

**Title of Thesis**

**An Ethnographic Case Study of Secondary School's Moral  
Education in a Mainland City of the Greater Bay Area**

by

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## Statement of Originality

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## Abstract

Moral education (Deyu) is a large domain in China, dealing with interpersonal values, social norms, and ideological and political education, but often criticized for being overly politicized, neglecting contextual factors, and being exam-oriented. Since the Reform and Opening-up policy in Shenzhen, the content of moral education is less politicized and less indoctrinated, unlike that of the period after the Cultural Revolution. In 2019, Shenzhen was given more autonomy in implementing moral education under the GBA initiative. A “One school, one design” policy was even adopted in the Nanshan district in Shenzhen in 2020. Plenty of research focuses on the theoretical development and the general implementation of moral education theory in China. However, little attention is paid to individual schools' moral education practices and teachers' perceptions of these practices.

This study intended to investigate the school-level implementation and teachers' perspectives of moral education to find out the facilitating and, more importantly, inhibiting factors across different layers to the success of students' morality advancement.

To examine the contextual factors of moral education, an ecological perspective is vital for investigating how moral education is being carried out and perceived by teachers. Thus, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is used as the theoretical framework. In order to get a holistic portrait and explore the nature of these practices, a prolonged qualitative research method is more suitable for this study. Thus, a two-year-long ethnographic case study was carried out in the case school located at the heart of GBA, and a total of 18 teachers in the school participated in the semi-structured interviews.

The research finds that the facilitating factors in different ecological systems include: 1) a strong foundation and guidelines on the national level; 2) teachers' constant renewal of their teaching methods and teaching philosophy; 3) an ambitious principal with clear visions for moral education; 4) Shenzhen's potential as the pioneer of moral education reformation.

The lack of communication and mutual understanding contributes to moral education teachers' emotionally exhaustive experience. Here are the factors hindering the success of moral education on different levels: 1) the rigid content in the textbooks; 2) teachers' burdensome responsibilities; 3) teachers' vulnerability and powerlessness in dealing with parents and protecting their rights; 4) extravagant moral education activities without supervision and evaluation; 5) stuffy school culture; 6) no mutual understanding between teachers, the school, and parents on moral education belief; 7) no tight alliance across different layers; 8) the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results suggest that 1) schools should be the only organization responsible for moral education, and an alternative and more inclusive model is needed; 2) decisions on moral education strategies should be made in a bottom-up instead of a top-down fashion; 3) teachers should be treated as socialist moral exemplars instead of merely as capitalist employees; 4) the Ecological Systems Theory should be used for more specific purposes in examining moral education in China.

**Keywords:** ecological systems theory, GBA, moral education

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## List of Abbreviations

GBA	The Greater Bay Area
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
MOE	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China
ECS	Ethnographic Case Study
CPC	The Communist Party of China
PRC	People's Republic of China
K12	Kindergarten through twelfth grade
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development
MAXQDA	Max Weber Qualitative Data Analysis
USA	The United States of America
SEN	Special Educational Needs
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
MLB	Morality and Law Basis



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## Chapter One Introduction

*Once upon a time, there were six blind men in India. They touched a different part of the elephant to describe what an elephant looked like.*

*The man who feels the body says the elephant is like a wall.*

*The one who feels the tusk says the elephant is like a spear.*

*The one who feels the leg says the elephant is like a pillar.*

*The one who feels the ear says the elephant is like a fan.*

*The one who feels the tail says the elephant is like a rope.*

*The one who feels the trunk says the elephant is like a snake.*

*A little girl passing by heard them and said, "Every one of you is right, and you are all wrong simultaneously, but I know what you are talking about."*

*---Six Blind Men and an Elephant*

We all heard the famous Indian parable of "Six Blind Men and an Elephant." It is used to discuss the exciting combat of truths and fallacies. It basically means our subjective experience is authentic, but it cannot account for the whole picture or others' realities. Truth can be inexpressible and opaque because we do not have full access to the information. Truth can be hard to obtain because relativism constitutes a denial of absolute reality; ethical and epistemological facts depend on what the individuals and groups hold.

This is what I felt when I finished this study's data analysis: the truths of moral education vary in the mind of the teachers, parents, middle leaders, and the principal. They are not wrong, and they are not right, but I understand what they are talking about as an outsider.

### 1.1 The Path to the Current Study

Qualitative research methods are effective in answering questions about meaning, perspective, and experience, "most often from the standpoint of the participant"(Hammarberg

et al., 2016, p. 499). It is of great significance to understand the study's first participant, the researcher myself, and my possible bias through a brief history of my life.

I grow up in a small village in Henan province in a low-income family with a strong mother figure. As the second child, I quickly learned how to behave myself because I had witnessed too many spankings and beatings. I was quiet and obedient, thin and weak, a perfect target for being bullied in schools. In primary school, when I was rope skipping, my ill-fitted pants fell off, for it was my brother's. I still remember how embarrassed I was that day simply because my family couldn't afford new pants. I always feel like less than others, which lays the foundation of my personality. That is why in this research, I try to connect the family's financial situation with the moral education their parents provided, and I try to take the regional economic development conditions into consideration.

Junior high is the hardest simply because of the sheer number and frequency of me getting bullied. The reasons are pretty diverse, from my appearance, my excellent test scores to my appearance, and one time several boys beat me on my birthday for sharing the same birthday with them. Everything was so confusing, and at the same time, it scared me for life. I don't understand people's motives and sometimes my own motive in doing things like bullying, stealing, passing around pornographic novels, and starting rumors. For me, the junior high school is a place with violence brewing beneath its surface. Sex education, campus violence, and how people react to it are also emphasized in this study.

The senior high was getting by fast with the company of my best friend and discovering a passion for music and English. It is also the time I start to appreciate teachers. One history teacher said that when students fall asleep in your class, it is the teacher that should be blamed. Teachers need to organize the course so tight and excitingly that it leaves no room for students to feel bored. The Chinese teacher who graduated from Beijing Normal University, one of the best universities for teachers, always quotes and cites extensively from

various sources. He told one of my classmates that I have great potential, which I hadn't realized. It makes me want to be a knowledgeable teacher with a great personality. There was an elderly physics teacher whose class was so pedantic and uninteresting that I started to listen to my Walkman. He broke my Walkman in class in front of everyone and crushed my dream of being a musician by saying, "poor and unattractive people cannot be playing music." I was not fond of physics and got the idea that students can have negative attitudes towards a whole subject because the teacher is unlikable to them. Students of this age are emotional rather than rational. In this study, some interpretations of the teachers' behavior may be influenced by my previous experience with different teachers. I spent a large amount of description to capture the hidden emotions of the teachers and students. That's the beauty of ethnographic study; I got the chance to live and experience these emotions as the participants.

I got my bachelor's degree in Zhengzhou, an underdeveloped city in the middle, and I earned my master's degree in Hangzhou, a famous tourist attraction in mainland China. I start to think about the educational inequality in China. The uneven regional development and the cultural differences between northern and southern China left me an impression that the north is more political than the south, given a more extended history of kingship in a rigid feudal society, and the south is more free-spirited and practical for they pay great attention to efficiency and benefits in economic development. It could be biased in my mind in analyzing the data collected in this study, so I have to constantly fight this stereotype and try to be more just to ensure the study's validity.

I returned to my hometown to teach English as required by my mother. I could have stayed in Hangzhou, but I underestimated the Chinese family's power over their children. It carries significant weight in making the family proud and bringing honor to the family name. I was astonished to see the participants disobeying their parents in this study. I will try to analyze

the reasons behind that and make sense of the things that didn't make sense to me. Family education will be discussed, and several parents will be introduced in this study.

It is my fifth year of teaching college English. In one long hot, boring summer day class, I paused for five minutes to observe what was going on inside the students' minds at that exact moment. The first two rolls were, of course, empty as usual. Someone in the third roll looked up anxiously, wondering what was wrong with the teacher. The middle parts were peeking on their cellphones, and the students in the back were resting their eyes from too much game playing or partying. There were more than fifty students in the classroom, but less than five souls were presented.

Why are the college students wasting their life in my class, motionless, passionless, and soulless, and shouldn't they be the proud products of the quality education that started in the 80s?

Why have I wasted five years practicing how to destroy others' life? That moment reminded me of why I decided to become a teacher. When I was in junior middle school, I wrote in my composition titled "The Future me" that I wanted to be a powerful government official so that people would give me gifts and money. I would be more powerful and wealthier because my neighbor was doing that. My teacher replied to me in just one sentence, "Be a teacher; I see it in you."

The overarching question in this study and my life is how youngsters' moral values are cultivated. A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. I plan to investigate what's going on in moral education in senior high, elementary school, and college in the future. In this study, I want to use qualitative research methods to examine what is going on with moral education in today's middle schools, where teenagers start to think about the meaning of life.

## **1.2 Research Background**

### 1.2.1 The Greater Bay Area (GBA)

The milestone in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) development is the *Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area*, released in February 2019.

**Figure 1**

*Location and Administrative Division of GBA (Zhang et al., 2022)*



It contains HKSAR, Macao SAR, and nine Guangzhou municipalities: Zhuhai, Zhongshan, Zhaoqing, Huizhou, Foshan, Jiangmen, and of course, Shenzhen, the city in question in this paper.

Shenzhen, nicknamed “the City of Giant Eagle,” is the first special economic zone that enjoyed the Reform and Opening-up policy in the 1980s. Unlike other cities in Guangzhou, it gets direct legislative power from the central government in financing and overall development of the special economic zone (Luo & Lam, 2020, p. 11). It borders the New Territories of Hong Kong and connects the central government and HKSAR with the Beijing-Kowloon Express train. Out of the nine subways run by Shenzhen Metro in Shenzhen, Line Four is run by Hong Kong MTR Cooperation (Shenzhen) Limited. Shenzhen Baoan International Airport communicates with more than 150 cities in 17 countries. The twelve



boundary checkpoints cover air, sea, and land travel. With such a large and mature transportation system and critical geographic position, Shenzhen has excellent potential to become an actual “Giant Eagle” soaring in southern China.

**Table 1**

*Industries in Shenzhen (Luo & Lam, 2020, p. 12)*

Four pillar industries	Emerging industries	Future industries
High technology	Biotechnology	Wearable devices
Financial services	Information technology	Life and health care
Cultural industry	Cultural and creative industry	Marine technology
Advanced logistics	New material and new energy	Aviation and aerospace
	Environmental protection	Robots and smart equipment

The Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council printed and issued the *Plan for Comprehensively Deepening the Reform and Opening-up of the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone* in September 2019. However, the State Council approved this plan way back in 2010. It aims to establish Qianhai as the role model for the development of the GBA initiative. By 2035, Qianhai will have a world-class business environment and a global resource allocation center with innovative and high-quality development.

The school in this research is located in Qianhai, the heart of the heart of GBA.

The GBA initiative is labeled a “triple I helix strategy of integration, innovation, and internationalization” (Xie et al., 2021, p. 211). Integration means deepening the cooperation of the mainland with the two SARs to achieve mutual prosperities. Innovation means transforming labor-intensive to high-tech manufacturing in these areas to create new momentum and channel China’s economic development. Internationalization indicates that

GBA, the most open region in China, needs to take more active participation in globalization at a higher standard to pilot more reformations to internationalize China's economic power and comprehensive national strength (State Council, 2019).

Finally, the GBA development strategy is included in an even bigger national development blueprint that consists of the Belt and Road Initiative, the 21<sup>st</sup> century Maritime Silk Road, Yangtze River Delta Regional Integration Initiative, and the Jing-Jin-Ji Coordinated Development Strategy, all aiming at high-quality cooperation and development in these regions.

### *1.2.2 Moral Education (Deyu) in GBA*

Moral education (Deyu in Chinese) is a large domain in China, ranging from character education, ideological and political education, legal knowledge, physical and mental health, and career development to many other activities other than students' academic education (Li et al., 2004). Early in the Ming Dynasty, a famous educational philosopher in China, Wang Yangming, stated that "the ultimate goal of school education is to cultivate students' morality (You et al., 2018).

In primary and secondary school, Deyu is compulsory in that it deals with interpersonal values, social norms, and ideological and political education. In university, Deyu is closer to political science, whose main courses include Marxism, Mao Zedong's thoughts, Deng Xiaoping's theory, and world politics and economics (Li et al., 2004).

Historically, Chinese moral education has focused more on the connection between moral beliefs and moral behavior rather than the speculative logic of moral beliefs, which has triggered several ups and downs in moral education practice since the founding of New China in 1949 (Sun, 2022). From 1949 to 1976, moral education followed in the footsteps of the Soviet Union (Hou, 2019) and it criticized Dewey's theory of moral education to break the shackle of federalism on the moral education of old China (Du et al., 2019).

After the Cultural Revolution, from 1978 to 1988, the content of moral education was less politicized and less ideological (Tan & Chen, 2018). Still, several core values remain the same, such as love for the people, love for socialism, love for the country, and the Communist Party (CPC) and the Chinese culture (Lei, 2021).

From 1990 to 2012, Chinese moral education started to find its own path and voice in theory and practices, such as human-centered and modernized moral education (Du et al., 2019), interdisciplinary moral education (Tan & Chen, 2018), and scientific moral education (Hou, 2019).

From 2012 to the present, Chinese moral education has entered a flourishing and diversified development stage featuring the renaissance of traditional Chinese culture (Du et al., 2019) and “the preserving of social stability, state's power and social hierarchies (Lei, 2021, p.237).”

The Greater Bay Area Development Strategy stresses upholding the philosophy of people-centered development in education and proactively expanding cooperation in social security, culture, education, tourism, and urban planning (State Council, 2019).

Shenzhen, the pilot demonstration area of socialism with Chinese characteristics, is taking the lead in piloting reforms in the education system by maintaining higher quality and larger scale of primary and middle school education and modernizing the vocational education system.

Shenzhen is asked to follow the guidance of Xi Jinping’s thoughts on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and strengthen the comprehensive leadership of the Party (CPC). The policy requests schools to cultivate students into individuals who have confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristic and takes up active roles in socialist construction.

The Greater Bay area had the preemptive opportunity of enjoying the benefit of the Reform

and Opening Up Policy 40 years ago. However, the economy's advancement does not necessarily go with moral ethos shoulder to shoulder in this area. The great leader Deng Xiaoping exclaimed, "it is absolutely tragic to have any kind of economic prosperity at the expense of morality" in 1981.

This study chooses one middle school in Shenzhen to understand whether moral education (Deyu) is compromised in today's school setting.

### *1.2.3 Moral Education Textbook---Morality and Law Basis*

The textbook used in Shenzhen middle school was called "Morality and Law Basis" by People Education Press, issued in 2017. Before that, it is called "Morality and Life" for Grade 1-2 in the K12 curriculum, "Morality and Society" for Grade 3-6, and "Ideology and Morality" for Grade 7-9. This is under the guiding philosophy of "having multiple versions for one guiding principle" of the new curriculum reform for elementary and middle schools in 2001, led by the Ministry of Education of the PRC (MOE).

In 2011, to increase the operability of the curriculum standards, the MOE released *Standards for the "Ideology and Politics" Course in General High Schools (2011 Edition)*. It changed the approach in developing textbooks to "one version under one guiding principle" (Tang & Wang, 2021, p. 3). The courses "Morality and Life," "Morality and Society," and "Ideology and Morality" were combined and called "Morality and Law Basis" throughout the K12 curriculum in 2016. People Education Press issued the new and the only version of the "Morality and Law Basis" textbook in 2017.

The content of the "*Morality and Law Basis*" textbook, according to the authors in the textbook writing team, which has frontline teachers, moral education experts, and theorists designated by the MOE, is under the fundamental guideline of "returning the cultivation of moral character to life" (Gao et al., 2021c, p. 1). They want to reconstruct the teaching of morality by representing a realistic and holistic life experience of the children, shifting the

academic value orientation of studying morality as knowledge to promoting an attitude of moral conduct and emotional education. It pays great attention to the students' psychological well-being and whole-person development (Ma, 2009). Because the textbook is constructed according to the “logic of children’s lives,” it could encourage the children to reflect on their own substantive life experiences to finally “achieve moral autonomy” (Gao et al., 2021c, p. 18).

Moreover, the textbook included cultural diversity, like the differences between rural and urban areas, Han and other minority groups, and the mainstream culture and the traditional Chinese culture. Still, they admitted the inclination toward an urban perspective (Gao et al., 2021c, p. 11).

Since the Reform and Opening-up policy in Shenzhen, the content of moral education is less politicized and less ideological, unlike that of the period after the Cultural Revolution. Still, several core values remain the same, such as love for the people, love for socialism, love for the country and love for the CPC, and love for the Chinese culture. In 2017, the State Council released *Opinions on Implementing the Project to Pass Down and Develop the Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture* to integrate traditional Chinese culture at every stage of moral education in the current K12 curriculum, which is a “new trend in the reform of Chinese moral education” (Tang & Wang, 2021, p. 735).

### 1.3 Problem Statement

Moral education is a much broader concept than academic education in China. For centuries, it has been considered one of the most effective statecrafts in China. The CPC regards it as one of the determinants of the success of Chinese socialism.

Currently, Chinese moral education is still heavily criticized for many issues, such as neglecting the contextual factors, emphasizing the school-based values education model only, and being overly politicized, detached from real life, exam-oriented, rote memorization, and

the harshest criticism is on indoctrination (Feng & Newton, 2012; Gao et al., 2021a, 2021b; Lee, 2021; Li et al., 2004; Tang & Wang, 2021; Wan & Wu, 2004; Yang, 2021).

This study investigates the school-level implementation and teachers' perspectives of moral education to determine the facilitating and inhibiting factors across different layers in the ecological systems of students' morality advancement.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

To understand the root cause of this problem, I went back to middle school, when the value of the students started to come into being. This essay will discuss the critical factors in implementing moral education in middle schools and conclude that moral education needs to be individualized, closely evaluated, and future-oriented.

#### **1.5 Research Question**

To find out how moral education is carried out in middle schools, I combine my own ethnographic observation and reflection with the interviews with the teachers and form a research question:

From an ecological perspective, how is moral education being carried out and perceived by teachers in a “future” middle school in Shenzhen in GBA? More specifically:

- a. How can these ecological factors be accurately measured, recorded, and interpreted?
- b. What are the facilitating factors affecting teachers' perceptions of moral education in middle schools?
- c. What are the inhabiting factors in teachers' perceptions affecting moral education in middle schools?
- d. What should be done to ensure a promising future for moral education in this area?

#### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The aim of the study is not to find a causal effect of middle school moral education and the current characters of college students, but it is a starting point to initiate conversations between educators throughout students' school life. This study will shed some light on the reality of moral education in middle schools through the eyes of a college teacher to understand what could be done earlier in students' school life to form a sustainable momentum in their later life and to improve empathy for middle school teachers, parents, and their children so that a joint force of moral education could become consensus in every level. The school in question claims itself the "future" school, and the principal is so confident in claiming the school is at the "center of the universe." Cities in the GBA have more significant potential to be the exemplar of moral education in China, especially Shenzhen, the frontier of Reform and Opening up policy and now the pioneer of the demonstration area of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

This study provides a valuable and unique opportunity to examine the moral education strategies in a "future school," which could offer some valuable implications for the educational and economic policymakers, because it focuses on educational equality, students' physical and emotional well-being, family education, school governance, and teachers' professional development. It is of great significance to pause and examine what is working and what is buried without acknowledgment, and to think about at what expense the economy is soaring, be it the well-being of teachers and students or the social justice and educational equality.

Finally, the study could provide insights into the ethnographic case study research methodology. As a newcomer to this field, a passionate educator, and a member of the Communist Party of China, on one hand, I need to overcome my bias to present the research findings with a neutralizing attitude so that it won't be condescending and judgmental. On the other hand, it allows me to be much more caring and actively engage in the whole process. It

will provide a lot of information and struggles in balancing the researcher's roles in an ethnographic study in the sense that it'll be factual as well as emotional.





## Chapter Two Literature Review

### 2.1 Rationales behind the Chosen Theories

The theoretical framework is based on finding a comprehensive theoretical lens to answer the research questions. I first try to define the focus of the study, moral education, and I notice a more comprehensive range of moral education in Chinese society. To examine the key factors influencing moral education in school, I want to adopt a more inclusive theory on children's development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a framework for examining the contextual factors in a systematic and ecological way, so it "can potentially provide an insightful perspective in identifying the root causes of the problem and figuring an alternative model of tackling moral disorders in China" (Yang, 2021, p. 2).

On the Chronosystem level, I adopt Kohlberg and Gilligan's moral stage theory because they view moral education as a developmental process, and they believe indoctrination is not in the final stage of students' moral development.

On the Microsystem level, to understand the teaching practice in moral education, I adopt more theories into the framework, like the Revised Bloom Taxonomy and Krathwohl's Taxonomy of Affective Learning (Allen & Friedman, 2010) and Neuman's Taxonomy of Affective Learning (Neuman & Friedman, 2008). Attachment theory is used to examine the parents' behavior because it stresses the significance of the relationship between caregivers and children in their moral development (Gilligan, 1993; Govrin, 2014).

On the Mesosystem level, I add transformational leadership and corporate culture to the theoretical framework because reality requires it. When I first went into the research field, I couldn't understand the principal's talks in the weekly meeting, so I searched keywords like "shared vision" and "intellectual stimulation," and I got that she wanted to be a transformational leader who values school culture.

On the Exosystem level, I use moral identity theory to examine the influence of social factors

such as the pandemic and the Internet.

On the Macrosystem level, I add Lickona's comprehensive approach to the theoretical framework to better understand the impact of broader contexts socially, culturally, and politically.

More importantly, all the chosen theories intend to provide a possible answer to the current Chinese moral education's problems. Because it is still heavily criticized for neglecting the contextual factors, I use Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Lickona's comprehensive approach to include a more extensive and ecological context.

Also, it is criticized for emphasizing the school-based values education model only and being detached from real life, so I adopt attachment theory and moral identity theory to show the tension and connection in children's real life. I also use the transformational leadership theory and the school culture theory to investigate why the school is still the primary location in Chinese moral education.

The harshest criticism is on indoctrination and being overly politicized, so I incorporate Kohlberg and Gilligan's moral stage theory and the revised Bloom taxonomy to emphasize the importance of developmental, emotional, and affective sides of students' morality advancement.

## **2.2 Moral Education**

Regarding morality and moral education, most people, including philosophers and educators, believe that what is good for the kids is what is good for society, and vice versa. Modern educators consider morality as a form of self-realization, and moral education the human developmental progress to "betterness" (Nucci & Narváez, 2008).

### *2.2.1 Views on Moral Education*

Socrates and Plato claim that "knowledge of the Good" is at the highest state of human

development. Socrates advocates “know thyself,” then you can know the Good to practice it, and Plato demonstrates the Divided Line analogy through his famous Allegory of the Cave. The physical world is nothing but shadows of the real things, the truths cast by the Sun, the Good (Stewart & Blocker, 2012). This learning process is slow and challenging, and it is up to the teachers, parents, and society to force the chained prisoners to come out of the cave and know the Good.

Buddhists believe in achieving the emptying of the self, nirvana, as the ultimate goal by practicing the Eightfold Path, right viewpoint, the right value, right speech, right actions, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and proper meditation (Heim, 2020). The ascetic Hinayana takes it as a gradual process where one detaches himself from the worldly processions. Zen in Mahayana allows people to get sudden enlightenment and enter a state comparable to nirvana. Doing all kinds of selfless acts in this life to produce good karma, giving up the relentless pursuit of what one does not have, one can eventually liberate himself from desire and get enlightenment.

Aristotle proclaims two themes, “conformity with reason” and “habituation” (Nucci & Narváez, 2008), in his conceptions of character and character education. His moral reasoning is a “here-and-now” interpretation of the current situation, and that’s why he is pointing to the ground while Plato is pointing to the Sun in the painting *The School of Athens*. Through sensitivity training, kids learn to be more morally sensitive. Civic education shapes kids’ collaborative thinking. Moral teachers and parents should use modeling, repetition, and discipline to help kids form moral habits (Nucci & Narváez, 2008).

Kant proposes a new conception: personal autonomy in which one obeys the moral law because you govern yourself in pursuing your own vision of the good (Formosa, 2013). Kant thinks rationality is essential and worthy, while our physical nature and passion are lower and unworthy. Acting according to goodwill is morally good only when it comes from yourself.

Kant's categorical imperative requires one always to respect the humanity in others and follow the rule of conduct that is unconditional or absolute for all agents (Johnson & Cureton, 2021).

The traditional Chinese character education, centered on Confucian thinking, aims at being a tool of governance of the society and nation in the highly divided ancient China (Sun, 2022).

Confucius said perfecting one's self is the fundamental construction of all moral development. Human beings are considered to be born good, and favorable character traits could be acquired through self-cultivation and maneuverable education at school at a young age. These moral agents have equipped themselves with concrete moral values to "follow their heart without infringing morality in their 70s". Society would be free of ethical problems once there were enough righteous saints or moral agents in the country.

Focusing on Confucian thinking, emphasizing "Ren" (benevolence) and "Li" (behavior etiquette), the traditional Chinese moral education aims at being a tool of governance of the society and nation in the highly divided ancient China (Lei, 2021, p.233). The Ministry of Education (MOE) of China issued the Guide in 2017 to identify the fundamental task of "developing people by cultivating character virtues" and the Code in 2015 to "comprehensively refining students' behavioral standards as a way of facilitating moral education"(Huo et al., 2022, p. 12).

Shi (2016) proposes that the modernization of Chinese moral education needs traditional moral education as the foundation and a historical transformation to a mature system as the priority of modern schools. Only in this way can a secure and ethical moral education system be established and modernization of Chinese moral education preserved. This ethical moral education system should be a democratic community where all participants can grow morally (Du et al., 2019) and a sustainable research site where theories and practices elevate each other (Tan & Chen, 2018). It is also an enjoyable learning place where test scores are not the

sole assessment standard (Fang & Chen, 2016) and moral education is a virtue-based guarantee system where the results and the process are guaranteed to be ethical (Ye, 2019). Sun (2022) argues that the epistemological issues of Chinese moral education urgently need to be improved. It is under three major effects, the traditional deficiency of moral education epistemology, the disadvantage of being a developing country, and "the aphasia under cultural colonization (Sun, 2022, p.86)." She urges Chinese moral education scholars to put students' morality advancement into a broader ecosystem to combat the epistemological crisis in China's moral education research.

### *2.2.2 Moral Stages proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg*

Piaget and Kohlberg later developed moral cognitivism based on the knowledge of the Good: to know it is to choose it. There are several logically connected stages to cross to the final fusion of moral wisdom and moral virtue.

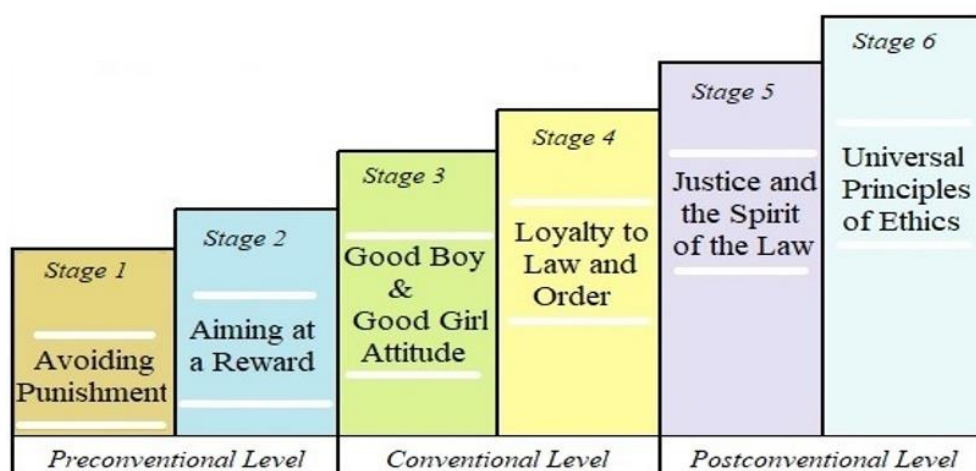
Level One, the Preconventional Morality, consists of stage one: Punishment-avoidance and Obedience, and stage two: Exchange of Favors. People at this stage make decisions merely on the basis of self-interest. They could recognize others' needs but put their needs a higher priority.

Level two Conventional Morality has stage three, Good boy/Good girl, and stage four, Law and Order. People try to please others to maintain interpersonal relations in stage three while looking for behavior guidelines and rules in society in stage four.

Level three, Postconventional Morality, comprises stage five Social Contract, where people realize social rules can be altered when necessary, and stage six, Universal Ethical Principle, where people adhere to abstract principles and an inner conscience that transcends specific social rules (Kohlberg, 1984).

**Figure 2**

*Moral Stages as Proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg*



Although this stage model provides an excellent way to examine and understand students' moral stages and structures, it fails to explain the formation process, and it can't provide adequate guidance for schools and parents about how to raise their children in the particular stage, so it is not the main focus of the theoretical framework in this study.

