

**Life and Death Education in Hong Kong: Case Studies of Three Secondary  
Schools**

by

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## Statement of Originality

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## Abstract

Between October 2014 and January 2019, 138 university, secondary, and primary students in Hong Kong committed suicide. Studies have revealed an upward trend in this phenomenon. The implementation of life education and life and death education has been suggested as a means for supporting students. In the past, resilience and self-confidence were the main focuses of life education, whereas the importance of life–death-related topics in the exploration of the value and meaning of life was often neglected. Although these topics have been included in some schools' life education curriculums, few studies have evaluated their effectiveness. Crucial questions for investigation include the following: What school philosophy resulted in the inclusion of life–death-related topics in life education and/or life and death education? What considerations did schools have during implementation and how did it proceed? What were the problems they encountered? How did schools overcome the problems? What would be their future direction?

This research involved case studies of 3 secondary schools in Hong Kong which have included life–death-related topics in their life education and/or life and death education curriculums. Through focus interviews, and document reviews, the implementing life–death-related topics in life education and/or life and death education in Hong Kong and three secondary schools was clarified. The difficulties, needs, and attempts to address the problems during the implementation were also explored. The researcher hopes that the current findings provide valuable information regarding the development and implementation of life and death education in Hong Kong and help guide future improvements.

This study revealed that the people involved in life education and/or life and death education curriculum development play a crucial role. The teachers in charge of life education are responsible for determining the themes, designing the curriculum, and teaching in school. Their recognition and feelings towards death-related topics directly affect theme selection and teaching. However, many of the teachers involved in these programmes lack relevant training, which affects the selection of themes and setting of teaching objectives. Because of limitations in matters such as teacher training, teaching hours, manpower, and resources, life education and/or life and death education runs the risk of becoming synonymous with moral, civic, and national education, values education, or religious education, with a focus on students' life growth and resilience without a deeper exploration of life–death-related topics. Teachers' perception of students' needs replaces the students' real needs, which should be the central

focus when designing any curriculum. This misplaced focus results in classes that simply emphasise life planning for students' future.

The current researcher proposes that life and death education, which includes life–death-related topics, need not necessarily be established as an official subject by the Hong Kong Education Bureau (EDB). Instead, if a partnership with schools to coordinate, organise, and integrate research and professional efforts can be formed, it can help establish a network for resource sharing and support, enabling the collection of expertise and resources to offer relevant support according to the needs of each school.

*Keywords:* life education, life and death education, Hong Kong secondary schools, student needs, curriculum implementation.





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## List of Abbreviations

EDB	Education Bureau
CSRP	Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention
EdUHK	The Education University of Hong Kong
HKJCCT	Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust
IMC	Incorporated Management Committee
LEC	Life Education Center
P.A.T.H.S.	P.A.T.H.S. to Adulthood : A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme



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## Chapter 1: Background

As an educator teaching mainly in secondary schools for more than 20 years, I understand and recognize the importance of knowledge and academic performance to students' future. However, I also see that students' exploration of their life growth, values and meaning is equally important but is often neglected in the society. From 2006 to 2016, I first worked in an NGO and then in a university, which was a totally new experience for me. This experience on the one hand opened my mind to see how different ways, means and resources could be used to help young people grow and build up their self. On the other hand, it further proved that academic achievements are not the only element students need during their growth, but physical, mental and spiritual well-being can more effectively build up their confidence and self-image. I started to explore how I could further help young people to grow. I began the study of life education. Because a student in my school committed suicide and aroused negative influence in school which triggered me to reflect on how life and death issues could be adopted to alleviate the problem, I began my exploration of the 'meaning of life' and the integration of death-related issues into life education.

## 1.1 The Mystery of Life and Death

Life and death are both mysteries. Most people have a joyful attitude towards life and a negative attitude towards death. Life is perceived as brightness with unlimited possibilities, whereas death is darkness and sadness - it is the end of everything.

However, people and societies have different perceptions of death.

- Death is the end of life.

The Greek philosopher Epicurus <sup>1</sup> did not believe in life after death. In his *Letter to Menoeceus*, he stated the following:

Accustom thyself to believe that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply sentience, and death is the privation of all sentience; ... Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not. (Epicurus, 1994, p. 50)

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<sup>1</sup> Epicurus, (341–270 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher and sage who founded Epicureanism.

Xun Kuang <sup>2</sup> stated in *Ritual Doctrine*, ‘Life is the beginning of humans; death is the end of humans.’ <sup>3</sup> This statement also suggests that death is the end of life.

- Death is the other side of life.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus <sup>4</sup> said the following in *Fragments of Heraclitus*:

‘And it is the same thing in us that is quick and dead, awake and asleep, young and old; the former is shifted and become the latter, and the latter in turn are shifted and become the former.’ (<https://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Philosophy/IEP/presoc.htm>)

The *Samyukta Āgama* (《雜阿含經》) (Vol 294) states the following:

He is ignorant and ignorant of ordinary people, covered by ignorance, bound by love, and gained this body of knowledge. His ignorance is constant, love is endless, his body is bad and his life ends, and he is regained; he also suffers from

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<sup>2</sup> Xun Kuang (Xunzi), (310-235 BC) was a Chinese Confucian philosopher and writer who lived during the Warring States period (戰國時代) and contributed to the Hundred Schools of Thought (百家爭鳴).

<sup>3</sup> ‘Life is the beginning of humans; death is the end of humans.’ (「生，人之始也；死，人之終也」) is from *Ritual Doctrine*, 17, (<https://ctext.org/xunzi/li-lun/zh>), translated by researcher.

<sup>4</sup> Heraclitus, (540-480 BC) was a Greek philosopher. Heraclitus criticizes his predecessors and contemporaries for their failure to see the unity in experience. He claims to announce an everlasting Word (*Logos*) according to which all things are one, in some sense.

death, and cannot be free from birth, old age, sickness, death, sorrow and suffering. (Translated from Chinese by the current author)

This quote reflects the belief of *Saṃsāra* (輪迴)<sup>5</sup> in Buddhism that life appears in different features and forms, enabling the cycle of life and death to continue.

- Death and life are the same; and passing from life to death is a natural process.

Zhuangzi<sup>6</sup> stated in *Knowledge Rambling in the North* (〈知北遊〉) that passing from life to death is simply a process. He said, ‘Life is the follower of death, and death is the predecessor of life; but who knows the Arranger [of this connexion between them]?’ He further argued, ‘Since death and life thus attend on each other, why should I account [either of] them an evil?’

(<https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/knowledge-rambling-in-the-north>)

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<sup>5</sup> *Saṃsāra* (輪迴) in Buddhism is a ‘suffering-laden cycle of life, death, and rebirth, without beginning or end’, and in each rebirth, one is born and dies, to be reborn elsewhere in accordance with the completely impersonal causal nature of one’s own karma (業力 / 因果). Cited from Jeff Wilson (2010). *Saṃsāra and Rebirth, in Buddhism*. Oxford University Press.

[doi:10.1093/obo/9780195393521-0141](https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195393521-0141), Williams, Paul (2002), *Buddhist Thought*, Routledge.

For an interpretation of *saṃsāra*, please refer to the entry 「輪迴」 in *Fo Guang (Buddhist) Dictionary* (佛光大辭典). Retrieved from [https://www.fgs.org.tw/fgs\\_book/fgs\\_drser.aspx](https://www.fgs.org.tw/fgs_book/fgs_drser.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> Zhuangzi, also known as Zhuang Zhou, was an influential Chinese Philosopher who lived round the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC during the Warring States period (戰國時代) and contributed to the Hundred Schools of Thought (百家爭鳴).

- Being towards death.

In *Being and Time*, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger <sup>7</sup> held that man is a being towards death ('Sein zum Tode' in German). Humans approach death from the day they are born. Life is a process towards death, and life has an end. People must face death, regardless of how reluctant and resistant they are and despite their attempts to exclude death from life, which are all in vain. Heidegger emphasised that 'man is born to die'. Therefore, when people are facing death, the ending point of life, they tend to reflect on their life plans and consider deeply the meaning of life. As such, death becomes the key to a fulfilling life. (Heidegger, 2010)

The questions 'Without an understanding of life, how can one understand death?' and 'How can one understand death without understanding life?' reflect the complex relationship between life and death. In general, all these perceptions, different as they are, reflect people's limited understanding of death. However, most of these perceptions express the inevitability and irreversibility of death. Death is unavoidable in the process of life and is a stage that is irreversible (the end of life). Our perception

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, (1889-1976) was a key German philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He is best known for contributions to phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism.

of and response to death are something we must face and consider seriously. When facing death, people often ask, ‘why?’ and ‘why me?’

Some people regard death as taboo in traditional Chinese culture; therefore, society lacks exploration and discussion of the topic. Confucius said, ‘If you do not understand life, how can you understand death?’ (*The Analects of Confucius*, Hsien Tsin), which illustrates how people perceive death. When Ji Lu asked his master regarding serving the spirits of the dead, Confucius replied, ‘While you are not able to serve people, how can you serve their spirit?’ When Ji Lu continued to enquire about death, Confucius answered, ‘If you do not understand life, how can you understand death?’ (quoted in Chen, 2013, p. 119) Therefore, many believe that Confucius treasured life more than death, which might explain why death is regarded as a taboo topic in traditional Chinese culture and why exploration of the topic is lacking.

Whether Confucius disregarded death or had an indifferent attitude towards it as well as whether people in traditional Chinese cultures are aware of and ponder death are questions worth exploring.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Confucius stated, ‘While respecting spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom’ (*Confucian Analects: Yong Ye*, 22, quoted in Chen (2013), p. 119), and ‘To sacrifice as if

Despite being a modern international city where East meets West, traditional Chinese cultural beliefs predominate in Hong Kong. Here, the mainstream perceptions of life and death and how to address related matters are determined by traditional Chinese culture. Discussions of death and related matters are still avoided in Hong Kong.

Although it has become more acceptable to discuss such topics, people tend to focus on hospice care and suicide prevention. The systematic and comprehensive introduction of life and death education in Hong Kong has rarely been discussed.

## **1.2 The Overdue Introduction of Life and Death Education in Hong Kong**

Suicide among teenagers is a serious problem in Hong Kong. Between October 2014 and January 2019, 138 university, secondary, and primary students committed suicide.

<sup>9</sup> According to the latest statistics released by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (CSRP) on 10 September 2018, the suicide rate of

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the ancestor or God were there.’ (*Confucian Analects: Ba Yi, 12*). Sacrificial rites play an essential role in Confucius’ efforts of reconstructing propriety, especially as a form of showing respect to the dead. By expressing love, respect, and remembrance to the dead, the living’s attention to their ancestors’ funerary rites can be nurtured. However, the focus remains on the living.

<sup>9</sup> Wikipedia, table of Hong Kong student suicide. Retrieved from [https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/table\\_of\\_Hong\\_Kong\\_students\\_suicide\\_-\\_cite\\_note-110](https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/table_of_Hong_Kong_students_suicide_-_cite_note-110).

young people aged between 15 and 24 years in 2016 was 9.5<sup>10</sup> (which means 9.5 deaths by suicide per 100,000 people), an increase over the 8.3 recorded in 2012.

Among full-time school students, the number of suicide cases rose from 19 in 2012 to 29 in 2016, which is an increase of 53. The suicide rate also increased from 4.6 in 2012 to 8.1 in 2016, an increase of 76.1. The suicide rate among full-time school students aged between 15 and 24 years is constantly increasing.

([https://www.hku.hk/press/press-releases/detail/c\\_18364.html](https://www.hku.hk/press/press-releases/detail/c_18364.html)) Experts have suggested that academic pressure is not the sole cause of the persistently high suicide rate.<sup>11</sup> The needs and concerns of young people should be carefully considered to formulate an appropriate response to this problem. Among the 30 students interviewed in a 2011 study, six students (20%) reported that they had considered committing suicide because of their problematic situations (Mak, 2011). That research also revealed that ‘suicide has been the leading cause of death among young people

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<sup>10</sup> All suicide rates are calculated as per 100,000 people. Taking the overall suicide rate in 2017 (12.4) as example, it means there were 12.4 per 100,000 people in Hong Kong died by suicide. ([https://www.hku.hk/press/press-releases/detail/c\\_18364.html](https://www.hku.hk/press/press-releases/detail/c_18364.html))

<sup>11</sup> Experts suggest that academic pressure is not the sole cause of the persistently high suicide rate. ON.cc, 2018.09.11. Retrieved from [https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/news/20180910/bkn-20180910160854235-0910\\_00822\\_001.html](https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/news/20180910/bkn-20180910160854235-0910_00822_001.html)



since 1999 in Hong Kong'. (p.309)

In response to the gravity of the student suicide problem, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region established the Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides in 2016. Headed by the director of the CSRP, Professor Paul Yip, Siu-fai, the causes of suicide were analysed, and preventive measures were suggested.

In November 2016, the committee submitted their final report. Professor Yip expressed the following sentiment in the prelude: 'There is indeed no easy solution to complex problems. However, we strongly believe and emphasise that these seemingly meagre measures standing alone could yield great resilience and proactive strength when implemented together.' (Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides, 2016c, unpaginated) According to the final report, teenage suicide has multiple causes including academic, family, interpersonal relationship, and emotional problems.

Numerous counselling and support measures, including career and life education, life education, and life and death education, were deemed useful for helping students manage life pressure. However, CSRP's final report has not mentioned the data concerning how life education and/or life and death education prevent or reduce

suicide. According to Testoni, et al (2020), the implementation of “Beyond the wall” project in middle schools (secondary schools) was death education, which aims at the prevention of suicide. Through films, workshop activities, photovoice and psychodrama, it helps participating students to establish resilience, emotional competency and psychological well-being. Assessment suggested that after participating in the project, students’ ability to recognize emotions and communicate has improved. Their psychological well-being has been enhanced and expectation for the future has been positively developed. This may be evidence to prove the effectiveness of life and death education for suicide prevention.

However, the career and life education mentioned in the report mainly refers to career planning and development. The understanding of life education and life and death education is aligned with that of the Education Bureau (EDB), which mainly involves positive thinking and resilience.

An examination of the title of the EDB’s website,<sup>12</sup> ‘Life Education: Live a colourful life, face your adversity’, suggests that life education is approached from the

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<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.edb.gov.hk/tc/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/moral-civic/Newwebsite/html/Life.html>. This website was offline during the research period. The

perspective of resilience. The principles and samples of teaching plans provided are all targeted towards facing adversity, with the aim of helping students manage their emotions in a positive manner (positive thinking) and fostering their resilience by, for example, developing problem solving and communication skills to face their problems and overcome challenges successfully. Concerning the life education curriculum for preventing student suicide, positive thinking and overcoming adversity appear to be the main objectives.<sup>13</sup> The EDB implements life education by focusing on positive thinking and resilience to prevent suicide and encourage students to treasure life.

The understanding of life education of both the Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides and the EDB strongly emphasizes positive thinking and resilience. Although these perceptions of life education and life and death education do not violate the

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following description concerning life education under the ‘Prevention of student suicide and concerns of students’ mental health – Secondary School Life Education’ was found on the EDB’s website: <https://www.edb.gov.hk/tc/teacher/prevention-of-student-suicides/secondary/index.html>. This illustrates that life education was treated as a solution to the student suicide problem, focusing on positive thinking and relieving pressure.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Prevention of student suicide and concerns of students’ mental health – Secondary School Life Education’ Retrieved from <https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/teacher/prevention-of-student-suicides/secondary/index.html>

objectives and content of the courses, they might limit the scope of topics related to young people's growth and merely satisfy the preliminary goals of the courses. Such courses are not equivalent to life education and do not enable the mastery of relevant content.

### **1.3 The Past and Present of Hong Kong Life and Death Education**

The Hong Kong government and those in educational circles, to a certain extent, support the implementation of life education. An article on *Mingpao* on 25 July 2011 entitled 'Tsang Tak Shing, Secretary of the Civil Service, Intends to Implement Life Education' reported the following: 'Mr Tsang believes that the principles of life and death education are more profound and philosophical than those of civic education' (麥梅卿, 2011). However, life education or life and death education has still not been implemented despite legislation being passed by the Legislative Council in 2002 requiring the government to implement life education in response to problems such as teenage suicide, drug abuse, and violence. Because the Education and Manpower Bureau (renamed EDB in July 2007) considered life education a part of moral and civic education, student counselling, and schools' academic curriculum, the bureau

had no intention to increase the subsidy for its implementation. The EDB also believed that not only schools but also wider society should have the responsibility to implement life education because different aspects in society affect young people. Schools should use different methods to introduce life education into their curriculum (王秉豪 et al., 2016). In sum, the EDB had neither an independent department nor a specific viewpoint or practical action towards how to implement life education or life and death education.

Therefore, a major recommendation in the final report by the Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides is that schools implement life and death education to help students overcome adversity and benefit their growth. Concerning the topic of teenage suicide, some researchers have investigated the relationship between young people's understanding, attitude, and death-related factors and the problem of suicide.

Among the 30 secondary school students interviewed, six (20%) reported that they would consider committing suicide over facing problems that they believe are impossible to deal with during adversity (Mak, 2011). The principal of a secondary school explained the reason for one of his students' attempted suicide: to face the

numerous mistakes the student had made in the past and possible future adversity, the student decided to ‘end the game’ by committing suicide, enabling the student to ‘restart the game [future life]’. This student’s rationale reflects how ignorant young people are of life and death.

Research on the awareness of death and dying among university or secondary students revealed that their notions of death are mainly derived from family, schools, religion, or personal experience. Some may also be affected by mass media (Mak, 2010; Mak, 2011). However, because of the perception that death is taboo, young people have limited knowledge or even misconceptions regarding death. The aforementioned research also revealed a common need among most of the university and secondary students: the importance of receiving appropriate education concerning death and dying at an earlier age. They also thought that life and death education should ideally be introduced in schools; furthermore, research on and education policies concerning the implementation of life education should be prioritised (Mak, 2011).

Communication and education are the most effective tools to address young people's avoidance, ignorance, and misunderstanding of matters concerning death and dying.

These tools can reduce young people's fear of and confusion towards death as well as empower them to face different changes and challenges in life.

Life education is perceived as a part of moral and civic education and has focused on helping students develop skills such as positive thinking, resilience, problem solving, and communication. However, the implementation of life education has never been officially or practically considered to address the needs of students in their process of growth. However, this cannot prevent life education from being the most valuable tool to guide young people in their growth and the pursuit of meaning in life.

Professor Sun Hsiao-Chih (孫效智, 2001) stated that life education evolved from the need to save lives. The concept originated in Australia in 1972 in response to the problem of drug abuse among young people at that time. Education policies were implemented, and research was conducted; the Life Education Center (LEC) was also established, targeting the problems of teenage drug abuse, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, and the prevention of violence. The LEC later became

one of the organisations of the United Nations. Its branches have been established in the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, South Africa, Thailand, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Taiwan started to introduce life education in secondary schools in 1997.

Hong Kong has already been offering life education for some time, but it remains in its preliminary stage, with some effort to promote and strengthen it in schools. Mak (2012) noted the slow pace of developing life education in Hong Kong. Despite being regarded as crucial by the EDB, life education has not been defined as an independent subject in schools. Schools are expected to implement life education independently.

According to the Primary School Profile 2014 and Secondary School Profile 2014 (王秉豪 et al., 2016), more than 20% of primary and secondary schools implemented life education in the academic year 2014–2015. Currently, most of the 400 secondary schools in Hong Kong report having implemented life education, but only a few have taught it as an independent subject.

In the absence of official curriculum or guidelines by the EDB, schools implement life education according to their understanding and needs. Some schools view life



education from a development perspective, with a focus on personal development, interpersonal relationships, social responsibility (civic responsibility), moral education, and religious studies. Other schools, which established and implemented life education earlier, have more mature and well-established experience in terms of the principles, curriculum, and development of teaching and learning. The establishment and implementation of life education in Hong Kong have drawn from and, to a certain extent, have been affected by Taiwan's experience. The principles of life education in Hong Kong can be divided into four relationships in life: human and self, human and others, human and nature (things), and human and spirit (heaven). However, topics related to death and dying as well as other death-related matters are rarely included in the curriculum.

Although the EDB has not considered establishing life education as a separate subject in schools, it started a 1-year scheme—the Programme on Planning Life Education in Primary Schools and the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools. These programmes invite universities that are eager to implement life education to apply to assist 20 primary and 20 secondary schools to develop and

introduce life education. The Hong Kong Institute of Education (renamed the Education University of Hong Kong [EdUHK] in May 2016) was commissioned to manage the Programme on Planning Life Education in Primary Schools for 10 consecutive years, from 2010 to 2020, as well as the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools from 2014 to 2020, for 6 consecutive years.

In the final stage of the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools, each of the schools was required to exhibit the main focus (theme) of the school's life education programme during that academic year. Among the 156 participating schools (including schools for students with special needs) from 2014 to 2020, only two schools explicitly explored the meaning of life from the perspective of death. Another school explored impermanence, which touched upon life and death matters. However, in general, few schools explored topics related to life and death in life education.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Programme on Planning Life Education in Primary/Secondary Schools 2019/20 (commissioned by the EDB), Centre for Religious and Spirituality Education EdUHK. Retrieved from <https://www.eduhk.hk/crse/tc/project/programme-on-planning-life-education-in-primary-secondary-schools-2018-19/>.

The two secondary schools that included 'death' as their theme in life education were (1) St. Marks' School (From death to life—Exploring the values of life through death (「出死入生」—

In short, life education in Hong Kong focuses on the exploration of life from the perspective of personal development (self-recognition—to treasure, value, and use life), moral and civic education (interpersonal relationship as well as social and civic responsibility), and career planning (helping students plan for their future careers).

Concerning life–death-related topics, two major focuses emerged: the prevention of suicide and religious beliefs. Education related to the prevention of suicide emphasises resilience and cultivates positive thinking, whereas education related to religious beliefs explores life and death through religions studies. Although the meaning of life is explored, the ultimate goal is the cultivation of religious beliefs.

#### **1.4 Life and Death in One Body: Life Education and Life and Death Education**

Life education is used to foster young people’s values and their perception of the meaning of life. Its original purpose was to reduce self-harm among young people but was later influenced by different educational perspectives, such as moral education,

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由死亡探討生命的價值」[2014–2015]) and (2) PHC Wing Kwong College (Mourning, thanksgiving, love, apology, forgiving, farewell—Life and death education (「悼念、道謝、道愛、道歉、道諒與道別—生死教育」)[2019–2020]). The Buddhist Sum Heung Lam Memorial College had a theme that touched upon ‘death’: Exploring life and death issues through ‘impermanence’ and *Tuesdays with Morrie*—Learning about impermanence and living in the present (「《相約星期二》—學習無常及活在當下」)(2016–2017).



including moral and civic education, religious studies, and whole-person education.

As mentioned, life education taught in many schools in Hong Kong is based on Taiwan's curriculum. Taiwan introduced life education in 1997, with the initial goal of preventing teenage suicide and violence; the goal later expanded to also include the value and meaning of life. Under the guidance of Professor Sun and other scholars through 'The Three Key Enquiries of Life', life education focused mainly on the following: ultimate concern and its practice, the cultivation of the ability to think and reflect on morality, and the integration of personality and spiritual development. Ultimate concern includes critical matters in death education and religious education (孫效智, 2004). Ultimate concern and its practice are closely related to death education; that is, through reflection on death-related matters, we can explore the value and meaning of life.

Life education and death education are not mutually exclusive but mutually interpretative. Life and death are two sides of the same coin. Schools in Hong Kong rarely mention matters related to death, concern of life and death, or ultimate concern.

The reasons for this relative absence include the following: the topic is not regarded

as relevant to schools' situation; the topic is not a major concern of schools; or

teachers, students, and parents are not ready to explore and discuss such issues.

However, exploring life and death issues based on the existing life education

curriculum and its teaching and learning at this stage is valuable and meaningful.

First, only a few schools implementing life education have included some elements

and content related to death education and provided related experiential activities. Ho

Fung Ping, Wendy (何鳳屏) researched the effectiveness of life education in a

group of F.6 students in a secondary school as the theme of her master thesis.<sup>15</sup> Wu

Yu Feng's (吳宇峰) master research was an empirical study of experimental

teaching of life and death education in a secondary school.<sup>16</sup> Precious Blood

Secondary School (寶血女子中學) organised an activity named 'Stations of the

Cross' to enable students to 'accompany Jesus Christ on his journey of the cross'

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<sup>15</sup> Ho Fung Ping, Wendy. (1995). *Effects of death education on students: a case study*. The University of Hong Kong. Retrieved from [http://dx.doi.org/10.5353/th\\_b3195784](http://dx.doi.org/10.5353/th_b3195784); <http://hdl.handle.net/10722/26532>.

<sup>16</sup> Wu Yu Feng, 吳宇峰 (2009). *A Study on Experimental teaching of Life-and Death Education Programme for the Secondary School Students in Hong Kong*. (生死教育課程對香港某中學學生實驗教學之實證研究). Nanhua University (南華大學), Taiwan. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/11296/pj3vmr>

(「陪伴耶穌踏上苦路之旅」) to help them understand cognitively and empathise emotionally with Jesus as he walked on the road to crucifixion. The activity included meditation on life and death to enable students to recognise and experience the feeling of sacrifice and self-denial; the goal was ultimately for the students to develop love in faith and consider the meaning of life and death from different perspectives during a traditional festival. The Chinese YMCA Secondary School (中華基督教青年會中學) introduced a trial scheme for life education, named ‘Adventure-Based Counselling Activity: Simulated Disaster Situation’

(「歷奇輔導體驗活動：模擬災難情境」). Although the activity did not involve an exploration of death, students were able to consider and explore life and death while facing disasters.<sup>17</sup>

Academic circles in Hong Kong have placed great emphasis on the implementation of death education and the exploration of its relationship with life education. The

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<sup>17</sup> Programme on Planning Life Education in Primary/Secondary Schools 2019/20 (commissioned by EDB) Website of Centre for Religious and Spirituality Education EdUHK. Retrieved from: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GRLPPFrNqV5yb2SvxEDqwO-j\\_7kF9Qrm](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GRLPPFrNqV5yb2SvxEDqwO-j_7kF9Qrm); Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools (2015-16) Partnership Schools Trial Module, [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GRLPPFrNqV5yb2SvxEDqwO-j\\_7kF9Qrm](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GRLPPFrNqV5yb2SvxEDqwO-j_7kF9Qrm)

research topic of 曾文珊 for her Master of Education thesis at the Chinese University of Hong Kong was ‘How to Educate Youths? A Narrative Inquiry of Three Youth Workers on Youth Life and Death Education’

(〈年青的生命怎樣教育？三位青少年生死教育工作者之敘事探究〉). Her study was an exploration of how life and death education in Hong Kong inspires young people to reflect on life to gain more power and determination to seek meaning in life. <sup>18</sup> Lingnan University (香港嶺南大學) offered an elective course named ‘Life and Death’ in Philosophy and General Education’, <sup>19</sup> which has been established as an independent course of Thanatology under Philosophy Department since 2002. <sup>20</sup>

In 2006, with a donation from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust (HKJCCT), the Centre on Behavioural Health of the University of Hong Kong

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<sup>18</sup> 曾文珊。(2015)。《年青的生命怎樣教育？三位青少年生死教育工作者之敘事探究》。香港中文大學。(How to Educate Youth's Life? The Narrative Inquiry of Three Youth Workers on Youth Life and Death Education. The Chinese University of Hong Kong.)

<sup>19</sup> Lingnan University General Education. Retrieved from [https://www.ln.edu.hk/le/cwd02/about\\_course/about\\_course.html](https://www.ln.edu.hk/le/cwd02/about_course/about_course.html)

<sup>20</sup> Lingnan University, Department of Philosophy. Retrieved from [https://www.ln.edu.hk/philoso/life\\_death/main.php.html](https://www.ln.edu.hk/philoso/life_death/main.php.html)

launched the ENABLE Project aiming to (1) promote to the public the understanding of death and bereavement, (2) support elderly patients and their families to prepare for death, and (3) develop comprehensive professional training to support terminally ill patients and their families during death. The project, which included research, education, and publications, highlighted that in future life education should be expanded to every age group, especially young people, to assist them to master the value of life and death.<sup>21</sup>

Some organisations, such as Ark Life Education House in Ma Wan and the Jockey Club Life Journey Centre's Senior Citizen Home Safety Association, also provide resources for life and death education. The hospice care department of S.K.H. Holy Carpenter Church District Elderly Community Centre (聖公會聖匠堂長者區中心屬下安寧服務部) organised 「當繪本遇見死神」, a free exhibition to promote picture books about life and death education on 1 December 2017. The talk for teachers and parents shared how to discuss life and death with children. Jockey Club End-of-Life

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<sup>21</sup> The Centre on Behavioral Health (CBH) of The University of Hong Kong, ENABLE Project (美善生命計劃). Retrieved from <https://www.ke.hku.hk/spotlight/a-renewed-positive-perspective-on-death-through-the-enable-project-society-takes-a-more-active-role-in-facing-and-preparing-for-mortality>; <http://www.enable.hk/>



Community Project (賽馬會安寧頌計劃) was also introduced in the exhibition.<sup>22</sup>

Tung Wah Group of Hospitals organised a conference on life and death education focusing on people with intellectual disabilities, named ‘Don’t hide, this is not hide-and-seek’

In the conference 《別躲了，這不是捉迷藏》－智障人士生死教育研討會 organised by the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals in 2013, research results were shared regarding how people with intellectual disabilities face death and bereavement as well as their needs and the effectiveness of education concerning life and death matters.<sup>23</sup>

Other organisations cooperate with or are stationed in schools to provide learning opportunities related to life and death education.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, in this context,

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<sup>22</sup> Retrieved from the Facebook of the hospice care department of S.K.H. Holy Carpenter Church (聖公會聖匠堂安寧服務部) . <https://www.facebook.com/parangels/posts/908115702676174/>; Jockey Club End-of-Life Community Care Project, <http://foss.hku.hk/jcecc/zh/教師家長生死教育講座一-當繪本遇見死神-2/>

<sup>23</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.tungwah.org.hk/newsletter/> 《別躲了，這不是捉迷藏》-智障人士生死教育研討/

<sup>24</sup> Bliss and Wisdom Charitable Foundation (2015) . Death is the greatest invention of Life: Life and Death Education Activities and Lesson Plans (死亡是生命中最偉大的發明：生死教育推廣活動及教案結集) Bliss and Wisdom Charitable Foundation.

exploring and researching topics related to life and death in life education have become particularly crucial.

Little research has been conducted on how secondary schools implement life education, especially in terms of topics addressing death and dying and other related matters. The University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Lingnan University have offered some seminars and courses and conducted research on this topic, focusing mainly on more specific topics of thanatology, such as medical science, nursing, philosophy, psychology, and grief counselling. Few investigations have addressed matters related to education, teaching, and learning. In 2013, the University of Hong Kong School of Professional and Continuing Education and the Society of Life and Death Education co-organised a series of courses on life and death education named ‘Thoughts on Life and Death’（死生之念及思入生死課程），with the aim of expanding learners’ knowledge of death, reducing their avoidance of death, helping them discuss life and death matters with their family calmly and easily, providing information on the needs and mental state of dying patients, and helping them learn how to help patients make arrangements for their funeral. The courses also

included different workshops, film appreciation and sharing, and visits to funeral services and graveyards. The book *DEATH, DYING and BEREAVEMENT: A Hong Kong Chinese Experience* (Lai & Yin, 2006) is a discussion of death, dying, and bereavement by different scholars, such as different perspectives towards death between East and West. *Gazing into Death: Multi-disciplinary Perspective (in Chinese)* (《凝視死亡：死與人間的多元省思》) (Leung & Cheung 梁美儀, 張燦輝, 2005) includes articles by scholars of different areas, such as religion, anthropology, medical science, and nursing presented at Death and Life-world: Multi-disciplinary Seminar (「死與人間」研討會) organised by the Office of General Education of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2002. However, the two publications did not devote much attention to life and death education in secondary schools. Social Workers Across Borders held the Life and Death Education Conference in 2019. Despite the inclusion of discussions on how Taiwan made use of ‘experiencing death’ in death education, little academic research exploring the teaching of life and death education was shared. <sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Social Workers Across Borders Ltd, Conference of Life and Death Education 2019

<https://www.swab.org.hk/tc/%E6%B4%BB%E5%8B%95%E8%B3%87%E8%A8%8AUdyq7ef60>

COVID-19, one of the deadliest pandemics, has not yet been completely under control (1 April 2021). Some scholars advocated death education for students of all levels from elementary to undergraduate should be fully strengthened in this pandemic situation. The education for and promotion to the “public square” should also be enhanced. (McAfee et al, 2020). During COVID-19 pandemic, different sharing on life and death education could be found in Hong Kong. For example, sponsored by the Wong Tai Sin District Council, Hong Kong Life and Death Studies Association organized 「齊上齊學－抗疫及生死教育線上工作坊」, including talks and workshops mainly for the residents in Wong Tai Sin district according to the requirement of the fund. The topics of the workshops concerned people’s physical and mental well-being in the pandemic, while talks covered ‘life and death education’.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, some organizations offered courses on life and death education. For example, HOBBYHK was sponsored by the Southern District Council to organize the

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[5fc8dba5425d6965fbd4c8fbe1fZ1b4755e86d92e291c7f6e3d7d7a6326cMdkp](https://www.facebook.com/LifeAndDeathEducation/posts/3190769864354682?comment_id=3199055136859488)

<sup>26</sup> This activity cannot be found on the website of Hong Kong Life and Death Studies Association which has not been updated but on 「生死教育 X 伍桂麟」 Facebook page:

[https://www.facebook.com/LifeAndDeathEducation/posts/3190769864354682?comment\\_id=3199055136859488](https://www.facebook.com/LifeAndDeathEducation/posts/3190769864354682?comment_id=3199055136859488).

talk 「人生何處覓意義 —— 意義感的四個支柱 (敘事篇)」 in 2021, using narrative approach to reconstruct life story to arouse people's awareness of the meaning of life.

The talk also covered topics related to life and death education. The aforementioned were mainly targeted to the public.<sup>27</sup> In sum, much effort and work has been devoted to the promotion of life and death education in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the implementation of life and death education in Hong Kong secondary schools is also important which must be further strengthened. Are Hong Kong secondary schools working in this direction? How is life and death education introduced in secondary schools?

Considerable room for improvement and development remains in terms of research, principles, practice, and teachers' development of life and death education. The current research involved case studies of three secondary schools with their own life education curriculum, which includes topics concerning life and death, to understand how these topics are introduced in life and death education in Hong Kong schools.

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<sup>27</sup> The activity can be found on HOBBYHK Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/hobbyasliving/posts/3770408079741377>. Other life and death education activities of HOBBYHK can be found: <https://hobbyhk.org/lifeeducation/>

The schools' main needs and concerns, difficulties they encountered when implementing the curriculum, and attempted solutions were also explored. On the basis of the findings, I provide suggestions for curriculum implementation and development as well as highlight areas for further research on life–death-related topics in life education in Hong Kong.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This research involved case studies to examine the implementation of life and death education in Hong Kong secondary schools.

In the following sections, I will first explain the differences among ‘life education’, ‘death education’ and ‘life and death education’. Then based on the research questions, the situation of implementing life and death education in Hong Kong, the different observations, participation and discovery of scholars towards its implementation will be discussed, followed by the concerns of implementing life and death education, including objectives, teaching methodology (use of multimedia resources and experiential learning), and the importance of sympathy in teaching. Finally, I will propose the principles of life and death education.

李佩怡（2004）stated ‘life education’, ‘death education’, ‘life and death education’ are often confused; Phan et al. (2020) believed that life education, life and death education are even perceived as the same. Their respective meanings and differences are explained below.

## 2.1 What is Life Education?

Phan et al. (2020) believed that ‘Life education, also known as life and death education, is an important subject in Taiwan...’ (p.1) Life education originated in the west. When the Ministry of Education of Taiwan first introduced life education in 1998, it had different understanding and development towards the content and objectives of life education.

Life education was first offered in Ananda Village, founded by J. Donald Walters in California in 1968. His book, *Education for Life: Preparing Children to Meet the Challenges*, argued that life education not only trains students to pursue their careers or acquire knowledge but also teaches them to equip themselves for future challenges; fosters their physical, mental, and spiritual development; and helps them comprehend the meaning and purpose of life (Walters, 1999, translated by 林鶯).

Sun (2001a) stated that life education originated in Australia in 1974 to address a major social problem: teenage drug abuse. Rev. Ted Noffs initiated the concept of life education, and the LEC was established in Sydney in 1979 to assist with antidrug education in schools as an application of life education. At the LEC, young people



were taught to have a positive, healthy, and determined attitude towards life and were provided with a healthy living environment; this was regarded as the most effective method to prevent the problem. Life education centres are now common in most primary and secondary schools in Australia, with the aim of providing comprehensive life education. The LEC was later developed as an international organisation and became a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) member of the United Nations. LEC branches were also established in various countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, South Africa, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (高昌平, 2002; 黄淵基, 2015)

‘Life education’ is used in the English version of the website of Life Education Activity Programme (LEAP) established based on the principle and aim of Australian Life Education Centre (LEC):

Life Education originated in Australia. The first Life Education Centre was established in 1979 by the Reverend Ted Noffs in Sydney, Australia. The concept spread throughout Australia and then internationally. Today Life Education also

operates in Australia, Barbados, Cyprus, Finland, Hungary, Macau, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and USA.

In the Chinese version of the website, ‘Life Education’ is rendered instead as

“Education about living”（生活教育）：<sup>28</sup>：

生活教育的概念源自澳洲——在一九七九年，Ted Noffs 牧師於澳洲悉尼創辦了首間生活教育中心後，此概念傳遍澳洲，並擴展至世界各地。時至今日，生活教育已在澳洲、巴巴多斯、塞浦路斯、芬蘭、匈牙利、澳門、新西蘭、英國及美國開展教育的工作。

The objective of implementing life education in Australia is clear:

At Life Education we are innovators in the health education space. This was proven with our inception in 1979 and remains true today.<sup>29</sup>

The objective of implementing life education in Australia has long been about health education which concerns life (survival) and living. Therefore, it is understandable

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<sup>28</sup> LEAP Webpage (English Version): [https://www.leap.org.hk/en/about\\_us.php?cid=10](https://www.leap.org.hk/en/about_us.php?cid=10); (Chinese Version, 中文版): [https://www.leap.org.hk/tc/about\\_us.php?cid=10](https://www.leap.org.hk/tc/about_us.php?cid=10)。

<sup>29</sup> Life Education: <https://www.lifeeducation.org.au/about-us/40>.

that ‘life education’ is used instead of ‘health education’ or ‘education of life (living)’.

Life education in Hong Kong and Taiwan began in the 1990s, with Taiwan being the first among the Chinese community to develop a more comprehensive life education curriculum. In Taiwan, life education was first introduced in schools in the form of a pilot programme at Stella Matutina Girls’ High School

（台中市私立曉明女子中學），with the aim of addressing the problems of teenage suicide and bullying in schools. The Ministry of Education of Taiwan also implemented a comprehensive top-down life education programme in 1997 to help young people develop an appropriate attitude towards life: to treasure their lives, respect others, and master the meaning and value of life (高昌平, 2002; 何琦瑜, 2003, cited from 陳柏霖, 2006).

