

NATIONAL EDUCATION OR LET'S SAY NO TO EDUCATION ?

A Report on National Education

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I. Background and Rationale

“Value education” is the fourth main area of study in this visit. Owing to the wide scope of the topic, if dealt with generally, the topic may become too broad and formidable to handle, and hence losing the practical value of the visit. Therefore, after some serious pre-trip discussion, it was decided that our group should narrow down the focus to ‘National Education’, which was underpinned by at least four reasons:

- (1) Without scientific or official evidence though, it has been widely accepted that the value system of Hong Kong students has been degenerating and there has been an insufficient sense of belonging to their nation among students. The scenario requires intervention.
- (2) The reunification of Hong Kong with China in 1997 necessitated a serious reflection of the identity and roles of the Hong Kong people as Chinese nationals. This historic political

change requires the students to develop an awareness of their national identity and sense of responsibility at both individual and societal levels.

- (3) The Taoist Association insists on quality education and emphasizes the preservation of the traditional Chinese virtues and philosophy in the process. A properly restructured moral and civic education relating the religious essence of the Association to national education thus seems to be inevitable.
- (3) Singapore is renowned for her success in National Education despite the short history of development. It would be a great miss if the topic is not to be explored in this visit.

II. A General Survey of the Singaporean Scenario

A. Aims and Objectives of National Education in Singapore

The purpose of National Education is to develop national cohesion, the instinct for survival and confidence in the future, which can be further and fairly classified into five pillars which Singaporeans choose to call them the ‘five defences’. They are:

- (1) Social defence: To achieve racial harmony and care for the unfortunate and the under-privileged.
- (2) Civil defence: To ensure that the safety and basic needs of all nationals are properly met.
- (3) Military defence: To ensure the community would function properly both in normal times and in emergencies.
- (4) Economic defence: To ensure the economy would function properly by equipping students with the necessary economic skills and knowledge.
- (5) Psychological defence: To develop commitment to national confidence in the future of the country.

B. Events Pertaining to the Launch of National Education

A series of events signified the determination and efforts of the Singaporean Government to develop National Education, the success of which has been acclaimed among the academia and the educationalists in many places including Hong Kong. They are listed as follows:

- (1) The Prime Minister of Singapore highlighted National Education as a vital component of education at the Teachers’ Rally Day on 8th September, 1996.
- (2) National Education was formally launched in schools on 17th May, 1997 by the Ministry of Education.
- (3) A National Education Committee was subsequently set up to develop strategies in National Education.
- (4) A National Education Coordinator was appointed in every school for coordinating work.
- (5) National Education seminars were organized for all school principals, Ministry staff, National Education coordinators in schools and tertiary institution staff.
- (6) The National Education Unit was set up in Ministry of Education to assist schools in disseminating information and responding to feedback from schools.

- (7) The National Education web site for teachers on the Ministry of Education Intranet was launched.

C. General Characteristics of National Education in the Four Visited Schools

The characteristics described below would bear some variation in the degree of emphasis in different schools. Nevertheless, the school-to-school variation is quite small and the four schools are after all more similar than different.