This paper focuses on two main points of view on moral formation. One is the Aristotelian perspective that humans should possess virtues to develop their characters and flourish. The other is the Kantian perspective that human cognitive development enables people to make moral decisions in dilemmas, and we need to develop this sophisticated mental competence deliberately.

### *2.2.3 The Social Intuitionist Model*

Kohlberg and Piaget's rationalist perspectives have been criticized for focusing on moral judgment, not moral emotions like sympathy. Haidt (2001) proposed an alternative approach, the social intuitionist model, which considers intuitions or feelings are in firm control, and reasoning is only used in post hoc rationalization. Moral intuition makes moral judgment automatically and effortlessly like "you feel a quick flash of revulsion at the thought of

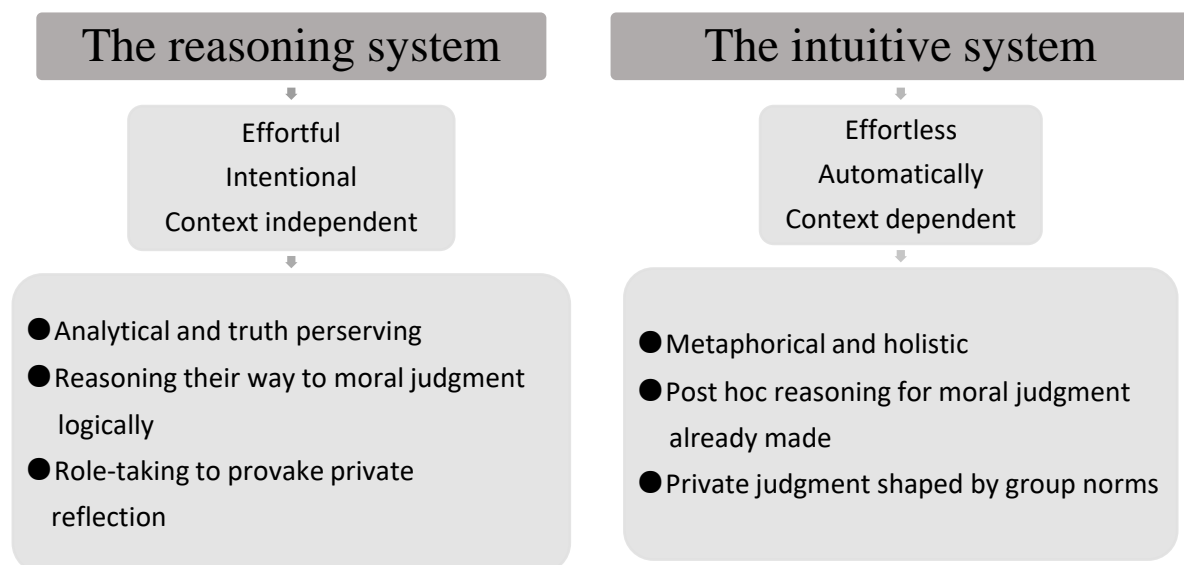
incest” (Haidt, 2001, p. 814), so simply put, moral intuition is a “gut feeling in the mind”(Haidt, 2001, p. 825).

In the world-renowned book “Metaphor we live by,” Lakoff and Johnson(2008) propose that metaphor has a wider entailment than we think, and all our complicated thought is embodied by metaphorical concepts from our physical and emotional experience. These metaphorical concepts are systematic because “the human conceptual system is structured and defined metaphorically”(Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, p. 6). Thus, moral intuition is also based on unconscious interlinked moral concepts, which are built upon metaphorical entailment extended from physical experience. However, children may be under the verified cultural and social influence to allow morality to get from outside experience to inside the children’s intuition. Haidt (2001) argues that moral intuitions are enculturated like language acquisition as well as innate in terms of brain and body maturity.

Here contrast the rationalist and social intuitionist’s points of view.

**Figure 3**

*Contrast between Reasoning System and Social Intuitive System*



In the intuitive system, moral reasoning happens after the decision-making process,

functioning more like a lawyer than a scientist. To manage others' impressions and to fight one's own cognitive dissonance, people act more like "intuitive lawyers" who only find supportive evidence to protect their prior beliefs and internal cultural worldview because they are under the influence of "my-side bias" and "confirmation bias." Hence, educators need to pay closer attention to quick and effortless intuition instead of merely worshiping reason like ancient Greeks (Haidt, 2001, p. 821).

If educators provide students with hypothetical and unemotional moral dilemmas, they will get an unusual and disinterested moral judgment from the students. Social intuitionists believe that in real-life situations, especially controversial ones like abortion and euthanasia, people are more intuitive than rational in seeking confirmation in upholding their existing beliefs.

While scholars like Gigerenzer (2007) strongly advocate making decisions based on "gut feelings," as proposed by Haidt, other scholars like Stanovich (2009) argue that bias, discrimination, polarization, and reckless behavior in current society are the result of lacking reflective and rational moral reasoning. Another scholar believes the truth lies in the middle. People who are more analytical will do better in certain fields, and more intuitive people will excel in other areas (Evans, 2010).

For this study, the social intuition model is advantageous in explaining how the moral education practice in school creates emotional circumstances to get what they want and why there are many reoccurring ethical misconducts in school and the classroom.

## **2.3 School**

### *2.3.1 Kohlberg's Just Community schools*

The moral formation of youngsters is one of the fundamental purposes of school education.

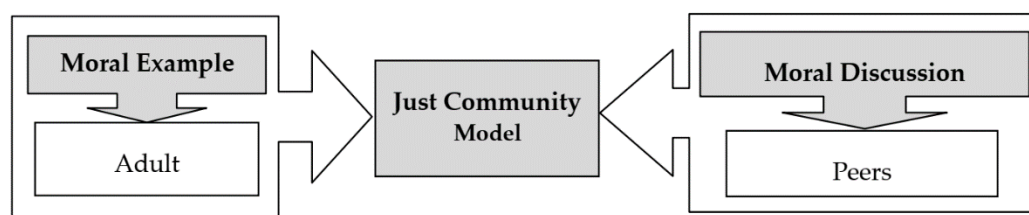
Thus, Kohlberg (1984) proposed three moral education pedagogies: learning from moral



exemplars, discussing ethical dilemmas with peers, and building Just Community schools. The moral ideals on Kohlberg's list possess two superior qualities: firstly, mature moral reasoning and empathy, like Saint Tomas More and Marcus Aurelius. Secondly, they lived out their moral stance through moral behavior and heroic action even when facing the death penalty, like Martin Luther King and Abraham Lincoln.

**Figure 4**

*Just Community (Sukma et al., 2019)*



The best way to do dilemma discussion is to integrate it into the curriculum of school classes, such as literature, history, and even economics. Similar to the zone of proximal development (ZPD) concept, Kohlberg proposed that dilemma discussion with another peer one level higher is the ideal setting for children's development of moral reasoning.

To help children learn universal moral values from their peers, Kohlberg and colleagues designed the Cluster School, which practices democratic governance to develop students' sense of community solidarity (Sukma et al., 2019). Students gained a half-stage in moral advancement in the two-year longitudinal experiment.

The justice in these schools is often described as caring, trust, participation, and collective responsibility. However, it would not be successful to run the school with merely direct democracy, and it limits students' possible life pathways beyond school (Curren, 2020).

### 2.3.2 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory

Yang (2021) advocates Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory to shed light on analyzing and reforming Chinese moral education. Experiential research is needed to examine whether

the typical Chinese culture and characters would make this proposal difficult to implement.

The bio-ecological approach comprehends and defines ‘environment’ as a rich, multidimensional construct that consists of five layers (Bronfenbrenner, 2005):

Micro- (immediate settings, such as parents, peers, teachers, etc.).

Meso- (the link between two or more microsystems, such as the interrelations between the family and school).

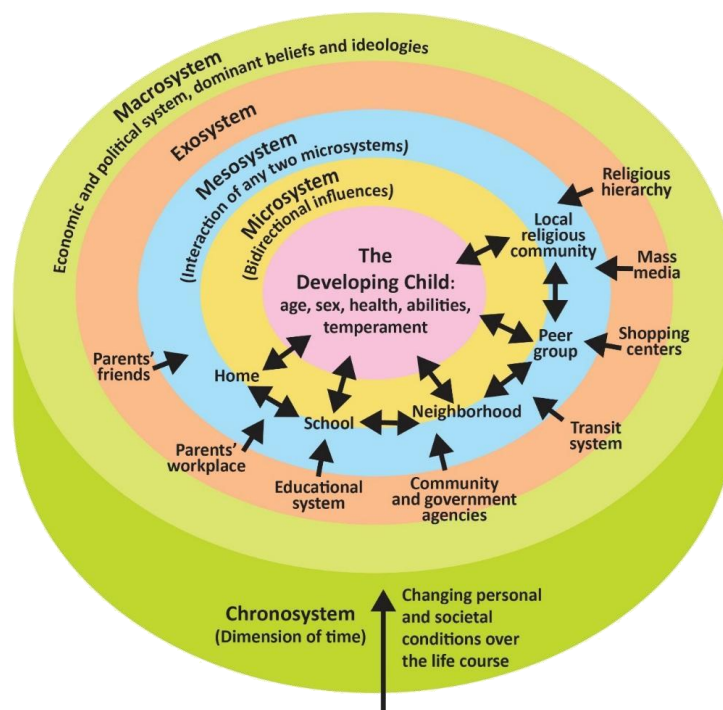
Exo- (settings not directly affecting the individual but influencing the microsystem, such as mass media).

Macro- (broader society and culture that encompasses the other systems, such as the organizational, social, cultural, and political contexts).

Chrono- (consistency or change over the life course, such as the historical contexts).

### Figure 5

*Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Model. Image By Ian Joslin Is Licensed Under CC BY 4.0.*



Second, it suggests that both individual biological resources and environmental factors are essential for the individual's development, but what matters most is the engine that drives the story—the interactive proximal processes and the relationship between the context and individual characteristics, as well as the complex relationships between the various level systems, which are critical in understanding the development of the individual.

Briefly speaking, it is critical to understand the development of the individual in the PPCT model, namely process, person, context, and time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a theoretical lens, Chinese scholars have made numerous findings in moral education and family education research.

Luo (2022) finds that public space is beneficial for realizing children's proximal learning process through active interactions among children, parents, other community members, and social norms and etiquette. Li and Cheong (2022) suggest that a combination of efforts at all levels of the ecological model could maintain students' physical health by integrating home-based fitness behavior, mass media promotion, and school guidance during the pandemic.

Luo et al. (2020) propose that it is necessary to establish a long-term home-school association mechanism as middle school students' academic stress is significantly correlated with students' perceptions of the teacher-student relationship and parents' emotional warmth.

Other scholars suggest promoting a positive school climate in China is necessary to support students suffering from peer victimization (Sullivan et al., 2021). It shows that

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is highly effective in examining individual factors and their relationships in the PPCT model across the systems.

This study adopts a much more comprehensive and inclusive definition of moral education in Chinese middle schools. Bronfenbrenner's ecological moral education paradigm still needs a long time to be localized, and I do think the typical Chinese culture and characters would make this hard to compare and comprehend. I would love to find out what is going on in the

frontier of moral education in the Chinese setting, what is working, and what should be done next.

That being said, Bronfenbrenner's ecological paradigm also serves as the literature review framework. It will also serve as a theoretical foundation for interpreting school ecology in the target school.

### *2.3.3 Transformational leadership theory in school*

James MacGregor Burns (2012) believes leadership is a process of morality since moral leaders share motives, goals, and values with their followers and listen to their actual economic, spiritual, physical, safety, or psychological needs. Transformational leadership enables followers to make a conscious choice among other competing alternatives than the traditional transactional leadership. Transforming leaders can create a dramatic change in people's lives, expectations, and values, significantly improving the organization and, more importantly, changing the organizational culture.

Transactional leaders only value the "give and take" relationship, and they are comfortable with this kind of organizational culture with no plan in changing or improving it.

Transforming leaders are not only moral exemplars but also could make a change through positive examples, motivational speech, and the leaders' personality traits. Transformational leadership in schools focuses on second-order changes and the support of changes instead of direct control and constant supervision(Yulianti et al., 2021).

The most favored Transformational school leader's theory is the model developed by Leithwood and his colleagues, which conceptualizes transformational school leadership into eight dimensions (Leithwood & Duke, 1998, p. 36).

This paper also examines the school culture influenced by transformational school leadership.

The school culture is the social indoctrination of unwritten rules; simply put, "how we do things around here," and it becomes part of the teachers and students when they try to fit in

the school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 19).

Because principals are at the center of building the school culture, and the culture manages the school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 29), so we need to analyze the school's mission, climates, routines, stories, heroes, values, and beliefs to understand what is the principals' leadership style.

**Table 2**

*Principal's Transformational Leadership Practices and the School Culture*

<b>Principals' Transformational Leadership Practices</b>	<b>School Culture</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a widely shared vision</li> <li>• Building consensus about school goals and priorities</li> <li>• Providing intellectual stimulation</li> <li>• Providing individualized support</li> <li>• Building collaborative structures</li> <li>• Demonstrating high performance expectation</li> <li>• Modeling behavior</li> <li>• Strengthening school culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission and vision</li> <li>• Climate</li> <li>• Routines, rituals</li> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Humor</li> <li>• Norms</li> <li>• Roles, heroes</li> <li>• Stories</li> <li>• Symbols</li> <li>• Values and beliefs</li> </ul>

Transformational leadership in schools focuses on second-order changes and the support of changes rather than direct control and constant supervision (Yulianti et al., 2021). Scholars believe that transformational school leaders can "travel across contexts" (Yu et al., 2002, p. 383), "positively affect the school climate and students' modernity development" (Wang, 2019, p. 339), "make the teacher feel substantial job satisfaction" (Kouni et al., 2018, p. 158),

and "significantly influence teachers' work motivation"(Lee & Kuo, 2019, p. 109).

It is also beneficial in encouraging school-based parental involvement if the principal is welcoming and supportive to parents because transformational school leadership values authentic relationship building, promoting communication, and empowering individual families (Yulianti et al., 2021).

However, Berkovich (2016, p. 617) warns us on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of transformational leadership theory that we need to “exchange theoretical beauty for empirical support,” and we need to “meaningfully fit transformational leadership theory to other theories in the field of educational administration” to better understand the unique arena of educational administration.

Next, I try to incorporate the school culture theory in understanding the leadership practices in this study.

#### *2.3.4 School Culture*

As mentioned beforehand, the culture manages the school. Similar to transformational leadership theory, I try to incorporate another popular idea, “Corporate Culture,” from organizational management into the school setting to examine the effects of school culture in the school in question.

“Corporate Culture” is an inclusive term ranging from corporate norms, values, and beliefs to the dress code, business hours, turnover rate, and office setup, with some things explicitly stated but mostly implicitly implied (Gorton et al., 2022). The *Harvard Business Review* identified six crucial components of successful corporate cultures (Coleman, 2013).

### **Table 3**

#### *Components of School Culture*

Components	Meaning in this study
<b>Vision</b>	The vision or mission statement that guides the school's value
<b>Values</b>	The mindsets or mentalities in achieving the school's vision
<b>Practices</b>	Tangible methods under the guidance of the school values
<b>People</b>	Recruiting the most suitable people to enhance the school culture
<b>Narrative</b>	A great origin story for the school's growth and public image
<b>Place</b>	The school layout and design impact the values and behaviors

Combining with the school culture theory proposed by Gruenert and Whitaker (2015, p. 29), I suggest that this study focuses on the following six aspects of observing, recording, and examining the school culture. This study pays special attention to the target school's visions, values, moral education practices, how people are recruited and treated, the narrative, and even the layout of the buildings.

## 2.4 Family

Unlike cognitive-developmentalists, Piaget, Kohlberg, Walker and Taylor (1991) suggests that parents play an influential role in children's moral formation. Children need a supportive discussion and interaction with parents, and the parents can display a higher level of moral reasoning. The lecturing style is the least effective, and the Socratic style of questioning could be effective and respectful to the children. The more caring and inspirational the interaction, the more fruitful the moral reasoning development of the children will be. However, research shows that Chinese mothers are much more caring and involved in teenagers' education than fathers; however, youths who enjoy more social time with fathers

have higher levels of general self-esteem, self-worth, and social competence (Lam et al., 2012). Mothers, especially educated mothers, could significantly increase the nutrition status of the children, mental health, test scores, college aspiration, and of course, higher adolescents' school enrollment and their generally positive attitude towards education (Cui et al., 2019).

#### *2.4.1 Gilligan's Stage of the Ethic of Care*

This study adopts Carol Gilligan's moral development theory to examine how parents care for their children. When she tries to find why a group of teenage boys is stuck in the third stage of Kohlberg's moral development stage, Gilligan works on women's moral development and outlines three stages in women's morality: pre-conventional level, conventional level, and post-conventional level (Gilligan, 1993, p. 74).

**Table 4**

#### *Gilligan's Stage of the Ethic of Care*

Stage	Goal
Preconventional	Individual survival
Transition is from selfishness to being responsible for others.	
Conventional	Self-sacrifice and caring for others
Transition is from goodness to truth that she is a person as well.	
Post-conventional	Principle of nonviolence: live in peace

Preconventional judgment is egocentric and intensely focused on survival and self-interest.

In the conventional stage, the good is equated with responsibilities and caring for others.



The third stage may never be reached because it follows the principle of nonviolence: taking care of oneself and others. Women need to transform themselves from feeling that self-sacrifice is goodness to believing the truth that she is a person too.

This model provides an excellent framework for understanding the parents' behavior in family education, particularly the mothers.

#### 2.4.2 Attachment Theory

Similar to Carol Gilligan's ethics of care, Attachment theory, firstly proposed by John Bowlby, stresses the significance of the relationship between caregivers and children in their moral development (Gilligan, 1993; Govrin, 2014). As the social intuitionist model emphasizes "Automaticity" and "Gut feeling," they believe moral development is a matter of emotion and intuition, starting from infancy, rather than abstraction and logical reasoning (Govrin, 2014; Greene & Haidt, 2002).

Based on Bowlby's concept of maternal care, Mary Ainsworth developed the Strange Situation Procedure and differentiated attachment qualities into three types: secure attachment, insecure-avoidant attachment, and insecure ambivalent/ resistant/ anxious attachment (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Mary Main added "insecure disorganized attachment" to the current four categories of attachment quality (Keller, 2018).

**Table 5**

*Attachment Types, Antecedents, and Effects*

Types of attachment	Quality of caregiving	Effects on the relationship
<i>Secure</i>	Sensitive, loving	Confident, reciprocal, resilient
<i>Insecure avoidant</i>	Insensitive, rejecting	Isolation, emotionally distant, self-reliant

<b><i>Insecure resistant</i></b>	Insensitive, inconsistent	Internal conflict, dramatic, unpredictable
<b><i>Insecure disorganized</i></b>	Atypical, atypical	Sensitive, Emotional hunger, turbulence

If the caregiver's response is insensitive, ignoring, irritated, and rejecting, infants will show minimum negative emotion and become increasingly isolated, emotionally unavailable, and self-reliant. If the caregiver is inconsistent and unpredictable, the infants suffer from overwhelmed distress and cope with extreme negative emotions to attract the caregiver's attention. Atypical parenting behaviors are frightening, sexualized, or dissociated, resulting from caregivers' unresolved mourning, emotional or sexual trauma, and domestic violence (Benoit, 2004, p. 542). These three attachment types increase the risk of developing social and emotional adjustment problems in children's future lives.

Sensitive and responsive care is crucial in fostering children's secure attachment with the principal attachment figure, mothers, or mother-like caregivers. If securely attached, the children are confident in exploring the environment and adapting to the physical and social world (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Keller & Bard, 2017). Securely attached children are believed to be able to show greater emotional understanding and empathy, better conscience development, and more prosocial behaviors (Laible et al., 2019, p. 24).

In the Chinese context, Li et al.(2020) find that mothers' anxious attachment and avoidance attachment is associated with poorer psychosocial adjustment, and secure attachment is beneficial to positive youth development, particularly psychosocial adjustment and self-control.

In a word, children's social and emotional development is determined by the security that care engenders in attachment theory. Emotion is considered an essential driving force in moral judgment in the social intuitionist model (Greene & Haidt, 2002). That's why this study also uses attachment theory to explain the connection between family education and

children's moral development.

Attachment theory, starting with the infant attachment style as the baseline, is increasingly used in research in preschool, adolescence, and even adulthood (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). However, it is criticized as “inconsistent with documented cultural variability,” so it doesn't have universality because it is developed by WEIRD people, western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (Keller, 2018).

To truly understand the effectiveness of parenting strategies, cultural beliefs, goals, and values of personhood in that culture need to be understood, which is usually embedded in the local cultural context and living conditions. By conducting an ethnographic study, talking with and listening to the local people, the researchers could obtain first-hand information and knowledge of the local culture, and it is considered “the best way” by many scholars (Keller, 2018; Keller & Bard, 2017; Morelli et al., 2018). This research uses an ethnographic case study to examine the localization of attachment theory in family moral education in China. By observing and communicating with the parents, the author aims to comprehend the quality of Chinese parents' parenting strategies in cultivating their children's moral development.

## **2.5 Teacher**

Moral education emphasizes the cognitive development of children's sense of right and wrong through role-play, moral dilemma discussions, and peer collaboration in a democratic classroom and school culture. To some extent, today's Chinese moral character education follows Durkheim's pedagogy: first, choosing moral authorities with desired personal characteristics and traits; then, asking children to practice prosocial conduct; and exposing more moral aspirations from history, literature, and culture.

However, Piaget and Durkheim agreed that moral behavior results from cognitive understanding and free will. Like many other scholars, they also agree that teaching morality

is to explain, not preach or indoctrinate (Durkheim, 2012; Hand, 2018; Jonas & Nakazawa, 2021; Piaget, 1970).

### 2.5.1 The Revised Bloom Taxonomy

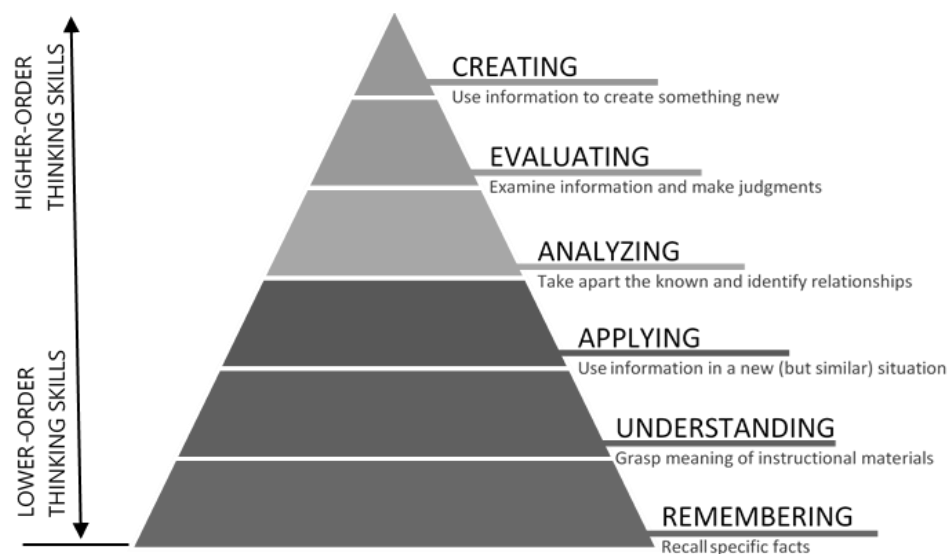
This study uses revised Bloom's Taxonomy to examine the effectiveness of moral teaching by teachers in the classroom. There are six levels in the cognitive domain. The first three levels involve only lower-order thinking skills: remembering (retrieving specific facts and knowledge), understanding (interpreting and summarizing ideas), and applying (using knowledge in a new situation). The higher-order thinking happens in the latter three stages: analyzing (dividing the known and identifying relationships), evaluating ( assessing and critiquing information), and creating (organizing information to create something new) (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Krathwohl, 2002).

### 2.5.2 Affective Learning

Bloom's taxonomy is expected to get cognitive outcomes from the teaching practices, while affective learning is expected to get affective outcomes from the teaching practices.

**Figure 6**

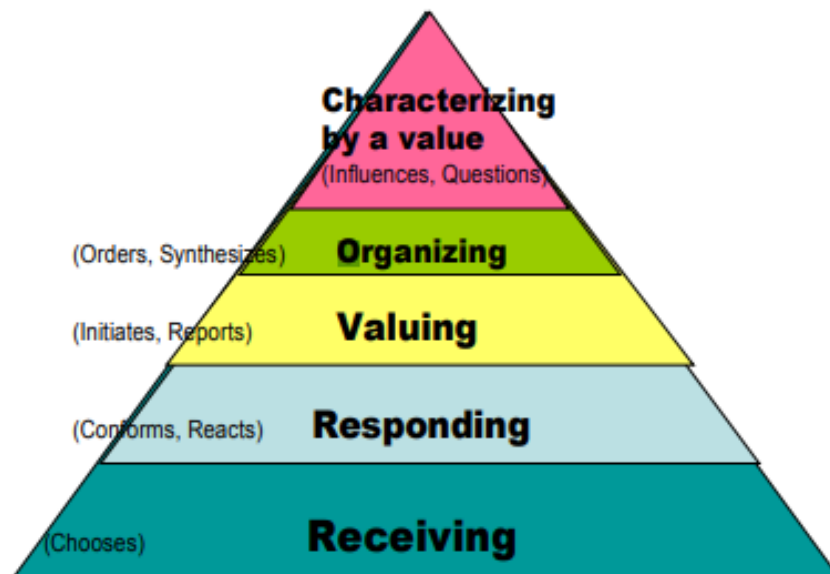
*The Revised Bloom Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002)*



In the first two stages, students need to listen and respond to the teacher's instruction. On the third level, students compare existing values or attitudes with the new material. On the fourth level, organizing, students begin conceptualizing and synthesizing their value system to add new affective learning outcomes. On the fifth level, the individual internalizes a comprehensive set of values and displays a daily commitment to a principled practice, which is the highest element of Krathwohl's taxonomy of affective learning (Allen & Friedman, 2010; Buissink-Smith et al., 2011).

**Figure 7**

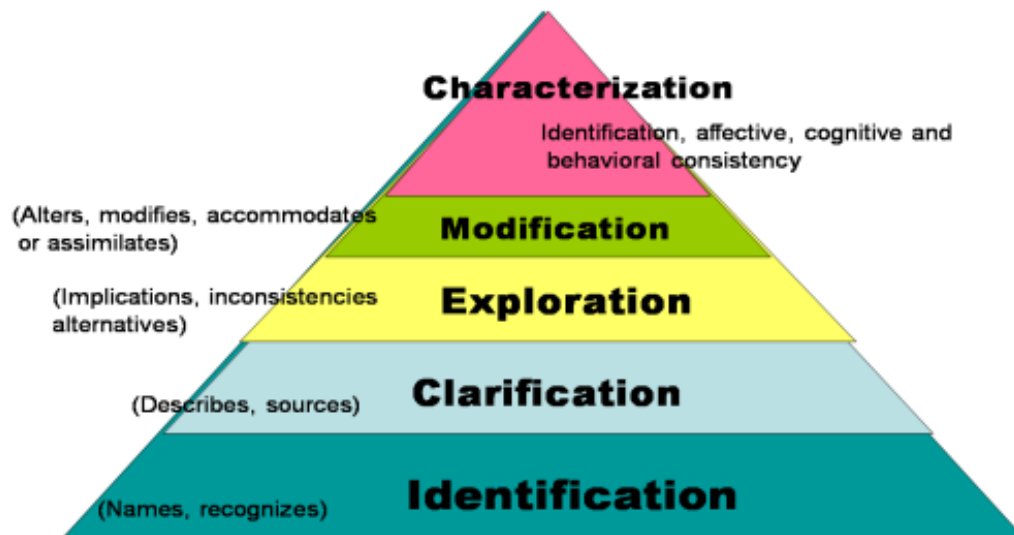
*Krathwohl's Taxonomy of Affective Learning*



Because this study focuses on understanding the teaching strategies for helping students move up the hierarchy, which is not clearly suggested in Krathwohl's model, I chose Neuman's taxonomy of affective learning to evaluate teachers' effort to maintain students' attention and motivation.

**Figure 8**

*Neuman's Taxonomy of Affective Learning*



On the first level, the teachers need to help students identify and name their existing beliefs or values. On the second level, teachers need to provide descriptions and material to the students to help them clarify their feelings and values. On the third level, teachers need to help students to explore their views and possible alternatives for them to choose by putting them into groups. Students modify or alter their beliefs and values on level four to accommodate their belief system after group discussion (Neuman & Friedman, 2008). On the fifth level, students characterize themselves with affective, cognitive, and behavioral consistency due to internalizing certain moral beliefs and maturity (Allen & Friedman, 2010).

## **2.6 Society**

Piaget (1970) believes children's brains actively construct thought, knowledge, and action. Because of "the child as a moral philosopher," moral authorities' push for moral reasoning imprisoned children's autonomous maturity. It is much more valuable than heteronomous morality imposed by moral authorities, which, in contrast, is valued in Durkheim's cultural

socialization approach (Durkheim, 2012). Durkheim holds that moral character formation is about learning the social norms, social solidarity, peer support, and group conformity.

