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# The planning, implementation and evaluation of a character-based school culture project in Taiwan

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This study focused on the planning, implementation and evaluation of a character-based school culture (CBSC) project in Taiwan. The project integrated the principles of justice, caring and developmental discipline and was influenced by several well-known American models of character education programmes. The CBSC project was conducted in a Taiwanese elementary school from August 2005 to July 2007. The methods included symposia, workshops, meetings, interviews, surveys, observations and experimentation. The findings were: (1) the planning, implementation and evaluation of the CBSC project revealed numerous strengths and a few limitations; (2) the CBSC project demonstrated its coherence and feasibility in practice; and (3) the results of this case study showed the CBSC project's effectiveness in qualitative but not quantitative terms. Several recommendations are made to schools and researchers on how to use the CBSC project as a basis for instilling an effective, high-quality, character-based school culture in Taiwanese schools and also in schools elsewhere.

## Introduction

### *Background and purposes*

The implementation of moral and character education in the Taiwanese educational system since the abolition of formal moral curricula in 1998 is an important issue (C.-M. Lee, 2004a). Before that, Taiwanese elementary and junior high schools had taught 'moral' subjects for approximately five decades beginning with the Nationalist government's move from China to Taiwan in 1949. The Taiwanese government promulgated *The guidelines for a nine-year joint curricula plan of elementary and junior high schools* in 1998 and had it fully implemented by August 2004 (Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 2003). As a result there is no longer a specific moral education course in Taiwanese schools. Following the abolition of formal moral curricula, a number of Taiwanese scholars and educators sought to rebuild and implement

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moral and character education, believing that traditional cultural values curricula had been removed from the schools. Others argued that moral and character education should not be merely a reflection of traditional morality nor confined to direct moral teaching. They believed it still possible for educators to deliver modern moral and character education through various curricula, such as core curricula and school activities (Dan, 1998; C.-M. Lee, 2002; F.-J. Lee, 2004).

In response to concerns expressed by Taiwanese academics and school officials, the Taiwan Ministry of Education (TMOE) released a Moral and Character Education Improvement Program (MCEIP), which was drafted by the author in late 2004 and amended in 2006. This programme offers guidelines for implementing moral and character education in primary and secondary schools, as well as post-secondary education. The programme's main goals (Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 2006) are: to facilitate the development of students' moral thinking and their ability to select, reflect on, cherish and identify with core ethical values and codes of conduct; to develop a character-based moral culture in Taiwanese schools, one involving teachers, students, administrators, parents and community leaders; to strengthen the roles parents and community leaders play in schools' moral and character education; and to give non-political organisations, cultural and educational foundations, as well as the mass media, a larger role in schools' moral and character education. Berkowitz and Bier (2004) indicated that moral and character education in the USA has historically been a practice but not a science and there have been few studies on the effectiveness of this practice. Similarly, in Taiwan existing moral and character education programmes tend to lack a clear scientific basis; a research-based model for moral and character education, compatible with the goals of MCEIP, still needs to be developed.

Therefore, this study's foremost aim was to provide a number of professional strategies, for both educators and administrators, which would fit the Taiwanese contemporary social context and moral education policy. This two-year study, funded by the Taiwan National Science Council, focused on how to plan, implement and evaluate a 'character-based school culture' (CBSC) project. The study's purposes were as follows: (1) to conduct a thorough analysis of the theoretical bases of schools' cultural and moral atmosphere; (2) to analyse several well-known models for a character-based education programme and integrate them into the Taiwanese educational system; (3) to examine the feasibility of planning, implementing and evaluating a CBSC project in Taiwanese elementary schools; (4) to explore the effectiveness of such a CBSC project and examine its strengths and limitations; and (5) to make recommendations for the implementation of an effective, high-quality, character-based school culture, both in theory and in practice.

### *Positive school culture*

School culture is an important contextual variable influencing students' adjustment to school (Higgins-D'Alessandro & Sadh, 1998). It is obviously desirable to have schools that are moral communities to improve individuals' moral development and

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school moral atmosphere. By moral communities we mean school cultures with justice, caring and developmental discipline, all of which are interrelated and central to a modern theory of civic and moral education. Previous research (e.g. C.-M. Lee, 2002, 2003) indicated that Taiwanese school culture has had a tendency towards the caring approach, but was weak in terms of justice and developmental discipline approaches. Therefore, one of the aims of Taiwanese recent educational reforms, as well as the CBSC project's purpose, was to build a positive school culture strong in justice, caring and discipline.

The idea of justice was partly adopted from the Just Community approach constructed by Kohlberg, Power, Higgins-D'Alessandro and other colleagues beginning in the 1970s. Higgins-D'Alessandro (1995) explained the meaning of a just community as follows:

> The just community approach represents the effort to balance justice with community to introduce the powerful appeal of the collective, while both protecting the rights of individual students and promoting their moral growth…The justice side is embodied in the democratic process and institutions of the program and in the focus on moral discussions, consideration of fairness, rights and duties. The community side is an attempt to create a more ideal form of school society in which the pragmatic aspects of schooling…are transformed by a 'sense of community'… (p. 58)

In the just community approach the assumption is that a positive school culture can develop over time (Power *et al.*, 1989, p. 104). Kohlberg and his colleagues described 'stages of the sense of community values' based on their long-term empirical research. Among those three stages, the highest stage, exemplifying a desirable school culture, is that 'membership in the community is understood in terms of entering into a social contract to respect the norms and ideals of the group' (p. 119). In addition, the engine for moving the school forward toward greater justice is participatory democracy, which may foster members' responsibility and identification with the school (Power & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008, p. 236).