- (1) National Education is usually implemented at two levels. One is the direct level, running two periods per week; the other is the indirect level at which National Education elements are infused into regular subjects. All these are coordinated by the Humanities Department of the School.
- (2) Textbooks are prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The materials may be modified by the school, though the modification is usually very minor.
- (3) Every academic year, one whole day will be set aside for National Education which is usually activity and fun oriented, and students are expected to learn to appreciate different festivals, cultures, families, traditions, customs and religions.
- (4) Every week, there is a six-hour community programme, in which students actively involve themselves in serving the community like organizing food and fun fairs to raise funds for the old folks homes, running tuition sessions for younger children, and joining the uniform groups comprising St John Brigade, National Cadet Call, Scouts and Girl Guides.
- (5) Students are required to take part in the Learning Journeys through which students are expected to broaden their mental horizons and think about the roles they can play to ensure that their country continues to stay strong as a nation and to make progress. Learning Journeys are usually organized visits.
- (6) The less frequently run activities are the Student Exposure Programmes. They expose students to other cultures and provide them with opportunities to show leadership and shoulder responsibility. Places visited include New Zealand, Australia and Hong Kong.
- (7) There are formal and informal assessments of the effectiveness of National Education. The formal one is usually project work or quizzes testing students' knowledge, while the informal one focuses on the teachers' evaluation of the observed behavioural changes through daily life interaction.
- (8) Limitations revealed by the visited schools:
 - (a) Teachers often have extra to do, but the problem has been alleviated with the help of ample electronic materials provided by the advanced IT development of the schools.
 - (b) Some teachers are not very familiar with the curricula. The more experienced teachers need to help the less experienced.
 - (c) Students' motivation varies a lot and it very much hinges on how the teacher presents the materials. Experience reveals that success could be better secured if the class activities are more student-oriented.
 - (d) Discipline problems sometimes occur. Should the students become too disruptive, they may need to be isolated and, in the more serious cases, detained after school.

III. A General Comparison Between Singapore and Hong Kong in National Education

A fair and apposite comparison between the two places should be helpful as it might shed light on the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different systems, making improvement and innovation possible. The following table, though not exhaustive, summarizes some aspects of National Education in the two places.

| | | Singapore | The HKSAR |
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| 1 | Aims and Objectives | - highly specific, structured and officially imposed on all schools. - emphasize the five defenses i. Social ii. Civil iii. Military iv. Economic v. Psychological | - bear no clear-cut official definitions. - recent consensus regarding the aims among educationalists are mainly: i. developing a sense of belonging to the HKSAR. ii. developing an awareness of one's rights and obligations as a Hong Kong citizen. iii. recognizing oneself as a Chinese national. iv. taking pride in one's country and respecting other races and cultures. |
| 2 | Historical & political backgrounds | A city-state with city-and-state equivalent, and so easier to engender national loyalty & shared value. | A special administrative region under the one-country, two-systems rule. There is no city-and-state equivalent, and so feelings of detachment and autonomy, at least politically, prevail, making national loyalty and shared value more difficult to nurture. |
| 3 | Social and political control | Stronger control and stronger civic sense. | Weaker control and weaker civic sense. |
| 4 | Levels where National Education is emphasized | From kindergarten to university. | Mainly in primary and secondary schools, depending on individual schools. |
| 5 | Racial concern | Racial harmony a major emphasis in curricula. | Racial harmony not a major emphasis in curricula. |
| 6 | Government's role | More directive, high-profile and imposing. eg. official launching of National Education, making it compulsory. | Less directive, mainly suggestive and advisory. eg. The Education Department - Usually plays an advisory role only. Guidelines provided are often for reference. |
| 7 | Process | Mainly top-down, with minimal modification by schools. | Suggestive top-down, with great autonomy and flexibility for school-Based development. |
| 8 | Support for | National Education Committee of | Not available, except for some piece- |