Moral education focuses on the direct teaching and helping in children's moral formation through role modeling and behavioral reinforcement by the teacher, parent, relatives, and other moral exemplars. Youngsters need constant and systematic exposure to society's cultural heritage to autonomously construct a sense of social identity. Here they know all the different consequences of other behavior, but they still choose to comply with one's duty and society.

### *2.6.1 Lickona's Comprehensive Approach*

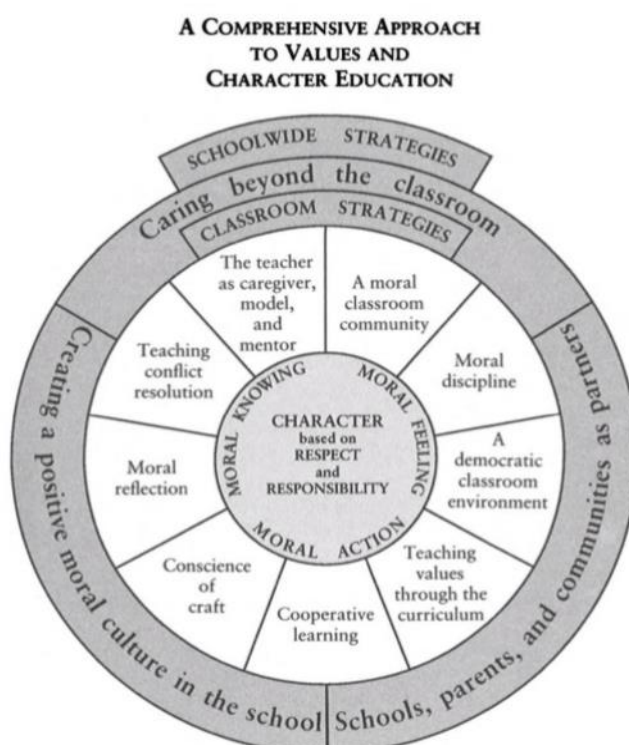
Since the 1960s, Western scholars have started to emphasize student-centered learning, experiential learning, cooperative learning, and neutrality in moral education. James Arthur (2002) added that character education could not be equalized with behavior control, discipline, or indoctrination. Children should be allowed to participate in behavioral changes actively and form certain kinds of characters consciously.

Berkowitz and Bier (2007) identified moral education needs to be integrated into the academic curriculum, implemented by professionals, and taught directly with peer interactions and family and community involvement.

Thomas Lickona once said, "practice what you preach, but don't forget to preach what you practice." Lickona (2009) integrates the moral education ideas and proposes a comprehensive approach that calls upon the teachers to act as caregivers, models, and mentors, create a democratic classroom environment with cooperative learning, encourage moral reflection, and practice moral discipline.

**Figure 9**

*Lickona's Comprehensive Approach*



This study adopts this approach to evaluate the teacher's behavior in teaching values in the classroom in moral education and other academic classes. This approach also examines the school culture: "a positive moral culture in school supports and amplifies the values taught in classrooms" (Lickona, 2009, p. 69).

### 2.6.2 Model of Moral Identity

Hart constructs five factors that influence children's moral identity formation: (1) enduring dispositional characteristics; (2) enduring social and cultural characteristics; (3) moral judgment and attitudes; (4) commitment to ideals; (5) opportunities for moral action (Matsuba et al., 2011, p. 188).

Since children cannot choose their family, location, neighborhood, community, and culture, they must match their personality dispositions and the contextual development environment.

Hart implies an ecological system offers plasticity in children's moral formation (Hart &

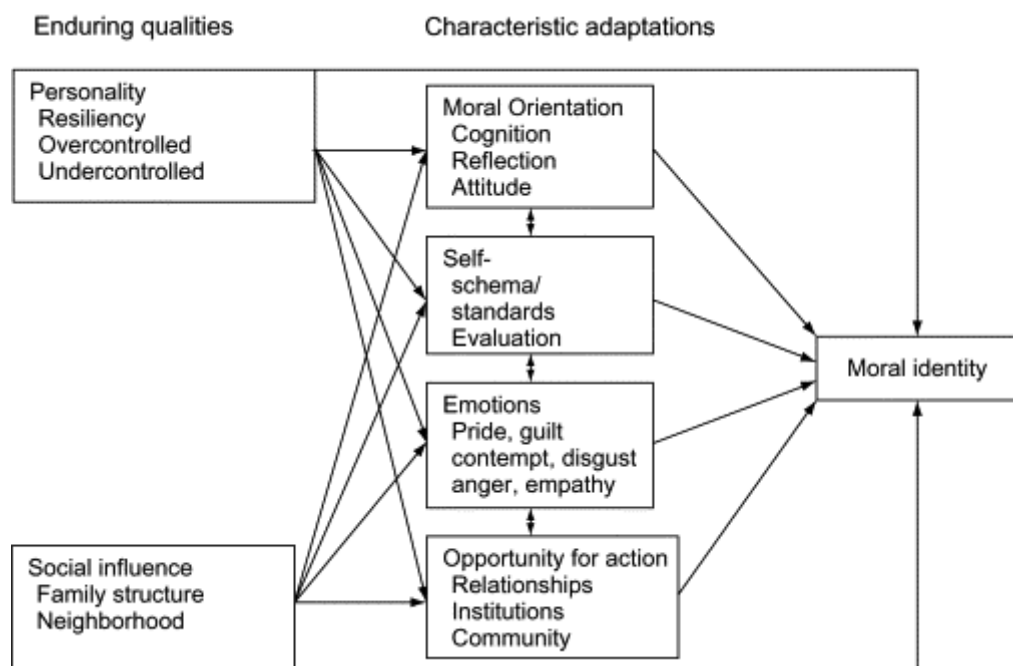


Carlo, 2005). Children should be given opportunities for moral action like service learning and voluntary community service. The concern for civic engagement and charity to others makes moral education more relevant to policymakers and the public. Doing voluntary community service, even for nonmoral reasons, positively affects children's moral beliefs and sense of self (Hart & Carlo, 2005, p. 227).

Pratt and his colleagues (Pratt et al., 2003) conducted a longitudinal study to showcase the power of community involvement. Active community involvement produces endorsement of a moral self-ideal, a person of six qualities, trustworthy, just, care, fair, good citizen, and integrity. It suggests that the change of behavior here means greater community involvement leads to the greater prominence of prosocial and moral values (Pratt et al., 2003, p. 579).

**Figure 10**

*Model of Moral Identity (Matsuba et al., 2011)*



Based on Hart's model of moral identity, this study pays close attention to the formation of students' moral identity in relation to whether they are actively engaging in social activities and community involvement.

## Chapter Three Research Methodology

### 3.1 Ethnographic Case Study (ECS)

Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, “What people say, what people do, and what people say they do are entirely different things” (Wood, 2022). Originating from anthropology, ethnography is essentially a qualitative research method in which the ethnographer enters a new environment and observes people’s daily lives overtly and covertly to collect data for an extended period. Instead of testing hypotheses, it is strongly focused on “exploring the nature of particular social phenomena...with unstructured data...in the investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case”(Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 248)

The ethnographic case study (ECS) is defined as “prolonged observation over time in a natural setting within a bounded system (Angers & Machtmes, 2005, p. 777), similar to Creswell’s delineation of Ethnography and Case study. Ethnography studies a social group or entire social or cultural system through prolonged observation and participation to get a holistic portrait of a group or system, while a case study investigates a bounded system to provide an in-depth analysis of an issue through multiple sources, including documents, interviews, observation, and surveys (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The first principle is “the nonobvious.” The researcher enters the new environment and observes the people’s daily lives with an insider’s point of view. The researcher also analyzes the collected data with an outsider’s point of view to make sense of the environment (Murchison, 2010). I will enter the school as a *Morality and Law Basis* teacher to investigate how moral education is carried out in this school to get an emic analysis. Meanwhile, as a doctoral student, I need to examine the whole process with an etic perspective.

The second principle is “thick description.” A thin description only reports facts, while a thick

description showcases the context of the ethnographer's experience and makes sense of the purposes and intonations of strange experiences new to the ethnographer. In this research, I will report the daily routine and the teaching material in detail. Meanwhile, more words are dedicated to analyzing my experience as a morality teacher and my interactions with colleagues and school leaders. I will start an observational journal to record the experience from my end, class observation notes, and several formal and informal interviews with each participant to enrich the thick description of my experience.

Researchers hold a certain amount of preconception when entering a new environment, so it is crucial for the researcher to verify and develop theories with first-hand empirical data. The third principle I will follow is "the development of theories." I have six years of college English teaching experience in a third-tier university in China, where I began to question the moral character formulation of my students in middle school. Some students are unmotivated in class and sometimes even very disrespectful to teachers. I wonder what is going on in middle school nowadays. I was once a middle school student 20 years ago in a rural area where moral education is not highly valued as the academic education. This research will rectify my assumptions about how moral education is being carried out and the ideology behind every decision made by the school leaders to develop my understanding.

However, I need to be extremely careful not to be a Utopian. It is about gaining knowledge of moral education and about the moral development of the children. The data and the theory need to be grounded in reality and not influenced by my personal bias and personal wishful thinking. After all, "Utopian attempts to do politics by means of research are of no service to anyone"(Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 254).

### **3.2 Research Context**

The proposed research will be conducted in P school (pseudonym of the middle school under

discussion) in Nanshan district in Shenzhen, one city of the Greater Bay Area. The school's staff totals 165, of which 75 are masters, more than 45%, average aged at 31. The school opened in September 2019 and covered an area of 2.84 hectares and a floor space of 35,600 square meters. It is known as the 5G school in China and the “model of future school in China.”

### 3.3 Participants

I will invite a total of 18 teachers in the school to be the participants in the semi-structured interview: 11 teachers from different subjects, geography, Chinese, English, History, Math, physics, and of course, Morality and Law Basis (MLB), two psychology teachers working as student consultants, two middle leaders in the school, and the headmaster of the school. Eight of them serve as headteachers of their classes and are generally considered more responsible for the moral education of the students. Here is some detailed information for each participant.

**Table 6**

*Detailed Information for Each Participant*

Name	Age	Gender	Subject	Experience	Positions
Participant 1 Alton	40	Male	Mathematics	15 years	Middle leader
Participant 2 Brian	35	Male	Geography	11 years	Headteacher
Participant 3 Casey	23	Female	MLB	1 year	Headteacher
Participant 4 Debbie	22	Female	MLB	1.5 years	Vice headteacher
Participant 5 Eva	32	Female	MLB	10 years	Middle leader

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Participant 6 Frankie	26	Male	Mathematics	2.5 years	Headteacher
Participant 7 Gabby	26	Female	Chinese	4 years	Headteacher
Participant 8 Hana	25	Female	Chinese	3 years	Headteacher
Participant 9 Irene	23	Female	Physics	1 year	Headteacher
Participant 10 Jager	28	Male	P.E.	5 years	Subject teacher
Participant 11 Kamila	29	Female	Psychology	3 years	Consultant
Participant 12 Leon	28	Male	English	2 years	Subject teacher
Participant 13 Mandy	28	Female	Chinese	6 years	Vice headteacher
Participant 14 Nicky	48	Female	Physics	25 years	Middle leader
Participant 15 Olivia	30	Female	History	8 years	Headteacher
Participant 16 Percy	30	Male	MLB	8 years	Headteacher
Participant 17 Quinn	28	Male	Psychology	3 years	Consultant
Participant 18 Raven	49	Female	Chinese	24 years	Headmaster

---

I worked with them for two years, and we have developed close relationships so they can talk about the moral education in the school frankly and without holding back their genuine attitude. In an ethnographic study, relations and emotions are critical to interpreting the whole experience (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). The participants are spreading out in the school structure, so they are more likely to approach moral education from different perspectives at different levels.

### 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

#### 3.4.1 Participant observation

The first source of data comes from my observational notes and reflective notes, in which I will record the details of what I encountered every day, especially the note-worthy events and the reflection after the events. I will record the activities as a reference to see what I might miss from that day and add the missing details in the observational notes. In each observational template, I try to describe the event from the following dimensions, including space, actors, activity, object, act, event, time, goals, and emotional feelings (Reeves et al., 2013).

**Table 7**

*Dimensions of Observation*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>
<b>Space</b>	The physical layout of the place(s)
<b>Actor</b>	Range of people involved
<b>Activity</b>	A set of related activities that occur
<b>Object</b>	The physical things that are present
<b>Act</b>	Single actions people undertake
<b>Event</b>	Activities that people carry out
<b>Time</b>	The sequencing of events that occur
<b>Goal</b>	Things that people are trying to accomplish
<b>Feeling</b>	Emotions felt and expressed

The second source of data is from the conversations with the parents and the teachers. When we are doing family visits or when the parents are invited to the school, the main ideas will be recorded and analyzed in my field notes. For interviews with teachers, there will be

recording, transcribing, and member checking before data analysis.

The third source of data will be various reports on the school from media, WeChat public accounts, and other documents I collected during the research. From government-issued policies and regulations to school syllabus, exam papers, and teaching materials. This will give me a holistic and concrete picture of the reality of moral education in middle schools. It is also valuable for data triangulation in data analysis and the final discussion.

### 3.4.2 Semi-structured interview

The interview protocols cover participants' perception of personal knowledge of moral education to their attitudes and emotion toward the school's moral education activities. According to the literature review of the family education, school culture, and teaching models, I proposed 14 questions related to implementing moral education in this school.

**Table 8**

*Interview Protocols*

<b>Teaching</b>	1. What are your academic and moral education responsibilities? 2. Is your subject related to moral education? 3. Have you ever received any help in conducting moral education?
<b>Students</b>	4. Did you ever encounter any moral misconduct of the students? 5. How did you deal with it? 6. Why did you choose to deal with it like that?
<b>Family</b>	7. How do parents affect the success of school moral education? 8. Are these effects controllable, and how?
<b>School</b>	9. Who takes up the most responsibilities for moral education in our school? 10. What are your comments on the moral education activities in our school?

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<b>Society</b>	11. What is the influence of the pandemic on moral education?
	12. What is the perfect moral education model in your mind?
	13. What is your metaphor for the relationship between students, teachers, parents, school, and society?
	14. Is there anything special about carrying out moral education in Shenzhen?

---

### 3.4.3 Data analysis

To identify themes, analyze, and report patterns immersed from the data, the thematic analysis will be adopted to understand the participants' perceptions of moral education in this middle school. The researcher will follow the thematic analysis process to capture the nuance in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012).

**Table 9**

*Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87)*

Phase	Process
1. Familiarizing with the data	Transcribing, reading, and familiarizing myself with the data.
2. Generating original codes	Coding the data systematically
3. Group codes into Themes	Collating relevant codes into themes
4. Generate a thematic map	Checking the relevance of the themes and creating a thematic map for data analysis
5. Refine the themes	Refining the name and definition of each theme
6. Report the findings	Selecting the compelling excerpts to support the thematic map and connecting the analysis to the research questions and literature review.

All the transcriptions will be imported to MAXQDA 2020 to be coded and formed into



themes and patterns. I will first familiarize myself with the data and generate initial codes. After collating codes into possible themes, I will work on a code map and name them. In the final report of the themes, some compelling extract examples will be compared and connected to the research questions and literature review.

### 3.5 Research Credibility

Validity and reliability are of great significance to any research. According to the validity procedures (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126), as follows, several methods are adopted to ensure the credibility of the current study.

**Figure 11**

*Validity Procedures within Qualitative Lens*

<b>Paradigm assumption/Lens</b>	<b>Postpositivist or systematic paradigm</b>	<b>Constructivist paradigm</b>	<b>Critical paradigm</b>
<i>Lens of the researcher</i>	Triangulation	Disconfirming evidence	Researcher reflexivity
<i>Lens of study participants</i>	Member checking	Prolonged engagement	Collaboration
<i>Lens of people external to the study: readers, reviewers</i>	The audit trail	Thick, rich description	Peer debriefing

I pay close attention to the following three methods in ensuring the research validity.

Triangulation: Triangulation of document analysis, observational notes, and interviews will be used to validate the data collected in the study.

Member checking: After the interview, the participants will be asked to double-check and comment on the written transcription and interpretation of the interview. The supervisor's feedback will serve as the audit trail as people external to the study.

Intercoder reliability: I applied a Chinese Society for Tao Xingzhi Studies research project. Two other research team members and I are responsible for reading the transcripts, reducing data to codes, comparing similarities and differences, and combining codes into themes. The whole process consists of backward and forward data assessment to verify and modify the themes.

The researcher will take reflective notes as well to ensure the researcher's reflexivity. Davis stated that the credibility of qualitative research is hard to ensure but can be enhanced through "persistent observation," "prolonged engagement," and "triangulation"(Davis & Hadiks, 1995). I decided to spend two years on this research, four semesters. The study has been conducted for two years, a prolonged engagement to ensure the researcher understands the school under investigation. Repeated observation and thick, rich descriptions have also been employed to improve the validity of the qualitative research.

The interview data and the data analysis process will be described as detailed as possible to depict a more faithful rendition of the researcher's and the participants' lived experiences.

The primary purpose of detailed descriptions is to allow other researchers and readers to "assess the quality of the findings and check for logical and empirically supported claims"(Cheung & Tai, 2021, p. 4).

## Chapter Four Data Analysis and Findings

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, data from this research came from multiple sources, filed notes, interviews, teaching materials, meeting audio files, reports online, speeches, PowerPoint files, casual conversations, and family visits reports. The data analysis process tries to incorporate as much information as possible, and thick descriptions will be adopted at each point, all with the intention of presenting an unbiased interpretation of reality as closely as possible. However, as an ethnographic study, lots of emotions of that time are also kept, indicating the untold and unofficial residue of each event.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 159) advise researchers to downsize and interpret the empirical data with “creative insight and careful attention to the research purpose.” Thus, I only use the documents closely related to my research question, and it is meaningless to interpret all the vast amount of data besides two primary data sources, the field notes and interview data.

Some of the data analysis actually began with the taking of field notes. As a newcomer to the setting of moral education in middle schools, I have to make sense of what’s going on in the new environment; even most often than not, the initial analysis is heavily biased and naive. Still, they are included in this chapter to show the gradual understanding and unfolding of the reality of moral education. It is fair to say that data analysis of this study happens throughout the research project and works like a spiral drill with newer understandings of the myth of what happens in moral education in GBA middle schools, spiraling down deeper and deeper. The writing of the data analysis and findings uses a narrative form. It has two advantages: firstly, it allows me to situate myself quickly in the study, and secondly, it brings an immersive reading experience for the readers. Readers can have a better understanding of the events and the emotions from a participant’s perspective.

Of course, there is a timeline in the ethnographic study. However, the findings in this chapter

are not arranged in chronological order. If so, it is difficult for the theme to surface from the data, and without logical understanding, it is simply a day-to-day account of daily anecdotes. According to the field notes, the following timeline of significant events is provided for clarity.

**First Semester** (Sep. 2019- Jan. 2020): I participated in the teaching competition as a Morality and Law Basis teacher and won the first prize. I have a very different class design and get a good reputation from other Morality and Law Basis teachers.

**Second Semester** (Mar. 2020- July 2020): I got a taste of what is the P school's characteristics. I make more than 50 family visits that semester. I witnessed the unfair treatment of temporary teachers and the permanent teachers firsthand and the economic gap between students.

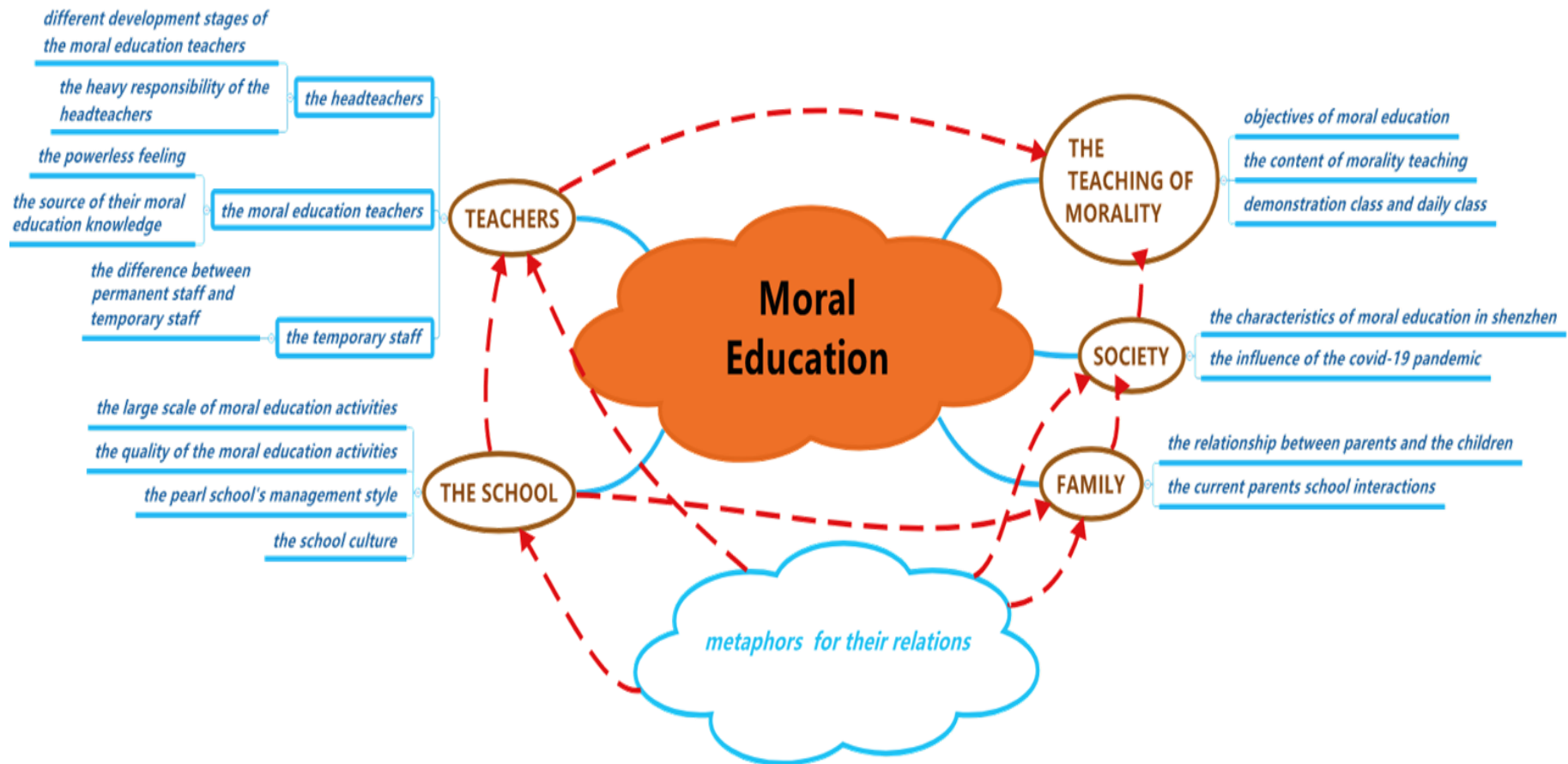
**Third Semester** (Sep 2020- Jan. 2021): I witnessed a fight between a PE teacher and a student. The middle leaders dealt with this issue unfairly, leaving me with a negative impression of the middle leaders.

**Fourth Semester** (Mar 2021- July 2021): I took up an administrative role in the school, and I have a closer relationship with the middle leaders and realize that the principal is not implementing her transformational leader's role successfully.

After the analysis of the interview transcription in Maxqda, 16 themes surfaced from the data: Moral education objectives, Perfect moral education model, Metaphor for moral education stakeholders, Source of teachers' moral knowledge, Moral education with Shenzhen's characteristics, The school's roles in moral education, Impact of the Covid-19 epidemic, The influence of the Internet, Society's influence on children, The headteacher in charge of everything, the roles of the subject teachers, Teachers' professional development, The content of morality teaching, Dealing with children's behavior, Effect of family education, Teachers' role in family education.

**Figure 12**

*The Thematic Map*



The themes map is subsequently constructed, as shown in Figure 13 on the previous page.

## **4.1 The Teaching of Morality**

This part centers on the teaching of “Morality and Law Basis” and interdisciplinary teaching of morality in other subjects like Chinese, Math, English, Physics, History, and Geography.

### *4.1.1 The objective of morality teaching*

Every teacher is supposed to have a copy of the 2011 version of the Curriculum Standard of Morality and Characters, but I didn’t get one until I went to the new school to get my textbook for online classes in March 2020. In 2022, the MOE put forward the latest version of Curriculum Standard for Morality and Law Basis, with a special message from President Xi Jinping on being ambitious, competent, and responsible successors for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The Standard states clearly that the objectives of the Morality and Law Basis class is based on the 12 Chinese socialism core values, and it aims to promote the formation and development of students’ right value and morality, encouraging students to be the socialist successors with lofty socialism ideals and good morality, cultured and self-disciplined.

In terms of emotions, attitudes, and values, students are encouraged to feel the preciousness of life and form an optimistic and purposeful life attitude; agree to the coexistence of humans with nature; love the earth and the resources, and show respect to parents and peers, be faithful, be responsible, and be helpful to others; love science, love teamwork, love laboring, and love creativity; establish a sense of rules and law and enhance civic awareness; love the people, love the country, and love socialism; identify oneself with the Chinese culture and history and carry forward the national spirit; develop global awareness and international vision and love peace.

For ability, students are required to be able to learn to control their emotions; know how to

protect the environment; learn how to communicate and participate in public social service; learn how to collect, process, and apply information to adapt to the information society; learn to make proper moral judgments and the choices in the complicated social life; learn to use the law to protect one's, others, and the nation's legitimate right.

For knowledge, the youngsters need to know the basic principles of mental and physical development; understand the relationship between individual and social environment; understand the biological and the environmental problem that human beings are facing currently; master the basic knowledge of environmental protection; know the basic knowledge of laws and regulations; know the fundamental realities of the country and have a basic grasp of the trends of world development (MOE, 2022).

#### 4.1.1.1 Teachers who don't know

I thought that the ability objective should come first because we want to say some actual change in students' behavior. It was not until one senior morality teacher went in that I knew the correct order of the objectives in designing a teaching plan for Morality and Law Basis. I didn't know about the objective until the second semester. I do need to prepare lessons in the first semester. Whenever that happens, I would use the teaching plan that I could download online or the reference book containing each lesson's objectives. The main focus is all on the class design and how to design classroom activities to grab students' attention.

##### *Excerpt 1*

*I have a hot debate with the Chinese teacher over the objectives of the teaching plan. He said that the knowledge objective should come first, and the Ability objectives should go second, under the objectives for emotion, attitude, and values should come last. She said in this class, nothing is more critical than arousing students' passion for our country and positive approval of the socialist governance. It is very different from any other subject; only in this class do we need to put the objectives of emotion, attitude, and values as the*

*top priority. (Field notes, 2020.4.2)*

It means that because the objectives are pre-determined and cannot be altered, they must be the same in different versions of the teaching plan online or from the reference book.

Gradually, the teachers start to take it for granted and are used to its existence without thinking about or even noticing them. Other teachers also said that they have a general picture of what it is. It is always the exact keywords, like socialism, collectivism, and respect for the parents and teachers. It has been so long, and they cannot remember the exact words.

*Excerpt 2*

*I know First of all, there is the national level. The big goal is to be patriotic. If it is for a smaller local area, such as the Greater Bay Area, as we did in Qianhai, it must involve some local moral education. In addition to the love of the motherland, there is a closer place to love, the love of hometown. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

All teachers have a basic understanding of the objectives and notice the different interpretations at the municipal and school levels. The notions of being patriotic (Excerpt 2) and working for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Excerpt 3) have interiorized in every teacher's heart. They had learned about it when they were undergraduate students and graduate students repeatedly. They have a clear understanding that they need to have faith in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

*Excerpt 3*

*I know that the objectives of socialism in China are to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and communism is the ideal model of a harmonious society. As for the objectives of moral education in this school, it should be the headmaster's decision. I have worked in different schools, and they always have other moral education objectives. I pay attention to those objectives more because they affect my adaptation process. (Nicky, Interview 14, 2021.7.12)*



We learn about ideology and morality throughout our entire study career, even years after graduation. We all have the general idea of the objectives in socialist China, even sometimes unable to use the correct political jargon. Chinese people are very practical, so they started to pay attention to the immediate regulations that have direct power over their life.

It is not appropriate to say that some teachers don't know about the objectives of morality teaching. Instead, every teacher in China has learned and been tested so well that the goals of moral education are rooted deeply in their heart. Without further looking, they are very available whenever they are in need, just like what I mentioned in my field notes.

There is a board saying the core values of Chinese socialism in every class, every office, and on everyone's computer screen saver and wallpaper. It includes the national values of "prosperity," "democracy," "civility," and "harmony"; the social values of "freedom," "equality," "justice," and the "rule of law"; and the individual values of "patriotism," "dedication," "integrity," and "friendliness."