The idea of caring was borrowed from Gilligan's Morality of Care and Noddings's caring approach to moral education. Gilligan advocated caring and relationship and brought women's voices into the domain of psychological theory to reframe the conversation between women and men (Gilligan, 1982/1993, p. xxvi). In her book, *In a different voice*, she emphasised 'voice' as a litmus test of relationships and a measure of psychological health; and 'difference' as a marker of the human condition rather than as a problem to be solved (pp. xvi–xviii). Noddings (2002) also indicated that caring is a mutually satisfying relationship between caregivers and cared-for persons, without regard to gender. She regarded modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation as four components of moral education from the caring perspective (pp. 1–21). Based on care theory, Noddings (2008, pp. 166–167) stressed that teachers as professionals should have the skill sets to respond to the expressed needs of students and to build a moral climate in school which reinforces students' self-worth and moral decency.

The idea of discipline originated from the moral theory of E. Durkheim, who analysed morality as having three basic elements: discipline, attachment to social

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groups and autonomy (Lukes, 1973, pp. 112–119). Durkheim advocated that discipline is essential to ensuring consistency and regularity of conduct and also a sense of authority, which serves to evoke desired behavioural responses and also has a restraining effect (Saha, 2001, pp. 26–27). In his book, *Moral education*, Durkheim (1925) argued that:

> The most essential element of character is this capacity for restraint…which allows us to contain our passions, our desires, our habits, and subject them to law…It teaches us that conduct involves effort; that it is moral action only when we restrict some inclination, suppress some appetite and moderate some tendency…All discipline has double objectives: to promote certain regularity in people's conduct and to provide them with determinate goals that at the same time limit their horizons…Discipline is thus useful, not only in the interests of society…but for the welfare of the individual himself. (pp. 46–48)

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The developmental approach to discipline is different from a traditional approach (Watson, 2008, p. 198). In general, while traditional discipline relies on authoritarian practice to control classroom and maintain school order, 'developmental discipline' focuses on building respectful and cooperative relationships, establishing shared norms and goals and promoting moral discussion and reflection in order to establish a caring, just and democratic learning community (Watson, 2008, pp. 197–198, 181).

These educational approaches to justice, caring and discipline share common traits and are complementary to one another. In Kohlberg's view, caring and justice were not two moral values that connected in the life cycle, but facets of the same morality (Power & Makogon, 1995). Gilligan asserted a two-voice model of moral maturity and addressed justice and caring as coherent moral perspectives or languages intertwined in dialogue with each other (Reed, 1997, p. 236). Moreover, the goals of discipline stressed by the Positive Discipline Association (n.d.) is to help students feel a sense of connection, to be mutually respectful and to encourage them to be responsible, respectful and resourceful members of their communities in the future.

### *American character education programmes*

This study adapted several research-based character education programmes implemented in the USA and transferred them into the Taiwanese educational system. The Character Education Partnership (CEP: Lickona *et al.*, 2003) addresses *CEP's eleven principles of effective character education*, which is the cornerstone of CEP's philosophy on effective character education. Each principle outlines vital aspects of character education initiatives (e.g. curriculum, staff development and students' parents) that should not be overlooked in programme implementation. The CEP (n.d.) also provides *Character education quality standards*, which is a practical self-assessment tool of character education for educators and administrators. Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (Respect and Responsibility) (n.d.), whose goals and function are similar to the CEP's, developed *A 12-point comprehensive approach to character education* and *The twelve component assessment and planning*

*program*. The former is composed of nine classroom strategies (e.g. creating a democratic classroom environment) and three school-wide strategies (e.g. creating a positive moral culture in the school) and the latter is an assessment tool for school character education. The CBSC project was informed by the CEP's comprehensive approach to implementing and evaluating school culture.

In addition, the CBSC project adopted the idea of developmental discipline from the Child Development Project (CDP: Developmental Studies Center, n.d.) and a step-by-step procedure to implement character education from CHARACTER-Plus. The Developmental Studies Center has, for more than 15 years, used the CDP's research-based K-6 programme that builds classroom as well as school-wide communities and embodies the idea of developmental discipline. Research has indicated that the CDP programme has had positive effects on students' social, ethical and intellectual development (Battistich, 2008, p. 336). CHARACTER-Plus, a division of cooperating school districts in greater St. Louis, has become the largest community-wide project in the USA. It advocates a process that secures community consensus on values and weaves character education throughout school life. Its practices are synthesised as the *Ten essentials of the CHARACTER-plus process* and the Caring School Community Project (CHARACTER-Plus, 2004). The CBSC project was also influenced by Minnesota's Community Voices and Character Education Project, which is a research-based, systematic and holistic approach to character education, as well as by a theoretical model for Integrative Ethical Education (IEE) (Narvaez *et al.*, 2004; Narvaez, 2006). The IEE model is presented in a step-by-step format beginning with 'Step 1: Establish a caring relationship with each student' (Narvaez, 2008, p. 316).