In Taiwan, stakeholders had different perspectives concerning the objectives and content of life education. For instance, the movement of the Three Acts of Goodness by Fo Guang Shan（佛光山），‘Do Good Deeds, Speak Good Words, and Think Good Thoughts’ is closely related to life education. The Bliss and Wisdom Cultural

and Educational Foundation emphasised observing merits and appreciating kindness when implementing life education. Chung Yuan Christian University (中原大學) used the holistic structure of ‘heaven, human, objects, and self’ as the structural basis of whole-person education and general education. Sun (2000) contended that despite the different backgrounds of institutions that implement life education and the diverse themes they employ, the solutions are interconnected. The objectives of life education are to help people explore and understand the meaning of life; respect and treasure the value of life; be passionate and develop a unique approach to life; and practise and live with self, others, heaven, and earth in an inclusive and harmonious manner. What is life education? Professor Sun believed that ‘in one word, life education concerns the fundamental problems of human beings, aiming at leading people to be conscious of these problems and explore them in order to acquire wisdom and lead a fulfilling life.’ (孫效智，林綺雲，& 94 年生命教育知識平台計劃，2005。p.vii) Sun (2001b) based the core themes of life education on the ‘Three Enquiries of Life’: Why do I/humans live? How should humans live? How should humans live a life that they should live? The first enquiry relates to ultimate concern—exploring the purpose and

meaning of life, with the aim of ‘deepening life view’ and establishing ultimate beliefs. The second enquiry relates to ‘moral thoughts and reflections’, exploring the direction men should choose and ‘what should and should not be done’. Life aesthetics was later added to the second enquiry to widen the scope of ‘value speculation’. The third enquiry focuses on the ‘integration of personality and spiritual cultivation’ to integrate cognition, emotion, and determination and ‘express the inner self sincerely’ so as to achieve the stage of unity of knowledge and action. To conclude, life education emphasizes the meaning and value of life, the ‘knowledge of life’, guiding students to achieve the ‘unity of knowledge and action’ (Sun, 2008; 2009; 2019).

In addition to the ‘Three Enquiries of Life’ as the core theme of life education, Professor Sun also included ‘cultivation of competencies of thinking’ (philosophy of thinking) and ‘exploration of humanity’ as the methodology and basis of the ‘Three Enquiries of Life’ to establish the five core attainments of life education. The establishment of curriculum guidelines and teachers’ development in Taiwan’s life education is based on this theoretical structure (Sun, 2015; 2019).

Under the establishment and implementation of the Curriculum Guidelines of 12-Year Basic Education by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan, life education is officially included under the domain of integrative activities in different types of secondary schools as a core or elective course. In addition to a curriculum that schools can follow, these guidelines also include certain elements of life education in the National Core Competencies; as such, the philosophy of life education becomes the foundation for the curriculum planning of different domains. Because of its extension from a single topic or a learning activity to a subject that is integrated into different subjects or even a comprehensive curriculum, the development of life education in Taiwan has matured, and the system is progressing towards whole-person education.

Hong Kong implemented life education at a time when it faced similar social and economic problems as in other parts of the world, especially teenage self-harm behaviour, such as drug abuse, bullying, and suicide. To address the societal problems, some stakeholders hoped to strengthen Hong Kong people's confidence, resilience, and competitiveness to manage future problems, especially among teenagers, by offering certain types of education or training. Different organisations

and schools implemented life education with their own characteristics, focus, and resources. The Catholic Education Office of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong initiated the series ‘Love and Life Education’ in 1999, providing materials and teaching methodologies for family education (黃成榮, 2002). The Department of Cultural and Religious Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and SPHRC Kung Yik She Secondary School (天水圍十八鄉鄉事委員會公益社中學) implemented the exploration and practice of life education in the school in 2001. They not only introduced the subject of life education but also established the life education committee to cooperate with the discipline and guidance committee, cocurricular activities committee, home-school association, and organisations outside school to organise life education activities. In 2002, Professor Ma Hing Keung (馬慶強) of Hong Kong Baptist University implemented the Life and Ethics Education Programme for Primary and Secondary School Students. The Centre for Citizenship Education of the Hong Kong Institute of Education (renamed EdUHK in May 2016) advocated the integration of civic education and value education through life education in 2002. All these actions suggest that life education is based on social

interaction. Different organisations have actively promoted life education and successfully cooperated with local schools.

The introduction and development of life education in Hong Kong referenced the theoretical framework and model of Taiwan. Since 1999, most of the schools in Hong Kong implementing life education have gradually introduced their own curriculums.

Although localisation can be observed in the implementation of life education, school-based life education emphasises practice and action rather than exploring the understanding of life education. For example, life education lacks a localised theory and structural framework that addresses questions such as ‘what is life education?’, ‘what is life education for?’ and ‘what is life education about?’. How people perceive life education will result in different understanding, which may result in diverse implementations.

Because life education covers various dimensions, different perspectives result in a different focus. Some may regard life education as religious studies, moral education, values education, or positive education. Rev. Lo Lung-kwong (盧龍光, 2019) argued that religious studies focuses on religion, whereas moral education, values education,



and positive education are concerned with virtues and values. When life education is implemented through the aforementioned perspectives, the content and themes do not deviate from those of life education itself but cannot be considered comprehensive.

Although these perspectives of life education will not result in ‘the system of the Dao being torn in fragments’ (Zhuangzi, *Tian Xia*, 《莊子・天下篇》).

<https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/tian-xia>), the ‘blind-men-feeling-the-elephant’ approach will inevitably lack parity and completeness when implementing life education.

周惠賢 and 楊國強(2002)defined life education by stating its two objectives: (1) encouraging students to treasure life and (2) helping students develop appropriate perspectives when encountering diverse situations in life. The aforementioned researchers provided the following definition of life education: (1) cultivating students’ balanced intellectual, emotional, mental, and physical development and (2) establishing a mutually respectful, communicative, and responsible relationship with self, others, and the environment so that students can grow in maturity and have a joyful life.

梁錦波 (2011) integrated the principles of life education from various scholars to suggest a ‘whole-person’ approach to life education as the main model for the implementation of life education in Hong Kong. He proposed that life education should include four elements, namely physical, mental, social, and spiritual, involving material, intellectual, interpersonal, and philosophical (spiritual) states to interact in four different dimensions, namely human and objects, human and self, human and others, and human and the environment and heaven.

The objectives of life education are ‘being a man’, understanding and respecting life, and being benevolent towards the self and others according to the Confucian notion of exerting oneself to do good deeds.

## **2.2 What is Death Education?**

When exploring life, dealing with death is inevitable. Death is the unavoidable and irreversible ending of life. Wherever there is life, death will also be. Despite being perceived as the ending, completion, transcendence, or transformation of life, when facing death, people tend to be full of confusion. The only certainty regarding death is that all people must face it.

Thanatology and death education are closely related. The term thanatology was first used in Elie Metchnikoff's *The Nature of Man*, written in 1903. The word thanatology is of Greek origin. According to Greek mythology, *Thanatos* (death) was the son of *Nyx* (night) and *Chronos* (time) and twin brother of *Hypnos* (sleep). Ancient Greeks began to use *thanatos* as a generic word for death. (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2007, as cited in Fonseca & Testoni, 2012) Death has always intrigued humans. For example, Socrates' discussion on the soul's immortality and the overarching theme of death in Seneca's letter (Postiglione, 2008, as cited in Fonseca & Testoni, 2012).

Thanatology is an integration of different disciplines, exploring death and related phenomenon and behaviour through different perspectives. According to Kastenbaum, known as the study of death, thanatology is an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses various areas of study. The aim of thanatology is to construct a scientific comprehension of death, its rites, and its meanings. The 'study of life with death left in' is an alternative definition of thanatology (Kastenbaum, 1993, p. 76, as cited in Fonseca & Testoni, 2012, p.157).

Death education is part of thanatology. Death education has been practised both formally and informally throughout human history. Herman Feifel's book *The Meaning of Death* in 1959 was the first work of the death awareness movement and resulted in greater attention on formal death education. And the death awareness movement is seen as death education (Wass, 2004). Elisabeth Kubler-Ross published *On Death and Dying* in 1969 to explore the psychological state of terminally ill patients and proposed five stages of grief (five stages of responses in ordinary people): denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In addition to illuminating the psychological state of terminally ill patients, the book has become a classic of death education, which has had a profound effect on hospice care and the development of death education. Pine (1986) contended that the hospice movement and death education movement developed in parallel in society. The implementation of death education in secondary schools and universities followed the start of the death awareness movement (Corr & Corr, 2013). During that period, high schools and universities held activities concerning thanatology, and the development of death

education courses flourished; life and death matters were also further expanded into concern regarding the meaning of life (Corr, 2015).

Because most studies during that time highlighted the positive influence of death education on people's attitude towards death, degree of anxiety, and perspective of death, the number of studies and courses on death education also increased. In statistics released in 2000, the Association for Death Education and Counseling, founded in 1976, revealed that there were 3700 hospice care organisations and mentioned the establishment of death education and a professional certificate for death counsellor (林綺雲，張苑珍等, 2018).

It is generally acknowledged that all kinds of education concerning death-related topics can be classified as death education. The purpose of death education is to acquire knowledge and skills to address various problems and situations caused by death. Death education involves the (1) analysis of death and an interpretation of the process of understanding death and the relation between life and death, (2) identification of the differences and similarities of death and mourning in different

cultures, and (3) knowledge on the experience of mutual or individual bereavement, with ‘transcending the quality of life’ being the most crucial. David Leviton proposed the three dimensions of death education: the nature of death, the attitude towards death and dying and the emotions that arise, and the adjustment to death and dying.

The objectives and focus of death education should vary when teaching different target audiences. Wass integrated these objectives into three aspects: (1) acceptance of death-related information, (2) development of abilities and skills for facing and managing matters concerning death, and (3) clarification and cultivation of individual values (張淑美, 1999).

Kurlychek argued that death education pertains to increasing one’s knowledge of the role of death in life and the process of providing a structure for students to examine and integrate all these matters into their lives (Gibson et al., 1982,10, cited in 蘇雅慧, 2006). The International Work Group on Death, Dying, and Bereavement proposed the principles of death education in 1992. The experience of death has a considerable effect on people; therefore, having an appropriate attitude towards death and hospice care as well as having the ability to make decisions for one’s own and other people’s

lives with quality and quantity is not only effective in maintaining individual well-being and meaning in life but also improves the quality of life in society (International Work Group on Death, Dying, and Bereavement, 1992).

The purpose of implementing death education is to help students have a more comprehensive recognition and understanding of death, encourage change in behaviour (e.g. a reduction of fear and anxiety when facing and experiencing death), and encourage more balanced feelings towards death (i.e. an absence of anxiety concerning death). An increase in knowledge changes people's response when encountering death. Death education not only addresses the theoretical (intellectual) definition of death but also focuses on topics derived from death, such as anxiety related to death, hospice care, palliative care service, bereavement, and sorrow.

By contrast, life education begins with a focus on matters related to life, assisting people to pursue the meaning of life and face death appropriately. The recognition and exploration of death education is only one of the items in life education (Sun, 2001). By contrast, death education begins with an exploration of death-related topics, with the meaning and value of life being the main focus; this encourages people to

live positively as they approach death and end their lives with no regrets but only peace. Life is involved in death; life and death are interconnected. Therefore, some scholars believe that death education is in fact life education (Corr & Corr, 2013; 張淑美, 1998, 2000, 2001).

### 2.3 What is Life and Death Education?

Is life and death education simply a combination of life education and death education? Does it involve using the joy of life to mitigate the fear of death? Does it state the truth that life and death are two sides of the same entity?

Life and death education was proposed in the book *Dignity of Death and Respect for Life* by Professor Fu Wei-hsun (傅偉勳) published in 1993. Life and death education was named by Prof. Kuo-Shu Yang (楊國樞教授) who suggested using ‘life and death education’ to replace ‘thanatology’ in the prelude of Professor Fu’s book *Dignity of Death and Respect for Life*.

Professor Fu observed that life and death education was constructed and developed on the basis of research results on thanatology from the United States as well as on Chinese wisdom concerning life and death. The core belief of life and death education



is that ‘life and death are two sides of an entity’: death and life are not regarded as mutually exclusive or opposite to each other. In life and death education, death-related topics are expanded to include life and death topics so that the dignity of death is closely related to the dignity of life, which enables the exploration of how modern people overcome death spiritually and appreciate the ultimate meaning of life. Life and death education can be regarded as ‘modern thanatology’ (傅偉勳, 1993). As Taiwan launched life education in 1997, the concepts of life and death education, introduced by Professor Fu, also gained greater prominence.

Life and Death Education was implemented by the Education Bureau of Kaohsiung City Government in 1998 and the *Handbook of Life and Death Education* (生死教育手冊) was published. Although the curriculum included death-related topics to strengthen the education towards death, it was believed that the notions of “life” and “death” were mutually inclusive. “Death education” alone cannot completely express the exploration of the meaning of life, which was in line with the concept of ‘thanatology’ by Professor Fu. Therefore, it was called Life and Death Education.



However, 許禮安(2016) disapproved of the change from thanatology to life and death studies and later to life education and believed that it was an unconscious use of the joy of life to dilute the fear of death.

In 1999, Ovid Tzeng (曾志朗) proposed that the content of life education is to emphasise affective education, establish interpersonal relationship, understand the meaning of life, respect others, recognize death properly (陳立言, 2004).

In 2003, the domain of ultimate concern of life (「人生終極關懷領域」) in the Teaching Resources of Life Education Construction Scheme (「生命教育教學資源建構計畫」) included the ‘concern of life and death’ (thanatology and life and death education) taught by Professors Co-shih Chantal Chao, Gee Chieh-fang and Lin Chi-yun (趙可式教授、紀潔芳教授、林綺雲教授). ‘Concern of life and death’ was a one-term elective course of life education with 2 credits designed by Professors Co-shih Chantal Chao, Gee Chieh-fang and Lin Chi-yun (陳立言, 2004; 孫效智, 2008).

Professor Sun Hsiao-Chih (孫效智(2008) suggested the positive value of ‘death’ in exploring the ‘meaning of life’ when discussing the focus and characteristics of senior secondary life education curriculum:

..... death education is like a severe warning to remind people in chaotic times:

you can forget death, but death will not forget you; ..... still, the inevitability of

death will make people feel uneasy or hard to endure but facing death is an

important opportunity and beginning for pursuing the truth of life. To avoid

death experience or neglect the education of death will not lead to true and

profound philosophical education of life. (p.4)

The Ministry of Education in Taiwan launched the revised edition of the curriculum guidelines for life education in 2018. It was based on the ‘Three Key Enquiries of Life’ by Professor Sun and developed into five core qualities: ultimate concern, speculation of values, spiritual cultivation, philosophy (cultivation or competencies) of thinking, and exploration of humanity. Ultimate concern includes three dimensions: (1) objectives and meaning of life, (2) concern of life and death and its practice, and (3) ultimate beliefs and religions. The topics of ultimate concern

integrate crucial matters concerning life and death as well as human philosophy and religions, guiding students to master the meaning of life and establish their ultimate beliefs concerning life. The curriculum guidelines cite eight core abilities, one of which is pondering life and death matters so as to reflect on the principles and practice of life–death concerns. Life–death concerns originated from and were constructed according to the eight core abilities: understanding related to death, reflection on the relationship between life and death, reflection on the religious concept of life and death, exploration on the meaning of life and death in literature and art, understanding the principles and practice of life and death, understanding related to loss and grief counselling, exploration of the meaning of funeral culture, and cultivation of the ability to practise the concern of life and death. The arrangement and explanation of the above curriculum guidelines reflect the inevitable importance of ‘death’ or ‘death-related topics’ in exploring the meaning of life.

Professor Chang Shu-mei (張淑美), a scholar of life and death education in Taiwan, proposed the definition for death education and life and death education; Prof. Chang contented that by exploring the nature of death and the phenomenon of

dying and bereavement, people can reflect deeply on their relationship with self, others, society, nature, and even the universe and become aware of the ultimate meaning and value of life; that is, education related to facing death, overcoming the fear and anxiety of death, transcending death, and reflecting on life can help people understand and treasure life, exhibit the brilliance of human nature, and live out the meaning of life (張淑美, 2001).

Rev. Lo Lung-kwong (盧龍光, 2019) believed that life and death education is the basis of life education. Life education involves the development of a positive view of life and death as well as the exploration of the process of growth between the two.

Life includes birth, survival, daily living, and being; death is nonexistence or disappearance; the time in between refers to the process of growth, which includes matters such as living, ageing, sickness, love, hatred, and desire.

Confucius said, ‘If you do not understand life, how can you understand death?’

(quoted in Chen, 2013, p. 119) This explains why life is treasured but death is neglected in traditional Chinese culture. Confucius remarked, ‘The superior man does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to virtue. In moments of haste, he

cleaves to it. In seasons of danger, he cleaves to it' (*Li Ren* ㄹㄣ 仁), Ch. 5; <https://ctext.org/analects/li-ren>). Confucius also said, 'The determined scholar and the man of virtue will not seek to live at the expense of injuring their virtue. They will even sacrifice their lives to preserve their virtue complete' (*Wei Ling Gong* ㄨㄟ 靈 公), Ch. 9; <https://ctext.org/analects/wei-ling-gong>). In terms of life and death, Confucius expected people to live well and die well. His saying, 'If we do not understand death, how can we understand life?' highlights that people should understand death to understand life. We are reminded that before we die, we should explore why we live, how to live, and how we can live a worthy life. Life and death education emphasises that the foundation of life is the process from life to death. Humans should strive to live a meaningful life with dignity. When facing death, we should not only have dignity but also transcend death spiritually in addition to exploring the ultimate meaning of life and death.

#### **2.4 The situation and needs of life and death education in Hong Kong**

The Hong Kong Education Bureau has not established formal life education curriculum, not to mention life and death education. As mentioned, Hong Kong

schools implement and design school-based life education and life and death education curriculums. Although the EDB does not use the term ‘life and death education’ or refer it to life education directly, the following explanation about life education by the EDB can be applied to the discussion of life and death education.

Amidst calls from scholars and educationalists (王秉豪 et al., 2016), life education in Hong Kong started in the 1990s and developed slowly (Mak, 2012). The Hong Kong EDB has long regarded life education as the cultivation of positive values and resilience. Life education is even categorised under moral, civic, and national education. In the introduction to life education on the EDB’s website, the principles of life education are stated explicitly: ‘Life education is regarded as moral, civic and national education which is aimed at fostering perseverance’.<sup>30</sup> The EDB intends to encourage students to persevere, treasure life, and not easily abandon life. In addition to strengthening their resilience, students can also learn to be optimistic, positive, and persistent when facing diverse challenges in life. Therefore, the prevention of suicide

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<sup>30</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.edb.gov.hk/tc/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/moral-civic/Newwebsite/html/Life.html>

is one of the objectives of life education advocated by the EDB. By cultivating resilience, life education can help prevent suicide. Chan Chi Wai (陳志威, 2017) observed that the EDB did not specify the content of life education but only proposed learning through life experience, listing some life experience-based activities as a reference for schools to implement life education. Thus, relevant curriculums are still far from comprehensive.

The EDB bears no responsibility for the implementation of life education. It has explicitly stated that no formal curriculum for life education will be established, but schools are expected to introduce school-based life education in diverse manners (王秉豪 et al., 2016). The EDB also does not provide specific suggestions for how life education should be implemented or any practical curriculum guidelines. The bureau only states that life education should be implemented according to students' life experience, and learning should be interactive (EDB, 2016; Cheung Wing Hung 張永雄, 2010, cited from Chan Chi Wai, 陳志威, 2017).



Under these circumstances, schools must design the teaching and learning plan of life education, and life and death education as well as execute and evaluate the curriculum in an independent manner according to their own understanding.

In 2010, the Moral, Civic and National Education section of the EDB started a 1-year programme to assist schools as they plan their life education curriculums.

The Hong Kong Institute of Education (renamed EdUHK in May 2016) was commissioned to manage the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools from academic year 2014–2015 to 2019–2020 (6 consecutive years). The programme includes assistance in terms of recommendations and advice on planning and implementing school-based life education. The assistance encompasses various aspects such as management and organisation, teaching and learning (curriculum-related matters, activities design, and implementation), and student assistance.<sup>31</sup>

Because it is a 1-year programme, school visits are limited to avoid disturbing rather than assisting the schools. Unfortunately, establishing a comprehensive and

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<sup>31</sup> Programme on Planning Life Education in Primary/Secondary Schools in 2019/20 School Year (Commissioned by EDB). Retrieved from <https://www.eduhk.hk/crse/project/programme-on-planning-life-education-in-primary-secondary-schools-2018-19/>

systematic curriculum as well as implementing it successfully within such a short time is impossible.

Of the 156 secondary schools that participated in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools over the 6-year period, only two schools included life and death as the theme in its life education curriculum, with a third school including the topic of impermanence (unpredictability), which could be regarded as an attempt to explore life–death-related topics. In addition to the difficulty involved in exploring topics related to life and death, implementing life education with limited time and resources is a major challenge.

Research has revealed that because of the rarity of life education, ‘quality of death’ in Hong Kong was lagging behind that of other countries or regions. The Economist Intelligence Unit measured countries’ Quality of Death Index in 2010 and 2015 according to five categories: palliative and healthcare environment, supply of palliative care professionals, affordability of care, quality of care, and community engagement. In 2010, Britain was ranked first among 40 countries supplying palliative care services. Taiwan and Singapore ranked 14th and 18th, respectively.

Hong Kong was ranked 20th. An Apple Daily report in 2013 entitled '*Having no policy on Life Education: Hong Kong ranked lower than Taiwan in the Quality of Death Index*' (〈無政策推行生死教育：死亡質素排名，香港低過台灣〉)

cited the 2010 Quality of Death Index results to indicate that the response to death and dying was desperately insufficient in Hong Kong, urging the government to take greater responsibility (Apple Daily, 26 November 2013).

The second Quality of Death Index report (in 2015), which evaluated 80 countries that provide palliative care services, indicated that Taiwan rose from 12th to 6th place. Singapore rose from 18th to 12th. By contrast, Hong Kong dropped from 20th to 22nd. Hong Kong's overall ranking as well as its results in each individual item were below those of Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, the other Asian countries that were analysed (Apple Daily, 7 October 2015).

In Hong Kong, the term life and death education is used to focus on terminal care, palliative care services, and hospice care. One of the NGOs that offer life and death education, Life Enlightenment Charity Foundation, organised a conference entitled 'Life and Death Education in Asian Regions' in 2012, exploring life education in

mainland China, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. However, it mainly focused on discussing the situation and future development of hospice care (Life Enlightenment Charity Foundation, Life Enlightenment Bimonthly, 2012-07 issue, p.12).

Because life and death education develops in parallel with hospice or palliative care (Pine, 1986), it is reasonable and understandable that the understanding, mastery, discussion, and implementation of life and death education in Hong Kong arise mainly in response to practical needs, which are prone to emphasise hospice care or terminal care.

The Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Hong Kong conducted a survey on attitudes towards death in 2014 by interviewing 464 Hongkongers. Relative to the previous 2007 survey results, people had a more open attitude and exhibited less avoidance of death. However, under the traditional belief that death is a taboo subject, the implementation of hospice education faces some difficulty. The researchers suggested that the government implement life and death education to help the public to accept and prepare for death more easily (RTHK, eTV Liberal Studies, Daily

concepts: Life and Death Education, 6 June 2014).<sup>32</sup> Associate Professor Chow Yin

Man (周燕雯) of the Department of Social Work and Social Administration of the

University of Hong Kong said, 'People do not treasure life if they have not thought

about death'. She argued that Hong Kong should be led by the government in the

implementation of life and death education, similar to the process in Taiwan (Apple

Daily, 2013). 麥梅卿(2011) also highlighted the following: 'For everyone to have the

chance and perseverance to live a better life full of meaning as well as face living,

life, and survival with ease, the introduction of life and death education in family and

schools brooks no delay.'

Many people believe that young children have no feelings towards death, arguing that

it is unnecessary or even meaningless to discuss death with them. Some people even

believe that discussing death with young children may cause anxiety and fear.

Therefore, they avoid touching upon death and related issues with children. However,

the fact that young children may not be intellectually prepared to understand death

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<sup>32</sup> RTHK, eTV Liberal Studies, Daily concepts: Life and Death Education, 9/6/2014. Retrieved from

[http://www.liberalstudies.hk/daily\\_concepts/index.php?year=2014&month=6&page=2#dcMenu](http://www.liberalstudies.hk/daily_concepts/index.php?year=2014&month=6&page=2#dcMenu)

does not mean that they have no feelings towards death. They may develop a feeling that is equivalent to a death message through their experience of observing not seeing (in front of them), loss, and separation in their life (Kastenbaum, 1977, cited by 蘇雅慧, 2006). Some people think that mentioning ‘death’ may bring fear to children, so they avoid discussing it and let the mass media do so instead (Mak, 2011). Wong & Tomer (2011) suggested that the presentation of ‘death’ in popular violent video games, TV dramas, and Hollywood movies ‘provide further evidence of our morbid fascination with death’ (p.100) which may cause further misunderstanding towards death. However, the mass media can still play an important role in life and death education. This topic will be further discussed in section 2.5 Life and Death Education—Curriculum and Consideration.

Research in Taiwan even revealed that primary school students aged 5 to 6 years have already developed a mature sense of death (張淑美, 1999). Some people are concerned that discussing life and death with energetic older children or teenagers full of aspirations is impractical or even leads to negative results. However, research has indicated that young people desire to understand and think more about death-related

topics during their growth, and they continually amend their beliefs, including anxiety and fear towards death. Their thoughts may progress from the anxiety of ‘denial of one’s death’ to ‘everyone should have one death’, which then triggers their thoughts on the reality of death and consequently enables them to pursue the meaning of life (Knowles & Reeves, 1984; Schavaneveldt, 1982; Kastenbaum, translated by Wong Wei 王瑋, 1989, cited by 蘇雅慧, 2006).

However, some research revealed that the situation of the avoidance of life-death-related topics has started to change. McGovern & Barry, (2000) conducted research among teachers and parents. The participants of the research admitted life-death issues were important to primary students aged 5 to 12 years old that should be discussed in family and school. However, they expressed they felt unfamiliar and uncomfortable to discuss these issues and suggested schools should conduct courses to teach students related knowledge and attitudes.

Mak (2011) in a study on Hong Kong secondary school students’ awareness of and attitude towards death, dying, and life education revealed that their understanding or awareness of death was typically derived from family, school, religion, and personal

experience. Some are also affected by the mass media. When unable to manage adversity, some young people resort to suicide as a solution. Young people clearly have a distorted understanding of death because it is a taboo topic, resulting in insufficient awareness of death or even misunderstanding.

Studies on the understanding of death and dying among both university and secondary students have drawn the same conclusion: when young people are ignorant of, avoid topics related to, or have misunderstanding concerning death and dying, the most effective solution is to help them reduce their fear and confusion towards death and equip them to face different changes and challenges in life through communication and education. Most of the respondents or participants in the study reported that if they had developed an improved understanding of death and dying when they were younger, especially if schools had provided life education, it would have made a considerable contribution to their lives. They even expressed the hope for more progress on implementing educational policies and academic studies on life education (Mak, 2010; Mak, 2011).



Various studies on death-related matters have revealed that death education (e.g. death and dying and grief counselling) not only helps students in their perception of death and enhances their attitude and emotions towards death but also helps students reflect on the meaning and value of life (Carr L. Wallace & Harriet L. Cohen, and David A. Jenkins, 2019; Corr, 2016; Elizabeth A. Doughty and Wendy J. Hoskin, 2011; 林昱秀 & 陳錫琦, 2015; 林季玲 & 楊淑晴, 2009; 黃禎貞等, 2009; 鍾美玲, 2008; 蘇雅慧, 2006; 林綺雲等, 2018 ). In the research targeted to student nurses by Liu et al. (2011), workshops on life and death issues enable participants to become more capable and positive, understand and recognize oneself more deeply, share and comprehend one's feeling in a more positive manner. This brings positive influence on one's learning, working in the medical field and even towards the meaning of life. Here, I try to provide a real case as reference and evidence. HOBBYHK organized a workshop "Reading Death Notes" (「遺書導讀」) for the F.4 students of a school in July 2021. In the workshop, life and death education was used as an entry point for students to reflect on the most important people and things around them as a mid-term review to adjust themselves how to continue to strive. Teachers first felt worried

whether students were cognitively matured enough to handle the topic of ‘death’.

Finally, not only students but teachers were involved actively and benefited from the workshop.<sup>33</sup> The exploration of life and death education in secondary schools is still worrying. However, sufficient preparation and life-death educational activities with good quality will be crucial to the recognition of ‘death’ and the consideration of the meaning and value of life.

Although some universities, colleges, and welfare agencies or organisations in Hong Kong provide educational resources and services related to life and death education, no complete system has been established or consistently developed for the time being. One of the NGOs in Hong Kong promoting life and death education, HK Life and Death Studies Association whose chairman and the writer of 《生死教育講呢啲》)

Ng Kwai Lun<sup>34</sup> expressed in the interview with me that although schools invited

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<sup>33</sup> 「深培中學：試後中四級遺書導讀工作坊，重新反思家庭關懷（父親節篇）」 The activity can be found on HOBBYHK Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/hobbyasliving/posts/4300167013432145>,. Retrieved from

<https://www.facebook.com/hobbyasliving>

<sup>34</sup> Ng Kwai Lun（伍桂麟），an important person to promote the development of life and death education, is the initiator of “Silent Teacher” Body Donation Programme（「無言老師」遺體捐贈計劃），the ex-Chairman of Society of Life and Death Education（香港生死教育學會），the founding chairman of HK Life and Death Studies Association（香港死亡學協會），founder of

him or the representatives of the association to share life and death education with students, the speakers were expected to share their ‘personal experience’, ‘characteristics of their work’, ‘career exploration’, ‘reflection on faith’, etc. Life and death education was only slightly touched upon. This has resulted in a lack of close cooperation with schools as they implement life and death education.

Clearly, life–death-related topics, which are perceived as taboo, are still not easily discussed publicly. Despite greater exploration, promotion, publicity, and education related to death, which is beneficial to overcoming the taboo surrounding death, whether this greater openness can address schools’ situation and students’ needs must still be confirmed. What remains to be seen is whether schools are willing to face this challenge.

## **2.5. Life and Death Education–Curriculum and Consideration**

Leviton (1977) proposed that curriculum design should address the following elements: (1) target groups, (2) number of students, (3) nature of the subject, (4)

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Minimal Funeral Limited (「一切從簡」殯儀社企). He has written a book (《生死教育呢啲》). He has 2 Facebook pages (「生死教育 X 伍桂麟」) and (「陪着你嘔」). I conducted an interview with him on 16/6/2021 in the office of Minimal Funeral Limited and obtained his approval to use the content of the interview in my research.

teaching objectives, (5) teaching approach (mode), and (6) teaching methodology (張淑美, 1999; 林綺雲等, 2018).

### 2.5.1 Curriculum and Teaching of Life and Death Education

Chan Chi Wai 陳志威 (2017) observed that when designing and developing a life education curriculum, goal setting, selection of the subject content, design, and evaluation should all be considered. For effective curriculum design and teaching, the subject content should be consistent with the reality of students taking the course. The aspects and knowledge that are related should be arranged to highlight this relationship. Students should be gradually guided to employ higher-order thinking skills. The activities involved should be consistent with the proposed learning outcomes, and learning should be both fun and challenging.

### 2.5.2 Objectives and Content of Death Education or Life and Death Education

Various scholars and research have placed different emphasis on the objectives and content of death education or life and death education.

Corr et al. (2019) stated death education should include the following four dimensions:

1. Cognitive dimension—respond to what people know. Provide diverse information and experiences related to death and the interpretation of this death experience;
2. Affective dimension—respond to how people feel. Help people learn how to manage feelings, emotions, and attitudes concerning death, dying, and bereavement.
3. Behavioural dimension—respond to how people behave. Help people learn how to face death and bereavement appropriately. Equip people to become carers and listeners to those who are facing death and bereavement and assist them to express their grief.
4. Valuational dimension—respond to what people value. Assist people to identify, express, reflect on, and affirm the meaning and value of life by facing the inevitability of death.

The objectives of death education are as follows:

To enrich the personal lives of those undergoing the training. To help individuals develop a greater understanding of themselves and appreciate their strengths and limitations to live a fulfilling life;

1. To inform and guide individuals in their interactions with society. To help individuals manage different situations in society through funerals and rites;
2. To help prepare individuals for their public roles as citizens. To help those who have suicidal thoughts, advocate for organ donation, and cultivate individuals' civic role through a concern for public health.
3. To help prepare individuals for and support them in their professional and vocational roles. To encourage individuals to perform their vocational role by taking care of those who are facing death, dying, and bereavement.
4. To enhance the ability of individuals to communicate effectively on death-related topics;
5. To assist individuals to understand how development throughout life interacts with death-related matters.

The Ministry of Education in Taiwan revised the Life Education Curriculum Guidelines in 2018, modifying the phrase 'consideration of life and death' to 'reflection on the

principles and practice of life–death concern’. Life–death concern includes the following:

1. Understanding related to death
2. Reflecting on the relation between life and death
3. Reflecting on religious life–death views
4. Exploring the meaning of life and death in the literature and arts
5. Understanding the principles and practice of life–death concern
6. Understanding loss and grief counselling
7. Exploring the meaning of funeral culture
8. Cultivating the ability to practise life–death concern

(Life Education Research Centre, 2018)

The Comfort Care Concert Group is one of the first organisations that introduced life education in Hong Kong. It organised the Youth Life and Death Education Conference in December 2000. The organisation was provided with financial support from the Quality Education Fund of the EDB to implement a 2-year Youth Life and Death Education Programme in 2001, foster life education according to life and death

education, and publish the *Youth Life and Death Education Handbook*. The organiser of the programme, Cheng Bing Yee 鄭冰兒, proposed to ‘strengthen students’ awareness that life is limited’ and ‘encourage students to live life to the fullest’ as the two objectives of life education (The Comfort Care Concert Group, 2001).

The objectives of life and death education proposed by Cheng Bing Yee 鄭冰兒 (2007) are as follows:

1. Raise students’ awareness that ‘life is limited’ and ‘death is irreversible’; help clarify students’ perceptions of death;
2. Help students to reflect on life, treasure life, and make good use of it;
3. Cultivate care and respect for others’ life;
4. Learn how to manage loss and bereavement brought by death;

Life and death education should include the following:

1. Life cycle: birth, growth, sickness, ageing, and death;
2. Exploration of the meaning of death (physical, social, cultural, legal, religious, and ethical);
3. Handling of death and bereavement;



4. Exploration of special topics, such as suicide, euthanasia, and organ donation;
5. People's perceptions of life and death;
6. Appreciation of literature, music, and arts on the theme of 'life'.

The aforementioned objectives and content for death education or life and death education are described in diverse manners. They can be summarised by the four dimensions proposed by Corr et al. (2019): intellectual, emotional (including volitional), practical, and values or meaning of life and death.

Kim et al. (2016) used DACUM (Developing a Curriculum) method to develop the curriculum of life and death education for the general public. He used a questionnaire to understand their expectations and needs of the curriculum. The following are the 10 most concerned issues in the questionnaire:

1. What is the kind of meaningful life I want?
2. Fear of death
3. Need for death education
4. Loss and mourning
5. Medical ethics related to death

6. Communicating death
7. What is meaningful life
8. Death and law
9. Hospice and alleviation medical service<sup>1, 2</sup>
10. Preparation to say goodbye

According to the research, ‘what is the kind of meaningful life I want?’, ‘fear of death’ and ‘need for death education’ are the three most concerned issues. ‘What is the kind of meaningful life I want?’ ranked first for both frequency and importance.

To pursue meaningful life and eradicate the fear of death are both important.

Therefore, life and death education should respond not only to the objective of ‘recognizing’ death, the eradication of the fear of death and the pursuit of the meaning and value of life should not be neglected.

Niemiec, & Schulenberg, (2011) indicated the consideration and response of different scholars towards this point: Viktor Frankl’s ‘Logotherapy’, ‘Posttraumatic growth (PTG)’, Paul Wong’s ‘Meaning-Management Theory (MMT)’, etc. Paul Wong’s meaning-management theory, also known as ‘meaning-seeking’, ‘meaning making’

and ‘meaning-reconstruction’ has positive value in establishing healthy acceptance or attitude and views when facing death. ‘Meaning’ is not expressed merely by words or through language acquisition. It should be constructed through experience, feeling and reflection.

When facing and constructing meaning of life and death, religious faith and spiritual elements are also important. Klass Dennis (2014) expressed that when facing life-death issues, especially the bereavement of death, religious faith originated from faith can become the comfort of the living.

Phan et al. (2020) proposed Positive Psychology to integrate philosophy, religious faith and spirituality for people to reflect on their state of liveliness, and courage and consideration to face ultimate fate (death) with their Holistic Self.

To plan for life and death education curriculum, the utmost importance is to establish teaching objectives. Personal preference or focus that one perceives as important towards the curriculum should be avoided instead the expectation and needs of the general public must be considered. We must identify what the public treasure and expect to learn most through the curriculum in order to recognize, understand and

master. Therefore, we must first consider students' needs and the situation of the teachers at the same time to design the curriculum but not what the teachers want.

Otherwise, the 'impractical' curriculum with 'personal preference' will be ineffective and invalid.

Because of the lack of guidelines or a curriculum for life education, death education, or life and death education, the aforementioned objectives and content are suitable for addressing the existing situation in Hong Kong. They can be regarded as recommendations and guidelines for establishing and developing a curriculum.

### 2.5.3 The Teaching Approach of Life and Death Education

The following are the teaching approaches (dimensions) and methodologies to cater to the objectives and content of life and death education:

Durlak and Riesenberg (1991) proposed two approaches for teaching life and death education: (1) cognitive or informational—didactic—and (2) personal or affective—experiential.

Corr et al. (2019) held that life and death education can be divided into (1) formal or planned education and (2) informal or unplanned education. Formal education

typically applies to that offered in schools, which is planned and arranged by teachers or counsellors. In addition to discussing death, dying, and bereavement, this type of education also focuses on the grief and loss when facing death. It also concerns matters such as suicide, prevention of suicide, emotion counselling, and crisis support.

Informal education refers to experiences during growth; for example, the death of family members or relatives. Different resources are available, such as Death Café, which is currently popular, enabling people to share and exchange thoughts with others who have experienced death and bereavement. The media have also become an informal avenue for learning through books, films, TV programmes, and the Internet. Most media resources are not planned but random and rely on individuals or others to highlight the teachable moment and guide the media user through the experience. The effectiveness, advantages, and disadvantages of formal or informal education should not be compared; the focus should rather be on the exploration of their applicability.

李佩怡 (2004) stated that for life education, we should consider (1) what content and when to teach and (2) where and how to teach. Whether life education should be taught through lecturing, experiential methods, or both must also be considered.

Moreover, teaching content and process merits attention. Teaching content refers to knowledge teaching, whereas teaching process denotes the design and elaboration, which includes curriculum arrangement and teaching methodology (e.g. multimedia resources, experiential activities, sharing, and discussion).

