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2011/07/14 PM 05:34

To <panel_e@legco.gov.hk>

cc

Subject CDI- A Comparison of Policy: Moral & National Education in Hong Kong and the West

To the Attention of the Legislative Council Education Panel:

(Please find a research and in-depth analysis document attached to this email).

I am writing to you today, on behalf of the ***Community Development Initiative***, to voice our concern on the proposed **Moral and National Education Legislation**.

The current proposal of the Hong Kong Education Bureau (HKEB) is to integrate an MNE curriculum, as an addendum to the current primary and secondary school curriculum. The program promises to aid the children in their growth as individuals, within their family, society and amongst their peers; however, the devil is in the details. The current proposal, in Hong Kong, stems from the Chinese proposal, for the Mainland; thus, it is instilling a fear that the program will become extremely subjective inside the classroom. Especially in regards to how the teachers incorporate the teachings of the Mainland culture, tradition, politics and way of life—all of which differs greatly from the policies and political aspirations of Hong Kong people.

It has been stated, by the HKEB, that the policies, currently being proposed, are similar to those of Western orient, however, when pinning the policies against one another, it is easy to see that this is far from the truth.

In the United States the purpose of Moral and National education (known as *Character and Citizenship education*) is to cultivate the student(s) self identity; growing more confident within their own skin, thus, allowing them to form their own thoughts and opinions regarding their surrounding environment. The components of character and citizenship education are imbedded into the original core curriculum for all primary and secondary age students. The process is gradual and each year it builds upon itself, from the previous year. This gradation process allows for the elements of the program to be incorporated into all lesson-types and allows students to make cognitive choices, in an educational setting—a *democratic* form of education.

Despite these differences, the HKEB continues to push the current MNE proposal—much to the detriment of Hong Kong citizens/ students. Without the concern of “political brainwashing”, Hong Kong people still have concerns regarding the financing of the proposal, along with other logistical concerns: policy implementation and method(s) of

curriculum/ student assessment. A separate concern is that due to the lack of expedience within the HKEB, we were not able to receive the full-English translation of the LegCo Consultation on the proposed MNE legislation. Henceforth, the proposed policy remains extremely vague with an extreme lack of public support.

We, here at CDI, believe there are ways to sort through these issues, ways that are not only helpful in resolving many of the tensions in the moral and national education debate, but ways that enable more powerful approaches to teaching and learning—through adoption of compulsory and more democratic methods.

Please find the attached document as an in-depth analysis and research into the juxtaposition of the Chinese proposal with the policy which is currently in place in the United States.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of our work and, furthermore, welcome any questions, comments and concerns that you may have.

With regard-

Jessica Nalepa

Community Development Initiative

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CDI- MNE Comparison and Analysis.doc

The Community Development Initiative: Moral and National Education in Hong Kong

Summary

“Education makes people easy to lead, but difficult to drive: easy to govern, but impossible to enslave.”

To know one's culture, heritage and to explore its history is something that ought to be ascertained throughout one's education process. To understand the past in order to prepare for the future is the underlying goal of any Moral and National Education (MNE) program. However, implementation style and a tightly bounded curriculum can, ultimately, deter MNE programs from reaching their educational goals.

Currently, the Hong Kong Education Bureau (HKEB) is proposing a plan to integrate an MNE curriculum, as an addendum to the current primary and secondary school curriculum. The program promises to aid the children in their growth as individuals, within their family, society and amongst their peers; however, the devil is in the details. The current proposal, in Hong Kong, stems from the Chinese proposal, for the Mainland; thus, it has created fear that the program will become extremely subjective inside the classroom. Especially in regards to how the teachers incorporate the teachings of the Mainland culture, tradition, politics and way of life—all of which differs greatly from the policies and political aspirations of Hong Kong people.

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opinions regarding their surrounding environment. The components of character and citizenship education are imbedded into the original core curriculum for all primary and secondary age students. The process is gradual and each year it builds upon itself, from the previous year. This gradation process allows for the elements of the program to be incorporated into all lesson-types and allows students to make cognitive choices, in an educational setting—a *democratic* form of education.

