposed to be implemented through a subject-based approach which caused great controversies in the society. There was an anti-hegemony movement in response in 2012, which induced weeks of protests on national education regarding the cultivation of patriotism. In the end, the government
backed down on the plan to make MNE mandatory. Schools now have the autonomy to decide when and how they would like to commence the subject.

Although there have been quite a lot of discussions on the implementation of civic education in Hong Kong since the 1980s (Leung, 2009), studies investigating practices of moral education are scarce. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the strategies of moral education adopted in a secondary school. The first objective of this research is to examine the methods initiated by the school for moral education, including the factors influencing the school's practices. The second purpose is to find out the perceptions of teachers and students towards the moral education in this school. Data regarding the objectives is collected through school visits, examination of school reports and interviews with teachers and the principal. Concerns and viewpoints of the teachers, the principal and the current students on the school's practices are included.

This qualitative research provides a better understanding of the actual practices of moral education in the secondary context. It also reveals the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students regarding contributions of the school-based approach on moral education. This research suggests the need to investigate discrepancies between the intended curriculum and the actual practices at school levels before the policy-makers formulate strategies concerning the promotions of Moral and Civic Education.
Chapter 2- Literature Review

Moral education has been regarded as one of the essential learning experiences for whole-person development (CDC, 2002). This chapter intends to draw up a literature review on the aims and strategies of moral education, and their limitations.

Aims of Moral Education

Moral education serves as an umbrella term to cover various forms of teaching values. Moral education means value oriented education (Venkataiah, 1998). It is a complex process which involves developing the ability to think morally, the ability to do right things, and also the ability to feel the appropriate emotions. One of the important aims of moral education is, to develop learners' ability to make moral judgment autonomously (May 1971, Kohlberg 1971, Venkataiah 1998, Stephenson 1998). May (1971) states that the aim of moral education is to encourage every child to develop as fully as possible in moral understanding and judgment, and that the hope of moral education is that "the great majority will become responsible, mature, and morally autonomous members of the community". Lawrence Kohlberg, who introduced the idea of the stages of moral development in 1960s, stated that 'moral education should be aimed at the moral development of the individual and at his/her ability to deal autonomously with moral dilemmas and ethical issues' (Kohlberg, 1971, as cited in Schuitema, 2008).

Scholars have also articulated the importance of moral education from the perspective of society. Schuitema (2008) mentioned that 'the terms "citizenship education" and "democratic education" have increasingly been used in the past decade on the discussion of moral education'. The perspective of society is strongly emphasized by the 'proponents of citizenship education, who stress the development of attitudes and values, such as tolerance and respect for others and appreciating differences' (Grant 1996, Print 1996, as cited in Schuitema et al., 2008).
In Hong Kong, the curriculum of moral education is included in the Moral, Civic and National Education as issued by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC). Its aim is to develop positive attitudes and values that provide the affective basis for students to learn more effectively. CDC puts emphasis on five values and attitudes which are seen as essential to students’ personal and social development: Perseverance, Respect for others, Responsibility, National Identity and Commitment. In 2008, the Education Bureau introduced 'care for others' and 'integrity' as two additional values.

**Strategies of Moral Education**

There is a large variety of strategies to implement moral education. Due to the research purpose, I will only focus on three common methods of teaching moral values: use of direct instructions, provision of moral climate, and discussion of moral issues.

*Learning through direct instructions*

Character education, one of the most popular approaches to moral education in the United States (Halstead & Pike, 2006), uses explicit and direct instruction is considered as a way to internalize moral values and produce moral agents (Solomon *et al*, 2001 as cited in Schuitema *et al*, 2008; DeHaan & Hanford, 1997; Halstead & Pike, 2006). Halstead & Pike (2006) state that the use of direct instructions in civic and moral virtues is most effective 'when it is systematic and explicit'. In particular, stories drawn from history and literature are seen to be effective ways for teaching the virtues. The aims of the use of direct instructions parallels with the "direct approach" introduced by Solomon *et al* (2001, as cited in Schuitema *et al*, 2008), aimed at 'students' internalization of values inherent in the tradition and culture of society'.


DeHaan & Hanford (1997) conducted a study to evaluate three strategies of ethics education: a 'standard introductory ethics class' that provided an introduction to philosophical ethics, an 'economics-ethics class' that integrated ethics curriculum into an economic course, and a 'role-model ethic class', where an ethic instructor served as a role model and teach with the teacher. Results show that students who attended the 'standard introductory ethics class', showed improvements in moral reasoning, moral emotion and moral behavior. Hence, DeHaan & Hanford suggest that the effective moral education strategies in high school should first draw on students' attention to ethical issues explicitly, and that the quality of instructions provided affects its implementation.