李桂仙(2005) argued that the focus of death education should not be on studying textbooks and acquiring knowledge but rather on physical and mental cultivation and the assumption of responsibility. Therefore, death education can start with ‘recognition’ or ‘action’. For recognition, death education must be taught through emotional and volitional dimensions. Action must be accompanied by experiential activities, which are appropriately designed for the curriculum and environment. Students’ mental horizons should be widened through learning by doing and thinking by doing, enabling them to obtain death-oriented life and death education and experience meaningful interaction of life.

紀潔芳 and 鄭璿宜(2011) listed 10 methodologies for life and death education: didactic, (2) discussion and debate, (3) experiential learning, (4) hands-on learning (e.g. writing one’s will), (5) inquiry, (6) critical thinking and value clarification, (7)

case study, (8) collaboration, (9) appreciation, and (10) activities (including visits).

顏心庭(2019) integrated the methodologies of different scholars and teachers into the following eight points:

1. Didactic: Teaching and explaining death-related topics and knowledge through lecturing.
2. Opportunity: Using teachable moments, for example when death-related incidents occur or related topics emerge, to educate students.
3. Appreciation and discussion: Leading students to participate in group discussions through the use of films, literature, art, and newspaper and magazine articles concerning death-related topics.
4. Activity-based: Teaching through activities such as using picture books, role play, drama, drawing, and writing.
5. Hands-on: Teaching through visits to related venues, organisations, or exhibitions.
6. Reading and thinking: Reading books or materials concerning death-related topics and sharing thoughts and feelings.
7. Assignment feedback: Reading, integrating, and analysing literature concerning

death-related matters to acquire knowledge.

8. Collaboration: Integrating multiple subjects into death education. Experts in different areas can be invited to enrich the content of death education.

Despite being relatively diverse, the methodologies can be classified into knowledge (intellectual) and emotion (volitional) dimensions together with experience (experiential) learning, as explained by Durlak and Riesenberber (1991).

Regardless of how the curriculum is implemented, it must be student centred.

Moreover, who teaches the subject is another critical concern that merits attention.

According to Engarhos et al. (2013), relevant studies (McGovern & Barry, 2000) have revealed that those teaching life education typically have the following experiences:

- (1) they felt uncomfortable when discussing death-related topics with students, (2) they felt confused when discussing sensitive death-related matters with students, and (3) they lacked appropriate and sufficient preparation and training to address the topics. Therefore, the aforementioned study in 2013 explored the following: (1) educators' experiences and concerns regarding discussing death in the classroom, (2) their self-perceived ability to approach the topic of death with children, and (3) their



attitudes regarding death education in school. The teachers participating in the research all agreed that it was essential to discuss death-related topics with students. However, they all felt hesitant and lacked the confidence to do so. They were anxious and still desired more guidelines and training.

What criteria should be used for selecting life and death education teachers and what qualities should they possess? What type of training should they receive?

林綺雲 (2005) proposed that the criteria for a life education teacher should include the following:

1. Knowledge

- Teachers must have mastered the content they teach
- Teachers must be acutely aware of social change and how it affects death-related topics and even legislation.

2. Skills

- Teachers are able to use the word ‘death’ and death-related vocabulary comfortably

3. Attitudes

- Teachers should understand individuals' feelings and responses towards death as well as the effects of these emotions on people.
- Teachers should be empathetic towards death-related matters as well as the situation and problems they bring.

張盈堃 and 林綺雲 (2001) also proposed that teachers of life education should possess 'negative epiphany' (負顯化<sup>35</sup>) and have a critical perspective by emphasising the importance of disclosing the negative side of a phenomenon instead of taking any phenomenon or knowledge for granted or accepting it completely.

When teaching life and death education, teachers should lead students to explore and question the experience of death in the world they live in from different perspectives,

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<sup>35</sup> Negative epiphany is a coined phrase. It was originally used by Susan Sontag when discussing the 'reality' that photos display. [Soong Wen Li](#) 宋文里 borrowed this term in his *Negative Epiphany: A Way of Seeing Jieh-Qiao* (《負顯化：觀看借竅儀式的一種方法》). Negative epiphany is a combination of epiphany and negative. Epiphany comes from the manifestation of spirits in Chinese tradition, which has an efficacious and magical connotation, similar to 'theophany' in Western religion. However, the meaning here is not related to religious belief but simply to 'manifestation' and 'present'. [Soong Wen Li](#) stated that negative means 'opposite side'. Because the original use of the word by Susan Sontag refers to photography, when borrowing this word, it was translated to mean 'negative side'.

[Soong Wen Li](#) 宋文里。(1999)。負顯化：觀看借竅儀式的一種方法 (Negative Epiphany: A Way of Seeing Jieh-Qiao.)。台灣社會研究季刊, 35 期 (1999/09/01), p.163 – 201。

enabling students to become aware of and understand the deeper social and cultural meanings that form the foundation of their lives (林綺雲, 2005).

The following discussion may be considered a cliché which is widely known. To compare with other academic subjects, life and death education is not the teaching of ‘academic knowledge’, but rather the exploration and pursuit of ‘meaning’ and ‘value’ of life, which is similar to religious faith and spiritual cultivation. The teaching design and approach must be:

- multidimensional to explore, communicate, share and integrate
- interactive to establish consideration, understanding, acceptance and tolerance.

However, sometimes the curriculum planning, design and teaching may not follow the above because of different reasons and gradually they may be neglected and even forgotten.

#### 2.5.4 Teaching Methods (the use of multimedia and experiential learning)

The focus and topics of life and death curriculum, and different approaches and teaching planning are mentioned above. The following will be about teaching methodology. The discussion concerns mainly multimedia and experiential learning.

As mentioned, ‘death’ is taboo which is seldom discussed, and the mass media has become a channel to introduce ‘death’. However, it may not present or spread correct understanding or recognition of death, which may cause misunderstanding or even entanglement of the fear of ‘death’. “In short, our relationship with death cannot be reduced to terror; a complete psychology of death needs to move beyond terror and denial and start investigating positive attitudes towards death” (Wong & Tomer, 2011, p. 100).

### The Use of Multimedia

The mass media is a two-edged sword. Niemiec & Schulenberg; (2011) stated films depict the development of character strengths useful in embracing life and lessening death anxiety. Besides entertainment values, movies are precious resources for teaching life and death education. Movies are one of the most powerful underutilized resources at the hands of teachers; the use of movies to educate students – cinemeducation –can supplement concepts and ideas in the classroom to enhance learning. Because of the frequency and variety of death portrayals and death reaction on screen, teachers can choose suitable portrayals to discuss with students about life

and death issues. Many scholars, such as Prof. Ng Shu Sum in Taiwan and Lu Xiaoya in mainland China, use movies to teach life and death education with excellent outcomes.<sup>36</sup>

Movies are an integration of the intense and impressive experience of the music, visual and sound effect, bringing the audience to the world of the characters to experience the plot and are involving them in the consideration and discussion brought by the story and the characters. In addition to movies, different multimedia means, such as words (writing), music, drawings, photographs, etc., can become effective teaching resources. Besides using the existing resources, effective result can be achieved through the participation and sharing of the students. Testoni et al. (2019) run informal photo-voice production workshop for university students studying death education. These workshops were opportunities to encourage them to debate on death and spirituality in order to open the dialog about their views and emotion on the afterlife.

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<sup>36</sup> Lu Xiaoya has started to teach the elective module ‘Movies in Thanatology’ since 2012 in Beijing Normal University. Lu Xiaoya (2016). *Ying Xiang Zhong De Sheng Sike*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University.

Other research on suicide prevention among middle school students indicated that using films, workgroup activities, photovoice and psychodrama can strengthen students' resilience, emotional competency and psychological well-being, resulting in positive impact on the participants, especially on "improving the students' ability to recognize emotions and communicate them verbally while maintaining stable initial characteristics, such as psychological well-being and positive expectations for the future". (Testoni et al., 2020, p.1)

Careful selection of movies and different multimedia means, consideration of the connection with the topics and objectives of the curriculum, and relevance to the students' situation are needed. Keller's ARCS motivation model <sup>37</sup> is a good reference and useful model for teachers or designers of the teaching programme to develop learning activities that will boost the educational process. ARCS can be broken into four elements: Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction. Unlike other teaching methods, movies and multimedia means can arouse students'

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<sup>37</sup> ARCS motivation model was formulated by John Keller in 1983. ARCS Model of Motivational Design suggests that an instructional designer can routinely improve a learner's motivation to learn by focusing on Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction (ARCS). Retrieved from <https://www.arcsmodel.com/>

Attention. When the story, content, characters have close Relevance with the students, they feel interested and involved. Their Confidence and expectation of learning will be enhanced, leading to Satisfaction. Therefore, their learning will be successful. Otherwise, it will become unfocused and ineffective, wasting a good learning opportunity.

### The Use of Experiential Learning

Why do we use experiential learning? To connect students with life and death education, relevance is important. Through experiential learning, students can experience and feel more easily involved during the lessons and activities. John Dewey stated that ‘life is education’ and emphasized ‘learning by doing’. David Kolb started from Kurt Lewin’s action research and laboratory test, and combined John Dewey and Jean Piaget’s theories into ‘experiential learning cycle’. All these theories support the benefits of experience and interaction of human activities in learning. (Beard & Wilson, 2002).

Experiential learning may not be the best and most effective way for students to learn a subject or a certain topic. However, it provides a crucial and effective means for

people to develop interest and ability in self-awareness, and it offer a good

opportunity for them to progress throughout their learning process.

Life and death education is not only the acquisition of ‘knowledge’, but involves

consideration, exploration and establishment of ‘values’ and meaning’. Compared

with didactic education, experience is more personal and impressive. Most people do

not have the experience of death. Experiential learning in life and death education is

an ‘imitation’ of certain situation which leads to changes in feeling and volition,

resulting in reflection and response. The death experiential activities in Taiwan

enable participants to experience death vicariously <sup>38</sup> The workshop “Reading Death

Notes” (「遺書導讀」) by HOBBYHK mentioned before is an activity of

experiential learning. In a camp activity designed by the researcher, the participants

were first directed to write down the ‘unsaid words’ before the activity as a source to

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<sup>38</sup> The activity can be found on the website 「生命禮儀研發中心」 of 仁德醫護管理專科學校 (Jen-The Junior College of Medicine, Nursing and Management)

<http://jlife.jente.edu.tw/index.php/4/274-2019-10-08-00-50-52>,

<http://jlife.jente.edu.tw/index.php/en/4>; some relevant reports: 預約死亡體驗，此對生死改觀：死亡體驗教育裡的一課。FIFTY PLUS。 <https://www.fiftyplus.com.tw/articles/8841>；

憾！瀕臨死亡體驗 躺棺當下 4 位小編全員淚崩。三立新聞 (網頁)，

<https://www.setn.com/News.aspx?NewsID=889802>



trigger their consideration of values and meaning after failing to save their team members' lives in a rescue.<sup>39</sup> 'Experiential learning' is an important learning experience. A crucial element is the debriefing after the activity, which allows students to think, share and discuss in a trustful, accepting and positive atmosphere.

#### 2.5.5 The importance of Empathy in teaching

To implement life and death education, curriculum and teaching strategies are important. Teachers' involvement is indispensable. Although teachers may recognize the needs of life and death education and its implementation in school, they feel uncomfortable to discuss death and worry about their capability of teaching the subject. Herrero et al. (2020) stated in their research that teachers believe the support they need most is relevant training but without specifying what kind of training.

Female teachers are more open and positive towards life and death education than male teachers. Older teachers recognize more the significance of life-death issues to meaning of life than the younger ones.

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<sup>39</sup> Lee Hon Chuen (李漢泉), 2017. 2017 年生命教育國際學術研討會，題為「生當為人傑，死當為鬼雄—生死探問」報告。Appendix A: PowerPoint slides of 「生當為人傑，死當為鬼雄—生死探問」

Some research indicated that teachers feel difficult to explore death and life-death issues: do not know how to respond to students' needs or intervene at the wrong time. Other teachers feel frustrated when they fail to perform a professional role to control their emotion when handling some issues or real cases. Some teachers express that they cannot understand or offer support because they are not the sufferers. (Robinson et al., 2018)

According to Stylianou & Zembylas (2020), through participating in in-service training programmes of death-related issues, bereavement, etc., teachers can be more confident and effective in sharing this 'difficult knowledge'. The research also suggested that the participating teachers first experienced the true feeling and reflection when facing these life-death issues in the training. Then they could interact, understand and accept more in the exploration of life and death when teaching the lessons. These changes of the teachers obviously are conducive to the implementation of life and death education. According to the participating teachers of the programmes, they gave more desirable responses in the lessons after receiving the

training. In general, teachers were satisfied with the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral impact of the lessons on their students.

Relevant training can enhance teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching and allow them sufficient room to reflect, enabling them to establish effective teaching methods, and more importantly, develop empathy to understand students' situation and needs, respond timely and properly with sympathy in teaching after they have experienced how to honestly face their difficulties.

Because of the lack of curriculum guidelines or guiding principles for life and death education, schools must determine their own implementation on the basis of their needs. That is, the relevant teachers must take full responsibility for preparing and designing the curriculum, teaching plans, materials, methods, and evaluation. When examining the curriculum, teaching, and teachers of life and death education in Hong Kong with the aforementioned criteria, it is unclear how many schools and teachers would receive a favourable evaluation.

## **2.6. Principles of life and death education in schools**

The understanding and objectives of implementing life and death education cannot be generalized. Different societies, cultures, individuals have different views, leading to different definitions. The focus of life and death education can be modified to keep abreast of the time. I try to summarize the above discussion of the principles of life and death education below.

Life and death education is not simply a combination of life education and death education. 'Life is by chance, death is inevitable'. The uncertainty of death causes fear and anxiety. The exploration of death or life-death issues can alleviate these worries. The exploration of life-death issues also concerns the value and meaning of life, leading to an opportunity for life changes.

I recognize the importance of the implementation of life and death education because it can achieve the following :

- to open students' mind in recognizing and exploring life and death in order to value and treasure life;
- to foster positive influence towards personal growth, relationship with others through facing death (meaning of life, calling of life, bereavement, empathy);

- to address the problem of student suicide.

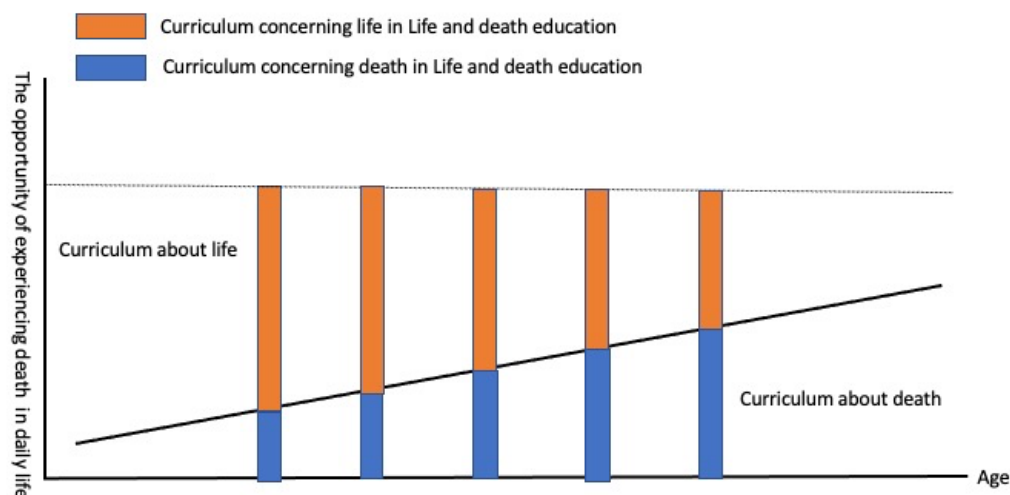
Schools must have clear teaching objectives which include responding to students' intellectual and affective development, capability, relevance; inclusion of knowledge, skills and attitudes when introducing both formal and informal life and death education curriculum.

As mentioned, the focus of life and death education should vary according to times.

Therefore, the curriculum and content need not be 'identical' or 'similar', but rather should be adjusted according to students' needs.

The proportion of life and death issues in life and death education against student age

is shown in Figure 1 : <sup>40</sup>



Teaching methods should not be limited to the teaching of ‘knowledge’.

Multidimensional, interactive and experiential learning models, such as using

different resources: words, music, images, movies, etc., should be adopted to help

students participate and get involved. Students can be ‘touched’ and their true feelings

and emotions can be aroused so as become more open in discussion and sharing.

Teachers should have sufficient preparation not only for teaching skills, also for their

<sup>40</sup> The figure is adopted from 李佩怡 (2004) 。生死教育的釐清、反思、與應用。諮商與輔導；227 期 (2004/11/05), p.2-9 。DOI:10.29837/CG.200411.0002

learning and reflection on life and death education so that they can understand

students' real needs and respond to their learning situation with more sympathy.

Life and death education is not only an academic subject but a life reflection.

Implementing life and death education is an establishment of life, values and culture.

## **2.7. Research Questions**

As the youth suicide problem grows, an increasing trend of exploring and

implementing life education has emerged. However, the focus remains on positive

thinking and resilience. Discussions related to and recommendations for activities

encouraging 'youth growth' are also based on the guidelines of moral, civic and

national education. Discussion of life–death-related topics and life and death

education remains rare. Although various universities and organisations, such as the

University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Lingnan

University, have organised conferences and courses focusing on thanatology (e.g.,

medicine, nursing, philosophy, psychology, and grief counselling), the exploration of

education and teaching–related matters is insufficient. I could only locate two master

research papers on life–death-related topics in life and death education relevant to the

context under study in the current research. One of these is the ‘Effects of death education on students: A case study’, and the other is ‘A study on experimental teaching of life and death education programme for the secondary school students in Hong Kong’, conducted in 2009 by a Hong Kong student studying in Taiwan.

Therefore, this matter deserves further attention.

Life education should be strengthened in Hong Kong. Considerable room for improvement and development remains for matters related to research, theories, practice, and teachers’ training. This study investigated the curriculum of life education and life–death-related topics in three case study secondary schools in Hong Kong to determine the following:

1. How do the three Hong Kong secondary schools, with or without religious backgrounds, implement life and death education? What are their concerns, reasons for implementation, and guidelines they follow in their school-based curriculum?
2. What are the teaching methods, processes, and materials used for teaching life and death education in these Hong Kong schools? What problems and



difficulties have these schools faced and how have they overcome these concerns?

On the basis of the findings, I will provide suggestions for curriculum implementation and development as well as highlight areas for further research on life–death concerns in life education in Hong Kong. I hope the current results will support the implementation and development of life education and/or life and death education in Hong Kong.



## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

### 3.1 Case Study

The purpose of this research was to understand how life–death-related topics are introduced in life and death education in secondary schools in Hong Kong, the challenges these schools encounter, and their attempted solutions. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the existing curriculum and activities for life education in schools are all designed by relevant schools. However, discussions and exploration of life education are rare. For this exploratory research, I collected data through case studies.

A case study is a qualitative method, which can be used in different contexts. Yin (2003) observed that different methods have their own ‘applicable conditions’. Case studies are most suitable when research questions contain ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions.

Case studies are suitable for exploring the nature of a subject in a specific (present) situation or context, revealing its uniqueness and complexity, and highlighting the interaction it has with the phenomenon and situation (林佩璇, 2000; Miles, 2015).

Especially when the boundary between the phenomenon and the actual context is unclear, and the subject and other related factors are impossible to ‘control’, the

subject must be examined through multiple sources, such as files, evidence, interviews, and observations. Case studies enable researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful qualities of the reality as well as analyse, explore, and search for the meaning of the case (Miles, 2015).

### **3.2 Principles and Methods of Selecting Case Subjects**

The aim of this research was to understand how secondary schools in Hong Kong introduce life–death topics in life and death education, the difficulties they have encountered, and how they have overcome these difficulties. The principles guiding the selection of subjects were as follows:

1. Secondary schools are the target of the case study;
2. The case study schools should include life–death topics in their life education curriculum and/or provide lessons and activities related to life and death education;
3. The case study schools should include school(s) with religious affiliation and school(s) without religious affiliation.

The main reason for the principle regarding religious affiliation is that the exploration of life–death-related topics involves matters such as meaning, values, religious beliefs, spirituality, and ultimate concern. When determining teaching topics, objectives, discussion topics, teaching strategies, and education implementation, the religious affiliation of a school and the values and beliefs of the teachers who teach the subject are likely to result in different outcomes. Therefore, the presence or absence of religious affiliation of a school was one of the major factors for consideration in this research.

Because life and death education is not a compulsory subject in Hong Kong, no specific guidelines are provided for its teaching, and not every school provides life and death education. Even in schools that have their own life education programme, life–death topics and life and death education are rarely discussed or found in their curriculum.

In this research, the schools participating in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools, commissioned by the EDB and managed by EdUHK, were first considered for inclusion. The objective of the programme is to

help 20 to 30 secondary schools in Hong Kong each year to plan and develop their own life education curriculum. The schools participating in the programme must have their own life education programme, and life education pilot schools are often invited to share their experience. Therefore, the pilot schools were also invited to participate in this study. I believed that those schools would more easily understand the purpose of this study and be more willing to participate.

Of the schools participating in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools from 2014–2017, only two included life–death topics in their life education programme. I encountered several difficulties during the invitation period.

As mentioned, very few schools included life–death-related topics in their life education curriculums, which limited the number of schools that could be included in this research. In addition, some of the schools declined to participate in the case study.

After 3 months of effort, I was still unable to encounter a school willing to participate; schools provided various reasons for their refusal, such as teachers' heavy workload and anxiety regarding the school's situation being disclosed.

By December 2017, three schools finally agreed to participate in the research. Of these three schools, one Christian school was among the first schools in Hong Kong to have its own complete life education curriculum and was a pilot school of life education. Teachers at this school also shared their experience in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools. The second included school, also with a Christian affiliation, first introduced religious, morals and civic education as its life education curriculum. After participating in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools, this school developed its own life education curriculum with a subsidy and the involvement of the school sponsoring body. The sponsoring body of the third school had no religious affiliation, and neither had the school. The school developed its own life education curriculum after participating in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools. With the resources provided by Christian churches and as a result of the advocacy of the school's principal and relevant teachers, the school's life and death curriculum was full of Christian characteristics since the school cooperated closely with different churches to

promote life and death education. The details of these three schools are presented in

Table 1.

Table 1. Description of Case Study Schools

Case study school no.	Religion of sponsoring or responsible body	Implementation method	Target students	Teacher	Remarks
C1	Christian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole-school approach</li> <li>• Regular curriculum</li> <li>• Life education lessons provided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• F.1–F.6</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designated teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Received Chief Executive's Award for Teaching Excellence</li> <li>• Shared life education experience in the Programme on Planning Life Education in</li> </ul>





Case study school no.	Religion of sponsoring or responsible body	Implementation method	Target students	Teacher	Remarks
					Secondary Schools and was open for visits
C2	Christian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-curriculum</li> <li>• Regular curriculum</li> <li>• Taught in class teacher period</li> <li>• Introduced life education in religious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• F.1–F.3</li> <li>• F.4–F.5</li> <li>• F.6</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participated in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools</li> </ul>



Case study school no.	Religion of sponsoring or responsible body	Implementation method	Target students	Teacher	Remarks
		studies lessons			
C3	Nonaffiliated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduced life education through extracurricular activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>F.1–F.3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Church pastors</li> <li>Church staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School has no religious affiliation, but the principal and responsible teachers are Christians</li> <li>Church worship was held in school</li> <li>Invited churches to assist</li> </ul>



Case study school no.	Religion of sponsoring or responsible body	Implementation method	Target students	Teacher	Remarks
					<p>in the implementation of life education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participated in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools</li> </ul>



### 3.3 Data collection

This study had three data sources: (1) interviews with relevant individuals (e.g., principal, vice principal, teachers responsible for teaching life education, subject teachers, activity tutors, and students), (2) document analysis (documents related to the programmes), and (3) non-participating observation of activities. The non-participant observation of activities was ultimately not allowed by the schools. School C1 also provided a video clip of a media interview concerning the school's life education programme. Interviews, document analysis, and observations arising from School C1's video clip were used for triangulation to confirm the reliability and the validity of the research.

#### 3.3.1 Interviews (Individual or Focus Group)

For schools interested in participating in the study, I first explained the details of the research and the use of the consent form(s) (Appendix B). I also confirmed that all the data collected would only be used for the research and that confidentiality of the data would be ensured. After agreeing to participate in the case study, each school and all participants were requested to sign the consent forms. Those under 18 years old and

their guardians signed separate consent forms. All these procedures were performed to fulfil research ethics requirements.

I interviewed the following individuals:

- Relevant staff at these three schools, including the principal, vice principal, teachers responsible for life education, and subject teachers. For each school, four relevant individuals were invited for the interviews. However, for School C1, only the principal and vice principal, who was also the subject teacher, attended the interviews. For School C2, only three individuals, the school's vice principal, the responsible teacher, and the subject teacher attended the interviews. For School C3, only one teacher responsible for life education and two individuals responsible for teaching life education attended the interviews.
- Relevant staff of the responsible bodies which cooperated with School C3 to offer life education programmes. Of the 15 relevant people of the 10 organisations (Christian churches), only two pastors attended the interviews.
- Some of the students participating in the lessons and activities.

The interviews were conducted from December 2017 to June 2018. Different arrangements were made for each school during the interviews. I endeavoured to interview the three groups of stakeholders at each school. In addition to particular people, such as the principal, vice principal, and responsible teachers, who could not be selected randomly, the students attending life education lessons and activities, the main focus of this research, were randomly selected by the schools to attend the interviews. The schools arranged the time and venue of the interviews. I strictly abided by the schools' ethics requirements not to conduct interviews outside of the appointed time and place and not to contact students privately.

Because in School C3, other organisations (churches) were involved in the case study, the school also invited relevant people to attend the interviews.

Relevant personnel were interviewed individually, and each interview had a duration of 60 to 90 minutes. By contrast, students were interviewed in the form of focus groups, according to the arrangement of the schools, each of which lasted 45 to 60 minutes.<sup>41</sup> All the interviews were conducted in school, with Cantonese being the

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<sup>41</sup> Only actual interview time was counted. The time for transcribing the recordings, confirmation of the transcripts with the interviewees, clarification, and further questions was not included in the

main language spoken. All the interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees, who also verified the subsequent transcripts. During the process of verifying the transcripts with the interviewees, I discovered the need to clarify and further explore some information relating to certain incidents and the interviewees' opinions. Through cross analysis of the interviews, documents, and observations, I could enrich and complete the information obtained.

The interviews were semistructured. During the interviews, I provided a question sheet (Appendix C) to the interviewees. Except for basic questions, other questions were classified into three categories: knowledge, skills, or attitude (including religious beliefs, personal consideration of life). I hoped to determine interviewees' perception, mastery, and thoughts related to life–death topics in life education and life and death education. I also explored different situations, interviewees' perception of effective and ineffective practices in teaching and learning, the difficulties they encountered, and the attempted solutions. For student interviewees, I focused on their perceptions concerning learning and responses during the lessons and activities.

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calculation.

Although individual interviews and group interviews were conducted separately, I based my questions on the information in the relevant documents and the activities provided, which enabled me to perform cross analysis to verify the effectiveness of the programme.

The questions in the questionnaire were classified under different focuses. The interviewees responded completely and directly during the interviews. Their responses were presented are presented in Chapter 4 below.

Specific details of the interviews at each school are provided in Table 2.





Table 2. Information of Interviews at Participating Schools

School no.	Interviewee	Format
C1	T1: School principal	Individual interview
	T2: Department head and teacher of life education	Individual interview
	S1–S9: F.6 students (9) <sup>42</sup>	Group interview
C2	T3: School vice principal (coordinator of life education)	Individual interview
	T4: Department head and teacher of life education	Individual interview
	T5: Teacher of life education	Individual interview

<sup>42</sup> Approximately 60 minutes were allocated for each focus group interview because of the number of participants in each group.

School no.	Interviewee	Format
	S10–S12: F.5 students (3)	Group interview
C3	T6: Coordinator of life education	Individual interview
	T7: Church pastor and life education tutor <sup>43</sup>	Individual interview
	T8: Church pastor and life education tutor	Individual interview
	S13–S16: F.3 students—Group 1 (4)	Group interview
	S17–S19: F.3 students—Group 2 (3)	Group interview

<sup>43</sup> The Education Ordinance stipulates that only a registered teacher or a permitted teacher can teach in class. Because church pastors or members are not qualified to teach in school, they are not considered formal teachers.

### 3.3.2 Document Analysis

For document analysis, data were obtained from the following sources:

- Online information of case study schools including the schools' life education websites or life education-related websites
- Scheme of work (teaching plans and design) and teaching materials

Concerning the aforementioned documents, School C1 provided printed teaching materials and press articles; the recording of an interview of the school's life and death education involving the activities and sharing of teachers and students. School C2 provided online teaching materials; and School C3 provided one set of teaching materials for F.1 and one worksheet activity for F.3. Although I expected to collect students' assignments, tests, and assessments as the research documents, all three schools declined. The documents provided by each school are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. School Documents

School no.	Types of materials
C1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teaching materials: In-house-designed life and death education printed learning materials (F.6 students' book)</li> <li>2. Press articles</li> <li>3. Activity: Press interview and video report (52 minutes 21 seconds)</li> </ol>
C2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teaching materials: Two sets of online in-house-designed life and death education learning materials (F.4/F.5)</li> </ol>
C3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teaching materials: In-house-designed life and death education printed learning materials (F.1 students' book)</li> <li>2. Online materials: In-house-designed life and death education scheme of work (F.1, self-printed)</li> <li>3. Activity: F.3 life and death education (life witness sharing) worksheet</li> </ol>



### 3.3.3 Observation of activities

None of the three case study schools arranged lessons that were open for observation in this study. Therefore, interview data was the main source illustrating each school's situation. School C1 provided press articles and a video report with some learning activities being shown, which enabled me to observe related learning.

Data from individual and focus group interviews, document analysis, and observations enabled triangulation to confirm the reliability and validity of the research. The details of the information obtained and the parts that merit further discussion are reported in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Findings

Each case study school has unique characteristics. Thus, the description of the findings for the three schools will not be completely parallel. For example, the principal of School C1 was one of the interviewees, whereas the principals of Schools C2 and C3 declined to be interviewed. Therefore, the description format or structure varies for each case.

The main direction of the presentation of the findings will include representatives of the school sponsoring body, teachers, students, curriculum, learning activities and assessment.

The establishment and execution of the school's mission plays a significant role in the consideration of implementing life and death education of the school by the school sponsoring body and its representatives. The school's administration should also consider the teaching arrangement and resources, etc., which directly affect the establishment of life and death education.

As mentioned, the teachers are responsible for executing and teaching of life and death education, bearing an important role in exchanging and sharing not only

knowledge, but exploring emotions and values, and establishing students'

understanding of life and meaning of life.

Students'(learners') understanding of the knowledge, changes in emotions,

application of the knowledge in real life, responses and attitude to the school-based

curriculum after learning life and death education is a significant indicator for the

schools to assess their life and death education curriculum. Students may not be

'learners' only, but facilitators of teaching and learning. Teachers can be inspired by

the responses and learning of the students.

Curriculums, learning and activities are manifestation of teaching, a direct sharing of

life and death education, which are important to determine whether the objectives of

implementing life and death education can be achieved effectively. I will present the

above items below.

## **4.1 School C1**

### **4.1.1 Background Information of School C1—The Development of Life and death**

Education<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The information in this section was derived chiefly from the related section(s) on the school website.

The sponsoring body of School C1 is a nonprofit Christian organisation. In the 1970s, when insufficient positions were available for students eligible for enrolling in secondary schools, the first director of the school conceived the idea of building a school for them. Although the Hong Kong government allocated the necessary land, the school had to secure its own resources. After the school's director obtained a sufficient amount of donations from churches abroad and in the mainland and selling all of his properties, including his own flat, as well as donating all of his savings, the school was finally constructed. The school aims to provide an all-round, holistic Christian education, nurturing students as future leaders by instilling in them favourable personal qualities, high moral values, a passion for integrity and an altruistic spirit, and critical thinking and creativity skills. It is a Band 2<sup>45</sup> school, suggesting most of the students have average abilities.

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<sup>45</sup> Banding (分級) originated from the need of the Hong Kong EDB to assess the results of primary school students who were promoted to secondary school. According to the three rankings of students in primary school (usually evaluated in the second term of P.5 and the first and second terms of P.6) as well as the adjusted past results of the students of each primary school in the Secondary 1 Attainment Test, each student is provided a scaled mark. This mark is used for ranking students in descending order and dividing them into three groups: Band 1, Band 2, and Band 3. Although the EDB does not regard this grouping as a differentiation of students'



The school has offered religious studies since its inception. However, because of changes in the social environment, as perceived by the school, such as the continuous expansion of ‘self’ in people and a disregard for the existence of God, which does not lead to a fulfilling life, the school launched its 5-year school-based life education programme in 2002. The school formed a special committee, including administrative and teaching staff, to plan and implement the life education curriculum. The school referenced the life education experience of mainland China and Taiwan, cooperated with different schools and organisations, and applied for external resources, such as the Quality Education Fund, to launch its programme.

The school integrated religious education and life education into religious life education, aiming to instil appropriate values in students through life education and helping students become aware of the dignity of man and develop respect for life. In

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academic performance, it is understood that Band 1 students are academic high achievers, Band 2 students are mediocre, and Band 3 students are low achievers. Education Bureau: Secondary School Places Allocation System : 香港教育局「中一學位分配法內容」。Retrieved from [https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/edu-system/primary-secondary/spa-systems/secondary-spa/general-info/max-SSPA2020-part2\\_clip2-CANT.mp4](https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/edu-system/primary-secondary/spa-systems/secondary-spa/general-info/max-SSPA2020-part2_clip2-CANT.mp4) ; [https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/edu-system/primary-secondary/spa-systems/secondary-spa/general-info/Updated\\_SSPA%20leaflet\\_2018-20\\_TC\\_March%202020.pdf](https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/edu-system/primary-secondary/spa-systems/secondary-spa/general-info/Updated_SSPA%20leaflet_2018-20_TC_March%202020.pdf)

response to reforms related to the New Senior Secondary 3-3-4 Scheme<sup>46</sup>, the original 5-year curriculum (F.1–F.5) was changed to a 6-year curriculum (F.1–F.6); the single subject ‘religious life education’ of School C1 also became a cross-curricular subject, combining topics such as counselling, discipline, Christianity, and civic and environment education; the updated curriculum included various activities to nurture students and help them become passionate towards life.

Through life education, the school helps students to internalise behaviour into core life values through ‘care groups’ and ‘practising the meaning of life’. For care groups, students are divided into groups by class. Practising the meaning of life is achieved

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<sup>46</sup> The **3-3-4 Scheme** is the academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education in Hong Kong, referring to the structure of 3 years of junior secondary school, 3 years of senior secondary school, and 4 years of university education. This scheme began in the 2009 school year. In 2012, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) became the concluding exam for secondary school students. The core subjects of the 3-3-4 Scheme are Chinese, English, mathematics, and liberal studies, along with three elective subjects. To proceed to university education, students must pass all four core subjects in the HKDSE. See also : 高中課程概覽及新發展簡報 : parents\_seminar\_session1a.pdf 。高中及高等教育新學制網上簡報 。Retrieved from <https://334.edb.hkedcity.net/new/tc/19-20.php>

Because of the change in the curriculum structure, students study core subjects which are compulsory and different combinations of elective subjects. Schools were required to restructure their teaching arrangements and teaching hours to provide students with a greater variety of subjects to choose from. Therefore, some nonacademic or non-exam subjects were abolished to allocate more teaching hours to subjects with public exams.

through events such as competitions, hoping to deepen students' characters and strengthen their expression of care into a habit that is revealed not only in school but also in family and in their everyday interactions. Students elevate their self-expectations, transcend their self, and exhibit perseverance when facing adversity and subsequently overcome challenges. The school transformed a single subject into cross-curricular activities, integrating it into the school's culture and creating an atmosphere that welcomes everyone to participate in activities that permeate the school's curriculum and all related events.

#### 4.1.2 School Sponsoring Body and School Principal (T1)

A greater number of people believe in and support the implementation of life education than those who doubt, disagree, or even oppose its implementation. However, when life–death-related topics are included in lessons and activities, different stakeholders may not necessarily support the implementation. People are sure to have strongly conflicting views.

School C1 introduced life education because of the initiative of its principal (T1), who is a Christian. Before life–death-related topics could be included in the life education

curriculum and activities, the principal, who is the administrative person with the most authority, had to connect with the upper sponsoring body (i.e., the incorporated management committee [IMC]) and promote the notion and share it with the external public and teaching staff as well as students and parents internally. T1 was asked whether he was under great pressure and faced any difficulty in promoting life–death topics in life and death education.

The principal has the least pressure and difficulty [in promoting life–death issues in life and death education] because the work is done by the teachers. The principal is only responsible for communication and providing support to the teachers. (T1)

T1 revealed that the IMC supported the implementation of life education and even the inclusion of life–death-related topics. When sharing the principles of the curriculum, the framework, and the development of their school’s life education programme with the IMC, T1 stressed that the curriculum was based on Christian ethics to nurture ‘students’ character, which corresponded with the principles and practice of their school-based life education programme and the mission of the school sponsoring

body. Therefore, the IMC enthusiastically supported the proposal and provided the school (the principal, life education committee, and all the teaching staff) sufficient flexibility to develop the curriculum.

The themes during the school's 6-year life education programme from 2007 to 2013 were 'Passion of life' (2007–2008), 'Sharing of life' (2008–2009), 'Appreciation of life' (2009–10), 'Making use of life' (2010–2011), 'Sustaining life' (2011–2012), and 'Reflection on life' (2012–2013). The design of the curriculum and the main focus were adjusted according to previous experience to maximise students' development. Therefore, the life education programme, including both the curriculum and activities, involved a complete cycle catering to students' needs in different stages. The principal (T1) emphasised that after implementing life education, students' attitudes and behaviour developed satisfactorily. The school has been invited by different organisations to share their experience and received prestigious awards, such as the Chief Executive's Award for Teaching Excellence, as a recognition of its effort and success.

In academic year 2012–2013, the theme of the school’s life education curriculum was ‘Reflection of life’, which involved directly exploring life–death-related topics. T1 revealed that it was not overly challenging to include such topics in the curriculum because of the following factors:

1. The school’s religion. In Christianity, it is neither abnormal nor prohibited to discuss life and death.
2. The availability of teachers with long-term experience in implementing life education in school as well as the understanding and support of parents.
3. The principal’s personal life experience. Perceiving life and death as ordinary and dealing with them with open-mindedness, sincerity, and positivity has helped students develop similar attitudes.
4. Sufficient preparation of the curriculum and activities as a result of long-term experience in implementing life education. The school also suffered various traumatic life–death-related experiences, which were suitable opportunities for life learning and development. Maximising learning and discovery of life meaning through suffering has become a major lesson. The school has made appropriate

use of these opportunities to emphasise the message of the irreversibility of death and the reality of bereavement (progressing through death to life) as well as helping students see the beauty of life from death.

