

**An Evaluation Study of  
the Teachers' Receptivity of  
the Hong Kong Catholic Social Ethics  
Curriculum and the Training Programme**  
**教師對天主教社會倫理  
課程和培訓計劃的回應：評估研究**

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[ABSTRACT] Hong Kong's civic and moral education scene had been described as skewed towards moralized and depoliticized nature since the shelving of the 2012 Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide, leaving the local schools at a loss about the future 'what' and 'how' in doing civic and moral education. It is against this background that the Catholic Diocese launched its Catholic Social Ethics (CSE) curriculum in 2016 on a try-out basis through the Centre for Catholic Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The Centre invited a team of The Education University of

Hong Kong academics to conduct an evaluation study on the curriculum and training programme. This article reveals some of the major evaluation findings. The findings from the mixed method study show that participant teachers are positive about the relevance and practicality of the curriculum and training programme and are satisfied with the curriculum support from the project team. Nevertheless there is a certain degree of reservations when asked about the non-monetary cost benefit aspect of doing the curriculum. Some expressed that it is worthy of their time and energy while some disagreed. At the same time, the majority of them agreed that the CSE curriculum can fill up the curriculum void left vacant by the shelving of the Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide. Lastly, some implications are made about how to better implement the curriculum in the present local school context.

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## **Introduction**

Hong Kong civic education has been described as moralized and depoliticized in both policy and practice for years after the end of the British colonization period of 1997 which saw Hong Kong being given back to China sovereignty.<sup>1</sup> The lack of political education due to the depoliticized nature of civic education has led to poor understanding of politics, democracy, human rights and the rule of law among the citizenry. Students and teachers, as important stakeholders in the citizenry, also suffer in this kind of impasse when it comes to civic learning and teaching. Catholic schools and teachers

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<sup>1</sup> See Leung Yan Wing and Ng Hoi Yu, "Delivering Civic Education in Hong Kong: Why is it not an Independent Subject?" in *Citizenship, Social and Economic Education* 13 no. 1 (2014): 2-13. It discusses about the political, social and educational context of civic education in 2014.

in Hong Kong are also facing the same challenge of finding appropriate resources and delivery method that could marry Catholic Social Ethics to civic education. The Catholic Social Ethics was developed by many popes over a 126 year of studies beginning with Pope Leo XIII's watershed document 'On Human Work' and is said to be a unique academic and pastoral resource for the formation of an active citizenship in society.<sup>2</sup>

The Centre for Catholic Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong was commissioned by the Catholic Education Office to design and launch such kind of curriculum in 2015. The project which had 60 local Catholic primary schools and 140 teachers participating between 2015 and 2016 held an interim evaluation study in 2016 by inviting a team of researchers from the Education University of Hong Kong to study the efficacy of the Curriculum with its curriculum guide and teaching resources. It is against this backdrop that this study comes into play.

Research literature informs us that teachers' receptivity to a curriculum change has great impact on the success or failure of the curriculum. If they perceive the new curriculum in a positive note, it is highly likely that they will implement it with their heart and soul, hence better chance of achieving success. The research team used a mixed method approach to study teachers' perception of the curriculum in the summer of 2016. The methodology will be explicated later on in the passage. The findings show that the Catholic Social Ethics curriculum (hereafter referred to as CSE curriculum) was positively received by the participant teachers in terms of curriculum support and relevancy, nevertheless teachers had

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<sup>2</sup> This description of the Catholic Social Ethics curriculum project was retrieved from the Sunday Examiner, an on-line publication of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese on 15 May 2017 from an event account of the Project's International Conference held in Hong Kong between 17-18 March 2017.

some reservations about the cost-benefit aspect of the CSE curriculum and revealed some of their school based concerns when implementing the new curriculum. The fact that teachers in this study revealed that they hold reservations over the cost benefits of the CSE is similarly found in another local study and it inevitably calls for the attention of local education practitioners to address this challenge.<sup>3</sup> The study also investigated participant teachers' views of the current situation of CSE curriculum in the face of the present political, social and educational ideological tension areas. It was found that the majority of them found the CSE curriculum capable of filling in the gap left vacant in the civic and national education arena after the shelving of the Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide in 2012. Recommendations were also made at the end for schools and teachers to resolve the perceived cost benefit disadvantages. Since it is the first time that Catholic Social Ethics has been introduced into the local education sector as a kind of formal curriculum and the fact that it is very much related to civic and moral education goals, this study is of significance in investigating how local teachers would perceive the new curriculum as well as its interrelatedness with civic and moral education learning outcomes. The significance is further exacerbated when we examine the findings against the present local sensitive political, social and school educational context.

## **The Current Context of Civic Education in Hong Kong**

To the research team, the Catholic Social Ethics curriculum is related to civic, moral education and to a lesser extent, the National Education, thus the need to highlight here the current situation of

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<sup>3</sup> Wong Koon Lin, Lee Chi Kin, Kerry Kennedy, Jacqueline Chan and Ian Davies, "Hong Kong Teachers' Receptivity Towards Civic Education," *Citizenship Teaching and Learning* 10 no.3 (2015): 271-292. A lot of this study's findings will be drawn in comparison with the findings of this large-scale study.

civic, moral and National Education in Hong Kong to understand the present position CSE curriculum is in and its future possible trajectories.