#### *Excerpt 4*

*"This morning some guy and the vice principal came to our office to test each teacher to memorize the core values. I cannot believe I have been tested again as an adult. The students are also being tested outside randomly. I asked my colleagues who they were, and they told me they belonged to the office which is in charge of "building a civilized city" in Shenzhen. (Filed notes, 2019.10.12)*

If a city gets elected as a civilized city, then everyone working in the state-owned organizations will get a 600 RMB subsidy every month. Some teachers peeked at their computer wallpaper to pass the test. Some teachers did know every word, and most students recited it fluently. Before the arrival of the examiners from "Building the civilized city office," we had a meeting on the significance of passing the test. Nobody wants to be blamed for losing everyone's subsidy.

The first school has a school motto of “science, creativity, enhancement,” and the P school’s motto goes like “nurturing with love, learning to be a responsible adult.” I know immediately these two schools are pretty different. I participated in several teaching competitions in the first school and spent much more time with the students in the second school. The results proved that my initial adaptation strategies were on the right path in seeing the two different school mottos. Clearly, the first school values competition and advancement, and the second school wants the teacher to show some love towards the students.

Simply put, everyone has a general idea regarding the objectives of morality teaching. They are more concerned with more practical issues, such as getting a subsidy, adapting to a new environment, and designing classroom activities.

#### 4.1.1.2 Teachers who don’t agree

When asked about what the objectives of morality teaching in GBA should be, one participant shouted, “Less is more.”

##### *Excerpt 5*

*There are so many objectives for the students to achieve, and so many regulations for the students to obey. Everyone has goals for the students to achieve. Less is more.” (Quinn, Interview 17, 2021.7.20)*

He continued to say that “innocence should be the nature of the children.” He believes that students nowadays are under too much pressure in learning. At the same time, the Internet is offering mixed information. It is of no use to fight for students’ attention by setting up different objectives on every level, state level, school level, and family level. It is too much for the children, and less is more in children’s moral development.

Another teacher believes that there should not be a goal in moral education. He believes that everyone has his value. Students should be entitled to have different dreams and career choices, just like some people want to be an astronaut, some want to be a scientist, some want

to be a doctor, or become a worker. Nobody is qualified to judge whether one dream is better than another dream.

*Excerpt 6*

*Some people want to drop out of school as a fertilizer for society, not the cheery on the top. Fertilizer is also a contribution. If the world were that harmonious, everyone would be very happy. It's not a very happy society. Even in pantisocracy, I do not think it is very happy, it's an ideal state, but it loses its color if it contains the same species. Say Mosquito, people hate them so much, should they disappear? (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

He is an idealist and romantic teacher. He is very liberal in his teaching, and he has the best relationship with the students. From his social media pictures, WeChat Friend Zone, I can see that he treats students as friends. They are having dinner together, cooking in his apartment, walking in the playground, and laughing. He sees students as who they are, so he doesn't want to put an objective on what they will become in the future, which is why he proposed that *"the goal of moral education is to have no goal at all."*

Other teachers share similar thoughts and believe children need to develop freely. There shouldn't be such a thing as morality teaching but morality coaching. That is, although we found him on this bad or wrong road, we don't give them immediate solutions but give them the guiding ideology, let him find, and let him reflect.

*Excerpt 7*

*I started to think about this matter when I had my kids. Or, when he has taken a detour, give him proper guidance in thought, and let him grope in the dark. So, I think we do not need objectives of moral education. We just need to coach. We need kids to develop more freely because that's how you get all kinds of people, not the same people. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

As a mother of two, she believes there shouldn't be a set of objectives that fit everyone. She knows how different her two children are, so moral education's objectives shouldn't be predetermined because students learn better by making mistakes themselves, and we need to give them appropriate and individualized help like one-on-one coaching for an athlete. Because each child is different, we can't set him a big direction, or a big goal early in life, let the children develop freely first, and then see him going on the road he chooses. Another teacher goes further with this point. She said that free exploration makes it easier for students to reach the highest moral status of finding the truth, goodness, and beauty.

*Excerpt 8*

*Amongst the truth, goodness, and beauty, truth is in the first place. Because if you are given a task to solve this problem, you will only be able to be expected to find the right answer. (Nicky, Interview 14, 2021.7.12)*

Other teachers are concerned about the mental health of the students. Students should have a healthy and positive mental status to even starting to consider taking in moral education.

*Excerpt 9*

*Moral education? First of all, I think he must be mentally sound. It's about his happiness, his life, his well-being, and his future schedule. If it's all very healthy, it's positive, and there's no addictive behavior, no aggressive behavior, you know, that's what matters the most. (Kamila, Interview 11, 2021.7.11)*

She later explained that students with mental illness always left a deep impression on her during her teaching career. For her, the majority of the students turn out to be useful to society and more or less successful. She is scared to hear from students with mental issues. She concluded that it broke her heart seeing some of them become social outcasts after graduation.

Other teachers extended this concern from mental illness to mental and physical health.

### *Excerpt 10*

*I think moral education is to train us to be healthy people first, then extend to yourself, your place in this society, and your relationship with the community. (Percy, Interview 16, 2021.7.18)*

Although he teaches Morality and Law Basis, he is also a part-time football referee, marathon runner, and a great swimmer. He benefits a lot from leading a healthy lifestyle. So, to him, students must achieve physical well-being before they could achieve mental well-being. You cannot expect the students always to think positively while they are suffering from certain diseases all the time. After that, students have the chance to enter society as a healthy adult. A pattern emerges from these teachers' perspectives. Teachers have deep-going one-sided disagreements regarding the predetermined objectives of moral education. These opinions are profound because they are the results from keenly felt pains and struggles.

#### *4.1.2 The content of morality teaching*

The content of morality teaching is also clearly depicted in the 2011 curriculum standard issued by MOE. It is divided into three parts, Part one growing up, Part two getting along with others and communities, and Part 3 identifying with Chinese society and culture.

In part one growing up, firstly, students need to be able to embrace their physical changes in puberty and learn how to deal with stress and anxiety. Secondly, students need to understand the uniqueness of life and cherish one's life, love themselves and others, make a clear distinction between right and wrong, and know how to save themselves and dangerous situations. Thirdly, students need to know the special protections law provides for teenagers and understand the consequences of violating the law and the regulations.

In Part 2 getting along with others and communities, firstly, students need to know the negative effect of psychological lock-down in puberty and learn to understand and communicate equally with parents, the elderly, authorities, and teachers. Secondly, students

need to learn to tolerate, respect, and help others in class and in school, understand the relations of competition and cooperation; more importantly, do not bully others and do not discriminate against others because of their family situation, body type, intelligence, or gender differences. Thirdly, students need to learn the basic knowledge of the constitution and understand the citizens' legitimate rights and obligations like receiving education and serving in the army. Students need to know the multiple roles as citizens and learn to protect themselves by using the law as a weapon.

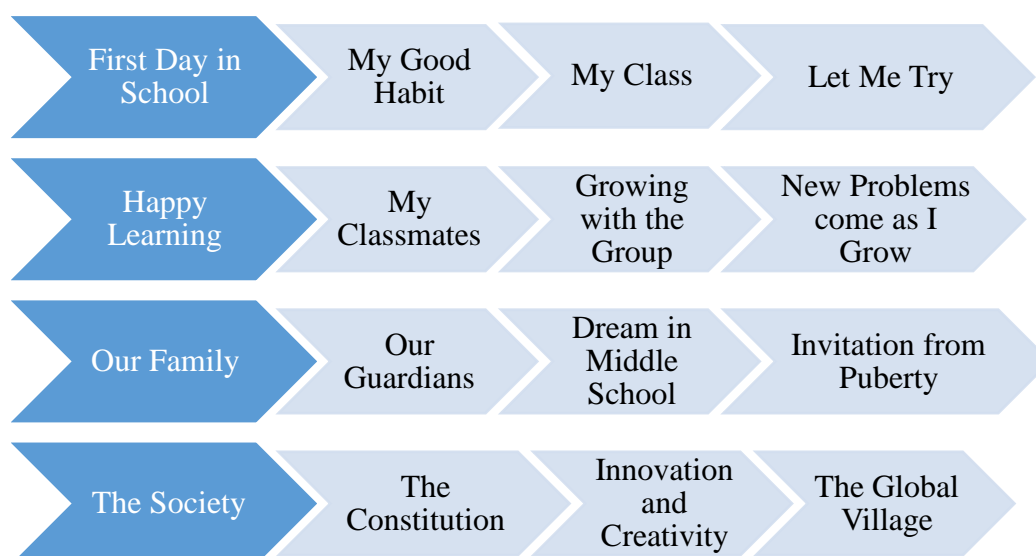
In Part 3 identifying with Chinese society and culture, students needed to know their basic social responsibilities and use the Internet responsibly; develop a Chinese cultural and historical identity; feel the pride and cohesiveness of the Chinese nation. Secondly, students need to know the general policies on China's technology, education, environment, resources, minority ethnic groups, and birth control. Students need to learn more traditional Chinese culture and respect other nationalities and countries. The student also needs to learn about China's position and function in the world geopolitics and contribute to world peace and progress. Thirdly, students need to know the basics of the constitution, know environmental protection, and safeguard the national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

#### 4.1.2.1 The content of Morality and Law Basis

The set of 18 books of Morality and Law Basis is written by a group of professional Chinese moral education experts like Desheng Gao from East China normal university and Jie Lu, Xiaoman Zhu, Le Zhang, and Yan Tang from Nanjing Normal university. They believe that because the students are continually growing physically and mentally, the textbooks and curriculums should also be evolving and be represented in the logic of children's life (Gao et al., 2021c, p. 17). They have done a splendid job in arranging appropriate content in each unit. We can get a clear, logical connection by reading the titles of unit ones in each textbook.

**Figure 13**

*The Logical Progression in the Morality and Law Basis Textbook*



As we can see, the content is evolving around children's physical and cognitive growth. It begins with knowing oneself to knowing the groups, family, and society. In grade 8 and grade 9, they start to talk about politics like the constitution, the importance of innovation and creativity in the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and last, the relationship between China and the rest of the world.

However, within some units, there is an internal logical contradiction, as shown in the following interview. It seems like one unit is trying to enhance gender stereotypes and eliminate gender stereotypes at the same time.

*Excerpt 11*

*For example, one lesson titled the Boys and Girls in Grade 7 Morality and Law Basis textbook talks about gender stereotypes. The problem is how it mentions gender stereotypes. It spoke of the differences between boys and girls in the first part, then focused on telling the stereotypes. (Percy, Interview 16, 2021.7.18)*

This unit is trying to persuade students to stop stereotyping the other gender, but they spend a lot of time on the differences between boys and girls. On the one hand, it aims to help the students eliminate the stereotypes, but on the other hand, it repeatedly emphasizes what boys

should be and what girls should be.

When this happens, the teacher could actually use this as a learning opportunity and start to initiate an open discussion on how to treat gender stereotypes morally.

*Excerpt 12*

*So, we teachers also need to help students update this concept. They cannot be completely obedient, for books cannot be the only authority, nor the teacher. We should pursue the truth by engaging in intellectual and open-minded classroom discussion.*

*(Casey, Interview 3, 2021.7.9)*

It means that some teachers use this textbook not only as a framework but also as a starting point. This is an internal logical contradiction; thus, it makes students so confused. Teachers think that not only the content but also the attitude towards the content could benefit students' growth in moral education.

They would love to add something more practical to their class besides what's in the textbook, especially from traditional Chinese culture.

*Excerpt 13*

*I will sometimes incorporate the knowledge of Taoism into my class. I still think it is helpful in dealing with the moral dilemma in the Chinese context. Taoism teaches people to be fluid like water. Morality is like water. It changes according to different situations.*

*And I think there is some wisdom we can borrow from Taoism. (Casey, Interview 3, 2021.7.9)*

They think the content of the textbook can be a little politicized sometimes. Morality teaching should be much more abstract and much more philosophical. The textbook's content seems a little prescribed and emphasizes one correct answer, which is nothing morality should look like. Not only Taoism, Buddhism and even some traditional Chinese literature are also worthy content for some teachers to add to their classes, like Legalism in ancient China, even some



romantic figures in Chinese history.

*Excerpt 14*

*I want to introduce someone who is not an educator. I want to introduce Li Bai, because of his carefree attitude towards life. Li Bai's poems and values specifically stimulate people's romantic feelings. Tao Xingzhi encourages students to start with a positive behavior pattern and love education, so I hope these three could be integrated into the textbook. (Percy, Interview 16, 2021.7.18)*

When teaching in class, teachers are finding a way to integrate their own understanding of morality, such as morality should be more philosophical, morality is a pearl of fluid wisdom, morality is a romantic feeling, morality starts with love, and how should it translates into behaviors.

Given that this course is designed to promote the ideology of socialist China, it is understandable that the content can be a little rigid. Other than the rigid content, it is the language that caused some trouble in the learning process. The writers use formal and concise language in the textbook writing, but it creates a cognitive distance between the students. *Teachers think their job is to inspire students to be able to internalize this knowledge, not memorize the exact words in the textbook.*

*Excerpt 15*

*The final exam and the midterm were when I had an evident sense of who were my students and who weren't my students, well, because I found that my students were using what I said in class to answer the test questions. I think my students have already internalized what is in the textbook, and some students are pretty slow in their language competency. It is unfair not getting the credits they deserve simply because they are not using the "professional and official" language in the book. (Percy, Interview 16, 2021.7.18)*

In order to get higher marks in the exam, students are advised to answer questions using the official language of the textbook. Even if it is not wrong to use these expressions in class, it is very difficult for them to get credits on the answers because they are not the exact same words on the standard answer. Later, the students explained to him, *“Well, it’s easy to remember what you say in class, for it is straightforward and interesting, but it’s too formal to remember textbook sentences.”* He believes that Generation Z values individuality and discards conformity. They don’t want to be portrayed as “old school,” so they use their own languages, sometimes even language used online.

*Excerpt 16*

*I don’t understand why the students are losing so many points, and I cannot imagine such informal answers appearing in the final test. The correct answer is “observing disciplines and obeying the law,” but the students are giving answers like “Don’t be a gangster,” “Don’t rob me, and I won’t rob you,” and “As long as I don’t commit a crime, the rest is like ‘sprinkling sprinkling water.’” (Field notes, 2020.1.8)*

“Sprinkling sprinkling water” is Cantonese slang for describing something easy to some people, which is quite popular online. Although students have internalized the knowledge, they are not getting high scores because they are using their own words.

To conclude, the content of the Morality and Law Basis textbook is arranged in a logically appropriate order for the student; however, inside every chapter, there are minor logical contradictions and some rigid and stuffy expressions that are too “old school” for the current students. The language of the textbook has a cognitive distance with the students, and it creates barriers in understanding the content and getting the correct answers in exams. The teachers have great ideas and creative methods in morality teaching, but it won’t be reflected in the textbook because these textbooks are written in a top-down fashion by renowned experts appointed by the central government.

#### 4.1.2.2 The morality teaching content in other subjects

Moral education (Deyu) is a much broader concept in China, expanding to almost every subject in junior middle high school. For example, in Chinese literature classes, there are a lot of things beyond the Chinese knowledge level, other than pronunciation, intonation, and writing. It is actually aesthetic appreciation or the inheritance of traditional culture when students are learning ancient Chinese poems and article.

##### *Excerpt 17*

*In the 7th grade Chinese textbook, there is a story about Wen Yituo, who is killed during the 1946 Chinese civil war. The story is very patriotic, and in the end, he is considered one of the 100 excellent contributors to the establishment of new China. We also have classes about the beauty of the yellow river, the relationship between government and the people, poets' reproach of the incompetent and the corrupted feudal emperor, and minority groups' legends and customs. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

The Chinese class is also on the frontier of moral education in China. Firstly, it is the most important subject in any Chinese public school. Secondly, the Chinese subject teacher is usually the head teacher of the class or at least worked as had teachers before. Now they are promoting the idea of the “Big Chinese Course,” which contains not only Chinese language learning but also moral education, aesthetic appreciation, and cultural identity. It's about everything associated with Chinese language learning, for example, students' moral character, attitude, and self-identification with the traditional Chinese culture.

History is also closely connected to moral education in the textbook content. History mainly involves moral education in the evaluation of historical events and certain historical figures. History teachers also need to watch their tone and expression in class. The wrong expression will affect students' evaluation of the events, thus the evolvement of their ideological values.

##### *Excerpt 18*

*After all, history is written by the victors. It has ideologic propaganda on every page. It's natural and understandable, and I think it is true in every history textbook that exists in this world. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

Some history teachers like participant 15 Olivia believe Morality and Law Basis is simply about ideology, while history is about historical facts plus ideology. In her opinion, moral education is on every page of the history textbook.

Before 2019, Morality and Law Basis was not a test subject in Shenzhen's high school entrance exams. Later in 2019, it became a test subject along with History on one piece of the exam paper. History takes up 70 points, and Morality and Law Basis takes up 50 points. It is fair to say the History subject has a deep connection to current moral education and ideological education in China.

Moral education is very big in English teaching, represented mainly by the choice of the English reading texts in textbooks and examination papers.

*Excerpt 19*

*There is a text about the red-crowned crane girl. She sacrificed her life to save the red-crowned crane, which touched upon the topics of environmental protection, social responsibility, and the meaning of life in moral education. (Kamila, Interview 11, 2021.7.11)*

In English, moral education is mainly reflected in the reading material. The English reading content is pro-socialism, politically charged, and consistent with the Chinese socialism core values. Here is a reading comprehension article in the final exam in 2021. You can see clearly that this material is about promoting the CPC's efforts on poverty elimination in China.

*Excerpt 20*

*Shashiyu was once a poor village in Hebei Province, but now it has changed into a prosperous and livable place. In the 1940s, villagers in Shashiyu had little food and few*

*clothes, but they had a strong wish for a better life... Led by the Communist Party of China (中国共产党), the villagers carried water and soil to their village from faraway places to improve their land...From 1966 to1971, they reclaimed (开垦) lots of lands and significantly improved their life...In 2009, the city-level government invested over 1 million yuan (\$152, 723) to change the village's exhibition hall into a museum in memory of development efforts made by earlier generations... After 10 years, the village was called "National Forest Village." (Shenzhen high school entrance exam paper, 2021)*

The Chinese characters are used to explain possible confusion in the reading comprehension article. The English textbook is very inclusive in selecting their reading material. There are carefully chosen pieces of material related to moral education and political propaganda both in the textbook and in the test paper.

For physical education, PE teachers usually incorporate moral education in their daily teaching practice. All sport values rules and disciplines.

*Excerpt 21*

*First of all, I want them to be able to discipline themselves in my class emotionally. Most of the time, they want to speak to their classmates or do whatever they want since the gym and the playground are much bigger than the classroom. So, I trained them to be focused and listen to me attentively.*

*Secondly, I want them to be able to restrain their behavior. I train them to exercise regularly every day, even out of my class. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

The content of moral education in PE class is not written in the textbook but in the process of how the class is carried out. Students are encouraged to be team players, rule followers, and sports lovers. They believe physical education and moral education help each other move forward. Emotional and physical strengths are beneficial to their future life physically and

mentally.

Geography is related to moral education. One teacher thinks that other than obeying the discipline of the class and showing respect to the teachers and students, it is also important to think about the purpose of studying Geography.

*Excerpt 22*

*First of all, you have to know the beautiful landscape of the motherland, the most crucial point is to cultivate a patriotic feeling. Then, we also need to see the world, understand the world, cultivate an international vision, and take a long-term view, so that children are not that shortsighted, and they could have a global vision. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

In geography, the image of the beautiful landscape of the motherland is used to provoke a patriotic feeling, and the beautiful scenery of the world is there to stimulate students to explore the world. He also thinks every subject aims to have a long-term effect on students' morality advancement.

For mathematics, a new teacher thinks morality teaching lies in classroom management and after-class interaction, not so much in the content.

*Excerpt 23*

*For me, as a new teacher in mathematics, I don't think the content itself is very relevant to moral education. But I do know classroom management is related to moral education. Sometimes I will tell them what is the right thing to do in the after-class interaction when they come to me with a personal issue. (Frankie, Interview 6, 2021.7.9)*

However, for an experienced math teacher, he thinks mathematics is essential in cultivating students' aesthetic ability and problem-solving ability. Necessary psychological comfort and moral guidance after class are also valuable parts of the morality teaching in mathematics.

*Excerpt 24*

*Mathematics has concise beauty, symmetry beauty, and knowledge of problem-solving. Students' self-efficacy and other aspects may encounter setbacks along the way. When students fail, as a teacher, it is necessary to pay attention to students' classroom performance. If necessary, provide psychological comfort and moral guidance. (Alton, Interview 1, 2021.7.8)*

Alton thinks Math teaching has the function of moral education in addition to moral education activities and moral courses in the school. The learning process will involve communication between students and knowledge, students and students, and students and teachers. It is crucial to be a caring teacher in helping students overcome challenges in life, here means solving difficult Math problems.

For a young physics teacher, Irene knows there should be connections and overlaps in the content of physics teaching and morality teaching, but she is unable to make that connection. She's now at this stage of observing others making this connection.

*Excerpt 25*

*Actually, there is a famous physics teacher who I followed online. One time he put two books together page on page, then he asked the students to pull them apart. When they failed, he asked why, and students said it was because of the friction force.*

*He then said, "when this happens in life, you needn't be so stubborn and so forceful."*

*He picked up one book and shook it a little while; then the two books fell apart. He continued to say that "There will be constant frictions from every aspect of life. Lose yourself, relax, and deal with it with wisdom." (Irene, Interview 9, 2021.7.11)*

She is closely observing other experienced teachers making the connections between Physics teaching and moral education. She is amazed at how this teacher is teaching the truth of life through the teaching of physics knowledge.

For an experienced physics teacher, Nicky believes that Physics teaching and moral education

can be connected perfectly. She said, “*It’s based on the principles of physics, and it’s a combination of life experience.*” She used the word “intersperse” repeatedly in her interview.

*Excerpt 26*

*I tried to intersperse environmental protection into the chapter called Work and Energy.*

*We are learning about  $W$  equals  $Fs$ . I ask one student to demonstrate this formula by picking up a piece of paper from the floor. I said to the whole class, “this little kind act of yours has a lot of energy.” The students argued that it has very little energy, so I told them this energy is not only for physics but also for environmental protection. It is moral to make saving the planet everyone’s responsibility. (Nicky, Interview 14, 2021.7.12)*

To her, although teachers and students are given the same textbook, the teacher must intersperse morality teaching in the physics classroom. She thinks every class can be connected with moral education. Although it’s not in the subject requirement, she still thinks it is the teachers’ duty to make it one of the teaching objectives. If you do that, your physics class will be much more exciting and relatable to the students.

In conclusion, teachers of different subjects unanimously claim that their subjects are somewhat related to moral education. The Chinese teacher and history teacher firmly state that the content of their subjects is also closely associated with morality teaching. Some reading materials from English textbooks and the test paper are related to moral education and political propaganda. In physical education and science subjects like geography, physics, and mathematics, the content of morality teaching is more reflected in the teaching process than in the textbook content.

There seems to be a cognitive discrepancy between young and experienced teachers in how morality teaching is related to their subjects. Young teachers either think there is no connection or cannot make the connection themselves. Since the experienced teachers are no longer struggling with the content teaching of their subjects, they try to “intersperse” morality



teaching in their subject teaching.

#### *4.1.3 The difference between demonstration class and daily class*

There are countless opportunities for teachers to give demonstration classes. Every teacher is obligated to give at least one demonstration class each semester. There are also numerous teaching competitions and guests visits for teachers to showcase their teaching talent. As a former college English teacher, I've won two first prizes in the Morality and Law Basis teaching competition.

I find that there are huge differences between the demonstration class and the daily class in terms of profundity, the teaching arrangement, the material selection, and the class activity design. I'm using the teaching plans of the demonstration class and the daily class to show these differences. I will also explain what I have done to win the two first prizes in a field that is comparatively new to me. It can also reflect the problems of the common practice in morality teaching in Shenzhen.

##### *4.1.3.1 A typical daily class in Morality and Law Basis*

Here is what a typical daily class teaching plan looks like.

###### *Excerpt 27*

###### *Part 1 Teaching objectives*

*Knowledge objective: Know the importance of communication and the interaction*

*Ability objective: Understand the complexity of society and understand the relationship between self-development and society*

*Objective for emotion, attitude, and values: Increase the emotional bond with parents, teachers, students, and society*

###### *Part 2 Teaching process*

###### *Lead in*

*Show the picture on the textbook and the PowerPoint titled “Shaoming’s day.”*

*Ask a question: What did the Shaoming do all day? What’s your feeling?*

*Possible answer: Shaoming has a wonderful and interactive day in society.*

*Feel the colorful social life*

*Show pictures of visiting factories, farming, and attending legal lectures.*

*Ask a question: Why do we participate in these activities?*

*Possible answer: We learn how to communicate with others. We provide suggestions for the community, and it makes us proud of the country’s development.*

*What’s your role in society?*

*Show pictures: family photo, tourist photo...*

*Ask a question: What is peoples’ role in society, and how are we connected?*

*Possible answer: If the individual is regarded as a point, and the relationship between people is a line, then all kinds of lines are woven into a big net called society. Everyone is a knot in the big net of society.*

*Class discussion*

*Divide the students into two groups and debate around the topic.*

*Can humans achieve success without the help of society?*

*Part 3 Conclusion*

*In this class, we understand the complexity of society. Everyone has different roles in different relationships. As a knot in the big net of society, we cannot achieve success alone without the help of society. (Teaching plan, 2020.04.12)*

In this teaching plan, the content is laid out logically, from knowing the society and knowing one’s different roles in different social relationships to the discussion and evaluation of the relationship between the individual and society. The teaching materials are in the textbook, and after each question, that is a possible answer in the teaching plan to guide the whole class

in working towards the right direction. The textbook also advises the classroom discussion. However, the topic, “Can one achieve success without the help of society,” makes it very hard to debate fairly. Everyone would arrive at the same conclusion that humans cannot thrive without society’s help. It seems like a one-sided game where the result is predetermined.

#### 4.1.3.2 A general picture of the demonstration class

Here is how I design and carry out my demonstration class for the morality and the law teaching competition that I win.

##### *Excerpts 28*

##### *Part 1 Teaching objectives*

*Objective for emotion, attitude, and values: Be strongly aware of one’s responsibility, be grateful to the people who take responsibility for you, and be ready to take social responsibilities willingly.*

*Ability objective: Be able to identify the reason for the people’s responsibility and be able to correctly evaluate the price and the reward of undertaking responsibility.*

*Knowledge objective: Know the meaning of responsibility and the consequence of irresponsibility.*

##### *Part 2 Teaching process*

##### *Lead in*

*Ask the students what’s the hottest movie right now and show the trailer of the film*

*“Chinese Captain.”*

*Ask a question: What is everyone’s responsibility in that movie?*

*The students answered the different responsibilities of the captain, the flight attendant, and the customers.*

##### *Grouping game*

*Ask the student to group the similar responsibilities and discuss the source of*

*accountability, for example, driving the plane and serving the customer all come from “profession’s requirement.”*

*Students are able to identify more sources than what is in the textbook, such as promises for others, traditional customs, moral principles, commandments from a higher authority, and legal requirements.*

#### *Painting the fans*

*Put a giant paper fan on the blackboard and ask students to fill in names or draw pictures of people who are responsible for them in their life.*

*Students write down headmasters, parents, doctors, lawyers, and absurd ones like a prison guard, web admins, and social media influencers.*

*Put a second paper fan on the blackboard and ask students to imagine what activity they would love to do if they could enjoy total freedom for a day in a world of lawlessness.*

*Students write down and draw pictures like sleeping for a day, robbing the bank, setting the school on fire, smacking the ATM, and such.*

#### *Matching the fans*

*Put the two fans together vertically and see the results of mismatched responsibilities.*

*The whole class burst into laughter when they see pairs of people and responsibility, for example, headmasters are responsible for robbing the bank with the students, doctors are responsible for setting the school on fire with the students, and the social media influencer helps the students smack the ATM.*

*Have an open discussion on “the differences between one’s own responsibility and the others.”*

#### *Elevation of the theme*

*Put the two fans together horizontally and form a traditional Chinese Taiji diagram.*

*Explain what the Taiji diagram means in traditional Chinese culture: It symbolizes*

*harmony between black and white, Yin and Yang, and rights and responsibilities. We should know we have different roles and corresponding responsibilities in social life. We must learn to be responsible for ourselves and others to have a better future.*

*Part 3 Open-end Conclusion (Teaching plan, 2019.11.11)*

I conclude the class with a hands-on activity: Update their social media status with a sentence like “From now on, I will be responsible in...”.

Finally, I told my story of being irresponsible, and I regret it to this day.

One of the judges on the panel critiqued my teaching design as follows. She thinks the teaching design is very fresh, everything revolves around the center of students’ and other people’s responsibility, and the classroom activities are cleverly designed in provoking students’ emotion.