- A student's suicide. Soon after the start of the school term in September, a new F.1 student jumped to his death. After being notified of the incident, the school implemented its follow-up mechanism to counsel students who were affected. T1 took the initiative to contact, visit, and accompany the deceased student's parents, turning the care and focus from the deceased (student) to the survivors (family). He served as an example of grieving and walking with those who suffer. The school also collaborated with the students by advocating 'walk one more step, glance one more glance, talk for a little while longer, give one your hand'. The teachers and students mobilised to support vulnerable students to prevent suicide in school.
- Teachers insisted on teaching until the last minute of their lives. The school held memorial or funeral services for teachers who passed away during their service, highlighting how these teachers devoted their lives for the sake of

their students' learning and development, which required tremendous effort.

One teacher, who had a brain tumour, worked until late at night and placed a photo of each student in her class and the seating plan on her desk at home to memorise the names and faces of her students as quickly as possible. Another teacher suffering from kidney disease had to undergo dialysis every day. In addition to working at school, the time on his bed at home or undergoing dialysis was spent working, marking assignments, preparing lessons, and calling his students to express his concern for them. These examples of professionalism and dedication were shared with students during the memorial services, and the teachers' passion for life as well as how to live every day fully and meaningfully also touched students' hearts.

- Loss of a loved one, spouse, or child. After a teacher lost his wife, the only son he had left also suddenly died. People usually feel hard to sustain these successive attacks and so did this teacher. The school organised caring actions for this teacher to uplift him during that trying time. The school put into practise the scriptural teaching 'mourn with those who mourn' (Romans



12:15) and also emphasised the connection of life and the importance of blessing others.

- The principal's (T1) experience of a severe car accident and cancer treatment. During the interview, the principal indicated that he was undergoing cancer treatment. Because he was open-minded towards life–death-related topics and felt relief when facing death as a result of his religious beliefs, he did not hesitate to include these topics in the curriculum and activities when implementing life education.

5. Facing death and mourning can shorten the distance between people and help them learn how to care for others and show sincerity. People with sincerity are worth others' respect.

T1 believed that life–death-related topics, which were usually not easy to deal with and encounter, should be included in the school's life education because death was neither taboo nor unfamiliar in the school. Therefore, lessons and activities could be adjusted according to unfortunate events, which represent an opportunity for teaching

and sharing. This learning was not only helpful for the growth of the students but also led to a positive and direct effect on the teaching staff and parents of the school.

Because we are willing to face the reality of the inevitability of death [in implementing life–death issues in life education or life and death education], it does not separate us [teachers, administrative staff, students, parents, and alumni], but rather helps us become connected and closer [in emotion and relationship] with each other. (T1)

After years of receiving life education, all students were affected to some degree. T1 had the following concluding remarks:

There is no bad person in this school. Because we are touched by life education, we are a big family. Even those who are bad aren't [bad here] and won't do anything bad here. (T1)

#### 4.1.3 Teacher (T2)

Teacher T2, who is a Christian, is the department head of religious and life education and the teacher responsible for life education at School C1; he teaches F.1 life education. When the school decided to form a special committee to implement life

education in 2002, T2 had already been involved in it; she has been the department head of religious and life education since then. T2, who has a broad and comprehensive understanding of the life education development of School C1, believed that it is appropriate to include life–death-related topics in the life education curriculum to make the subject more comprehensive.

T2 also believed that life and death are necessary stages in the process of life. To reverse Confucius’s words, ‘While you do not understand death, how do you understand life?’ How people perceive death will become the reminders or guidelines for them to face life. Discussing death also involves life because exploring life–death-related matters are not limited to the topic of death. Thoughts related to people’s feelings, emotions, and relationships with themselves and the world are also triggered, enabling them to establish their own values, aspirations, and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, including life–death-related topics is not contrary to the foundations of life education.

T2 was asked why such topics in life and death education were introduced in senior secondary 3 (F.6).

Senior secondary students are facing one of the greatest challenges and changes: the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination. It is necessary to allow students more room to think about the meaning and value of life as well as their own direction. Facing death allows students to seriously consider the meaning and value of their lives. (T2)

Although students tend to think that death is something distant, or death is completely unrelated to them, the fact remains that death is neither remote nor unpredictable. A key question in life education is how to help students understand that life is full of uncertainty and that they should treasure and use the limited time they have to display their strengths and live their life to its fullest before it ends. Thus, the school included the exploration of life–death-related topics in their life education curriculum in senior secondary 3 (F.6).

T2 stated that the school's life education programme was combined with and developed alongside religious education; therefore, the two are closely related.

However, the school was not limited to employing Christian concepts, such as angels, in the discussion of life–death-related topics. On the contrary, T2 introduced the

concept of death in relation to life and death from different perspectives, such as medicine and science, and different cultures and religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam. This wider perspective is aimed at helping students understand the inevitability of death, enabling them to adjust their bereavement and loss when facing death as well as consider how to live with meaning during their limited lives.

The school principal (T1) highlighted that the school had experienced the death of teachers and students. Having experienced the loss of people close to her, T2 had strong feelings towards life–death and death-related topics and affirmed that these experiences were helpful in sharing and thinking about death-related matters. The experiences served as preparation for exploring and sharing not merely knowledge but feelings as well as understanding the feelings and experience surrounding death.

T2 stated the following concerning the training provided to teachers of life–death-related topics or life and death education:

I did not receive professional training in death education or life and death education. In order to teach life–death and death-related issues, I searched for

related information and read books. I also paid attention to and thought about how to explore and share [these topics] in an experiential way since they are more abstract concepts that cannot be understood through lecturing [knowledge].

(T2)

T2 believed that life education does not merely involve knowledge teaching. The critical factor was how to practise the knowledge. T2's performance was in line with the perspective of the school principal (T1): although T2 lacked some academic preparation, she was willing to devote time and effort to equip herself with more knowledge regarding life education and take responsibility for leading the project.

T2 employed different teaching methods to explore life–death-related topics in the teaching process; for example, multimedia sources (film, TV programmes, and songs), life stories, and experiential activities. T2 highlighted that using experience rather than lecturing was more effective when teaching and sharing these topics.

Experiential activities often triggered students' feelings of the inevitability of life and death helped them reflect on living in the present, living without regrets, and striving to live a good life as well as practising the aforementioned principles. T2 also

organised a unique experience—visiting a graveyard—to help students reflect on life; this fieldtrip was also reported by the media. T2 affirmed that despite the considerable time spent organising the activity, it was all worth it because students were committed to the activity and had a valuable opportunity for reflection and learning, especially when reading information on the tombstones, such as background information of the deceased person or an epitaph. T2 went on to describe the biggest difficulty encountered in implementing life–death-related topics or life and death education.

Although parents did not disapprove of experiential activities, students were so busy preparing for public exams that they could not spare extra time to join the activities out of school hours. Actually, formal school hours are limited. I

understood the importance of preparing for public exams. So, I could only cancel the visit. (T2)

Because these activities were not compulsory elements of the curriculum, they could only be arranged during weekends or holidays—participation was completely voluntary. Such activities were subject to cancellation because of students' rigorous academic schedule. However, T2 still believed that students' exploration of and

reflection on life–death-related topics during the lessons were sufficient even without participating in these activities.

This interview revealed that the knowledge, skills, and attitude of T2 when implementing life and death education in school are consistent with those mentioned by Lin Chi-yun (林綺雲, 2005): possessing knowledge regarding death and being willing to discuss and teach such topics to the students during lessons. T2's dedication to designing the curriculum, arranging the lessons, and equipping herself with relevant knowledge as well as her experience in teaching religious education and life education all contributed to the successful implementation of life and death education in the school. Therefore, T2 could take the leading role in implementing and teaching the programme, which also agreed with what the students observed and thought.

#### 4.1.4 Curriculum

The life education of School C1 started in 2002; it initially involved formal lessons in the curriculum but was later expanded into cross-curricular subjects. It is now implemented in a whole-school manner. Students in junior secondary 1 and 2 (F.1 and F.2) have two periods of life education each week, whereas those from junior



secondary 3 (F.3) to senior secondary 3 (F.6) have one period every week. Each period is 40 minutes. The school has four to five teachers of religious and life education. T2 is one of the F.6 religious and life education teachers.

School C1 has an independent life education curriculum. It started in 2002 and has been developed into a 6-year-cycle curriculum. The objectives of the curriculum were determined by the life education coordination committee (renamed Life Education Group) led by the vice principal and the Christian education committee. The Life Education Group not only designed the curriculum but also compiled textbooks and learning materials, in addition to arranging related experiential activities. Life–death-related topics are introduced in the senior secondary 3 (F.6) curriculum.

T2 provided the following reasons for this approach:

1. The 6-year life education curriculum starts with teaching ‘what is life?’—‘the beginning of life’ in F.1. In senior secondary, ‘what is death?’ is explored. The curriculum was designed to represent the journey of life. Senior secondary 3 students arrive at the final stage of the curriculum—‘life and death’— which involves an exploration of and reflection on the value of life.

2. Senior secondary 3 students face one of the greatest challenges in their lives: the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination. After the exam, students leave school to construct their future. Therefore, considering the limitations and inevitable end of life would enable students to view their future life from more perspectives.
3. Senior secondary 3 students, having developed particular intellectual skills, are in a more appropriate position to face, consider, and discuss life–death-related topics.

T2 has been teaching senior secondary 3 (F.6) religious education and life education for many years. The following are the topics and arrangement of the life and death education curriculum according to the in-house-designed textbooks (materials) provided by School C1.

Content and teaching approaches (see Table 4)

The curriculum of senior secondary 3 (F.6), ‘From the present to eternity’, includes four modules: (1) ‘To be a steward of life’, (2) ‘Say farewell to agony, the choice of life!’, (3) ‘From death to life’, and (4) ‘Live in the present’.

Module 1, ‘To be a steward of life’, introduces the theme by using the following topics: ‘The limitation of life, inevitability of death’ and ‘The impermanence of life, living in the present’; through experiential activities, students experience the limitations of life and plan for their future. Students are guided to realise that their plans could be interrupted by death, destroying their original plan; thus, they would need to face life and death at some point. Subsequently, teachers explore the value and meaning of life (through topics such as ‘What is death?’ and ‘The truth of death’) with the students. The beliefs, understanding, attitude, and methods for managing death by different religions are also introduced. Because no single religion is prioritised, students with or without religious beliefs are provided a wider perspective to consider these matters.

Module 2, ‘Saying farewell to agony, the choice of life!’, explores the problem of suicide. Students evaluate the attitudes of different people who have attempted suicide

and even have conversations with them to discover the reasons why they could no longer live and explore topics related to suicide (e.g., how to deal with the emotions of agony and loss). The module is concluded by reviewing the life of Job, a Bible character, particularly how he faced his inexplicable adversity and misfortune as well as how he overcame all the hardships in life; the purpose of this activity is to encourage students to face suffering without losing hope.

Module 3, 'From death to life', explores the value and meaning of life through the concept of stoppage time. If stoppage time (not extra or added time) were provided for living, how would students use it? By exploring the things that students would focus on during that extra time, they can clarify the value and meaning of their life.

*Tuesdays with Morrie* tells the story of how Morrie, a university professor with terminal illness, discusses different topics of life with his student, Albom, for 14 Tuesdays. Students are directed to reflect on the attitude towards death throughout this book. The lesson Transcendence of death is based on the Biblical notion of the nature of death and salvation.

Module 4, 'Living in the present', uses Moses, a Bible character, and Dr Lee Lok Sze, a Hong Kong polar explorer, as examples and teaches students about these noteworthy individuals' missions in life and the difficulties they faced. Students are encouraged to develop their own tasks that must be accomplished in life and reflect on their future direction. Finally, students are instructed to write their wills, enabling them to reflect on how they would face death as it approaches.

The organisation of the curriculum demonstrates the integration of intellectual, emotional, volitional, and practical dimensions of death or life and death education.

The attitudes and manners of perceiving, understanding, and responding to death are introduced from different religious perspectives, enabling students with or without religious beliefs to benefit from the lessons. The experiential activities trigger students' feelings and help them become aware of the closeness of death. They must live with sincerity and add meaning to their lives so as to plan their lives well and reach their goals.

The curriculum, which includes the concepts of life (being or living), different perceptions of death by various cultures and faiths, prevention of suicide, support in

bereavement and loss, and writing one's will, is relatively comprehensive and complete. It corresponds to the two objectives of death education or life and death education in the curriculum guidelines proposed by 鄭冰兒 (2001): (1) strengthen students' awareness of the limitation of life and (2) encourage students to live life to the fullest.



Table 4. Senior secondary 3 (F.6) Life Education Curriculum of School C1: From the Present to Eternity

Module 1: To be a steward of life		
Lesson 1	Life strategy	<p>Students devise their future plans. How will they face and understand the reality of dying?</p> <p>Students develop their understanding of death and share their perceptions of death.</p>
Lesson 2	The truth of death	<p>To understand how death is perceived in different cultures, religions, science, and medical science through reading materials.</p>
Module 2: Say farewell to agony, the choice of life!		
Lesson 1	I have gone quietly...	<p>An activity that involves examining historical figures who committed suicide (Qu Yuan, Adolf Hitler, Xiang Yu, and Judas, who betrayed Jesus) to help students consider the problem of suicide.</p>



Lesson 2	Your past, my prelude	<p>To explore the problem of pain. To observe the emotions and feelings of those who commit suicide from a first-person and third-person perspective.</p> <p>To read different cases of suicide and reflect on students' personal views on suicide.</p>
Lesson 3	How to face loss and bereavement	<p>An activity, which involves arranging the order of values that students treasure, helps students reflect on what they regard as essential in life. Loss involves not only people, objects, and things but also emotions.</p> <p>Different solutions (relief) to loss and bereavement are introduced, enabling students to determine the most suitable approach to a death-related discussion.</p>





Lesson 4	The man who is most vulnerable to suicide—Job	<p>Through the experience of Job, students explore suffering and the sense of unfairness and emotions that result from it.</p> <p>To examine Job’s understanding and experience of adversity to help students learn how to face adversity and transcend suffering.</p>
Module 3: From death to life		
Lesson 1	Stoppage time for life	<p>The TV programme <i>Loss: Time: Life</i> is centred on the notion that at the end of life, a person could be awarded the chance to transfer the time (life) wasted in the past to extra time in the future. How would people make use of it?</p>



		To help students identify the most valuable people, objects, and things in life, encouraging them to live a life with meaning and value.
Lesson 2	The last 14 lessons on Tuesdays	<i>Tuesdays with Morrie</i> (both a book and a film), which tells the story of a professor with terminal illness and a writer at a crossroads, is used to guide students to consider their attitude towards death.
Lesson 3	Transcendence of death	Use a lecture and discussion to talk about the nature and salvation of ‘death’ through the Christian faith.
Module 4: Living in the present		



Lesson 1	The three 40 years of Moses	Students consider Moses' experience during his 3 40 years of life.
Lesson 2	The three 20 years of Lee Lok Sze	<p>The life story of Dr Lee Lok Sze, especially the consideration and preparation of her goals in different stages, is used to help students connect with their own life goals and preparation of different stages and aspects in life.</p> <p>Reading materials and discussion alongside life planning.</p>
Lesson 3	Writing a will	Through the experience of writing their own will, students consider how they would face the approach of death.



<p>Experiential</p> <p>activity</p> <p>(during a</p> <p>nonschool</p> <p>day)</p>	<p>Visiting a graveyard</p>	<p>By visiting a graveyard and observing the tombs, tombstones, and epitaphs (information of the deceased), students record their experience and clean the graveyard (e.g., throw away rubbish and remove weeds).</p> <p>By observing the reality of death, students start to consider their own life direction and the importance of living a meaningful life with value.</p>
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#### 4.1.5 Assessment

According to T2, School C1 has formal assessments for students concerning life–death-related topics in life education. The assessments focus on testing knowledge, such as the perspective on and response to death of different religions. Students’ performance, discussion, and sharing during lessons are also part of the assessments.

T2 noted that the purpose of the assessment is not to evaluate students’ results or marks but rather their personal growth. School C1 also emphasises that teachers should not only focus on academic performance but assess students’ growth and development in a holistic manner. Life education should emphasise all-round and whole-person education for general growth in life. T2 remarked that the effectiveness of life education was reflected in students’ words and deeds as well their characters; the teachers recognised these changes and found them gratifying. Such clear growth in students also motivated T2 to persist in teaching life education.

#### 4.1.6 Students

School C1 arranged a total of nine students (five boys and four girls) studying senior secondary 3 (F.6) for interview; before students participated in interviews, consent

was provided by their parents. Among the nine students, one boy and one girl indicated that they were Christians. The remaining seven students did not report having any religious belief nor showed any indication of religious belief (see Table 5).

Table 5. Background of Student Participants of School C1

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9
Sex	M	F	F	M	M	M	F	F	M
Religious belief	Christianity	Christianity	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

All nine participants (S1–S9) exhibited positive attitudes towards the implementation of life education in School C1 and regarded as appropriate the inclusion of life–death-related topics in the senior secondary 3 (F.6) curriculum.

Concerning the organisation of the school life education curriculum, in junior forms it covers the beginning of life. Therefore, in SS3 [senior secondary 3] (F.6), the year of graduation, topics such as life and death are included. SS3 is a time for completion, and the curriculum seems to be a completion, too. (S1)

All the student participants agreed that teaching life–death-related topics in junior forms was inappropriate because junior students might not be interested or understand the importance of the topics. Even if teachers discussed these matters with them, the effects might not be satisfactory, and time and effort would have been wasted. Senior secondary 3 students are more mature intellectually and are likely to be more rational when considering death.

Exploring life–death and death-related issues in SS3 [senior secondary 3] (F.6) allows students to seriously consider the inevitability of death. It has a positive effect on planning for future life because [they are] facing graduation and their futures. Exploring life–death and death-related issues can help students treasure life, and do appropriate and meaningful things before the approach of death. [We should] plan the future well and not waste our life so as not to regret and feel sorrow when leaving the world. (S2)

All nine students believed that the life education curriculum had a positive influence and helped them understand and consider life–death and death-related matters.

Concerning the content and teaching methods, all nine students agreed that using different learning activities in life education could arouse their interest in learning and discussing the relevant topics.

Students mentioned two learning activities: (1) sharing their thoughts about life and death through drawing and (2) Module 1: the experiential activity of life strategy in Unit 1 'To be a steward of life'.

Regarding the drawing activities, students stated that one of the most impressive works used colours of different shades as well as different objects and scenery to represent the feelings, perceptions, and thoughts of life and death. S3 stated that the most unforgettable drawing, which aroused discussion and reflection, was one by a student (not one of the nine students being interviewed) who wrote the Chinese character for 'life' on one end of the paper and that for 'death' on the opposite side, connecting the two words by a line which represented the distance and journey between the two. The line also represented time. I drew the following picture according to the description of S3:





S9 also mentioned another student in class (not one of the nine being interviewed)

who drew the characters for 'life' and 'death' one on top of the other. The character

on top was 'life'. The last stroke of 'life' (at the bottom) and the first stroke of 'death'

(on top) were joined together to become the same stroke. The student who drew the

character mentioned that it represented the connection between life and death. The

following was drawn according to the description of S9:



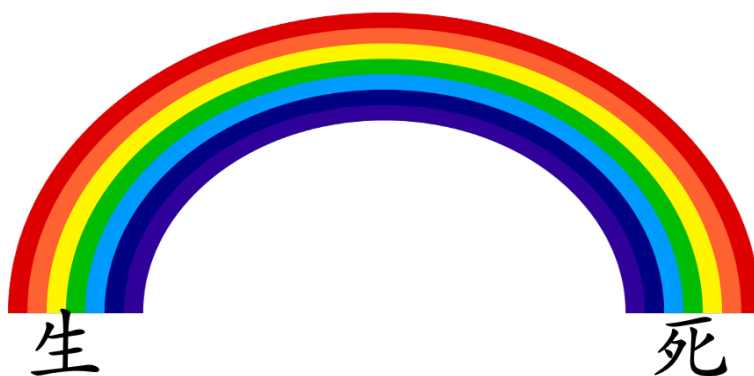
The students also described the drawing of their teacher (T2), which represented his

thoughts on life and death. The Chinese characters for life and death were written on

the two ends of the paper and were connected by a rainbow in between. Through the

drawing, T2 expressed his desire for a life full of colour and wished everyone a happy

life. The drawing was as follows (described by S3):



The students provided thought-provoking opinions; however, each period lasted only 40 minutes. Because of limited time, they could not have a deeper discussion of the topics, and students mainly commended each other's work.

Concerning experiential activities in the lessons, T2 instructed students to arrange their plan for each stage of their life. Then, they were randomly assigned different life durations. Some could live up to the age of 80 years, whereas others died in middle age. The most shocking experience for the students was dying at birth.

The interviewed students shared some of the most memorable elements of this lesson.

Students who were assigned to die young found the assignment unbelievable and unacceptable because their arranged plan had to be changed and adjusted in a hurry.

They felt at a loss and even regretted that they did not use their time to live a

meaningful life. S4, who was assigned to die at birth, not only felt helpless and at a loss but also puzzled and angry when he realised his beginning was also his ending.

Most of the students agreed that their thoughts on life were triggered through the learning activities, especially the impermanence of life and the sudden approach of death. Initially, they thought that death was something distant. However, when they imagined death approaching, the people and things they treasured most came to mind, leading to a re-examination of their life. S4 revealed that he was the only son in a single-parent family, and he used to dislike his family. However, this activity inspired him to develop a stronger relationship with his family. S4 and S6 both understood that they had to live their lives well and with meaning as well as make good use of the time they had. When they were asked the meaning of ‘making use of life’, ‘living a meaningful life’, and ‘values’, they did not provide a concrete response. However, all the student participants admitted that the activity helped them realise how close death could be and that they needed to plan their lives well.

From the student participants’ responses, it is clear that the curriculum design and the organisation of teaching and learning helped students enhance their knowledge of

life and death. By participating in activities, students could experience the truth and unpredictability of death. The activities also helped students consider their future life direction, make an effort to live well, and realise the importance of giving of themselves and living a meaningful life.

The participating students all confirmed that the experiential activities and using different media to teach topics related to life and death were suitable and well received. However, other topics, such as the Bible characters (e.g., Job) and people's life story (e.g., Lee Lok Sze) had little relevance to their lives. Students hardly touched upon these topics because these lessons did not trigger strong feelings.

In addition to the experiential activities in the lessons, experiential activities were also conducted outside of school, such as contemplation in the graveyard. Most of the students indicated that the activity had considerable meaning and value, but they lacked the intention and interest to participate. They were busy preparing for their external examination and did not regard contemplation in a graveyard as sufficiently interesting to devote time to. When asked why they were not interested, most of the

participants stated that it was unrelated to them or that they doubted that effective thoughts and learning could be generated from taking part in this experiential activity.

#### 4.1.7 Conclusion

The support of the sponsoring body of School C1 benefited the implementation of life education. The school evolved from religious education to life education. By using past experiences, the school established its own curriculum which was influenced by the perception of the value of life of the sponsoring body. To cater to students' practical needs, career planning is combined with life–death or death-related topics and introduced in the senior secondary 3 (F.6) curriculum. It starts with the end of life to explore matters of life and life planning and then proceeds to the prevention of suicide (e.g., resilience in adversity as well as loss and bereavement when encountering death) to become a complete series. With the full support and acceptance of life education, sensitive topics, such as death, are not prohibited. When the school experienced death (e.g., teachers' death and students' suicide), teachers demonstrated a positive and open attitude without concealment. The teachers also help students consider the meaning and value of death, not regarding it as horrible but

rather focusing on the power of life. However, the school certainly did not exaggerate the beauty of death; teachers showed empathy and shared and accepted the sorrow, sadness, and loss that students experienced. The responsible teacher designed the curriculum and taught life education according to her own experience and considerations. She also revealed a strong understanding of students' thoughts, feelings, and emotions for topics concerning death or life and death in the learning process. School C1 is a relatively mature example of the implementation of life and death education.

## **4.2 School C2**

### **4.2.1 The Background of School C2 and Its Implementation of Life and death**

#### **Education <sup>47</sup>**

School C2 was established by a nonprofit Christian sponsoring body. A British church founded a school in mainland China in 1913, but it was moved to Hong Kong because of World War II. After the war, the school moved back to mainland China and has been managed by the Mainland government ever since. The alumni of the

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<sup>47</sup> Information regarding this school was derived chiefly from the related sharing section(s) on the school's website.

school in Hong Kong founded the alumni association in the 1960s to memorialise the nurturing environment of the school. They gathered resources and identified an appropriate location to construct a school to continue the spirit of the former school.

The school was established and run by a church in the 1970s. The mission of the school is ‘to foster whole-person education based on Christian principles; to nurture abundant life through the gospel and Biblical truths; and to carry on the school tradition of perseverance, diligence, frugality, respect for teachers, and love for the school’. It is a Band 1 school; thus the students are the academic elites of society.

School C2 has a profound historical and religious background. Consistent with its mission of establishing the school to provide whole-person education with the spirit of Christianity, the school prioritises the nurturing of students’ personalities and values.

The school’s mission is based on Christian beliefs. Therefore, religious (Christian) education is a prominent element in the curriculum. Life education is a new topic (not considered a subject) that was recently introduced. To cater to students’ needs, the school adopted a learning package ‘P.A.T.H.S. to Adulthood: A

Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme’ (henceforth P.A.T.H.S.), which was designed by a research committee composed of scholars from five universities, sponsored by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust (HKJCCT). The learning package, which was comprehensive, was endorsed by the Social Welfare Department and the EDB for cultivating junior secondary students’ individual growth and development. After careful examination, School C2 decided to introduce a curriculum concerned with students’ growth based on P.A.T.H.S. It also participated in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools, commissioned by the EDB and managed by EdUHK (previously called the Hong Kong Institute of Education), and the Life Education Exchange Programme to Taiwan to develop its F.4–F.6 senior secondary life education curriculum.

Referring to the special topic ‘life education’ on the school website, Christian education, moral and civic education, discipline and counselling, life planning education, leadership, and extracurricular activities are included. School C2 intended to introduce life education in a cross-curricular manner to collaboratively plan and



implement relevant topics, hoping to foster a culture that enables students to achieve various goals.

Measures for life education include the following:

1. Provision of value education to enable students to establish positive values and attitudes;
2. Provision of multiple pathways for students with different strengths and interests;
3. Provision of different learning experiences, especially leadership responsibilities and community service, to enhance students' sense of responsibility as well as leadership qualities and skills;
4. Formulation of a whole-school policy and conducting planning on the basis of identified student needs;
5. Fostering a caring campus environment with a strong support network to facilitate high-quality interpersonal relationship and personal growth.

However, School C2's website did not provide information on life education or relevant lessons.

#### 4.2.2 School Sponsoring Body and Vice Principal (T3)

The school sponsoring body pioneered the implementation of life education in the school. The church was not only instrumental in implementing life education but also engaged in writing textbooks and learning materials. To strengthen its life education initiative, the church further established an education department specialising in identifying resources and methods for the implementation of life education. For example, it promotes the programme ‘Life education in movies’, subsidised by the Quality Education Fund, and regularly invites researchers and workers from different countries and regions who are involved in life education to organise seminars and workshops. The programmes and subsidy enable the school sponsoring body to also provide on-site support (e.g., teacher training and sharing of life education through movies). In addition, new teachers are provided with training on life education to ensure their perspectives and methods of introducing life education are consistent with those of the sponsoring body. Under the guidance of the sponsoring body, the subsidiary primary and secondary schools have developed their own plans and



objectives for life education, with different focuses according to the situation of each school.

The vice principal (T3) of School C2, a Christian who has been working at the school for more than 30 years, is an English teacher and the head of student affairs.

When describing the development of their life education programme, T3 stated that although the school offered religious (Christianity) studies and also participated in the Understanding Adolescent Project and P.A.T.H.S., only using one or two sets of learning materials might not adequately encourage students' growth, especially if the unique situation of the school and the needs of the students are not considered.

Therefore, the school decided to establish a special committee to utilise part of the P.A.T.H.S learning materials to gradually develop their own curriculum.

In addition to the initiative and support of the sponsoring body, School C2 used the experience gained by participating in the EDB's Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools and the Life Education Exchange Programme to Taiwan (to understand the development of its life education programme) to determine the content and materials suitable for its own curriculum. The first stage of the

school's life education curriculum was a combination of the previously established curriculum with novel elements, consisting of various types of materials with different (life education) principles.

Because the subject 'religious (Christian) studies' was already being offered, the school did not establish a separate subject but rather lessons that introduced life education. In the first stage, the school formed a special committee led by the vice principal (T3), and teachers who were aware of the need of implementing life education were invited to join the committee on a voluntary basis. The committee consisted of eight teachers who were mainly from the student support and development board, including teachers of religious education, career guidance, discipline, student guidance and information technology. These teachers planned the curriculum; designed, collected, and compiled materials; and taught and obtained feedback to modify the materials. For training, the special committee participated in an exchange programme to Taiwan arranged by the school sponsoring body. A 50-minute class period was allocated for the teaching of life education by members of the special committee. During Stage 2, the class teachers were responsible for teaching

life education. The members of the special committee became the coordinators, assisting and arranging regular discussions with the class teachers concerning the situation and needs of the lessons and offering support.

The school also makes use of the resources of the sponsoring body, such as the aforementioned Life Education in Movies programme to obtain more related teaching resources and on-site support.

After consulting the life education curriculum of Taiwan, the teachers also included life and death education in its curriculum. Therefore, topics of ultimate concern were added to the curriculum. The journey from life to death represents a complete life process. Christianity does not regard death in a negative light. For example, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is often mentioned in Christianity. Therefore, it is not taboo to discuss life and death. During the design of the life education curriculum, the teaching objective was based on the ‘meaning of life’; thus, students were encouraged to consider the meaning of life so as to plan for their future. This planning is particularly crucial when selecting subjects in F.4 and planning for career development: students must consider various perspectives in the preparation of their

career path. Because death-related topics are not used for exploring life and death, no further teaching materials have been written for these issues.

Having participated in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools and the school's Life Education Exchange Programme to Taiwan, the vice principal (T3) has considerable learning experience and understanding of life education.

#### 4.2.3 Teacher T4

Teacher T4, who is the department head of Chinese history and the teacher responsible for moral, civic, and national education, is in charge of life education in School C2. T4 has been teaching at School C2 for 5 years and professes no religious faith. Despite being responsible for student guidance, T4 did not initially join the special committee. In academic year 2016–2017 because of the development of the school, T4 was assigned to the moral, civic, and national education team and joined the special committee. T4 was mainly responsible for integrating various teaching resources into the junior form life education teaching materials (e.g., the Understanding Adolescent Project, P.A.T.H.S, and the Life Education in Movies

programme provided by the sponsoring body). T4 also taught senior secondary 1 (F.4)

life education to become familiar with the curriculum. T4 became the head of the

moral, civic, and national education team in academic year 2017–2018. T4 is now

responsible for the overall implementation and execution of life education in School

C2 and for integrating the curriculum of junior secondary students.

Concerning ‘death’, T4 shared her experience of her uncle’s suicide; although she was

not close to her uncle, the incident did affect her. However, she did not reflect deeply

on the incident at that time, only realising that her uncle’s death would have a

profound negative effect on her cousin’s growth; he has since become more

rebellious.

T4 was asked if her personal experience played a role in her involvement in life

education, especially teaching life–death-related topics to F.4 students.

Despite experiencing the death of my relative, it was not the main factor for me

to become involved in life education. Death-related topics have been included in

the curriculum since the beginning. It isn’t related to my experience. I accepted

the responsibility to be involved in the school’s life education. The more

important reason [for my involvement] is [that] I agree that life education is

helpful and valuable for students' life and growth. It's meaningful work. (T4)

T4 focused more on editing the junior secondary life education curriculum. To maximise students' personal growth, the junior curriculum focuses more on adapting to junior secondary school life and learning, morals and values, and positive education. The F.4 curriculum, devised by the special committee, included death-related topics mainly because they were based on the life education curriculum of Taiwan. The reason for its retention in the curriculum is unclear; it may simply be a case of following in previous people's footsteps.

T4 believed that including life–death-related topics in the F.4 life education curriculum was appropriate because (1) F.4 students are sufficiently mature for such theoretical discussions and (2) the death-related topics are mainly used to discuss and explore the limitations of life (the fact that everyone must die), to discover how to live meaningfully, with a focus on the meaning of life rather than on life and death.

In addition to the lack of exploration of death-related topics in the curriculum, T4 stated that the organisation of related topics in academic year 2016–2017 and that in



2015–2016 differed considerably. In academic year 2015–2016, only one period (50 minutes) was dedicated to covering death-related topics; however, this was extended to three periods in 2016–2017. In 2015–2016, ‘writing your own epitaph’ was simply one of the activities, but it became a main activity in one whole lesson in 2016–2017. Because an evaluation revealed that insufficient time was allocated for this activity in 2015–2016 to enable comprehensive sharing and discussion, the time for the activity was extended. According to T4’s observations, increasing the time for this topic benefited students’ learning.

Concerning the change in those responsible for teaching life education (from members of the special committee to the class teachers) because of the restructuring of the committee, T4 stated that not every teacher could master or was committed to teaching such topics. This could be attributed to most of the class teachers not being involved in planning the curriculum and their lack of training.

T4, unlike the vice principal (T3) of the school, had not received training or possessed experience in life education, nor knowledge of death education or life and death education before becoming involving in the work. T4 referred to and studied life

education materials while implementing life education and sincerely participated in the sharing sessions organised by the school sponsoring body and on-site training to obtain more knowledge. She would also consider taking related courses.

#### 4.2.4 Teacher T5

T5 teaches F.4 life education at School C2. T5 is a Catholic and has been teaching at School C2 for more than 20 years; he teaches art and design and is in charge of information technology. He was one of the members of the life education special committee who participated in the Life Education Exchange Programme to Taiwan.

T5 admitted that although he is involved in the special committee and teaches F.4 life education, he did not contribute much to the curriculum design. He recalled that, with the resources and support of the sponsoring body, the school hoped to establish its life education curriculum by integrating religious (Christianity) education and moral education to support students' growth, with the goal of establishing 'humanity education' through the curriculum and activities. T5 mentioned that the teachers involved in life education were 'groping their way across the river'—learning while doing. He did not remember why life–death-related topics were included in the F.4

curriculum. I referred to the curriculum theme, content, and design to help him clarify his thoughts. T5 then responded that one of the reasons for including such topics in F.4 might be because it is the first year of senior secondary school, which is a new stage for the students. Having a new start or restart could remind students to grasp each moment, treasure the present, use time wisely, and plan their life to maximise their potential. The purpose of including death-related topics was not to explore death itself but rather to provide a starting point that enables students to consider the limitations of life and how to live every day to the fullest so as to be prepared for tomorrow.

T5 stated that students did not have clear or major feelings towards the limitation of life (death); they regarded death as remote or not their business. Activities were deliberately included in the curriculum for students to plan for or consider their next 10 or 20 years. Then, teachers prepared some real cases to help students realise that an accident or death could come suddenly. From notions such as the lack of certainty or the inevitability of certain things in life, students were led to discuss topics such as living in the present and treasuring every moment.

T5 agreed that although death was one of the topics in the curriculum, the purpose was not to discuss death but rather to address the purpose and meaning of life, with the goal of encouraging life planning and how to prepare for future work or career. It may not be practical for students to directly face death-related topics. It might be more appropriate for students to start from considering the limitations of life when exploring life-related topics. It was challenging for individual teachers to determine how deeply the life–death-related topics should be discussed.

When asked regarding the difficulties and problems that emerge when teaching life education, T5 responded as follows: ‘I was teaching a science class. Students had no interest in life education. Some students even asked why the lessons for life education could not be cancelled so that the time could be ‘released’ for other subjects.’

T5 also highlighted that because the teacher responsible for life education most likely did not have as a close relationship with the students as the students did with their main teacher, eliciting in-depth responses from the students was challenging; the same concern also limited discussions of death-related topics.

Concerning curriculum design and teaching arrangement, the teachers hoped that integrating activities could enhance learning. T5 described students' visit to the Jockey Club Life Journey Centre (<https://www.ljc.org.hk/en/site/index>) to participate in an experiential activity, an opportunity students rarely had. T5 believed that the students were committed to and interested in the activity. However, because of a lack of resources, such activities are no longer arranged.

The interviews revealed that teachers of different hierarchies implementing life education had diverse experiences and considerations, especially towards life–death-related topics. At this school, it remains acceptable to include death-related topics in the F.4 curriculum. However, the teaching and learning design as well as who should teach the classes require further consideration.

#### 4.2.5 Curriculum

The materials shared by School C2 revealed that the senior secondary life education curriculum is adjusted annually. The following discussion only concerns the implementation of life–death-related topics in the curriculum.

Two teaching plans in the curriculum explicitly include life–death-related topics.<sup>48</sup>

School C2's life education programme was launched in academic year 2015–2016.

Some of the elements of the curriculum (Table 6) warrant further exploration.

The aims and schedule were inconsistent, especially concerning the topic of 'death'.

The curriculum documents stated that the topic 'death' was covered in a 50-minute session entitled 'Purpose of life'; however, the word 'death' was not used (Table 6).

This lesson has two outlines: (1) 'Can life be without aim?' and (2) 'Meaning of death', which were divided into two sessions of 50 minutes each for a total of 100 minutes. The 'meaning of death' part was taught in Lesson 2; that is, first the purpose of life was addressed and then the meaning of death (see Table 7).

In the lesson 'Meaning of death', students were provided with a hypothetical time of death (e.g., tomorrow, 1 month from now, 1 year from now) and were asked to consider how they would live their life during their remaining time. Then students were guided to write their epitaph, which they shared with other students. The lesson

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<sup>48</sup> Related materials were provided by School C2. In order not to disclose relevant people's information and include unrelated materials, the content and format of the documents were revised.

was concluded with a discussion of the ‘Three Key Enquires of Life’ by Professor Sun to remind students to live well in the present.

A considerable difference was noted between planning and actual teaching. The efforts of the special committee and responsible teachers in adjusting the teaching according to the situation should be appreciated. However, this adjustment could reflect their insufficient mastery of this topic and understanding of the teaching objectives while planning and designing the curriculum, which should be improved.

1. The titles (topics) of the curriculum, which was developed according to the objectives, were as follows:

- (1) Life education and the value and meaning of life
- (2) Purpose of life
- (3) Live a better life
- (4) Problems in life
- (5) Love and like

The programme starts with ‘Values and the meaning of life’ to help students consider and explore the purpose of life. The ‘Purpose of life’ topic was aimed at

exploring questions such as why it is necessary to establish a purpose in life as an entry point to exploring the meaning of death. Next, a more positive topic was introduced, dealing with happiness (the qualities of a happy life), morality (moral judgement and an ethical life), and followed by an exploration of the problems in life which focuses on life and technology (ethics of technology). Finally, in the ‘Love and like’ topic, matters related to love were discussed. Disregarding whether a 50-minute session is sufficient to discuss such complex topics, the arrangement (development) of these topics was rather odd. According to the school documents, the topic ‘Love and like’ was not covered in F.4 life education lessons but was postponed to F.5, which was more desirable.

2. According to the scheme of work, life planning was included in life education.

This is consistent with statements from teachers (T3, T4, and T5) that one of the functions or purposes of life education is life planning.

3. The scheme of work also revealed that teachers could have two roles: responsible teachers and observers. This confirms the interview data (from teachers T3, T4, T5) that some of the teachers involved in the special committee also taught life



education. Other members of the special committee became observers of the lessons or facilitators; they were involved in curriculum and materials design but also observed the lessons, enabling them to evaluate and revise the curriculum.

