The Asia-Pacific Network for Moral Education (APNME)

Reflections by
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on APNME's 2012 Conference, held in Chiayi, Taiwan

Research and Practice in Moral Education: Reflection, Dialogue, Interaction

The 7th Annual Conference of The Asia-Pacific Network for Moral Education was held at National Chung Cheng University in Taiwan, 15–17 June 2012. The conference was hosted by the College of Education, National Chung Cheng University and was supported and sponsored by the National Science Council, Ministry of Education and other bodies in Taiwan. There were more than 150 participants representing 17 countries and regions, the majority from Taiwan, Mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, India, Malaysia and Indonesia. Participants included experts in moral education and citizenship education, practitioners in education, psychology, pedagogy and ethics, doctorate students and other students. The conference programme had enlightening keynote speeches, thoughtful plenary sessions, practical professional sessions, an elementary school visit and an optional cultural visit to the Formosan Aboriginal Cultural Village and Sun Moon Lake. Central to the conference theme of "Research and Practice in Moral Education: reflection, dialogue and interaction" was our initial experience witnessing moral education in practice in a local elementary school.

  Keynote speeches were given by Prof. Jiaw Ouyang from National Taiwan Normal University, Dr Monica Taylor from the Institute of Education, University of London, Prof. Stephen J. Thoma from the University of Alabama, Prof. Kristján Kristjánsson from the University of Iceland, and Prof. Michael Winkler from the Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena.

  Prof. Ouyang Jiaw explored what reasonable moral education might be, suggesting that it is to cultivate moral sentiment that reflects both the mind and the heart. With reference to the moral effect, he employed both macro and micro perspectives to illustrate this form of moral education. He thought that the outcome of moral education is to be determined by the collective endeavour of everyone involved and suggested that morality is an art. As an example he gave the tension between new and old expectations for filial piety. Based on these general ideas about morality and moral education, he shared his experiences of moral education in practice.

  Dr Monica Taylor used content analysis to explore moral education trends as reflected in the 945 articles published in the *Journal of Moral Education* (*JME*) from 1971 to 2011. She and her colleague Prof. Chi-Ming (Angela) Lee (National Taiwan Normal University), investigated the disciplinary approaches, key topics, research methodologies and age-related educational levels in the published papers. She articulated interesting and constructive research findings about the trends of moral education over 40 years and pointed out some research gaps in the *JME* coverage, such as early childhood moral education for 0-3 year-olds. She added some personal experiences of her role as editor for *JME* for 35 years.

  Prof. Kristján Kristjánsson gave a philosophical perspective on the relationship between virtue ethics, virtue education and psychology. His presentation was in three parts. First, he charted some

of the history behind these disciplines, particularly the revival of philosophical virtue ethics. Secondly, he analyzed why the promise of virtue-inspired moral education had not really been fulfilled. Thirdly, he dealt with empirical moral psychology and suggested how moral psychology could be re-orientated to contribute to moral education on more practical levels. He used an interesting analogy: "the virtue ethicist brings the gun, the moral psychologist the ammunition and the moral educator the expertise on execution."

Prof. Stephen J. Thoma presented an historical overview with some anecdotal stories of the neo-Kohlbergian approach to morality research. He reviewed the positions of the Minnesota approach he framed in collaboration with Jim Rest, Darcia Narvaez and Mickey Bebeau. He then identified research traditions particularly influenced by the neo-Kolbergian model. In discussing development beyond the Kohlbergian approach he interpreted three clusters of items used, namely the personal interest schema, the maintaining norms schema and the post-conventional schema. He articulated the experience of applying the neo-Kohlbergian approach to the Defining Issues Test (DIT), which was the measure of choice in intervention studies, evaluations of ethics programmes and college student outcome assessments.

Prof. Michael Winkler spoke of the precariousness, insecurity and frailty in modern societies and the consequences of this for moral education.

The varied parallel sessions, reflecting regional or national concerns in the context of global issues, were wide-ranging and covered topics such as educational practitioners implementing moral education, moral education responding to new trends in technology and media, integrating moral education in different subjects and the cultivation of virtue in university education.

Scholars from Mainland China took up the following topics: citizenship education in Mainland China, Chinese moral culture, moral personality, moral relativism and moral responsibility and one professor philosophically analyzed Kant's virtue theory for moral education, which made the assumption that morality is the main feature of rational beings. Kant thought that human beings might become "rational animals" after surpassing their animality via education; moral education should aim to cultivate the virtuous person and if this is to be achieved then a critical examination of teaching is necessary.

One presenter reflected on current citizenship education methods, describing positive and negative conditions, and explored possible approaches in the future. There are four facets to positive conditions in the formation of citizenship: the information market, government management, social organizations and the extension of public spaces. On the other hand, negative conditions in the formation of citizenship are: plurality of subjects, a lack of the sense of rule of law, consumer entertainment preference and public opinion. An historical perspective was also given, tracking the development of citizenship education for reforming national character from an earlier time.

