

## Research Assessment Exercise 2020

### Impact Case Study

**University: Hong Kong Baptist University**

**Unit of Assessment (UoA): 37 Religious Studies**

**Title of case study: Nurturing Responsible Citizens: Pedagogical Practice in Teaching Ethical Reasoning**

#### **(1) Summary of the impact**

This is a case study about nurturing citizenship by introducing a new pedagogy in secondary education. The beneficiaries are teachers and students in 90 secondary schools in Hong Kong. Students in Hong Kong generally found that ethics were difficult to understand due to the discrepancy between Western theories and the local context. Professor Shun-hing CHAN developed a new programme advocating a pedagogy using local materials in teaching ethical reasoning, which was effective in helping students to study ethical issues and learn to be responsible citizens. This programme was adopted by the Education Bureau (EDB) in 2018.

#### **(2) Underpinning research**

Teaching religion and ethics is a difficult task in Hong Kong's secondary schools because of the discrepancy between Western theories and the local context. Most of the religious and ethical theories were developed in a Western context, and many examples illustrated in the textbooks are from Western society; thus, Hong Kong students find that the theories are difficult to understand and the examples are irrelevant to their everyday life experience.

Professor CHAN advocated a pedagogical practice emphasising the use of materials related to indigenous religions and local contexts to teach religion and ethics. Using action research, he tested the effectiveness of the local materials in teaching and learning in the classroom. He elaborates in "Western Theory, Indigenous Religion, and Local Material: Enhancing Learning Motivation among Students of Religious Studies in the Asian Context" (Chan 2001a) how he included indigenous religions in his teaching materials for his course "Religion and Modern Society" and how he employed the four steps of action research (initial reflection, planning, action, and observation) to refine the instructional materials in the process of teaching and learning. Materials related to indigenous religions and local contexts not only greatly enhanced students' learning motivation in the classroom, but also facilitated their understanding of the social theories of religion developed in the West (Chan 2001b).

Professor CHAN continued to engage in research-led teaching and further tested his approach in his ethics courses at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU). From 2012 to 2018, he used local materials such as news stories and social events in the course "Ethical Controversies in Hong Kong Today". In this course the content consisted of three ethical theories (utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics) and four ethical issues (ethics of life and death, sexual morality, environmental ethics, and business ethics). He used local materials to explain ethical theories and issues in class, and students were required to present local ethical issues in the tutorial sessions. The effectiveness of including local materials in teaching ethics was supported by the fact that the students were highly motivated in their study and, as evidence, they produced high-quality reflection papers discussing local ethical issues at the end of the course.

Professor CHAN has a 20-year track record of working with the EDB, offering advice to the committees responsible for educational policy development. In 2017– 2018, he conducted a

knowledge transfer project entitled “Teaching Ethical Reasoning in Secondary Education in Hong Kong,” and developed a new programme emphasising the pedagogical practice of using local materials for teaching ethical reasoning to students at the level of forms 4 to 6. [1] He partnered with the EDB and recruited six teachers from different secondary schools to form a taskforce, which developed 17 lesson plans, based on 17 reflection papers composed by HKBU students, on ethical reasoning for the module “Personal and Social Issues” of the subject “Ethics and Religious Studies” in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education. The lesson plans were published by the EDB in June 2018 under the title *Resource Booklet of Ethical Reasoning* (289 pages) [2].

### (3) References to the research

(1) Shun-hing Chan. 2001a. “Western Theory, Indigenous Religion, and Local Material: Enhancing Learning Motivation among Students of Religious Studies in the Asian Context.” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 4(1): 32–39.

(2) Shun-hing Chan. 2001b. “Religious Inquiry as Existential Question in Context: An Action Research Study in Religious Education.” In *The Compendium of Selected Teaching Development Grants Projects*, ed. Atara Sivan, 107–119. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist University.