Civic or citizenship education in Hong Kong has been in a contested and controversial ground due to its sensitive and multifaceted and complex nature.<sup>4</sup> One case in point is the Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools issued by the Curriculum Development Council in 1996 which emphasized human rights education, education for democracy, education for rule of law, nationalistic education, and global education. However the Guidelines drew serious criticism from the ‘Pro China’ camp politicians and educators as not putting sufficient emphasis on nationalistic education.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, dissenting voices were heard, arguing that the Curriculum Guide would easily lead to irrational indoctrination.<sup>6</sup>

CSE curriculum is very much linked to moral, civic and national education. In Hong Kong, Moral and National Education (MNE) was proposed as a new subject in 2011 in order to reinforce a patriotic agenda in Hong Kong schools. The draft Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide received a lot of social criticism and was eventually shelved in its initiation stage. Hence forth, there is a void created as to how schools should attempt to deal with MNE and other related subjects. Many schools still implement Moral and Civic Education through various methods, like General Studies, Personal

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<sup>4</sup> See Terence McLaughlin, “Citizenship, Diversity and Education. A Philosophical Perspective,” *Journal of Moral Education*, 22 (1982):235-250.

<sup>5</sup> See Lee Wing On and Anthony Sweeting, “Controversies in Hong Kong’s Political Transition: Nationalism versus Liberalism,” in *Education and Political Transition: Themes and Experiences in East Asia*, ed. Mark Bray and Lee Wing On (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 2001), 101-124.

<sup>6</sup> See Leung Yan Wing, Teresa Chai and Shun Wing Ng, “The Evolution of Civic Education: From Guidelines 1985 to Guideline 1996,” in *School Curriculum Change and Development in Hong Kong*, ed. Y. C. Cheng, K. W. Chow and K. K. Tsui (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education), 351-368.

Growth Education and Life Education. Values like filial piety, love for the family, modesty, integrity, the desire for continuous improvement, and collective responsibilities are stressed while sensitive and controversial topics on the other hand are avoided.<sup>7</sup> This kind of 'depoliticized' civic education curriculum has become the mainstream at the school level.<sup>8</sup> It is in this kind of curriculum gap and 'depoliticized' context that the Catholic Social Ethics curriculum comes into play.

Recently, in 2017, to fight off possible fears of independence in the former British colony, Beijing's top political advisory body (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Standing Committee) urged their delegates to visit schools in Hong Kong to promote mainland developments.<sup>9</sup> Earlier on, some Basic Law Committee members stated that pupils must be taught about Hong Kong's status by re-introducing national education into Hong Kong schools with the emphasis on Chinese culture and to stave off anti-Mainland sentiment among young people in Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup> Thus it is evident that local teachers and education community have recently again been thrown back into a stressful condition of not knowing where to go with their civic education beliefs and practice.

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<sup>7</sup> See Leung Yan Wing and Yuen Wai Wa, "A Critical Reflection on the Evolution of Civic Education in Hong Kong," *Pacific-Asian Education* 21.1 (2009): 35-50; and Paul Morris & Esther Morris, "Constructing the Good Citizen in Hong Kong: Values Promoted in the School Curriculum," in *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 20 no.1 (2000): 36-52.

<sup>8</sup> See Leung Yan Wing and Yuen Wai Wa, "Competition between Political and Depoliticized Versions of Civic Education Curricula: The Case of Hong Kong," *Citizenship, Social and Economic Education*, 11.1 (2012): 45-56.

<sup>9</sup> Peace Chiu, Jeffie Lam and Elizabeth Cheung, "Beijing Call for Talks in Hong Kong Schools Revives Brainwashing fears," *South China Morning Post*, 14 March, 2017, accessed May 15 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education-community/article/2078638/quash-ro-independence-ideas-schools-giving-talks>.

<sup>10</sup> Adrian Wan and Shirley Zhao, "National Education Should be Introduced in Hong Kong to Halt Anti-Mainland Feelings," *South China Morning Post*, Jan 8, 2015, accessed May 15 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1676776/introduce-national-education-hong-kong-combat-anti-mainland-feeling>.

To the research team, it will be interesting to see how the CSE curriculum teachers would position themselves in the try-out of this curriculum in this present sensitive political context.

In the realm of pedagogical and curriculum design principles, civic and national education in Hong Kong also faces some challenges due to its non-compulsory and non-independent status. The 1996 Civic Education Guidelines recommended three modes of delivery, namely the ‘permeation approach’, ‘integrated subject approach’ and ‘specific subject approach’ (CDC, 1996). Schools are free to choose one or more of these approaches to align with their school needs and situations. Leung Yan Wing & Ng Hoi Yu<sup>11</sup> reported that most local schools have adopted a permeation and interdisciplinary approach, making use of cross curricular activities like school assemblies, special events and extra-curricular activities.<sup>12</sup> The lack of space for civic education in the school curriculum timetable, the deficit professional knowledge on the part of the teachers and the controversial and sensitive nature of the subject have all amalgamated to make some schools and teachers feel restrained and hesitant in trying out this subject discipline. To further complicate the situation, the way teachers teach civic/national education also hinges on the way they conceptualize and understand it. Leung Yan Wing identifies three types of teachers’ understanding of nationalistic education, namely: cosmopolitan and civic

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<sup>11</sup> Leung Yan Wing and Ng Hoi Yu, “Delivering Civic Education in Hong Kong: Why is it not an Independent Subject?” in *Citizenship, Social and Economic Education* 13.1 (2014): 2-13.