In sum, these above-mentioned character education programmes showed common characteristics: a focus on positive school culture; diverse and integrated strategies; systematised step-wise project development and implementation; and research-based programme evaluation. Therefore, the author adapted those characteristics to the planning, implementation and evaluation of this CBSC project. For instance, the planning of the CBSC project followed *CEP's eleven principles of effective character education*; the implementation of the CBSC project referred to *A twelve-point comprehensive approach to character education*; and the evaluation of the CBSC project imitated the CHARACTER-Plus process and CEP's *Character education quality standards*.

### *Distinguishing features of the CBSC project*

Drawing on these established theories and programmes, the CBSC project chiefly focused on developing a comprehensive modern moral and character education programme that aimed to build a positive school culture. This project was unlike any other model of formal moral curricula implemented in Taiwanese schools over the past five decades. It was also different from the main features of Taiwanese traditional Confucian moral education and from the so-called 'moral/character education' sponsored by various religious or cultural organisations, of which the

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main purposes are to educate students to be obedient and polite and to reduce students' misbehaviour.

This CBSC project, which was influenced by certain American character education programmes and approaches to school culture, had 10 distinguishing features that together demonstrated its coherence and feasibility. It was a research-based project: (1) advocating principles of justice, caring and developmental discipline; (2) requiring and displaying collaboration among researcher(s) and educators; (3) revealing a school-based culture and its characteristics; (4) showing multiple creative, democratic methods and strategies for character education; (5) stressing the principal's moral leadership and mutual cooperation with the administrative office; (6) focusing on teachers' professional development in character education; (7) encouraging the involvement of students parents as educational partners; (8) emphasising student empowerment through various meetings, activities and classes; (9) featuring inter-school activities to provide students with experience of service learning and connections with the community; and (10) highlighting systematic procedures for planning, implementing and evaluating character education.

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## Methods

### *Participants*

The CBSC project was conducted by the author, two assistants, five graduate students and staff in one elementary school (here called School A) as an experimental school for two years, from August 2005 to July 2007. School A, founded in 1946 and located in central Taipei, is a well-known Taiwanese elementary school. It has over 2300 students and comprises 64 classes, plus four classes for special education from Grade 1–6 (age 6–12 years) and seven kindergarten classes. It is famous for its Chinese language instruction and collaborative research with scholars. In early 2005, the principal of School A wanted to focus on moral and character education and to improve its leading role among Taipei's primary schools. The author was looking for a suitable school for this study, so the principal and the author agreed to cooperate.

The CBSC project had both a school-wide and class-wide design, so almost all members of School A, including staff, students and parents, were involved in the implementation. The author utilised both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to better understand the effects of this CBSC project. The study employed a quasi-experimental design to compare the survey scores of three groups of students: the Experimental Group in School A, Control Group 1 in School A, and Control Group 2 in another elementary school (hereafter called School B). The Experimental Group comprised two fifth-grade (average age 11) and mixed ability, classes (called Class 1 and Class 2 in this project, with 34 students each) of School A, whose teachers voluntarily took part in the entire range of CBSC activities and lessons. Control Group 1 was two other fifth-grade classes in School A (Class 3 and Class 4, with 33 and 34 students, respectively) and took part in only the school-wide CBSC activities. Control Group 2 was two fifth-grade classes (Class 5 and Class 6,

with 35 and 34 students, respectively) from School B, similar to School A in scale and characteristics, but which did not carry out the CBSC project. In addition, this study examined observations and video-recording of all activities and lessons in the experimental group, as well as interviewing seven staff (the principal, the director of the office of academic affairs, three administrators and two homeroom teachers of the Experimental Group), two representatives of students' parents and 14 students (representatives of the students' self-governing organisation and the Experimental Group) of School A to discern the effects of the project.

*Procedures*

This CBSC project was divided into the planning, implementation and evaluation stages throughout the entire research period.

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*Planning.* In the planning stage, which lasted approximately six months, there were three main procedures. First, the author had a number of talks and meetings with the staff, students' parents and students in School A to explain what the CBSC project would be doing during the time they were asked for their consent and support. Second, approximately 20 people from School A organised the Committee for School Character Education (CSCE), a group that included the principal, the director of the office of academic affairs (the coordinator of this project), the directors of all other offices, representatives of teachers, students' parents and students. The CSCE was a policy-making and support system (e.g. human and financial resources) for the project. Third, the author held workshops for CSCE members to help them understand the principles and strategies of the CBSC project and discussed how to implement the project into School A's curricula and school-wide activities.