### (4) Details of the impact

The aim of the new programme was to empower teachers in teaching ethical reasoning and to facilitate secondary school students in learning how to formulate arguments when they discussed moral and ethical issues and to express counter-arguments when they encountered positions and arguments differing from their own. The educational value of this work is premised on the belief that understanding ethical reasoning is the basis of nurturing responsible citizens.

#### *Empowering the community of teachers with new concepts and skills*

The EDB announced the new programme in a Knowledge Enrichment Seminar on 12 June 2018, and 70 secondary school teachers attended. Professor CHAN explained the new concepts and skills of the pedagogical practice to the attendees. A survey was conducted after the seminar [3] and the responses were positive: (a) 79.7% of the attendees agreed that they learned new knowledge (Table 2.2); (b) 91.5% of the attendees would share what they learned with other people (Table 2.7); and (c) 81.4% rated the seminar “satisfactory” or “very satisfactory” (Table 2.8) [4]. In 2018, 90 secondary schools offered Ethics and Religious Studies for their students, to which the EDB sent the programme materials and the booklet.

Mr. Yat-sum LEUNG, Manager of Ethics and Religious Studies at the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority (HKEAA), made the following remark in his testimonial letter: “I acknowledge the great contribution to the above named project carried out by Professor Shun-hing Chan whose work greatly benefited the teachers’ community. The influence of the project will reach to numerous students when the teachers apply to their teachings the skills and knowledge acquired through this project.” He affirmed that the pedagogy “will bring positive impacts to secondary schools regarding the promotion of rational dialogue, social awareness and learning motivation” [5]. He used the materials of the *Resource Booklet of Ethical Reasoning* in a teachers’ training programme organized by the HKEAA in November 2018.

Mr. Fung CHEUNG, President of the Hong Kong Association of Ethics and Religious Studies (HKAERS), made the following remark in his testimonial letter: “We acknowledge the great contribution to the above named project provided by Professor Shun-hing Chan whose work greatly benefited our teaching community. The positive influence of the project has been reaching many students and teachers during the Ethical Lessons as well as the School Assemblies...The captioned project demonstrates a very good teaching materials and references for both the student and teacher development.” He affirmed, “the project is well received by HKAERS and many of our member schools will continue to use the materials in the coming years to enhance our students’ moral reasoning ability” [6].

#### Enhancing students’ skills of ethical reasoning

Two members of the taskforce used the lesson plans of “ethics of life and death” and “business ethics” provided in the programme materials in their classes from February to June 2018 respectively. The students’ scores generally increased, as indicated by the results of the pre-tests and post-tests [7].

Brother CHONG Kee Ann John, Coordinator of the Net 1 of the New Joint School Collaboration Committee (NJSCC) of the Hong Kong Catholic Schools on Ethics and Religious Studies, made the following remark in his testimonial letter: “We acknowledge the tremendous contribution of the project...Students could acquire the skills of moral reasoning through the Resource Booklet. The booklet also provides rich materials for students to equip themselves to face moral issue in life.” “We had compared the ability change among our students by their pre-test and post-test. Positive feedbacks were found after trying out the knowledge transfer project plan in the lessons between the two test.” He affirmed that NJSCC would use the materials to enhance students’ ethical reasoning in the Catholic schools in Hong Kong [8].

#### Nurturing citizenship via ethical reasoning

Mr. Cheong-man Eric YIP, Curriculum Development Officer of the Personal, Social and Humanities Education at the EDB, made the following remark in his testimonial letter: “We acknowledge the great contribution of the captioned project by Prof. Chan Shun-hing of the Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University, on the very remarkable positive impact brought to the domain of ethics education in secondary schools in Hong Kong.” He affirmed that “the project deliverables will play an important role in nurturing generations of informed, reasonable, responsible and contributive citizens” [9].