<sup>12</sup> Similar observations are also found in Lee Wing On & Leung Sheung, “Institutional Constraints on Promoting Civic Education in Hong Kong Secondary Schools: Insights from International Achievements Data, in *Democratizing Education and Educating Democratic Citizens: International and Historical Perspective*, ed. Leslie Limage (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2001). Also in Ng Shun Wing & Leung Yan Wing, “The Implementation of Civic Education in Hong Kong Junior Secondary Schools,” *Hong Kong Teachers’ Centre Journal* 3 (2004): 72-84 (in Chinese) and Paul Morris and Esther Morris, “Constructing the Good Citizen in Hong Kong: Values Promoted in the School Curriculum,” in *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 20.1 (2000): 36-52.

nationalism, totalitarian nationalism and cultural nationalism.<sup>13</sup> Each type of understanding implicates a different type of teaching approaches. Given the close relation of national education to the CSE curriculum, it is envisaged that teachers and schools contemplating doing CSE curriculum will have a lot of ideological and pedagogical issues to iron out first. This study attempts to tap into this muddled area of teachers' and schools' deliberation.

## Teachers' Receptivity to Curriculum Change

In literature research on curriculum change, it is found that teachers' receptivity to a curriculum innovation can be crucial in determining the success and failure of an innovation.<sup>14</sup> It may be particularly important if the curriculum is deemed as sensitive in some aspects. Russel Waugh and Keith Punch proposed a model that includes a number of variables that explain teachers' receptivity to a curriculum change. They include factors like (1) non-monetary cost benefits, (2) alleviation of fears and concerns, (3) significant other support and (4) feelings compared to the previous system. Locally there are a number of studies on teachers' receptivity that built on this model.<sup>15</sup> Lee Chi Kin's study on teachers' receptivity to the curriculum change in the subject of Environmental Education consists of the following variables; namely (1) non-monetary cost benefit, (2) practicality (3) issues of concerns, (4) school support, and

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<sup>13</sup> Leung Yan Wing, "Understanding and Teaching Approaches of Nationalistic Education: The Case of Hong Kong," *Pacific Asian Education* 19.1 (2007): 72-89.

<sup>14</sup> See Sally Brown & Donald McIntyre, "Influences upon Teachers' Attitudes to Different Types of Innovation: A Study of Scottish Integrated Science," *Curriculum Inquiry* 12.1 (1982): 35-51. See also Virginia Richardson, "How and Why Teachers Change?" in *The School as a Work Environment: Implications for Reform*, ed. S.C.Conley and B.S. Cooper (Boston: MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1991) : 66-87.

<sup>15</sup> F. Waugh Russell and F. Punch Keith, "Teachers Receptivity to System-wide Change," *British Educational Research Journal* 11.2 (2006) 113-121.



(5) other support.<sup>16</sup> On local teachers' receptivity towards civic education, Wong Koon Lin and her colleagues at the Education University of Hong Kong use five similar subscales including (1) others support, (2) non-monetary cost benefit, (3) issues of concerns, (4) school and organizational support, (5) comparison with previous system.<sup>17</sup> Regarding teachers' receptivity to curriculum reform in the case of Physical Education, Amy Ha and her colleagues at the Chinese University of Hong Kong use subscales like (1) attitude toward the guideline, (2) non-monetary cost benefit, (3) practicality, (4) school support, (5) issues of concerns, (6) other support and (7) behavioural intentions. Overall speaking, others' support, practicality, issues of concerns, non-monetary cost benefits were found to be the most significant predictors of teachers' receptivity to a curriculum innovation.<sup>18</sup>

Teachers' areas of concerns usually implicate that when teachers face a new curriculum, they might worry that the new curriculum might hinder their normal teaching, and that they may not have adequate knowledge to implement the new curriculum. Time constraints and extra workload are also usually mentioned. Lee Chi Kin points out that those teachers who have positive behavioural intentions towards the new curriculum are those who have a higher perception of non-monetary benefit, higher perceived support from schools and other agencies, and fewer worries about other relevant issues of concerns.<sup>19</sup> Organizational factors that are conducive to

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<sup>16</sup> Lee Chi Kin John, "Teacher Receptivity to Curriculum Change in the Implementation Stage: the Case of Environmental Education in Hong Kong," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 32.1 (2000): 95-115.

<sup>17</sup> Wong, et.al., "Hong Kong Teachers' Receptivity towards Civic Education," 271-292.

<sup>18</sup> Amy S. Ha, Ada C. Wong, Raymond K. Sum & Daniel W. Chan, "Understanding Teachers' Will and Capacity to Accomplish Physical Education Curriculum Reform: the Implications for Teacher Development," *Sport, Education and Society* 13.1 (2008): 77-95.

<sup>19</sup> Lee, "Teacher Receptivity to Curriculum Change in the Implementation Stage," 101.

teachers' receptivity are (1) timing and scale of the programme, (2) distribution of workload and division of labour, (3) procedural clarity and planning, (4) appointment of a person-in-charge or setting up a committee. These are usually referred to as the 'practicality ethics' mentioned by Doyle and Ponder<sup>20</sup> and the 'hows' of implementation mentioned by Michael Fullan & Suzanne Stiegelbauer.<sup>21</sup>

These findings shed some light on the kind of research focus we should aim at for this evaluation study and provides useful 'lenses' for our analysis and understanding.

## **Methodology**

In this study, the research team embarked with two major research questions to address the issue of how the participant teachers received the news CSE curriculum. They are:

1. How do the participant teachers view the new curriculum in terms of its relevancy, cost-benefit to their school and teaching, their perceived issues of concerns, and school support?

2. How do the participant teachers see the new curriculum in face of the current local educational, social and political context?