Presentations from Hong Kong were diverse: body consciousness for moral development; the ethics of care of the self and others based on a Foucauldian perspective of adolescent mindfulness; the implementation of values education in schools based on a case study of two primary schools in Hong Kong; middle school leaders from the perspective of directors of moral education in China; and embodying moral education to gain happiness and awareness through mindfulness practices.

A participant from Macau outlined an action-research project which included documentary analysis. The project aimed to solve conflicts and arguments caused by cultural differences among children in multicultural classrooms through cooperative learning activities.

Participants from India were interested in ethnic and cultural groups and moral education. Their

project finding was that younger generations developed their knowledge about ethics more through electronic media than through traditional story-telling. They concluded that technological developments consequent on industrialization, urbanization and migration affected the traditional mechanisms of values education (primarily through the family) which sustain the Indian cultural way of life.

The research of a Malaysian participant focused on the content of moral education (and a variety of moral education programmes) in response to within-country debate about it as a school subject and its mode of instruction. Shared values in educating for a morally cohesive society were identified to help in addressing society's concerns, and real-life moral dilemma discussion (Re-LiMDD) was recommended as an approach to teach moral education.

An Indonesian scholar shared her research on using problem-solving in character education with the students of Yogyakarta State University to explore ways of integrating character education with sociology, anthropology and social science at the college level. Building problem-solving skills could be done in two ways, through individual reflection and assigning a task to groups. Other methods explored were the use of stories as moral education for young children and designing a moral education-based textbook as an alternative model for integrating moral education in English language teaching.

Participants from Japan spoke of moral education across disciplines. One explored curriculum development in upper secondary schools and focused on classifying the benefits and problems of adopting an integrated approach for moral and career education. Another compared the responses of students from teacher education and economics colleges to financial morality topics in Japan. Another briefly described the main principles of what Chikuro Hiroike called 'supreme morality' together with the significance of moralogy in the global world.

There were also presentations on research conducted cooperatively with a group of APNME members from Taiwan and Japan proposing an international lesson plan aiming at the cultivation of consciousness of life for mutual support in Asia's diverse societies. One interesting finding was that the importance of life was associated with actual time and money by Taiwanese children while it was recognized mainly in the abstract term 'importance' by Japanese children.

Many Taiwanese academics and doctoral students took part in this international conference and their presentations were very broad-ranging. One described questionnaire findings that ethical ideology and positive psychology had a significant positive effect on adjustment to life, but work stress had a direct negative effect on life adjustment. Another presenter proposed that through a cosmopolitan multicultural perspective each society had the freedom to establish its own system with particular goals of additional social justice, provided that these goals did not conflict with the supreme idea of human rights. One doctoral student gave a report about his comparative study of literacy education in the media in Taiwan and England. A case study of good character in an elementary school by another doctoral student found that proactive character education, the recording process, core values, students' character development, excellent administration and school-based character education development played key roles. One presenter analysed Taiwanese government policies, examining the online policy, internet communication and management situation of Taiwan's educational institutions. Another argued that success in academic achievement entailed a halo effect on moral conduct in the Chinese educational context, a notion appearing in earlier literature and revealing that academic achievement is highly regarded in the Chinese educational setting. This study further elucidated the striking academic-moral link, which has long-standing

roots in Confucian philosophy where knowledge and morality have been seen as intrinsically intertwined.

Presenters from elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific spoke on topics such as: the purpose of moral education, teachers' spirituality, punishment in classrooms, discipline in moral education, citizenship education for undergraduates within a critical thinking strategy, and Malaysian moral education development from 1980 in the context of nation–building.

A doctoral student from Australia presented the use of the Listening Guide to analyze moral education experience from an applied ethics perspective. The Listening Guide is a narrative analysis approach to interviews with four distinctive steps that align with the four applied ethics dimensions of the hermeneutic, appreciative, appraisive and transformative, namely: listening for the plot, listening to the 'I', 'we', 'they' voices, focusing on the contrapuntal voices to listen to the ethical features of the moral education experience, and a final summation that provides a re-interpretation of a community experience.

There was also a poster session with topics such as moral education, citizenship education, environmental justice, cyberspace knowledge for education, teachers' action research and service learning. The APNME Best Poster Prize was awarded to Chih-Ming CHANG and Chien CHOU for their poster *Instructional Implications and Teaching Concerns of the Virtues of e-Character Education*.

In summary, there were a wide range of thoughtful presentations and participants gained much from them and the ensuing dialogue and interactions. The benefits included learning more about and from other parts of the region, critical peer evaluations and improving of research abilities as collectively we drew on our combined insights, experiences and perspectives.