*Implementation.* The implementation stage, which lasted approximately one-and-a-half years, consisted of three main procedures. First, as recommended by meetings of the different groups, all students, students' parents and staff voted in their respective groups on certain 'core ethical values' based on School A's characteristics. Second, through regular meetings of the CSCE the project defined and set out codes of conduct based on core ethical values for students, administrators, students' parents and teachers. Third, the project infused School A's core ethical values and the central components of the CBSC project with various curricula in order to build a positive school culture. Strategies included: school-wide and informal curriculum activities (e.g. strengthening the active role of the students' self-government organisation in promoting school character education; discussing the meaning of the school's core ethical values in students' class meetings; making a name tag embossed with School A's core ethical values for every student); class-wide formal and informal curricula throughout the academic year (e.g. character education as part of classes in language, social studies, music, PE, class meetings etc.); and inter-school activities (e.g. mixing service learning with inter-school interactive activities etc.).

The author guided five graduate students and two volunteer teachers of School A in developing 22 teaching plans, each plan lasting for approximately three to four

class periods, for all the above activities and lessons and then provided the staff with this plan as a basis of instruction. For example, the teacher discussed with students 'filial piety' and 'caring' infused in a story titled 'Grandmother and Taiwanese traditional dramas' in Chinese classes. The teachers also discussed with students how to set up friendly and fair rules in order to cooperate with each other when they exercised in PE classes. During the development phase the author held several meetings and one workshop for CSCE members to discuss whether these teaching plans were suitable for use and how to revise them.

*Evaluation.* The evaluation stage, which lasted approximately six months, overlapping with the implementation stage, focused on the effects of the CBSC project. The evaluation depended on five strategies, both qualitative and quantitative approaches. First, the CSCE held regular monthly meetings to reflect on and try to improve the overall effectiveness of this project. Second, the author surveyed the students of the experimental classes in order to ascertain their perceptions of the effects of this project on their school culture. Third, the author conducted individual interviews with the CSCE members and representatives of the students, students' parents, teachers and administrators in order to explore their perceptions and gather their suggestions regarding the CBSC project. Fourth, through observing, recording and analysing all the activities and lessons of the Experimental Group, the author examined to what degree the implementation process conformed to the principles of justice, caring and developmental discipline of the CBSC project and how to enable it to fit still more closely to these principles. Finally, a workshop was conducted to review the effects of this CBSC project and to share experiences with other invited Taiwanese researchers and schools.

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### *Research questions and instruments*

*Qualitative approach.* The research questions of the qualitative study were: (1) did School A develop core ethical values and codes of conduct by means of democratic methods?; (2) did School A follow the principles of the CBSC project, as well as their chosen core ethical values and codes of conduct, and integrate them fully, through diverse strategies, into school missions, school life and most school subjects?; (3) did School A's principal, administrative staff and teachers actively learn about character education and perceive the CBSC project as essential to their role in their work and teaching?; (4) did School A's students' parents perceive the importance of character education and actively take part in the CBSC project?; (5) did School A effectively provide students with opportunities for moral action and moral leadership within and outside the school and did the students benefit from these experiences?; and (6) did School A's staff, students and the students' parents perceive the progress made in the creation of a school culture with justice, caring and developmental discipline made possible by the CBSC project?

*Quantitative approach.* There were two research questions in the quantitative study: (1) was there a significant difference between pre- and post-test scores in the

Experimental Group to reveal changes in students' perceptions of their school culture after the CBSC project was completed?; and (2) was there a significant difference among the three groups, Experimental Group, Control Group 1 and Control Group 2, with regard to post-test scores and did the Experimental Group score higher than Control Group 1 and 2 in order to demonstrate the CBSC project's effectiveness? The research instrument used in this study was the School Life and Character Questionnaire (SLCQ), with 63 multiple-choice items and composed of five sub-scales: Scale A: Perceptions of student respect (e.g. students treat classmates with respect); Scale B: Perceptions of student friendship and belonging (e.g. students help each other, even if they are not friends); Scale C: Perceptions of students' shaping of their environment (e.g. students are involved in helping to solve school problems); Scale D: Perceptions of students' behaviour when they are disciplined only in positive ways (e.g. teachers usually enforce classroom rules in a just manner); and Scale S: Students' moral judgement in responding to stories of theft and helping, for example:

> Fung comes into the class. She sees that most of the students are already there but the teacher hasn't arrived yet. She goes out of the classroom, leaving her bag open on the table. Ming, one of Fung's classmates, looks in her bag and sees a NT$1000 note.
>
> Imagine that Fung and Ming are your classmates. How many of your classmates, do you think would steal the money in a situation like that?
>
> (1) None of them; (2) Some of them; (3) About half of them; (4) All or most of them.

Scales A, B and C, in a five-point Likert format, were translated into Chinese from the School as Caring Community Profile (SCCP II student edition) designed by Lickona and Davidson (2003), the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs. Scale S was a revision and Chinese translation of 'Two Stories' (Theft and Helping) of the School Moral Atmosphere Questionnaire (SMAQ) created by Host and Brugman (1998). Since the SMAQ was intended for students in secondary education, the author revised it in order to make it appropriate to primary school students. The author also added Scale D regarding an idea of discipline based on the Taiwanese school context and the principles of the CBSC project. To confirm the validity of the SLCQ, three researchers and four teachers were invited for in-depth discussion and revision of the questionnaire. In addition, the reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) of the SLCQ, with 0.819 on the pilot test and 0.895 on the pre-test, indicated a high internal consistency. The results of the survey of 192 students of the Experimental Group, Control Group 1 and Control Group 2 were coded and then statistically compared by *t*-test and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA: the pre-test of this study was taken as a control variable) by using SPSS for PC 15.0.

