

# 香港中學生 發展研究

(品格特質、社會心理能力及社會行為)

(第五號報告：校長和教師對小學和中學品德教育的看法: 定性研究)

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香港理工大學 應用社會科學系 2018年



Opening Minds • Shaping the Future

**Views of Principals and Teachers on Moral Education in  
Primary and Secondary Schools in Hong Kong:  
A Qualitative Study**

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**October 2018**

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Note.

- ❖ The authorship is equally shared amongst the three authors.
- ❖ The research report is for public reading only. More academic outputs will be published later.
- ❖ We thank Wofoo Foundation for its financial support for this project.

## 「塑造品格·共創未來」研究計劃研究團隊

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### 聲明

- 著作權：本研究報告的3名作者（石丹理，胡嘉如，梁曉廸）有同等貢獻。
- 本研究報告僅供大眾閱讀；更多相關的學術文章將於後期出版。
- 本研究計劃由和富慈善基金資助，謹此致謝。

## Executive Summary

Moral and civic education (MCE) is important for children and adolescent development to achieve holistic personal development. The present study investigated the views of principals and teachers on MCE in Hong Kong primary and secondary school settings. Specifically, it addressed seven questions. These included their views on the significance of moral education for students, policies in implementing moral education, leadership in advocating moral education in school settings, resources from Education Bureau (EDB) and school, implementation of related curriculum for moral education in school, perceived benefits of moral education, and perceived readiness and challenges in implementing moral education in school settings. A total of 26 primary and secondary school principals and 6 secondary school teachers participated in 10 sessions of focus group interviews.

With reference to the research questions, the findings revealed several major observations. First, the participants affirmed the significance of MCE for children and adolescents. Second, they noted that schools carried out creative adjustments to implement the related policies in MCE to make it in line with school missions and background. Third, they acknowledged the important role of school leadership in implementing MCE. Fourth, the participants felt that resources and support from the Education Bureau were not adequate. They also found it difficult to integrate official materials with school-based designs. Fifth, the participants favored tailor-made teaching materials. Sixth, they affirmed the benefits of MCE in promoting the personal development of both teachers and students. Finally, the participants pointed out that because of the heavy workload in teaching academic subjects, there were limited time and capacity in developing moral and civic education in school contexts. The findings are generally consistent with another study in the Wofoo Project based on quantitative methodology.

## 報告摘要

德育及公民教育對於兒童及青少年的全人發展非常重要。本研究調查了校長及教師對於香港中小學德育及公民教育的看法。具體來說，調查著重探究受訪者對於七個問題的看法，包括：德育對於學生的重要性、推行德育的政策、校內管理層倡導德育的情況、教育局及學校所提供的資源、德育課程在學校中的實施情況、德育帶來的益處，以及在實施道德教育時所需的準備與遇到的挑戰。共計 26 位中小學校長及 6 位學校教師參與了 10 次焦點小組訪問。

根據研究問題，研究者得出以下結論。第一，受訪者認可德育及公民教育對於兒童及青少年的重要性。第二，為了符合學校的辦學宗旨及背景，學校推出了創新的調整措施以實施德育及公民教育相關政策。第三，受訪者充分肯定學校領導層在實施德育及公民教育中的重要角色。第四，受訪者認為來自教育局的資源及支援不夠，很難將官方資料與校本課程相結合。第五，受訪者較喜愛“量身定制”的教學材料。第六，受訪者認為德育與公民教育對於教師與學生的個人成長均有所裨益。最後，受訪者指出由於教學工作量較大；在校內發展德育及公民教育的精力及時間十分有限。以上結果與另一項和富社會企業項目的量性研究結果一致。

## Introduction

This report presents findings of focus group interviews with principals and relevant teachers of managing and implementing Moral and Civic Education (MCE) in local primary and secondary school settings. In this study, relevant teachers are the teachers who are the heads or members of the Moral and Civic Education Committee (or relevant unit) in primary or secondary school settings.

