

Is Taiwan's New Curriculum Reform Lacking in Morality?

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This paper intends to examine whether the policy of moral education in Taiwan's new curriculum reform, namely, 9-1 Curriculum, lacks the implement of morality as is often alleged in the popular media. It intends to draw from John Dewey's views about moral education to clarify the issue at hand.

In the old curriculum, before it was reformed in year 2000, teachers used to teach moral concepts to children through an independent subject-matter, "Morality and Civility." Fixed moral rules and textbooks were provided. However, in the new reform, the Taiwanese ministry of education decided to remove the subject from the new 9-1 curriculum, requiring instead all teachers to incorporate moral lessons spontaneously into any part of the curriculum as they see fit—be it in a math or a social science class. In actual school practice, "moral education" could possibly be "no where" as well as "everywhere." After the moral education policy has been practiced for a few years, some teachers began to complain that the young generation in Taiwan is confused about moral rights and wrongs and indifferent to important moral virtues.

The controversy over the new moral education policy in Taiwan may have its roots in different philosophical conceptions about what morality is. The commonsensical understanding about morality, as manifested in many Taiwanese teachers, may refer morality to moral doctrines. According to Dewey, teachers may mistaken teaching morality with teaching "ideas about morality (Dewey, 1975, p. 3)." For Dewey, moral education needs to follow a few principles, such as participation in social life, understanding social relations, knowing individuals and constructing communal life, etc.

If we use Dewey's general principles about moral education to examine the core competences to be developed in all learning areas, we may have come to a different conclusion about whether the new curriculum is "lacking in morality" or trying to endorse a different conception of morality. However, there is always a gap between theory and practice. Although the new moral education curriculum may look good in paper (in the listed core competences and course objectives), the question of how it is actually practiced in school deserves scholarly attention. The conclusion raises a few questions about how to bridge the gap between moral education theory and practice.