However, the question of whether moral values can be learned through direct teaching remains questionable (Gordon, 2007; Halstead & Pike, 2006). Gordon (2007) doubts the value of imposition in education. He suggests that imposition rarely works in moral education because students are not likely to fully comprehend and internalize the information if teachers simply introduce and explain it to them. Gordon argues that students will pretend to engage to please the authority or not offend anyone. As a result, schools are under the illusion that students have changed their underlying attitudes or beliefs and have improved their morality.

Although Halstead & Pike (2006) have suggested a list of ways to process or integrate direct instructions, they are also dubious about the possibility to develop moral values commitment through direct instruction. They cite Ryle's (1972) argument that it is inappropriate to use the word 'instruct' since virtue is not a kind of knowledge or skill, and has to be learnt in a different way. Nash (1997 as cited in Halstead & Pike, 2006) also observes that direct instruction emphasizes compliance at the expense of critical reflection. The drawbacks have vexed scholars at the effectiveness of direct instructions in moral education.
Learning through the moral climate

Values are often embedded in the school climate. Kohlberg’s ‘Just Community’ approach to moral education (Power et al. 1989 as cited in Schuitema et al, 2008) has been very influential on research of the moral climate in schools. This approach focuses on how schools can be transformed into democratic, moral communities and on the effects of the moral atmosphere on students’ moral development.

Taylor suggests that 'a climate of openness, critical reflection and debate about values issues' is source of evidence of 'staff commitment about value education' which contributes to effective values learning in schools. Teachers influence the atmosphere of the classroom, and hence have the power of influencing the moral climate of the school. Many scholars thus suggest that teachers’ attitudes are crucial in shaping students' values and moral behaviors (Taylor, 2006; Halstead & Pike, 2006; Haydon, 2006). Taylor puts great emphasis on the importance of real-life experiences of teachers in the students' values learning. When the teachers share their experiences, they need to provide some insights to students. The teacher has to explicitly indicate what he/she has learnt from that life event.

Taylor also argues that the performance of values education highly depends on the structure of the school, time and resources given to the values coordinator. It is essential that academic and affective development are seen as interrelated and complementary to ensure that values will be given high profile in teaching and learning. All staff members need to agree upon the values development so that the school can promote itself as a values-learning community.

In relation, Halstead & Pike (2006) state that students learn moral values by observing their significant others, including teachers in their lives. They suggest that children learn many things by imitating the example of others, and 'values are inherent in teaching'. Even though teachers are not aware of the moral consequences
of what they are doing, students' value will certainly be influenced by the teachers.

On the discussion of teaching and nurturing respect, Haydon (2006) mentioned the teachers' responsibilities in nurturing respect. 'The responsibilities of teachers are not limited to seeking to induce attitudes of respect in individual students; teachers can and should seek to nurture a culture of respect at least within the classroom and school environment.' Haydon also urges teachers to bring their students to 'an attitude that will not refuse to make evaluative comparisons'. However, Haydon does emphasize that it is not possible to lay down a formula by which teachers should proceed in promoting intercultural respect. Teachers have to find the ways that suit their students most.

Some authors mention the limitations of over relying teachers as the moral agent at school (Taylor, 2006; Stephenson et al., 1998; Day, 2002). Stephenson et al. argue that the role modeling of teachers occurs in both explicit and implicit ways and has the potential to be either a positive or a negative influence upon the value development processes of the students. Effectiveness of value inculcation is hence highly dependent on the quality, attitude and values of the teacher. As Stephenson et al. mention, 'teachers need to be aware of students' reaction to what teachers model, say and do about values education and the effect this has on students'.

The perception of teachers is also another factor that varies the effectiveness of moral education. As Day (2002) discovered in his study of a theatre workshop (which aimed at improving students' empathy), the absence of explicit reflection and guidance from teachers limited the ability of the workshop to achieve its aim. According to Day, "this absence of follow-up relates to the fact that the workshop was perceived by teachers as a drama activity, and no attempts were made to address its moral content".

Taylor stated that "teachers who favor a transmission and didactic model of
teaching often feel less comfortable with values education and are generally less successful from a pupil perspective”. In addition, form tutors may lack confidence and are sometimes reluctant to deal with sensitive moral issues.