In the present project, we have already published three quantitative studies gauging views from the students (Shek & Lin, 2017), parents (Shek & Yu, 2018), and general teachers (Shek & Ma, 2017) and one study to review moral education in Hong Kong (Shek & Leung, 2018). While quantitative studies can generate profiles on the perceptions of moral values and behavior in adolescents by different stakeholders, focus group interviews help “uncover unique perspectives [and] various facets of the issues” through effective interactions among the participants (Hennick, Hutter & Bailey, 2010, p. 136). In addition, discoveries of alternatives or best strategies in handling issues raised in the focus group could be gauged through discussing or debating within the group (Flick, 2014). According to Shek (2017), focus groups can help to understand the subjective perceptions of different stakeholders that may not be easily captured by quantitative research methods. Focus group methodology has been widely used in the social science literature (Lam & Shek, 2006; Padgett, 2016; Shek & Chan, 2013; Shek & Lee, 2008; Shek, Yu, Wu & Chai, 2014).

There are two justifications for understanding the perceptions of principals and teachers of moral and civic education in Hong Kong. First, the views of principals and relevant teachers can help reflect how moral education has been implemented, and its merits, drawbacks, achievements, and challenges from their perspectives. As different stakeholders may have different views, the collected data can help to produce a rich and multi-faceted understanding of the issues under investigation. Second, views from principals and relevant teachers can be triangulated with views of students, parents, and general teachers revealed by the quantitative data to deepen our understanding of the implementation and effectiveness of moral education. Shek and Ma (2017) collected data from teachers on moral education issues. With the present findings, we can triangulate the quantitative findings with the qualitative findings.

## Research Questions Addressed in the Study

To promote our understanding of the views of principals and related teachers on moral and civic education in Hong Kong, we addressed seven research questions as follows:

1. What are the general perceptions of the meaning and significance of moral education for children and adolescents?
2. What are the stakeholders' understanding of official and school-based policies in enforcing moral education?
3. What is the stance (for principals) or perceptions (for relevant teachers) of leadership in advocating moral education in school settings?
4. How do the principals and teachers perceive resources from Education Bureau (EDB) and school?
5. How do the principals and teachers understand curriculum implementation for moral education in school?
6. What are the perceived benefits in advocating moral education in school settings?
7. What are the perceived readiness and challenges in implementing moral education in school settings?



## Methods

### *Participants and Procedure*

Purposeful sampling was adopted in principal and teacher focus group interviews. We conducted 10 focus group sessions for primary and secondary school colleagues. For the primary school session, 11 principals (six male and seven female colleagues) participated in the four focus group interviews held in May 2017. For the secondary school session, 15 principals (principals and vice-principals) and six teachers participated in the six focus group interviews held from March to May of 2017. Focus group interviews for all the sessions lasted from one to two hours. For each session, two to three researchers were present, with one as the moderator (whom has rich qualitative research experience) and others as observers to record significant non-verbal cues from the participants. The focus group sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed into full texts for data analyses. All the focus group sessions were conducted in Cantonese. Extracts from the verbatim are translated into English here for the purpose of report writing.

### *Protocol of Focus Group Interview*

A protocol of focus group interview developed by the research team was adopted for the present study to explore the perceptions and frontline experiences in implementing moral education in the school settings (see Appendix 1). The protocol comprised the following categories of interview questions with reference to the research questions:

1. General perceptions of the meaning and significance of moral education for children and adolescents;
2. Understanding of official and school-based policies in enforcing moral education;
3. Stance (for principals) or perceptions (for relevant teachers) of leadership in advocating moral education in school settings;
4. Perceived resources from Education Bureau (EDB) and school;
5. Understanding of curriculum implementation for moral education;
6. Perceived benefits in advocating moral education in school settings;
7. Perceived readiness and challenges in implementing moral education in school settings.

### Data Analysis

All focus group audio records were transcribed into full texts by research assistants. The researchers further checked the accuracy of all transcripts and made necessary revisions. Method of thematic analysis was employed to analyze collected data in the present study. Steps of analyzing and coding the texts of all focus group interview transcripts were referenced to the outline guide by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87), which are (1) familiarizing with data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. In addition, each theme was listed with name, description, and concrete excerpts from the raw data.