Six teachers in five secondary schools recommended by the HKAERS allowed Professor CHAN to study the effectiveness of the programme in their schools from September 2018 to May 2019. The study showed that the students’ scores on ethical reasoning generally increased, as indicated by the results of pre-tests and post-tests. In the interviews, the teachers and students affirmed that the programme was useful in advancing their knowledge and skills of ethical reasoning, and the students generally agreed that it enhanced their sense of citizenship [10]. For example:

A teacher of Lutheran Secondary School considered that the programme helped her students to acquire the skills of critical thinking and the lesson plans on personal and social issues strengthened their sense of citizenship. She concluded, “This training helped the students to think as independent citizens” (p. 11).

A teacher of Buddhist Tai Hung College affirmed that the lesson plans helped her students to reflect on their civic responsibility. Her students learnt how to discuss public policies in Hong Kong, which strengthened the students' sense of citizenship (p. 11).

A student of St. Paul's College held that he and his fellow students were more concerned about what happened in society after learning ethics and reasoning. They often applied what they learnt to thinking about social issues, from which they became aware of their citizenship (p. 13).

A student of Buddhist Ching Kok Lin Association considered that the learning materials helped her to gain knowledge and urged her to make ethical judgements on different cases, such as the issues of prejudice and equity in the topic of human rights. These exercises in ethical reasoning helped her to acquire the skills of judgement and also strengthened her sense of citizenship (p. 13).

A student of Buddhist Tai Hung College reflected on her change after learning social ethics and reasoning: She became aware that every individual act had a consequence, affecting her friends, family, and society. As a citizen, she began to think about the positive and negative influences of public policies on individual and society (p. 13).

A student of Lam Woo Memorial Secondary School held that the learning materials helped her to think as a citizen in Hong Kong and changed her attitude toward social issues. She cited land reclamation as an example and made the following remark: "Environmental ethics helped me to understand the importance of the environment. We human beings are the cause of global warming because we destroyed the environment. I am now concerned about environmental issues and always discuss with my friends how to protect our environment" (pp. 14-15).

##### **(5) Sources to corroborate the impact**

(1) The project was supported by the Knowledge Transfer Partnership Seed Fund provided by the Knowledge Transfer Office at HKBU (Reference number: KTP/052/FEB2017).

(2) The Taskforce of Ethical Reasoning, *Resource Booklet on Ethical Reasoning*. Hong Kong: Education Bureau, 2018,

[https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/curriculumdevelopment/kla/pshe/references-and-resources/ethics-and-religiousstudies/SS\\_Ethics\\_and\\_Religious\\_Studies\\_Moral\\_reasoning\\_booklet\\_2018.pdf](https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/curriculumdevelopment/kla/pshe/references-and-resources/ethics-and-religiousstudies/SS_Ethics_and_Religious_Studies_Moral_reasoning_booklet_2018.pdf).

(3) The questionnaire distributed at the seminar.

(4) Knowledge Transfer Office, HKBU, "A Report on the Survey for the Knowledge Enrichment Seminar," 30 June 2018.

(5) Letter of testimonial from Mr. Yat-sum LEUNG, Manager of the Ethics and Religious Studies at the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority.

(6) Letter of testimonial from Mr. Fung CHEUNG, President of the Hong Kong Association of Ethics and Religious Studies.

(7) Wing-leung LAW, "A Report on the Implementation of Lesson Plans from the Programme of Ethical Reasoning," 30 June 2018.

(8) Letter of testimonial from Brother CHONG Kee Ann John, Coordinator of the Net 1 of the NJSCC of the Hong Kong Catholic Church on Ethics and Religious Studies.

(9) Letter of testimonial from Mr. Cheong-man Eric YIP, Curriculum Development Officer of Ethics and Religious Studies at the Education Bureau.

(10) Shun-hing CHAN, "Nurturing Responsible Citizens: Pedagogical Practice in Teaching Ethical Reasoning." In *Education Curriculum Development: Perspective, Challenges and Future Direction*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2020 (forthcoming).