## Findings and discussion

### *The strengths and limitations of the project*

*Strengths.* Five strengths of the CBSC project in School A were identified during the planning, implementation and evaluation period:

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(1) The principal greatly supported the project; she had aspirations and goals regarding the promotion of character education in School A and a strong desire to be a role model for students and staff, she also displayed strong moral leadership in administrative affairs.
(2) The director of the office of academic affairs and her assistant were excellent coordinators. They encouraged and communicated with staff, students and students' parents in a transparent and patient fashion. They communicated with and gave recommendations to the author on a regular basis, in order to implement the CBSC project more efficiently and effectively.
(3) There were good relationships among administrators, teachers, students and students' parents in School A. The school enjoyed a good reputation among Taiwanese elementary schools both academically and in teachers' professional circles. Its established school culture helped the CBSC project to overcome several difficulties smoothly, e.g. school administrators and students' parents supported the Experimental Group teachers to exchange certain curricula and to take care of students when inter-school activities were held.
(4) School A had a positive atmosphere which allowed for teachers' professional development and mutual cooperation, encouraged parents' participation and reinforced students' moral behaviour.
(5) School A received adequate financial aid (e.g. for copying teaching and learning materials; for small gifts to praise and reinforce students' positive behaviour) from the CBSC project and the TMOE, both of which contributed to the implementation of the project.

These factors are partly consistent with the results of the project 'What Works in Character Education?' conducted by Berkowitz and Bier (2004). They speak of similar factors that improve the quality of character education, such as 'moral leadership', 'adults as role models', 'staff development', 'parent involvement' and 'student bonding to school'.

*Limitations.* The CBSC project also had several limitations:

(1) Few Taiwanese elementary teachers and administrators have professional expertise in the field of moral and character education, consequently the CBSC project provided workshops and meetings to communicate with and prepare the staff of School A. However, in a school of 2300 students, the principal and staff had to handle countless administrative affairs every day and the teachers had a heavy teaching load, consequently, they struggled to promote the CBSC project at the outset. In addition, it was not easy for them to fully realise or effectively practise the principles and strategies of the CBSC project, as they were constrained by only three workshops and a handful of meetings held through the duration of the project.
(2) Some students' parents had qualms about the CBSC project and refused to take part in it. Some other parents misunderstood the CBSC project as being a cure-all for resolving all the school's and students' problems. The second group

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had excessive expectations, while the first group had reduced expectations of the project. Both ideas were extreme and harmful to the project. In addition, the Parents' Association (PA) in School A was unable to sway enough parents to participate in the schools' activities, so only a small number of students' parents regularly took part in this project.

(3) Students in School A (like other Taipei students) had a great deal of academic pressure, so they did not have enough time or were not allowed by their teachers or parents to take part in many project activities or meetings. Moreover, both the author and the staff of School A adapted and transformed traditional moral/character education into a modern research-based character education. The author had to adjust certain ideals in order to accommodate to the Taiwanese educational situation. For example, this CBSC project was unable to apply a 'direct democracy' or 'radical democracy' method, which is one of the essentials of a just-community-based school-wide programme, because School A is large and some of the staff refused to participate due to their busy schedules. Hence, the author tried to infuse the spirit of democracy into several activities and programmes included within the curriculum, such as holding monthly meetings of students' representatives and classes in participant democracy and discussion of moral issues.

(4) The author was the key organiser of the CBSC project and also a participant observer and evaluator. Due to an active and ongoing developmental role and presence in school, it is likely that the author would have influenced perceptions of the project. Therefore, the author utilised both qualitative and quantitative approaches to evaluate the project and a workshop was held after the experimental period in which five researchers and the staff of the schools were invited to objectively review the effectiveness of the project.

(5) The most complicated and troubling issues for the CBSC project were how to transfer and implement the project in every class and how to maintain sustainable development in School A. That is, the CBSC project should have been long-term instead of being only a short-term research project. The CBSC project should ideally have been School A's programme instead of merely a professor's project. However, the principal of School A retired at the completion of the CBSC project. The new principal of School A subsequently modified moral and character education to make it more passive as there were no CSCE or formal character education programmes. Although the great majority of the administrators and teachers still held the same positions, they felt the principal was the key person to promote moral and character education in School A.

### *Core ethical values decided democratically*

Taiwanese primary schools were at one time familiar with 'core ethical values' (usually called 'Items of Central Virtues'), as proclaimed by the TMOE. In the previous *Curriculum guidelines for morality and health in elementary schools* (Ministry of Education, Tiawan, 1993) the goals for Grade 1 to 6 were for students to: follow

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moral codes and disciplines to cultivate a healthy lifestyle; have proper ethical concepts, basic virtues and high morale; learn to respect humanity and life in order to enrich one's moral and physical health; learn to think and judge critically and develop a sense of responsibility. 'Morality' in the guidelines was defined as eight moral values: benevolence, justice, courtesy, honesty, industriousness and thrift, filial piety, observance of laws and rules and patriotism. However, most schools implemented the Morality class with a tendency towards dogmatism and stereotyping, due to the anti-democratic and retrogressive views of certain educators, which left their colleagues feeling powerless to promote a more modern form of moral education.