### *Ethical considerations*

Ethical approval of the Project (including the present study) has been granted by the institutional “Human Subjects Ethics Sub-committee” (HSESC). Participant recruitment, data collection, and data analyses were conducted in accordance with the stipulations given the approving authority. In addition, written informed consent has been obtained from all the participants before the interviews were conducted.

## **Results**

With reference to the seven research questions, seven major themes were generated from the coding:

1. Affirmation of the significance of moral education for children and adolescents;
2. Creative school-based adjustments on policies on enforcing moral education;
3. Need for leadership with mission, vision, and care;
4. Inadequate resources from EDB and difficulty in integrating official materials with school-based designs;
5. Need for tailor-made teaching materials;
6. Enhanced personal development of both teachers and students by moral and civic education;

7. Limited time and capacity of developing moral education in addition to heavy academic development.

We will present the above themes in the following paragraphs.

### Theme 1: Affirmation of the significance and meaning of moral education for children and adolescents

#### *a. Primary School Sessions*

Taken as a whole, the interviewed primary school principals believed that moral and civic education played a crucial role in students' holistic development. It was generally agreed that moral education served to help students nurture virtuous characters at various levels. At the intrapersonal level, MCE promotes development of students' moral virtues including resilience, critical thinking, and decision making. At the interpersonal level, students learn the importance of values such as love, care, and respect for others as well as filial piety. At the societal level, MCE helps students gain a stronger sense of civic responsibility, national identity, and maintenance of social harmony. Some related narratives are as follows:

*When interpreting moral and civic education, I see it as a conceptualization of the Chinese teachings from the Book of Rites -- "Cultivate oneself. Bring order to the family. Govern the country. Bring peace to all". The foremost is for one to cultivate individuals' moral quality and virtues. However, as human beings, we are not alone. We are embedded in a society whereby one must interact with others, which pertains to civic education. As such, I believe that moral and civic education should consist of two domains, including the nurturance of individual moral virtues and learning how to interact with others (P001\_F3).*

*Actually, cultivating morality and teaching students how to interact with others will prepare students to step into society when they leave school. It*

*also affects one's psychological quality and wellbeing. In fact, moral and civic education is linked to the individual, family, and societal levels. It helps students develop a deeply-rooted set of values and attitudes (P001\_F2).*

In addition, it was mentioned that MCE also helps students to search for answers and explore the world around them.

*Our role is to lead students to search and explore, to differentiate between right and wrong. Through classes and various interesting activities, we enable students to get to know the world, such that when they are confronted with different situations and challenges, they will know how to face them (P003\_F1).*

*b. Secondary School Sessions*

The interviewed principals and teachers all affirmed the importance of moral education that helps students (a) nourish human kindness, respect, and empathy; (b) search meanings in life; (c) nurture character; (d) arouse the sense of civic responsibility; and (e) identify their life goals. The majority of the interviewees agreed that there was a great need for moral education in senior secondary school level as well and the implementation should not be limited to junior secondary school levels (i.e. S1-S3). Although the interviewees affirmed the significance of moral education, it was sadly noted that some of the principals perceived the implementation of moral education was not the top priority of school planning, including allocation of manpower and designation of resources. The following extracted dialogues capture the subservience of moral education.

*M2: In our school, the number of committee members has already indicated its priority and importance. [The Moral and Civic Education (MCE) Committee] is comprised of 4 teachers while the Discipline Committee is with 9 to 10 members. You will notice the difference very naturally (S005\_M2).*

*M4: We are in a similar situation. There are only a few members, around 3-4, in MCE Committee. I believe most of the schools are in similar allocation (S005\_M4).*

*M3: There are only 2 members in the MCE Committee in our school. The members are only responsible for arranging hall assemblies and mock-election program. That is IT! (S005\_M3)*

## Theme 2: Creative school-based adjustments on policies on enforcing moral education

### *a. Primary School Sessions*

While the Education Bureau (EDB) has provided a set of policies and guidelines on the implementation of MCE in primary schools, interviewees by and large pointed out that the curriculum guide was limited in its effectiveness. Schools had to take the initiative to make adjustment on the policies so as to enforce moral education in a way that was in line with the schools' mission, religious background, and students' developmental needs.

