Innovations in Education:

Moral Education, Social Cohesion, and Culture diplomacy

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ABSTRACT
This special issue contains three interesting articles which provide some innovating teaching experiences across different East Asian societies. They have presented some salient educational issues across different societies in this East Asia, which can possibly provide some references for other societies when they embark on educational reforms. This collection of papers further upfront recent issues such as moral education, community participation for social cohesions, and using educational institutes to promote culture as soft power.

KEYWORDS
Moral education; social cohesion; culture diplomacy; citizenship education; Hong Kong; Japan

SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL

This special issue contains three interesting articles which provide some innovating teaching experiences across different East Asian societies. Glancing at the articles in this issue, while they may be limited in geographical coverage, they have presented some salient educational issues across different societies in this East Asia, which can possibly provide some references for other societies when they embark on educational reforms. While citizenship may focus on teaching on rights and responsibilities of citizens as a specific level of equality (Janoski, 2014) and that citizenship manifests itself in a wide range of practices and in diverse places, locally, nationally and supra-nationally (Sassen, 2002, 2003), there are certainly much more challenges to handle in East Asian societies. For example, apart from recent issues such as enhancing global citizenship (Chong, 2020), both active and global citizenship such as community participation about understanding the world can be found alongside their emphasis on enhancing national citizenship (Shi et al., 2019), what to teach citizenship to young people during a global pandemic era (Chong, 2021), catering for student participation and voice in experiential learning (Wong et al., 2022). and then the Chinese experience of citizenship shows that de-Westernism needs to be considered by adopting more diverse perspectives to de-Westernise and enrich our understanding of citizenship (Guo, 2022), this collection of papers further upfront recent issues such as moral education, community participation for social cohesions, and using educational institutes to promote culture as soft power.

In this special issue, Wang has provided an in-depth ethnographic study of secondary schools' moral education in a mainland City of Greater Bay Area - Shenzhen. Moral education in China, just like many parts of the world, has seen both problems and challenges on aspects such as curriculum and teaching methods. The study takes place in one of the fastest growing region of Greater Bay Area of China, and Wang's article has given us some interesting observations on how moral education has been developed in a fast changing environment. This study investigates the school-level implementation and teachers' perspectives of moral education to find out the facilitating and inhibiting factors across different layers in the ecological systems of students' morality advancement. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, a two-year-long ethnographic case study was carried out in the case school, with a total of 18 teachers participated in the semi-structured interviews. The findings are revealing in the sense that lack of communication and mutual understanding contributes to moral education teachers' emotionally exhaustive experience in schools. These findings also possibly find echo across many education systems in the world. Wang also found that school teachers are not given enough support, protection, and communication opportunities, and there aren't efficient and measurable strategies to uphold a tight alliance across different layers. While the context is China, many readers would possibly find their own educational system sharing similar challenges in pushing ahead moral education in such a challenging environment presented by expansion of technological developments and information flows. A bundle of suggestions have

been made by Wang, which include future research is needed on alternative moral education models, decision-making processes, and school management style. In fact, the post-global pandemic may have ended by the early of 2023, but the challenges and suggestions for developing moral education remains pretty much alive for and educational setting in this world. A sharing culture of good practices and joint practice development can also be encouraged for local school authorities, schools, teachers and students to learn from each other (Chapman & Ainscow, 2019).

Chong and Tsbuota presented two interesting case studies of community participation to tackle social and community issues in Hong Kong and Japan. Both places face similar problems of ageing communities in some areas, while both schools found themselves having unique roles to help the communities to achieve social cohesion by providing chances for their young students to develop social understanding and empathy skills through community participation. In particular for Hong Kong schools, they have been facing the needs to prepare their school students to develop various skills for improving the communities (Chong, 2018). Therefore, both schools have planned and developed social understanding learning units for their students. After all, the purpose of education is to help learners understand the society in which they live and develop the skills to participate in it (Davies, et al. 2019). The implications for teaching and learning from these action research as a set of case studies (Sáez Bondía & Cortés Gracia, 2022) is that even as young as primary school kids, they can be assigned learning tasks such as devising living tools for the elderly people (the case of Hong Kong) and joining community festival and doing community research (the case of Japan). Young students can be regarded as pillars of future society and so educators should provide opportunities for them to practice various skills and knowledge, thus teaching 'active citizenship' has been called for, which urges for providing active learning activities for pupils within community, whole-school and classrooms (Peterson and Knowles, 2009). After all, citizenship is something that must be learnt and that rights must be accompanied by corresponding duties (Delanty, 2003). "New civics" have also considerably extended the definitions of civic participation and the purposes of civic education (Carretero, et al., 2016). Giving young students a chance in community participation means enabling them to act with social compassion and imagination, apart from being taught deliberative argumentation and the recognition of difference and otherness (Waghid, 2005). Of course, the readers shall bear in mind the issue that with such community observation which force us to view that particular place in sharp focus and to direct our attention to the specific citizenship practice emerging there, it can help us to take notice of the singular way in which citizenship and community play a role (Reyskens et al., 2011). However, the related mainstream concepts in policy discourse such as social cohesion and active citizenship may actually close off the space in which an original contribution to education can be developed rather than opening it up (Reyskens et al., 2011).We need to rethink our being-together-with-others in terms of concrete observable things in a community.

Sun has written an analytical essay on the Confucius Institutes by using a SWOT analysis. His paper outlined the China's approaches to disseminating cultural soft power through overseas Confucius Institutes. In a world of intense competition on exercising soft power, Sun's article has given us an updated assessment on how Confucius Institutes carries out the functions of promoting Chinese language and culture, fostering a favourable recognition of China and cultural power, and improving its cultural connections worldwide. Yet, Sun has also identified the limitation of Confucius Institutes since they carry not just cultural functions but also Chinese government's missions to promote China. This is not an acceptable model for foreign government-funded organizations and its presence on the university campus Therefore, Confucius Institutes have faced constraints in translating its soft power into the desired outcomes, especially in the United States and European Union under an international political climate which seems not so favourable to any attachments to China. The reaction to the Confucius Institutes has been mixed in the western world: while some universities or societies appreciate the contributions of Confucius Institutes to bring about Chinese culture to overseas, skepticism has arisen about them. China has utilized cultural diplomacy through education institutions such as Confucius Institutes to achieve its national interests. However, the credibility has been undermined. The case of Confucius Institutes show that China's cultural diplomacy can still be made more tailored efforts. In fact, while China has been successful on using two general rationales of persuasion of narratives of origin and narratives of promise in the Chinese textbooks to build up China's citizenship project by the state (Zhenzhou, 2014), as well as calling on individuals to self-reform for national rejuvenation (Zhang, 2022), the party-sate of China shall place more skilled efforts to manage its on-going cultural diplomacy in the western world, though its cultural powers have also been pushed ahead in other parts of the world.

We hope that this special issue shall give the readers some sense of what is happening here in East Asia. At the same time, the updated lessons learnt about the challenges of moral education faced by school teachers, the unique roles of schools in promoting social cohesion through community participation, and that using an educational institute to promote soft power can shed some lights for other educational systems to learn from.

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