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| | principals | the Ministry of Education helps principals to shape school policy. | meal seminars. |
| 9 | Support from other Government departments | Plenty: National Education Committee, Ministry of Information and the Arts, Ministry of Defence and Prime Minister's Office, etc. | Not many: mainly the CDI of the Education Department and some voluntary organizations, eg. Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education, Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers, and youth centres. |
| 10 | Formal Curricula | Compulsory. History: S1-S5 Geography: S1-S5 Civics & Moral Education: S1-S5 Social Studies: S3-S4 | Encouraged, but not compulsory: Class teacher periods Immersion in all subjects Formal Civic Education lesson (CDC syllabus) |
| 11 | Informal activities | Certain informal activities are core and compulsory, eg. singing national song and flag raising. | No commonly defined core activities. |
| 12 | Formal assessment as pre-requisite for study | Passing the National Education Test (a computer quiz) is a prerequisite for further study. eg. From P.6 to S.1, and from secondary to centralized institutes or polytechnics. | No such requirement at all levels, eg. HKCEE, HKALE. |
| 13 | Formal commemoration of certain historical events | Highly regarded and actively commemorated in form of activities. eg. Total Defence Day, Racial Harmony Day, National Day | With less regard and passively commemorated in form of holiday breaks. eg. National Day, The HKSAR Establishment Day, |
| 14 | Community visits | -An integral part of education called Learning Journeys. -With support from 20 ministries & statutory bodies which set aside time, resources & manpower to host visits. -With the Central Booking System on Internet to select schools. | -Usually in form of extracurricular activities which are usually not an integral part of the curriculum, depending on individual schools. -Key public installations not supportive enough, and hence difficult access sometimes. |
| 15 | Community service | Compulsory. | Encouraged, but not compulsory. |
| 16 | Strong political leader to identify with | Yes. Eg. LEE Kuan-yew | No. -Dr. SUN Yat-sin may cause political embarrassment. -Ancient saints too remote for younger students. -Mostly economic kingpins like LI Ka-shing. |
| 17 | Official | NEWS (National Education – | -Web site on Civic Education |

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| | supporting web sites | The World & Singapore) | Teaching Resources (ED) - Web site launched by Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education |
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IV. A proposed model for National Education implementation in the HKTA schools

A. The Proposed Model

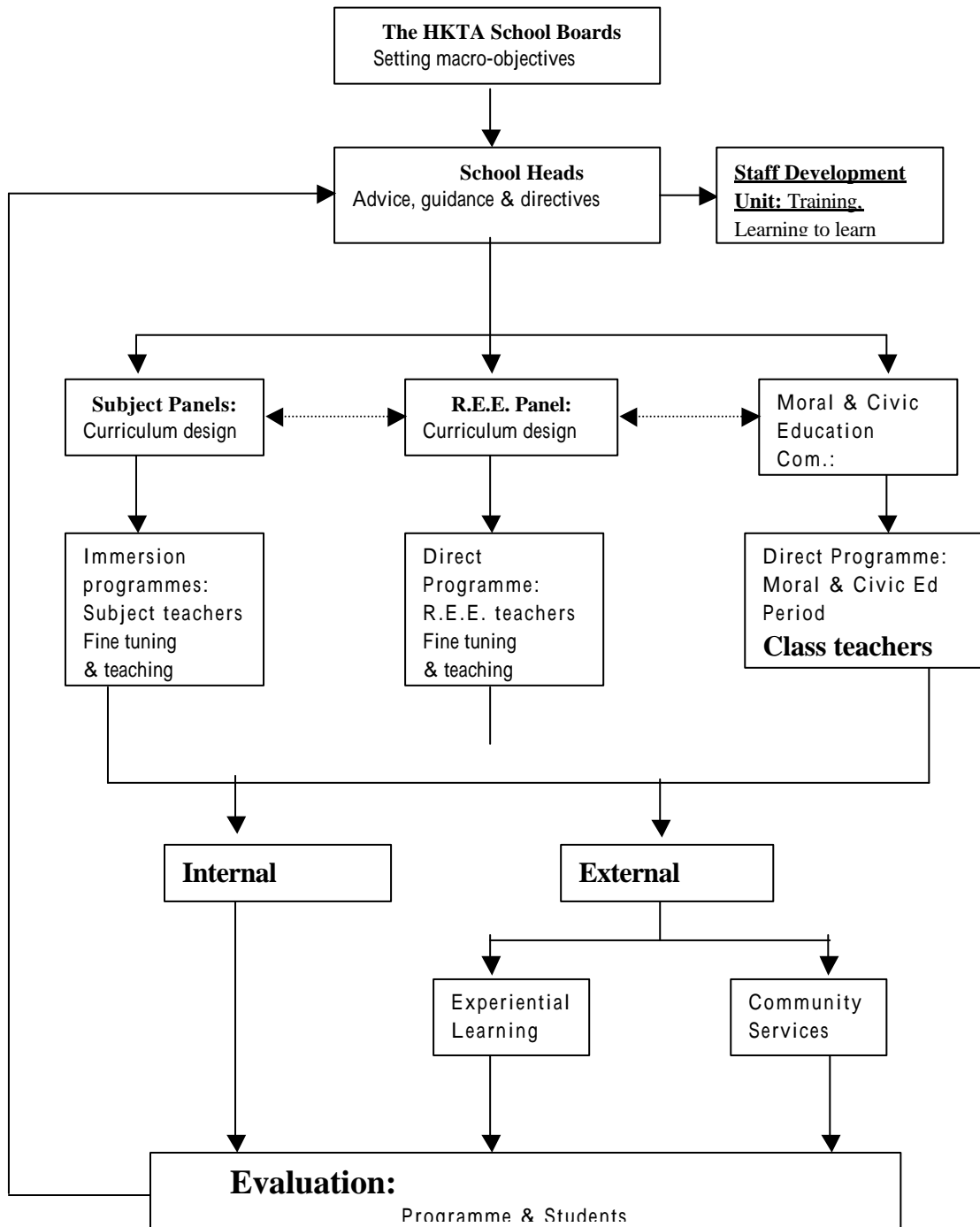
Our schools are open to three possible alternatives:

- (1) to maintain the status quo, leaving the present situation intact;
- (2) to innovate by adopting a completely new mode of National Education of our own design;
and
- (3) to modify the Singaporean model and construct another of our own by basing on some of our existing practice and addressing the peculiarities of our schools.

The first option is almost a euphemistic disguise of our reluctance to change, which we believe most dedicated colleagues would be least contented with, while the second one would sound a bit formidable for most of us as it requires an enormous amount of resources and manpower. Therefore, the last one seems to be the most viable option.

In the discussion session in Singapore, our group advisor, Mr. TONG Wai-hop, proposed a guiding philosophy for the development of National Education in the Association schools, the essence of which is in fact the four principles sustaining a successful national education curriculum. These principles are: (1) transmission of knowledge, (2) transmission of experience, (3) learning through activities, and (4) learning to learn. With these guiding principles, we would like to put forward the following model which presumably, may provide directions for the future development of National Education in our schools.

A Proposed Model for Implementation of National Education in the HKTA Schools



B. Mechanism of the Model

1. The model starts at the top tier with the Boards of Directors of the Hong Kong Taoist Association setting the key macro-objectives for all Association secondary schools. For example, some possible objectives are (1) understanding the proper way of life, (2) developing moral integrity and (3) taking pride in our nation.
2. School heads including principals and vice-principals, on the basis of the major objectives above, give advice and guidance to the relevant unit heads for actual planning and implementation, taking into consideration of their own school's characteristics.
3. With the directions provided by the school heads, the Staff Development Unit coordinates efforts or run programmes relating to the required training and experience.
4. Major curricula are designed by three main divisions: regular subject panels, the Religious and Ethics Education (REE) Panel and the Civic and Moral Education Committee.
5. Programmes are divided into the immersion programme and direct programmes. Elements of immersion programmes are infused into individual subjects (suggested elements are provided in CDI, 1998). Direct programmes refer to the R.E.E. period and the Class period and the latter could be renamed as the Moral and Civic Education Period.
6. As there are always class-to-class and teacher-to-teacher variations, the fine-tuning stint should be left to the subject teachers who know best how to suit the particular needs of the students. Most of our teachers are versatile and their potentiality should be realized to a fuller extent and their creativity encouraged. That is the point where fine tuning sets in.
7. With the formal curriculum being put forward, the next step is putting theories into practice, and hence internal and external activities.
8. Internal activities are held inside the school. They serve to enrich and supplement what students have learnt in class. Suggestions are:
 - a. Inter-class board decoration competition
 - b. Chinese culture quiz
 - c. Chinese calligraphy competition
 - d. Chinese folk songs competition
 - e. Joint-Schools Chinese Affairs Quiz (with other Association schools)
 - f. Chinese orchestra
 - g. Chinese music appreciation
 - h. Essay competition
 - i. Chinese painting competition
 - j. Traditional Chinese food cooking class or competition
 - k. Web Site design competition (with Chinese elements)
 - l. Model-making competition (eg. Taoist temples, Buddhist temples, etc)
 - m. Putonghua class and competition
 - n. Chinese book exhibition
 - o. Photo-taking competition (historical scenes and antiquities)
 - p. Showing documentaries or films displaying the stories in the Mainland
 - q. Chinese dance class
 - r. Chinese martial arts class
 - s. Drama competition
 - t. Project display and board exhibition
 - u. Chinese opera appreciation