*I would rather not use the curriculum guide. My warning is that, really, if you follow their guide, your curriculum will become "fragmented". This is not the perspective we should take. Just because they are "fools", does not mean that you should be foolish as well. You should "stand higher. (P002\_M1).*

*There is actually no particular lesson dedicated for moral civic education, which means that components of MCE may be permeated into the existing formal curriculum in various ways, (P004\_M4).*

Against this background, schools have tried to implement school-based adjustments by incorporating moral education elements into (a) extra-curricular activities; (b) school assemblies; (c) experiential activities; and (d) specialized curricula.

*I believe that in addition to incorporating MCE components to the formal curriculum, actually, extra-curricular activities are also important. For instance, schools may invite relevant guest speakers to address the students during morning assemblies, conduct talks, and provide opportunities for students to engage in experiential activities, such as*

*voluntary work. The design and liaison are all a part of the planning of extra-curricular activities that can be aligned with our school's focus and theme (P001\_F1).*

*b. Secondary School Sessions*

The EDB has devised a set of concrete policies on implementing moral education in local primary and secondary school settings. The interviewed principals and teachers are all well-acknowledged of this set of policies. However, according to the interviewees, these policies are understood as “abstract guidelines” with no explicit “recipe”.

*In fact, the only thing we get from EDB is “guidelines”. There is no concrete substance provided for school teachers. It is like cooking. If you ask me to cook “tomato egg”, giving me the instructions of buying tomato and egg is not enough! You have to give me the recipe! Not only the ingredients! THIS IS EDB (this sentence is originally in English)! (S004\_F2)*

The principals and teachers concretized these policies with school-based adjustments in their frontline implementations. The adjustments were executed based on students' developmental needs, school mission, school background, and district-unique issues. The school-based adjustments include (a) integrating the moral education with curricula of life-education or religious studies; (b) fostering inter-disciplinary or cross-units collaboration; and (c) encouraging experiential activities.

Theme 3: Need for leadership with mission, vision, and care

*a. Primary School Sessions*

The primary school principals had the consensus that leadership played a crucial role in the effective development and implementation of MCE.

*At our school, we try to influence different MCE stakeholders including teachers, parents, and students. Then why is leadership so important? It is*

*because other than the principal, who else would step up to the plate and provide directions on what should or should not be done in this regard. Of course, it is the principal's job to do so. (P002\_M1).*

Leaders themselves should serve with mission, vision, and care. In terms of “mission” and “vision”, principals expressed how they clearly advocated the importance of moral development as a part of students’ overall growth. The colleagues are reminded not to merely focus on students’ academic achievements, but to develop curriculum and teaching materials that aim to also foster positive virtues among students.

In terms of “care”, participants shared how they provided support and encouragement to their teaching staff by helping to seek and secure resources, as well as making executive decisions on how these resources may be allocated in favor of the development of MCE.

*Sometimes, we will think about what resources are available, such as teachers training, or which guest speakers we may be invited to help us motivate and reignite the “fire of passion” within our teachers. (P001\_F2).*

*As principals, we are in charge of allocating resources and manpower. Our job is to make decisions such as which teachers are to be responsible for observation, who should be responsible for implementation, whether it is the curriculum development team or student development team. We then encourage our colleagues to try to implement MCE. In the beginning, teachers came back to us and told us that they did not have sufficient time, so as leaders, we made administrative decisions on time-tabling that would enable more space for teachers to implement MCE. We would also discuss with the teachers during the actual implementation... As principals, we allocate resources, cultivate teachers, provide direction, and to work closely with teachers to solve encountered problems and to work out solutions collaboratively (P003\_F1).*

*b. Secondary School Sessions*

The interviewed principals and teachers agreed that leadership with mission, vision, and care is crucial in facing the consistent dilemma between the urge for academic achievement and moral development of the students. Principals and teachers-in-charge of MCE have to “stand higher” (translated literally from the verbatim) to have a clearer and better-fit choices for students and teachers and connect the dots in different units in school. Being accountable with their decisions is one of the most persistent themes in discussing about leaders advocating MCE in schools across different focus groups. The “accountability” is not limited to the decision making, it is also to shoulder the consequences of the decisions, no matter good or bad.