Despite these differences, the HKEB continues to push the current MNE proposal—much to the detriment of Hong Kong citizens/ students. Without the concern of “political brainwashing”, Hong Kong people still have concerns regarding the financing of the proposal, along with other logistical concerns: policy implementation and method(s) of curriculum/ student assessment. A separate concern is that due to the lack of expedience within the HKEB, we were not able to receive the full-English translation of the LegCo Consultation on the proposed MNE legislation. Henceforth, the proposed policy remains extremely vague with an extreme lack of public support.

We believe there are ways to sort through these issues, ways that are not only helpful in resolving many of the tensions in the moral and national education debate, but ways that enable more powerful approaches to teaching and learning—through adoption of compulsory and more democratic methods.

I. Introduction

The Hong Kong Education Bureau (HKEB) is planning to make patriotic education mandatory for primary and secondary school children. It is supposed that the objective of the proposed Moral and National Education Curriculum (MNE) is to build “national

harmony, identity and unity among individuals”, help the students to “develop a sense of belonging to the motherland”, “support national sports teams” and “appreciate Chinese culture” (Fairbrother 2010). However, the proposed plan has sparked fears, within the society, of political brainwashing.

In Hong Kong, there is currently a secondary-level liberal studies course in “citizenship education”—similar to the MNE proposal—which is compulsory. This makes it optional for the students to participate in the educational program, according to their interest(s). However, there has been growing concern in Mainland, as well as in Hong Kong, in regards to the proficiency of students in their understanding of Chinese culture, values and way-of-life. Hence, the proposal for a Moral and National Education curriculum is visibly coinciding with the general perception(s) of the youth, within the Hong Kong community. However, the weary perception, of the public, is not unfounded. Recent studies have shown great weaknesses in the students’ social morality, civic consciousness, political understanding and interest, national pride, and numerous other social and political attitudes (LegCo Ad Hoc Committee on MNE 2011a).

Over time, globally comparative studies have been performed and research has shown that youth, regardless of global location, are relatively weak in knowledge and positive attitudes toward their nation. Additionally, most youth are relatively politically passive and disengaged (Fairbrother 2010; Lickona 1993). However, more directly concerning is the fact that it has been found that the Hong Kong youth are below the international average with regard to economic and social responsibilities, positive attitudes toward the nation, and support for women’s political rights, even though, on a global scale, they are above international means in civic knowledge and trust in the

government and the media. Accordingly, it has been suggested that Western societies have a stringent policy for moral and national education; however, the Western policies differ greatly from those currently being proposed by LegCo, in Hong Kong.

Western societies have both citizen and national education. The so-called national education is to develop a sense of identification with a country's history and constitution, which restricts the power of the people elected to government. The other component, moral education—more often referred to as *character education*, in the West—is used as a mechanism to help the students “grow” personally, as well as, in their daily interpersonal environments—i.e.: in the classroom, at home, and in social settings (Black n.d.; Wynne and Ryan 1992). Therefore, while the core principles, of the current Western and the proposed Eastern curriculum, are similar, the implementation methods and overall purpose are staunchly different. In order to further highlight such areas of difference, one must take a deeper look into each system and juxtapose the policies (*for quick reference please see: Moral and National Education Comparison Table on page 13 of this document*).

II. Defining Character

A term that is being rejuvenated in the United States is *character education*. Character is "a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way." It refers to the moral qualities and ethical standards, which make up the inner nature of a person. Character might be termed the moral personality. Behavior is a product of character. Moreover, character education holds to the premise that civilization has a common core of shared values, referred to as *universal values or public values* (Black

n.d.; Kirschenbaum 1994). These universal values are rational, objectively valid, universally accepted qualities, actions and ideals to which people of all civilized nations, creeds, races, socio-economic status and ethnicity ascribe. In the United States, it is imperative that the basis of a “moral and national” curriculum be multi-dimensional, as well as, multi-cultural (Black n.d.). Therefore, the core elements of moral/character education in the U.S. are broad, all-encompassing initiatives that intentionally consider the personal backgrounds of each individual; for, it is known that the U.S. society requires universal values, because of the diversity within the population. In opposition, the Chinese proposed curriculum, for Hong Kong, is designed to focus intently on developing a sense of belonging to the motherland; support national sports teams, as well as, a deeper appreciation for Chinese culture and heritage. Seemingly, the educational environment in Hong Kong does not seem to support such a staunch viewpoint in regards to the proposed curriculum. While it can be assumed that there does need to be an understanding of Chinese culture and heritage, the proposal must also take into account that we currently live in a multi-ethnic and cultural society and stringently professing and educating children fundamentally on the Chinese way-of-life, may have the opposite effect than that which is desired. Overall, the specificity of the plan in Hong Kong, versus the generality of the Western curriculum in the United States is one of the biggest areas of contrast and concern.