Against this research backdrop, a mixed method approach was used. For the first research question, quantitative data in the form of a self-constructed questionnaire was used as well as qualitative data derived from a case study of four selected project schools employing research methods like focus group interviews, document analysis and classroom observations. The mixed methods approach allowed

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<sup>20</sup> Walter Doyle and Gerald A. Ponder, "The Practicality Ethics in Teacher Decision Making," *Interchange* 8.3 (1977): 1-12.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Fullan & Suzanne Stiegelbauer, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Teachers' College Press, 1991).

researchers to triangulate different types of data in order to analyse and integrate the findings into themes and to draw inferences and propositions.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the first author acted as a ‘participant observers’ to collect important information during the initial and intermediate phase that yielded critical source of data underpinning participant teachers’ perceptions of the CSE curriculum. Stephen Schensul, Jean Schensul, and Margaret LeCompte define participant observation as “the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting.”<sup>23</sup> Kathleen DeWalt and Billie DeWalt suggest that participant observation be used as a way to increase the validity of the study, as observations may help the researcher have a better understanding of the context and phenomenon under study.<sup>24</sup> As Patricia Adler and Peter Adler note, this “peripheral membership role” enables the researcher to “observe and interact closely enough with members to establish an insider’s identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership.”<sup>25</sup>

For the second research question, in view of the current sensitive climate in the educational, social and political context as outlined above, the research team saw the need to tap into participant teachers’ personal feelings and views toward the new curriculum. At the request of the research team, a small sample of 12 randomly

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<sup>22</sup> See Abbas Tashakkori and John Creswell, “Editorial: The New Era of Mixed Methods,” *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 1.1 (2007): 3-7.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Schensul, Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods: Observations, Interviews, and Questionnaire, Book 2 in Ethnographer’s Toolkit* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999), 91.

<sup>24</sup> Kathleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt, *Participant Observation: a Guide for Fieldworkers* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, “Observation Techniques,” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. N.K.Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1994), 380.

selected schools were invited to give their response to the following question in the format of a personal reflection report.

*The Catholic Social Ethics curriculum incorporates Catholic social ethics, moral and civic education values/concepts and National Education values/concepts. From your personal perspective as a teacher in a local Catholic school and from a school-based curriculum development point of view, will you comment if the curriculum addresses the current educational needs and concerns in Hong Kong?*

In the end, eight teachers from four schools responded and their responses were documented for analysis.

In the case studies, four randomly selected case schools from the whole cohort of 60 project schools were chosen for on-site case study. Lesson observations and post-lesson focus group interviews with teachers and students were conducted to collect information about how teachers and students felt about the lessons done and also on the degree of the ease of translation of the curriculum materials into actual teaching practice. A total of 10 teachers were interviewed and 4 focus group interviews with students were done. Participant observations were also conducted at several times when the project leader and his team designed and revised the curriculum. Playing the dual role of being the advisors to the project as well as members of the research team, the first author made serious discretion on when to give professional advice to the project team in un-obtrusive manners while at the same time not interrupting the flow of collecting valuable information.

### ***Questionnaire***

A 65-item questionnaire (with a Likert Scale of 1 – 5) designed by the Research Team was administered to all the 135 participants of the 60 project schools (teachers and principals) gathered in an assembly at the end of the training programme in March 2016. The retrieval rate was an almost 100%. There are 5 categories of questionnaire items, namely: (1) teachers' perceived support and relevancy of the training programme and teaching materials, (2) teachers' perceived relevancy of issue-based learning in Catholic Social Ethics and their behavioural intentions, (3) teachers' perceived relevancy of non-indoctrinated way of teaching Catholic Social Ethics and their behavioural intentions, (4) teachers' perceived definition, aims and realm of civic education, (5) teachers' perceived degree of understanding and acceptance of Catholic Social Ethics and (6) personal ethnographic and teaching-career related information and personal political orientation. The first five categories actually represent the different topics covered in the training programme of this curriculum designed by the Centre for Catholic Studies. The purpose of such a design of the questionnaire is two-fold, one to evaluate teachers' ratings of the key components of the training programme and two, to evaluate teachers' receptivity of the Catholic Social Ethics curriculum and its teaching materials in the line of studies on teachers' receptivity to curriculum change mentioned above (especially its relevancy, practicality and cost-effectiveness).

### ***Lesson Observations***

The researchers held lesson observations in four project schools on their try-out of the curriculum materials. Focus group interviews were conducted afterwards.

### ***Focus Group Interviews of Teachers and Students***

In the focus group interviews for teachers, we asked the following questions:

*How do you find the lesson going?*

*Any difficulty or problem in translating the curriculum guideline and materials into your classroom teaching? If yes, how did you overcome them?*

*In what way can the curriculum guide and materials be made more user-friendly to you and your school?*

In the focus group interviews for students, we asked the following questions:

*What did you learn in this lesson? Is it meaningful to you and why?*

*Did you learn the same concept or theme in the lesson before? How is it changed from your previous understanding?*

*Do you think what you learnt in this lesson make you change in any way? Why?*

*Do you like the present mode of teaching this subject (Assembly? Tutorial lesson? Assembly + tutorial lesson? Experiential activities?) Why?*

*Do you have any other topics that you would like to be introduced into this subject? Why?*

Relevant documents collected were interview transcripts, questionnaire findings, observation notes and teachers' reflection reports. An open coding system was used to identify useful pieces of information from both quantitative and qualitative data to form

meaningful segments and to fit what Robert Yin described as ‘pattern matching’.<sup>26</sup> Qualitative findings were used to triangulate, complement, develop and expand those of the quantitative findings.