*When the principal has made the decision, s/he has to stand out and let all your staff know your position [towards MCE development] ...Then the staff will know your advocacy and they will follow, even though there are some foreseeable obstacles ahead. (S005\_M4)*

*Frankly speaking, what I can do is “to be present”, even if the teachers do not agree with my decision on advocating MCE in school. Yes...to care and support...(S003\_F1)*

The “care” is understood not only as the caring attitude from the principals towards the teachers. In fact, it is to handle every decision regarding the moral development of the students with care. This careful attitude is especially crucial in advocating MCE and has assisted the principals and teachers-in-charge to have a more appropriate, accurate, and need-catering interventions (major concerns).

*To say “support” is easy...If the teachers ask me for resources to develop [life education or MCE], I have to be very cautious. If the promise does not match with expectations of the teachers, they (the teachers) will be very disappointed and misunderstandings may arise. (S001\_F2)*



#### Theme 4: Inadequate resources from EDB and difficulty in integrating official materials with school-based designs

##### *a. Primary School Sessions*

While participants from the focus group interviews acknowledged that EDB does provide a set of guidelines on the implementation of MCE and schools have access to diverse teaching materials, they criticized that there was a lack of coordination or integration of the host of available teaching materials as articulated by participants:

*Well, there is a lot of teaching materials that are consistently delivered to our school; however, they need to be better integrated. In fact, the materials are not always useful, appropriate, and aligned with the students' needs or the school's ethos. Yes, there is a lot of materials, but the key lies in how they can be used. (P001\_F3).*

*As there is a lot of different teaching materials available, schools cannot use them all! The issue then becomes which materials to select and integrate into the curriculum. (P001\_F4).*

With this set of guidelines and diverse teaching materials, principals voiced that many resources are still lacking, including (a) school-based support; (b) capacity for teachers to develop a curriculum; (c) on-site support; and (d) teacher training all of which posed barriers to implementation:

*At present, EDB does provide us with a framework for the implementation of MCE. I understand their constraints, however, if you ask me about our school, if we were to follow strictly to their framework, I think that it is not ideal, EDB's support is insufficient (P002\_M1).*

*The current "system" is that EDB pays little care towards the implementation process -- schools have the autonomy to do whatever they*

*wish in order to incorporate elements of MCE into their curriculum, so long as you can explain the rationale. I value this autonomy, however, it appears as though there lack support to carry out this sort of autonomous implementation. Basically, we are on our own. Would EDB consider striking a balance between autonomy and the provision of more support? (P002\_M1).*

*For all these years, in addition to the 530 thousand dollars which the Government invested in national education, the EDB has failed to support us in terms of financial resources, timetable planning, or in any other capacities. I have asked the teacher responsible for MCE at our school to share their needs. The teacher stated that if the Government really wishes to effectively implement MCE, what teachers really need most is the “space” for preparation and ways to equip teachers with the necessary competence... teachers need to allocate time to attend training sessions to equip themselves with the necessary understanding and skills to implement the MCE curriculum (P004\_M2).*

*So, if you ask me about the “concrete” resources provided by EDB, there are a lot of resources available on the Internet; however, regarding how they can be utilized optimally, then I would say that EDB has not provided any suggestions on this regard (P001\_F3).*

**b. Secondary School Sessions**

Most of the interviewees commented that the resources from EDB are inadequate and the materials provided are “outdated” and “not useful”. One of the principals shared the disappointment to the insufficient support on moral education:

*Regarding the help from EDB...there is not much help [from EDB] in actual practice or implementation of MCE. EDB has not paid much attention on MCE in the past 10 years...no attention at all. (S005\_M1)*

Although EDB has provided some sharing sessions on MCE practices for the principals and teachers, it remains insufficient. The interviewees perceived that the EDB has only delegated the “requirement” of achieving the learning outcomes to schools yet with least concrete support to orientate the development of MCE in the secondary school settings. The principals and teachers thus have to shoulder the responsibility by themselves in nurturing moral education in the secondary school settings. They have to examine the existing resources available at school such as the hardware (available time-tabling capacities; teachers’ availabilities), software (systems assisting arranging time-tables; possibilities of inter-units collaboration), and human-ware (teachers’ experience and training regarding the MCE; teachers’ readiness and willingness to implement MCE) to facilitate the MCE development of students.