III. The Issue of Polarity

This idea of polarity, between specificity and generality of the opposing curriculum, seems to be one of the biggest concerns regarding MNE implementation in Hong Kong.

With the idea of a mandatory curriculum, the largest concern is that the content is to be overly moralistic and focused on ethics, politics and, inadvertently, religion—areas that come with differing opinions and values, for most. When focusing on such areas, the educators are also running the risk of implanting their personal biases, thus, showing favoritism towards one methodology or another (Fairbrother 2010).

Related to the idea of educational polarity, is the threat of potential bias reflective of two of Hong Kong's major political camps: the pro-democracy camp and the pro-Beijing patriotic camp (Fairbrother 2010). Bias toward the democratic camp could be exemplified by an overemphasis in citizenship education on human rights and the rule of law, and a neglect of national history, education about contemporary China, and the encouragement of students to support Chinese government policies. Others could conversely perceive education in democracy and human rights to be neglected, especially after 1997, pointing to some schools' perception of human rights education as subversive (Fairbrother 2010; LegCo Ad Hoc Committee on MNE 2011b)

With talk of a stringent “national education curriculum” there is also mounting fear of increased overemphasis on the Mainland agenda and Chinese propaganda, to the detriment of ‘civic education’ in Hong Kong. This would, undoubtedly, increase the potential for schools to promote a submissive citizenship—something that Hong Kong citizens have been attempting to advocate against, since before their Hand-Over back to the Mainland in 1997 (Fairbrother 2010). Additionally, the mounting fear that the proposed curriculum would be one-sided and inconsistent with reality is not unfounded. Particularly because it is suggested that the proposal would solely present China's positive achievements and further encourage participation in Patriotic rituals, such as the

flag-raising ceremony. Such practices would be intentionally singled out as formalities with no educational purpose other than indoctrination. Thus, the idea of an extremely one-sided, nationalistic curriculum, described as being a model after “western practices” should be concerning to any Hong Kong person, for they are far from similar, especially in regard to implementation method(s).

IV. Implementation

In accordance with the current proposal, the MNEs are to be incorporated into current instruction schedule. However, there is also to be time set aside for specific MNE instruction. Additionally, it is suggested “MNE instruction should be complimented by core subject material to make sure that students are maintaining proper balance in the classroom and that the curriculum is being fully covered” (LegCo Ad Hoc Committee on MNE 2011a).

Given this, an additional obstacle would be the perennial concern about a lack of curriculum space for an additional independent subject, without the time allocated to other subjects needing to be reduced or other subjects eliminated (Fairbrother 2010). This in turn raised the fundamental question of the very rationale for mandating an independent subject, with the looming question of what the objective criteria would be for such a move and whether teachers and students would understand the purpose of the subject.

The suggested policy is supposed to encourage teachers to make use of relevant event/personal stories/ anecdotes as learning contexts and as a means of diverse learning and teaching strategies through: discussion, role-play, project learning, etc.

Encourage students to think critically about issues of national importance from differing roles/perspectives in a *passionate and rational manner* while using varying sources/learning materials: authentic cases, books, Internet sources, audio-visual resources, newspapers, etc. The notion of encouraging “passionate and rational” thinking, is extremely subjective. Who is to determine the degree to which a student is appearing passionate? Or what is rational outside of inherent respect and discourse for the teacher and their peers? Grey areas and wording, such as this, are what make it difficult to muster support for such a program.

Another key issue to be raised is the issue of school autonomy in choosing citizenship education curricular approaches. With a mandated independent subject, schools would lose this autonomy, would have less flexibility in implementation, and would potentially have different understandings of the subject based on their backgrounds and sponsoring bodies. There was also a related concern about a compulsory, independent subject going against what was seen as a worldwide trend towards curriculum integration.

Additionally, being that there is no proposed or set standard for assessment in the curriculum, teachers are simply instructed to give the students “written feedback regarding their progress in the classroom” (LegCo Ad Hoc Committee on MNE 2011a, 2011b). At the same time, The Education Bureau (EDB) will conduct school visits, external reviews and relevant research to ensure “proper implementation of MNE curriculum is being completed”.