*Excerpt 29*

*Usually, we do not want students to be this chaotic as in this class, but it works. When children are so mischievous in thinking of all kinds of crazy stuff to do in an absolutely free day, they have no idea how funny it is to connect their wishes to other peoples’ responsibilities in their life. I think we are a little obsessed with children being obedient, positive, and well-behaved in class. These are not who they really are, what they really care and what’s going on in their mind on the dark side. (Field notes, 2019.11.12)*

This teacher points out the fresh design of the classroom activities. It allows students to be who they are, and these activities and discussions reach out to the students and make a difference in their minds and possible future behavior. The other teacher points out my special attention to the traditional Chinese culture.

*Excerpt 30*

*We have been told repeatedly that the traditional Chinese culture is a treasure. The beautiful design of the fans, the amazing transformation into the Taiji diagram, and the*

*appropriate use of the movie trailer are all excellent examples of incorporating Chinese culture into the class, which will definitely enhance the students' cultural identity. (Field notes, 2019.11.12)*

The judge thinks this class tries to incorporate traditional Chinese culture's wisdom in explaining and solving the current issues in society. Students have the chance to think about their cultural heritage and identity in classes like this one.

From their compliments, we can have a glance at the problems of morality teaching in Shenzhen in their mind. Firstly, it focuses too much on being formal, positive, and orderly in teaching design. Secondly, more cultural elements need to be integrated into the class design, be it traditional cultural wisdom or current hot topics. Thirdly, teachers need not always be perfect and strong in front of the students; being vulnerable is actually relatable to students. Here is my second teaching plan in 2020, which got me another first prize and qualified me to compete at the municipal level.

### *Excerpt 31*

*Book one for grade 9 The cohesiveness of the Chinese nation*

#### *Part 1 Teaching objectives*

*Objective for emotion, attitude, and values: Feel the power of the Chinese national spirit in the nation's life and death moments of the nation and identify with the core socialist values of China.*

*Ability objective: Be able to put national spirit and the core socialist values into practice.*

*Knowledge objective: Know the meaning of the Chinese national spirit and its incredible impact.*

#### *Part 2 Teaching process*

*Lead in--- Play a game of "who is the real Baymax."*

*List the features and heroic acts of certain Chinese historical figures or modern heroes,*

*such as Li Dazhao, a famous revolutionist; Zhong Nanshan, the COVID-19 fighter; and Yue Fei, an ancient warrior, put a picture on the back of the cartoon figure. When students guess the correct answer, turn the picture over and show the whole class. Ask students to mimic this pattern, choose one of their favorite heroes, and ask the whole class to guess who the real Baymax is.*

*Show a clip titled “Wuhan in fighting the COVID-19---The power of Chinese national spirit”.*

*Ask the student to identify which acts symbolize the national spirit. Students use examples like “testing 10 people a time means Chinese people are innovative,” “locking down for one month means Chinese people are patriotic and resilient,” and” doctors and nurses from other provinces come to support Wuhan, which means Chinese people are unified and industrious.” This part is to explain the rich connotation of the Chinese national spirit.*

*Make an analogy*

*Make an analogy between national spirit and the core socialist values by using the images of Baymax in and out of the armor.*

*The heroes that saved the Chinese nation in the most challenging time are compared to the loving, caring, and innovative Baymax. Then, the core socialist values are like Baymax with armor, which is more robust and powerful, just like a protection for the traditional Chinese national spirit.*

## **Figure 5**

*The Core Socialist Values and National Spirit*



### *Hands-on classroom activity*

*Ask the students to put armor on Baymax piece by piece.*

*The students are searching for small things they can do to practice the core socialist values; for example, to practice “Equality,” we cannot discriminate against others because of their height and appearance; to practice “Friendliness,” we can start with giving a smile to a classmate every day; to practice “Democracy,” we could take up an active role in the coming class monitor election day.*

### *Part 3 Conclusion*

*We, Chinese people, collectively are a giant fire, and individually we make a sky full of stars. To practice the core socialist values, we must start small, pay attention to details, and move steadily. Next time our nation is in a life and death predicament, we will be ready like Baymax with armor.*

### *Part 4 Homework supermarket*

*Level 1 You can finish the proposal on the textbook.*

*Level 2 Design A group project to put the core socialist values into practice.*



*Level 3 Film your activity, make it into a promotion video, and put it on social media.*

*(Teaching plan, 2020.11.1)*

I did a survey before making the teaching plan. The results show that the greatest difficulty in understanding this class is making a solid connection between two abstract concepts, national spirit, and the core socialist values. I designed this class to solve this pain spot accordingly.

One of the judges on the panel thinks I have done a fantastic job. She points out that this teaching method is called “Concrete Reconstruction.”

*Excerpt 32*

*I could clearly understand the concept behind this teaching design. In grade 9, the textbook's content becomes very abstract and highly conceptual all of a sudden. It's beneficial for students to understand abstract concepts through a relatable image. I think you could write a paper on how to use Concrete Reconstruction in current Morality and Law Basis classes. (Fieldnotes, 2020.11.10)*

She commends me on the pre-class survey and encourages me to write a paper to promote the “concrete reconstruction” teaching method. In her opinion, the textbook content of grade 9 is much more conceptual than the other textbooks. The image of Baymax in and out of armor is very relatable to the students. Overall, my teaching plans stood out obviously. It was beautifully presented. These are the main reasons why I got picked as the winner, defeating the other 27 contestants.

One teacher also mentioned the huge differences between demonstration and daily classes in the interview.

*Excerpt 33*

*It's nice and lovely to prepare lessons together days before the demonstration classes. And I also learned a lot from sitting in other peoples' demonstration classes, but at the end of the day, it's not real, nothing more than an acting class. (Leon, Interview 12,*

2021.7.11)

After each demonstration class, teachers have to pick up the masses created in that class.

They would go back to some points that were excluded in the demonstration class to make it more coherent and concise. In daily class, teachers have to do all that dirty work like chivying students to do their homework, grading the papers, and drilling on the key points repeatedly. However, in demonstration class, teachers only need to be glamorous. It is an illusion or the ideal version that ordinary teachers cannot sustain all the time.

To create this “*glamorous illusion*” (Leon, Interview 12, 2021.7.11), teachers need to do the following things at least.

Firstly, teachers need to work independently or collectively on the teaching design, finding a way to set the design apart from others. Brainstorming is usually constructive in this stage. Secondly, teachers need to cherry-pick the best content that will work for them to present in the demonstration class.

Thirdly, materials must be carefully chosen to attract the students’ attention. Videos, self-made teaching aid, and interactive virtual reality technology are well-received in the class.

Fourthly, teachers must dress appropriately and deliver a glamorous presentation with carefully made PowerPoint files.

In conclusion, demonstration classes in any subject are much more “glamorous” than the daily classes in class design, material selection, profundity, and presentation. It is fair to say that the demonstration classes only represent what the teachers are capable of doing, not necessarily what they are actually doing on a daily basis.

## **4.2 The Teachers in P school**

### *4.2.1 The heavy responsibility of the head teachers*

The headteachers of the classes take up a crucial role in the moral education of the school. At the same time, moral education plays a significant part in the head teachers' job description. According to my observation, their job includes but is not limited to teaching their own subjects, setting up the class rules and the class culture, communicating with the parents and the middle-level leaders in the school, organizing weekly class meetings, monitoring the physical and psychological wellbeing of the students, cooperating with the assistant head teacher and the other subject teachers, and implementing the temporary work assigned by the school. The headteachers cannot turn off their phones, even at nights or during holidays.

*Excerpt 34*

*I teach history for three classes and work as a head teacher for one of them. My husband works in another junior high school as a Morality and Law Basis teacher and a head teacher. We fight a lot because he doesn't understand the workload in our school.*

*Because we are a new school, there are many temporary works, or as we call them "creative works," which are "absurd works" to him. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

As a new school, the P school organized many moral education activities, such as family visits, parents' school, and practice teaching activities, to establish a good reputation. The result is that teachers in P school have a heavier workload than the old ones in the same district. Teachers from other schools may find it abnormal because they think it is unnecessary, absurd, and even unethical to have a trial-and-error process in moral education in any school.

When I ask the participant how much work has the headteachers done, not a single participant says a percentage that is less than 50%. It ranges from 50% to 80%.

*Excerpt 35*

*The headteachers take up at least 70%, the school's activities take up 20%, and the rest of the teachers share the last 10%. When kids snitch, it's an opportunity for moral education. Believe me; they tatttle a lot. (Eva, Interview 5, 2021.7.9)*

In the first semester, I was in the office for just English teachers and Morality and Law Basis teachers. It is always quiet in the office. Students only come to hand in their homework. I stayed in the headteachers' office to observe how they carry out moral education after class for the rest three semesters.

Firstly, it is ten times noisier than the subject teachers' office. Secondly, you can witness all kinds of incidents, like a supermarket for drama. Thirdly, parents came to the office for various reasons, and many more emotions were being possessed, mostly anger and crying. It is definitely true that the headteachers take up much of the moral education after class. The headteachers see kids every day all day, and the students are more likely to share their thoughts with their headteacher. Meanwhile, they face much more pressure than subject teachers.

*Excerpt 36*

*The headteachers are under tremendous pressure; for example, they are responsible for tracking down the students when they run away from their families and skip classes.*

*They are not FBI agents. (Mandy, Interview 13, 2021.7.11)*

Similar incidents happened several times. Mandy is talking about one time one student ran away from his home and skipped classes for days because his parents did not allow him to have a girlfriend. The parents come to the headteacher and ask her to find their son. For the school, the safety of the students matters more than why he left home, so she had to rearrange her class schedule to talk to the boy's friends to find any possible clues of his whereabouts. It is a very stressful situation, and the headteachers are working like special agents.

Assistant headteachers and subject teachers are doing some complementary work besides the headteachers.

*Excerpt 37*

*I teach Chinese for two classes and work as an assistant head teacher for one of them. If the head teacher is absent or excused, I need to fill the position in time. Sometimes, especially when the school is organizing moral education activities, it requires two of us to work together. Also, when I see the head teacher is exhausted that day, I will volunteer to do some of the jobs. (Gabby, Interview 7, 2021.7.10)*

Assistant headteachers need to fill the gap created by the absence of the headteachers and report the students' misconduct to the headteachers. Lots of the moral education activities requires assistant headteachers and headteachers to work together. Headteachers get a small amount of subsidy, 1500 RMB per month, but assistant headteachers work for free. Subject teachers also need to work with the headteachers on students' moral education. In reality, many subject teachers simply send students to their headteachers when they disturb the class order.

*Excerpt 38*

*I usually correct the misdemeanors in my class immediately. Sometimes I will ask them to stand up or come to the front of the classroom. Now, I just send them to their headteacher to set them straight. I have a class to teach, so I don't have time for their shenanigans. (Leon, Interview 12, 2021.7.11)*

As a subject teacher, I have a close relationship with some students. Headteachers sometimes summon me to talk with them and help them locate them when they skip classes.

*Excerpt 39*

*Today, one headteacher came to my class to find me for help because one girl in her class was standing at the top of the teaching building. We both love Japanese animation,*

*so we talk a lot on that subject. I had to talk with the girl for 20 minutes to get her down finally, during which I quoted one line from the animation we both love, “Ignorant youngsters have to go through pain to be a grow-up.” (Filed notes, 2020. 4.5)*

Headteachers cannot share the same hobbies with every student in their classes. When subject teachers have a special bond with some of the students, it is very helpful for headteachers to carry out moral education meticulously and warm-heartedly. Her headteacher told me, “*it is always helpful to have someone who speaks her language.*”

I have worked as an assistant headteacher for two semesters in two different classes. There is no additional wage for this title, and it is not counted as headteacher experience in the academic title evaluation in the future. Things are different for the headteachers. Working as a headteacher for at least three consecutive years is a compulsory requirement for teachers’ academic title evaluation, which is connected to the elevation of their salary bracket.

*Excerpt 40*

*I didn’t volunteer myself because I didn’t think I was ready, but the decision-makers in our school still nominated me to be a head teacher. Since I had to do it anyway, I took the job. (Irene, Interview 9, 2021.7.11)*

Irene is not ready to work as a headteacher, but she takes the job in the end because it is a compulsory requirement if she wants to get career advancement in the future. She feels much closer to the students, which is a feeling she doesn’t have as a subject teacher.

In conclusion, the headteachers take up much bigger moral education responsibilities than the subject teachers. In new schools like P school, it means more responsibilities and more pressure for the headteachers, some of which are out of the control of the headteachers.

The assistant headteachers and subject teachers help and assist the headteachers. They can be precious if they have a close relationship with the students. The responsible assistant

headteacher could vastly reduce the burden on the headteachers' shoulders even they are not being paid for anything.

Furthermore, it is a compulsory task to work as a headteacher for three years to advance their teaching career, so they took the job no matter whether they were ready or not.

#### *4.2.2 The source of teacher's moral education knowledge*

In an ethnographic study, life history helps the researcher and the readers understand the participants' current viewpoint and behavior. From the interview, we can get a clear picture that teachers' moral education knowledge comes from their previous experience.

Gabby thinks teachers need to be there when students encounter emotional hard times. It doesn't mean that teachers should always take care of students' emotions all the time. It could be only for a certain period.

##### *Excerpt 41*

*When I need all that attention, and luckily the teacher pays enough attention to me. Then, after I pass the difficult time, or I have gotten rid of that problem, I won't need the teachers' attention as much. That's how one of my teachers treated me when I was in junior high school. That is my goal now when it comes to moral education. (Gabby, Interview 7, 2021.7.10)*

This teacher's point of view on moral education is influenced by her junior high school teacher. She now believes that students may experience certain difficult times in their moral growth, and it would be of great benefit if the teacher is there to accompany the students through this critical time.

Another teacher believes that their former teachers' teaching style could affect how they carry out moral education.

##### *Excerpt 42*

*You can see the shadow of his previous teacher or the unified version of his previous teachers. I know my high school teachers heavily influenced my moral education philosophy. (Leon, Interview 12, 2021.7.11)*

Leon believes that a teacher's teaching style, to a large extent, depends on the previous teachers. He goes into detail and gives a deeper understanding of how his former teachers' moral education style affects his belief and his current moral education practice. From his own experience, he believes public criticism and humiliation actually work for the so-called "good student" like him. He has got a lot of recognition from his teachers, and he wants to be able to change and get more recognition.

*Excerpt 43*

*My teachers used to call me to their office and scold me, and I knew they wanted me to improve. For students with bad grades, I know I am supposed to give them more praise and recognition. However, my time is very limited; as a major subject, I have to criticize the naughty behaviors in my class just to get through all the content. (Leon, Interview 12, 2021.7.11)*

Although the influence of former teachers is not understood until he became a teacher, he now holds and practices the belief that positive reinforcement works better for students with poor performance. In contrast, negative reinforcement may work miracles to students with good performance. He realizes that his high school teachers were motivating him through public criticism, but he has to modify this method according to the requirements of the heavy teaching tasks.

It is fair to say that teachers' moral education knowledge is the negotiation results of their ideal and reality. It also shows that there is a discrepancy between teachers' moral education belief and their actual practices.



Casey thinks moral education is about the accumulation of effective methods, which may involve a trial-and-error phase for teachers, especially new teachers. She believes that being a headteacher opens up many possibilities when dealing with unthinkable problems.

*Excerpt 44*

*Last year, I found that many of my students lost their textbooks mysteriously all the time.*

*Last semester, I asked them to make a name tag and put it on the textbooks. Still, so many people forget to bring their name tags and then they continue to lose their textbooks. This semester, I asked them to give me their name tag to exchange for a textbook. Now, I am sure every textbook in my class has a name tag on it. (Casey,*

*Interview 3, 2021.7.9)*

From Excerpt 44, we can see Casey is growing in her practical knowledge of moral education. These little things are not taught in graduate school. New headteachers have to accumulate effective methods when facing problems. She failed to tackle the problem in the first semester, but she kept on trying and finally found an effective method. Her cognitive knowledge towards moral education also grew as she concluded that moral education is about the accumulation of effective techniques.

Brain thinks practice is the most important. When he encounters problems in teaching practice, he will keep thinking and comparing. It means self-reflection and critical thinking give teachers a more profound understanding of moral education.

*Excerpt 45*

*When I meet educational theories proposed by big names, I don't follow their theory blindly. I usually think about why he put forward this theory and what might be his standpoint. Sometimes the new theory can be unrealistic because I find it impractical in my teaching practice. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

For Brain, his moral education knowledge comes from theoretical learning and the follow-up application in his teaching practice.

Teachers' family also offers support for teachers' moral education work. For Debbie, it is her parents, and for Frankie it is her husband.

*Excerpt 46*

*Growing up, my father and my mother are all very gentle in my mind. They are very open-minded. One day I said I don't want to do the homework, so they took me out to the park and played for the whole afternoon. They respect my opinions and never set goals for me to achieve. I set my own goal and then go to them for consent. (Debbie, Interview 4, 2021.7.9)*

Debbie says that her parents offer a moral education example for her. She draws inspiration from her parents' behavior and mindset in her current teaching practice.

Other than support and understanding from her husband, Frankie is also motivated by students' progress and improvement due to her belief that moral education can be a power source for both students and teachers.

*Excerpt 47*

*They are happy that I never treat them differently because their scores are not as good as other classes'. I draw power from their progress and improvement. It is a mutually beneficial relationship for me. (Frankie, Interview 6, 2021.7.9)*

Some teachers think the students and the job requirements are draining their blood and soul. She thinks it is a two-way relationship. It is clear that students' growth stimulates teachers' enthusiasm toward moral education.

Teachers with overseas learning experience may have a deeper understanding of moral education. Having compared with Chinese and foreign countries' political systems, Debbie believes the Chinese socialist political system has its competitive edge.

From grade one to grade four, she studied with a very small group of faculty children in her mother's workplace. From the 5th grade, she was transferred into the best junior high school and the best senior high school. After she finished college study at a first-tier university in China, she was sent to Australia to get a master's degree.

*Excerpt 48*

*I majored in ideological politics as an undergraduate and then the translation major in a foreign country. After talking to the locals, I realize their country is also not perfect.*

*It's the overseas study that makes me aware that socialism is actually quite competitive.*

*That's why I become a Morality and Law Basis teacher. (Debbie, Interview 4, 2021.7.9)*

Debbie thinks her overseas study experience helps her make the decision to become a Morality and Law Basis teacher. However, her determination is influenced more by her previous educational background. She grows up with parents working in state-owned facilities, the better ones with affiliated kindergarten. Her junior high school, senior high school, and university are comparatively better in China. She has more identification with the Chinese education system and political system, so one-year overseas study won't change her belief in socialism and Chinese ways of moral education.

Moral education training courses are beneficial to moral education teachers. These training courses are mainly coming from two sources: the weekly meetings provided by P school and the online courses offered by the Shenzhen education bureau. However, there isn't a synthesized comprehensive course that is useful for the teacher, the parents, and the moral education workers on different levels.

*Excerpt 49*

*I don't think more education training is only for us Morality and Law Basis teachers, and it should be targeted to all stakeholders. I find the online training courses required every semester can be very helpful if you choose carefully. I chose one course on*

*teenagers' psychology, which is complementary to my knowledge background. (Debbie, Interview 4, 2021.7.9)*

Shenzhen education bureau spends a great amount of money and efforts developing a sustainable training system for teachers on the website called “Shenzhen Teachers’ Sustainable Education.” Although the updating speed is slow, there are plenty of courses for the teacher to choose from. Debbie finds the course on teenagers’ psychology very helpful to her comprehensive understanding of moral education, but she also points out the lack of synthesized courses for teachers and parents to help them work with each other on children’s moral education.

In conclusion, teachers’ moral education knowledge is closely related to their previous experience. Their former teachers’ moral education methods could affect their attitude toward the students, teaching style, and moral education beliefs.

Their moral education knowledge also comes from the accumulation of effective methods in their previous teaching practices, their critical reflection of those teaching practices, and their interactions with their family members and citizens in other countries.

The training courses offered by the school and Shenzhen education bureau are pretty helpful in advancing teachers’ moral education knowledge.

#### *4.2.3 The development stage of the moral education teachers*

##### *4.2.3.1 The development stage of the teachers’ skills on moral education*

There are clear development stages in the teachers’ skills in dealing with moral education issues. Although every moral education teacher has their own strengths and weaknesses, their moral education skills are experiencing growth in different areas at different paces.

Casey and Irene unanimously agree that the first challenge is brought by the parents. It’s tough to win their trust, and they are overwhelmed by the diversity of the parents’

personalities. Luckily, the family committee is very helpful most of the time. After one to two months, they could identify high maintenance parents and learn how to communicate with them effectively. From then on, things go back on the right track.

For Casey, she thinks the second challenge comes from the students, and the third challenge is brought by the school administration.

*Excerpt 50*

*The biggest challenge comes from the school. I teach Morality and Law Basis for five classes, so you can imagine how much homework for me to check. Then, I have lots of responsibility as a headteacher. From time to time, the school will assign me some tasks, like video editing, writing a news report, or working as a receptionist. I am, indeed, overloaded right now. (Casey, Interview 3, 2021.7.9)*

From the interview, I see her development stages clearly. As a new headteacher, she has to find a way to gain the parents' trust first, and then try to find more appropriate ways to handle students' conflicts. The third challenge is managing the teaching workload and headteachers' moral education responsibilities. She is a blogger and a great video editor, so she is asked to contribute her time to making promotional videos for the school.

For Irene, she also has time management issues in carrying out predetermined moral education topics from the school.

*Excerpt 51*

*Every class meeting has a predetermined topic by the school. The topics range from school regulation, traditional holidays, CPC history, environment protection, and international relations. I have to find another time to address the problems that happened last week in my class. Sometimes I have to sacrifice my own subject teaching time. (Irene, Interview 9, 2021.7.11)*

The school makes the PowerPoint files for the weekly class meeting, during which they should have dealt with the specific problems that happened last week in their class. Instead, she has to find another time slot to work on their issues.

Being new headteachers, Casey and Irene are all troubled by the heavy workload. They find time management and distribution of energy to be the most challenging part of working as headteachers.

For experienced headteachers like participant 14 Nicky, she finds it challenging to balance her work and her family. Her children need quality time with his mother, but she has to work very late in the office. She solves this problem by bringing her little son to school until 10 o'clock at night, and she usually asks her son to draw pictures by himself.

In dealing with the misconduct of the students, moral education teachers also experience growth in their skills. My field notes have record the growth of a new teacher's communication skills in one short semester.

*Excerpt 52*

*I'm surprised by the differences in Miss Zhang's communication skills with the students. For the first few weeks as the new teacher, she talked to the students gently and slowly, and she was very frustrated when students wouldn't listen to her. Later she found out this method was not for every student, and she began to shout at some students. Then, she realized it was not good for her mental health, and the louder she screamed, the less went into the students' hearts. So, she became soft-spoken again, but some students just won't be moved by her patience. Now she will speak nicely to most of the students and occasionally shouts at some stubborn ones. (Field notes, 2021.6.12)*

We can see the changes in her communication style in dealing with students' behavior problems. She wanted to be a nice gentle friend to the students at first, but they won't listen to her, so she began to shout at some of the students. In the end, she learned to adapt her

communication style to the personality of the students, and now she is not hesitant to show tough love to some students while remaining truthful to herself. The time duration is not set, and the speed is different individually.

The skill set is more commonly known as “style” in reality when one teacher is trying to learn from the others. Every teacher has a different style in dealing with the misconduct of the students.

*Excerpt 53*

*I am very mild and gentle, and others may be more tough and forceful. I always call in the parents to sort out a comprehensive solution, and others may think involving parents in everything is not very competent on their ends. I’m trying to learn from the best now.*  
(Hana, Interview 8, 2021.7.11)

We can see that Hana acknowledges that there are differences in moral education teachers’ moral education skills, and she admits her conflict resolution skills are not as mature as the experienced teachers.

Undeniably, moral education teachers are all maturing in their skill set in different stages at a different speed. For example, they may experience growth in communication skills with the parents and the students, time management skills, conflict resolution skills, and class management skills.

By observing the experienced teachers and headteachers, they might improve the techniques very quickly. However, the school is providing predetermined topics for every class, not specific guidance, so they struggle to find suitable moral education skills by themselves.

#### 4.2.3.2 The development stage of the teachers’ cognition level on moral education

Compared to the clear distinction between skillful moral education teachers and new moral education teachers, the difference in the teachers’ cognition level on moral education is much more subtle and difficult to detect.

Usually, only the headteacher gets the credit when the class performs well. New teachers, especially new headteachers, have unrealistic perceptions about the power of the headteachers.

*Excerpt 54*

*When one class is always on the top, you can't always hear comments like "what a wonderful job the headteacher has done!". But right now, I think the headteachers' influence is very limited. Before, I will copy class management methods from famous headteachers indiscriminately. Now I realize there is no such thing as the best education methods, and as headteachers, you need to find the most suitable methods for this class. See the students as who they are. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

Before, Brian would copy others' class management methods, but his cognition level deepened as he became more experienced. He now realizes moral education needs to align with the students' real status. Before, he has an unrealistic obsession with the power of headteachers. He now harbors a more realistic cognition of the influence of the headteachers in the moral education process.

We can also see the cognition level differences in the interaction between two headteachers. One teacher feels very defeated when one student hasn't shown any sign of improvement after she puts in her heart and soul.

*Excerpt 55*

*Last Friday night, I had a breakdown and burst into tears when having dinner with my best friend, who is also a headteacher. The frustration of this work is just overwhelming. She comforted me and told me that moral education is not an equivalent exchange. As long as you feel you have done your personal best, there's nothing more you can do. Do not expect anything in return. (Casey, Interview 3, 2021.7.9)*



I know that the other teacher had gone through lots of frustration to have this kind of enlightenment. She has to take care of one student who is diagnosed with severe ADHD every day. One day the boy got into a physical fight with the security guard outside the school gate, so she had to put down her breakfast tray to calm him down. The following morning, he forgot the part where the security guard apologized to him and bit the guard again. She has to put down her breakfast again to bring him into the canteen to share some food with him and calm him down.

Casey thought she was a failure and was not qualified to be a headteacher. The other headteacher comforted her and told her that she should not expect moral education to be an equivalent exchange. Experienced teachers go through frustration with students' moral education daily, forcing them to intensify their metacognition and eventually deepen their cognition level.

Another cognition difference lies in the different attitudes toward class regulations and class culture.

All teachers agree that the construction of class culture plays a significant role in moral education. On the practical level, it can facilitate class management. On the spiritual level, it can enhance the cohesiveness of the class, and cultivate children's collectivism awareness. If the students feel they are working together towards a shared goal, it can stimulate their fighting will, which is conducive to the elevation of moral education for the whole class.

*Excerpt 56*

*Many young headteachers are obsessed with making class regulations, and rules for students to follow. The invisible class culture is much under-appreciated because it's more difficult to formulate and more intangible to abide by. (Percy, Interview 16, 2021.7.18)*

For younger or new teachers, they tend to focus on the formation and implementation of the class regulations. Experienced headteachers believe the class culture is much more critical in the success of moral education for the class. Class culture can be motivational but intangible to follow. Class rules are effective in behavioral regulation and easy to carry out. Class regulations need to serve the class culture. Suppose one teacher could realize the class regulation is there to serve a greater resolution, the inspirational class culture. In that case, he is having a deep cognition on the success of moral education for the class.

However, making students follow rules are much easier for the school leaders to notice than helping students reflect on the invisible class culture.

*Excerpt 57*

*When two students fight with each other, I often ask them to retell the story one by one. Then, I will ask them to write down what happened again and their reflection on it. When they are not that emotional, sometimes they forget why they are fighting in the first place. I act like a “Buddhist youth” because our class culture pays great attention to inner peace. However, it may come across as indifferent and unprincipled to the leaders. That’s why I am no longer a headteacher anymore. (Percy, Interview 16, 2021.7.18)*

This teacher is trying to use metacognition in moral education. Reflection on their behavior could enable them to have a deeper understanding of themselves. Teachers like him pay attention to the root cause of students’ behavior besides correcting the behavior.

Teachers have a deeper cognition on moral education may use unique methods to deal with students’ misconduct. Nicky will ask them to do some labor work like cleaning the basketball court or the toilet and tell them they are capable of accomplishing everything when they finish the labor work.

*Excerpt 58*

*Some students don't want to write homework, so I will ask them to play basketball for 30 minutes. Afterward, I will tell them they are capable of finishing the tasks given by the teachers. Moral education takes a long time, maybe one or two decades. I wish they could have a cheerleader like me in every step of their lives. (Nicky, Interview 14, 2021.7.12)*

When Nicky uses “cheerleader” to describe the relationship between teachers and students, I realize she has a deeper understanding of moral education teachers’ roles in students’ lives. Her teaching methods may look similar with others’ methods, like sending them to do extra cleaning work, but she would encourage them to see their potential. She designs educational methods with the mindset of being a cheerleader, which means there is a deeper cognition of moral education.

In summary, teachers may entertain different levels of cognition on moral education.

Teachers’ cognition level involves the attitude toward moral education, goals of moral education, the effectiveness of moral education, frustration with moral education, class regulation and class culture, metacognition of moral education, and roles of moral education teachers.