## Findings

After triangulating and integrating data from various sources, the following themes emerged:

### *Curriculum Support*

From the questionnaire survey, majority of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the support offered by the Project team and the training programme (Mean 4.05 , SD 0.577):

(i) 66.67% and 19.26% of the respondents expressed ‘Agree’ and ‘Very much agree’ respectively to the question ‘Do you think the curriculum support is adequate?’

(ii) 62.96% and 22.96% of the respondents expressed ‘Agree’ and ‘Very much agree’ respectively to the question ‘Do you think the professional knowledge for curriculum planning and design offered by the training programme adequate?’

Curriculum support offered is in the form of on-site curriculum support by the project team, pre-project on-site visit and the training programme. Professional and pedagogical as well as curriculum knowledge necessary for teachers to implement the curriculum are given in the pre-implementation phase. In the interviews, teachers also expressed appreciation of the on-site support by the project

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<sup>26</sup> Robert, K. Yin. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. (London: SAGE, 1994).

team, in particular confidence building and clarification of the pedagogical and curricular recommendations given in the Guideline through the face-to-face meetings with the teachers.

### ***The Relevance of the Curriculum Design***

From the questionnaire survey, respondent teachers revealed that they think the curriculum design is practical, inspiring and relevant to their teaching and school context (Mean 4.09 SD 0.604).

(i) 65.19% and 16.30% of the respondents expressed 'Agree' and 'Very much agree' to the question 'Do you think the kind of knowledge and experience gained in the training programme and the process is relevant to your teaching and school context?'

(ii) 52.59% and 26.67% of the respondents expressed 'Agree' and 'Very much agree' to the question 'Do you think the knowledge and experiences gained so far is inspiring to you?'

The teaching resources designed in the curriculum guide received very high ratings of relevance. Pictures, films, video links and fact sheets designed are deemed as very useful and relevant to the project teachers' teaching. They can stimulate students' motivation and set up for a good discussion and flow of ideas.

*I feel that picture (on equity and equal opportunity) is very good, it conveys obvious meaning, one look at it you will understand what is meant by 'justice' and 'equity' (Teacher A, School A)*

*My students like those pictures, they could help to explicate the concepts more concretely, a simple picture it is, yet it conveys so many different meanings. (Teacher B, School A)*



On the issue of whether project teachers found it easy to put the teaching materials into use, the responses are positive. One teacher said:

*Last time we used the 'deductive approach' 拱橋式, later on we switched to using 'inductive approach' 三進式. At first when we were not so familiar with the design of those materials, we had some difficulties in linking them up, but later on we found that the 'inductive approach' also worked out fine, and even better, at last we decided to use 'inductive approach' instead'.  
(Teacher C, School B)*

Another teacher also expressed that there is little problem in adapting to the teaching materials:

*No, it is not difficult to adapt. I followed your advice, first it is the 'motivational materials' 引導教材, then the 'principles' 原則教材, and then 'Catholic Social Ethics' 天社倫, and after that the 'application materials' 應用教材. I found that this sequence goes smooth and is reasonable. I even felt that it was easy when I started using it. In the planning for the lesson on environmental protection, starting from the picture of the 'lung', and how it led to the 'Tree of Love' and how I could elicit some good discussion points for students through the 'Tree of Love' and gave my students some bit of critical thinking, and finally it led up to the 'principles' part. Say we talked about the question 'why we need to protect things on earth' it is not only for environment protection sake, it is also because it is given to us by God and we have every reason to protect it. So as I said, this kind of adaptation is not difficult'.  
(Teacher D, School C)*

The CSE curriculum guide strongly suggested that teachers relate the teaching content and topics in the teaching resources to students' daily life experience and the school events. One teacher agreed to this principle and found it successful in her classroom. She said:

*Yes, the incorporation of those themes to our daily life and school happenings has made things so easy and relevant. Just like we had an English lesson in which we held a "Box of Hope" activity. We asked our students to donate some stationery to help those needy ones, their little sisters in distress etc. Even though some of our students are not Catholics, they were reminded that it is their responsibility to help those people in need, just like the school's 'Big Sisters, Big Brothers' scheme. The whole thing is about caring for others. (Teacher A, School A)*

### ***Cost Benefit of the Curriculum***

From the questionnaire survey, respondent teachers *modestly* agree that the curriculum is worthy of their time and energy to implement. If teachers perceive that the benefits of doing a new curriculum outweigh the costs of doing it, it is highly likely that they would agree to do the new curriculum. For example, teachers would feel that it would be acceptable if their workload incurred by the new curriculum is not enormously increased and their teaching is not seriously affected. Key issues of teachers' cost benefit consideration include time constraints, workload and their professional knowledge versus their beliefs of the desirable outcomes out of the new curriculum.

(i) 48.15% and 25.19% of the respondents said 'Agree' and 'Very much agree' to the question; 'Do you think the curriculum and

the project is worthy of your time and effort?’ However, 24.44% wished to remain ‘Neutral’ in answering this question.

It is apparent that teachers might have some reservations as to whether to try out the new curriculum while weighing all the pros and cons factors. The critical determinant is their teaching belief in the efficacy and desirability of doing a particular curriculum or subject.