This CBSC project offered an opportunity to transform the previous authoritarian approach to a more democratic one that empowered the staff, students and their parents. This was the first time that students and teachers of School A had chosen their own core ethical values, which were manifest in a spirit of participant democracy practised in the campus, contrasting with the usual top-down educational policies and practices. The core ethical value that staff voted for in secret ballots was 'respect'; that chosen by students was 'honesty'; and that chosen by parents was 'filial piety'. The results of the vote for core ethical values in School A are listed in Table 1, and from them came three significant outcomes. First, three school groups (including staff, students' parents and students) were each allowed to have their own 'voice' in discussing and voting for core ethical values. Second, those three core ethical values might be seen as correlating with the principles of the CBSC project. In other words, respect might align closely with justice, filial piety with caring and honesty with positive discipline. Third, some CSCE members interpreted these results as suggesting a psychological need for 'compensation' because they felt the three ethical values to be on the decline in Taiwanese society (e.g. most students' parents voted for filial piety because of their children's disobedience).

Table 1. Summary of the voting on core ethical values in School A

| Groups / Values | Staff | Parents | Students | Total | Chosen core values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Filial piety* | 7 | 470 | 287 | 761 | By parents |
| Benevolence | 3 | 69 | 116 | 188 | |
| Service | 1 | 35 | 68 | 104 | |
| Responsibility | 25 | 420 | 212 | 657 | |
| Respect* | 31 | 297 | 284 | 612 | By staff |
| Honesty* | 11 | 441 | 404 | 856 | By students |
| Cooperation | 2 | 31 | 144 | 177 | |
| Courtesy | 6 | 104 | 171 | 281 | |
| Patriotism | 0 | 29 | 250 | 279 | |
| Law-abidingness | 7 | 68 | 111 | 186 | |
| (null) | 3 | 21 | 13 | 37 | |
| Total number | 96 | 1985 | 2057 | 4138 | |

Note: *the highest ranking among those 10 core ethical values in three different groups

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*Character education integrated into school culture*

This study found that School A followed the principles of the CBSC project, as well as the core ethical values voted for by the staff, students and parents, integrated them fully, through diverse strategies, into the school mission, school life and most school subjects under the guidance of the author. The strategies comprised school-wide activities and hidden curriculum enterprises, class-wide formal and informal curricula and inter-school activities. According to the author's participant observations and interviews with some staff, students and parents, the most impressive activities, in which the students had a lively engagement with their learning, took place in social studies, class meetings and inter-school activities. The CBSC project offered teaching plans for the teachers of School A to integrate 'moral dilemma discussion' in social studies classes. For example, one moral dilemma concerned balancing economic development with environmental protection in Taiwanese mountainous areas. The teachers encouraged students to express their opinions freely, to participate in group discussion, to debate and to make decisions in a just and caring manner. In addition, the class meetings of this project emphasised the ideal of developmental discipline, to build a just and caring class culture. The teachers, using creative strategies provided by this CBSC project, endeavoured to improve students' identity, autonomy and their active engagement in class and school rule-making. Moreover, this project combined service learning with inter-school activities for the experimental students (average age 11) of School A. They were hosts to approximately 50 students (average age 14) of a junior high school in the neighbourhood for four hours. Although they had to prepare to guide the visitors on their campus, make brochures to introduce the school and plan performances for a month in advance, almost all School A's experimental students expressed their enjoyment in participating in these types of activities.

The above findings show the feasibility and effectiveness of integrating the CBSC project into school culture. However, several issues regarding the sustainable development of character education in this context need to be noted. First, this project stressed that each subject (e.g. Chinese language, PE) with its own educational goals, was partly infused rather than wholly replaced by character education. It is important to enhance elementary teachers' ability to integrate character education with many subjects effectively. Second, the project did not expect teachers to keep rigidly to the teaching and activity programmes provided by the project, but focused on teachers in their professions to revise and develop plans best suited to their students and classes. Third, the average time allotted to the CBSC project in the experimental classes was approximately one class period (40 minutes) per week, which was too short. The main obstacle to extending this time was the fact that most teachers and parents usually think of moral and character education as an 'additional activity' and not as part of the 'normal curricula'—i.e. not something that would be asked about in a test. To change teachers' and parents' misapprehension of moral and character education is a challenge for Taiwanese academics and educational authorities.

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*Promoting the professionalism of the staff*

The principal, administrative staff and experimental class teachers of School A actively attended meetings and workshops, which provided opportunities to promote teachers' professional development in terms of character education and to overcome their anxiety about how to implement moral and character education in the school. Most staff affirmed the effectiveness of this project, as shown in CSCE meetings and interviews. For example, a Chinese language teacher said:

> In the past I never fully thought about how to infuse character education into Chinese language subjects; now I have begun to list it as one of my top three priorities when I prepare for class.

A PE teacher mentioned that:

> I used to take it for granted to teach my students to line up; however, I understand now that this can be connected with character education. I should instruct them to think about why it is so important to line up rather than just asking them to do it.