*Learning through discussions*

Apart from direct instructions and provision of a moral climate, discussion is another teaching strategy suggested by scholars (Taylor, 2006; DeHanna & Handford, 1997; Schuitema et al., 2008). Taylor suggested that discussion is probably “the single most widespread technique” used in moral and value education. She quotes Blatt & Kohlberg (1975) that discussion has to be “used diagnostically and strategically” in order to improve students’ moral reasoning effectively. When using discussion as a strategy of teaching moral values, teachers have the responsibility to facilitate a discussion among students.

Taylor's idea echoes with DeHaan & Hanford's suggestion. In their study, where they enrolled students in three different classes (mentioned previously), they found that in the Role-model ethic class, students failed to show improvements in all moral aspects. The authors explain the phenomenon by 'the absence of extensive or optimal use of moral dilemma discussions initiated by the ethic instructors'. They, therefore, recommend that 'group discussions of ethical dilemmas are important to include in academic courses designed to promote moral maturity'.

Schuitema et al. believe that 'a problem-based approach to instruction, co-operative learning, and dialogic learning (i.e. discussion) is one of the most commonly suggested teaching strategies'. In their review on teaching methods for moral education, they find many scholars are in favor of co-operative learning as it 'stimulates students’ critical-thinking skills and enhances perspective-taking’. Through moral discussion, the interaction between students helps them to resolve differences
of opinion and to tolerate disagreement.

Although discussion is seen as an effective approach to moral education, it has its own drawbacks. As implied by Taylor (2006), teachers have to pay significant effort to facilitate discussion among students. In her study, it is stated that 'many teachers would benefit from training in how to facilitate rather than orchestrate a discussion in which most class teacher can participate.' In view of the growing stress on active learning and emotional literacy, teachers may look for new strategies and abandon the use of discussion to promote moral education.
Chapter 3- Methodology

In this chapter, the details of the research design, research site, participants and the data collection procedures will be described.

Research design

To investigate how MCE has been implemented in local schools, a case study research was conducted to identify the issues. As Yin observes (2003), case studies are useful to 'investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident'. Since there was a lack of comprehensive review on the actual practices in this school, this research examined the actual practice of moral education in a secondary school and the perceptions of teachers and students towards the practices. The aims of this descriptive research fit into the category of case study researches which are also referred to as a type of qualitative research. There are two research questions in this study:

1. What are the strategies of moral education used in the school?
2. How do teachers and students perceive moral education in this school?

The research assumes fundamental beliefs that events must be studied in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and cannot be understood unless one considers how they are perceived and interpreted by the people who participated in them (Wilson, 1977 as cited in Tuckman, 1994).

Research site

The chosen school in this study was established in 2002. It is a government-aided Chinese medium (CMI) secondary school with no religious background. There are 84 teachers and 1180 students in this school. Students are of mixed-gender and most of
them have lower socioeconomic background. One reason of choosing this school was the public attention this school has gained from its school-based moral education.

**Research methods and sources of data**

'Qualitative research relies on observations of interactions and interviews of participants to discover patterns and their meanings' (Tuckman, 1994). In this research, multiple sources of evidence were used to collect data as suggested by Boudah (2011) for qualitative inquiries: observation, interview, and document review. Analyzing the data from these three sources provides an in-depth study of the natural settings in the case school.

To collect data in relation to the first research question, site visits were made to obtain the holistic view of the school setting. Two moral education lessons were observed and copies of relative documents were collected. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and tape-recorded with the principal and the coordinator of MCE in the school to identify the factors influencing their strategies.

Focus groups were formed to understand the perceptions of teachers and students so as to answer the second research question. Boudah (2011) suggests researchers to create a survey with several questions to understand the ideas about concepts important. Five teachers were involved in a focus group discussion in which open-ended questions (Appendix A) were asked to facilitate discussion. The process was video-recorded upon approval of the participants and the principal. This focus group aimed at understanding their attitudes towards moral education and their perceptions on the strategies adopted by the school. Teachers of the four compulsory subjects (Chinese, English, Mathematics, and Liberal Studies) were chosen to investigate how moral education was integrated in different subjects. Seven students were involved in another focus group (Appendix B) for the researcher to understand
their perceptions on the school’s strategies of moral education. All of them are the 'Moral Ambassadors' from senior grade and responsible to 'assist the promotion of moral education' in the school. They are seen as well-behaved students in the school with relatively strict moralities. Instead of video-recording, their discussion was audio-recorded to provide a more comfortable environment for the students to express their genuine beliefs. Students were given pseudonyms in the research to maintain confidentiality.

A research proposal (Appendix C) was sent to the principal in November 2012 and was approved a week after. Ethical approval (Appendix D) was given before the start of the research.
Chapter 4 – Findings

This chapter presents the results of the research, organized according to the two research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the strategies of moral education used in the school?