#### Theme 5: The need for tailor-made teaching materials

##### *a. Primary School Sessions*

Generally speaking, principals voiced that they favored tailor-made teaching materials that were contextually and developmentally appropriate. They preferred activities or materials that were in line with the schools’ ethos or religious background, students’ developmental needs, as well as the incorporation of issues that were up-to-date and relevant to the society.

*Students wish to be exposed to issues that are relevant to their daily lives. In addition, when promoting morality, we are talking about experience and applicability to real life scenarios, rather than merely delivering information at a knowledge level... (P001\_F1).*

Unfortunately, EDB has not provided such resources as noted by one of the primary school principals:

*Take our school for instance, it was quite a challenge for us to tailor-make a set of MCE teaching materials in the beginning, as we found it impossible*

*to find support [from EDB] for the development of such materials. In the end, we collaborated with two different departments from a local university and developed two sets of MCE teaching materials... the university sent experts in the field to our school to conduct in-class observations, and provided constructive feedback to our teachers regarding the implementation process. This greatly helped our staff (P001\_F3).*

*b. Secondary School Sessions*

The interviewees favored tailor-made teaching materials in advocating moral education in secondary school settings. The guidelines from EDB are “for reference only”. The principals and teachers have developed their own curriculum with reference to their school mission, school religious background, and students’ needs. There are several reasons for the principals and teachers favoring the tailor-made teaching materials. First, this can facilitate a bi-directional interaction between the principals and teachers in designing the curriculum. Second, this can offer a platform for principals to understand the needs and concerns of the students from the teachers’ perspective. Third, this would help the principals understand whom will be more suitable in designing and teaching MCE in the tailor-making process. A related narrative is as follows:

*I (the vice-principal) wish to enhance the students’ time-management skills. I recognize that the form-coordinator is very good at this and very experienced in designing curriculum of self-understanding and self-help [for students]. Then I ask her to write me the lesson plans and then we discuss what we could improve, as I am doing research and have been trained in this area (moral education). (S003\_F1)*

Theme 6: Positive impact of MCE on personal development of both teachers and students

*a. Primary School Sessions*

Principals reported on various benefits of MCE to both students' and teachers' development. In terms of students' benefits, principals acknowledged that it was seldom the case that students reap immediate benefits. Rather, the outcomes of MCE are long-term changes in students' values and attitudes.

*I have always taught my students to be filial and polite. If someone told me that students may make immediate changes as a result of one particular activity, I would be skeptical (P001\_F4).*

*That is why I believe in sustainability and consistency... it is like watering plants; when you water your plants daily, you will see it growing into a tree over time. However, if you ask whether there are any immediate outcomes, it is unlikely to be the case, as one may not detect subtle growth. That is why I always say that as teachers, success comes only in the future, we are farmers (P001\_F2).*

*Because students are all seeds, hearts, you will not see the changes immediately. For subjects like mathematics, it is obvious when a student gets the answer correct. However, moral values and attitudes may be seen through the behaviors of students, how they interact with others. It is not something that can be easily assessed, it is a long-term journey. Growth itself is a beneficial outcome, even if it is step-by-step (P001\_F1).*

The benefits of MCE are not limited to students. Principals also reported growth in teachers through the implementation of MCE. First, teachers gained a sense of job satisfaction, as well as reflection during teaching of MCE, which also enabled teachers to enhance their own virtuous qualities.