The principal also gave the project positive feedback:

> This project was a very special experience for me because it was so effective, democratic and efficiently managed.

However, the coordinator of School A worried that a gap between the research and the practice of the CBSC project had developed:

> I confirm the value of most of this project. However, it was a pity that all of our classes couldn't get involved in the entire range of CBSC activities and lessons because we were too busy in school and the time was too limited. There was always a gap between theory and practice.

*Enhancing the participation of the students' parents*

This CBSC project involved the parents of students of School A, using different strategies. First, more than 90% of students' parents took part in voting for core ethical values. Second, representatives of the PA participated in the CSCE and approximately 20 members collected books related to school-based core ethical values for School A's library. Third, the parents of 10 experimental class students engaged in inter-school activities. Most parents perceived the importance of character education and offered positive feedback regarding the CBSC project. One representative of the PA said:

> As parents, we were so glad to have such a good character education project in School A. This created an opportunity to cooperate with teachers in implementing this project.

A parent of a student in an experimental class excitedly claimed:

> I can recognise the important role for parents in character education. Our duty is to encourage and accompany them instead of railing at or punishing them.

Therefore, the evaluation found that the CBSC project enhanced the active participation in character education by a number of students' parents. However, one

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factor that limited their participation was the prevalence of working fathers and mothers.

*Increasing students' opportunities for moral action and leadership*

All School A's students were invited to vote for core ethical values and to participate in several activities, such as reading books and listening to stories related to school-based core ethical values. In addition, students in experimental classes took part in several subjects, class meetings and inter-school activities, all of which were infused with character education themes. Several student-governing organisation representatives and the experimental classes were involved in the CSCE meetings and workshops. A great majority of the experimental class students thought the CBSC project was excellent and expressed this opinion clearly in interviews and some documents, e.g. assignments for feedback and reflection on activities and lessons. These students enjoyed the discussions in class and found the class meetings interesting. In particular, they made a great effort to prepare for inter-school activities and provided useful feedback on their experiences. One student in an experimental class said:

> I had an elegant portfolio in which I collected all the documents and learning materials. This made a strong impression on me.

Another student who represented a students' organisation said:

> Because I have participated in this project, I am now more concerned about the moral behaviour of my classmates. I will give advice to those whose behaviour I feel is not correct. And I always remind myself that I have to be a role model for other students as well.

The social studies teacher, who was also the assistant coordinator, expressed her feelings on encouraging students to join the CSCE meetings and workshops:

> I wondered if students had the courage and ability to join the committee at first. However, now I have to say my doubts were unfounded. I have come to realise that we must trust our students absolutely because they have such boundless potential.

At the beginning of this study a few students mentioned that they had a heavy academic load and worried this project would only increase it. One student withdrew from the CSCE for just this reason. Fortunately, nearly all experimental class students actively participated in class discussion; and all the student representatives in the CSCE showed notable progress in moral thinking and expression due in large part to encouragement from their teachers. For example, it became apparent that most students improved their ability to express their points of view and offered constructive advice when participating in meetings. Through the project School A effectively provided students with more opportunities than before for moral action and moral leadership within and outside the school and students benefited from these experiences.

*Participants discern the improvement of school culture*

The evaluation of this study found that most of the staff, students and parents participating in this CBSC project in School A clearly discerned the improvement of

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school culture. Moreover, most of them thought that 'School A is like a big family'. The director of the office of academic affairs, who was the coordinator of this project, pointed out:

> I had to remind myself that I should remain patient and friendly with my colleagues and students since I was taking part in this project. And I found that these attitudes helped me to implement school policies and several project activities much more easily.

Several student representatives claimed:

> Our classmates are more calm and peaceful than before. We learned how to care for others through the 'Little Servant, little Master' activity [one of several class meeting activities, the main purposes of which were to educate students to take care of their classmates and to appreciate expressions of caring from their classmates]. Quarrelling and fighting now happens much less than before in our classes.

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From observations and interviews, it seemed the CBSC project had allowed most staff, students and students' parents to readily perceive the progress in the creation of a school culture with justice, caring and developmental discipline. The author was also perceived by those involved to have built up cooperative teamwork and good relationships with all project participants. Nevertheless, one of the parents said:

> It's very hard to perceive a significant advance in character-based school culture in one or two years. I hope this is a long-term, sustainable and comprehensive school project.