Although the Education Bureau has provided a curriculum guide to assist schools in Hong Kong to implement MCE, the MCE coordinator has found the guide of little help in planning school-based moral education. The school instead adopts the philosophy in a parenting book of Michele Borba (2001). Michele mentions seven virtues in her book: respect, empathy, self-control, conscience, fairness, patience and kindness. Each year, the school applies one of the seven virtues as the theme of moral education. After spending seven years in the school, students should have been exposed to all virtues and are expected to be moral persons. The school believes the seven virtues will help students make moral judgments and become responsible members of the society in the future. The major strategies of the school are adopting routines to support moral education, use of physical arrangements to enhance moral climate, and training moral ambassadors to assist promotion of moral education.

Status of "moral education" in this school

Before looking into the actual methods used to educate moral values, it is worthwhile to investigate the status of moral education in this school. As mentioned by the principal, the school is directed by three 'core businesses': moral education, academic achievement and extra-curricular activities. “The three core businesses frame our school targets. The founders of this school and the authorities agree on this direction… Among the three, moral education may be the most important one.” When
asked the reason for putting great emphasis on moral education, he said, “I believe school and church are the only two places that can effectively educate moral values in our society. And when comparing the two, school can even perform better in moral education as students must attend schools and receive education from us—it is mandatory. But people are not forced to go to church.” The principal has clear visions on moral education and believes in its effectiveness in schools.

Each year, schools have to list their ‘major concerns’ on their websites or school plans. The practice of this school is to make the theme of moral education one of the major concerns of the year. This year, "The Cornerstone of Personal Relationships is Respect" is the theme. A teacher was assigned to be the MCE coordinator in this school ten years ago due to her prior experience on students development. According to the coordinator, the school is very supportive. "I was given a high degree of autonomy and flexibility to develop a school-based curriculum for moral education. I have the time to focus on different activities as I am teaching less number of lessons when compared to the other teachers." The MCE coordinator is also the leader of the MCE team which is formed by seven other teachers.

*Routines that support moral education*

Students have to line up autonomously for morning assembly every morning. Unlike most schools using school bells to indicate particular events, there are no notifications from this school to remind students of the time. The arrangement aims to establish punctuality. As punctuality is part of being responsible, the morning assemblies allow students to practice the virtue of responsibility.

On Wednesdays, the students listen to a 2-3 minute morning speech given by the MCE coordinator before the first lesson starts. The content of the speech relates the annual theme of moral education to current affairs. For instance, the facts and
background information of Diaoyu Islands were included in a morning speech; the way Japan occupies the Diaoyu Island was claimed to be an example of 'disrespect' and 'injustice'. The speech is then followed by a reading session inside classrooms. Usually, students are given two pieces of commentary regarding the current affairs mentioned in the morning speech. The two commentaries have opposite opinions and students have to read them and write down which commentary they agree with and why. The task is done individually, and students are encouraged to make their own decision and not to discuss with other students. Works are collected by class teachers.

Two periods of moral education lessons (40 minutes per lesson) are arranged per week. The lessons are conducted in mainly two forms: lectures held in the school hall, and in-class discussions. As the year's theme of moral education was 'respect', lectures were held throughout the year for students to understand the underlying concepts of 'respect'. Different guests were invited to give speeches. For example, a pastor was invited to give a speech on 'chastity education'; a youth organization founder was invited to talk about intra and interpersonal skills. In-class discussions are also held, and students had the opportunity to express their views to their class teachers and classmates. The discussion is seen as an opportunity for students to reflect and discuss moral dilemmas. The MCE coordinator co-plans with class teachers twice a month to ensure consistency and quality of in-class sharing. Case studies, current issues and debate topics are used to initiate discussion.

**Physical arrangements**

With the help of the Visual Arts teachers, boards in the classrooms are decorated according to the theme of moral education each year. Students are responsible to design the board in their classes. It is an opportunity for students to reflect on the
particular virtue and produce creative artworks. A room (心靈培育室) is also arranged opposite the staff room to provide activities related to moral education. As mentioned by the principal, the room helps to build a moral climate and reminds students that moral education is of high priority: "I don’t see many schools in Hong Kong using such room. It certainly confirms the importance of moral education in our school. Also, it helps to create a moral climate here. When teachers and students enter the room, they will know what they are doing is related to moral education."