Academic year 2016–2017 was the second year that life education was offered at School C2. An examination of the F.4 life education curriculum outline in terms of the inclusion of death-related topics revealed several notable elements that merit further discussion (Table 8).

1. On the basis of experiences during the 2015–2016 academic year, the topic ‘Purpose of life’ (meaning of death) was revised to encompass three sessions for a total of 150 minutes (relative to the previous year’s 100 minutes) for year 2016–2017. According to the curriculum outline, all the students attended Lesson 4.7 ‘Purpose of life’ and Lesson 4.8 ‘Purpose of death’ (divided into two periods) in 2016–2017. The lesson design and activities of Lesson 2 ‘Purpose of death’ was the same as those in 2015–2016. Students were asked to consider (1) what they will do before death (the rest of their lives) and (2) whether they would make different choices if they knew when they would die. Subsequently, students were

asked to write their epitaph and share it with other students. For Lesson 4.8 ‘Visit to the Jockey Club Life Journey Centre’, all the F.4 students visited the centre.

However, because of manpower and venue limitations, the visit was separated into two occasions, with two classes each time. While two classes were on the field trip, the other two classes joined an English activity in school.

2. For the topic ‘Purpose of life’ (meaning of death) in 2016–2017, students attended an experiential activity—a visit to the Jockey Club Life Journey Centre—which was a revision and improvement of the teaching approach and arrangement of 2015–2016.
3. The topic ‘Purpose of life’ (meaning of death) was taught in the middle of the term (i.e., Lessons 4.7–4.8 in 2016–2017), according to the curriculum outline. Before discussing the purpose of life, students were provided with some real-life examples to refer to in Lessons 4.2–4.4, which enabled a more comprehensive discussion of the topic.

The aforementioned revisions reflect the effort of School C2 in implementing and developing life education.

The interviews and curriculum documents revealed that School C2 made some arrangements for teacher training while the teachers prepared the life education curriculum; for example, participating in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools and related life education activities organised by the sponsoring body. At the same time, a special committee was formed to develop the school's life education programme, teach classes and conduct lesson observation, and organise co-preparation sessions to enable teachers to exchange ideas. Teaching life education became the responsibility of class teachers in 2017–2018. As a result of this change, the importance of teacher–student relationships and privacy concerning the topics was highlighted; whether class teachers are sufficiently prepared to teach these topics is a question that should be considered.

Table 6. 2015–2016 Life Education Curriculum Documents of School C2

### Objectives of the F.4 Life Education Curriculum

Life education helps students to:

1. establish the appropriate attitude towards life and find the meaning of life
2. cultivate an attitude of appreciation of and respect for life
3. strengthen their determination to pursue the meaning of life



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Lesson  (50 mins)	Date	Topic	Course Outline	Activity
1	11 November  2015	Life education and the value  and meaning of life	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain why life education is necessary</li> <li>2. What is the value and meaning of life?</li> </ol>	<p>Lecture (PowerPoint slides):</p> <p>To share different ‘favourite things’ of different people. Most people judge value according to price, but the value of life cannot be decided by money (materials or prices).</p>



Lesson (50 mins)	Date	Topic	Course Outline	Activity
2	29 January  2016	Purpose of life	1. Can life have no purpose?  2. Meaning of death	Questions for reflection:  (1) What will you do before death (the rest of your life)?  (2) If you knew when you would die, would you make different choices?  Writing and sharing of epitaph



Lesson (50 mins)	Date	Topic	Course Outline	Activity
3	5 February  2016	Live a better life	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The qualities of a happy life</li> <li>2. Moral judgement</li> </ol>	<p>Point for discussion:</p> <p>Students are guided to share their views on what is right and wrong in a dilemma on a TV programme.</p> <p>Message: A life without morals will not be blessed.</p>



Lesson (50 mins)	Date	Topic	Course Outline	Activity
4	4 March  2016		3. Ethical life	<p>Point for discussion:</p> <p>Students discuss their views on fairness and morality by using daily scenarios (e.g., cheating in exams and contaminated food).</p> <p>Message: People are moral beings</p> <p>Discuss the meaning of morality.</p>





Lesson (50 mins)	Date	Topic	Course Outline	Activity
5	1 April 2016  and  22 April  2016	Problems in life	1. Technology and life  2. Ethics of technology	Exploration: Ethics of technology  Students are led to consider the changes  and problems that have emerged because of  the rapid development of technology by  exploring different technological incidents.
6	6 May 2016  and	Love and like	1. What is love?  2. How to practise love	Video clips: Analyse different situations of  love, for example the difference between



Lesson (50 mins)	Date	Topic	Course Outline	Activity
	20 May 2016			<p>loving and liking, through three video clips.</p> <p>Explore the power of love to bolster others' good qualities, and discuss ways to put love into practice.</p>



Table 7. 2015–2016 Schedule for F.4 Life Education Curriculum of School C2 (Facilitating Critical Thinking, Moral Judgement, and Life

Planning)

Duration of each lesson: 50 minutes

Lesson	Date	Topic (course outline) #	Form	Responsible teacher	Observer
1	16-10-2015 (Fri)	From understanding a career to setting goals (CFS)	4A & 4B	TC* & AY	---
	27-11-2015 (Fri)		4C & 4D	TC* & AY	---
2	11-12-2015 (Fri)	Life education and the value and meaning of life  1 Explain why life education is	4A, 4B, 4C & 4D	WFC*, LM*, YCW &  CMC	AL & CH



Lesson	Date	Topic (course outline) #	Form	Responsible teacher	Observer
		necessary  2. What are the value and meaning  of life?			
3	29-1-2016 (Fri)	Purpose of life:  1. Can life have no purpose?	4A, 4B, 4C & 4D	WFC*, LM*, YCW &  CMC	AL & CH
4	5-2-2016 (Fri)	Purpose of life:  2. Meaning of death	4A, 4B, 4C & 4D	WFC*, LM*, YCW &  CMC	AL & CH
5	4-3-2016 (Fri)	To live a happy life (1):	4A, 4B, 4C & 4D	WFC, LM,	AL & CH



Lesson	Date	Topic (course outline) #	Form	Responsible teacher	Observer
		1. The qualities of a happy life  2. Moral judgement		YCW* & CMC*	
6	1-4-2016 (Fri)	From job advertisement to equipping myself (CFS)  To live a happy life (2): ethical life	4A & 4B;  4C & 4D	TC* & AY;  YCW* & CMC*	AL & CH
7	22-4-2016 (Fri)	To live a happy life (2): ethical life  From job advertisement to equipping myself (CFS)	4A & 4B;  4C & 4D	WFC, LM;  TC* & AY	AL & CH



Lesson	Date	Topic (course outline) #	Form	Responsible teacher	Observer
8	6-5-2016 (Fri)	<p>From way of life to life planning (CFS)</p> <p>Problems in life:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Technology and life</li> <li>2. Ethics of technology</li> </ol>	4A & 4B; 4C & 4D	<p>TC* &amp; AY;</p> <p>YCW* &amp; CMC*</p>	AL & CH
9	20-5-2016 (Fri)	<p>Problems in life:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Technology and life</li> <li>2. Ethics of technology</li> </ol>	4A & 4B; 4C & 4D	<p>4A &amp; 4B;</p> <p>4C &amp; 4D</p>	AL & CH



Lesson	Date	Topic (course outline) #	Form	Responsible teacher	Observer
		From way of life to life planning  (CFS)			

# Refer to Table 6.

\*Form teachers

CFS: Career Further Studies



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Table 8. 2016–2017 Life Education Curriculum Documents of School C2

## F.4 Life Education Course Outline for 2016–2017 (revised on 29 August 2016)

Date	F.4 Life Education Course Outline
20/9	4.1 Introduction of life education: value and meaning of life
4/10	4.2 Meaning and value of life: A case study of Hong Kong athlete Lee Wai Sze
18/10	4.3 Meaning and value of life: Emma Watson
15/11	4.4 A model of service learning: The life story of Mother Teresa
29/11	4.5 Introduction of service items and grouping  (Introduction: play the last 15 mins of the movie: <i>I Am</i> )



Date	F.4 Life Education Course Outline
7/2	<p>4.6 Service learning—group training</p> <p>(2 February to 20 April: Service-learning practice)</p>
28/2	4.7 Purpose of life
7/3	<p>3.8 Purpose of life: meaning of death (F4A &amp; B)</p> <p>Same teaching design and arrangement as that in 2015–2016.</p> <p>Questions for reflection:</p> <p>(1) What will you do before death (the rest of your life)?</p> <p>(2) If you knew when you would die, would you make different choices?</p>



Date	F.4 Life Education Course Outline
	<p>Writing and sharing of epitaph</p> <p>(3 to 12 April: Visit to the Jockey Club Life Journey Centre)</p> <p>Because of manpower and venue limitations, F.4 students will be divided into two groups (two classes each) to visit the Jockey Club Life Journey Centre. The two classes <u>not</u> visiting the Life Journey Centre will participate in an English school-based assessment activity in school.</p> <p>*English: <i>Bucket list</i> (movie for English school-based assessment)</p>
14/3	<p>4.8 Purpose of life: meaning of death (F4C &amp; D)</p> <p>(3 to 12 April: Visit to the Jockey Club Life Journey Centre / English school-based assessment)</p>



Date	F.4 Life Education Course Outline
25/4	4.9 Service learning: experience sharing (Group 1)
2/5	4.10 Service learning: experience sharing (Group 2)
12/5 (Fri Assembly)	4.11 F.4 life education sharing of learning outcomes (whole school)
Life Education (LE) Teachers	<p>4A: CHY (FTs: YMC* &amp; TL)</p> <p>4B: AL (FTs: CYL* &amp; CSL)</p> <p>4C: LH (FTs: MCL* &amp; LH#)</p> <p>4D: JK (FTs: CCK* &amp; JK)</p>



Date	F.4 Life Education Course Outline
Common periods for lesson preparation	Thursday: periods 4–5 (i.e., 10:10–11:20 am)

\* Form teachers

# Form conveners



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#### 4.2.6 Assessment

The interviewed teachers (T3, T4, and T5) stated that School C2 had no formal assessment for life education. Although students completed worksheets and shared their thoughts, the collection of and feedback on worksheets were not required.

Individual teachers placed more emphasis on responding to students' performance, discussion, and sharing in class. However, because of time constraints, little could be done. T4 mentioned that extending the topic 'Purpose of life' from one lesson in 2015–2016 to three lessons in 2016 – 2017 provided more room for students to discuss, share, and respond to the topic.

#### 4.2.7 Students

Five senior secondary 2 (F.5) students were selected to participate in the interviews, but only three of them (S10–S12) eventually attended. All three participants were female arts students. One of them was a Christian. Another student followed her family to convert to Guanyin, and the last had no religious belief (Table 9).

Table 9. Background of Student Participants of School C2

	S10	S11	S12
Sex	F	F	F
Religion	Guanyin (觀音)	Christianity	Nil

All three student participants studied life education in 2016–2017 when the topic

‘Purpose of life’ (meaning of death) was included in the curriculum.

The students revealed that it was acceptable to discuss death-related topics during the F.4 life education lessons. They provided the following reasons: (1) senior secondary 1 (F.4) students are more mature in terms of age and mentality to explore provocative topics in a more in-depth manner; and (2) students promoted from junior secondary 3 (F.3) to senior secondary 1 (F.4) have to study many new subjects, especially those they had never studied before, which could lead to anxiety and pressure. Therefore, they felt that the topic ‘Purpose of life’ in life education could provide the guidance they required.

The interviewees also noted that F.4 was a critical moment—a turning point in their secondary school life. Some students may be unable to select their preferred subjects

(or combination of subjects) in F.3 because of their academic performance; therefore, they might start to doubt themselves and have thoughts of death (e.g., hopelessness and suicide) because they are unable to reach their goals. The content in the ‘Purpose of life’ lesson, which covered the meaning of life, represented a timely response to their needs.

Concerning learning (teaching) methods, S10 stated the following:

In junior life education lessons, group discussions were often used mainly to discuss the questions about the topics. In senior form lessons, although movies related to the topics are used, there was little interaction and discussion. Teachers did most of the talking in the lessons. (S10)

The students observed that the lessons did not arouse their interest in the topics, and only some ‘superficial’ elements were covered.

I invited student participants to focus on their feelings and the teaching arrangement of the lessons on ‘Purpose of life’ (meaning of death). The interviewees were more impressed by the lesson in which they had to write their epitaph; students were instructed to write what they would like to see on their epitaph on a piece of paper.

S12 felt extremely helpless during that lesson for the following reasons: (1) not knowing what an epitaph was because of a lack of guidance from the teacher; (2) perceiving death as too far away and not having considered the matter before; (3) and previous teaching on death-related topics in life education lessons having addressed life and death superficially, without in-depth exploration. S12 said, ‘In contrast to one or two religious (Christianity) education lessons, this topic was covered less deeply.’ S11 expected ‘more advanced-level and in-depth exploration of the content in senior life education’. However, the lessons did not fulfil her expectations. Religious (Christianity) education and life education taught during class periods were two separate subjects.

F.4 religious (Christianity) education focuses on ethical issues. There are more chances to explore the meaning and value of life as well as discuss death or life–death-related topics. In religious (Christianity) education, the exploration of the topic of ‘death’ is more in-depth than that in life education. As I said, life education lessons are more superficial. (S12)



S12 used the lesson involving epitaph writing as an example and had the following concerns: (1) the teacher (not T3, T4, or T5) required students to write their strengths on their own epitaph, and S12 did not understand why they had to write this content; (2) life education was taught during class periods—teachers attempted to teach as much content as possible within a limited period, which resulted in content being covered in a hurried manner.

S10 understood the objectives of the epitaph activity to be as follows: (1) brainstorming—helping students consider their life from a broader perspective, (2) recalling—to identify the most meaningful elements in life, and (3) to perceive from different angles that not only certain things are valuable.

Regarding teaching methods, S11 believed that the experiential activities were more effective in helping students to learn than using audiovisual means or lecturing. The interviewees argued that life–death-related topics could not be adequately covered through simple lecturing, which cannot trigger students’ feelings regarding the meaning of life. They noted that they were not attracted by simple lectures during life education and often paid little attention to it. S11 was aware of the experiential

activity involving a visit to the Jockey Club Life Journey Centre. The students who participated in the activity could experience the whole process of life and the stage of death and were strongly affected by the experience. They were also introduced to new forms of funeral rites, which supported their contemplation of death-related topics.

S11 knew that the F.4 students in 2015–2016 had visited the Jockey Club Life Journey Centre. However, when she was in F.4, this experiential activity was no longer arranged, and the topic ‘Meaning of death’ was taught through lectures instead. S11 said, ‘Very disappointed! Very disappointed! It’s a pity!’ She even asked why the school did not arrange the visit. In such cases, students might feel they are treated unfairly.

The three participating students had different understandings and expectations towards death or life–death-related topics.

1. S10 thought that death was special. Some people were afraid of death, whereas others faced it without fear. The difference came from the ‘qualities’ inside these people.
2. S11 thought that death was related to the existence of life and was the meaning of

everything. Without life, there would be no possibilities. Therefore, it was the foundation of life education and the most important topic.

3. S12 believed that death could not be shared with others. This is in contrast to the topic ‘Life planning’, which can be discussed, shared, or exchanged with experienced people. The experience of death and related feelings cannot be shared because no dead people can return to share their knowledge with the living.

All three participants expressed that the present arrangement and design of the curriculum were suitable for F.4 students. However, they noted that their initial high expectations turned into disappointment regarding the arrangement, teaching design, and even the learning topics.

S12 stated that the theme ‘Life planning’ was repeatedly discussed, explored, or shared in whatever topics they were busy learning; however, S12 perceived that the teachers actually had not mastered the theme sufficiently.

Life education should not be merely life planning. Since there are different life education topics, the discussions should have different focuses. When talking

about death, the focus should remain on it. It should not go back to life planning.

(S12)

S11 highlighted that she preferred lessons in which students can explore death-related topics directly; for example, lessons that address major questions, such as ‘what is death?’ and ‘what will happen after death?’

From life to death, there are lots of things unresolved. For example, is there a world after death? What will it be? These are interesting and attractive topics but there is no such content [in the life education curriculum] nor a serious exploration of death or life–death-related topics in-depth. (S11)

S10 indicated that the teachers of life education only read from the textbook and taught without deviating from the curriculum or using their own life experience.

Although teachers might have been affected by some experience of death, that was merely a third-person experience. Teachers seldom shared their own experience; for example, whether they had contemplated ending their lives when facing challenges.

In general, the student participants all confirmed that they progressed from high expectations to disappointment concerning death-related topics in life education; they

believed that students' attention and motivation to learn were not ignited during the lessons.

The three interviewees provided the following suggestions for improving the teaching design and arrangement:

### 1. Teacher training

Students perceived that teachers had not received sufficient training, especially for topics related to life and death; thus, teachers' knowledge of the topic and mental preparation should be strengthened. In the absence of such preparation, teachers are prone to simply follow the materials or books without touching students' hearts.

### 2. Experiential learning

The interviewees thought that lectures and movies could help students master some of the knowledge. However, death-related topics do not only involve knowledge but also feelings and thoughts. Therefore, experiential learning should be encouraged.

### 3. Student sharing

The interviewed students stated that the lessons were mainly conducted in the form of a lecture. Lessons in which students are encouraged to share their thoughts on some of the philosophical topics would be more beneficial; otherwise, their feelings, thoughts, questions, and concerns might not be addressed. Greater student participation might also arouse students' interest and motivation to learn.

#### 4.2.8 Conclusion

School C2 has some advantages in implementing the life education curriculum.

1. School C2's sponsoring body provided life education experience and resources.

The sponsoring body provides diverse support; for example, by applying for special resources, unique projects were implemented (e.g., teaching life education through movies).

2. For the life education curriculum, religious (Christian) education and life education are separated into two independent parts to avoid redundancy in topics or even confusion caused by different focuses and objectives.
3. School C2 formed a special committee to integrate past experience into their own life education curriculum. Class teachers are led by the special committee, and

they are jointly involved in promoting life education. Because of the acceptance and support of the school, sensitive issues such as death are not prohibited. To cater to students' needs during their growth process, death or life–death-topics are introduced in the senior secondary 1 (F.4) curriculum—a discussion on the meaning of death serves as an introduction to the exploration of the purpose of life and life planning. However, the programme has faced various problems related to matters such as curriculum planning, teaching design and implementation, teacher training, and preparation and involvement, which require further attention.

### 4.3 School C3

#### 4.3.1 The Background of Case Study School 3 and Its Development (Plan) of Life

##### Education <sup>49</sup>

School C3 was founded by a nonprofit organisation without religious affiliation in 1975. The school emphasises the importance of both academic performance and conduct, providing whole-person life education to nurture students' 'soul, character,

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<sup>49</sup> Relevant school information was derived chiefly from the related sharing section(s) on the school's website.

and knowledge'. School C3 promotes 'three virtues', leading students to (1) live a prosperous life, (2) understand the meaning of life, and (3) develop an attitude of life-long learning.

The mission of the school is to implement whole-person life education through values education and helping students establish appropriate 'values (attitude) of life', which is consistent with the EDB's understanding and arrangement of life education.<sup>50</sup>

Life education is one of the highlights of the school. The school perceives life education as vital and bearing satisfactory results. The school prioritises the performance of their programme by implementing effective evaluation mechanisms.

The school sponsoring body has no religious affiliation. According to the school website's<sup>51</sup> 'Teaching and Learning' section, the school has no subject concerning

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<sup>50</sup> Education Bureau of Hong Kong. (2014). *Life Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.edb.gov.hk/tc/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/moral-civic/life-education.html>  
張永雄 (Chang, Y.-H.) (2010). *A Preliminary Investigation into the Implementation of Life Education*. Retrieved from [https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/moral-civic/NewWebsite/Life\\_understanding/edb\\_02.pdf](https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/moral-civic/NewWebsite/Life_understanding/edb_02.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> The copyright information on the school website was for 2015, suggesting the website was created in that year. I was unable to locate—and the school did not provide—school-related information for the period before 2015. Therefore, all the information displayed on the website reflected the school's reality in or after 2015. An examination of the school's website revealed no evidence that the school offered religious education, life education, or a (Christian) student



religion (e.g., religious education or religious studies) nor any subject or course related to life education. The ‘Student Support’ section also mentions no group or activity relating to civic and moral education nor extracurricular initiative for religious belief or life education.

According to T6, the teacher of School C3 participating in the research, who was placed in charge of life education in academic year 2014–2016, the life education curriculum had already been established as an official subject and taught by designated teachers before the present school principal took up the position in 2013–2014. The school sponsoring body was open-minded towards religion and allowed the establishment of a Christian student fellowship in the school. Because of the previously discussed senior secondary curriculum reform, the school rescheduled its subjects and teaching hours. Life education as well as art and design were cancelled in the senior forms. However, life education, despite no longer being an official subject, was retained in junior forms; it was not taught by designated teachers but rather by Christian church tutors after school.

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fellowship.

The school sponsoring body was so tolerant towards religion that it even approved the establishment of a branch of a Christian church in the school by lending the school hall to the church for their assemblies (e.g., Sunday worship service and other activities).<sup>52</sup> Because the school principal ‘actively invited the churches in the community to organise [the] life education curriculum, it paved the way for the establishment of the church.’<sup>53</sup>

The school works with different churches by actively inviting them to form a cooperative relationship. The churches’ voluntary support of the learning and teaching of life education helped the school’ subsequent development of their curriculum. In the life education programme, the school also allows churches to have more contact with the students (e.g., providing tutorial classes or inviting students to join church activities).

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<sup>52</sup> Schools commonly offer their facilities to churches for their activities. Many schools with religious affiliations also lend the school facilities to the school sponsoring body for religious activities. Some churches even rent some school facilities and establish their office inside the school. However, it is uncommon for schools without religious affiliation to offer their facilities to religious organizations to establish offices and hold religious activities.

<sup>53</sup> The original text was from a church newsletter about its establishment, found on the church’s website. It explained the reasons for cooperating with the school, their working relationship, and the work involved.

Therefore, the design and implementation of life and death education of School C3 can be understood as Christian life and death education.

The school participated in the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools but not the Life Education Exchange Programme to Taiwan.

#### 4.3.2 Curriculum Leader (T6)

The life education curriculum leader (T6), a Christian who joined the school in 2000, teaches Chinese. T6 was assigned to coordinate life education in 2014–2015. Not remembering exactly when it started, T6 confirmed that the school has been offering life education for a considerable period. She could clearly remember that the school had an official life education curriculum for both junior and senior forms, with designated teachers, before 2013–2014. Although senior life education and art and design were cancelled to provide more time for other subjects, life education was retained in junior forms and taught by a designated teacher to students of all three forms, a total of 12 classes. When T6 was assigned to coordinate the curriculum in 2014–2015, that designated teacher was still teaching all the F.1–F.3 life education classes. However, in 2015, the designated teacher was no longer responsible for the

life education curriculum and teaching and rather focused on her own subject teaching. Teacher (T6) did not remember the content of the life education curriculum at that time, nor did she approach the designated teacher to understand the situation.

Because of the change in teaching methods, from formal lecturing to learning activities, the teaching content would also be different. Those who taught life education also changed, from teachers to tutors; thus, it actually wasn't necessary to refer to the past experience. (T6)

Because life education was cancelled in senior forms and was scheduled after school for junior students, the lessons had to be conducted during the same time slot for all classes; thus, teaching by one designated teacher was no longer possible. Therefore, according to T6, the assistance provided by the church tutors was crucial. The teaching of life education was completely entrusted to the church tutors, and the current designated life education teacher and T6 assisted with the discipline during lessons.

Because the life education lessons for F.3 were conducted after school (as a result of the cancellation of formal lessons), the Christian student fellowship was also

cancelled. T6 provided two reasons for this arrangement. First, the attendance of the student fellowship was unstable, ranging from 1 to 30 participants. Because the school had no religious affiliation, the student fellowship could not be compulsory.

However, life education was a formal lesson that every student was obliged to attend; thus, abolishing the student fellowship was relatively simple and faced little objection.

Second, it was desirable to invite church tutors to be involved in teaching because the school's goal for life education was to cultivate appropriate and positive values in students, which are consistent with Christian values. Compared with other faiths, Christian beliefs are more practical and include more positive values. Therefore, this was considered a desirable arrangement.

When asked what difficulties she faced when addressing life–death topics in life education, T6 replied, 'I'm not responsible for teaching life education, only for managing and supervising students during lessons; the most difficult [job] is coordination [of life education].'

T6 provided the following reasons why it was difficult to coordinate life education:

1. The administrative workload was heavy and tedious. Although T6 was not directly

involved in teaching, she was responsible for the time-consuming and exhausting coordination with churches and tutors; and arranging venues and other things.

2. The church tutors were involved on a voluntary basis. Therefore, the coordination had to be adjusted every year. For example, if a church withdraws, its church tutors follow. If a church continues to help but its tutors withdraw, new tutors may or may not join; in such cases, T6 must seek help from other churches.
3. The situation of each year's students varies. The curriculum, teaching (activities), and methods must be adjusted, in collaboration with the churches, to address the different situations. The necessity of change becomes a major question.

When asked why she continued with this job, T6 said that she could see the substantial effect life education had on students' growth. Therefore, she was willing to proceed despite the challenges.

According to the life education curriculum (2015–2016) provided by School C3 (Table 10), death-related topics were taught in F.1. For this arrangement, T6 explained that life education must include life and death to form a complete structure.

When asked why death-related topics were eliminated after being taught for 1 year,

T6 said, ‘F.1 students may be afraid when you discuss death-related topics with them.

Even adults will feel uncomfortable in such situations.’

T6 stated that some F.1 students regarded death as an unacceptable topic, and others thought the concept was too remote. For example, students regarded the topic ‘My ideal funeral’ as unrelated to them, did not think that death was a crucial topic, and that its study was not worth devoting time to. T6 admitted that discussing death in F.1 was inappropriate and undesirable for the following reasons:

1. Once students’ awareness of death is aroused, they might consider the inevitability of death. Considering death-related topics too early might lead to curiosity towards death and the possibility of attempting suicide.
2. Discussing topics related to death might not be necessary in students who are this young. Such topics are too abstract and unrelated to them. More appropriate topics for F.1 students include ‘knowing myself’, time management, and interpersonal relationships.
3. Students feel uneasy when discussing or participating in activities related to death, such as designing their own funeral. Students tend to feel confused and uneasy

because they have limited knowledge of funerals (e.g., what type of religion or ritual should be used?).

Death-related topics were removed from the 2016–2017 life education curriculum. T6 emphasised that death-related topics were still explored: instead of addressing the topics within the curriculum or during lessons, they were covered through more relaxing thematic activities, which would be more desirable for students' learning. T6 shared an example of one such activity from 2017: a celebrity addressed the whole school and shared his experience as a youth; he had strong superstitious beliefs, and after a fortune teller told him that he would die young, he constantly felt fearful. After converting to Christianity, he became free of all the fear, worry, and confusion and developed a more positive attitude towards life. T6 regarded this type of testimony as more comprehensible and practical for students of their age than class discussion of the abstract concept of death and being encouraged to treasure life. Although this type of activity was not arranged very often, T6 noted that it received a positive response and recognition from students because of its perceived benefits. Students had learned



to develop positive thoughts, and because life was unpredictable, they had to learn to trust others. They should live well rather than be anxious about death.

Concerning the cooperation with the church tutors, T6 revealed several modifications (Table 11).

1. In 2013–2014, in addition to the existing assistance from one church, the school also invited other churches to help because of changes in the arrangement of life education. When church tutors responded that they were available, the coordinating teacher corresponded with different church tutors and arranged the life education lessons in 2014.
2. From 2014 to 2018, the curriculum leader was responsible for planning and implementing the curriculum, whereas the church tutors were responsible for the execution. During the same period, the Life Education Handbook for F.1 as well as the curriculum of F.2 and F.3 were completed, and the curriculum for F.1 was revised.
3. In 2018–2019, the roles of the school and the church (tutors) changed. Church tutors were responsible for planning, implementing, and executing; the school

(teachers) became the advisers.

4. In 2019, the school reached a major milestone in the development of its life education programme: the publication of the school-based life education coursebook. One of the churches was responsible for contacting a publisher to publish the coursebooks to share among all the churches involved; if churches use the same coursebooks, consistency would be maintained in terms of teaching plan and materials. During this process, T6 only served as an adviser, offering professional opinions on curriculum planning and teaching and learning.

T6 recognised the effectiveness of using individuals for implementing life education.

The church tutors have built a fairly good relationship with the students. The church tutors not only visit students at home, they even invite students to understand more about Christianity and join their religious activities in church. “Religious belief can really help the students.” (T6)

T6 repeatedly emphasised that she would insist on implementing life education regardless of the difficulties she faced because the greatest challenge was the administrative work (as mentioned before). The rest of the work was not too difficult.

Table 10. 2015–2016 Life Education Curriculum of School C3

Duration of each lesson: 60 minutes

Module	Topic	Activity
(1) Self-image	<p>Lesson 1: The anonymous me—Who am I?</p> <p>To explore ‘My character’</p>	<p>A survey: Knowing myself (self-assessment and worksheets for assessment by others)</p> <p>Students assess eight of their character traits by awarding marks from –2 to +3 for the following attributes: affection, confidence, courage, honesty, compliance, diligence, tenderness, and optimism.</p> <p>Task completion:</p>



Module	Topic	Activity
		Students ask their parents and teachers to assess them. After collecting all the marks provided by teachers and parents, students record the attributes that received an average mark of +2 or +3 on the assessment worksheets.
	Lesson 2: A single spark of fire  To explore ‘What affects my emotions?’	Worksheet:  Students are asked to state who and what make them angry. They write the answers on a worksheet.  Ask students to share how they soothe their emotions.



Module	Topic	Activity
	<p>Lesson 3: From generation to generation</p> <p>To explore 'How my parents affect me'</p>	<p>Family Tree:</p> <p>Students describe their family through their family tree.</p> <p>Task completion:</p> <p>Compliment parents and show them gratitude.</p> <p>Complete worksheet: How I am affected by my parents (write less than five words for each item).</p>
<p>(2) Interpersonal relationships</p>	<p>Lesson 1: Stand by me</p> <p>To explore 'Friendship'</p>	<p>Experiential activity:</p>



Module	Topic	Activity
		<p>Observe my performance (role) in a team: for example, actively sharing opinions, being silent, or complaining.</p> <p>Share feelings concerning the class. Ask students how they can improve.</p> <p>Task completion: Present a small gift to a classmate who tends to be neglected.</p>
	<p>Lesson 2: Music Café</p> <p>To explore 'Love'</p>	<p>Songs sharing:</p>



Module	Topic	Activity
		Share the lyrics of two songs. Ask students to write down their ideal procedures of love.
	<p>Lesson 3: Online</p> <p>To explore ‘How to differentiate true and false messages, and identify unsubstantiated messages’</p>	<p>Form filling:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The most shocking message</li> <li>2. The most deceitful message</li> <li>3. The most hilarious message</li> <li>4. The most ridiculous message</li> <li>5. The most worrying message</li> </ol>



Module	Topic	Activity
		<p>Students are guided to discuss elements to notice when receiving messages.</p> <p>Task completion:</p> <p>To complain about an advertisement (reasons: motivation or values of the ads.)</p>
(3) Fairness and justice	<p>Lesson 1: What is fairness? What is justice?</p> <p>To explore ‘What is fairness?’ and ‘What is justice?’ and the differences between them</p>	<p>Comics about distribution of resources:</p> <p>Students discuss the differences between fairness and justice and provide reasons through comics.</p>





Module	Topic	Activity
		<p>Task completion:</p> <p>Find a newspaper report related to fairness and justice.</p>
	<p>Lesson 2: Sacrifice and self-denial</p> <p>To explore ‘Social system and personal choice (sacrifice and self-denial)’</p>	<p>Show pictures of the capitalist social class described by sociologists as well as the derivative work of the social structure of Hong Kong in 2010.</p> <p>Students analyse and share whether the two pictures can be compared and explain their reasoning.</p> <p>Student reflection:</p>



Module	Topic	Activity
		<p>Can people use whatever means they prefer for survival?</p> <p>If someone must be sacrificed, will you choose to sacrifice others or deny yourself?</p> <p>Task completion:</p> <p>Collect information on the electoral system during the week.</p>
	<p>Lesson 3: Election</p> <p>Explore ‘Electoral system’ and relevant issues</p>	<p>A mock election of village chief:</p> <p>Use the solicitation of votes before elections and matters after elections as examples to lead students to share their views on elections.</p>



Module	Topic	Activity
(4) Life and death  education	Lesson 1: Precious life  To explore the ‘uniqueness of people’ and the  ‘uniqueness of me’	Ask students to circle vocabulary ‘describing people’.  Students create a slogan to express appreciation for themselves and the  ‘uniqueness of me’.
	Lesson 2: Discussing life and death  To explore ‘personal views on death and five  things to do before death: saying farewell,  giving thanks, apologising, expressing love,  and asking forgiveness’	Ask students to assess their feelings towards death, acceptance of their  own and relatives’ death, and faith of afterlife (from 0–10, with 0 being  the most negative).  Task completion:



Module	Topic	Activity
		Ask students to consider how they would express their ‘farewell, thanksgiving, apology, love, and request for forgiveness’ and explain their reasons.
	<p>Lesson 3: Where to die?</p> <p>To explore ‘the arrangements after death’</p>	<p>Title: My last will</p> <p>Use nine multiple-choice questions to let students consider topics such as body or organ donation, funeral arrangement (e.g., burial or cremation), and who to invite to the funeral.</p>



Module	Topic	Activity
		<p>Activity of designing own funeral: consider matters such as the portrait and plaque to display, the decorations to use, and the music to be played.</p> <p>To help students consider the whole funeral ritual and process.</p>
	<p>Lesson 4: Cherish life</p> <p>To explore ‘Abundant life’</p>	<p>Completing worksheets:</p> <p>Ask students to think of five things that are necessary for an abundant life, such as people or things.</p> <p>Task completion:</p>

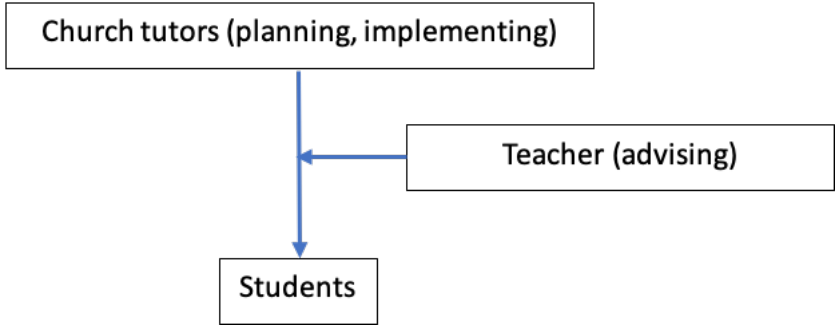
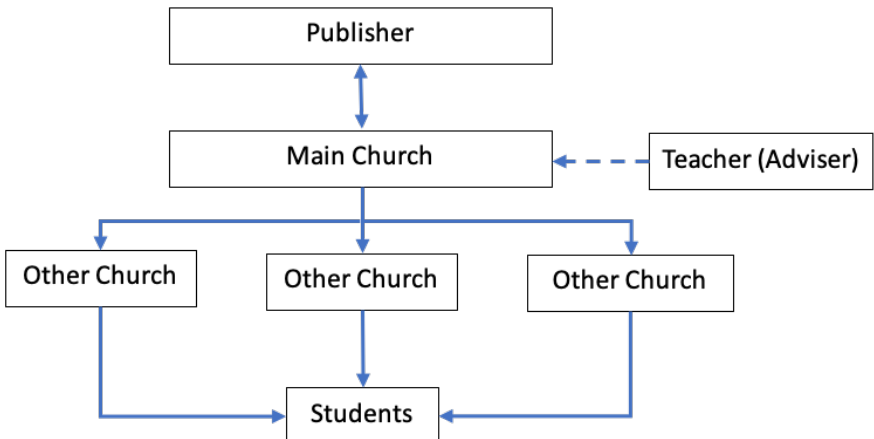


Module	Topic	Activity
		Complete the 'Summer Plan' worksheet with three things to achieve during the summer holiday.



Table 11. History and Development of School C3's Life Education Programme

Year (Stage)	Progress and Operation Mode
<p>Before</p> <p>2013–2014</p>	<p>One designated teacher responsible for life education</p> <p>Formal curriculum with formal teaching hours, curriculum, materials and lessons taught by one designated teacher independently and (partly) assisted by churches.</p>
2013–2014	<p>Life education was cancelled in senior forms because of curriculum reform but retained in junior forms, with one designated teacher responsible for curriculum, materials, and teaching and (partly) assisted by churches invited by the school.</p>
2014–2018	<p>Roles and task distribution of church tutors and school:</p> <div> <pre> graph TD     A[Teacher (planning, implementing)] --&gt; B[Church tutors (execution)]     B --&gt; C[Students]           </pre> </div>

Year (Stage)	Progress and Operation Mode
2018–2019	<p>Roles and task distribution of church tutors and school:</p>  <pre> graph TD     A[Church tutors (planning, implementing)] --&gt; C[Students]     B[Teacher (advising)] --&gt; AC[ ]     style AC width:0px,height:0px     AC --&gt; C           </pre>
2019–	<p>Roles and task distribution of church tutors and school:</p>  <pre> graph TD     P[Publisher] &lt;--&gt; MC[Main Church]     TA[Teacher (Adviser)] -.-&gt; MC     MC --&gt; OC1[Other Church]     MC --&gt; OC2[Other Church]     MC --&gt; OC3[Other Church]     OC1 --&gt; S[Students]     OC2 --&gt; S     OC3 --&gt; S           </pre>

Note: Created according to the description of T6 during the interview at School C3



### 4.3.3 Church Tutors (T7 and T8)

Both church tutors (T7 and T8) are church preachers. They started participating in the life education programme of School C2 in 2014 but withdrew in 2018 (Table 12).

Table 12: Background of Church Tutors of School C3

	T7	T8
Sex	M	F
Religion	Christianity	Christianity

Regarding teaching in school in addition to serving in church, T7 and T8 agreed that the main concern of Christianity or any religion was life. Whether they were involved in church ministry or the school's life education, their goal remained to nurture the growth of young people. The two interviewees were asked whether life education was equivalent to evangelism and whether the Christian faith could become the core value of life education. They responded that there were similarities, and their churches hoped to have contact with more students by becoming involved in the school's life education; the tutors' participation in the programme was an opportunity to share their faith with students, but they emphasised that life education remained distinct from evangelism.

T7 indicated that he decided to join the programme after receiving the invitation from the school and discussing it with his church. His work involved curriculum planning and preparing teaching materials. T6 arranged the tutor meetings, where they discussed matters such as the (F.1) curriculum structure, themes of life education and topics, the main focus of each topic, and relevant content. Different jobs were then allocated. The tutors of each church were responsible for different topics, including preparation of the teaching design, activities, and materials (e.g., PowerPoint slides), which were compiled and published in the F.1 Life Education Handbook. Church tutors were also responsible for teaching in class and for arranging large-scale experiential activities.