*Effectiveness not shown in quantitative terms*

Although the CBSC project was shown to be effective in qualitative terms, this was not demonstrated in quantitative terms by means of the SLCQ survey of experimental class students. According to the statistical analyses, the Experimental Group students had high average scores on both pre- and post-test except for scale S (see Table 2). Almost all the mean scores of scales A, B, C and D were higher than

Table 2. The experimental group's pre- and post-test scores

| | Pre-test (September 2006) ($n$=66) Mean (SD) | Post-test (May 2007) ($n$=66) Mean (SD) | $t$-test ($\alpha$=.05) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Scale A: Perceptions of student respect | 3.7071 (.5225) | 3.6582 (.5799) | $t$=−.790 sig=.433 No difference |
| Scale B: Perceptions of student friendship and belonging | 3.5118 (.6502) | 3.5455 (.5917) | $t$=.530 sig=.598 No difference |
| Scale C: Perceptions of students' shaping of their environment | 3.5038 (.6441) | 3.4545 (.7291) | $t$=−.573 sig=.569 No difference |
| Scale D: Perceptions of students' behaviour with positive discipline | 3.5875 (.6762) | 3.6347 (.6257) | $t$=.622 sig=.536 No difference |
| Scale S: Students' moral judgement regarding theft and helping stories | 3.0350 (.3407) | 2.9890 (.3233) | $t$=−.995 sig=.324 No difference |

3.5 on a five-point range; except that the mean score of scale S transformed into five-point format was near 3, the lowest among those five sub-scales. These findings revealed that the students had positive perceptions of respect, friendship and belonging, the shaping of their environment and adapted their own behaviour by showing autonomy and self-discipline. However, the students did not perceive their classmates as having greater capacity for moral judgement as a result of the project. Furthermore, there was no significant difference between pre- and post-test scores in the Experimental Group as measured by *t*-test. Neither by comparing all three groups (Experimental Group, Control Group 1 and Control Group 2) by ANCOVA was there a significant difference in the post-test score (see Table 3). These results showed that on these scales the implementation of the CBSC project had no apparent impact on the experimental students' perception of improvement in their school culture.

The CBSC project undertaken in School A was not successful when evaluated in strictly quantitative terms and this gave rise to several points for consideration and further investigation. As the author had simultaneously established the CBSC project in another school, a junior high school, and shown its effectiveness by quantitative methods, was the project less effective in the elementary school (School A) than in the junior high school (another school) (C.-M. Lee, 2008)? Second, how can the difference between the quantitative and qualitative results for School A be explained? Third, the pre- and post-test scores of the SLCQ in School A and School B, as compared to those obtained in another project with the involvement of 48 schools (C.-M. Lee, 2004b), were much higher than the average for Taiwanese elementary and junior high schools. Hence, is this a statistical 'ceiling effect' with these experimental group students? Fourth, was the students' 'perception' of school culture and character, as measured by the five sub-scales of the SLCQ, a mirror of 'actual' school culture? So then, was the SLCQ an adequate or appropriate measure of the students' perceptions of the project? Did students become more critical rather

Table 3. Comparison of experimental group and two control groups on post-test scores

| | School A Experimental group ($n$=66) Mean (SD) | School A Control group 1 ($n$=60) Mean (SD) | School B Control group 2 ($n$=66) Mean (SD) | ANCOVA ($\alpha$=.05) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scale A | 3.6582 (.5799) | 3.6111 (.6094) | 3.5135 (.6843) | F=.177 sig=.838 No difference |
| Scale B | 3.5455 (.5917) | 3.3704 (.6982) | 3.4646 (.7318) | F=1.563 sig=.212 No difference |
| Scale C | 3.4545 (.7291) | 3.5750 (.6679) | 3.5625 (.7650) | F=1.721 sig=.182 No difference |
| Scale D | 3.6347 (.6257) | 3.6630 (.6437) | 3.5286 (.7383) | F=.099 sig=.906 No difference |
| Scale S | 2.9890 (.3233) | 3.0528 (.3002) | 2.8998 (.4741) | F=1.906 sig=.151 No difference |

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than simply unconcerned with regard to school and class culture, thereby resulting in no significant improvement in the SLCQ score? Fifth, as this project had a quasi-experimental design, it was impossible to control all the variables when dealing with the experimental and control groups during the research period. Therefore, it was understandable that the control groups rather than experimental group had a significant 'elevation' in their SLCQ scores. Is it possible to efficiently control most variables of educational experimentation?

## Conclusion

This study sought to construct a modern model of character-based school culture and demonstrate its feasibility by means of planning, implementation and evaluation during a two-year research-based case study of a Taiwanese elementary school. Although this was a pioneering effort in a Taiwanese urban context, the CBSC project has the potential to be used in other districts of Taiwan and other countries. Based on the above findings, several conclusions about this study could be drawn:

(1) Principals and staff needed to familiarise themselves in depth with the philosophy and processes of the project in order to increase the pace of their professional development.
(2) Teachers needed assistance from academics or publishers to develop sound, highly concentrated and integrated packages of activity and lesson plans, befitting school-based curriculum development.
(3) The CBSC project stressed the principles of justice, caring and developmental discipline, which were also the basis for the procedures through which the project was implemented. Hence, all participants in the project needed to be encouraged to follow these three guiding principles in order to maintain participatory democracy, good relationships and self-discipline.
(4) The CBSC project focused on theory and practice and on the process and outcomes of implementation. Moreover, the entire school culture and the professional development of staff were just as important as students' character development.
(5) The CBSC project focused on a deliberate and comprehensive moral and character education programme but it was limited in time. To build lasting changes and a stable and positive school culture may well need a longer intervention. Finally, scholars wishing to research further in this field should continue to conduct qualitative and/or quantitative studies on intervention and experimental programmes and refine their evaluative instruments in order to identify more precisely the factors which affect improvement of school culture and its sustainability.

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