*Moral ambassadors training*

A group of students from higher forms (F.4-6) are selected and trained to be the moral ambassadors in the school. Their duties are 1. Being the role-models of the other students and be a 'moral student', 2. Assist the enactment of different promotional activities of moral education, 3. Collaborate with each other and help to develop a moral climate. The moral ambassadors were assigned by the MCE coordinator each year, and they are not involved in the planning progress of moral education in this school. The MCE coordinator said through her observation, she would choose the students 'with good moralities and academic competencies' to be the moral ambassadors. She believes these students are role-models for their fellow schoolmates.

**Research question 2: How do teachers and students perceive more education in this school?**

*From the teachers’ perspective*

“Example is better than precept.” Every interviewed teacher believes that teachers are role models and therefore have to be moral. According to Teacher 1 and 4, this common belief has made moral education in the school much easier. Teacher 2
claimed that he had found the sharing of real-life experience very useful. “It is necessary to tell students what are the benefits of being moral. It is pointless to lecture them.”

All teachers strongly support the provision of moral education in the school and believe that the school has been doing very well in this aspect. They all agree that students had been reacting positively to the policies and showed acceptance.

Teacher 5 recalled the moral education he received in childhood and vague memory of the values he learnt. He then suggested that moral values should be taught explicitly within a moral climate. “One thing special and good about this school is its explicit and systematic framework of moral education. The school conveys clear expectations to students with a list of moral values.” He believes that it does work for the students. His view echoes with Teacher 2’s perception. Teacher 2 mentioned that the slogans about moral values used in school had shaped students’ behaviors, “It is difficult to tell them what to do, but with thorough explanations and reminders, students will internalize the values and develop good habits. Slogans are often used in this school to guide our students.”

The teachers have a strong concept of themselves as ethicists. In the interview, they all discussed integrating moral instructions in their own subjects. Teacher 3 and 4, Chinese language teachers, use articles related to different moral values. They believe that it is easy to integrate moral education in their subject as the values in the Chinese literature are usually coherent to those the school wants to inculcate: “Most of the readings implicitly include moral elements and are embedded with values. It is therefore logical for us to integrate moral education in Chinese lessons.” Teacher 2, an English teacher, finds the use of story most effective in teaching vocabulary. "I believe story is a powerful mean to teach English, and very often, stories imply moral messages." He used the word "unscrupulous" as an example, "I relate this word to
current affairs. I ask students to name some of the unscrupulous businessmen and politicians, and explain to me why they think they are unscrupulous. In this way, they will never forget the meaning of the vocabulary items."

**From the students' perspectives**

In general, the students agree that schools should emphasize on moral education. Most of the students admitted that moral education in school provides them guidance on how to be a moral person. They believe the knowledge of morality is the prerequisite of making moral judgments and applying moral values. However, they believe the school could modify the strategies to make moral education more effective.

Student 1 reckons the moral climate in the school as an opportunity for them to learn the moral values: "There are too many different values in the society. Sometimes, I am confused and puzzle. The moral concepts provided by the school remind us what is right and what is wrong.”. Student 3 believed that the school helps them recognize their own responsibility: “The school is just like our role-model. We learn our responsibility and I think this will help us adapt to the society more easily in the future.”. Student 2 said, “It is hard to define whether we are applying the moral values. However, when we have the knowledge of what good values are, we will have the chance to apply them in the future.”

Some of the students mentioned the positive influence of moral education on their behaviors. Student 1 claimed, “Sometimes we need rules to control our behaviors. The moral expectations from the school changed our behaviors in some way. At least we are different from the students of other schools in this region. I think we are better students.” She also suggested that the moral education in school made students more reflective. “The school allows us to learn the moral dilemmas and
reflect on our own behaviors. It is quite meaningful as I don’t always have the opportunity to self-reflect.”

Although the interviewed students believed that the school has good intentions to shape students into moral people, some of them said that the strategies were not very effective. Student 4 said the school was too idealistic: “Very often, their (the school’s) recommendations are very impractical. We find it difficult to follow their advices. The ways they inculcate moral values are too theoretical and not sentimental enough to inspire us. Solely telling us what to do is not persuasive at all.” He suggested a more extensive use of sharing from teachers: “It is a delight to listen to the real-life experiences of our teachers. They can convince us which values are important with their own experiences. Their stories can be so powerful and I think the school should inspire us with these. When we are moved, we are willing to make changes.” Student 3 said moral education would be more effective if the school gives them more practical suggestions: “Even if we agree on the values, we need to know the methods to apply them. The school lacks provision as such.”