The two tutors were asked whether they had any special considerations when organising the death-related topics in the F.1 life education curriculum, which were taught over four lessons. The tutors (T7 and T8) agreed with the interviewed teacher (T6) that life and death are indispensable to complete life education curriculum.

Furthermore, Christianity never avoids discussing death. They argued that students should have already received information concerning death. Therefore, discussing

death in a systematic manner might help students develop a clearer understanding of the concept. All church tutors participating in the life education programme agreed to include this topic in the curriculum. One tutor, upon noting the social problem of teenage suicide, discussed the topic with some youth church members. After receiving a positive response, the tutor suggested discussing teenage suicide with the school's students during life education lessons. However, the tutors could not reach a consensus regarding the inclusion of this topic, and fierce arguments ensued, even after the coordination of T6. As a consequence, only the tutor who offered the suggestion and the tutors who supported his proposal taught this topic to the students. T7 and T8 followed the original teaching plan.

T7 stated that the curriculum started with 'knowing myself' and then explored interpersonal relationship, which were essential during growth. The topic 'fairness' was related to understanding society, and in topics related to 'life and death education' and the 'end of life', students could contemplate their life's dimensions. The last theme 'life and death education' helped students consider what was the most valuable things in life, how to live well in the present, and how to plan for their

futures. These topics were related to establishing ‘life’, and the themes supported students’ growth, targeting positive values as the teaching goal.

The two tutors were asked how they perceived F.1 students’ learning and response to life–death-related topics. T8 indicated that students could generally accept the discussion of death-related topics but were unable to master topics such as ‘where to die’, which addressed matters such as organ donation and funerals. Concerning the fact that students regard death as distant because of their age and, thus, fail to master related topics and have little interest in considering and designing their own funeral, T7 believed that remoteness was one of the reasons. Another problem was related to curriculum design. F.1 students lacked practical knowledge on funerals. Tutors had difficulty explaining the functions of a funeral and the rituals of different cultures, religions, and faiths in the lessons. Therefore, students had difficulty mastering this topic.

Suicide was one of the topics in life and death education. During the interview, I asked T7 and T8 to clarify why one tutor’s suggestion for including a discussion on suicide caused such tense arguments. T7 provided the following reasons:

1. Timing—Teenage suicide was a severe problem at that time. Some tutors questioned whether ‘suicide’ was a suitable topic for F.1 students. They did not want to cause unnecessary problems (e.g., provoking students to commit suicide).
2. Preparation—Although teenage suicide was a major social concern at that time, it was not a topic in life education. Only some of the tutors had experience discussing and sharing it with young church members. Doubts were expressed regarding the psychological and intellectual preparedness of tutors as well as whether students were psychologically prepared to discuss the topic.
3. Professionalism—Not all of the tutors necessarily underwent professional training on how to address suicide problems and work towards its prevention. Even though some of the tutors were pastors, preachers, or missionaries who had received related training, they might not be able to manage the topic well. Tutors without any training would thus be in an even more precarious position.
4. Crisis management—Because teenage suicide was a provisional topic, whether the school and the tutors would have the time and ability to handle the topic was in doubt. Another concern was whether tutors had sufficient understanding of

students' situation to avoid provoking students' emotions during discussions. If the discussions caused some students to experience emotional distress, the school and the tutors would not necessarily have sufficient resources to address the problem on the spot and follow up afterwards.

Finally, the tutor who suggested the topic alongside other tutors who agreed to teach this topic, prepared their own materials and PowerPoint slides to be used in the lessons. The remaining tutors taught the lessons according to the original life education teaching schedule.

This aforementioned situation and consequence highlight that School C3 should examine whether church staff or church tutors should be eligible and are sufficiently experienced to teach in school.

Concerning the teaching experience and qualifications of church tutors, T7 revealed that he had no formal teacher training, whereas T8 had both teacher training and experience. However, because they were working as volunteers, the church tutors were not required to have any training or experience. T8 indicated that most of the tutors were pastors. Others were mentors assisting the youth fellowship, most of

whom were not professionals in education (teaching) and curriculum design.

Therefore, when discussing the curriculum and teaching arrangement, they would concentrate on arranging activities similar to those in the church's 'cell groups', focusing on relationships with students rather than teaching and learning.

T8 said that the absence of teacher training and experience resulted in curriculum planning being neglected, although the meetings included some discussions regarding the curriculum, topics, and teaching plans. However, in practice, different tutors approached the topics by using their own methods.

T7 admitted not following the teaching design when teaching simply because of the students' situation. Adjustment of the curriculum (lessons) was often required. Life education lessons typically did not simply follow textbooks but varied according to each situation; this was vital because the lessons were conducted after school, and some of the students were less motivated to attend. Therefore, the lessons had to be interesting and attractive. Because church tutors were not formal teachers, some students felt more freedom to express their opinions; however, other students took advantage of the situation and misbehaved. Therefore, much time was spent on

dealing with disciplinary problems and other business. Sometimes, the school teacher (T6) was present to settle disciplinary matters. However, building rapport between the tutors and the students was most time-consuming.

The two tutors (T7 and T8) shared some of the difficulties they faced. In addition to the aforementioned problems, the church tutors differed in their understanding of the principles of life education. Although T7 and T8 were preachers, they realised that life education should be distinguished from religious education or Christian education. Although the Christian faith and values could be useful when teaching the module ‘Life and death education’, the sharing of other cultures, religions, or faiths should not be excluded. However, the school and other church tutors employed life education for the purpose of evangelism. In 2016–17, the death-related topics were removed, and the teaching was simplified to focus on audiovisual methods and the discussion of related issues—life education became more similar to Christian education. Although the lessons were supposed to focus on life education, in practice they included fellowship, evangelistic meetings, or even civic or growth-related lessons. T7 mentioned that death-related topics or life and death education were only



the entry point for discussing the Christian faith or having an evangelistic meeting.

For example, in 2017, a celebrity was invited to share his personal life experience of believing in what a fortune teller said and becoming fearful of death. The celebrity emphasised how his life changed after becoming a Christian. T6 believed this activity did involve an exploration of death. T7 countered as follows: ‘It is a Christian’s (celebrity) testimony with the message of salvation through faith. It is actually evangelism and not a serious consideration of the topic of life and death’.

T7 and T8 both indicated that the change in the nature of life education at School C3 was a substantial deviation from the original purpose of life education when they first joined the programme, therefore; they decided to withdraw in the following year.

#### 4.3.4 Curriculum

According to the materials shared by School C3 and the information provided by T6, the development of the junior secondary life education curriculum was completed in one cycle (2015–2016, 2016–2017, and 2017–2018). In 2018–2019, a more precise version with minor amendments was completed, and their school-based life education

coursebook was published in 2019–2020. The following discussion only relates to life–death-related topics in the curriculum.

According to the F.1 Life Education Handbook, edited in 2015–2016 (Table 10), the curriculum has four modules: Module 1: ‘Knowing myself’, Module 2: ‘Interpersonal relationships’, Module 3: ‘Fairness and justice’, and Module 4: ‘Life and death education’.

Module 4: ‘Life and death education’ was taught over four lessons of 40 minutes each. The focus of each lesson is as follows:

1. Precious life—exploring the uniqueness of ‘human beings’ and the uniqueness of students.
2. Discussing life and death—discussing students’ feelings and perceptions of death and considering and sharing ‘thanks’, ‘love’, ‘farewell’, and ‘apology’ before death.
3. Where to die?—students write their will before dying and design their own funeral service.
4. Cherish life—considering the meaning of abundant life and planning for the

summer holidays.

Each lesson was taught with scriptures from the Bible as well as Christian songs.

The curriculum starts with the ‘uniqueness of human beings’, prompting students to consider their own uniqueness in Lesson 1. Module 1 deals with ‘knowing myself’, a similar topic which focuses on the dimensions of character and growth; the focus of Module 4 is more on life values and the uniqueness of ‘human beings’. Module 4, Lesson 2 deals with students’ feelings and perceptions of ‘death’ and employs scaled statements to explore students’ thoughts regarding fear of death. The following five statements were used: ‘I am extremely afraid of death’, ‘I will avoid the topic of death’, ‘I can accept my or my relatives’ death,’ ‘My life will be filled with gratitude and contentment’, and ‘I believe that people will go to heaven or hell after death.’

Furthermore, in the session ‘I have something to say’, students are required to express their ‘thanks’, ‘love’, ‘farewell’, and ‘apology’ (asking for and offering forgiveness).

Lesson 3 addresses the different arrangements of death. The ‘My last will’ lesson confronts students with nine questions. Questions 1 and 2 concern body or organ donation, questions 3–6 concern funeral arrangements, question 7 involves the

expectation of who should attend the funeral service, question 8 concerns the things or procedures at the funeral service, and question 9 involves the last words students want to play at their funeral service. An activity in which students design their own funeral service is also included. Lesson 4 discusses the notion of an abundant life (criteria of an abundant life). Finally, students plan their summer holidays and determine three things they must complete during that period.

Module 4 ‘Life and death education’ covers a broad range of topics with some relation among them, but in general it is complicated and lacks coherence. For example, in the ‘Design my funeral’ lesson, students design their own funeral service.

Although some more acceptable terms such as ‘farewell’ and ‘graduation ceremony’ are used to instruct students, F.1 students have not reached the stage of graduation.

Therefore, the curriculum designers should consider whether this is suitable time to ask students to design their funeral service. Students are also instructed to select the portrait and plaque to be displayed in the funeral hall, the decorations in the hall, and songs; although examples are provided, students still lack sufficient knowledge of

funerals to respond to these requirements. The problem of introducing this activity in the lesson is ‘why’ but not ‘how’ this activity should be used.

The topic ‘My last will’ should focus on an appropriate ending and quality of death, which are not described in the handbook in detail. However, the nine questions asked in the handbook do not concern quality of death but rather a will and last wishes or the arrangements of a funeral service; nevertheless, the exploration of students’ final choices remains valuable. Students may oversimplify a ‘good ending’ as treatment of the corpse, arrangements of the funeral, and sharing of last words. The problem of introducing this activity in the lesson still concerns ‘why’ but not ‘how’ this activity should be introduced.

For example, the goal of ‘Discussing life and death’ is to help students think about death and their fear of death. Simply using five questions to address this topic might be insufficient. After students answer these questions, appropriate feedback and time to do so is another concern. Because of limited time, teachers might even be unable to provide feedback. In the lessons, when students’ thoughts and fear of death are ‘activated’, they are immediately directed to express their thanks, love, farewell, and

apology to the people around them before they die. Students might not have relevant life experience to perform such actions. They might also have insufficient time to recall, think about, and write down sincere words (practice). How should the teachers (tutors) respond in such situations? Teachers should consider whether sufficient time is available to address any emotions that may be triggered by these activities. All these concerns should be considered by the school.

Therefore, when designing Module 4 ‘Life and death education’, the school must take lesson time and student participation into consideration because they may affect the teaching effectiveness. Whether students, who are still growing and developing, can comprehend and master the concepts mentally, emotionally, and intellectually is also a concern.

Another critical factor is the tutors. The curriculum is designed by tutors. Thus, the lessons are designed and taught by those who have direct contact with the students.

How the tutors perceive the topics and plan and teach the lessons affect the content and the students’ learning outcomes. A more detailed discussion on tutors follows in a later section.

#### 4.3.5 Assessment

Teacher T6 and tutors T7 and T8 stated that life education in School C3 had no formal assessment. Worksheets were employed, which the teachers could collect and respond to, and students also shared their ideas during the lessons. Some tutors were more enthusiastic than others, but marks were generally not awarded.

#### 4.3.6 Students

School C3 invited eight junior secondary 3 (F.3) students, and seven (six boys and one girl) of them attended the interviews. The interviews were conducted in School C3. One of the students was a Buddhist following his family religion. The other six students reported no religious belief (Table 13).

Table 13: Background of Student Participants of School C3

	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19
Sex	M	M	M	M	M	M	F
Religion	Nil	Nil	Buddhism	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

The school organised the interviewees into two focus groups: S13–16 comprised

#### Group 1

and S17–S19 comprised Group 2. Six of the junior secondary 3 (F.3) students attended the life education lessons in 2015–2016 when the topic ‘Life and death education’ was included in the curriculum. One of the students (S17) was admitted into the school in F.3; thus, he did not attend the life education lessons in 2015–2016 but listened to the celebrity’s testimony in 2017. According to the teacher responsible for life education (T6), the aforementioned activity involved someone sharing their fear of death and overcoming that fear through faith, which could be understood as an exploration of death. Therefore, T17 was included as one of the student participants.

Regarding the inclusion of death-related topics in life education, the interviewees agreed that it was necessary, meaningful, and beneficial to students. S13 regarded life education as meaningful and believed death-related topics issues could ‘change one’s understanding and attitude towards life and death education’. S13 further said, ‘I have never thought about death before. Now [after studying topics related to death] I realise all people will die, so I will live a fulfilling life so that I will die without any regrets.’ S13 agreed that although some elements of life education lessons were



monotonous, more activities were being included. Because the tutors were not too strict when enforcing discipline and tended to share their own personal life experience and include multimedia elements in lessons, students had a more positive and open attitude.

However, S16 had a different perspective, saying ‘Including death-related topics in life education is not good. It isn’t necessary.’

It’s mandatory [students are required to attend lessons and activities on death-related topics]. If students are tough enough, they won’t think about death [suicide], [they] will think it [the lesson] wastes time. The students who aren’t strong enough or who think about death [suicide], will it become a trigger for them? (S16)

S16 argued that death-related topics were more relevant to students with specific needs instead of the whole student body. S16 believed that life education should focus on life.

Some student participants (S13, S14, S15, and S16) indicated that life and death education should help students understand and consider death and the value of life.

## 1. Awareness of death

To understand and respect death: Students shared that after completing the ‘Life and death education’ module they understood and were aware that death was unavoidable. Everyone had to face death, which was something serious and inescapable.

Therefore, they would not casually curse or tease people using the topics related to death. S14 highlighted, ‘[after the implementation of] life education, the relationship among students as well as their attitude and views towards other people improved’. He Further added, ‘I won’t tease or curse others with the word “death” or say “go to hell” to others easily, which is disrespectful and harsh.’

## 2. Value of life

Treasure the present and plan for the future. S13 revealed that he never used to think of death or that he would die. After taking the class, he endeavoured to do his utmost to live a fulfilling life with no regret. S17 said he now treasured life and the people (e.g., family and friends) around him more.

To love oneself and family: The exploration of death motivates students to

treasure life, especially during adolescence when they face considerable academic pressure. Because of such strong pressure, they might consider suicide. S15, referring to the death-related topics in life and death education, said, ‘Suicide is an escape but not a solution to problems’. When he was asked what others might think or feel after he died, he was reminded of the importance of family, relatives, and friends; therefore, he realised that he should not and would not consider suicide.

### 3. Knowledge about death

Students mentioned the ‘Design my funeral’ activity in the life and death education lessons. They were required to design their own funeral service.

Students stated that before studying death-related topics in life education, they had never received this type of information. From this perspective, students did obtain relevant knowledge of death through life and death education.

However, students also highlighted some concerns regarding learning and teaching of the theme ‘Life and death education’.

#### 1. The suitability of life and death education in the F.1 curriculum

The students studying the module ‘Life and death education’ in 2015–2016 expressed that it helped them understand and consider matters related to death, which was a positive result. However, they also noted the negative aspects. First, death was too distant, and they felt that it was none of their business; thus, they felt bored (S13). Second, the topic was too complex. They had never considered planning for a funeral, choosing a coffin, or the type of burial they wanted; therefore, they did not know how to respond (S14, S15). Third, the topic was rather shocking: they had never studied this type of topic and felt horrified to learn about death shortly after being promoted to F.1 (S14, S15). Fourth, discussing topics such as self-harm and suicide is uncomfortable and challenging (S16). Fifth, students feared death because it was unavoidable and represented a loss of something enjoyable (life) (S15).

S13 and S15 contended that life and death education should not be taught in F.1 but rather in F.2 because F.2 students are more mature and could handle such topics. S16 argued that it was even better to postpone introducing the topic to F.3 or F.4. Junior students could learn about life and senior students could be

introduced to death because they are more psychologically prepared and experienced for taking death education classes.

All student participants agreed that it was not appropriate to teach life and death education in junior secondary 1 (F.1). I noted three main concerns: (1) whether F.1 is a suitable stage and whether F.1 students are sufficiently mature to explore life and death education, (2) whether 'Life and death education' is a suitable topic and whether the content is suitable for junior secondary 1 (F.1) students, and (3) whether the learning conditions (e.g., teachers, teaching design, learning environment, venue, and time) are suitable.

Attitudes towards death are largely influenced by cognitive development levels (Meagher and Balk, 2013). Research has also revealed that children develop a mature understanding of death as early as age 6. 蘇雅慧 (2006) emphasised that adolescents think and want to learn more about death-related topics and continually adjust their views, including their fear and anxiety towards death; adolescents progress from denying the fear of their own death to admitting the inevitability of death; this realisation helps them consider the truth of death and

explore the meaning of life. Therefore, F.1 is a suitable time for students to receive life and death education because they are old enough.

According to the response of student participants, the theme ‘Life and death education’ enabled them to understand and consider death and the value of life.

This suggests that School C3’s students’ objection to the implementation of life and death education in F.1 does not equal to a rejection of the topic. Their reasoning is explained in Points 2 and 3.

2. The relevance, level of difficulty, and practicality of the content of life and death education.

Students indicated that the content of life and death education was not suitable, especially the topic ‘Where to die’. Some students even misinterpreted the topic.

S15 revealed that some students even teased the teacher by saying, ‘Where [you] should die is none of my business!’ Some students were confused regarding the relation between the topic ‘Where to die’ and matters such as organ and body donation and burial. They were unsure whether they should discuss where they believe they will go after death. They referred to the topics of life after death or

last home, which they hoped to explore.

Students repeatedly mentioned that the lesson ‘Where to die’ was ‘boring’, ‘complex’, ‘remote’ (irrelevant topic and content), and ‘horrible’. S15 did not understand why he had to design his own funeral and simply regarded it as the arrangement of any funeral, which resulted in little learning.

3. The advantages and disadvantages of changing teaching methods and the balance between evangelism and education.

Students said that life education lessons had more activities. The teaching was complemented with video clips, activities, and group discussion. In consideration of students’ response to the module ‘Life and death education’, teachers and tutors adjusted the topics and teaching methods in the new academic year, basing the class mainly on videos produced by a Christian organisation, which were followed by a discussion. Some students thought the modification was more suitable because more ‘realistic’ elements were introduced, representing a departure from abstract discussions and teaching only. Students mentioned that death-related topics were no longer included in the school’s life and death education. A celebrity

was invited to share his life story with the whole school in 2017, which the students preferred and found impressive. However, the students sensed that the classes were now mainly focusing on Christianity. S14, S17, S18, and S19 stated that they understood that the original purpose of life education was to help students realise the preciousness of life and that the tutors were likely to share their religious beliefs in the process. However, after the changes, the classes had a clear focus on faith, which was less acceptable for students who were non-Christians or nonreligious.

S14 said, '[Tutors] most of the time talk about faith. They advocate believing in Jesus.' S18 added, 'This [life] education seems like religious education more than life education.'

They [tutors] mostly talk about faith. Even though a student was knocked down by a car outside the school, they did not share [that] with the students, nor regarded it as life and death education to be discussed [it] with us. (S19)

#### 4. Why is life education compulsory and conducted after school?

This was a concern shared by all interviewees.



It involves two questions: (1) who needs life education? and (2) why is it scheduled after school?

Although life education is beneficial, not everyone requires it, especially not the discussion of death-related topics. The school should identify the students who have suicidal tendencies and offer these classes to them, helping them address their negative thoughts; the classes should not be offered to all students, who do not necessarily require a discussion of death-related topics. Life and death education of School C3 teaches Jesus Christ (Christian faith) but not life-death related topics. All the student participants disagreed with the arrangement of having life education after school because it was not desirable for students to have lessons the whole day.

I feel bored because I have been staying in the school for long... Staying in school [attending life education lessons after school], I can't do much, only listen to the tutors talking about faith, the content on the slides [PowerPoint], and the promotion [of faith] leaflet. I have no religious belief and don't feel interested. It's useless to me, wasting [my] time. (S19)

#### 4.3.7 Conclusion

In general, School C3 has faced a unique situation as they implement their life education programme. They have a major advantage in the form of experienced and committed tutors from churches. However, considerable limitations remain, such as the lack of continuity. The new principal and coordinating teacher did not establish a new life education curriculum but rather edited the existing one with the help of the church tutors. The roles of the school and church tutors are not clearly defined. The school also relies too heavily on the resources of the church tutors. All these matters result in several problems. The school and churches do not avoid death-related topics and even designed the module 'Life and death education'. However, whether the school has sufficiently considered students' growth process and unique needs when designing and implementing the curriculum for F.1 students must be seriously considered. Curriculum planning, teaching design and implementation, teacher training, and the preparation and commitment of individual teachers should also be reviewed.

#### 4.4 Chapter Summary

The three case study schools have different situation: School C1, a Christian school, is experienced in implementing school-based life education and/or life and death education and its success is recognized; School C2, with the support from the sponsoring body, has launched and developed its school-based life education and/or life and death education; School C3, not being a Christian school, arranges lessons of school-based life education and/or life and death education to be taught after school by church tutors. The three case study schools are at different stages of developing life and death education and encounter diversified circumstances. The solutions they use vary according to different school situation.

For curriculum planning of the three case study schools, Schools C1, C2 selects topics and teaching methods such as using multimedia sources (Module 3, lesson 1 ‘Stoppage time for life’ of C1 was to guide students to consider using their time wisely in order not to regret); and experiential learning (School C1’s students were asked to express their consideration of ‘death’ and life through drawing and visit to the graveyard; School C2’s students were arranged to visit Jockey Club Life Journey Centre to experience life changes first-hand) to correspond to students’ situation,



intellectual and emotional development, to coordinate with the death experience in their life and help students to learn and reflect on life and death education. Students gave positive response to their learning. Although School C3 uses experiential learning, such as designing own funeral service, writing epitaph, it does not consider the growth and developmental stages of F.1 students or respond to their personal experience. Students felt that life and death education was unrelated to them. They expressed not knowing the meaning of the lessons or even disliked them. A student responded, 'Where [you] should die is none of my business.'(S15). However, there are other reasons for School C3's students felt detached to life and death education.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings in Chapter 4 highlight the principles, concerns, considerations, curriculum, teaching arrangement and students' learning and responses to life and death education of the three case study schools as examples of the implementation of life and death education in Hong Kong. The findings also revealed the problems these schools encountered and their attempted solutions concerning planning the curriculum and teaching, students' involvement, and teacher training.

When I elaborated the objectives and content of life and death education in Chapter 2 Literature Review, I mentioned the complexity and extensive nature of life and death education. To respond to different needs and understanding of life and death education, the domains selected will be different. The needs of the healthcare professionals for life and death education will be different from those of the secondary students. This is a case study research of three secondary schools implementing school-based life and death education, focusing on the understanding and needs of life and death education of secondary students. The research concerns the responsible people, principal, designers and promoters (teachers) of life and death

education; and the manifestation of life and death education (curriculum and execution). The responses and reflection of the students are the most appropriate criteria for assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum and teaching. The situations of the three secondary schools vary. The difficulties and their attempted solutions are diversified. The research is not a comparison of their strengths and weaknesses, but some suggestions on further development of life and death education can be drawn from the research findings. Concerning data collection, the topics of the interviews were not limited to curriculum design and planning. Through the interviewees' sharing and reflection on their experience, I could also understand from diverse perspectives the context and considerations of including death-related topics in life education as well as its value.

In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive discussion of the findings: (1) Why do schools implement life and death education (life–death-related topics)? The objectives of implementing life and death education ; (2) Curriculum planning and execution; (3) Who is leading and teaching life and death education? Teachers or students; (4)

Students' needs. The difficulties the schools encounter and their solutions to these problems will also be discussed.

I do not intend to compare the three case study schools because each has its own development and situation, which is not conducive to comparisons. However, the related parts of the three case study schools will be listed together in part of the discussion to allow for a more in-depth understanding of their situation and limitations.

Education is not limited to the teaching of knowledge and skills or the nurturing of character and moral values; it also involves the exploration of everything in life and people's manner of being. Chinese culture expects teachers not only to guide students to become masters of knowledge but also to be their models for life. In *On Teaching*, Han Yu argued, 'A teacher is one who transmits knowledge, provides for study and dispels confusion' (<https://eastasiastudent.net/china/classical/han-yu-shi-shuo-i/>), which indicates that the purpose of education is to guide a person to live life in the manner that it should be. The Confucian classic *The Way of Ultimate Wisdom* starts as follows: 'The way of ultimate wisdom is the comprehension of absolute integrity,

genial development of the common people and endless pursuit of the perfection of humanities' (<https://28utscprojects.wordpress.com/2011/03/01/英譯-孔子-大學之道/>), which suggests education of the whole person, including moral aspects. This is also why a school is established and what it should endeavour to accomplish.

Regardless of the focus of life and death education and what form it is provided in, the objectives of life and death education mentioned in 2.6 Principles of life and death education in schools in the Literature Review are :

- to open students' mind in recognizing and exploring life and death in order to value and treasure life;
- to foster positive influence towards personal growth, relationship with others through facing death (meaning of life, calling of life, bereavement, empathy);
- to address the problem of student suicide.

Life and death education addresses topics such as knowing oneself, personal growth, and interpersonal relationship, it can be regarded as moral, civic, and national education. When it appears to address things and people according to the changes in a



situation, it can be seen as teaching students how to manage adversity, be optimistic and ambitious, and aim for self-betterment and resilience.

### **5.1 Why do schools implement life and death education (life–death topics)? The objectives of implementing school-based life and death education**

The three case study schools believe that life education can embody their school mission as well as cultivate students' knowledge, characters, values, and spiritual growth. The question is why do these three schools include life–death-related topics in life education. Of course, the principles of including such topics in life education should not violate the beliefs, principles, and purpose of the school sponsoring body. However, the inclusion of death-related topics or establishing life and death education is not practically dealt with by the sponsoring body or IMC. The implementation relies on the design, planning, and execution of the school administration and management alongside the support of the teaching staff.

#### **5.1.1 Religious Faith—Death is Not Taboo**

The sponsoring body of the three case study schools do not all have religious backgrounds. Schools C1 and C2 were founded by Christian sponsoring bodies.

School C3 has no religious affiliation. It cooperates with Christian churches and the church tutors become teachers of life and death education of the school.

Therefore, life and death education of C3 is strongly influenced by Christianity.

The life and death education curriculums of the three case study schools all consist of Christian characteristics. Christianity does not regard death as a taboo subject but rather as a critical and special topic. Death and its meaning were first addressed in the Old Testament of the Bible. In the New Testament, the death of Jesus Christ, as the price of salvation, brings hope and transformation of life, demonstrating through his resurrection that from death life can come. In the Christian faith, death represents the end of life but not the end of all things:

Christians believe in eternal life after death. Therefore, when discussing faith, it is natural and understandable to talk about life and death, which represent the complete cycle and experience of life.

#### 5.1.2 The Educational Purpose of Exploring Death

Schools C1 and C2 have different purposes for establishing life and death education or introducing death-related topics. School C1 clearly includes death-related topics or life and death education in its F.6 life education curriculum, which is the ultimate purpose of life and death education. The F.1 life education curriculum starts with a discussion of life and ends, naturally, including the topic of 'death'. In addition to being critical for a comprehensive curriculum, 'death' is regarded as a process in life. Therefore, exploring death-related topics becomes a core element of the curriculum. According to the in-house-designed materials of School C1, the curriculum includes the understanding of death; for example, the definition of death in science and medicine as well as relevant views on death, such as the perspective of different cultures and religions. The curriculum also covers topics such as euthanasia and suicide. Students are encouraged by the stories of a Bible character (Moses) and a Hong Konger (Lee Lok Sze) to consider their life direction and strive to live well (Table 4).

For School C2, death-related topics are included in the F.4 life education curriculum. However, its purpose is not the exploration of death-related topics.

Death is only an entry point to discuss life planning. The curriculum first addresses the meaning of life. Death is the end of life. The discussion of how to live life well before its end and how to live a meaningful life will naturally return to the topic of life planning. A teacher at School C2 (T3), describing the background of establishing life education and the lesson arrangement, mentioned that death-related topics were taught in one 50-minute period, which could only focus on how to live a meaningful or purposeful life. The visit to the Jockey Club Life Journey Centre was arranged not because of curriculum guidelines but because of a subsidy obtained by the school. When the subsidy was no longer available, the school excluded the visit because it was not deemed necessary.

Although School C3 does not have a religious affiliation, the mission of the school focuses on holistic values education to cultivate students' mind, characters, and knowledge, enabling them to live a meaningful life, understand the meaning of living, and plan for a successful life. Because life education in School C3 is taught by church tutors, the classes are full of Christian characteristics; the



influence of religion might even be stronger than in Schools C1 and C2 which have religious foundations.

Although all three schools include life–death-related topics in their life education curriculums, they have different purposes for these topics, which ultimately lead to different focuses and teaching design. Life–death-related topics provide a context for exploration of various issues. Schools C1 and C2 focus on life planning. Death is the end of life; thus, the schools hope that students seriously consider life planning and use their plans to live a meaningful life. School C3 focuses on religious belief, enabling students to discover Christian beliefs and potentially accept and convert to Christianity. Undoubtedly, the aforementioned focuses do not violate the consideration and exploration of the meaning of life and value of life. However, an in-depth exploration of life–death-related topics is lacking.

Life and death education is for people to reflect on their state of liveliness, and courage and consideration to face ultimate fate (death) with their Holistic Self,

There is no doubt that the life and death education of the three case study schools

is intended to enable students to consider life and death in order to establish and discover their personal meaning and values of life and a better future.

Curriculum and teaching are the expression of the principles and objectives of life and death education. The curriculum and teaching of the three case study schools will be discussed in the following.

## **5.2 Curriculum Planning and Execution**

Different curriculum planning reflects different focuses of life and death education.

The curriculum structure involves different theoretical principles, and the purpose of the curriculum involves various considerations. To achieve certain learning objectives and outcomes, curriculum planning must include aims, content, teaching methods, and assessment as well as focus on learners' experience obtained in learning and the result of the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. An effective curriculum design must consist of objectives, content, and assessment in an organised manner to form the learning experience. To achieve effective learning outcomes, the design and implementation of learning activities

and experience must be planned and considered carefully to achieve the following criteria (Biggs, 2003; Meyers & Nulty, 2009, cited from 陳志威, 2017):

1. Be related to the real world
2. Be orderly, constructive, and interconnected
3. Require students to use higher-order thinking progressively
4. Be aligned with with learning outcomes
5. Be interesting and challenging enough to inspire learning

Keller's ARCS (Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction) motivation

model mentioned in 2.6 Principles of life and death education in schools in the

Literature Review can be used to construct the curriculum and teaching of life and

death education. The use of multimedia sources and experiential learning

facilitates the teaching of life and death education, making it more effective. Corr

et al. (2019) proposed life and death education can be divided into formal or

planned education and informal or unplanned education. Informal or unplanned

education refers to education arising from experiences during growth. Experiential

learning activities such as Death Café may be more effective to arouse students'

empathy and concern as well as motivation and involvement in learning compared with lecturing.

The proportion of life-death-related issues in life and death education must match with the death experience in students' growth. The curriculum design must correspond to students' intellectual and emotional development in order to respond more properly to their needs. For example, junior secondary schools have less experience of encountering death. When discussing death with them, examples such as seasons change, or the death of their pets should be used for better understanding. For senior secondary students, topics concerning aging, death and the anxiety of facing death can be presented directly (李佩怡, 2004) .

The three case study schools have their own characteristics in terms of curriculum design, teaching arrangement, and execution of teaching and learning.

5.2.1 School C1 appeared to have a mature and comprehensive life education programme and related activities. Relative to the other schools, School C1 has a longer history of developing life education, with substantial experience related to



the concepts, theories, and practice. The school has continually modified its 6-year life education curriculum after its introduction and adopts a whole-school approach to implementing life education, involving the coordination of different subjects, groups, and activities.

Death-related topics are taught in F.6 for a whole year, providing students with sufficient time to explore the themes. These topics are taught in F.6 to correspond to students' needs as they face graduation. F.6 students have more developed beliefs and are cognitively and psychologically ready to explore death-related topics. 'Death' is the core theme of the related curriculum, which is inclusive and comprehensive.

Formal lessons are employed to enable teachers have sufficient time to prepare lessons, and students have ample time to learn; these matters are crucial for life education and/or life and education and reflect the importance this school places on it.

5.2.2 School C2 used the experience and support of the school sponsoring body, including participation in life education visits (Life Education Exchange

Programme to Taiwan as well as the exchange programme to Taiwan organised by the school sponsoring body) to gain relevant knowledge. The school also formed a special committee which is responsible for modifying the curriculum after trial teaching and for teaching design.

Death-related topics are taught in F.4, with the intention to remind students to grasp the present when they are promoted from junior to senior secondary forms and face future changes. Despite students' psychological and cognitive readiness to discuss and explore death-related topics, these themes are only used as an entry point for life planning. Therefore, the exploration of death-related topics and the related teaching and learning are neither sufficient nor sometimes effective because of a lack of resources.

No formal lessons are dedicated to life education; the teaching of relevant topics is integrated into other class periods. However, class periods have numerous roles such as assemblies and dealing with administrative affairs. Thus, for a variety of reasons, but mainly because of the importance of maintaining teaching progress, life education lessons taught in the class period are often cancelled and replaced

by the teaching of academic subjects. With such limited knowledge on life education, students struggle to commit to exploring the topics.

5.2.3 School C3, instead of building on past experience, opted to develop a new life education curriculum, relying on the participation of external organisations (Christian churches). The church pastors and tutors take full responsibility to design and teach the curriculum. The school is only responsible for the supervision of classes and is involved in the discussion of the curriculum and activities. The teaching of students is the responsibility of external church pastors and tutors who have not necessarily received relevant training or possess qualifications. For teaching and activities, church pastors and tutors discuss and divide the work among themselves; however, tutors do not necessarily strictly follow the teaching plan.

The module ‘Life and death education’, which has a relatively more comprehensive design, is taught in F.1. However, its suitability for F.1 is unclear. According to a teacher at the school (T6) and the students who participated in the interviews, the module does not correspond to the students’ abilities. A systematic

and clear connection between the topics is also lacking. For example, an activity in which students must arrange their own funeral service, with the goal of helping students reflect on their lives, is challenging for F.1 students to understand and respond to. F.1 students also struggle to comprehend and explore elements related to organ donation.

The school later cancelled the module ‘Life and death education’ because it was regarded as irrelevant; individual activities involving the topic of ‘death’ was rather used for life and death education. Whether such an arrangement is systematic and theoretical is unclear. Tutors T7 and T8 believed that it was not.

All the three case study schools use movies, multimedia tools and experiential learning to teach life and death education. The curriculum guidelines and teaching resources provided by these three schools show the inclusion of movies and multimedia sources to teach life and death education with short extracts of films or internet-based video clips being selected to be watched in the lessons followed by short discussion and sharing with students to avoid the copyright issue and solve the problem of limited teaching hours. The sponsoring body of School C2 has developed

in-house teaching resources using movies to teach life and death education and provides services supporting and training teachers. During the research, I discovered using movies to teach life and death education in School C2 was mainly conducted in junior forms by the sponsoring body. The main reason is the sponsoring body provides complete movies and a designated team responsible for teaching and conducting discussions. It is easier to arrange the lessons in junior forms with minimum manpower deployed by the school.

No matter whether watching a complete movie or an extract of a movie, the main focus should be whether the main learning theme can be addressed, and the plot is sufficient and complete enough so as to enable students to master the message, recognize and understand the emotions to reflect on, discuss and share the relevant issues in learning process. Wong and Tomer (2011), Niemiec, and Schulenberg, (2011) mentioned movies and multimedia tools are a two-edged sword. It is important to select and use them wisely. Furthermore, debriefing (reflection) plays an even more significant role to allow students to share freely in a trustful and safe environment

with an aim of achieving learning and life growth. Liu et al. (2011) has also made the same discovery in their research.

The students of C3 had two major unresolved questions. First, why is life education arranged after school in the form of and during time for extracurricular activities?

Although this arrangement could solve the problem of insufficient teaching hours and enable church tutors without formal teaching qualifications to legitimately teach the lessons, it aroused dissatisfaction among students; therefore, their involvement greatly decreased, and they even rejected the classes. Second, regardless of calling the classes life education or life and death education, the students felt that it was evangelism.

Students were extremely dissatisfied that they were compelled to remain after school for 'listening to the gospel'. This aspect could explain the failure of the approach.

Curriculum, teaching materials, and activities are external tools: Only people's life can touch and activate thoughts and help students internalise learning.

I will explore the preparation and participation of teachers and students for life and death education below.

### 5.3 Who is Leading and Teaching Life and Death Education?

#### Principal/Responsible teachers/Front line teachers (Tutors) or Students

The social culture a school is imbedded in is a critical factor in life education.

Mak (2010, 2011) mentioned that young people's knowledge of death is, to some extent, influenced by the media. Their family, school, religion, and the experience of individuals and the people around them help young people construct their notion of 'death'.

All three case study schools have included death-related topics and life and death education. Thus, the people responsible for leading and teaching life and death education is a major consideration.

The values and attitudes of those who lead and teach life and death education as well as their expectations towards the objectives of the curriculum can greatly affect the design and implementation of the curriculum and, by extension, the learning of the students.

- Teachers' and students' attitude towards and preparation for death-related topics and/or life and death education

A school's mission and the purpose of establishing the school according to the school sponsoring body are the guiding philosophies of the school. The school principal and the teachers concerned design and implement the curriculum and organise the teaching arrangement and execution in school according to these principles and direction.

Therefore, a consideration of the different people involved is crucial. Life and death education is not limited to subject knowledge that deals with external, objective information and messages; the central focus should be on the understanding of life (i.e., the problem of human being). Death-related topics have long been considered taboo, making it difficult to discuss and explore them publicly. Therefore, when discussing the implementation of life and death education, the first and foremost concern must be teachers' willingness and ability as well as students' needs and capability. If neither the teachers nor the students are sufficiently prepared emotionally, mentally, and intellectually for addressing such topics, the programme may not have effective outcomes despite having a curriculum, activities, and appropriate teaching. Throughout this process, teachers



also have a heavy burden in terms of planning, implementing, and teaching the curriculum.

### 5.3.1 The School Principal (T1), Responsible Teacher (T2), and Other Relevant Teachers of School C1

Relative to the other schools, School C1 is more organised, open-minded, committed, and willing to introduce death-related topics in a more systematic manner.

The interviews suggested that School C1 has a well-established and mature life education programme and related activities. Not only does it have a complete theoretical structure and principles to support its work, it has also completed its 6-year curriculum with regular modifications and introduced cross-curricular connections for implementing the programme. The school's principal (T1) is a model of appropriate behaviour for the students and does not hesitate to share his thoughts and feelings concerning his own life experience. In times of adversity—for example, when a student died—he took the lead to manage the situation and transformed the tragedy into an opportunity for life reflection and growth.

In addition to T2, other teachers at School C1 also agree with and understand the life education principles underpinning the programme. The school's principal (T1) mentioned that suitable teachers would be assigned to teach life education. However, T1 did not address the situation of the other teachers' involvement in death-related topics in life and death education. The current life and death education curriculum at the school is managed by T2.