Nevertheless in the interviews, some teachers had an alternate view on the cost benefit of the curriculum—whether teachers’ effort in trying out the curriculum can reap desirable learning outcomes in the end even though the change process entails a lot of work and personal worries. Also a lot depends on teachers’ personal beliefs on what makes a desirable learning outcomes. For example: the following teacher shared her views:

*When I asked my class whether they liked my class that day, they answered it is good, it is good. They said they could learn a lot of things during the lesson. The most important thing is that I did not follow the textbook. I said this from the bottom of my heart, and it is not flattery. The teaching materials you have given us is not like that of the textbook, and I like it very much because students do not need to learn the expected answers, they felt that it was a very special lesson, they were allowed to give their own answers and ideas without following any answers that might come from the textbooks (Teacher E, School C)*

The CSE curriculum guide also strongly recommends doing experiential learning in some cases. The following is another case of a teacher who used experiential activities when teaching the ‘Tree of Love’ lesson on environmental protection, she found the learning outcomes very desirable:

*The way I see it is that experiential activities really arouse students' feelings, I think if we want our students to develop empathy with tree protection and human care, this kind of activities would be particularly useful, because it really drives the message into their heart.*  
(Teacher F, School B)

Locally a large scale study by Wong et al<sup>27</sup> on teachers' receptivity to civic education also revealed that the 'cost benefit' factor stood out significantly from the other factors like 'others support', 'issues of concerns', 'school and organizational support', and 'comparison with previous curriculum'. It definitely calls upon the attention of local civic educators as well as the project team of CSE curriculum to delve into the reasons behind this quagmire and deliberate ways to alleviate teachers' concerns.

### ***School Support***

School support is considered as crucial when teachers implement a curriculum change. Teachers are often expected to initiate and implement curriculum change alone without the continuous support and communication at the school and community level.<sup>28</sup> Michael Fullan<sup>29</sup> commented that without it, the change process would become disconnected and fragmented. It can be in the form of incentives and support from the school administration. The support can be in the form of the school assigning a person-in-charge

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<sup>27</sup> Wong et al., "Hong Kong Teachers' Receptivity towards Civic Education," 271-292.

<sup>28</sup> See Louis K. Seashore & Helen M. Marks, "Does Professional Community Affect the Classroom Teachers' Work and Student Experiences in Restructuring Schools?" *American Journal of Education* 106. (1998): 532-575.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Teachers' College Press, 2001).

to oversee the new curriculum, form teachers' 'Professional Learning Community', set up a task force and initiate teachers' team teaching and planning. Lee Chi Kin<sup>30</sup> also mentions good timing and scale of the curriculum, good distribution of workload or division of labour and a clear manifest goal and planning would constitute valuable support to teachers in the change process.

Needless to say, different schools have different context and in different schools will find both facilitating and inhibiting factors that affect the curriculum change process. In this study, we found a mixed response when we asked the teachers whether they find their school context facilitating or inhibiting their curriculum work. Team teaching in a Community of Learning manner was seen in two case schools and their schools did a very good job in facilitating this by re-arranging lessons and teachers' timetable so that they could regularly meet and plan together. Curriculum leaders were also involved in the curriculum process. In the other two case schools, the project teachers did the curriculum on a solo basis.

One of the project teachers who did the curriculum on a solo basis revealed the problem of 'balkanization' in her school. In the research literature on educational change, teachers are usually found to incline to balkanization in the early phase of change. Balkanization means the school undergoing change is usually made up of different cliques, generating various subcultures going their separate ways in a school.<sup>31</sup> She remarked:

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<sup>30</sup> Lee, "Teacher Receptivity to Curriculum Change in the Implementation Stage," 95-115.

<sup>31</sup> The term 'Balkanization' appeared in quite a number of sources like Stephen J. Ball, *Micropolitics of the School: Towards a Theory of School Organization* (London: Methuen, 1987); and Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves, "What's Worth fighting for in Your School?" (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996); and Patricia Sikes, "Imposed Change and the Experienced Teacher," in *Teacher Development and Educational Change*, ed. Michael F. and Andy H. (London: Falmer Press, 1992): 36-55. Also found in Patrick Whittaker, *Managing Change in Schools* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993).

*In my school, I know some of the Religious Education teachers might say 'I don't want this curriculum work to be done by other teachers, it is true, they really don't like it. But at the same time some Religious Education teachers might say, 'How I wish other teachers could help me with this!' and General Studies teachers might also say 'I don't understand this...' General Studies teachers are often like this. 'Oh, how could it be! In this way it means Religious Education teachers would gain an advantage of having less to teach'. It all boils down to mean that different people have different ways of seeing this kind of curriculum implementation. But as teachers' leaders and from an administrative point of view, the best way to go about it is to do curriculum integration. (Teacher E, School C)*

Another teacher who is on a solo basis revealed that the school did support her in trying out the new curriculum by assigning other senior teachers to be on the sideline to help her if needed. When it comes to the idea of the curriculum integrated with other subjects, she explicitly made clear her aspiration that the curriculum would have had better development if the school had adopted an interdisciplinary approach of integrating subjects and putting in place school assemblies to do the interdisciplinary learning of CSE through different subjects as suggested by Lee Wing On in his book on the multifaceted school based practices of Civic Education in Hong Kong.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Lee Wing On, *Civic Education in Secondary Schools: Multiple School Based Practice* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Commercial Press, 2004) (in Chinese).

## Issues of Concern

Most of the teachers interviewed showed a big concern of needing time to read through and digest the teaching materials because of the sheer volume. They need a lot of time to read up and link up the different themes and activities in a way they see as most fitting their students and their way of teaching.

Another issue of concern is to do with teachers' reluctance or hesitancy to link the new curriculum with National Education, though the new curriculum is avowed to linking up the two in the best professional way for teaching and learning.