On the other hand, in the United States, school curriculum is determined at the state level. The Federal Dept. of Education, governs over the activities of the states by means

of standard (i.e.: *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001)), but ultimately there is little involvement at the national level. In a survey done in 2010, 4 states had no state-level policy, whatsoever, for character-building education. 4 states had an optional program, which could be adopted at the local level. While 8 states—including Virginia and California—had adopted state-mandated character education into their pre-existing school curriculum (Morris and Wells 2000; Virginia 2010; Wynne and Ryan 1992).

In the State of Virginia, the code reads: "the entire scheme of instruction in the public schools shall emphasize moral education through lessons given by teachers and imparted by appropriate reading selections (Virginia 2010)." Essentially, the fundamental character-building principles will be incorporated into what is already included in the school curriculum. Thus, there will not be individual lessons strictly devoted to character building; which is in contrast of the Chinese policies. Similarly, on the western coast of the United States, in the State of California, their education code, regarding character education reads: "Each teacher shall endeavor to impress upon the minds of the pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice, patriotism, and a true comprehension of the rights, duties, and dignity of American citizenship, and the meaning of equality and human dignity, including the promotion of harmonious relations, kindness toward domestic pets and the humane treatment of living creatures, to teach them to avoid idleness, profanity, and falsehood, and to instruct them in manners and morals and the principles of a free government" (*California Education Code* 2009).

An effective character education program should be embedded in the core curriculum and the school culture on an ongoing basis (Kirschenbaum 1994; Virginia 2010). It requires an intentional, proactive, consistent, and comprehensive approach that

promotes a common core of personal and social values in all phases of school life. There are opportunities to infuse the elements of character into all of the curriculum frameworks, particularly the history-social science framework and the reading/language arts framework. Thus, in the West, the character education programs are not an add-on by just an “add-in” to the already funded and fundamental core curriculum; a way to strengthen existing programs through integration—a policy in direct opposition to the current proposal in China/ Hong Kong.

V. Financial concern

In addition to the concern about overload in the teaching curriculum, in regards for time, there is also the pertinent and logical concern regarding finances. Financial resources provided by the government are limited, and comprehensive training for teachers is lacking. To date, the government has resourced only certain citizenship education activities; activities that acted in accordance with solid government policy—this is sincerely problematic (Fairbrother 2010). For some, government involvement in the provision of citizenship education was viewed as interference, because of its conservative nature. Specific mention was made of the inadvisability of the government’s organization and sponsorship of study tours to Mainland China for teachers and students. Such resources should instead be provided directly to schools to be used at their own discretion (Fairbrother 2010). A related issue was that of content, with concerns that these tours would only highlight China’s positive achievements without touching upon the sensitive issues of censorship, freedom of expression, and one-party rule. Therefore, the government was advised by some to continue and expand the current practice of

funding non-governmental organizations to develop citizenship-education teaching materials and programs. On the other hand, this approach was alternatively viewed by some as evidence of government neglect and an abdication of its leading role in citizenship education provision.

In the United States, public school programs are funded nationally by way of the individual state government. Each state sets their curriculum, which is then approved by the state and, ultimately by the federal government. This set-up provides the educational system with a method of “checks-and-balances”—as any democratic system should (Lickona 1993; Wynne and Ryan 1992).

VI. Assessment

With the current proposal, in Hong Kong, the assessment process is very subjective. There will be no public examinations, or any examinations, at all, based on the MNE curriculum. Instead it is to be subjective learning. The teachers are simply supposed to provide their students with “written feedback regarding their progress, be it positive or negative, on the basis of the curriculum (Fairbrother 2010; LegCo Ad Hoc Committee on MNE 2011b). The teachers would also be instructed to guide and assist students in differentiating “right from wrong”, while aiding in “developing a positive attitude towards life through cultivating and putting into practice the positive values and attitudes developed.” Additionally, it is proposed that the Education Bureau (EDB) will conduct school visits, external reviews and relevant research to ensure “proper implementation of MNE curriculum is being completed” (Fairbrother 2010; LegCo Ad Hoc Committee on MNE 2011b). However, for such a system to work, there would be some essential

elements to be put in place and questions to be answered.