Although T2 does not have as much first-hand experience as the principal (T1), she has been involved in life education for many years and has learned from the past curriculum structure. She also expands her knowledge by reading about life education and life–death-related topics. Although she did not mention what principles informed the curriculum structure, each form has a different focus.

Students had also experienced death-related incidents before and were, therefore, not unfamiliar with such matters. Introducing death-related topics in the senior secondary 3 (F.6) curriculum is practical and suitable for students' abilities and needs because they have to face public exams and leave their familiar campus and environment to embrace their future studies and life. These students are also

more developed mentally to master the relevant knowledge and skills; thus, the timing of introducing such topics is appropriate.

T2 is closely involved in the programme and has a considerable influence on the curriculum because of her broad and in-depth participation. T2 has been involved in curriculum planning, teaching design, compiling resources, and arranging activities directly since the curriculum was implemented. Furthermore, as a front-line teacher of life education, T2 has long been teaching and interacting with students, establishing a close relationship with them. Therefore, she has been able to obtain the trust of her students. When discussing life education and life–death-related topics, she inspires students to participate in the activities and sharing sessions and provides appropriate responses. During the interviews, students clearly recognised T2’s commitment and sincerity in the curriculum arrangement and activities.

Despite the success of School C1’s programme, the school should be mindful of some concerns.

- The principal (T1) has been working at School C1 for many years. All the work concerning life education was started and led by T1. T2 has also been teaching at the school for many years: she promoted the implementation of life education alongside the principal and other teachers and knows and understands the school's culture as well as the background of the life education programme, its principles, and curriculum. Therefore, she plays a critical role in the implementation of life education and can embody the school's spirit. T2, as the core teacher responsible for the life education curriculum and activities, integrates directly and completely the principles, theories, ideas, and teaching design with students' learning and feedback so as to minimise diversity, not only in learning but also (and especially) in teaching.
- School C1 has a long history of developing life education. Because of the school's religious (Christian) affiliation, the school principal, teachers, and even students are neither unfamiliar with nor resistant towards the exploration of death-related topics. Life education is taught in senior forms

and other students join relevant activities. The school principal uses every life–death-related incident to encourage students to reflect on life, and support is offered in a whole-school manner. However, the school faces a major problem: the lack of a successor.

- The principal (T1) of C1 retired without a successor, which is extraordinary in Hong Kong. Different from government schools, it is unusual to change the principal in aided schools unless he or she retires or resigns. The principal is publicly recruited by the school sponsoring body with very little teachers' involvement in the recruitment process. Therefore, the major concerns of the school may be restructured because of the change of principal. As a result, the development of the school-based life and death education will become unpredictable.
- School C1's implementation of life education started with subjects and groups; this was followed by cross-curricular cooperation, which culminated in the extension of the programme to the whole school. The school principal, life education committee, and religious education committee worked together

to construct the life education objectives. Therefore, the school has clear objectives and sufficient human resources to support the implementation of the programme. A teacher at the school (T2) noted that the school is now in a stage where it endeavours to establish a life education culture in which teachers demonstrate their attitudes towards life to promote life education. First, 'life on life' must be the core principle of life education. However, teachers' individual attitudes towards life is unique, which may not necessarily correspond with or be suitable for teaching death-related topics and/or life and death education. In addition, the school has not arranged or required teachers to receive life education training, especially on death-related topics and/or life and death education. The existing teaching staff may have developed a consensus or thoughts on death-related topics that are more in line with those of the school. However, new teachers may struggle to understand and align their own thoughts with those of the school. The in-house designed material (textbook) of the school is from 2013. The absence of a newer edition may be explained by problems relating to existing stock

quantity and printing cost. Notably, only T2 is now responsible for curriculum design and implementation. C1 should seriously consider the continuity of the programme if key members were to leave.

- This type of diversity in message and performance is especially obvious in Schools C2 and C3. The school principals of Schools C2 and C3 do not participate directly in the life education programme: only the front-line teachers or responsible teachers (tutors) teach life education and arrange relevant activities. How the teaching focus (message) of the curriculum is transmitted, thus, becomes the key factor that must be addressed.

### 5.3.2 Vice Principal (T3), Responsible Teacher (T4), and Front-line Teacher (T5) of School C2 and Other Related Teachers

The principal of School C2, who has held this position in the school for 2 years, is not directly involved in the work of the life education programme. Although the school principal has his own perspective on life education, he has not intervened because (1) the planning of life education was led by the vice principal and was almost complete before his arrival and (2) the school sponsoring body has

considerable experience and resources for life education and provides sufficient support to the school to develop its programme.

Led by the vice principal of School C2, the school launched its curriculum on top of religious (Christian) education, responding to students' future development needs and focusing on the importance of life planning. A special committee, which included teachers responsible for students' growth (e.g., the head of religious education), the school discipline officer, and teachers who were willing to be involved in life education, was established to implement its pilot programme. The committee referred to different external life education curriculums and activities (e.g., Understanding Adolescent Project and P.A.T.H.S.) and professional programmes (Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools as well as the resources and support for life education by the school sponsoring body) to select and compile their junior and senior life education curriculum; the committee members were also responsible for teaching.



Similar to School C1, School C2 established a special committee to implement the life education pilot programme during the introduction stage. Having a large team of teachers devoted to the development of life education and intra-curricular and interdisciplinary cooperation, which reflects the school's commitment to life education, is conducive to thorough curriculum planning and the support of students' needs.

School C2 started with a life education pilot programme, which was developed and taught by the special committee mentioned above. The advantage of such a committee is that the effort of several people can be combined. However, obtaining a consensus on, for example, which topics to include in the curriculum and how to teach them can be challenging; nevertheless, diverse opinions can enrich such a committee. When class teachers are responsible for teaching the lessons, closer teacher–student relationships benefit teaching and learning. Thus, the special committee becomes the support team of the class teachers. However, whether class teachers agree with the curriculum and receive sufficient training are decisive in determining the success of life education in School C2. Regular

training and support are imperative to enable new class teachers to adjust to the system.

However, the members of the special committee of School C2 have not all received professional training in life education. Even teachers without professional training or qualifications can help plan the life education curriculum as well as design or arrange teaching; they can also learn while thinking about and improving life education at the same time. However, difficulties are inevitable.

How the school coordinates, balances, and judges different opinions and ideas and creates a single curriculum when every member of the committee is an expert in different fields is a major question.

The vice principal of School C2 and some of the members of the life education special committee have received training; thus, they are more experienced. The school's participation in the Life Education Exchange Programme to Taiwan also enabled the teachers concerned to enhance their understanding. However, related teachers have not explored life–death-related topics in their learning of life education. They mainly consulted the Taiwan life education curriculum and

existing resources to develop their own senior secondary life education curriculum. Even though the committee has included life–death-related topics, it is merely an imitation of Taiwan’s curriculum without thorough thought on its objectives.

The curriculum planning and execution of School C2 focuses on who should implement life education and how their understanding and attitude towards death and life–death-related topics will affect the teaching and learning.

The decision to structure the life education curriculum around death-related topics is not based on the committee’s recognition of the importance of life and death education or death-related topics but merely because that was the approach of the model they referenced. When planning a school-based life education curriculum, following or imitating other programmes should not be the main approach; instead, the curriculum should be adjusted according to the actual needs of the students. Therefore, in the curriculum of School C2, the central focus on death-related topics is not about death itself but rather serves as an ‘ending point’ to remind students that life is limited. Students are also reminded that they must

start, as early as possible, to search for the meaning of life, consider their life direction, and establish future development to ensure effective life planning. Is such a design—including death-related topics as an entry point to discuss life planning—necessary?

Because the discussion of death-related topics is not mandatory, they are overlooked. Therefore, all the activities concerning death-related topics are conducted and for the sake of life planning. For example, the visit to the Life Journey Centre was organised when funds were available. The activity was cancelled when dedicated funds were not available, even though students welcomed the activity and recognised it as meaningful and conducive to the exploration of the meaning of life and its value. It appears that the curriculum of School C2 has been developed to cater to students' cognitive and mental development but is not as comprehensive as it could be.

The vice principal (T3) has been teaching at School C2 for many years. The teachers participating in the special committee of life education (pilot programme) are also experienced teachers. After launching and leading the

school's life education programme, the responsibility for the continued planning and teaching of life education was passed to other teachers, including the coordinator of life education (T4).

T4 was responsible for junior (F.1–F.3) curriculum integration and modification.

Therefore, T4 had little time to also manage the senior (F.4–F.6) curriculum.

Because T4 has not received formal professional training on life education, nor participated in any learning and exchange programmes related to life education with the special committee, she could only use the existing materials for life–death-related topics in life education without modification.

The curriculum was taught by class teachers. Some of the members of the special committee remained as coordinators in senior forms; they helped the class teachers to understand the curriculum and shared teaching content and resources with them. As a member of the special committee, T5 stated that the focus of life education teaching and learning in School C2 was not knowledge but the relationship between teachers and students. During the trial teaching, teachers noted that students did not have a positive attitude concerning life education

because the curriculum and topics were similar to those in religious (Christian) education. Moreover, a lack of rapport between teachers and students also caused resistance and non-involvement. Therefore, the special committee decided to allow class teachers, who typically have a higher-quality relationship with the students, to teach life education; the committee hoped that the closer teacher–student relationships would help enhance students’ recognition of the importance of and their participation in life education. An evaluation of the success of this change in approach follows next.

1. Arranging class teachers to teach life education is a transfer of responsibility.

Although class teachers recognised the importance of life education and did not oppose the inclusion of life–death-related topics, they were not necessarily willing to take the responsibility.

2. Most of the class teachers had not been involved in the pilot programme of the special committee, nor did they join the exchange programme to Taiwan. They lacked a thorough understanding of the principles, curriculum, and teaching approach of the school-based curriculum and some had difficulty addressing

life–death-related topics; therefore, these teachers felt confused and struggled when teaching these topics. The teachers responsible for teaching failed to integrate students’ learning and feedback with the principles, theories, and teaching design of the curriculum. Therefore, more problems were encountered while teaching. When the school decided to assign class teachers to teach life education, the members of the special committee were involved in assisting them to understand the curriculum and teaching through co-planning meetings (Table 8). T4, a teacher at the school, highlighted that not every teacher teaching life education could master or was committed to teaching related topics. As a member of the special committee, T5 also mentioned the need to reassess and reconsider the teaching personnel. One student participant (S10) mentioned that class teachers only teach from textbooks without involving personal experience.

3. School C2 is a high-Band school with demanding requirement for students’ academic performance. Life education was not conducted in the regular school timetable but rather occasionally during class periods (e.g., biweekly class

period) or as a special activity (e.g., assembly). If different school affairs had to be dealt with, adjustment of the timetable would result and life education lessons would eventually be affected. Not only did students find life education inferior to other topics, class teachers also tended to use the time assigned for life education to deal with other class affairs or teach other subjects, which had a much higher priority.

Points 1 to 3 reflect the following:

1. The curriculum lost its efficacy. The original curriculum was organised and based on solid principles. The rearranging, restructuring, replacing, and cancelling of parts of the curriculum had already damaged the order, constructiveness, and interconnection of the curriculum planning. To teach life–death-related topics, which are regarded as sensitive and even taboo, requires sufficient preparation and time for teachers and students to exchange and share ideas and experiences in a safe atmosphere. However, such an environment becomes elusive in such circumstances. Therefore, the objectives and outcomes of the curriculum as well as teaching and learning were affected.



2. The diversity of the teachers harmed teaching and learning efficacy. The limitations of teachers concerning these topics caused difficulty in teaching and learning. Teachers' insufficient knowledge and ability and, more crucially, their attitudes failed to enhance students' interest in life education and life–death-related topics but rather hindered their learning.
3. Student participants were disappointed by the cancellation of the visit to Jockey Club Life Centre, believing that such an experience would have supported their life growth and the exploration of the meaning of life. They also thought that class teachers guided students to consider life direction, future development, and career planning in whatever topics they taught, disregarding students' real needs or the topics they expected to learn. Students believed that teaching life–death-related topics without exploring 'death' was meaningless. Relative to classes on life planning, students expected to explore more life–death-related topics in life education and did not agree with what the teachers taught.

### 5.3.3 The Responsible Teacher of Life Education (T6) and Church Tutors (T7 and T8) at School C3

The present school principal of School C3 arrived in 2013. According to T6, the principal was not directly involved in the life education programme. However, the planning and implementation of the school's programme started after the present school principal arrived. Because of senior secondary curriculum reform, School C3 cancelled the original formal life education lessons for the whole school but retained those for F.1–F.3; lessons were conducted after school instead of during formal lesson time. However, according to T6 and the materials provided by churches, the perception of the school principal on life education became the main driver of the planning and implementation of life education in the school. Planning and implementation could not proceed without the agreement and support of the school principal.

T6 stated that the school allowed churches to use its facilities for church activities; the churches were also invited to become involved in the school's life education work before 2013. Therefore, inviting churches to be involved in planning life education for the school after the curriculum change was reasonable. However, T6 emphasised that some teachers were responsible for planning and teaching life

education to all classes before 2013 with formal lessons. Therefore, churches were most likely not involved in life education before 2013.

T6 affirmed that life education was conducted after school because students' academic needs must be prioritised, and lesson time must be reserved for academic subjects. In the past, Christian fellowship was one of the extracurricular activities which received a poor response from students because it was not compulsory. However, after the curriculum changes, life education, taught by church tutors and related closely to churches, became compulsory. The prime consideration of churches is obviously not merely teaching life education but also evangelism.

According to the publications of the churches, the '[School Principal] proactively invited local churches to organise life education for the students.' The churches interpreted the cooperation as a 'road leading to the gradual establishment of churches' (Table 10). Religious organisations commonly establish schools, charities, or social services to spread religious beliefs.

Life education is not contradictory to religious education. (盧龍光, 2019) The

life education of School C1 started from the integration of religious education and

life education into 'religious and life education'. School C2 established life

education on top of religious (Christian) education, but the content overlapped.

The life education of senior secondary 3 (F.6) involved direct teaching of religious

(Christian) education. School C3 relied mostly on churches to plan and implement

life education. How can the school maintain the distinction between religious

education and life education in understanding, planning, and executing the two

subjects?

The responsible teacher (T6) has participated in the Programme on Planning Life

Education in Secondary Schools but not the Exchange Programme to Taiwan. She

has also not received relevant training, especially concerning life–death-related

topics. T6 emphasised her continual cooperation with the churches and the

prospect of a new milestone of the life education programme: a coursebook

written by churches and published as part of the teaching materials of the school.

Publishing teaching materials and coursebooks related to life education is not a

novel concept. School C1 has a complete series of school-based coursebook for F.1–F.6. School C2 also published its own materials. However, schools should consider the following: the adjustment of the curriculum. A coursebook is a completed product which is difficult to change. The school-based curriculum must, therefore, be stable and not require extensive modification in the short-term. The question remains whether churches are sufficiently experienced and capable of compiling coursebooks. Other questions, such as copyright and declaration of interest, should also be considered. Because these matters are not related to the current research, they are not discussed in detail here.

Concerning the death-related topics taught in F.1, T6 stated that the responsible teachers (tutors) believed that it was necessary to include life and death education in the curriculum after discussing the matter with T6. However, after some experience with these topics, T6 realised that they are too remote and psychologically stressful for F.1 students and should not be retained. Death-related topics were cancelled after being taught in the 2015–2016 academic year; these topics were replaced by the sharing of resources on death-related matters

from the perspective of religious faith instead. T6 felt that the modification was more suitable for students' needs and learning, which encouraged students to consider the meaning and value of life in a more positive manner. However, the insufficient exploration of death-related topics as well as replacing them with other topics or resorting to evangelism when encountering difficulties in teaching all reflect the confusion of the curriculum objectives.

The two interviewed church tutors (T7 and T8) had been involved in the life education of School C3 from 2014, participating in life education curriculum planning and implementation. They both opted to leave the team in 2018. As preachers of churches, they understood that life education was not religious education or Christian education. Despite admitting that they joined the work for the purpose of spreading their faith, they denied using life education as a means of evangelism because 'education is education': life growth should be the purpose of involvement in life education, and although religion can be a part of it, it should not be overemphasised. They did not understand why the cancellation of the module 'Life and death education' in the F.1 curriculum was compensated with

the testimony of a Christian celebrity; despite the celebrity mentioning ‘death’, the tutors did not regard it as equivalent to the exploration of death-related topics in life education. Both interviewed tutors conceded that some of the content of the module ‘Life and death education’ might not be related to students’ real life situation and growth experience; however, adjustments could have been made. The theme should not have been removed in its totality.

The tutors were asked concerning the intensive use of multimedia aids with a strong emphasis on spreading Christian belief as life education materials, which was incompatible with the original purpose of life education. T8, who underwent teacher training and has teaching experience, said that when discussing the life education curriculum with other tutors during meetings, ‘topics’ rather than ‘curriculum’ was the more common terminology. Each tutor had his or her own understanding and reasons for participating in the life education programme. Some of them, without receiving any professional education training, taught just because they desired to do so; therefore, some tutors failed to consider the

consistency of the curriculum. As a result, different individuals had different methods and teaching styles.

Similarly, church tutors are not teaching staff and are voluntarily involved in life education; they also have a more distant relationship with students. More time is required to establish relationships between tutors and the students. These relationships are especially crucial in life education because it not only involves the teaching of knowledge but also the sharing and exchanging of ideas and the consideration of values. Students' participation and the teaching objectives play a major role in the effectiveness of the classes. Student participants in the research expressed that even though the celebrity's sharing of his story concerning life, death, and numerology was attractive—his life experience and conversion were meaningful—this type of activity happened once only. Students felt that they were being deprived of joining other after-school or extracurricular activities by being forced to attend an extra lesson after school; the students remarked that the lessons mainly consisted of watching Christian films and 'listening to Jesus Christ', which they found boring and a waste of time.



School C3 relies heavily on external resources to strengthen its life education team and reduce the burden on the school's teachers. However, the tutors (most of whom lack professional qualifications) cannot teach in formal lessons but only after school as extracurricular tutors. Cooperation among different individuals should be led by strong leaders. The construction of a team is another problem because the tutors are mainly volunteers who can join and withdraw at any time. When tutors choose to leave, the team must be reconstructed.

The observations discussed in the preceding sections reflect the following:

1. The school hoped that the curriculum taught in 2014–2015 could cover critical topics for students' growth: from individual to society and to the exploration of the meaning of life. Was the level of difficulty suitable for F.1 students? Was it appropriate for the cognitive and emotional level of students? Moreover, life–death-related topics, which are regarded as sensitive and even taboo, should be prepared and taught with sufficient time to enable teachers and students to share and exchange ideas and experiences in a safe atmosphere. Whether the teacher–student relationships were close enough to enable the discussion of these issues is

in doubt. The most appropriate solution to the lack of sufficient time for life education during formal lesson was teaching these classes after school. However, such a teaching environment could hardly be understood as suitable or proper.

When students are not motivated, the effectiveness and objectives of the curriculum and teaching and learning are affected.

2. The diversity among teachers harmed teaching and learning effectiveness. As mentioned, teachers' limitations in terms of knowledge and ability as well as their attitude towards the subject made arousing students' interest in life education challenging; in fact, these factors hindered students' learning.
3. T6 planned to produce and publish resources for their curriculum. Although various problems existed at this stage, for example, whether the curriculum was suitable, an extensive number of manpower for edition was needed, how different sources should be selected and the copyright problem to be solved, I perceive that the plan to publish its own resources can, to some extent, solve two problems: (1) integrate the life and death curriculum and topics for different teaching personnel (including church tutors) to teach; (2) create an atmosphere of emphasising life

and death education; and the intention and determination to continuously develop it.

The three case study schools have their own understanding of life–death-related topics in life education. School C1 regards ‘death’ as a critical topic which encompasses various matters, such as suicide, which is a more comprehensive perspective. School C2 uses ‘death’ as an entry point to discuss life planning. Life–death-related topics are not essential in themselves. Relative to ‘death’, topics and activities related to service learning are more crucial. School C3 has no preference for life–death-related topics, which are only included in the curriculum because of the suggestion of the church tutors. Therefore, when life–death-related topics fell out of favour, they were replaced completely by the sharing of the Christian faith.

The three case schools have their own arrangement of life–death-related topics in life education and/or life and death education, which reflects whether the school and teachers have prepared for and considered the topic sufficiently.

#### 5.3.4. The Needs of Students in Life and Death Education



Every non-student research participant from the three schools (the school principal, front-line teachers, and tutors), emphasised that the teaching of death-related topics and/or life and death education was aimed at responding to students' needs. However, in practice, whether the curriculum planning, teaching design, and execution represent a response to students' needs is unclear.

Concerning the understanding and handling of death or life–death-related topics of the three case study schools, School C1 targeted senior secondary 3 (F.6) students, who are facing a new stage of life. Life education is arranged to include relatively comprehensive topics taught in one whole year. Topics discussed include the following: the definition of death according to science, the perspectives of different cultures and religions towards death, suicide, and the meaning of life and life planning; these topics address students' cognitive needs related to 'death'. The students of School C1 participated actively in the programme and received ample opportunity for reflection and developing their thoughts; the students also appreciated the efforts and arrangement of the school and teachers.

School C2 introduced life–death-related topics in senior secondary 1 (F.4) mainly because it represented a new stage in students’ school journey; thus, an exploration and reminder of the meaning of life and living one’s life well was timely. However, the ‘Meaning of death’, as one of the topics, did not involve sufficient exploration of the phenomenon of death itself but rather focused on students’ life planning only. Thus, students found it irrelevant.

Although the students of School C2 did not have an in-depth exploration of life–death-related topics, they were inspired in their path towards personal growth and development and perceived the curriculum as acceptable.

School C3 introduced life and death education in junior secondary 1 (F.1). The suitability of such an early introduction of these topics remains to be seen. The relevance of the topic in which students had to arrange their own funeral service is particularly difficult to understand; what student needs this lesson is responding to is unclear. Before exploring life–death-related topics, students might never have seriously considered their relationship with ‘death’. However, simply discussing ‘death’ with students as well as reminding them of the closeness and inevitability

of ‘death’ in the hope of leading them to treasure their life and the present may not be sufficient to address students’ needs and help them plan and live their lives well. The students of School C3 attending the life education lessons in 2014–2015 did not thoroughly comprehend the life–death-related topics and even felt resistant because of the incompatibility of the topics with their learning stage. However, such topics were used as proxies in the 2015 curriculum for the real topic: Christian faith. Students understood that the topics were used for sharing the Christian message rather than involving a comprehensive exploration of the topics from different perspectives. Students felt unfamiliar with the topics which were narrow and did not have sufficient time to consider and explore them. Under such circumstances, the celebrity’s testimony could have simply been regarded as a show.

Although the DACUM model by Kim et al. (2016) to develop the curriculum of life and death education for the general public cannot be directly transferred to the life and death education curriculum for secondary students in Hong Kong, understanding the real needs of the targeted people (students) and main concerns of life and death

education enables the development of a curriculum that responds to students' needs, matches their intellectual and emotional growth, addresses students' individual learning styles, and arouses their learning motivation, resulting in more effective learning.



## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This research involved case studies of three secondary schools in Hong Kong which address life–death-related topics in their life education and/or life and death education curriculum. The objective was to identify the major needs and concerns when integrating life–death-related topics in life education and/or life and death education in Hong Kong, the difficulties encountered during implementation, and the attempted solutions.

The following were the research questions:

1. How do three secondary schools, with or without religious backgrounds, implement life and death education? What are their concerns, reasons for implementation, and the guidelines they follow in their school-based curriculum?
2. What are the teaching methods, processes, and materials used for teaching life and death education in these Hong Kong schools? What problems and difficulties have these schools faced and how have they overcome these concerns?

### 6.1 Research Question 1



The three case study schools have different considerations when implementing life and death education.

6.1.1 School C1 believes life education is conducive to students' growth, and 'death', having special meaning and value, enables students to consider the value and direction of their lives. Topics related to death are covered in the F.6 curriculum to coincide with students' graduation; thus, the F.6 life education curriculum corresponds with students' learning and life stages. The school understands that 'death' is a sombre topic, but it can be employed for the affective education of students, helping them to sympathise with others.

The school progressively widened the extent of life education, developed cross-curricular subjects and groups involving the religious and education committee, discipline, and guidance; in this manner, a school-wide life education curriculum and culture was established which included different school activities. Death-related topics are not only addressed in life education lessons but also whenever appropriate (e.g., teachers' memorial service).

Official lessons are based on a well-developed and comprehensive curriculum and teaching plan, and in-house-designed printed textbooks are available to facilitate students' formal learning. The curriculum is not limited to lecture-based teaching of principles but also includes multimedia elements and experiential activities to bring the material to life. Experiential activities are aimed at triggering students' emotions, helping them move beyond simple knowledge of a topic.

6.1.2 School C2 hopes that the introduction of life–death-related topics and/or life and death education can help students consider the meaning of life. The school expected students would 'be the best me' and serve others as they consider life planning. Therefore, the curriculum contains little in-depth exploration of topics related to death; instead, it mainly focuses on the meaning of life, making use of one's life, and living to benefit oneself and others. No formal independent lesson is allocated for life education; it is conducted during class periods. Class periods can involve whole-school assembly or it can

be used by class teachers to organise class affairs or even teach academic subjects. Thus, life education is not always the main priority.

6.1.3 In school C3, life and death education is included in the curriculum designed by church tutors. They believed that including life and death education could help students consider the meaning of life and help them understand their uniqueness and the preciousness of life. Furthermore, the consideration of ‘death’ could help students live a life filled with meaning and make use of the time they have. Therefore, the curriculum covers a variety of topics, such as dying without regrets and organ donation, which are accompanied by experiential activities, such as designing one’s own funeral service.

## 6.2 Research Question 2

In this section, I address the following topics: (1) the teaching methods, curriculum and lesson arrangement, and teaching materials for death-related topics and life and death education of the three case study schools; (2) the difficulties the schools encountered and how they addressed them.

Here, I first summarize the teaching and learning situation of death-related topics or life and death education in the three case study schools. All three schools mainly employ their own in-house-designed life and death education materials.

6.2.1 School C1 has a mature life education and/or life and death programme, with a 6-year comprehensive curriculum. Each form has its in-house-designed materials (textbook) with corresponding topics (e.g., ‘Life and death education’ in F.6). It includes not only related teaching materials, questions, and activities but also materials for further exploration (e.g., relevant articles).

Teaching is not limited to one-way lecturing but often includes experiential activities, such as students drawing pictures related to their understanding of life and death or activities that use multimedia (e.g., film appreciation: the Japanese TV Programme *Loss: Time: Life*); thus, thinking, sharing, and discussion are instrumental during these lessons. Experiential activities outside of school are also arranged; for example, students visited a graveyard where they could observe ‘death’ up close and consider the reality of death in their own lives.

6.2.2 School C2 mainly uses the school's own teaching materials and multimedia tools to illuminate the topics. For instance, the life of Mother Teresa was used to explain the importance of serving people and self-sacrifice; although she has already died, her life can be used to encourage students to learn. In this school, experiential activities are relatively rare. One of those most impressive activities for students was writing their own epitaph. The visit to the Jockey Club Life Centre is not a planned and regular activity but arranged when subsidies are available.

6.2.3 School C3 mainly uses school-based teaching materials. More experiential activities are found in the module 'Life and death education'; for example, students organise various aspects of their own funeral service, such as decorating the funeral hall. Bible scriptures are cited as learning highlights. Students found the activities difficult to comprehend; consequently, their involvement and commitment suffered.

The three case study schools use multiple teaching methods and multimedia sources, such as films, music; experiential learning activities, etc., which are well

received by the students. However, organizing one's own funeral service and decorating the funeral hall by the F.1 students of C3 exceeded their cognitive and emotional ability, and could not arouse their curiosity and feeling, resulting in dissatisfactory responses from students. Therefore, C3 cancelled this topic. I have stated in the Literature Review that schools must pay attention to students' growth and situation when designing the curriculum of life and death education and teaching the curriculum.

Based on research and evidence, at least the three case study schools implement school-based formal life and death education in Hong Kong. In the following section, the difficulties the three schools encountered as they implemented life education and/or life and death education as well as their attempted solutions are discussed.

#### 6.2.4 Room for Teaching

Insufficient teaching hours. Because academic endeavours must be prioritised, especially preparing students for public exams, allocating time for death-related topics or life and death education during formal lessons is challenging. The three case study schools each have their own solutions. C1 integrated the curriculum to be taught

during formal lessons. C2 used flexible timetable to teach the lessons. C3 ‘borrowed’ time out of the normal lessons. Although each solution has its own pros and cons, all of them are the result of a lot of serious effort on the part of the respective schools and teachers.

School C1 integrated religious education and life education into religious and life education to replace the original religious education’s teaching hours. Through cross-curricular and interdisciplinary cooperation, the school adopts a whole-school-participation approach. Although the time allocated to academic subjects may be reduced, the school believes that education should not be limited to students’ academic performance—cultivating students’ life growth is also essential.

The students of C1 still prioritize study and preparation for exams over attending activities when the school intends to arrange extracurricular experiential activities to enrich their learning. This is not a problem only encountered by C1 but by all the schools. The experiential activities thus are often cancelled if students are busy with homework and exam preparation.

School C2 makes most efficient use of the timetable, life education in School C2 is conducted in class periods once a week; thus, these topics do not encroach on the time for academic subjects in formal lessons. However, other school affairs are also managed during class periods (e.g., life planning, class club activities, or even subject teaching), which leads to insufficient time to explore death-related topics or teach life and death education. Although this arrangement is undesirable for curriculum planning and teaching, the programme has still resulted in fair outcomes.

School C3 conducts life education lessons after school in the form of extracurricular activities, which is a specific time for life education. Again, the purpose is to maximise the time dedicated to academic subjects in the formal curriculum. Despite the original positive intention, the arrangement affects students' participation in other extracurricular activities and uses their free time. The resulting dissatisfaction has reduced, directly and indirectly, students' desire to participate in life education. Students regarded the module 'Life and death education' as difficult and irrelevant; therefore, they were more resistant to it.



The arrangement of School C3 does not increase teachers' teaching hours, which might result in annoyance among teachers because after-school lessons are still regarded as formal lessons; however, the teaching load of the responsible teachers does increase.

If not scheduled during the formal teaching timetable, such arrangements might become a 'do me a favour' (捱義氣) job, requiring a considerable amount of work to be done after school. By offering life education and/or life and death education as an extracurricular activity led by external tutors (church volunteers), School C3 avoids increasing teachers' workload. The volunteer tutors, who cannot teach independently in formal lessons because of a lack of professional training and teaching licences, are allowed to help in extracurricular activities.

However, tutors still have limited time (60 minutes) to settle students, help them learn, and involve them in activities.

Students felt dissatisfied when they were compelled to join the extracurricular activities which were scheduled after school, reducing their participation and involvement. Although the school managed to address the problem of

insufficient teaching hours and tutors' lacking in teaching qualifications, students' learning motivation and outcomes suffered when they were forced to attend lessons after school.

Despite some controversy regarding how the three case study schools obtain more room for the teaching and learning of death-related topics in life and death education, their use of multiple methods and the effort involved should be appreciated.

The recognition of life–death-related topics is even more challenging. How to strive for and expand the recognition and support of schools and society for exploring life–death-related topics merits further attention.

#### 6.2.5 Professional Training: The Needs of teachers

The teachers of life and death education of the three case study schools, including the church tutors of C3, have not received proper professional training of life and death education; instead, they engaged in learning while doing. The teacher of C1 (T1) is comparatively more experienced. Despite the involvement of other teachers, T2 bears most of the responsibility for the school's life

education programme and hopes to improve the teaching design of life education topics in the school.

In School C2, most of the teachers teaching life and death education in the past or those responsible class teachers at present have not received life education training or even lack understanding of the curriculum, especially concerning life-death-related topics; therefore, some teachers tend to simply teach what is in the textbook and emphasise the meaning of life and life planning.

Most of the church tutors responsible for life and death education in C3 lack teacher training, so (1) they cannot teach or hold activities independently in the classroom during formal teaching hours, and (2) they may not be suitable to teach or possess sufficient ability in life education, especially in terms of curriculum planning. They use the method of leading church fellowship to teach the lessons.

As mentioned, teachers' professional training enables teachers not only to respond to students' academic needs more effectively but understand students with sympathy and help them establish an open-minded and trustful attitude

towards the topics of life and death education. (林綺雲, 2005; Herrero et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2018; Stylianou & Zembylas, 2020). The three case study schools and other schools intending to establish life and death curriculum must strengthen teachers' training. The EDB can provide training, for example, the EDB commissioned the Programme on Planning Life Education in Secondary Schools held by EdUHK in 2018. EdUHK organised the first refresher course in life education for secondary school teachers (Certificate in Professional Development Programme on Life Education in Hong Kong) and the first refresher course of life education for primary school teachers in 2019 to provide systematic training to the teachers who recognise the importance of and are involved in the implementation of life education. The training can also be in the form of courses offered by relevant university departments and social welfare organizations, for example, EdUHK offers doctoral and master's programmes in life education involving the exploration of life-death related topics and focusing on the content of life and death education. Teachers can select relevant workshops or courses according to the needs of their school curriculum to

accumulate and transform the knowledge into the curriculum and teaching most suitable for their own students

#### 6.2.6 Curriculum and Teaching Materials: Responding to Students' Needs

The EDB has not established a life education and/or life and death education curriculum, nor specific guidelines on life education and/or life and death education; it only provides teaching and activity guidelines on positive thinking and resilience. It is necessary for schools intending to implement school-based life and death curriculum to have teaching resources. Ng Kwai Lun explained the reason to publish 《生死教育講呢啲》 is to provide teaching resources of life and death education<sup>54</sup> although the book is more suitable for professionals than for adoption as teaching resources for secondary school. Schools which intend to implement life education and/or life and death education should develop their own curriculum and teaching materials according to their own situation and students' needs.

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<sup>54</sup> I conducted an interview with Ng Kwai Lun on 16/6/2021 in the office of Minimal Funeral Limited and obtained his approval to use the content in my research.

The school-based curriculum of the three case study schools, perceived as effectively responding to students' needs by the teachers, each has its own characteristic. However, can the curriculum respond to students' real needs? Have the schools consulted and understood students' needs and concerns before designing their own curriculum?

The students of C1 understand and accept the implementation of life and death education and are aware of its objectives: the recognition of 'death' and consideration of death-related topics at the same time. Although not every topic is attractive (e.g., the life story of Lee Lok Sze), the students understand the importance of searching for life meaning and living well in the present. The students of C2 understand the objectives and intention of including death-related topics and recognise the importance of life planning; however, the discussion of 'death' should be more in-depth and serious.

The students of C3 reported not feeling too afraid of life and death education but felt confused and lacked the necessary knowledge for deeper involvement in certain topics (e.g., organ donation and planning their own funeral).

According to the interviews with the students of the three case study schools, although they did not all agree with the arrangement of the school, they mostly understood and accepted it, except the students of C3 who regarded the curriculum and teaching arrangement less acceptable. It is interesting to notice that life and death education of the three schools is all related to religious education or religious beliefs. The life and death education curriculum of C1 is integrated into that of religious education. Students do not query or dislike much of religion or Christian beliefs. Life and death education of C2 is deliberately separated from religious education. However, students compare the two subjects, perceiving that life-death issues are discussed more deeply in religious education. Religious education of C3 is concealed by life and death education, which is regarded as evangelism by the students.

The students' critical responses towards the various relationships between life and death education and religious education exemplified in the three case study schools are worth further exploration.

All types of curriculums (e.g., formal, informal, or hidden) have the same need: materials. The teachers at School C1 compiled and published their own materials. However, the materials have not been revised since its publication in 2013. School C2 also has its own teaching materials. However, the school's programme is still in the first stage of implementation and, thus, lacks systematic and comprehensive materials. Life–death-related topics are only used as an introduction to the exploration of life planning. The materials focus principally on students' future career development. School C3 also compiled its own materials, mainly with the help of church tutors, for its first stage of curriculum development. The school is also planning on publishing the life education materials compiled by the church tutors. The school should carefully consider whether the topics, teaching focuses, and content are consistent with students' unique and diverse needs. However, the school's tutors have only been designing the life education materials for a few years. The publication of these materials seems rushed; thus, their effectiveness is uncertain.





The three case study schools have attempted to use different ways to solve the above problems although not completely successful. Their continuous efforts to review and improve their life and death education in order to generate more desirable outcomes should be appreciated.

In sum, the three case study schools in Hong Kong use different approaches to establish the objectives of and implement life and death education (in terms of strategies); and respond differently to students' needs. They are at different stages of implementing life and death education, and; therefore, should not be compared.

C1 is more mature, has solid foundation and effectiveness in developing life and death education; C2 has some experience and is continuously improving its curriculum and teaching resources; C3 is at the beginning stage in developing curriculum and teaching materials. When the three case study schools encountered difficulties or problems, such as addressing problems related to various factors: teaching time, curriculum guidelines, curriculum, teaching materials, teacher training, and related resources and support, etc., they used different solutions to generate multiple possibilities, which are precious reference information and

experience for other schools. They can also serve as cases that offer lessons for further development of life and death education in Hong Kong, which is the contribution and value of this research.

## **6.3 Reflection**

### **6.3.1 Limitations of the Research**

First, this study included only three case study schools, with two of the schools being Christian schools, which is far from sufficient for comprehensively exploring the teaching of life–death-related topics in schools in Hong Kong.

Second, class observation and participant observation during activities could not be arranged in the research, partly because the schools denied relevant requests and because of cancellation of the activities owing to insufficient participants or other reasons. Therefore, I could only refer to documents, recordings, and interviews to comprehend the situation.

The documents, such as curriculums, teaching plans and materials, students' assignments and feedback, that the schools provided were also limited.

Only the responsible teachers and students who participated in the programme were interviewed. Other life education teachers and those not involved rejected the interviews because of heavy workload or failed to respond to the invitation. Therefore, I was unable to schedule interviews with them.

Because parents were not the target participants of the research, interviews with them were not arranged. Thus, their views on life–death-related topics and the arrangement of related issues in the schools’ life education curriculum as well as the effects of the schools’ implementation and development of these topics could not be explored.

The research participants were asked about their understanding of and response towards ‘death’ during the interviews. However, because of time limitation in the current research, I could not regularly track their perceptions to observe and understand how teachers and students were affected by the life education programme and the activities related to life–death topics. Relevant topics could have included participants’ conception of death, their response when facing

death, their handling of bereavement and the value of life, and their thoughts on the meaning of life and their future.

### 6.3.2 Way Forward

As mentioned, some organisations, such as the Methodist Church Hong Kong, Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui, Catholic churches, Hong Kong Buddhist Association, universities, and social welfare organisations, have established different life education resources centres, published related materials and journals, and provided learning and experiential activities. Others provide hospice care, grief counselling, and training on understanding life and death education. If such resources and training could be coordinated more effectively with the schools' needs and developed continuously, it will be very beneficial to the development of life and death education in Hong Kong.

Future research could consider the following matters:

1. Use a case study to follow a secondary school implementing life and death education and focus on the situation at different stages during the research process, including the needs assessment conducted prior to the decision to

offer life and death education; preparation, such as curriculum design, arrangement, teacher involvement and training as well as searching for and coordinating external resources; the implementation and execution of the curriculum; and participants' (teachers, students, and parents) response to the programme, such an investigation can provide practical guidelines for implementing life and death education for schools intending to do so.