*'I heard you (the project team) explain the use and rationale of the 'factsheet materials' and understand why it is quite distant from the local context and happenings because you want to link up the curriculum with what is happening in Mainland China. But what is happening in China might be not so relevant to Hong Kong, and when we use this kind of materials, we find one issue of concern: students need to take some time to understand the distant happenings in Mainland China and relate it to the lesson content. (Teacher G, School D).*

Nevertheless one teacher interviewed perceived some positive aspect of introducing the National Education part into the curriculum. She said:

*We have the Life and Moral Education (LME) in our school curriculum. It is taught by the Class Teachers (班主任). There are five domains in the LME curriculum, namely: individuals, family, society, nation and the world. But we found that this year the part on 'nation' is a bit problematic in our planning, so we now*

*only have four domains, that is, we go straight to the 'world' domain after teaching 'family'. Imagine that we could try to use the Catholic Social Ethics to go with the National Education part and put it into the 'Nation' domain of the LME curriculum. In this way, we could understand more about the context of Mainland China events, and at the same time teach some moral and social ethics in this category. I think this can be a way out. (Teacher A, School A)*

The third issue of concern is the lack of space and know-how to do an integrated curriculum.

As mentioned above, in some schools project teachers feel that there is a lack of school support for them to do the curriculum. Despite the fact that project teachers understand the advantage of using an integrated curriculum approach to implement the new curriculum as depicted in Lee (2004), they do not have the necessary space and curriculum knowledge to do so. They reveal that their schools do not have school assembly time for them to do interdisciplinary theme based learning. Their schools also do not 'block schedule' the timetable to enable teachers in groups to do team teaching and planning. The new curriculum, they say, is competing for a place and space with other subjects (for example Religious Education, Life and Moral Education and General Studies) in their school curriculum calendar. This resonates with findings from the Hong Kong Teachers' Union study in 2011<sup>33</sup>. Lacking in curriculum knowledge to do integrated studies across different subjects dampens their attempt. They envision their school principals, senior teachers and the project team could provide them

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<sup>33</sup> Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union. "Press Release on the Survey Results on the Moral and National Education," 9 August 2011.



with the leadership and space to adopt an integrated curriculum approach with the new curriculum.

## **Teachers' Views of the Position of the Curriculum in the Recent Educational Context**

As mentioned above, recent local context has been beset with political turmoils and internal strife. Implementing MNE could put teachers and schools in a dangerous situation<sup>34</sup>. Teachers and schools tend to adopt a 'depoliticized' stance when teaching civic education and national education. They will tend to avoid teaching those sensitive political issues in subjects like General Studies and revert to teaching moral education topics instead. It is important in this study to see whether the project teachers in this study also shy away from teaching sensitive National Education and Civic Education topics and also how they see the Catholic Social Ethics curriculum in face of the current controversial educational and social context. It is against this backdrop that the research team wanted to tap into project teachers' perspectives by using a kind of personal reflection report on a small cohort of project teachers. Project teachers of 12 project schools were asked to participate in a voluntary written response to an open ended question on how they see the position of the curriculum in the face of the present local educational context (see the questions above). A total of eight written responses were received. All except one teacher expressed that the curriculum can positively fill in the curriculum gap left behind from the shelving of the MNE Guideline in 2012. One teacher has this to say:

*General Studies is supposed to be one subject that bears the responsibility of teaching National Education,*

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<sup>34</sup> Wong et al. "Hong Kong Teachers' Receptivity towards Civic Education," 271-292.

*yet the local publishers produced textbook content that is far from comprehensive and unbiased. In the Religious Education curriculum, there is also room for teaching National Education, but students find that learning in this topic falls short of a good holistic structure. In this connection, Catholic Social Ethics curriculum can really fill up the void, and at the same time lends itself to a more successful blending with schools' educational missions. In this way, it really fits our needs. (Teacher G, Reflection Reports)*

Another teacher commented thus:

*Due to the rapid increase in the media use and technology, students are found to receive information from the outside world faster than ever before. In this way students' civic consciousness can easily be influenced by the mass media. If students can receive proper moral and civic education in their schooling days, it could help them to develop better judgmental power so that they can make a good judgment on any social event they face.*

*Moral and Civic Education is becoming more and more important in local schools, and schools usually would have their own school-based Life Education or Civic Education curriculum. But Value Education depends very much on the teachers' values and beliefs, we all think it is appropriate that the Catholic Church can offer us a set of universal values to give to students, so that they can use them as their rational ground on which to make their judgment. Catholic Social Ethics in*

*this way can really support the Value Education of Catholic schools. (Teacher I, Reflection Report)*

In a nutshell, as can be seen, the majority (7 out of 8) of the respondent teachers felt that the CSE curriculum can fill in the curriculum gap left vacant after the shelving of the MNE Guide. Nevertheless a word of caution needs to be made, as is evidenced in Wong et al study in 2015, teachers' belief in and perceptions of the curriculum goals determine the degree of teachers' action and way of implementation. Further research needs to be done on the following questions: 'How do teachers see national education?', 'How do they see the relation between national education and civic education?' and in our case 'How do they see the relationship between CSE curriculum and national and civic education?'

## **Implications**

From data gathered from the questionnaire, interviews, participant observations and teachers' reflection reports, it shows that project teachers see curriculum support as adequate, the curriculum has high relevance and practicality for their teaching and school, and they welcome the introduction of the curriculum in the midst of present local educational and social context. While for the cost benefit of the curriculum, questionnaire results show that project teachers have some reservations as to whether the outcomes can outweigh the effort made. From interview data, teachers also think that school support is not adequate for curriculum implementation and they mention three issues of concern in their early phase of adoption—(1) time constraints to read through the sheer volume of material resources and sort out ways of linking up the unit themes and sections for the best pedagogical purpose; and (2) their worries on how the sensitive National Education elements should be dealt

with in the new curriculum; and (3) the lack of space and know-how to do an integrated approach for the curriculum.