- v. Taiji class
 - w. Qigong class
10. External activities are divided into Experiential Learning and Community Services.
11. Experiential Learning shows certain affinities with the Learning Journeys in the Singapore schools. They provide opportunities for students to explore the community they live in, accumulate life experience, enrich their knowledge, widen their mental horizons and develop their sense of belonging to Hong Kong and the Mainland.
- Suggested activities (including cross-border ones) are:
- a. Visits to public utilities
 - b. Visits to government departments
 - c. Visits to political establishments, eg. Legislative Council
 - d. Visits to museums
 - e. Visits to temples
 - f. Visits to historical sites
 - g. Visits to the Liberation Army
 - h. Visits to prisons
 - i. Visits to hospitals
 - j. Inter-school competitions (basketball, football)
 - k. Ball-game competitions with Mainland students
 - l. Exchange programmes with Mainland students
 - m. Visits to the Mainland (eg. The Shengzhen Culture and Folk Village, places of historical importance, etc.)
 - n. Military training camp in Mainland China
 - o. Serving the rural school children in Mainland China
 - p. Family pleasure trips to the Mainland (in collaboration with the Parent-teacher Association)
 - q. Visits to orphanages in Mainland China
12. Community Services are important in engendering a civic sense and sense of belonging in the students, and more importantly, in shaping them into caring and responsible nationals. The service commitment should be made compulsory, but details about how students can serve and how long they should serve should be left to the discretion of the individual schools. However, if students can show proof of contribution to society in services other than those programmes run by the school, it is reasonable to accept it as fulfilling part or even the whole of the community service requirements.
- Some of the suggested services are:
- a. Scouts
 - b. Girl guides
 - c. St. John's Brigade
 - d. Civil Aid Team
 - e. Working for the Hong Kong Council for Voluntary Work
 - f. Visits to homes for the aged
 - g. Visits to homes for children
 - h. Running tuition sessions for children of the neighbourhood or children centres
 - i. Running programmes for new immigrants
 - j. Tree planting
 - k. Cleaning the beach campaign
 - l. Selling flags for charity

- m. Joining the Social Services Group of the School
- n. Helping the handicapped
- o. Junior Police Call

13. The final stage is the evaluation stage at the bottom of the model. Evaluation is of two levels, one evaluating the effectiveness of the National Education programme, and another assessing the attitude and behavioural change of students. Programme evaluation may take the form of discussion, experience sharing, reviewing materials and collecting feedback. As students are concerned, questionnaires can be administered to them at the beginning and the end of the term to identify the attitudinal changes. Some statistical analysis may be required. If so desired, a mark for 'Civic Sense' may be awarded and incorporated into the R.E.E. mark to represent their behavioural achievement.
14. The model fairly fits the above-mentioned underlying principles:
 - (i) Transmission of knowledge: immersion and direct programmes transmitting knowledge to students.
 - (ii) Transmission of experience: Staff Development Unit equipping teachers with the necessary skills and experience.
 - (iii) Learning through activities: achieved through internal activities, Experiential Learning and Community Services.
 - (iv) Learning to learn: teachers learning through curriculum fine tuning, evaluation process and staff development programmes to constantly upgrade themselves.