*Witnessing students' growth serves as an indication of teachers' growth and success as well. Teachers are touched to see that their inputs result in positive changes in their students (P001\_F4).*

*I agree, what makes teachers most touched is when students are able to demonstrate what they have learned through their behaviors. Even if the process of development was difficult, teachers are often deeply moved to see the “birth” of the curriculum. As teachers, we pursue beauty and kindness, otherwise we would not be teachers. That is why teachers gain a sense of satisfaction when they have conducted an effective class (P001\_F3).*

*I think for teachers, the most challenging point of implementing MCE is the requirement of patience. It is different from teaching students knowledge; rather, it demands teachers to internalize the values being nurtured. The teachers’ own values and whether they are in line with the school or the society becomes crucial. At the end of the day, whether the teacher “buys in” to MCE, they have still undergone the process of reflection, internalization, and added in their own views. Thus, the implementation of MCE becomes a source of personal and professional development for teachers... (P004\_M3).*

b. *Secondary School Sessions*

The interviewees all agree that the implementation of MCE has benefitted the students in character building and self-understanding. One interesting observation is the interviewees discovered “accidentally” that the implementation process has nurtured teachers’ personal development as well. As reflection is stressed in delivering MCE curriculum, teachers have reflected their needs (including personal needs and societal needs), relationship with different stakeholders in the society, their capacity and ability in “teaching” MCE in school settings, and their own character building.

*It is all about personal example (“shen-jiao” in Chinese). I have not noticed that we are spending much effort in nurturing students’ character and I could do it. (S001\_M2)*

*In fact, the life education is for ourselves as well. It [the life education] happens in the school for everyone. For example, nurturing our civic virtues; being more empathic to others' feelings or interactions in between; and understanding the importance of politeness. These are for all of us in school (S003\_F1)*

## Theme 7: Limited time and capacity of developing moral education in addition to heavy academic development

### *a. Primary School Sessions*

One of the greatest challenges faced by primary schools, especially teachers, lies in the limited time and capacity to develop moral education on top of academic demands. In Hong Kong's society, academic achievement is highly prioritized. At times, this emphasis is made possible at the expense of classes and activities associated with character building and nurturance of civic responsibility which are perceived as being "less imperative".

*The reason why I believe that MCE is so difficult to implement is the fact that its effectiveness depends on whether the teacher themselves see it as important, i.e., the perceptions of teachers towards MCE... (P002\_M1)*

*The most challenging situation occurs when teachers do not understand "why" they are doing what they are doing. Once they become aware of the rationale, they will be able to seek ways to implement it. The greatest difficulties lie in teachers having to gain the knowledge, and understand the meaning, importance, and rationale behind the implementation of MCE. If teachers trust in the aforementioned, they will be willing to do it... (P003\_F1).*

### *b. Secondary School Sessions*

The majority of the interviewees, especially the school principals, found it difficult to balance the academic development and MCE nurturance of the secondary school students. The school

principals (including the vice-principals with teaching duties) shared frankly that the academic development is mostly the priority of the school.

*It really depends on how you (the principal) prioritize, that is to focus on academic achievement or character building of the students. Originally, you wish your students to be with good characters, obedient, presentable, and polite. But at the same time, you are urging them to do well in academic development...then you cut their time for extra-curricular activities. And you ask the teachers to have make-ups instead of letting the students do services in the community. (S005\_M2)*

This skewed focus on academic development furthers the dilemmatic torn of the school principals to develop both academic and moral education, even if principals and teachers agree that character-building is the basis of education and crucial for students' development. The principals and teachers lamented this "give-in" to the reality of advancing students' academic development instead of spending time on character building.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings from the focus groups consisting of principals and teachers from both primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong revealed the importance and positive outcomes of MCE for both students' and teachers' growth and development. These observations are in line with the findings reported by Shek and Ma (2017) that teachers overwhelmingly saw the value of moral and civic education and they believed that moral and civic education would promote the holistic development of young people. Similar findings were revealed in the studies by Shek and Lin (2017) and Shek and Yu (2018). Besides, the stakeholders saw the positive impact of moral and civic education on the students, an observation which is in line with the literature that moral development is closely linked with other aspects of student development.



As far as Government guidelines are concerned, while EDB has provided a set of guidelines for the implementation of MCE locally, schools find the guidelines to be abstract and at times, misaligned with the schools' mission, religious background, students' developmental needs, and the ever-changing environment of society. Again, these observations concur with the findings reported by Shek and Ma (2017) that the teachers raised questions about the support from EDB.