First, if assessed, an independent subject would need to manage Hong Kong's examination culture and emphasis on knowledge acquisition, memorization, and the recitation of facts. Related to this would be concerns of citizenship education, once again, amounting to ideological indoctrination, one-sided national education, value standardization, and government intervention. Suggestions for overcoming these obstacles could include emphasizing the development of students' critical thinking skills and the use of a variety of pedagogies and activities. This, in turn, would require overcoming the obstacle of a lack of qualified teachers with specialist knowledge and able to make use of non-traditional methods, through government planning and support for citizenship-education teacher training (Fairbrother 2010).

VII. Conclusion

Given the numerous considerations at the levels of society, government policy, the education system, schools, curriculum, methodologies, teachers, and students explored in this analysis, there appears to be insufficient support for the idea of the Hong Kong government mandating a compulsory, independent secondary school subject of citizenship education. The claim, by the HKEB, that it is similar to the Western system for moral and national education, is unfounded, as it has been shown that at the basic level there are similarities, yet fundamentally the comparison is a great stretch.

It would be more worthwhile to improve citizenship practice and outcomes through a mandate that some form of citizenship education be compulsory, with decisions on how to deliver it within this requirement left up to the schools. The possibility of such a move

occurring, however, given the range of opinion in society, would seem to depend upon the appearance of strong policy advocates in Hong Kong's evolving political context.

Moral and National Education Comparison Table

	<i>Hong Kong</i>	<i>Virginia (U.S.)</i>	<i>California (U.S.)</i>
Governing Body	Hong Kong Education Bureau (HKEB)	Virginia Department of Education (VDOE); U.S. Dept. of Education	California Department of Education (CDOE); U.S. Dept. of Education
Purpose	-Enhancing students' personal and national qualities to enrich the very essence of life: support for Chinese culture -Facilitating students' identity-building under the different domains of family, society, nation and the world;	The purpose of the character education program shall be to instill in students civic virtues and personal character traits so as to improve the learning environment, promote student achievement, reduce disciplinary problems, and develop civic-minded students of high character.	Each teacher shall endeavor to impress upon the minds of the pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice, patriotism, and a true comprehension of the rights, duties, and dignity of American citizenship, and the meaning of equality and human dignity.
Learning Objectives	Cultivate/ enhance students' positive values/ attitude in 4 Key Domains: - Personal Domain, Family Domain, Social Domain, National Domain	Character education holds to the premise that civilization has a common core of shared values, referred to as universal values or public values.	Character education holds to the premise that civilization has a common core of shared values, referred to as universal values or public values.
Implementation Process	The MNEs are to be incorporated into current instruction schedule, but there is also to be time set aside for MNE instruction.	It requires an intentional, proactive, consistent, and comprehensive approach that promotes a common core of personal and social values in all phases of school life.	It requires an intentional, proactive, consistent, and comprehensive approach that promotes a common core of personal and social values in all phases of school life.
Teaching Methods	Incorporation of many methods: interactive (internet, television, radio/music), storytelling, reading pertinent magazines, books, articles, game(s), artwork & project learning.	Incorporation of many methods: interactive (internet, television, radio/music), storytelling, reading pertinent magazines, books, articles, game(s), artwork & project learning.	Incorporation of many methods: interactive (internet, television, radio/music), storytelling, reading pertinent magazines, books, articles, game(s), artwork & project learning.
Connection with Existing Subjects	Separate subject from the core curriculum; occasional implementation into the core curriculum.	An effective character education program should be embedded in the core curriculum and the school culture on an ongoing basis.	An effective character education program should be embedded in the core curriculum and the school culture on an ongoing basis.
Curriculum Assessment Methods	Not specific/subjective; Written comments regarding curriculum performance	None	None
Government Funding	Partially funded by the government; subjective funding based on if the school "supports" governmental policy/methods	Publicly funded at the State level through various citizen taxation methods. *National programs funded by the Federal Government.	Publicly funded at the State level through various citizen taxation methods. *National programs funded by the Federal Government.
Cultural Diversity	Curriculum does not allow for cultural divergence;	Education common to the diverse social, cultural, and	Education common to the diverse social, cultural, and religious

	strictly based on Chinese culture/heritage and government/policies.	religious groups *Nothing to be construed as requiring or authorizing the indoctrination in any particular religious or political belief.	groups *Nothing to be construed as requiring or authorizing the indoctrination in any particular religious or political belief.
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Appendix

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