Initially, I assumed that the more experienced teachers are, the deeper their cognition level. However, according to the interview and my observation, many new teachers’ moral education beliefs are more sophisticated than old teachers. Although a correlation between teachers’ experience and cognition level cannot be made directly, there is definitely progress in teachers’ cognition level, and it tends to be true that with more experience, teachers’ cognition level on moral education will be more profound than their former self’s cognition level.

#### *4.2.4 The powerless feeling of the moral education teachers*

There are several sources of teachers’ vulnerable feelings.

The first one comes from the other teachers. For headteachers, having a united force in carrying out moral education methods in the class is crucial. Teachers think the headteacher needs to join forces with the subject teachers. If they have a clear division of moral beliefs in moral education, for example, the headteacher values collectivism, other subject teachers speak highly of individualism, it will be very confusing for the students to follow.

Because of the pandemic, there is a high turnover rate of teachers in the school. Many teachers leave the job for various reasons, so it is hard for the headteachers to have a stable moral education team.

*Excerpt 59*

*After the pandemic, almost half of our subject teachers changed. I have worked so hard to build a team in moral education. Now I have to start from scratch, which makes me feel powerless. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

Some teachers have apparent ideological differences with the headteachers. It creates confusion for the students, which costs a lot of time and energy for the headteachers to bring the students back to the right track.

I share the apartment with participant 2, Brian, so I know what he has gone through. In 2020, his class changed six teachers in two semesters. When new teachers came into the picture, he had to help the students make sense of the new teachers' moral beliefs. One teacher was born and raised in Shenzhen and got his high school and college degree in the USA. He believes in materialism and individualism, while participant 2 grew up in the poorest region in China, so he believes in thrift and kindness to the strangers. After that teacher proudly shows off the new features of the latest cell phone and his ridiculously expensive watch collections, he has a feeling that all the teaching and advice on being thrifty has gone into the sewage.

Secondly, the powerless feeling comes from the lack of protection for teachers' rights in the school's administration system.

*Excerpt 60*

*There should be something in the middle to protect teachers' rights. The labor union is only responsible for giving out gifts on holidays. It causes you to feel a kind of powerlessness. Firstly, I feel powerless in how to discipline the misconduct. Secondly, I feel helpless to protect my own rights. (Hana, Interview 8, 2021.7.11)*

Hana tried to discipline one student who disturbed the class order several times. When she was talking to him, he jingled his body, tilted his head, and tapped his feet impatiently, which is a very disrespectful manner in front of the teacher, so she pulled his shoulder and tried to make him stand straight. Several teachers were there to witness this maneuver, and there was nothing violent going on in that interaction. The next day, his parents came to school and reported to the principal that Hana physically abused their son, and that the teacher should be fired or they would report to the district education bureau.

After a meeting with the principal and the parents, Hana can no longer work as a headteacher, and she is not qualified to get a high score at the end-of-semester appraisal. She feels powerless in carrying out disciplinary actions and angry about not even having a chance to defend herself and protect her rights and reputation.

A similar thing happened to participant 10 Jager as well. He thinks that for 5000 years in Chinese culture, teachers have been highly respected by society. Right now, evil is respected. He will certainly pay great attention to his actions and words in the future.

*Excerpt 61*

*When students come to the middle-level leaders with a false allegation, I have to apologize to them regardless of the fact that they broke the rule first. For the longest time, I have wanted to be a teacher who cares about the kids' moral education. Now, I just want to be free of trouble. I'm worried that society will fall apart one day if everyone breaks rules like this. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

Jager was reported to the school's middle leaders for physical abuse by one student. The boy didn't follow the teacher's order of quietly and orderly walking in line with others. The teacher pulled him out of the formation so he could stop talking and laughing with others. The boy cursed at the teacher and kicked the teacher because he thought the teacher embarrassed him in front of the whole class. The teacher controlled the student by holding the collar of the uniform. The middle leader asked Jager to apologize to the student and said that it was the teacher's fault no matter how the conflict started. The indulgence for the students from the middle leaders also enhances the powerless feeling of the teachers besides doting parents. When teachers call the parents to talk about the misconducts of their children, parents sometimes make tons of excuses for them.

*Excerpt 62*

*One student in my class wrote numerous small-sized names of another student to constitute a huge word "FU\*K". He proudly passed it on and called it "a masterpiece of art." His father said the boy was only practicing calligraphy. At that moment, I understood why this boy had so many outrageous misconducts in school. (Gabby, Interview 7, 2021.7.10)*

One boy has been living with his grandmother after his parents got divorced. He is being bullied for being a left behind child.

*Excerpt 63*

*Other kids play pranks on him by shoving leftovers into his backpack. Later I find out that the bullies think he should always be smelly since he doesn't have a mother to do his laundry. I know teenagers can be really naughty, but I consider this morally corrupted. However, their parents thought they were just being kids. (Irene, Interview 9, 2021.7.11)*

Doting parents can be extremely defensive when it comes to the misconduct of their kids. They either deny it or try to soften the seriousness of the problem. Teachers feel even more powerless when parents choose to ignore their advises on children's moral education at home.

*Excerpt 64*

*I feel powerless when parents come to me for help. There's not much I can do; even when I give them advice, they are not following through. (Irene, Interview 9, 2021.7.11)*

Teachers' powerless feeling starts when seeing overprotective parents unwilling to face the problem head-on. It could be even more frustrating to see parents not being very cooperative. What happens at home is entirely out of the teachers' control. Even when teachers point out what needs to be done in their kids' character and behavior, doting parents can be evasive and defensive.

The fourth source of the powerless feeling comes from Shenzhen's social and cultural environment. Shenzhen is one of the most crowded places to live in China. From participant 9 Irene's story, we can see an extraordinary family living situation in Shenzhen, three generations living in a single-room apartment with two bunk beds.

*Excerpt 65*

*When I got the call, a boy was physically fighting with his father because they had different bedtime. The mother said there are no other rooms because five of their family members have to sleep in one room on two bunk beds. (Irene, Interview 9, 2021.7.11)."*

Chinese grandparents think they are obligated to take care of their grandchildren while the parents work in the daytime. The problem for this family is unsolvable to the teacher because she cannot single-handedly change how the Chinese traditional culture works and what kind of living standard and housing condition their family could get in a metropolis like Shenzhen.

The living conditions are not satisfying in Shenzhen. Lacking personal space creates a physical and emotional clash between parents and their kids. Indecent living conditions bring out the wrong side of each person, making family moral education even harder to implement. The last source of the teachers' powerless feeling comes from the uncertainty of students' moral education in the future. Teachers think they are merely passersby in their life.

*Excerpt 66*

*Most students, especially the ones harboring negative moral thoughts, are sinking slowly into the quicksand daily. It's very hard for us to pull them out of the quicksand. Only if they encounter a significant turning point or frustration, will the sense of the crisis stemming from it turn their life around. The inner power is much more effective than the outsiders' help. (Nicky, Interview 14, 2021.7.12)*

Nicky expresses her concerns about the current moral education situation. Teachers are powerless to engage in drastic but effective moral education methods. It is primarily up to the students to wake themselves up and rescue themselves from their own slowly decaying moral beliefs.

Teachers have to adjust their attitudes towards the success of students' moral education.

*Excerpt 67*

*As an experienced teacher, the most important thing for me is to be optimistic and to have a relaxed and calming mentality. I know my appreciation-oriented moral education strategy will work in the end. All I need to do is wait patiently. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

Brian continues to talk about the long and unsystematic moral education prospects for the students. Teachers can only ensure they have done everything right and leave the result of moral education to time.



In conclusion, firstly, teachers feel powerless in maintaining a stable moral education team and unifying the team's ideology.

Secondly, teachers also feel vulnerable when they are disciplining the students, and they can be easily reported to the school leaders, middle leaders, and even the district education bureau. They feel their personal rights and reputation are not being protected.

Thirdly, they feel powerless when doting parents are not cooperative in their children's moral education issues. Fourthly, the unique traditional Chinese family bonds and noticeably income gap in Shenzhen are not something the teachers could change in a short period of time.

Lastly, due to the lack of a clear future in the students' moral education system, teachers can only hope their moral education strategy works well enough to see them through the next chapter of their life. Teachers are also not sure when moral education will end, so the duration of moral education is also out of their control.

#### *4.2.5 The differences between permanent staff and temporary staff*

This part emerged from the first few interviews with the participants. I found that the differences between permanent and temporary staff became a reoccurring issue that matters to the interviewees, so I paid extra attention to the following interviews and the data analysis to dig out more information on its effect on implementing moral education.

The first noticeable difference is the income differences between permanent staff employed by the district education bureau directly for life and temporary staff employed by a labor dispatching company providing contracts to teachers annually. One permanent teacher makes a minimum of 320,000 RMB annually in 2020, while a temporary teacher makes 120,000 RMB a year in 2020. The income of temporary staff is very embarrassing. Life in Shenzhen is very stressful without sufficient money

*Excerpt 68*

*There are some inequalities from time to time popping up just when you let your guard down. There may be some opportunities that favor teachers in the system, like chances of promotion, attending the academic symposium, and getting government-subsidized housing. (Gabby, Interview 7, 2021.7.10)*

The temporary staff may experience a higher level of stress, and they may miss out on training opportunities both in academic teaching and moral education training. It is way harder for the temporary staff to get government-subsidized housing than the permanent staff, so they may have to leave the job and create vacancies in the moral education team, as mentioned in the previous section.

There is a very slim chance for the temporary staff to get a promotion in the school, so they enjoy less authority in carrying out moral education strategies. Brain finds that it is difficult to be taken seriously by the newly recruited young permanent teachers.

*Excerpt 69*

*The school asked me to be new teachers' mentor, but the truth is that they don't take me seriously at all. You are inferior to them. Why would they listen? (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

The newly recruited young permanent teachers make three times more salary than temporary teachers. It also creates difficulties in uniting the ideology of the moral education team consisting of permanent and temporary staff, experienced teachers, and moral education green hands. Some permanent teachers have a different attitude towards temporary teachers and other permanent teachers.

*Excerpt 70*

*They will be more restrained towards a fellow permanent teacher because they think they have a long-term relationship to maintain. They will be less reserved towards a*

*temporary teacher because they know you're only on a one-year contract. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

I personally experience the permanent teachers' different attitudes in communicating with their colleagues. I fought with another teacher in my office one day.

*Excerpt 71*

*When other permanent teachers' students entered the office talking and laughing, she didn't say a word. When my students come to hand in the homework, she tells me my students are being too loud and they should put the homework outside the office so I can get it myself. All of them get the homework sent to their desk. She is more tolerant of other permanent teachers, not me, a temporary teacher. (Field notes, 2020, 3, 2)*

When facing the school leaders, the temporary staff needs to maintain a positive image to be considered qualified and worthy of getting the next contract. Some teachers are good at maintaining a positive and active image on social media.

*Excerpt 72*

*They love to post photos of working late and organizing class activities on their WeChat friend zone. I did the same thing and even more, but I only want to keep my social media private. People of the middle level and top-level management won't see my hard work. They probably think I am redundant. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

Temporary teachers are more likely to be replaced and there is no legal consequence in getting rid of a temporary staff. They feel like walking on eggshells in carrying out moral education strategies. If a temporary teacher's personal moral education beliefs are not in line with the school's or the leaders' ideas, he may not get his contract renewed for next year.

*Excerpt 73*

*The differences lie in the details of daily life; for example, I dare not to make mistakes, I dare not to be late, and I dare not to ask for leave. You know how it is for the temporary*

*teachers. We can be easily replaced by others, newly recruited permanent teachers and other more obedient temporary teachers. (Kamila, Interview 11, 2021.7.11)*

Some temporary teachers think the differences between the permanent and temporary teachers are less than the economic background differences between them. Some temporary teachers come from wealthy families in Shenzhen, and they have a much better life than most of the teachers in the school.

*Excerpt 74*

*The differences between the family background are much more significant than the differences between permanent teachers and temporary teachers. Any family with a house in Shenzhen has conquered an insurmountable economic hurdle. (Kamila, Interview 11, 2021.7.11)*

Some teachers think it is understandable that temporary teachers have a much higher turnover rate because they were recruited to fill the position of absent teachers.

*Excerpt 75*

*The reason why they want temporary teachers is that some permanent teachers are on maternity leave or sick leave. It is a capitalist way of managing teachers by employing temporary teachers. Will students have a temporary soul in moral education? I don't think so. (Nicky, Interview 14, 2021.7.12)*

Nicky plans to go to Hong Kong to study as a graduate student. She wants to go back to her hometown to be with her divorced mother. She thinks it is a capitalist way of managing teachers by employing temporary teachers, but students' moral education is not a temporary job.

Other teachers, like participant 2 Brain and participant 15 Olivia, believe no matter how long they work for the school, they should enjoy equal pay and equal opportunities. Or else, they will leave the school for good. For Kamila, a graduate School in Hong Kong has already

accepted her. Just like what she said, *“Being a permanent teacher or a temporary teacher means nothing to me, and I quit my job simply because it is not in line with my future development prospect.”* A stable so-called “Iron rice bowl” job is losing its attraction, especially to the younger generation.

The newly established P school has 52 temporary staff, almost half of the staff in total. Why can’t they all become permanent staff?

The principal said in the interview that *“One temporary teacher’s position equals seven college graduates’ positions.”* It means if the school wants to turn one temporary teacher into a permanent teacher, the school has to take in seven newly graduated college students to help the government with the graduates’ employment pressure. I couldn’t find any publicly announced documents on her claim, but I do know there are limited opportunities, 3 or 4 positions in one school per year, for temporary teachers to fight against 200-1500 people for each post.

On the other hand, the educational bureau gives more than 20 spots for principals to choose from the new graduates in famous universities globally. In this sense, the principal’s words have some merit in that it is much easy to recruit recent graduates than to help the temporary staff become permanent staff.

It is a consensus among the participants that a high turnover rate creates instabilities in school moral education. The temporary staff makes one-third of the salary doing the same job in school. They also experience higher stress levels and fewer opportunities in getting promotions and housing subsidies. They are treated differently by their colleagues, and they can be replaced much more easily, so they have to be more cautious and obedient.

At the same time, the school has difficulties keeping the excellent temporary teachers they want due to a limited quota from the education bureau. The school needs suitable employees, but they don’t have absolute control over the personnel. Some temporary teachers have other

plans or are forced to get further education in order to be recruited as new graduates. All of these increase the instabilities in building up moral education teams for the students.

To solve this problem, a temporary teacher has to be more proactive in preparing for the examination for becoming a permanent teacher, building a closer relationship with the school leadership team to convince them to set up positions specifically for them, or leaving this profession.

The school and the education bureau also need to show more humanistic care towards the temporary staff other than simply adopting a modern corporate human resources management system, because as mentioned by several participants, *“You cannot expect teachers to eat ‘capitalistic grass’ and produce ‘socialistic milk’ at the same time.*

#### *4.2.6 The appeal of the moral education teachers*

The first five sectors introduce the source of teachers’ moral education knowledge, the heavy responsibility of the headteachers, the development of teachers’ moral education skills and cognitions, and the different status of temporary and permanent staff. This section focuses on their appeals on different levels. This section is put initially in the last part of this chapter for its interconnectedness with the following sections, school management and society. It is moved here to depict a more wholesome picture of teachers in P school.

Firstly, some teachers think smaller class sizes are more conducive to implementing moral education. Teachers think it’s better to have a small class system. Schools should have a small sized class and not have too many students in one class.

#### *Excerpt 76*

*It’s like meritocracy, but you can’t have too many people. Now, there are at least 40 people in one class, and I don’t think they are at the same moral development stage.*

*(Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

Olivia wants smaller classes because she believes students on different moral stages should be put together in smaller groups. The school doesn't put students with similar academic performance together until the ninth grade to have a better enrollment rate for high school, which is against the current education law in China. Academic performance is much easier to evaluate than the moral development stage. Although her suggestion makes a lot of sense, it has little practicability to the school.

Secondly, teachers want to clarify the roles of teachers and students in moral education. They think teachers can be role models and torchbearers, and students need to be responsible for their own moral cultivation. Debbie thinks a teacher should be a moral exemplar to the students and a noble person to society.

*Excerpt 77*

*A teacher needs to be a noble teammate, a noble person with noble morality, and a pure person who has detached himself from vulgar interests. Students can be influenced by what they hear from teachers, but most importantly, what they see, step by step, constantly improving their moral cultivation. (Debbie, Interview 4, 2021.7.9)*

*Excerpt 78*

*Teachers are only supposed to lead. Why can't the students themselves strive to be good person? (Eva, Interview 5, 2021.7.9)*

Debbie and Eva think that it is the students' responsibility to cultivate their own morality, and teachers are only responsible for being moral exemplars or torch-bearers in moral education. Gabby believes role models are powerful because of their invisible influence.

*Excerpt 79*

*It's the feeling that I want to be "the whole package" of my role model. I believe in this invisible influence. (Gabby, Interview 7, 2021.7.10)*

She believes that if students have more role models, teachers, or others, they will be more or less influenced. The students admire their role models' professional ability as well as their morality. Students are more likely to be affected by the imperceptible impact on their behavior and characters from mimicking their role models, and less likely to obediently accept lecturing and indoctrination from the so-called authorities.

Nicky thinks that too many factors are trying to influence the moral cultivation of the children. They should be allowed to choose who they want to be, practicing morality and exploring society by themselves. Let a child be a child.

*Excerpt 80*

*There are too many voices for him. The teacher thinks he should behave like this, and the parents think he should think like that. These cause chaos in children's minds. Why can't the children have their own life? (Nicky, Interview 14, 2021.7.12)*

Nicky and Quinn believe children should have a chance to develop their morality naturally without too many interferences. Children's moral development is not necessarily going hand in hand with cognitive development, so it makes no sense to simultaneously teach morality to an entire class. They think methodologically speaking, what is inculcated should be a natural growth process of individual psychology. Cognitive development is not equal to moral development.

Teachers think the number of moral education activities should be downsized significantly. Right now, there are too many lousy interventions from parents, teachers, the Internet, some entrepreneurs, and the government. There are also a variety of activities organized by all these people to fill every possible gap in the children's life.

*Excerpt 81*

*Moral education needs to do subtraction. In the book Emile by Rousseau, I learned that teachers need to follow the natural development of the children. Let them do whatever*



*they want to do, and cultivate them to be free, equal, and independent. They are way too tired. Everyone wants a piece of the children, and we must do some serious subtraction.*  
(Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)

From the teachers' perspective, there are too many low-quality moral education activities in children's lives and too many voices trying to get into the children's heads. Meanwhile, teachers also think the school's moral education needs more outreach activities from society. Frankie thinks the current moral education needs field trips to the fire department, the transportation department, the police office, and the government office to closely observe how society works.

*Excerpt 82*

*I also would love to invite the graduated students to come back and talk about their current situation, good or bad. They can talk about how they arrange their middle school life and what it brings to the future. As teachers, we don't judge whether it's good or bad, let the audience figure out what to do next.* (Frankie, Interview 6, 2021.7.9)

Leon thinks military trainings may put the idea of discipline into students' mind.

*Excerpt 83*

*I think we should send them to some summer camps, lock them up and get military training. The military training instructors are much harsher than teachers. They will learn to obey and have some discipline in them. Military training, instead of classroom management, improves coercion.* (Leon, Interview 12, 2021.7.11)

Teachers think that the school should be working with the fire department, transportation department, and even prison and military training centers to allow students to experience how society works in person. Those departments should have educational purposes.

The school and even society can also influence parents, including their continuous learning on family education. Parents should have opportunities to learn about moral education ideas

and methods. There should be a consistent agreement between all the stakeholders regarding children's moral education.

*Excerpt 84*

*The parents are reflecting when problems come. They won't know how to deal with it by themselves, and they are unable to change their educational idea and methods without professional help. There shouldn't be a backlash on the school's more education activity. If parents are complaining, we should be able to find the loopholes and deal with them in time to form a closed circle for moral education. (Alton, Interview 1, 2021.7.8)*

There is no specialized institution for educating the parents. When the parents disagree with teachers' moral education methods, without timely communication, it could trigger misunderstandings and vacancy in children's moral education.

To sum it up, teachers think students with similar moral development stages should be put into much smaller classes. They also believe teachers or other role models should emphasize the invisible influence on children's moral education because it is much more potent than indoctrination from authoritative figures.

Teachers think that currently, students are not fully acting as their moral education agency, so there should not be so many factors in children's moral education. Let them be themselves. In this way, students could have their own voice.

Moreover, parents are not being educated enough to have a mutual understanding of children's moral education with teachers.

## **4.3 The P school**

### *4.3.1 The P school's moral education activities*

#### **4.3.1.1 The large scale of moral education activities**

The school spends every first week of the new school year carrying out the SPECIAL life education courses. SPECIAL stands for safety, patriotism, etiquette, creativity, artificial intelligence, and life education. Here is the class schedule for grade 8 in the first semester of 2020.

**Table 10**

*Class Schedule for the SPECIAL Course in 2020*

<b>Monday</b>	Opening ceremony	Life Education	National Defense	Military training	Science talk and TV
<b>Tuesday</b>	First Aid practice	Youth never comes back	Safety Education	Good habits films	Study habits formation
<b>Wednesday</b>	Fire escape drill	Be masters of time	DIY with wastes	Life stories	Sports and life
<b>Thursday</b>	Social responsibilities	GBA super scholars	National security	AI in life	Listening efficiently
<b>Friday</b>	Request and rejections	Scientific films	Psychological lecture	GBA development	Lantern festivals

The course design shows that the one-week SPECIAL course is very ambitious and inclusive. These courses benefit the students in different aspects of their moral education, creative thinking, and scientific awareness. The rationale is not clearly stated at the beginning of the week, so some teachers think it is not very helpful. Alton believes the class schedule is too much for students to digest in one short week.

*Excerpt 85*

*The SPECIAL life education courses are outstanding, but it is squashed in one week, which is not conducive to helping children cultivate good habits and moral beliefs in the long run. (Alton, Interview 1, 2021.7.8)*

The number of moral education activities is also overwhelming for students to participate. Take the first semester in 2021 as an example, and I find that there are more than 40 activities throughout the semester, making it at least twice a week.

*Excerpt 86*

*I counted the number of moral education activities this semester. It reaches a surprisingly 45 activities in one semester, the weekly bilingual flag raising ceremony, red scarf wearing ceremony, moral education forum, moral education story-telling competition, headteachers' moral education skill competition, youth trail walk, tomb-sweeping day activity, dragon-boat festival activity, May Fourth Youth Day activity, parents' meetings, all students' family visits, pledging ceremony on examination integrity.... The list goes on and on. (Field notes, 2021.6.18)*

The school arranges too many extracurricular activities that take up way too much of teachers' time. New teachers may feel horrible when there is only a slight improvement in their professional skills.

*Excerpt 87*

*There are too many different kinds of activities things, weird things, like the dancing competition, being a receptionist for all kinds of competitions, being a judge of the volleyball competition, and standing outside the gate as a guard. (Leon, Interview 12, 2021.7.11)*

The school hosts district-level and municipal competitions, such as volleyball competitions, dancing competitions, headteacher skill competitions, and all kinds of teaching competitions. Teachers are required to work as receptionists or service staff, and they are generally repulsed by this kind of “free labor”. New teachers like Leon think it is unfair for them to sacrifice their own time and opportunity to advance professionally as a teacher to work as functionaries in various school-based extracurricular activities.

Teachers think that an effective moral education attends to details. P school loves to organize grand and solemn ceremonies when it comes to moral education, like the opening ceremony every semester, joining the Youth League ceremony, and sitting in the high school entrance examination ceremony. The school pays more attention to the formality of moral education and is keen on creating a “sense of ceremony.”

*Excerpt 88*

*I agree we need the students to feel the “sense of ceremony,” but it has a very limited effect on students’ moral education with these ungrounded lofty scenes. Some students write in their weekly diary that they have had enough of the formalism in this school.*

*(Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

Teachers like Brian believe moral education activities should be about effectiveness but not numbers. High-quality activities and even traditional moral education activities are not as polished as fancy modern ones. Still, they can be of great value to the moral cultivation of the children. In his previous privately owned junior high school, they have the red song singing competition annually. Every year students are given a repertoire of 20 songs to choose from. The class will prepare two songs to compete against other classes.

*Excerpt 89*

*After junior high school, they will know at least six songs by heart, and they won’t forget them for the rest of their lives. You can feel the different temperaments in the class. It improves the sense of belonging and honor of the class. It also expresses the love and admiration for the country and the CPC party. Our school’s moral education activities are very gaudy. It’s all about being photogenic. Little impact is made on the students’ hearts. I bet our students could not even sing one red song completely. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

He believes high quality and classic moral education activities may have deeper influence on students' patriotic character than P school's gaudy activities. Teachers, especially headteachers, regard some of P school's moral education activities as superficial and insignificant.

*Excerpt 90*

*I think it's probably 50 percent for the headteachers, and then the other 30 percent comes from the subject teachers. The other 20 percent is at the school level. I think it is meaningless to always do some superficial work on moral education. (Casey, Interview 3, 2021.7.9)*

Casey believes since the headteachers and the subject teachers have already taken up the majority of the moral education task, the school needn't have done so many superficial and time-consuming activities because the school-level moral education activities have a hard time penetrating and arriving to the heart and soul of the students.

The school realized the problem of excessive moral education activities, but the changes take time, and the leaders are not ready to let go of some of their moral education activities.

*Excerpt 91*

*In one regular meeting for the middle leaders, I have stated explicitly that we have enough moral education activities where subtractions are needed. Effective and successful activities need to be preserved, while random innovative activities shouldn't be carried out. It is also difficult for the school since it has a reputation to maintain, so it's like riding a tiger. (Alton, Interview 1, 2021.7.8)*

Riding a tiger means doing a difficult task and being stuck in the middle, similar to "having the wolf by the ear." The school principal Alton has realized the problem of having too many moral education activities; however, the school has gained the reputation of being the "future school," "moral education exemplar," "high-quality moral education school," and the "loving

and caring school,” it is tough for the school to stop this momentum of going faster, further and attention-grabbing to downsizing and simplifying the existing moral education activities.

To sum up, the school’s moral education activities are quite ambitious and inclusive.

The SPECIAL life education courses and other 45 activities in one semester have attracted a lot of exposure for the school. They can be beneficial to the moral advancement of the students.

In teachers’ perceptions, there are simply too many activities, and they have occupied too much of their time. The school leader has realized this problem, but it has a powerful momentum to be called off for good immediately.

#### 4.3.1.2 The quality of moral education activities

The school pays great attention to the psychological well-being of the students. For primary school, they have psychology classes once in two weeks. For junior high students, they have a psychology class once a week. Teachers are aware of seeking professional help from the psychological teachers in the consultant’s office.

##### *Excerpt 92*

*The school paid enough attention to the psychological health of the students. As you can see, the school has invested sufficient funding for the psychology consultation center.*

*Many headteachers come to us for professional advice. Many headteachers sit with the students and try to comfort them with us. (Kamila, Interview 11, 2021.7.11)*

The school leaders and the teachers are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of students’ psychological well-being. The school has invested sufficient funding for the psychology consultation center and is paying close attention to the students’ psychological problems for its close relation with security issues.

Here is what happened when the school receives a suicide note.

##### *Excerpt 93*

*We receive a suicide note at 6:00 p.m. in the psychological consultant center after school. One middle leader takes it very seriously. She stayed up late till 10:30 p.m. to finally located the person who wrote the note and called in her mother. She said we could not have a news report on students' suicide. We ask the mother to sign a notification letter and let her go. (Field notes, 2021. 3.15)*

This middle leader act upon this matter quickly and professionally, not only to protect students' life but also to protect the reputation of P school.

Not everyone cares about moral education in the school. Even middle leaders treat moral education as nothing more than a part of their job description, which can be removed as they rotate their jobs within the school. Raven thinks the implementation of moral education rules in P school is only cared for by the people responsible for moral education directly.

*Excerpt 94*

*As a middle leader, when I worked at the Study guiding center, I would walk around the teaching building and check whether the students are paying attention or not in class. Now that I work at the students' growth and development center, I only pay attention to keeping the floor clean. If there were garbage everywhere, the headmaster would notice it immediately and scold me. Our center should be about moral education, but right now, it's nothing more than regulating the code of conduct, rules, and discipline.*

*(Raven, Interview 18, 2021.7.20)*

For the middle leaders like Raven, she believes that although the school constantly emphasizes everyone is responsible for moral education in school, the reality is that only the designated moral education personnel genuinely care about student's moral education, even only on the behavioral level, such as following the school's rules and regulations.

Teachers think that moral education concerns everybody in the school, including the security guards and the sanitation workers.



*Excerpt 95*

*Some parents complain that the security guard has a nasty attitude. She felt like her kid was going to be mistreated in this school. Basic etiquette training should be provided for the security guards and the lunch ladies. (Gabby, Interview 7, 2021.7.10)*

There is no training on the etiquette of the security guard, cleaners, and lunch ladies. Once in a while, there will be a conflict between the guards and the students or with the parents. I see new faces every month on the security team, so the high turnover rate also makes it difficult to maintain a helpful service team on children's moral education.