C. Pros and Cons

The above model only serves as a theoretical guide for schools. Individual schools have to improvise and consider the necessary modifications. There are certain pros and cons of following the model.

The pros are:

1. It provides a conceptual framework as a starting point for schools in the formulation of National Education policy.
2. It recognizes activities as an integral part of school education.
3. It adopts the whole school approach by which most teachers are involved.
4. It emphasizes inter-committee and inter-panel communication, which is presumably conducive to a better cohesion of the school community.
5. The status of National Education is raised and legitimized.
5. On some occasions, parents may also be involved in some of the programmes, hence extending National Education to the students' families.

The cons are:

1. The workload of teachers will increase. Some release of duties is necessary.
2. Additional skills may be required in pursuing the policy. The Staff Development Unit may have extra to do.
3. More funding is required.
4. A closer monitoring system is required in order to ensure that everything is working in the desired way.
5. An objective and scientific evaluation of the programmes remains a problem.
6. The situation and characteristics of some schools deviate more from the model than others do, thus requiring much more effort in innovation.

V. Mainstays for the Sustainable Development of National Education in the Hong Kong Taoist Association Schools

There are some crucial factors affecting the success of the proposed National Education.

1. Whole-hearted support from teachers is necessary. Teachers should not talk or behave in a way contrary to the values that they are supposed to pass on to the students and they have to show behaviour-attitude consistency. As remarked by a staff member in Anglican High School, ‘Seeing is believing’. Teachers need to display exemplary behaviour. Students learn ‘efficiently’ through daily interaction with teachers.
2. The Staff Development Unit would have to play a more important role in addressing the needs of teachers regarding the skills and knowledge required of them.
3. For the direct programmes, well-designed worksheets and materials are certainly helpful for the less experienced teachers. Guidance notes and handbooks may also help.
4. Renaming of certain lessons, for example, ‘Class period renamed as Moral and Civic Education Period’, can help to reinforce in the minds of the students the determination of the School to provide a quality National Education. To be more extreme, the Moral and Civic Education Committee may be renamed as Moral and National Education Committee, adding a special flavour to the school as compared with other schools in Hong Kong.
5. A reiteration of the importance and a proper monitoring of the Moral and Civic Education period are desirable. In particular, we have to ensure that students would not get a feel of disdain for the programmes, as it may be unwarrantedly exhibited by teachers.
6. Schools should provide full financial support for the projects and activities, provided that they are meaningful, worth doing and cost-effective, i.e. value for money.
7. Sharing of experience and exchange of information among the five Association schools are beneficial and desirable.
8. Duties and workload should be properly allocated among teachers to avoid burnout of teachers.

VI. Concluding Remark

The trip to Singapore is rewarding and enlightening. Much less was touched upon in the area of National Education by the visited schools, as compared with other areas of studies, like English teaching or IT. However, the limited information we got was well taken and elaborated by our group members. They fervently embarked on discussion, actively contributed and improvised, leaving behind traces of ideas, which are stimulating and conducive to the formation of the bigger ones. These ideas form the basis of the model described above. However, theorizing is an easier task for those who know a little bit about writing. The real test of success lies in whether words can be translated into actions. Dedication and enthusiasm of teachers are of vital importance, and so are the unfeigned support and tolerance of the School Authorities. Facing new challenges, people always fear. They fear making mistakes and that fear impedes progress. Thus, if National Education is to be pursued, teachers should be allowed to keep the rights to make mistakes, and to be fair, the obligations to rectify them as well.

‘National Education’ or ‘Let’s say “no” to education’? It depends.

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