Student 5 added that some teachers are quite stubborn and do not accept the students’ views. “Before the teacher asks for our opinions, they have their own model answers. If our responses are different from the model answers, they will come to us and we will be in trouble... It really depends on the teachers’ reactions. Some of them are really stubborn and we can only pretend to agree with the values because we don’t want to make them angry. We are discouraged to share our genuine thoughts.” When asked what the consequences of this phenomenon are, Student 1 said their ability of critical thinking will be reduced as they only follow what the teachers say.
Chapter 5- Discussion

Giving weight to moral education

The significant high profile given to moral education may indicate the vision and mission of the principal and the influential parties in this school, such as the sponsoring party and the supervisors. Great emphasis is put in moral education as one of the three core businesses of the school. This may contribute to a successful moral education as Taylor (2011) mentioned that the vision for values of the leaders is one of the important factors for effective value education in a school. Taylor also believes that the values coordinator has to be provided with senior management support, time and resources. In this school, the moral education coordinator was given time to focus on the implementation of moral values, which may imply that she is able to keep abreast of developments and provide ongoing evaluations and amendments. The adequate human resources, such as moral ambassadors and moral education team, may also account for the smooth promotion of moral values in this school.

Most of the teachers value moral education and agree with the practices in this school. Some teachers recognized the power of having a common goal when working with their colleagues. The idea of integrating moral values into other subjects may also stimulate teachers to work on moral education collaboratively. DeHann & Hanford (1997) suggest that it is preferable for all teachers to think of themselves as practical ethicists and to integrate ethic instructions into their regular courses. The common belief of the teachers may induce staff commitment and confidence about moral values (Taylor, 2006), which may mean consistent and potent moral education.

The discrepancies on direct instructions

The findings show that different strategies of moral education have been applied in the school. Explicit instructions are given to students and the school has clear
expectations on students' morality. The school is aware of the influence of school structure on moral education. As Halstead & Pike (2006) mentioned, the use of direct instructions is most effective when it is systematic and explicit. Direct methods used in this school (such as lectures, morning speeches, readings etc.) may lead to improvements in students' morality (DaHann & Hanford, 1997). Most of the students agree with the good intentions of the school in promoting moral education and that it is essential to have moral education in secondary education.

However, teachers and students shared different views on the use of explicit and direct moral instructions. Teachers generally believe that the use of direct instructions helps students to internalize moral value, whereas some students find the recommendations impractical, too theoretical, and even meaningless. Students also showed grievances against the autocratic attitudes of some teachers. They criticized the openness of the school and that teachers should accept other opinions. Rather than internalizing the values, students only viewed the instructions as school rules.

One reason to explain such phenomenon is that the instructions have turned out to be a kind of imposition in this school. It echoes with a limitation of direct instructions mentioned by Gordon (2007). He suggests that imposition rarely works in moral education because students are not likely to fully comprehend and internalize the information. Despite the students' resistance on internalizing the values, it seems that the teachers see their students as generally accepting the school's practice and that the school has given enough opportunity for them to express their own opinions. This misconception may due to the fact that many of the students simply pretend to engage in order to please the teacher or not to offend anyone (Gordon, 2007). The use of direct instructions, which might have become a kind of imposition, may therefore create an illusion that students have changed their underlying attitudes and beliefs or have improved their morality.
A possible negative impact on students' development is a decline in the ability of critical thinking as Nash (1997, as cited in Halstead & Pike, 2006) criticizes that "direct instruction emphasizes compliance at the expense of critical reflection". Even so, whether the use of direct instructions is appropriate for this school remains questionable as the discontent from the current students may not mean ineffective promotion of moral education. Some teachers believe that students will agree with the 'moral persistence' and practices of the school once they have entered the society, stating the essence of students' real-life experiences in values transformation.

**Different perceptions on 'moral climate'**

The importance of creating a moral school climate is well-agreed by different scholars with the foci on the interactions and sharing of ideas on moral issues within a school. Kohlberg's 'Just Community' approach (Power *et al.*, 1989 as cited in Schuitema *et al.*, 2008) suggested schools to be transformed into 'democratic and moral communities'. Taylor (2006) sees effective value education as being able to provide a climate of 'openness, critical reflection and debate about value issues'.

The school has put great emphasis on providing a moral school climate which may exert subtle influences on the students' morality. Explicit instructions, physical arrangements, assigning moral ambassadors, slogans and integration with other subjects are perceived as the approaches that help to establish a moral climate. The influence of teachers' behavior is another influential factor in moral education. All teachers agree that they should be role models and their behavior will shape students' morality. Teachers' influence may be proved by students' interest in listening to their teachers' experiences. Students learn by observing their significant others (Halstead & Pike, 2006), and I reckon this as a major reason that accounts for the influential role of the teachers. Taylor's idea of encouraging teachers to be 'a little disclosing about
themselves' is similar to the teachers' belief--- sharing of personal experiences will help to prove the benefits of being moral.