Teachers are not satisfied with the school's extra attention on promoting the school's image by organizing fancy moral education activities. It shouldn't be the primary focus of moral education.

*Excerpt 96*

*I have seen countless visitors in the past two years. They only get to see the glamorous aspect of moral education in our school, such as students marching in order, the bilingual flag-raising ceremony, and the well-made promotional videos. These shouldn't be the main focus of moral education, but we put so much effort into showcasing the elegant appearance. It's like putting the cart in front of the horse. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

Jager believes that the primary goal of any moral education activities should be student-oriented and future-oriented instead of focusing on glamorous presentations. These are on the shallow surface of moral education. The visitors and outsiders cannot see the long-term results of moral education, and they cannot see the real struggle behind all the glamour. In teachers' perceptions, being photogenic is another consideration of the decision makers in planning moral education activities in P school.

*Excerpt 97*

*Everything is for the purpose of better promotion. Bureaucratism and formalism are noticeably severe in this school. When they organize moral education activities, the first consideration is “being photogenic.” My fundamental values keep on being challenged by the absurdity that happened in this school. (Leon, Interview 12, 2021.7.11)*

Similar to Jager’s point of view, Leon also points out that the school’s moral education activities focus too much on the promotion part, like being photogenic. Because he thinks there is severe “bureaucratism and formalism” in this school, his values towards moral education are under serious challenge, but there is no place for him to express his concern. Teachers discover that the ineffectiveness of the moral education activities in P school results from the deviated top-level design. Brain thinks moral education in P school should have some high-quality top-level design and do some practical things at the same time.

*Excerpt 98*

*Looking from the surface, it seems that we have a variety of practice activities in promoting the formation of moral education, which is the key to implementing children’s moral education in practice. If you take a closer look at many activities in our school, the students benefit very little because the top-level design is targeted at another angle. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

Brain picks up what Leon is saying by offering a more in-depth analysis. The moral education activities are designed by the top-level administrators in the school, but effective moral education activities need to tackle the moral education issues from the actual need of the students. What kind of moral education activities are being carried out in school should be decided by fully understanding students’ needs not by guessing the intention of even higher-level administrators’ preferences.

This top-down decision-making process is ineffective, and a bottom-up decision-making process might be more advantageous to all students. I personally think the celebration

ceremony for the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Communist Party focuses only the glamorous side but not the struggling days of the Party. I think the hardship the Party endured might have stronger power in cultivating student' patriotic heart.

*Excerpt 99*

*My feeling is how perfect the school's celebration ceremony is, the dancing, the pre-recorded singing, the circling drones, and the perfect music. However, I was not very moved because there were no moving stories of the hard and dark days of the Party. I just think you cannot forget the struggle of the old times. Now the ceremony is just formalism to me. (Field notes, 2019.9.30)*

Math teacher Frankie thinks unlike the collective lesson planning sessions, the school's moral education principle, "love the students," is too elusive to be implemented.

*Excerpt 100*

*When all the math teachers prepared lessons together, we would brainstorm the best teaching methods for the Pythagorean theorem. It is practical and efficient, and I can adopt some of them directly in my class. The moral education training in our school stops at the level of loving the students. I need to know more practical methods to show love to them. (Frankie, Interview 6, 2021.7.9)*

Frankie concludes that moral education in the school is highly theoretical and less practical than the mathematics collective lesson preparation activity. She is ready to put effective moral education strategies into practice, but the school's moral education training stops at the theoretical level of "loving the students."

Almost all the teachers mention that there is not enough practical guidance on the implementation of moral education. There is a giant gap between theory and daily practice.

*Excerpt 101*

*In moral education, I mainly receive general theoretical guidance from the school level. It offers you a direction, which is crucial, of course. Love is an emotionally loaded word, so it has little practical meaning in dealing with the daily mass created by our beloved students. (Gabby, Interview 7, 2021.7.10)*

Gabby also thinks right now, the school offers nothing but an empty and unmeasurable direction, “love”. She knows the big focus is “loving the students.” The moral education training is way too theoretical, and she needs something down-to-earth. She thinks the overall conception, “loving the student,” put forward by the school, is something said by an armchair strategist. Teachers need more guidance and training in carrying out loving moral education strategies.

In conclusion, the school pays great attention to the psychological problems of the students but not everyone cares about the actual implementation of moral education in the school, even middle leaders.

Teachers have an impression of bureaucratism and formalism of the school’s moral education activities. They believe a student-centered moral education activity should have a bottom-up decision-making process, not a top-down way.

Additionally, the school’s moral education principle, “loving the students,” is way too elusive, so the moral education training is also highly theoretical and not practical.

#### *4.3.2. The P school’s management style*

The principal has reiterated her teaching philosophy several times on different occasions, like during the school’s opening ceremony, parent meetings, online seminars, and news reports on TV.

The first principle is to love. Teachers should love every student, and teachers are able to love every student. Every student should be able to feel love.

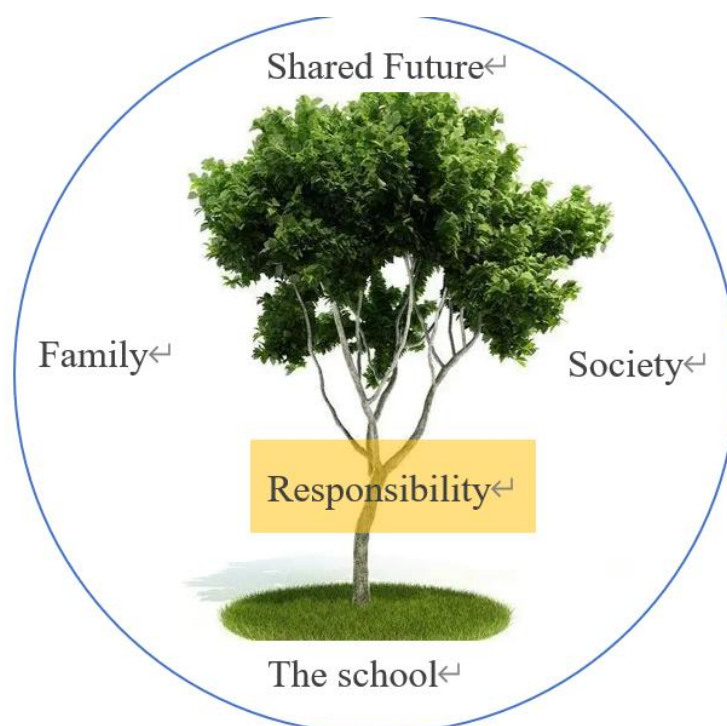
The second principle is to integrate every possible learning material into the curriculum,

which includes innovative courses like entrepreneur cultivation course; extended courses like English reading and art appreciation; local courses like GBA development landscape; and lastly, school culture like traditional culture museum, science and history museum, and information technology museum.

The third principle is the ecological system of students' growth. It contains three major stakeholders, family, society, and the school.

**Figure 15**

*The Ecological System of Students' Growth*



In her proposed ecological system, every stakeholder needs to grow strong inner power and motivation independently, and all stakeholders should communicate openly and develop in a coordinated way towards a shared future.

For middle leaders, she said that middle leaders' leadership skills determine the development level of the school. The principal provides "ideology," the vice-principal provides "thoughts," and the middle leaders provide "strategy" and "implementation."

She believes the most essential resource for school management is the "5M", money,

material, machinery, methods, and manpower. The principal identified several problems when she attended a seminar about middle leaders' leadership skills. She thinks currently, in this school, the middle leaders face multiple challenges from various aspects, such as being stuck in the middle positions, balancing teaching and management work, being underappreciated by the principal, being challenged by younger generations, and working for someone else's vision. Her solution to this problem is to rotate the middle leaders' jobs and responsibilities so they can be mature administrators quickly.

There is a clear division of labor and responsibilities in the management of moral education in this school, and the problem lies in the indifferent attitude of the middle-level management. There are three levels in the management of moral education in this school. On the bottom level, the management is mainly carried out by the headteachers, more than 50% of the work. The second is the middle-level management, and the third is the upper management.

*Excerpt 102*

*. It's like the traditional Chinese saying, "each one sweeps the snow from his own doorsteps, and not to be bothered by the frost on the neighbors' roof." In other subjects, it may be accurate, but in moral education, "the frost" is everyone's business. (Alton, Interview 1, 2021.7.8)*

Alton thinks the departments in P school only mind their own business. The middle leaders rotate their jobs so frequently that they haven't work out a stable system where they could work together no matter how their responsibilities change. The management problem of our school is the coordination of various functional centers.

*Excerpt 103*

*The headmaster should be more tolerant of mistakes made by the subordinates. You cannot say, "Well, I have done my job; blame others instead of me." The middle leaders*

*in different centers rotate their job once a semester or at most once a year, but I think for some key centers, such as the moral education center, and security department, the middle leaders need to accumulate years of experience. In a traditional Chinese saying, it is called “pulling up seedlings to help them grow.” (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

Teachers are worried about how moral education can remain stable with such a job rotation policy. They believe middle leaders in the moral education center and the security department should have a longer time to accumulate their experience, which is beneficial to the school’s moral education practice.

Middle leaders think they have the right to oversee the teachers’ teaching methods even when they are teaching different subjects. It can be a little condescending to some teachers.

*Excerpt 104*

*From middle leaders, we had better be robots. I want to be more down-to-earth in my Physics class, but they don’t want me to cook chicken soup for the students’ souls. That doesn’t even make sense. (Nicky, Interview 14, 2021.7.12)*

Nicky thinks Physics teachers cannot take every teaching suggestion made by the Chinese teachers simply because they hold a middle-level management position.

The middle leaders are great at “threatening” teachers by making improvement plans, but they are not consistent in following through with their plans. Leon thinks he is doing extra work because the middle leaders are not cooperating with each other.

*Excerpt 105*

*After analyzing the examination results in a group meeting, the studying guiding center threatened us with all kinds of supervisory measurements, like randomly checking the homework or observing our class without advance notice. But they never follow through. At the same time, the moral education center wants me to attend endless meetings, which*

*could be avoided if they collaborate with another department and put forward one comprehensive goal. (Leon, Interview 12, 2021.7.11)*

The principal only knows the teachers as described by the middle leaders. Jager thinks his contract is terminated this semester because he has made other permanent teachers, including one middle leader unhappy. It's entirely up to the school to renew temporary teachers' contract. So, if the middle leaders create layers of lies by negatively reviewing a particular teacher, he is at considerable risk of losing the job.

*Excerpt 106*

*I have made many sacrifices for this job, but the middle leaders only report negative information about me to the headmaster. He didn't know the whole picture. He lives in a reality created by the middle leaders. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

Since the headmaster may depend on the information reported by middle leaders, it creates opportunities for the middle leaders to bury potential dangers as long as the incident has no serious consequences. They know about the many bullying incidents in reality and online. Since there are no angry parents or injured students, they won't spend too much time following through with the incident.

*Excerpt 107*

*From a few unsettled events in my class, I can see that the middle-level leaders are not worth their salt. The online bullying incident, loan incident, and the truancy incident all ended up with nothing definite. (Mandy, Interview 13, 2021.7.11)*

Mandy thinks that the moral education department is not fulfilling its duty. They hold an office and enjoy all the privileges, but sometimes they can be negligent in not following through with moral education incidents. So, what teachers are seeing now is that many are buried in the middle layer in P school. The hidden danger is buried, which is not suitable for students' morality growth and development.



### 4.3.3 The school culture

A newly established school has more requirements as well as more opportunities. If teachers could use that to their own advantage, they could make greater career advancements.

#### *Excerpt 108*

*Because the school is newly established, it may require more from the teachers and the students in various aspects. On the other hand, if you can bring yourself up to the challenge, you can grow up quickly, personally and professionally. In the end, everything is worth it. (Gabby, Interview 7, 2021.7.10)*

As discussed in the previous section on the differences between permanent and temporary staff, it is very hard for a temporary teacher to get promoted, but I got a promotion from being only the Morality and Law Basis teacher to working in the moral education part-time. I got “Excellent” on my last year’s performance appraisal for all the hard work I have done, winning teaching competitions twice, writing news reports for the WeChat public account, and participating in the moral education story-telling competition.

#### *Excerpt 109*

*I got promoted! I finally got noticed by the school leaders, who decided to give me more responsibilities in the moral education department. This is unthinkable in other schools, only in new schools like this one. (Field notes, 2020. 2.26)*

Newly established schools want to put their name on the map so badly that they are too eager to promote their reputation, which is departing from the right track of moral education. Brain thinks the new schools in Shenzhen have similar management problems. They want to gain fame and recognition so bad and so quickly that they forget they are running a school instead of some kind of trendy Internet startup company.

#### *Excerpt 110*

*One school in the Longhua district promotes that they are the first school in China to*

*have two teachers in one classroom. Basically, one teacher is teaching, the other has to watch out for the class order. Imagine how much extra work teachers should have done in that school. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

One school in the Longhua district also puts teachers in very difficult position when they want to be a famous school in China. The school pays excessive attention to students being rule followers. Some school regulations are way too rigid, so the school culture can be intolerant and inhumane sometimes.

*Excerpt 111*

*You cannot reach too deeply with administrative hands. The students' privacy and psychological status needed to be carefully handled by professionals. You cannot meddle in students' life in the name of "love." (Quinn, Interview 17, 2021.7.20)*

Quinn thinks that the school culture needs to be tolerant, acceptive, loving, and respectful. The school shouldn't have done and needn't have done so much in controlling students' behavior.

Teachers are not happy about how the middle leaders sacrifice school regulations and even cross the bottom lines to cater to students' needs, no matter how unreasonable they are.

*Excerpt 112*

*I think he did encounter some unfairness the first time he went to the middle leaders for help. They helped him out, and he got the reward. He felt that such a method is feasible. Gradually, it becomes a form of indulgence. A kneeling teacher cannot produce a standing student. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

Jager thinks the middle leaders want to uphold the school's image, so they sweep the problem under the carpet. Instead of confronting the difficulty of moral education to the students, they choose the easy way out by asking the teacher to apologize and concealing the problems of the students' moral characters.

The school tends to protect its reputation in dealing with angry parents, and it sometimes means unfair sanctions on the teachers' part.

*Excerpt 113*

*I think those parents are being incredibly unreasonable. They frequently go to the municipal Education Bureau to report teachers they don't like who did absolutely nothing wrong. The only mistake made by the teacher is caring too much for the students. (Hana, Interview 8, 2021.7.11)*

As a new school, the leaders want to pour oil on troubled water to uphold their reputation. The school creates a safety bubble for the students and their parents. It is crucial for students, especially middle school students, to know the real consequences of breaking the law.

*Excerpt 114*

*Speaking as a PE teacher, I think the class needs more emphasis on the law. They need to go to the prison and visit the criminals and prisoners. They need to know what leads innocent people to crimes. There shouldn't be only teachers with no criminal records giving lectures on morality. Secondly, students nowadays can be a little hot-tempered and grumpy, so I think some poetic things, like arts, music, and literature, could make one's heart softer. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

Jager, the romantic PE teacher, thinks the school is too indulgent in protecting the students. Students haven't gotten the chance to see the truly ugly side of the society. Visits to prison and courthouse could offer a more direct impact on students' being law-abiding citizens. Literature and art could soften the students' hearts.

The school's administration centers have changed to confusing names to set them apart from traditional schools to sound more advanced. Right now, in P school, we have "Students' growth & development guiding center," "Security assurance & logistical support center," and "Evaluation & development center." This sounds very fancy, but their functions are very

confusing

*Excerpt 115*

*When I was young, our school had the moral education office, academic affairs office, finance office, and Security department. I remember our moral education director at that time was very fierce, very strong, and very intimidating. If anyone makes a serious mistake, like fighting with another person, they will be sent to the moral education department, and usually the penalty is heavy. Now I don't think any center in this school has the power to punish students. (Hana, Interview 8, 2021.7.11)*

The state has issued a law protecting teachers' right to discipline students, but I don't think anyone wants to get into trouble to discipline students.

The administrative power moves of the school hinder the successful implementation of moral education and create psychological and emotional burdens on the teachers. Quinn thinks everyone's rights should have a systematic safeguard without which people will be in a rebellious state of mind. The rebellious children are supervised and watched constantly, while the rebellious middle-level leaders and principals in the school act recklessly because of the lack of a supervisory system.

*Excerpt 116*

*This school has been using rules to bully and exploit ordinary teachers, such as the countless meetings and unnecessary training sessions, especially the on-watch system, which turns something simple to a severe psychological burden. (Quinn, Interview 17, 2021.7.20)*

The on-watch system required teachers to take turns standing at the front gate of the school for 3 hours at least three times a semester, 7:00-8:00, 1:00-2:00, and 5:00-6:00, which are not official working hours for teachers. The principal, middle-level leaders, and headteachers are excused from this responsibility.

Teachers think rules and discipline shouldn't and cannot be equated to morality. It will hurt students when the school upgrades violation of school rules to morality issue. Especially, what the school wants is nothing but convenient management.

*Excerpt 117*

*The school loves to get rid of the person who raises the question, instead of dealing with the problem head-on. (Quinn, Interview 17, 2021.7.20)*

Temporary teachers are bothered by the strict administrative regulations; even the permanent staff have been thinking about resigning. Leon's been in P school for half a year, and he is starting to doubt whether he wants to be a permanent teacher or not.

*Excerpt 118*

*If you want to muddle along day to day, being a permanent teacher in a public school is not a bad thing. The dynamic face recognition attendance system is nothing but torture to me. Why are they dragging me to the cheerleader dancing competition? I'm an English teacher, not a dancer. I am considering taking the civil service exam or returning to my hometown. (Leon, Interview 12, 2021.7.11)*

Non-teaching-related activities should be voluntary than compulsory; otherwise, they can stir up conflicts and antagonism between teachers and the decision-makers in the school. The principal needs to show more compassion and recognition to moral education teachers. Hana thinks the principal's words carry great power in the whole moral education system of the school. Teachers' contributions should be recognized publicly, and some encouragement in this part should be given to moral education workers. Right now, the school is full of tension.

*Excerpt 119*

*It should be a warm and welcoming place. The school culture needed to be much more relaxed than now. I think there should be some relaxation courses in moral education. (Hana, Interview 8, 2021.7.11)*

The current school culture is not relaxed and enjoyable in Hana's perceptions. Moral education should be filled with pleasure and appreciation for students and teachers. Now the principal is not showing enough support and praise for the hard-working teachers and headteachers. It could dampen teachers' enthusiasm in the long run.

Mandy emphasizes the pivotal role of the principal, the first responsible person for moral education, the legal representative, and the evaluator of the teachers' performance in moral education matters. There should be a fluent communication channel and report channel, so serious moral misconduct of the students won't be buried unprocessed. When facing these problems of moral education, they cannot only deal with what can be dealt with and put aside what cannot be dealt with.

*Excerpt 120*

*Lots of the hidden danger is buried. One boy cyberbullied another girl in my class, so she reported him to the headteacher, then to the moral education office. They are too busy, and it didn't cost serious damage. I don't think that principal knows about this.*

*(Mandy, Interview 13, 2021.7.11)*

Without a mature evaluation system, some incidents are out of the control of the headteacher, and some incidents are too tricky and too troublesome to deal with for the moral education office so that they will be buried and put aside without the principal's acknowledgment. Mandy points out that there might be less hidden dangers if only the headteachers and the moral education office know about students' moral misconduct.

*Excerpt 121*

*There should be one of those principal's mailboxes where you send it directly to the principal, and then the principal gets to know that there are a few things to do so that if they don't do it, the principal knows. The principal cares about this school, but some of the employees won't care as much. Right? (Mandy, Interview 13, 2021.7.11)*

This means that the school must set up some indicators on moral education to assess the middle-level managers' performance, at least counting things unresolved by them.

The school has realized that blowing its own trumpet is not doing them a favor. On the contrary, it could make them a laughingstock if they keep on pursuing fame and popularity because the school should be a vanity fair. Jager thinks using "love the students" as a slogan in moral education is very amateur. There are countless ways of showing love to others. Without a clear definition, it brings nothing but confusion to the teachers.

*Excerpt 122*

*You cannot trample on your own school regulations to cover up students' breach of discipline. Currently, the school is blowing its own trumpet on social media and every possible channel. Do you think people will believe in your self-glorification of "Wow, what an awesome school"? No, people will laugh at you. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

Jager thinks the school's moral education teaches students to be hypocritical and superficial. Education, more specifically moral education, needs to stand on solid ground, whose reputation is formulated by compliments and praise from the parents and society and is able to withstand the test of time.

Quinn thinks that the true purpose of moral education should be finding an appropriate and individualized way to lead them to believe in truthfulness, kindness, and beauty.

*Excerpt 123*

*Most of our students in this stage are optimistic, active, creative, and impressionable. Empty beauty is simply ugly. Hypocrisy is morbid. Unfortunately, this is what the school pays great attention to at this moment. (Quinn, Interview 17, 2021.7.20)*

Tokenism and formalism in moral education are superficial and perfunctory in nature, which is detrimental to students' morality cultivation. Students should have the freedom to seeking truthfulness and beauty on their own.

To summarize, the principal thinks she has a solid moral education theory, but in teachers' perception, some of her ideas can be very impractical. The school pays excessive attention to asking the students to follow the school's rules and creates a safety bubble for the students. Teachers feel the administrative centers generate a lot of physical and emotional burdens on them. They are underappreciated and closely monitored.

The school doesn't have a fluent communication channel, so many incidents are buried without notifying the principal. The school should put its reputation in the hand of the parents and society, not in its self-glorification.

#### **4.4 Parents and Family Education**

##### *4.4.1 The relationship between parents and their children*

In teachers' perceptions, parents are too busy to accompany their children, and they are sacrificing moral education time to make more money. Casey thinks the division of labor needs to be clearer within the family. Parents need to make a sacrifice in the work time and focus a little more on raising kids morally and virtuously.

##### *Excerpt 124*

*You cannot leave the children unattended while busy with your career and making money. If you don't give birth to children, you may concentrate fully on making money.*

*Some Chinese parents just don't understand there should be a difference. Be there when they need you. Cut the work time, not the quality time. (Casey, Interview 3, 2021.7.9)*

The parents focus too much on making money, and children are learning only destructive behaviors from the parents. Parents and family are no longer holding the moral compass of



the students but in the hands of their peers. Many parents think that the richer they are, the better parents they will be, especially in a competitive city like Shenzhen, which is not true.

*Excerpt 125*

*It's about companionship and mutual respect. Like father like son. One of my students has the tendency to solve problems with violence. In the family visit, I learned that his father always beats him, and his father used to be beaten by his grandfather. Violence is inherited in the family. I can almost imagine what he will do to his son. The father tells me that his son only wants to hang out with his friends. If he wants to know what his son thinks, he has to call his friends to find out. (Irene, Interview 9, 2021.7.11)*

Some parents inherit traditional disciplining methods from their parents. It is no longer suitable for the current family education. They have no efficient communication skills with their children.

Gradually, the children become more and more distant from their parents. It is hazardous because when they hang out with their friends, they do things and judge things by feelings, not by moral and ethical standards.

Teachers think the original family has a long-term influence on the children's morality cultivation.

*Excerpt 126*

*I found that most girls who start dating at such an early age have disharmonious parent-child relationships. They are not very closely attached to each other. Some parents are too busy to pay attention, and others have terrible conjugal relations. In a word, they want to get rid of their original family as soon as possible. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

While parents think moral education is the school's and teachers' main task, teachers believe the original family has a long-lasting influence on children's emotional wellbeing and daily behaviors.

Harmonious family bonds create a sense of security for the children.

*Excerpt 127*

*One girl in my class is very optimistic and confident, so I went to their home for a family visit to learn the secrets. Two things impressed me the most. Firstly, her parents love each other, and they have a very harmonious relationship. Secondly, her parents spend lots of time bonding with her over mountain climbing, shopping, and doing housework together. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

Olivia thinks these give the girl a great sense of security, which makes her an exuberant young girl with great inner confidence.

The most frequently appeared code in teachers' perception of family education is the word "hypertension" and "parents are overstrung at their children's future."

*Excerpt 128*

*The new generation has a new life, and you need to trust them and believe that they can live their life well. (Raven, Interview 18, 2021.7.20)*

Raven thinks this kind of hypertension is unnecessary in family education. Children should be trusted and given chances to face their challenges themselves. However, parents are labeling children against their will.

*Excerpt 129*

*The biggest problem of the parents is the tendency to put labels on their kids, like lazy, addicted to cellphones, useless, and unable to take care of themselves. (Quinn, Interview 17, 2021.7.20)*

Parents are too afraid of the stigmatization of having an SEN student.

*Excerpt 130*

*Many parents are in denial of the fact that their kids are SEN students. Their cognitive status and language development already have serious problems, but the parents are too*

*scared to admit the truth. Let alone seeking professional help from other professional facilities. (Kamila, Interview 11, 2021.7.11)*

On the one hand, parents are labeling their children negatively. On the other hand, they are very protective and deny the fact that their kids are SEN students, and they should be worried more about finding the proper treatment for their kids immediately.

The unfavorable living conditions and complex family relationships induce anxiety and depression in some students. One girl in Frankie's class lost her parents in a car accident. Her grandmother forces her aunt to take her to Shenzhen from their hometown to have a better life.

*Excerpt 131*

*One day, a physical fight broke out in the family because of sibling fuss, and her aunt put a knife on her neck at some point. Because they have a tiny apartment, her aunt's biological son always shouts at her, "Get out of my house." She has been depressed for quite a long time, and I feel powerless about how little I can do for this poor girl. She is like Harry Potter in real life. (Frankie, Interview 6, 2021.7.9)*

It is already challenging for her aunt's family to make a living in Shenzhen. With the girl seen as a burden to the family, the complex family relationships contribute to the cause of depression for the girl. Like the Chinese saying, every family has a difficult script to read. Parents are under a lot of pressure as well.

*Excerpt 132*

*It's so expensive to live in Shenzhen, and I have to work longer hours, or else younger college graduates might replace me. When I send the kids to school, I expect the school to take care of students' academic and moral education. If I cannot trust the school, I don't know who can be trusted. (Family visit, 2019.11.12)*

When parents are unable to take care of their children due to a heavy workload, they will invite the grandparents to live with them and cook for the grandchildren. However, there are fundamentally different educational beliefs between the parents and the grandparents.

*Excerpt 133*

*We have to admit the existence of a vast generation gap. There is no limit to the indulgence they show to their grandchildren. They fight with the parents when they are too harsh on their grandchildren, even when they know the parents are right. (Alton, Interview 1, 2021.7.8)*

Some parents are too busy, so they invite the grandparents to help them taking care of the children. Grandparents are usually more tolerant and even indulgent when disciplining the grandchildren. Thus, it creates obstacles in carrying out their family's moral education methods. The whole family's moral education system becomes more and more fragile and easy to fall apart.

In conclusion, in teachers' perceptions, parents only focus on making money, and when they have time for the children, some parents don't know effective communication skills and often resort to violence.

Parents also put an inconsiderable number of expectations on the school due to their heavy workload working in cities like Shenzhen. Parents still think there will be great stigmatization of having an SEN student in their family.

Lastly, generation gaps between parents and grandparents complicate carrying out moral education in families.

#### *4.4.2 Parents school interaction*

Cultivating "private morality" should be the goal of family education. Schools should concentrate on developing "public morality" like patriotism.

*Excerpt 134*

*I want to clarify what I called the cultivation of “private morality” by the family and the cultivation of “public morality” by the school. The family should take the responsibility as the guardians to ensure the children’s safety and physical and mental development. Successful family education enables the children to engage in meaningful social interaction, obey the rules, and adapt smoothly to society. (Alton, Interview 1, 2021.7.8)*

Alton thinks that children’s basic moral characters or private morality, such as honesty, punctuality, and good manners, depend on family education. “Public morality” is more about social responsibilities and patriotism

The parents’ committee can be extremely helpful if properly managed. The parent’s committee should be much more active in breaking down family walls. Actually, some of the best moral education activities are organized by the parents’ committee.

*Excerpt 135*

*I think the parents, the good ones, should go out and help each other. I know someone who organized a parent car club, and they brought their children with them every time to see the nature, to work together, and to share the fruits of labor. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

Parents’ school on weekends works for actively engaged parents. Some parents, whose children are seriously ill psychologically and morally, find the training useless in dealing with their children. The effectiveness is depended on voluntary participation and whether they are willing to accept those professional suggestions or not. They also think the psychological disease would ruin their family’s reputation and might stigmatize their children permanently.

*Excerpt 136*

*The truth is the parents of children with serious psychological issues won’t show up in these meetings. Firstly, they probably think it won’t help because their children’s problems are way too serious. More tragically, some of them are in denial because they*

*are afraid of the possible stigmatization of their children's psychological issues. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

Many schools open classes for parents on weekends, including us. It's a drop in the bucket, but it's the right drop in the bucket. Currently, moral education in school is not respected in families by parents. It is not a continuum between family and school.