2. Conduct a case study of cooperate with a secondary school implementing life and death education to investigate the teaching design and practice in the curriculum. Investigating the effect of action research, both participatory or nonparticipatory, on experiential learning and the use of movies to teach life and death education would be particularly beneficial. The findings can help illuminate appropriate teaching design and materials when employing different teaching methods in life and death education.
3. Use questionnaires and sample surveys to investigate the needs of life and death education of all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong.

Schools' understanding of and needs in life and death education can serve as

a reference point for the implementation of such programmes in Hong Kong.

The survey findings and academic exploration of life and death education can extend and help provide the foundation for related, more comprehensive research in Hong Kong; that is, preferably involving the coordination among universities, organisations, and schools to develop a partnership, to share resources on training and materials, and establish a theoretical framework or curriculum of life and death education according to the needs of Hong Kong.

### 6.3.3 My Personal Gain - The change in my understanding and views of life and death education before and after the research

In section 2.6 of the Literature Review, I have presented the principles and beliefs of life and death education:

Life and death education is not simply a combination of life education and death education. Using life and death education to explore death or life-death-related issues can alleviate fear and anxiety. The exploration of life-death-related issues also concerns the value and meaning of life, leading to an opportunity for life changes. Life and death education is not teaching of ‘words’ but ‘experience’

including ‘embodied’ and ‘emotion’. The research and its findings have not much changed my understanding and views of life and death education. I have had experiences with ‘death’ in my life; for example, my primary school classmate died in an accident in the middle of the term, one of my students committed suicide during my early years of teaching, and some of my senior relatives have passed away. Custom dictated that I must have some sort of bodily contact with them or attend their funeral services. These things were expected of me after their death, and I experienced them as remote and unreal. My first real experience of observing the process of death was when my family member’s heartbeat and breathing gradually stopped in the hospital and he lost consciousness. Then his death was certified. However, this experience did not have a strong effect on me. I even suspected that I was hard-hearted or that something was wrong with me. During this research, one of my family members was seriously ill and another even passed away. During the process of the burial, the funeral staff appeared so indifferent; this could be attributed to their thorough



understanding of life and death. The corpse is only mortal flesh. 'Death' is only the last stop in life.

Recently several publications have focused on various themes of 'death'; for example, a mortician, cleanup of spots and remains, relics arrangement, and forensics. The use of these themes suggests that such topics are becoming more acceptable and are no longer regarded as taboo (as they were in the past).

With greater consideration of 'death', an individual can become more serious towards life. Only human beings are conscious of 'death' and search for meaning. Heidegger's notion of being towards death suggests that life is by chance and death is inevitable. Men are thrown into the world without any choice, facing death, which is unavoidable. (Heidegger, 2010). However, ordinary people are typically unaware of the truth and existence of death, regarding 'death' not as a personal concern but others' business. When people become aware of the existence of death, they are likely to panic and experience feelings of denial, outrage, and mourning. In such situations, people also tend to recall their life and reflect on the value and meaning of life.



We are constructed by our experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Therefore, everyone has his or her uniqueness that cannot be replaced. How to 'live' out the true self is something everyone must address in life. Time (from birth to death) shapes life (meaning and value of life) until death (not dying but after death) then it is accomplished (complete). One's pursuit determines one's goal; one's goal determines one's behaviour, one's behaviour determines one's fate.

We are responsible for constructing and completing our lives. How to select the way we live our life and bear the responsibility for and consequences of our choice is the embodiment of our true self. Socrates accepted being 'poisoned' to death instead of 'escaping' to live. Wen Tien-hsiang's (文天祥) Poem

*Crossing the Lonely Ocean* highlighted the following: 'Since time began, to die who can decline? O through history books in glory, let our crimson hearts shine!'

(<http://chinesepoetryinenglishverse.blogspot.com/2013/03/tell-me-my-friend-since-time-began-to.html>) After Wen's execution, this note was found in his pocket: 'Confucius spoke of dying for a righteous cause; Mencius spoke of doing what was right. Only by persevering in what is right can benevolence be attained.'

Study the works of the sages and worthies to learn how to conduct yourself, and in future you will probably have a clear conscience' (quoted in Green, 2011, p. 173). The aforementioned texts are all appropriate examples to explain the principle of striving to the utmost throughout one's whole life. Some relevant Chinese sayings include the following: 'judging a person after his coffin lid is covered', 'be cautious towards the end', and 'bear a heavy responsibility through a long struggle until death'. *The Analects of Confucius* are consistent with these beliefs.

We must know ourselves well to live well.

The ancient Greek Delphi Temple is dedicated to Apollo, God of the Sun, who represents brightness, rationality, and form and has all the power. At the entrance of the temple, two mottos are displayed: To know thyself. Nothing in excess (γνωθισεαυτόν, μηδεν αγαν. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Know\\_thyself](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Know_thyself)) In the prelude of *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche explained 'knowing yourself': We have no choice but to keep a distance from ourselves. We cannot understand ourselves, nor can we have a clear picture of ourselves.

Our eternal verdict will be: ‘The one who is most far away from myself is me.’

We are not ‘knowers’ of ourselves.

The existence of death forces everyone to face themselves seriously and re-examine their whole life and being. The sooner we face ourselves seriously at different times in life and before we make a decision will result in different considerations and judgement, and we will regret less before death.

If death is not regarded seriously but only used as a means (tool) to satisfy a certain saying, it will not be helpful to anyone. If teachers do not face life seriously and only use the end of life (or death) as a reference point to encourage students to live their life seriously, set their life goals, and strive to achieve them (which could be regarded as the meaning of life), what benefit can it bring to students? Is the use of life and death education to achieve different purposes acceptable because it does not violate the principles or beliefs of education? Is this type of dishonesty acceptable?

Life and death education focuses the learner’s thinking on the original meaning of humankind. The purpose of education is to nurture the whole person.

Life and death education is not equivalent to religious education. When discussing topics related to life and death, one particular belief need not prevail.

Relative to religious education, life education has a broader perspective and provides flexibility to explore life and its problems. Life and death are major topics. By discussing topics related to death and life, secondary students consider the things they want and should do before death (living in the world), which is educational. Hong Kong young people should consider the type of life they want to live as well as the ideal, most valuable, and meaningful manner to use their lives.

Only when facing death can one consider the meaning and value of life.

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## Appendix A: PowerPoint slides of 「生當為人傑，死當為鬼雄－雷霆救兵，探問

生死」

### 生當為人傑，死當為鬼雄－雷霆救兵，探問生死 (歷奇營會體驗學習)

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2017-09-28

摘要：

香港雖然是中西文化匯聚，文化、思想、價值觀都比較接近西方，相對開放、包容，不過，在談及「死亡」，仍然是一大禁忌。「生命教育」的說法比較易為人接受，而「死亡教育」則仍然讓人不安。即使「生」「死」各取的「生死教育」，仍不容易成為「明顯」的說法。香港的學校願意明確以「生死教育」為主題的不多，可能談「生」易，說「死」難。不過，不必執著「生命教育」或「生死教育」的說法，兩者進路不同，但目標一致。生命教育（及或關涉生死議題）或生死教育，是「生命的學問」，是「成人之學」。其目的在探討人的價值及意義。

本文分享一項以歷奇為主軸（Adventure Base），透過體驗（Experience）及反思（Reflection / Debriefing），探討「生死」選擇及「死亡」對生命的意義的思考和營會學習設計。

Though Hong Kong is a city where East meets West, the cultures, thoughts and values are greatly influenced by the West, which is open-minded and inclusive, the discussion of "death" still remains conservative. "Life Education" is more acceptable by the public than "Death Education" which causes disturbance. The term "Life and Death Education" dealing with both life and death issues, is still not widely used in Hong Kong. Not many schools in Hong Kong are willing to implement "Life and Death Education" due to the fact that discussing issues about "life" is easier than "death". "Life Education", "Death Education", "Life and Death Education" are divergence in names but targeting the same purposes and goals. They are all about the "knowledge of life" and "completeness of humans"; and explore about the meanings and values of Life. This paper is a sharing of an adventure-based camp activity. Through experience and reflection / debriefing, participants explored the choices of "life and death"; and reflected on the meanings of "Death" towards "Life".

### 生當為人傑，死當為鬼雄—雷霆救兵，探問生死（歷奇營會體驗學習）

港大社會工作及社會行政學系副教授周燕雯藉《經濟學人》報告指出：「反映咗本港提供嘅善終服務質素係好，但就欠缺政府政策參與。」認為香港應仿效台灣，由政府牽頭推動生死教育，「人有諗過死，唔識珍惜同反思生命嘅意義」（蘋果日報，2013。）當然，「若要人人都有機會、有毅力活得更好，使生命更有意義，從容面對生活、生存和生命的問題，家庭和學校的生死教育，確是刻不容緩。」（麥梅卿，2011。）

香港並未有政府或教育部門指定之生命教育或生死教育之課程或綱領，而是鼓勵學校以校本及不同形式推動生命教育。故此，香港學校的生命教育（及或關涉生死議題）相關之教學或活動均為校本設計。

以下分享一項以歷奇為主軸（Adventure Base），透過體驗（Experiential Learning）及反思（Reflection / Debriefing），探討「生死」選擇及「死亡」對生命的意義的思考的三日兩夜營會學習設計。

由於本文重點不是活動設計及對歷奇、體驗、反思之探討，故文中不特別詳細介紹和說明有關項目的裝置、操作及安全，尤其是歷奇挑戰體驗活動。

### 歷奇營會體驗學習—雷霆救兵，探問生死（Saving Private Ryan）

#### 參加者

為香港中學中五級（相當於台灣高中二）學生，人數 40 人，男女各半。

#### 營會主題和理念

有關學習活動及反思討論，基於電影「雷霆救兵」（Saving Private Ryan）故事情節設計。

雷霆救兵（或譯「搶救雷恩大兵」，「搶救大兵瑞恩」）於 1998 年上映，劇情描述盟軍諾曼第登陸諾曼第後，死傷枕藉。抵壘士兵皆欲稍作休息。但此時由約翰·H·米勒中尉（湯漢斯飾演）率領的 8 人小隊接獲命令，要深入敵區搶救 1 名二等兵雷恩（麥迪文飾演），雷恩的三名兄長相繼於戰爭中陣亡，美國作戰指揮部以人道立場，不希望雷恩的母親面對僅餘的最少兒子陷於戰爭中死亡的危機。於是決定派遣特別小隊把雷恩安全救出戰區。當小隊陷入敵區，面對隨時喪命的各種危機，他們開始懷疑、爭論這項任務的合理性：為何值得犧牲 8 名士兵冒死救 1 名二等兵？故事最後二等兵雷恩在槍

林彈雨中活下來，不過營救他的 8 名士兵大部分壯烈犧牲，包括隊長約翰·H·米勒中尉。

#### 原則 (Principle / Rule)

雖然每項活動設計都有深意，而且環環相扣，當然希望參加者能全程和全情參與，不過，生命教育（及或相關生死議題）則另有不同的考量，容讓參加者在過程中有選擇的不參與（Challenge by Choice），可能比較必須完全服從更能有反思的空間，當然，這不能成為參加者「逃避」或「抽離」參與的藉口。營會強調的是「尊重」（Respect）每個人，包括參加者及大會的所有人。強調生命的尊貴（Honorable Life），必須對生命負責。

解說在最初（Debriefing at the Beginning）及留意受教時刻（Teachable Moment）的分享和反思，故此，反思及解說會穿插整營會，而非只安排在營會總結分享時段。

#### 程序 (Program / Process)

- 參加者進入營會前已知悉營會主題－雷霆救兵，並簡單的任務及要求認真面對生命的思考。營會不刻意模仿電影情節，但在開始時即以角色進入特定場境，以便參加者能迅速投入營會和思考主題。
- 按男女混合自行分組，每組 8 人。（每組另有小組導師 2 名隨行，作安全照護，如非即時及嚴重危險或涉及生命安全，則不會介入小組決定及行動。小組導師均有合格之野外活動及歷奇導師資歷。）
- 大會講解營會須知，安全指引及行政安排。同時派發「承諾書」－承諾真誠、盡力完成，參加者閱讀後如同意即簽署，並有宣誓儀式。
- 小組分享及選定組長及副組長，分派工作崗位。大會分發戶外（登山）物資，並安排小組觀看「雷霆救兵」開始片斷－登陸諾曼第。
- 大會發布「雷霆救兵」指令，請參加者按指示出發，完成拯救雷恩（Ryan）的任務。
- 小組按指示會在野外晚餐（自行煮食），並會有夜行（登山）、露營、定向等挑戰任務。最終，小組會按指示找到大會安排的雷恩（人形沙包，重量約為 20 公斤）。小組須把雷恩救回大會指定集合點，其中會遇上不同的困難和挑戰，不管如何，小組必須保護雷恩安全。抵達集合點後會有休息時間。

- 休息後，大會會安排「終極挑戰」(Final Challenge)－生死電網。在進行這項最後挑戰前，大會安排參加者找個人安靜的地方並寫下「最後的話」，完成後交給小組導師保管，萬一參加者在最後挑戰中不幸「陣亡」，小組導師會代為送出這些「最後的話」。
- 生死電網與陣亡區－生死電網在歷奇挑戰中屬低結構(活動空間離地面1米左右)，但高風險(因活動時參加者有機會全身被抬高，如不慎墮下有嚴受傷危險)活動。故此，小組導師會作為安全指導及照護角色。
- 生死電網設置為兩根橫拉繩子，在下的離地面約1-1.2米，而在上的離地面約2米。可以想像為羽毛球網的下緣和下緣，只是中間沒有球網。參加者全部集中在電網的一方，以參加者集體合力，不借用任何的工具，在指定時間內把每一位參加者安全運送穿越電網，如過程中有任何參加者觸碰電網，即會暫停挑戰任務，而觸碰者必須到陣亡區躺下，挑戰任務會重新開始。如時限內未能穿越電網的參加者，都算作陣亡必須到陣亡區躺下。
- 活動時限完結，陣亡者都已在陣亡區躺下後，大會會安排倖存者圍坐在陣亡區，然後小組導師邀請小組中的倖存者讀出陣亡組員「最後的話」。當然也包括了雷恩給隊友「最後的話」，雷恩的分享都是小組導師在營會的過程中，對參加者的觀察和回應。
- 完成所有「最後的話」的誦讀後，大會邀請倖存者安靜的「瞻仰」陣亡者，並說一句感恩、多謝的話。最後，大會會敲響鐘聲，呼喚生命，讓所有參加者「重生」。導師亦把各人(包括倖存者)的「最後的話」發還各人，然後圍坐分享。

#### 分享 (Reflection / Debriefing)

主要以 4F：經歷 (Facts)、感知 (Feelings)、發現 (Findings) 和未來應用 (Future) 為向度。

1. 事實／經歷 (Facts)－當中最深刻和最難忘的事件、人物、說話等。透過回顧和分享這些個別、共同的經歷，不單能重溫過程，更能發現當中的學習和成長。
2. 感知 (Feelings)－分享感受，表達思緒和情感，一方面可以整理及處理當中觸動內心的人和事，更可以進一步探問當中觸動的原因，背後的「故事」。

3. 發現 (Findings) — 不單是知道，而是呈現了一些過去忽略、不為人知，甚或自己也不太相信的自我特質。當然，也可以是對他者不一樣的發現。
4. 未來應用 (Future) — 經歷了這些事情，有深刻的情感，不一樣的發現，未來可以如何？這是（生命）啟程往前的思考。

雷霆救兵中，約翰·H·米勒中尉臨死前對雷恩說「Earn this! Earn it!」。正好作為這次總結分享的重點。

### 總結與反思

過去在「歷奇」為主軸的營會，往往容易出現「任務」（活動）為主（Task Oriented）著重參加者完成任務，呈現「團隊合作」、「解難能力」、「溝通信任」等等學習重點，而參加者亦有相當的參加經驗，往往亦會不自覺因應大會「需求」，給予恰如其分的回應和分享。但這次營會的重點則放在透過「生死的抉擇」，認真的看待和反思生命。

「雷霆救兵—探問生死」營會一開始即不著重「成敗論英雄」和「生命韌力」的老調，反而是強調「個人」、「團隊」在面對「拯救雷恩」的任務和面對抉擇時的思考及背後的（生命）價值考慮。在小組分享當中，開始時談到了「公平」：為何雷恩可以獲得特別優待？雷恩是「人」，小隊的每一個也是「人」，都有等待他們平安歸去的家人。「堅毅」：當看到費盡心力拯救的雷恩，竟然是沙包人時，真的想「打死佢」！已經十分疲倦還要帶著這個「雷恩」前行到集合點，應付許多的挑戰，真的想「打死佢」！但在疲乏中仍然想到「尊重」，只好忍耐堅持。「犧牲」、「苦難」……。而到「終極挑戰」及「陣亡區」誦念「最後的話」，小組討論及反思最多的是：生死的選擇（The Choice of Death）和對家人和生命的歉疚。營會過程中不強調接受任務和必然參與，反而集中在提問和思考：選擇前赴九死一生拯救雷恩的任務的原因何在？這樣的選擇和結局（不一定是生存，也可能是死亡）對你的生命有甚麼的影響和意義？

陣亡區靜躺，但意識清醒的感覺，也讓不少參加者有深刻的感受和反思：如能重新再來一次，生命會不再一樣。聆聽自己寫下的「最後的話」，同時，也迅速回顧了自己的一生，當中的美好和遺憾，對自己、對家人、對師友、對生命、對死亡……的道謝與道別，刻骨銘心。

能在「死亡」面前，說：生命，真好！死亡，真好！

如此這樣，真好。

25/08/21

2017年生命教育國際學術研討會  
生命教育與校園文化

生當為人傑，死當為鬼雄－生死探問  
(雷霆救兵－歷奇營會體驗學習)

分享：李漢泉  
香港教育大學博士生（生命及價值教育）  
日期：2017-09-29

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個人簡介

香港教育大學博士生（生命及價值教育）。  
資深歷奇輔導工作者、香港海谷青年中心義務職員、香港突破機構資深義工。

曾任香港教育大學（前香港教育學院）「宗教教育與心靈教育中心」助理項目經理，主責香港教育局委辦協助中學規劃生命教育計劃，協助小學規劃生命教育計劃。

2006年以前是中學高級學位教師。2006年加入突破機構，出任出版部編輯（2006-2007），負責香港教育局課程發展「新高中」通識科教學資源之編撰工作，提供學校老師相關培訓；及後擔任創路坊「師徒創路學堂」導師（2007-2008），協助低學習動機、低學業成績高考學生重尋生命方向，積極開展生涯規劃。轉任更新園訓練主任（2008-2013），透過工作坊、營會（室內、戶外）、歷奇體驗活動等等，培訓中學學生、大專大學學員生命成長、領袖素質等。

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分享安排

1. 香港生死教育（及或生命教育中生死議題探問）概況簡述
2. 歷奇（冒險教育）及體驗學習在生死教育／生死議題中的嘗試
3. 個案分享：「雷霆救兵」－歷奇營會體驗學習
4. 總結與反思
5. 交流分享（Q & A）

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香港生死教育（及或生命教育中生死議題探問）  
情況簡述

香港沒有明確的教育政策、課程推行生命教育，教育局期望學校以校本及多元方式規劃及推行生命教育。

甚至有「無政策推行生死教育：死亡質素排名，香港低過台灣」的說法。

香港教育大學（前香港教育學院）由2014年至2017年承辦香港教育局委辦「協助中學規劃生命教育計劃」專案，三屆的參與學校（包括特殊學校），合共：71所中學。

在計劃協助下，71所參與學校中在當屆推動有關生命教育的工作重點（主題），只有1所學校明確以「死亡」為主題探討生命意義，另外4所學校則探討「無常」而涉及生死議題，可見在生命教育中「死亡」或相關議題的討論，實在是少之又少。

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香港生死教育（及或生命教育中生死議題探問）  
情況簡述

自2015至2017年，已有71名大學、中學、小學學生自殺死亡。香港政府（教育局）為應對2016年3月及4月期間所發生的多宗學生自殺事件，成立「防止學生自殺委員會」。

同年11月發表《最終報告》，委員會主席葉兆輝教授於〈序言〉指出「任何複雜的問題都不會有簡單的解決辦法」，並且提供了不少輔導及支援建議。其中也包括了「生涯規劃」（頁x，xi，33，62，63，78，80，87，88）；「生命教育」（頁2，3，46，50）；「生死教育」（頁iv，50）。而當中防治青少年自殺之重點在「生涯規劃」，而教育局對應措施在培養「生命韌力」（正向思考、抗逆力）（頁70，註）。對於「生命教育」的理解和說法，《最終報告》與教育局相當一致，基本上就是「正向思考」、「抗逆力」。

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歷奇（冒險教育）及體驗學習在生死教育／生死議題中的嘗試

不少學校透過「歷奇」「體驗」來實施有關學生成長的課程，如：生命教育、價值教育、德育及公民教育等。

不過，歷奇體驗有時會「程序化」「公式化」，以任務導向（Task-Oriented），往往以「任務」（活動）為主（Task-Oriented），著重參加者完成任務，強調「成功經驗」，呈現「團隊合作」、「解難能力」、「溝通信任」等等有關「生命韌力」（抗逆力）的學習重點。

而參加者亦有相當的參加經驗，往往會因應大會「需求」，而給予恰如其分的回應和分享。

這次營會的重點則放在透過「生死的抉擇」，認真看待和反思生命。

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## 總結與反思－生死探問（終極關懷）

「終極挑戰」及「陣亡區」讀出「最後的話」，小組討論及反思最多的是：**生死的選擇**（*The Choice of Death*）和對家人和生命的歉疚。陣亡區靜謐，但意識清醒的感覺，也讓不少參加者有深刻的感受和反思：如能重新再來一次，生命會不再一樣。聆聽自己寫下的「最後的話」，同時，也迅速回顧了自己的一生、美好和遺憾，對自己、對家人、對朋友、對生命、對死亡……的追謝與道別，也有**寄語雷恩好好活下去**，刻骨銘心。

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## 總結與反思－生死探問（終極關懷）

營會過程中不強調接受任務和必然參與，反而集中在提問和思考：選擇前赴九死一生拯救雷恩的任務**原因何在**？這樣的選擇和結局（不一定是生存，也可能是死亡）**對你的生命有甚麼的影響和意義**？

雷達救兵，「救」的是誰？

香港把電影譯「雷達救兵」，含意深遠－救兵，既可以指拯「救」雷恩的士「兵」（8人小隊），也可以拆解為拯「救」雷恩這個小「兵」。前者角色是「救人」，後者是「被救」。

最後，營會要問的是：**（到底）誰救了誰**？

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## 總結與反思－生死探問（終極關懷）

知人者智，自知者明。勝人者有力，自勝者強。知足者富。強行者有志。不失其所者久。死而不亡者壽。〔註：雖死而以為生之道，不亡乃得全其壽，身沒而道猶存，況身存而道不幸乎。〕（《道德經》33章）

〔死而不亡者壽〕讓人重新思考死亡的意涵，原來「死」不等同於「亡」。「死」只是形體的終結，但是「亡」卻是一切歸零。所以，我們終能在形體終結，留下修行或作品在世上，則情愛與思想便不會結束，形而上的繼續綿延將使人「死而不亡」成為壽者。（蔡其華，2016，頁106。）

誠既勇兮又武，終剛強兮不可凌。  
身既死兮神以靈，魂魄毅兮為鬼雄。（屈原《九歌·國殤》）

生當作人傑，死亦為鬼雄。（李清照《夏日絕句》）

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## 交流分享（Q &amp; A）

謝謝聆聽

*Add Life to Days*  
人為生命賦意義

2017/09/28

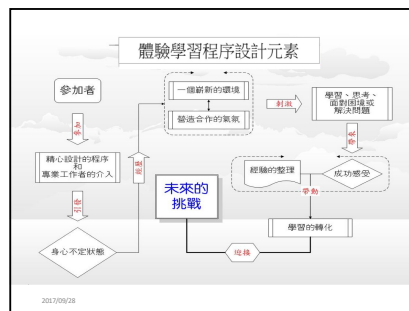
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## 體驗學習流程（舉隅）



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**營會流程（概略）－生死電網**

活動時間完結，陣亡者都已在陣亡區躺下後，大會會安排倖存者圍坐在陣亡區，然後小組導師邀請小組中的倖存者請出陣亡組員「最後的話」。

完成所有「最後的話」的講讀後，大會會請倖存者安靜的「聽」陣亡者，並說一句感恩、多謝的話。最後，大會會敲響鐘聲，呼喚生命，讓所有參加者「重生」。

導師亦把各人（包括倖存者）的「最後的話」發還各人，然後圍坐分享。




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**總結與反思－選擇的可能**

雖然每項活動設計都有深意，而且環環相扣，當然希望參加者能全程和全情參與，不過，生命教育（及或相關生死議題）則另有不同的考量，容讓參加者在過程中有**選擇的不參與（Challenge by Choice）**，可能比較必須完全服從更能有反思的空間。當然，這不能成為參加者「逃避」或「抽離」參與的藉口。營會強調的是「尊重」（Respect）每個人，包括參加者及大會的所有人。強調生命的尊貴（Honorable Life），必須對生命負責。



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**總結與反思－選擇背後的思考（價值判斷）**

過去在「歷奇」為主軸的營會，往往容易出現「任務」（活動）為主（Task Oriented）的情況，著重參加者完成任務，並呈現「團隊合作」、「解難能力」、「溝通信任」等等學習重點，而參加者亦有相當的參加經驗，往往會因應大會「需求」，而給予恰如其分的回應和分享。

「雷霆教兵」，營會一開始即不著重「成敗論英雄」和「生命動力」的老調，反而是強調「個人」、「團隊」在面對「拯救雷恩」的任務和面對抉擇時的思考及背後的（生命）價值考慮。

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**總結與反思－解說在最初／受教時刻**

解說在最初（Debriefing at the Beginning）及留意受教時刻（Teachable Moment）的分享和反思，故此，反思及解說會穿插整個營會，而非只安排在營會總結分享時段。只要情況許可（甚至是刻意製造可以分享的時機，例如：戶外煮食、夜行其間的小休……），特別出現「意外狀況」是小組或個人「情緒」爆發時，更是應該「停」「聽」「傾」。不作「判斷」而是「理解」。

不要說：「你（們）應該……」、「這是你的選擇……」。可以問：「發生甚麼事？」「你現在的感受是……」。「（是／因為）甚麼令你會有這樣的想法／感受／反應？」……

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**總結與反思－解說在最初／受教時刻**

主要以4F：經歷（Facts）、感知（Feelings）、發現（Findings）和未來應用（Future）為向度。

- 事實／經歷（Facts）**－當中最深刻和最難忘的事件、人物、說話等。透過回顧和分享這些個別、共同的經歷，不單能重溫過程，更能發現當中的學習和成長。
- 感知（Feelings）**－分享感受，表達思維和情感，一方面可以整理及處理當中觸動內心的人和事，更可以進一步探究當中觸動的原因，背後的「故事」。
- 發現（Findings）**－不單是知道，而是呈現了一些過去忽略、不為人知，甚或自己也不太相信的自我特質。當然，也可以是對他者不一樣的發現。
- 未來應用（Future）**－經歷了這些事情，有深刻的情感，不一樣的發現，未來可以如何？這是（生命）啟程往前的思考。

2017/09/08

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**總結與反思－生死探問**

在小組分享當中，開始時談到了

「公平」：為何雷恩可以獲得特別優待？雷恩是「人」，小隊的每一個也是「人」，都有等待他們平安歸去的家人。

「堅毅」：當看到費盡心力拯救的雷恩，竟然是沙包人時，真的想「打死佢」！已經十分疲倦還要帶著這個「雷恩」前行到集合點，應付許多的挑戰，真的想「打死佢」！

但在疲乏中仍然想到「尊重」，只好忍耐堅持。「犧牲」、「苦難」……。

2017/09/08

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25/08/21



13



14



15



16



17



18

3

25/08/21

### 期望

1. 不要只記著分享活動或營會流程，而忘記了說明這些活動／流程如何配合，並引領參加者（包括工作者）在經歷生死抉擇而思考生命的意義。
2. 不要把注意力放在活動（技術）或營會流程這些「硬件」（hard skills），而忽略了當中「信息」建構和傳遞者－「人」的生命素質、自省和分享。

2017/09/28

7

### 一直被救？！

美國到底花了多少錢拯救麥迪文？

From Saving Private Ryan to Interstellar to The Martian, America has spent a ridiculous amount of money to retrieve Matt Damon



2017/09/28

<https://news.gamme.com.tw/1351599>

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### 個案分享：「雷霆救兵」－歷奇營會體驗學習

#### • 參加者

- 為香港中學中五級（相當於台灣高中二）學生，人數40人，男女各半。

#### • 營會主題和理念

- 有關學習活動及反思討論，基於電影「雷霆救兵」（Saving Private Ryan）（或譯「搶救雷恩大兵」，「搶救大兵瑞恩」）故事情節設計。

2017/09/28

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### 個案分享：「雷霆救兵」－歷奇營會體驗學習

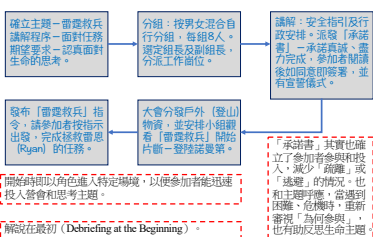
#### • 故事概略

- 1944 / 06 / 06 盟軍諾曼第登陸諾曼第，死傷慘痛。抵墨士兵皆欲稍作休息。但此時由約翰·H·米勒中尉（湯漢斯飾演）率領的8人小隊接獲命令，要深入敵區搶救1名二等兵雷恩（麥迪文飾演）。雷恩的三名兄長相繼於戰爭中陣亡，美國作戰指揮部以人道立場，不希望雷恩的母親面對僅餘的最少兒子陷於戰爭中死亡的危機。於是決定派遣特別小隊把雷恩安全救出戰區。當小隊陷入敵區，面對隨時喪命的各種危機，他們開始懷疑、爭論這項任務的合理性：為何值得犧牲8名士兵官兵死救1名二等兵？故事最後二等兵雷恩在槍林彈雨中活下來，不過營救他的8名士兵大部分壯烈犧牲，包括隊長約翰·H·米勒中尉。

2017/09/28

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### 營會流程（概略）－主題確立



2017/09/28

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### 個案分享：「雷霆救兵」－歷奇營會體驗學習



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## Appendix B: Consent Form(s)

(revised May 2016)

### (SCHOOLS)

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

##### 1. Consent to Participate for Data Collection Site/ School

The Project Investigator must prepare a set of Consent forms / Information sheets for school/ data collection sites so that the school / organization is aware of the research study and agrees in writing to allow the Project Investigator to run the study in the school/ organization.

##### 2. Guidelines on Obtaining Consent for Minor Participants

Please note the following guidelines on obtaining consent for minor participants (extracted from the HREC Operational Guidelines, paragraph 29):

*The following guidelines for obtaining consent should be adopted if the research participants are minors:*

- *For children aged below 9, only the signature of their parents/guardians is required; completion of the task, after verbal explanation of its nature by the researcher, provides implied consent by the child;*
- *For children aged 9 to 15, signature of both the children and their parents/guardians is required; and*
- *For adolescents aged 16 to 17, signature of the adolescents is required and consent from their parents/guardians is optional for studies involving minimal risk.*

##### 3. Language of the Information Sheet

- (a) Information Sheets should be written in simple language which is comprehensible to a non-specialist. A good rule of thumb is that the Information Sheet should be readable by a Grade 6 student.
- (b) Please be concise and indicate clearly in what procedures a participant will be involved.
- (c) Please do not include too many technical details that are not necessary to participants.
- (d) Typically one page should be sufficient for providing appropriate and adequate information on the project for purposes of informed consent.
- (e) If the consent form and information sheet are to be presented to participants/ parents in Chinese, please also provide a Chinese version to HREC for review, and ensure that there is consistency between the English or Chinese version.

(revised May 2016)

**(Principal / Vice-Principal(s) / Teaching Staff)****INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE****1. Consent to Participate for Data Collection Site/ School**

The Project Investigator must prepare a set of Consent forms / Information sheets for school/ data collection sites so that the school / organization is aware of the research study and agrees in writing to allow the Project Investigator to run the study in the school/ organization.

**2. Guidelines on Obtaining Consent for Minor Participants**

Please note the following guidelines on obtaining consent for minor participants (extracted from the HREC Operational Guidelines, paragraph 29):

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- *For adolescents aged 16 to 17, signature of the adolescents is required and consent from their parents/guardians is optional for studies involving minimal risk.*

**3. Language of the Information Sheet**

- (a) Information Sheets should be written in simple language which is comprehensible to a non-specialist. A good rule of thumb is that the Information Sheet should be readable by a Grade 6 student.
- (b) Please be concise and indicate clearly in what procedures a participant will be involved.
- (c) Please do not include too many technical details that are not necessary to participants.
- (d) Typically one page should be sufficient for providing appropriate and adequate information on the project for purposes of informed consent.
- (e) If the consent form and information sheet are to be presented to participants/ parents in Chinese, please also provide a Chinese version to HREC for review, and ensure that there is consistency between the English or Chinese version.

(revised May 2016)

**(STUDENTS)****INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE****1. Consent to Participate for Data Collection Site/ School**

The Project Investigator must prepare a set of Consent forms / Information sheets for school/ data collection sites so that the school / organization is aware of the research study and agrees in writing to allow the Project Investigator to run the study in the school/ organization.

**2. Guidelines on Obtaining Consent for Minor Participants**

Please note the following guidelines on obtaining consent for minor participants (extracted from the HREC Operational Guidelines, paragraph 29):

*The following guidelines for obtaining consent should be adopted if the research participants are minors:*

- *For children aged below 9, only the signature of their parents/guardians is required; completion of the task, after verbal explanation of its nature by the researcher, provides implied consent by the child;*
- *For children aged 9 to 15, signature of both the children and their parents/guardians is required; and*
- *For adolescents aged 16 to 17, signature of the adolescents is required and consent from their parents/guardians is optional for studies involving minimal risk.*

**3. Language of the Information Sheet**

- (a) Information Sheets should be written in simple language which is comprehensible to a non-specialist. A good rule of thumb is that the Information Sheet should be readable by a Grade 6 student.
- (b) Please be concise and indicate clearly in what procedures a participant will be involved.
- (c) Please do not include too many technical details that are not necessary to participants.
- (d) Typically one page should be sufficient for providing appropriate and adequate information on the project for purposes of informed consent.
- (e) If the consent form and information sheet are to be presented to participants/ parents in Chinese, please also provide a Chinese version to HREC for review, and ensure that there is consistency between the English or Chinese version.

(revised May 2016)

**(PARENTS)****INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE****1. Consent to Participate for Data Collection Site/ School**

The Project Investigator must prepare a set of Consent forms / Information sheets for school/ data collection sites so that the school / organization is aware of the research study and agrees in writing to allow the Project Investigator to run the study in the school/ organization.

**2. Guidelines on Obtaining Consent for Minor Participants**

Please note the following guidelines on obtaining consent for minor participants (extracted from the HREC Operational Guidelines, paragraph 29):

*The following guidelines for obtaining consent should be adopted if the research participants are minors:*

- *For children aged below 9, only the signature of their parents/guardians is required; completion of the task, after verbal explanation of its nature by the researcher, provides implied consent by the child;*
- *For children aged 9 to 15, signature of both the children and their parents/guardians is required; and*
- *For adolescents aged 16 to 17, signature of the adolescents is required and consent from their parents/guardians is optional for studies involving minimal risk.*

**3. Language of the Information Sheet**

- (a) Information Sheets should be written in simple language which is comprehensible to a non-specialist. A good rule of thumb is that the Information Sheet should be readable by a Grade 6 student.
- (b) Please be concise and indicate clearly in what procedures a participant will be involved.
- (c) Please do not include too many technical details that are not necessary to participants.
- (d) Typically one page should be sufficient for providing appropriate and adequate information on the project for purposes of informed consent.
- (e) If the consent form and information sheet are to be presented to participants/ parents in Chinese, please also provide a Chinese version to HREC for review, and ensure that there is consistency between the English or Chinese version.

## Appendix C: Question Sheet(s)

### 訪談問題 (學校行政、教學人員)

#### 第一部分：個人資料

- 姓名
- 性別
- 年齡
- 本科／專業訓練
- 信仰（如可以，了解信仰狀況）
- 現任學校崗位（負責工作，尤其是與生命教育／生死教育相關之工作）
- 現任學校年資
- 整體教學年資（如可以，了解過去曾否有接觸或參與生命教育／生死教育相關之工作）

#### 第二部分：對生命教育或生死教育認知及態度

- 為何覺得／認為（同）要在學校設立／推行生命教育（與生死議題）或生死教育？
- 是個人因素（信仰？價值觀？經歷？）
- 是其他因素（辦學團體要求？回應教育政策？社會因素？老師期望？家長訴求？學生需要？）
- 個人認為生命教育或生死教育應該包括甚麼主題或內容（重點）？

#### 第三部分：學校的生命教育或生死教育規劃及實行

- 現在學校推行的生命教育或生死教育的計劃、課程、教學等，由誰規劃？其根據及關注重點（要回應或解答的問題）是甚麼？有甚麼特色？
- 當中有甚麼可以（值得）分享的經驗？例如：精采的課程、教學，曾遇到的困難，解決方法，老師、學生的回應等等？
- 現在學校推行的生命教育或生死教育的計劃、課程、教學等，是否和你個人所認知和認同的方向相符？
- 如不，為何？當中有甚麼因素影響？
- 對未來的發展有麼期望，預期會遇到甚麼困難？有甚麼建議？

訪談問題  
(學生)

第一部分：個人資料

- 姓名
- 性別
- 年齡
- 分科（如學生是中四或以上，按新高中課程應已選定選修科目）
- 信仰（如可以，了解信仰狀況）
- 家中兄弟姊妹數目或排行

第二部分：學校的生命教育或生死教育規劃及實行

- 現在學校推行的生命教育或生死教育的計劃、課程、教學等，由誰規劃？課程及教學重點（要回應或解答的問題）是甚麼？有甚麼特色？一般上課的情況怎樣？同學的參與和投入怎樣？個人的參與和投入怎樣？
- 當中有甚麼可以（值得）分享的經驗？例如：精采的課程、教學，曾遇到的困難，解決方法，老師、同學的回應等等？
- 在生命教育或生死教育的課程、課堂或活動中，最感興趣或深刻的經驗是甚麼？為甚麼
- 你認為學校現行的生命教育或生死教育，有甚麼值得保留、減少、增加、改進的地方？包括教學設計、活動、老師的教學方式、態度等等。

第三部分：對生命教育或生死教育認知及態度

- 為何覺得／認為（同）要在學校設立／推行生命教育（與生死議題）或生死教育？
- 個人認為生命教育或生死教育應該包括甚麼主題或內容（重點）？這與你個人的經歷、信仰或學習有甚麼關連？
- 個人經過現行的學校推行的生命教育或生死教育，對個人在生命教育或生死教育認知及態度，有甚麼的改變？（例如：對死亡的憂懼？對「死亡」的悲傷？個人對生命意義的思考等）
- 你對未來推行生命教育和生死教育有甚麼想法和建議？