However, reports of the stubbornness of teachers and the 'too idealistic and theoretical' moral advices may mean a failure to generate a climate of openness and democratic community. Some students showed dissatisfaction and are reluctant to listen to the teachers' advices as they are 'too demanding and impractical'. This phenomenon may indicate a negative influence upon value development processes of the students. As Stephenson *et al.* (1998) imply, effectiveness of moral education is highly dependent on the quality, attitude and values of the teachers, and there are potential negative influences embedded in the role-modeling of teachers. If the students' criticism of the teachers' unwillingness to appreciate views different from their own is valid, it will be an obstacle for teachers to nurture a culture of respect within the school environment. As a result, teachers may fail to model and transmit values such as 'respect' and 'tolerance'.

*Facilitating discussions*

The school may consider initiating more debates on moral issues, apart from the discussion sessions in the every-week moral education lessons, to increase the openness experienced by the students. Discussion is seen as "the most widespread technique" used in moral education (Taylor, 2006) and is an effective way to promote moral maturity (DeHaan & Hanford, 1997). The quality of learning is highly dependent on the teachers' strategies to facilitate discussions. Unfortunately, the current impact of discussion in the school is hard to identify in this research, because strategies used to facilitate in-class discussions were not measured.

The planning and facilitation of discussion are time-consuming as it has to be 'used diagnostically and strategically in order to improve students' moral reasoning'
(Blatt & Kohlbeg, 1975 as cited in Taylor, 2006). Taylor (2006) also notices that teachers will be looking for new strategies in view of 'the growing stress on active learning and emotional literacy' and the significant effort for teachers to facilitate a discussion. One possible reason for the school to put relatively low attention on the use of discussion is the lack of time and resources available. Without substantial support from the government, the school has independently sought out resources, such as the moral intelligences parenting book. The methods of moral education may not be applicable and practical for teachers, however, as the targets of the book are parents but not schools. Consequently, strategies to facilitate discussion among a group of students are not mentioned in the book at all.
Chapter Six - Conclusion

The aims of this research were to find out the strategies of moral education in a local secondary school, and to understand teachers’ and students' perception towards the practices. Given the significant high status of moral education in this school, great effort was put in and a large variety of methods were adopted to promote moral education. The research focuses on three strategies: use of direct instructions, provision of a moral climate, and discussion on moral issues.

The findings suggest that the principal, teachers and students have a common belief that moral education is an essential part in high school education. The strong sense of collaboration to work on moral education among teachers provides a superior condition for this school to develop moral education into a potent and effective one.

However, the perceptions of teachers and students on the strategies were divergent. The use of direct instructions might have become a kind of imposition, in which students were not likely to internalize the moral values, and an illusion of attitudes transformation may have emerged. Students showed resentments towards direct instructions. As the interviewed students are seen as the well-behaved moral ambassadors in a school with relatively strict moralities, it is worth reflecting on other students' acceptance of the direct instructions in this school.

Relatedly, definitions of 'moral climate' were different between the teachers and researchers: while the scholars focus on the degree of openness and democracy, teachers in the school believe that frequent and explicit moral instructions are keys to establish a moral climate. One strategy that may improve democratic moral climate in this school is to facilitate discussions on moral issues among students. The school has put relatively low attention on the use of discussion due to the lack of resources and time for teachers.
Findings here are limited by the small scale of this project. The information obtained by the researcher may not reflect the actual situation in determining the moral education strategies of the case school. In particular, the perception of teachers and students were the only sources to understand the degree of acceptance of the strategies. Future research should investigate the perception of others, such as parents and graduated students, to further substantiate the effectiveness of the strategies. Additionally, this research does not focus on difficulties the school encountered in planning and implementation, including the lack of resources, insufficient training for teachers, or influences of the society on students' moralities. Future research should explore these obstacles encountered by the local schools to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies and to suggest short-run and long-run measures.
References


Appendix A

Questions in focus group- Teachers

1. How do you perceive the importance of moral education in this school?

2. What are the practices of moral education in this school? (Who/ what/ where/ when/ how?)

3. How did you promote the value "respect" this year in the school?

4. What are the sources of your understanding towards "moral education"?

5. What are the sources of your understanding towards "respect"?

6. What are the expected outcomes of this year's theme "respect"?

7. How effective do you see the promotion of "respect" as?
Appendix B

Questions in focus group- Students

1. Do you think moral education is important in your study as a student? Why and why not?

2. Do you think moral education is important in your future career? Why and why not?

3. What is the most memorable part of moral education in your learning?

4. How did the promotion of moral education help with your personal development?

5. What are benefits of having moral education in your learning?

6. Is there anything you think the school can improve in the promotion of moral education?
Appendix C

Summary of the research proposal

Brief Content of Study:

Objectives:
This research aims to examine how the value “respect” is promoted in one school’s practice in Moral Education. The methods used to enhance students’ interpersonal development will also be investigated in this research.