Despite the limitations of having a small sample of teachers for case studies and the fact that the questionnaire is a self-constructed one without pilot study; on a more positive note, from the data collected from interviews and observations in this study, the project teachers had portrayed a kind of scenario that is most conducive to the implementation of the curriculum. They reflected that the Catholic Social Ethics should be taught in an interdisciplinary manner and in themes that weave through different subject areas. The best avenue is through school assemblies and through teachers' team teaching effort so that a more uniform grasp of the teaching content and concepts can be had among the teachers before delivering them to students. This echoes the findings and recommendations in Lee's 2004 book on school based practices of Civic Education. Doing the theme based learning in school assemblies can enable the school to give a whole school effort and support to the curriculum and the teachers involved. Team teaching and a teachers' Community of Learning will enable teachers to collaboratively learn how to implement the curriculum in the best possible way. Schools should provide curriculum leadership and incentives to the frontline teachers. These all resonate with what the literature on curriculum change and implementation has to say on the possible avenues of doing a successful curriculum change.<sup>35</sup> At the same time this

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<sup>35</sup> Teachers' group deliberation and Community of Practice are considered as two of the most effective and viable means of engaging teachers in school based curriculum reform through collaboration and peer coaching and providing them with the space and place to implement the new curriculum in schools. For local case of group deliberation, see Lam Tak Shing, "Deliberation and School Based Curriculum Development—a Hong Kong case study," in *New Horizons in Education* 59.2 (2011): 69—82; and Gail McCutcheon, "*Developing the Curriculum: Solo and Group Deliberation*" (White Plain, NY: Longman Publishers, 1995). For Community of Practice, see Ann Lieberman's "Networks as Learning Communities shaping the future of teacher development". In *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51.3 (2000): 221-227.

scenario painted by the project teachers also shows the way the new curriculum can be developed in the near future.

This study is significant in two aspects. Firstly, it echoes other research finding locally (in our case mainly Wong et al 2015) in citing ‘others’ support’, ‘issues of concerns’ and ‘non-monetary cost benefit’ as three determining factors determining the success of a new curriculum. It strongly implicates that more efforts have to be made to convince our teachers of the desirability of CSE curriculum goals as well as those of civic and moral education. Secondly, this study is at the same time a most recent attempt to tap on the local teachers’ sensitivity awareness of their perceived situation and roles in the present political, social and educational tussle between nurturing ‘blind patriots’ and ‘critical patriots’. And the fact that majority of the participants see that the CSE curriculum can help to fill in the void left vacant by the shelving of the MNE Guide merits our utmost attention.

## **Conclusion**

In terms of curriculum support by the project team, the practicality and relevance of the new curriculum and its position in the current local political, social and educational context, project teachers have shown positive receptivity to the curriculum. Nevertheless they lament the lack of school support in some school cases, thus giving rise to some issues of concerns like short of space to do interdisciplinary studies with the curriculum.

To improve teachers’ receptivity to a new curriculum and their willingness to support it, principals and senior teachers need to take up a leadership role as advised by Fullan & Stiegelbauer in 1991 and significantly implicated in Ha et al’s study on Physical Education

teachers. They need to explain the benefits and value of the new curriculum to frontline teachers. They need to explicate the benefits like better pupil learning and understanding of Catholic values and principles through interdisciplinary studies, critical thinking and a heightened awareness of the ethical and social issues in both local and Mainland China context. Also they can alleviate teachers' fears and concerns by organizing regular staff meetings, internal circulars and meetings with external support agents (like the project team). Senior staff can help to communicate the benefits of change, provide informal advice and share other schools' resources. Principals can also play a role in alleviating teachers' fears and providing incentives and support. Their role is to involve front line staff in identifying self-perceived needs in face of the new curriculum and to formulate a policy for staff development that is in the best interest of the school curriculum as well as teachers' professional development. Academic support group like the project team can also lend its support if needed. In a nutshell, it requires a concerted effort from many parties both inside and outside schools to make the new curriculum come into fruition as schools are said to have 'civic missions' (the main principle tenet propounded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement in 2003)<sup>36</sup> in nurturing a young generation of youths that will become competent and responsible citizens throughout their whole life.

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<sup>36</sup> A report was generated by the Carnegie Corporation and the Centre and was entitled "Guardian of Democracy: Civic Missions of Schools" in 2003.

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[摘要] 自香港德育及國民教育科於 2012 擱置以迄，多數學校對相關學科之發展，有着「摸着石頭過河」之虞，情況令人憂心。香港天主教教區於 2016 年推出天主教社會倫理課程(簡稱「天社倫」)，透過香港中文大學天主教研究中心，嘗試推行，並邀請香港教育大學一批學者對該課程及培訓計劃，作一成效評鑑研究。研究結果指出大部分參與計劃老師對「天社倫」課程及培訓計劃之相關度及可行性抱有正面的評價，亦滿意所提供之學校課程支援。但老師對於參與課程所需耗之時間精力，是否有其價值，則正反意見相若。與此同時，大多數老師認為此課程能填補現今德育及國民教育之發展空隙。最後本文以一些在現行校況中可行之改善課改方案建議作結。