Regarding the curriculum materials for MCE, many schools have developed their own set of MCE materials through the penetration in the formal curriculum, as well as incorporation of character-building into extra-curricular activities, namely school assemblies, sports teams, life and death studies, and other experiential activities. While these initiatives are commendable, we have to be mindful that it is a scientific question regarding whether the "home-baked" programs are effective in promoting the moral and civic development of young people. Indeed, there is a need to develop evidence-based moral and civic development curriculum for young people. Good will alone is simply not enough (Shek, 2008). A review of the existing policy on resources allocated to schools to implement moral and civic education is in order.

Principals have shared that the resources provided to the schools from EDB is insufficient and would like to see more on-site support and teachers training. This observation is also consistent with the findings of Shek and Ma (2017) that 32.5% of the respondents perceived that the support provided by EDB was not sufficient.

In conclusion, while the value of MCE is apparent, more work and support are needed for its effective implementation at the individual, school, familial, and societal levels.

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## Appendix 1

和富慈善基金  
香港理工大學應用社會科學  
香港德育及公民教育推行情況及前瞻研究計劃  
老師焦點小組訪談指引

### 介紹

「大家好！歡迎各位參加是次焦點小組訪談，我是 \_\_\_\_\_，旁邊的是 \_\_\_\_\_。是次研究計劃是由和富慈善基金贊助，與香港理工大學應用社會科學系石丹理講座教授團隊合作的，希望探索香港中、小學「德育及公民教育」推行的情況。這次焦點小組訪談目的是特意探索老師對「德育及公民教育」推行的看法，及老師在推行過程的經驗分享。

您們所表達的所有意見都沒有對錯之分。我們期許您們提供不同的觀點。請各位自在地分享您的寶貴意見，即使您的意見與前一位發言者的所提出的意見是完全不同的也是寶貴的。

在這次討論中我們會有錄音，這樣我們就不會遺漏了各位意見。但是在書面報告中，我們不會提到任何人的名字。所有的意見都會保密的。

我(主持人)在這裡的目的主要是提出問題、傾聽各位的意見、以及確定每位成員都有分享意見的機會。我們在意的是能否能夠聽到每一位成員的意見。因此如果您說得太多的時候，我可能會提醒你，請您留一點機會給別人。如果你的說話機會比較少，我可能會邀請你發言。我們只是想要確定能聽到每一位成員說話。現在就讓我們開始討論。先讓我們彼此多一些認識，請順著我的右手邊依序自我介紹。」

### 開場提問

1. 您怎樣理解「德育及公民教育」？
2. 以您所知，「德育及公民教育」的意義是甚麼？

### 政策 (Policy)

1. 學校有甚麼德育及公民教育發展政策？
2. 您對於這些政策有甚麼看法？
3. 您在制訂學校德育及公民教育政策時有甚麼理念？(for principal)
4. 您在制訂學校德育及公民教育政策時有甚麼考慮因素？(for principal)

### 管理層 (Leadership)

1. 管理層在推行德育及公民教育時扮演的角色是甚麼？
2. 作為管理層的一員，您怎樣看您在推動德育及公民教育的角色呢？

### 資源/支援 (Resources)

#### (甲) 學校

1. 在推行過程，您認為有甚麼支援老師推動德育及公民教育？支援足夠嗎？
2. 在德育及公民教育這方面，學校有沒有交流文化？（例如：老師與老師；老師與管理層；學校與家長）

#### (乙) 教育局

3. 您認為教育局有清晰的德育及公民教育發展政策嗎？
4. 您認為教育局對學校德育及公民教育的支援足夠嗎？

### 課程 (Curriculum)

1. 在規劃學校德育及公民教育時，您怎樣參考教育局所發出的課程指引？
2. 在推行德育及公民教育時，學校有專責課程(specialized curriculum)嗎？

### 得著 (Perceived benefits)

1. 在推行德育及公民教育，對學生及老師有甚麼得著？

### 預備 (Readiness)

1. 當推行德育及公民教育時，您有幾願意去接受/幾相信會成功？
2. 當推行德育及公民教育時，您有多大信心去令推行成功？
3. 您認為有甚麼因素會令推行成功？

### 總結提問

1. 在推行過程，您認為有甚麼困難呢？
2. 整體而言，學校推行德育及公民教育有效嗎？
3. 有沒有什麼是我們必須討論、卻沒有談到的？