Research questions:
1. What are the sources of teachers’ understanding of the importance of Moral Education?
2. What factors have greatest influence on how the school implements Moral Education?
3. What are the strategies used in the school to promote the value “respect”? And how are they related to different theories of Moral Education?
4. How does the value “respect” promoted in the school help students in their interpersonal development? (In the eyes of teachers, current students and graduated students)

Methods for Conducting the Study:

- Interview with the Principal
  - Purpose 1: To understand the rationale behind the school policy of putting great emphasis on Moral Education
  - Purpose 2: To examine the factors influencing Moral Education implemented in the school

- Interviews with the teacher in charge of Moral Education and the teachers of the other subjects
  - Purpose 1: To find out the sources of teachers’ understanding of Moral Education
  - Purpose 2: To investigate how “Respect” is promoted with regard to students’ interpersonal development
  - Purpose 3: To obtain information on the schools’ strategies in promoting the value “Respect”

- Forming focus group with current students (one group, 4-5 students)
  - Purpose 1: To identify students’ perspectives on the effectiveness of Moral Education (promotion of “Respect” in particular) done by the school development
  - Purpose 2: To investigate how the promotion of “Respect” in the school helps with their interpersonal development
• Class observation
  o Purpose 1: To observe the practices done by the school with regard to
    the promotion of “Respect”

• Obtaining teaching schedules and materials
  o Purpose 1: To observe the practices done by the school with regard to
    the promotion of “Respect”

• Audio-record staff meeting(s)
  o Purpose 1: To observe the planning of the Moral Education practices in
    the school
  o Purpose 2: To realize the sources in planning the practices/ strategies

**Suggested timeline of the research:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested methods</th>
<th>Suggested dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Interview with the Principal</td>
<td>Dec 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interviews with the teachers</td>
<td>Jan 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Focus group interview with current students</td>
<td>Jan 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Focus group interview with graduated students</td>
<td>Jan 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Class observation</td>
<td>Feb 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Staff meeting observation</td>
<td>Jan/ Feb 2013</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Ethical approval- Letter to the principal

14th January, 2013
Dear Mr. ,

Strategies of Moral Education practiced in a Hong Kong secondary school

As part of my B.Ed. degree I am required to conduct a small-scale study of my teaching. This will involve the examination of how the value “respect” is promoted in your school in terms of Moral Education. The methods used to enhance students’ interpersonal development will also be investigated in this research.

According to the University’s policy on the ethical conduct of research, I am writing to ask your consent for these procedures.

I will make sure that the information teachers and students provide to me will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and anonymity. Interviewees’ participation is voluntary. They have the right not to be included in my analysis, and if I find out that a teacher/student does not wish to be included, I will act according to that wish and not include the student. They can also choose to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. The research procedures are temporarily arranged as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research procedures</th>
<th>Suggested dates</th>
<th>Suggested duration</th>
<th>Type of information to be collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Interview with the Principal</td>
<td>Jan 2013</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td>Audiotapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interview with teachers</td>
<td>Jan 2013</td>
<td>60 mins</td>
<td>Audiotapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Focus group interview with current students</td>
<td>Jan 2013</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>Videotapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Focus group interview with graduate students</td>
<td>Jan 2013</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>Videotapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Class observation</td>
<td>Feb 2013</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>Notes taken during and after observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Staff meeting observation</td>
<td>Feb 2013</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>Notes taken during and after meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants will be told that they have the right to review and erase any respective audio-records. The data will be stored on a USB device with passcode lock. The information collected will only be used for the dissertation and will be destroyed or returned to the school after the dissertation grade has been approved.

If you agree to these procedures, please sign one copy of this letter and return it...
to me. If concerns arise about this aspect of my work, please feel free to contact me (tel. 94679141), or my supervisor, Dr. Jackson Liz (tel. 2219 4195). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Faculties, HKU (tel. 2241-5267).

Yours sincerely,

Ho Hang Yin Renee
BEd(LangEd) programme
Faculty of Education
The University of Hong Kong

I agree to the procedures set out above to facilitate Ho Hang Yin to conduct the research project in my school.

Endorsed by: Date:

Mr.
Principal