*Excerpt 137*

*The parents promise to monitor their behavior and change their outdated parental style in parents' class, but they never carry it out in their family. Generally speaking, we put all our efforts into moral education for five days in school, and everything reduces to zero for two days in their home. (Raven, Interview 18, 2021.7.20)*

After the weekend school or parents' meeting, some parents are still not shouldering the responsibilities of monitoring and changing their parenting styles. At the same time, some parents are good at passing the buck and cutting down their own responsibilities.

*Excerpt 138*

*When I try to communicate with them about their kids' behavior in school, they will simply reply to me, "OK, thank you for letting me know what's going on. Please pay more attention to him in school because he only listens to the teacher's words." (Casey, Interview 3, 2021.7.9)*

Some parents think the school should be in charge of everything in academic education and moral education. Sometimes, reporting the children's misconduct to their parents is not the best way. In China, it may trigger domestic violence.

*Excerpt 139*

*One student in my class never does his homework, so I sent all the evidence I have, other teachers' complaints, and pictures of his empty exercise book. Later that night, I received a video shot by his mother in which the boy was kneeling on the ground, and*

*his father was whipping him pretty hard. From then on, I would pay extra attention to this boy and never tell him to his parents. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

When reporting students' behavior in school to their parents triggers violence, teachers think it's meaningless to try to communicate with parents like this.

In conclusion, teachers believe the cultivation of "private morality" should be the primary goal of family education. Not all parents care about the school's moral education as the parents in the parents' committee.

Although the school has provided useful lessons on weekend school for parents, not all parents show up for those events and follow the instructions and suggestions to improve their family's moral education abilities. Sometimes, immediate communication with the parents may trigger domestic violence in some families in mainland China.

#### *4.4.3 Metaphor for parents, children, and teachers*

Alton thinks the relationship between the teacher and the students is like a kid growing up with a dog. Teachers are growing up morally as a kid growing up to be an adult; kids are growing up from a stage unknown and unaware of morality to an entry-level of a human being with basic decency, like a dog changing into a boy. Here is the dog analogy.

##### *Excerpt 140*

*In moral education, the relationship between the teacher and the students is like a kid growing up with a dog. It is all about companionship. Teachers are the kid growing to be an adult; students are the dog growing to be a kid. It's a circle. (Alton, Interview 1, 2021.7.8)*

Alton thinks moral education mainly involves the teacher and the student, and he approaches this relationship from a socialization and enlightenment point of view. He emphasizes moral education cultivates children to be more sociable and enlightened, and teachers also develop

to be a more mature stage in life. The key point is the companionship and mutual development between the teacher and the student.

Olivia believes the ultimate goal of moral education is to find the truth, which is shaped like a disco ball. Here is the disco ball analogy.

*Excerpt 141*

*Students are the sunflowers, and to some students, the teachers are the sun. There's only one son---the truth. Right now, the sun is more of a luminous thing, a disco ball.*

*Teachers are one of the glitters emitting light. Some parents are light, and some parents are darkness itself. When parents are clouds or darkness, the other light must be bright enough, or the child will go astray. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

Parents and teachers are pieces of the disco ball emitting light and complementary to each other when one is not functioning well. Although she doesn't go into the details of the other pieces of the disco ball, we can see she believes it takes collective efforts to guide the students in searching for the truth in moral development.

For Raven, teachers, schools, and parents are like doctors, hospitals, and patients. Here is the hospital analogy.

*Excerpt 142*

*Teachers, schools, and parents are like doctors, hospitals, and patients. If the patients never think they are sick, they won't come to the hospital and get help from the doctors, will they? (Raven, Interview 18, 2021.7.20)*

Parents should take the initiative to seek help from the school regarding the moral education of the kids. The reality is that the school, like the hospital, which cannot save the patients who never visit the hospital, is unable to help the parents who never show up at the weekend family school. She stresses the powerless feeling when working with uncooperative parents in moral education.



In Debbie's analogy, she emphasizes the strong bond between the parents and the students by pointing out there is a chance of going towards success or destruction for parents and their kids. Here is the boat analogy.

*Excerpt 143*

*I think there should be a complementary relationship between each other. It's like the child is a boat going upstream, the parents are the pilot on board, and the teachers are the tracker on the shore. Then, the parents and teachers work together to push the child to the destination. However, the teachers can only cheer them on from afar. The parents endure the hardship of growing up with the kids together. Sometimes they arrive at the destination together, and other times they drown together in a shipwreck. (Debbie, Interview 4, 2021.7.9)*

Teachers are the trackers on the shore, trying as hard as possible to pull the kid in the right direction. This analogy is similar to the football analogy.

The football analogy.

*Excerpt 144*

*I want to use a football analogy. Students are equivalent to team members. Parents are the team leaders or captains, teachers are the coaches, and society is the referee. We coach them as much as possible before they go into the playground. The captain has to play the game with the team members. When the referee makes a decision, the captain and the players need to discuss it with the referee. (Percy, Interview 16, 2021.7.18)*

Percy believes parents and their kids are like captains and players on a football team. The parents have to form an alliance to face the challenges posed by society. Teachers are like coaches who only function outside the court, and society provides the family with ultimate challenges.

Mandy compares students to ships sailing on the ocean. Here is the ocean analogy.

*Excerpt 145*

*The environment of the school is the waves below. It has ups and downs for them, deep for somebody and shallow for someone else. Good parents are like dolphins pushing behind the ship. Disastrous parents are like icebergs crashing the Titanic. His dream and his ambition are the beacons in front of him. How far he could travel depends on his inner power, like what kind of person he wants to be, and how strongly he wants to achieve his goal. (Mandy, Interview 13, 2021.7.11)*

Similar to the boat analogy, in Mandy's Ocean analogy, students are ships moving against the waves. The differences are the roles of the parents and the school. Parents can be helpful or disastrous in children's moral education. Students absorb different energy from the school. Their ambitions motivate them to chase their dream and become the best version of themselves.

Nicky thinks the moral education of the students feels like farmers planting trees in an orchard in the "society land." Here is the garden analogy. Teachers are the man selling fertilizer to the farmers. Parents are the famers.

*Excerpt 146*

*The farmers don't know what is suitable for them, but the fertilizer dealer understands what kind of fertilizer is ideal for the students, chemical or organic. We also need to offer them an appropriate amount of fertilizer at the right time. Some students will buy fertilizer from us. Now, it feels like we are shoveling fertilizer to their faces, but they are hesitant to take it. The parents, who think they are the owner of the orchard, are actually another farmer who happens to have the key to this orchard. They will come to the orchard and fertilize the trees like crazy. Sometimes they even use toxic fertilizer. Eventually, the trees wither and die fruitlessly. (Nicky, Interview 14, 2021.7.12)*

Nicky uses a garden in the “society land” to symbolize the students’ morality. Students get fertilizers from various channels. Teachers are shoveling morality knowledge to the students, but they are reluctant to take it. Parents think they own the territory of students’ moral education and insert toxic values recklessly. By saying “*teachers know what kind of fertilizer is suitable to the students*,” Nicky believes teachers are responsible for knowing the students and offering individualized assistance in students’ moral education.

Here is the tree analogy. Everyone has different abilities. Lots of people expect the flowers to become fruits, especially the parents, but Jager thinks moral education shouldn’t have functions. They are all beautiful just the way they are.

*Excerpt 147*

*I think the moral education of the students is like a big tree. The parents are the roots, and the school is the stem. Teachers are branches, and students are flowers. The roots decide what kind of flower the students will be. Some flowers will blossom and bear fruit, and others will wither. Some will bloom very late in life. Some will never thrive.*

*Everyone is unique. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

Jager’s tree analogy perfectly represents Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system, as all the stakeholders in students’ moral education are situated in a tree. Parents are the roots, so they provide the majority of the nutrition and somewhat determine the species of the tree.

Teachers’ moral education abilities vary from each other, and some teachers are good at helping students bloom and bear fruits.

Parents are much happier when their children get good results in moral education and academic education. However, Jager believes there shouldn’t be an expectation of the success of moral education because moral education shouldn’t have functions in the first place, so there shouldn’t be any measurement of the success of moral education. Let the students be who they are. If they didn’t show any successful moral education results in society, they

shouldn't be hurried, pushed, or criticized. Instead, they should be appreciated for everyone is unique and has different paces in life.

Here is another tree analogy.

*Excerpt 148*

*The parent is a big tree, and the teacher is the gardener who waters it. The big tree is connected to the small one twisted roots and gnarled branches. The growth of that little tree shouldn't be under the big shade. They should be side by side, leaving enough space for the little tree to grow. They should all be getting nutrients, and they should all be getting sunlight. Right now, there is just not enough room for the little trees. (Frankie, Interview 6, 2021.7.9)*

Frankie's tree analogy also views the moral growth of children as a developmental process. Compared to society, a child is not merely a child, but a sapling. The parent is the model standing beside the children throughout their lives, for they are connected internally and externally. Teachers are the gardeners, providing advice for both parents and children, like providing water and nutrients for the trees. The lack of space between the parents and children is also addressed in this analogy.

Leon harbors a very negative emotion. He feels like he is being treated as a dog or a slave. Here is the slave analogy.

*Excerpt 149*

*I just feel like a dog in this school, and the students are the masters. Their parents are like the empress or the hands-off boss. I don't think the parents of my two classes care. They didn't say a word to me for an entire semester, and then they came to me at the end of semester in parents' meeting and asked me why their kids had such bad grades. The school is a control freak slave-owner who wants to control me as an enslaved person. I think only 20% of my energy goes to teaching, nonteaching jobs take the rest. At the end*

*of the semester, they come to criticize me for how bad the grade is. (Leon, Interview 12, 2021.7.11)*

Leon's analogy shows the frustration teachers endure when parents only care about the grades at the end of the semester, and when the school takes up most of his time with nonteaching tasks. The powerless feeling is so overwhelming that Leon feels like a slave to the school and the students, with one the slave-owner and the other masters. The difference is the slave-owner decides "your fate and how much you worth" while the masters are "the person you cannot mass with." (Leon, Interview 12, 2021.7.11)

In conclusion, some teachers think that the developmental process of children's morality is closely related to their parents. Parents should be stated in the dominant position as cooperative and strategic partners. Teachers should be outsiders or consultants because they are not facing the challenges of society after graduation.

Society is the judge of the moral education results and the examiner of the moral education quality. Parents will face the test of society with the students in the end. However, some parents think the school and teachers are more responsible for their children's moral education. Even worse, some toxic family education poses challenges for the school and the teachers.

The teachers stress the inner cognitive drive of the students. Dreams, ambitions, and self-agency are the major driving force in students' moral advancement. They need time and space to grow at will, and they should be appreciated, not judged.

Lastly, from teachers' perspectives, society need to have a much looser and relaxed attitude toward the success of students' moral education. Teachers are entitled to have full command of their time regarding their career development. They should be able to work on their teaching competence before being asked to be a morality educator. For some teachers, society and the school are only allowed to ask them to be competent subject teachers.

## 4.5 The Social and Cultural Influence

### 4.5.1 The interaction between school and society

Society has no filters. That's why students need to stay in school. Teachers think what they are learning is all the good stuff or the essence of their culture because they have been filtered.

#### *Excerpt 150*

*Teenagers in any country or any region are asked to go to school and learn to read and write. If they spend most of their time out in the world, the negative sides of the world will shape their moral characters and their moral value invisibly because there is no visible filter in the real world. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

Brain points out that schools are filtering out the negative influence of society and offering cultural essence in moral education, so it is crucial for students to stay in school. It is clear that teachers understand the possible negative effect of society, especially when society is not as beneficial as it should be currently.

The current moral education mode is not flexible.

#### *Excerpt 151*

*Are we dare to think of a new model that can replace school? In this new model, schools will continue play a role, sometimes a big important role and sometimes a less important role. It should be much more flexible than the model we are using right now. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

The current moral education model relies heavily on the mercy of the school. It would be better to have a more flexible model with a flexible role for the school. Olivia criticizes the fixed model and boldly proposes a new model decentralizing the school and incorporating flexible proportion from society.

The goal is set solely by the government. It should include the goals of the parents, and most importantly, goals of the children themselves. Teachers propose a new model that's all about the upbringing of the children.

*Excerpt 152*

*Firstly, a goal must be set for what kind of person the children should be. Then, everyone needs to work towards that goal. There should also be an evident standard to evaluate the whole process. It is even a bigger problem to decide who can achieve that goal. Right now, in moral education, the government is setting the goal, the MOE. We have to take the parents and the children themselves' goals into consideration. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

To build a new model for the students, setting a comprehensive goal, the primary task of the new model, should be negotiated and decided by all the stakeholders, including children. The MOE shouldn't dictate the goal of moral education; the goal needs to be inclusive, flexible, and measurable. The goal needs to be students centered. Students are entitled to decide what kind of person they want to be as long as they are not breaking any laws.

Teachers also think that the current law is not detailed enough to protect what happens at home and school. The current law is not perfect, and there is no corresponding legal system to regulate what happens at home or in the school.

*Excerpt 153*

*When students' hearts get hurt, there is no law to protect their rights. I don't think providing protection after they got serve physical hurt is enough nowadays. (Quinn, Interview 17, 2021.7.20)*

Quinn raises this point based on her observation of two incidents that happened to her students. One girl is harassed on the internet. The school and the parents have no idea what to do because the law only deals with public security or national security rumors. Another girl in

her class told Quinn her father sexually harassed her; however, her father is not charged because her father and mother denied that claim. Although Quinn wants to believe her and fight for her right in court, teachers are not the primary caretakers of the students, so there isn't much she can do.

There are several laws protecting the righteous rights of the students, but they fail to consider the emotion of the teenagers. The laws are made by rational adults; unless serious legal consequence appears, no legal action will be taken on issues imposing severe emotional damage to some students. To them, the negative influence may be long-lasting and deep-rooted in their future emotional and physical wellbeing.

The school doesn't have the ability to solve all the problems spotted in the school.

*Excerpt 154*

*We have psychological teachers in our school, but some psychological issues of the children cannot be solved by a few consultant sessions provided by our newly graduated, psychological-majored college kids. We need the government to purchase suitable professional psychological consultant services to support moral education in our school.*  
*(Raven, Interview 18, 2021.7.20)*

Students with severe psychological issues are out of the school's ability, and there are no convenient and professional consultant services from the government. The school can recruit psychological major graduates, but they are not eligible to recruit experienced consultants, and the post in school is not as attractive as the one in hospitals, so experienced consultants won't choose to work in the school.

*Excerpt 155*

*The training of the parents and the longitudinal tracking of individual cases are simply out of the reach of our school. We realize it is an issue, but we don't have the resources and jurisdiction to go into this restricted area. (Raven, Interview 18, 2021.7.20)*



The lack of a continuum for moral education makes it hard to track students' moral and emotional growth. There should be a specialized department in society or the educational system to systematically record students' moral advancement.

The society's help is not updated, so it can not directly hit the pain points. When some social organizations want to cooperate with the school, their promotional material is outdated.

*Excerpt 156*

*Courts are wanting to come to our school and run promotions; however, I go through their material only to find that what they want to promote is very outdated. There are no specific courses targeted at the latest online scams, drug abuse prevention, and juvenile delinquency prevention. (Raven, Interview 18, 2021.7.20)*

They are not able to offer the latest and the most helpful precaution methods against juvenile crimes, like drug abuse, online scams, and juvenile delinquency. The school and society are trying much harder to uphold a protective bubble than showing the cruelty of the real world. Society needs to be more forceful in facilitating cooperation between schools and parents.

*Excerpt 157*

*The alliance between teachers, parents, and schools is too weak. Society needs to intervene and monitor this bond closely and regularly. Society's power is too soft at this stage. (Raven, Interview 18, 2021.7.20)*

In the principal's mind, the connection between the school and parents is not very strong, for there are no bonding forces from the society. Society hasn't put any measurable strategies for enhancing the cooperation and alliance between the school and parents.

The school pays great attention to the smooth operation of the school, so they expect everyone to graduate on time. There should be an alternative system for the students with psychological issues to learn and keep healthy simultaneously.

*Excerpt 158*

*The school is very cooperative in helping the students go through the application for long-term leave. However, the school does not recommend suspension of schooling for a year or two. I wish there could be a much more direct communication channel with professional mental health centers. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

The headteachers and the school have paid enough attention for students with serious psychological issues, like depression, bipolar, and autism. Teachers find that the school is cooperative in giving long term sick leave to students with psychological issues but reluctant in giving suspensions for it looks terrible on the school if the students cannot graduate on time. The school pays great attention to its reputation in society.

Teachers are required to act like saints according to the traditional Chinese culture. In reality, the teachers' rights can be easily violated without solid evidence.

*Excerpt 159*

*Because the red lines are so low, the parents are always making complaints and strikes. The teachers are not respected or even punished. However, the moral expectation line is so high that teachers are required to be saints. (Raven, Interview 18, 2021.7.20)*

It is easy for the parents to file complaints to the educational bureau, but it is difficult for teachers to protect their rights. The high moral expectation for the traditional roles of teachers creates a tremendous amount of pressure on teachers.

In conclusion, teachers think schools still have great value in connecting students with the outside world. The current moral education model is not flexible. It carries out fixed goals set solely by the government, not comprehensive goals from parents and students. The current law system is not detailed enough to take care of teenagers' emotions when their emotions get hurt in school or at home. Social organizations are not providing suitable and prompt help to the school and students.

Society is not doing enough to establish tight cooperation and alliance between parents and

the school. Consequently, many students with psychological issues graduate on time without leaving extra time for them to heal. The society also puts a lot of unreasonable expectations on the roles of teachers in moral education from traditional Chinese cultural perspectives and not enough protection from the legal perspectives.

#### *4.5.2 The characteristics of Moral Education in Shenzhen*

In teachers' perceptions, society has a determining role in the moral education success of the students. At least three big environments are influencing the moral maturity of the students in big cities like Shenzhen. The first is the school environment, which should provide a sound moral education atmosphere, instead of focusing on "going out of bounds." The second is the family environment, which is fundamental and out of the teachers' control. And the third environment is society, which basically determines what children will be despite all the efforts we made in the school environment.

First and foremost, the school's moral education pays great attention to making itself known outside the fixed educational circle, which means breaking the stereotype of traditional schools' image and being famous for setting itself apart from other schools.

##### *Excerpt 160*

*I can't believe how much schools want to be known. In Shenzhen, schools try all kinds of methods to be different, for example, one school in Longhua arranges the headteachers' office cubicles in the classroom, and one school in Longgang release five news reports on the new labor education policy in one weekend to showcase the school's cooperation. One school hires internet troll to attack employees who post complaints online. (Field notes, 2021.5.22)*

Shenzhen, a city valuing efficiency, competition, and innovation, is affecting how schools operate in this area. This school also wants to adopt innovative moral education methods to make itself a household name.

Secondly, the giant economic gap between students' families creates a powerless feeling for the teachers in dealing with family education problems. As mentioned before, one family cannot offer a separate room for the father and the son to calm down.

The income differences are enormous in Shenzhen, which is hard to conceal. Teachers worry that many children from single-parent and relatively low-income families are more likely to suffer from psychological problems.

*Excerpt 161*

*Some children are from those school district housing, often costing tens of millions.*

*Some children are from government-subsidized housing or even the villages in the city.*

*Some parents work as senior executives in Tencent, while some work as street vendors chased by municipal officers. Although students are required to wear uniforms in school, they still could see the differences in their shoes, watches, and even stationary supplies.*

*(Kamila, Interview 11, 2021.7.11)*

The living conditions are not satisfying in Shenzhen. The students don't have a decent living condition, making it harder to carry out moral education in school. Teachers worry that the rules of behavior at school are difficult to transfer effectively at home.

*Excerpt 162*

*For example, we ask students not to litter in school, but we still see students throwing garbage in the school yard, parking lot, and playground. When I asked them, "why do you do that," he said that the school is 100 times cleaner than their community and house even with the few pieces of garbage they just threw. (Raven, Interview 18,*

*2021.7.20)*

Similar things happened before. Teachers ask the students to be polite and help the needed in the elevator. They don't know about the basic etiquette of riding an elevator, because they said they don't have an elevator in their poor community.

Shenzhen has to provide accommodation to migrant workers at all levels of society. Some affordable “villages in the city” have deplorable sanitary conditions. The school is teaching the children to follow certain sanitation rules and elevator etiquette. However, there is no place for the students to practice. They are influenced more by the living environment than the teaching from the school in moral education.

In teachers’ perceptions, students regarding living in Shenzhen as a success have unrealistic expectations towards their educational success.

*Excerpt 163*

*Students have no life plan, and they live blindly and primitively without purpose.*

*Students are not clear about their family status in Shenzhen. They believe that since they are in Shenzhen, they will have the same opportunities with their classmates, which is not valid. (Raven, Interview 18, 2021.7.20)*

Thirdly, the distinguishing characteristics of Shenzhen city also imprint the moral education in schools. The city is well-known for emphasizing efficiency and results, leading schools in this area to concentrate on the efficiency and results of the school education, be it moral or academic education.

The social atmosphere needs to be much more supportive of moral education. Society lacks the soil of moral education, and it won’t be easy to be changed by the minority. The moral education atmosphere cannot be altered, if the general social atmosphere remains unchanged in Shenzhen.

Raven echoes the decisive role of Shenzhen’s moral education atmosphere. Shenzhen is a fast-paced city of immigrants. The cultural and historical inheritance is not as affluent as in other cities in China. Adjacent to Hong Kong, Shenzhen is also considered more westernized than other cities in China. The central government started to put Morality and Law Basis into the high school entrance examination in 2019 after Hong Kong students’ riots.

The limited high school education resource makes everyone anxious about academic performance. It is self-contradictory to see the city labeling itself a city of innovation, inclusiveness, and liberalization.

*Excerpt 164*

*My teaching philosophy is heavily influenced by the educational philosophy of Shenzhen. On the one hand, they want comprehensive development of the children, quality-oriented education, and they encourage students to be innovative because it's one of the city's labels. On the other hand, the high school entrance exam is very competitive, for all the best education resources are concentrated in a few high schools. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

The limited high school seats create a “rate race” for the students and the parents. Although every stakeholder understands the importance of students’ comprehensive development, they have to face reality and urge students to get higher and higher test scores. On the other hand, the best educational resource is still under the control of the public school if students want to enroll in domestic colleges, so even wealthy people are nervous about not getting enough scores to be accepted by the public high school. For example, the upper-class rich people in Shenzhen are also very nervous. The scarcity of high school seats leads everyone by the nose. To some extent, education is fair in Shenzhen.

The educational inequality is apparent within the GBA. It will be a long way to having absolute equality due to the vast education systems’ differences between Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

*Excerpt 165*

*One student in my class never shows up for the weekend exam, but he wants the test paper and hands it back with other people's answers. For a long time, I have no idea why he has this privilege. Later I find out he is from a wealthy family in Hong Kong. He*

*has so many more options for high schools and universities. His unscrupulous behavior invokes controversy in my class. (Hana, Interview 8, 2021.7.11)*

Shenzhen has launched some progressive moral education policies, but they backfired because of untimely implementation. Although Shenzhen's comprehensive evaluation system has a terrific concept, it eventually failed due to the unfair social competition caused by this system. It combines some cutting-edge moral education concepts at home and abroad. The reason is that the foundation of this revolutionary system is not solid enough.

*Excerpt 166*

*There are not enough departments to receive volunteers, so volunteer positions have become a scarce resource. The only way to solve this is to change the evaluation method of moral education one school by one school, one district by one district, one city by one city, and eventually the whole country. (Alton, Interview 1, 2021.7.8)*

Shenzhen launched a heroic attempt to revolutionize the current moral education model in 2019. They built a website for all the students to apply and record their voluntary work, and the whole project was shut down due to mountainous complaints from parents. They cannot get voluntary work opportunities for their kids, so some resourceful parents even open fake charity companies so their kids could work there. The inequality between the rich and the poor was activated by this policy, making the poor realize there are certain resources they don't have access to in society.

*Excerpt 167*

*Only by ensuring fairness and justice through the system can students' moral education growing up. When kids from the rich and powerful families get all the opportunities to develop their overall quality, of course, people won't be happy about it. (Quinn, Interview 17, 2021.7.20)*

Quinn echoes the importance of building a fair moral education system. When the

government is trying to improve the current moral education model, fairness and justice should be the top priority instead of red-tapism and idealism innovations.

Shenzhen has the potential to lead the revolution on moral education. Shenzhen has a very powerful and tangible grid management system in communities. The city is well connected by volunteer organizations and possible venues for community service, such as libraries, museums, and community centers.

*Excerpt 168*

*To be honest, the current moral education mainly depends on family education and the school atmosphere in Shenzhen. I feel that these two forces are fighting against the opposing forces in society. Now, under the influence of COVID-19, there is a substantial improvement of national cohesion and a strong awareness of national identity. The public's social service, national security, and environmental protection awareness hit an all-time high. (Alton, Interview 1, 2021.7.8)*

Shenzhen is praised for its quick reaction and containment of the Covid-19 pandemic. It results from years of advanced trial and practice in grid management. To cope with the large migrant population, Shenzhen has been practicing how to manage them effectively. The large district is divided into interconnecting and at the same time independent grids where grid managers are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the people there. For example, I belong to the grid of the school where the principal is the grid manager, and I also belong to the grid of the community I live in; either of them could inform me to get the nucleic acid test. They will be notified if my test result is not shown online.

Many people express their genuine love for this city.

*Excerpt 169*

*Shenzhen is a weird place. You may think that only rich people with free time will do charity work. That's not true. One mother of my students makes a special pastry to sell*



*online, which is called the donkey-hide gelatin cake. She donates the majority of her daytime, working as a volunteer. (Gabby, Interview 7, 2021.7.10)*

People who choose to stay have a genuine love for this city. They give the best they have to build a better future for the city, and they sincerely care about the city's well-being. This city has many admirable qualities, and it has great potential to be the future of China.

To sum up, in terms of teachers' perceptions, Shenzhen's characteristics greatly impact the implementation of moral education in this city. Schools are working very hard to find ways to become reputable and competitive with other schools. As a migrant city, Shenzhen is under tremendous pressure of providing a decent living environment for people from different classes of society, and providing sufficient high school seats to release the students' and parents' tension. However, Shenzhen is admirable for taking the initiative to launch a comprehensive evaluation system for moral education. With a mature grid management system and residents' love for the city, Shenzhen has excellent potential to be the breakthrough in mainland China's moral education model.

#### *4.5.3 The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic*

The pandemic can be a blessing in disguise. *Some teachers think this pandemic also brings positive energy or positive opportunities for moral education or life education.*

##### *Excerpt 170*

*The Chinese word for "crisis" is "Wei Ji," in which "Wei" means danger and "Ji" means opportunity. Firstly, they got the opportunity to spend a very long quarantine time with their family members. Secondly, online classes offer them more opportunities to practice their ability in autonomous learning. Thirdly, seeing how the society copes with this pandemic helps them to reflect on the Chinese socialism structure. Last but not least, this pandemic could make them realize the importance of life and health. Nothing is more important than the right to live. (Alton, Interview 1, 2021.7.8)*

For Alton, three possible blessings emerged from this devastating pandemic, a longer quality time within the family, independent learning online, and a chance to observe the society and the government. Students have the first-hand experience of seeing how the society and the government cope with this pandemic. It could help them have a deeper understanding of the Chinese socialism structure.

The quarantine time can give a huge nudge on children's moral education if used wisely by the parents. If the parents spend a lot of time on their electronic gadgets during the quarantine time, the students will do the same unless they find more meaningful alternatives, like reading or learning another language.

One boy becomes much more focused and motivated after seeing his mother preparing for her examination during quarantine. Parents have valuable time together with the children. It creates an uninterrupted section of mutual observation and imitation. If parents show more positive traits in front of the children, it is very likely for the children to learn from these traits.

The pandemic is compressing the social circle of the children. Teenagers' social life could mean the world to them. It causes teenagers to retreat from social interactions.

*Excerpt 171*

*The pandemic created a terrible isolation space for the students. For some introverted students, it is like an igniter fuse. It is convenient for them to wall themselves up and retreat from social life. (Frankie, Interview 6, 2021.7.9)*

There are several cases where kids are unable to show up for school after long quarantine. One student in my class stops coming to school after the first wave of the pandemic. The parents both work and have no time to communicate with him. He is very normal, a little bit shy. Although he has a very small social support system, it works fine when he can come to school and hang out with his friends. During the quarantine, he immersed himself into the

cyber world so deep that he could not return to reality. The school functions as a social playground as well. The isolation and abrupt disconnection could negatively affect children's social life and emotional well-being.

Children experience cell phone addiction and even personality changes after quarantine. By being exposed to the dark sides of the Internet, the children are at the risk of getting into bad habits for life. When students returned from the quarantine, some changed dramatically, not only in behavior but also in personality. Some developed an addiction to cell phones.

*Excerpt 172*

*Without teachers' supervision in school, some of them developed terrible and lazy habits during the quarantine time. Some bad habits might accompany them for the rest of their life, like Internet addiction, pornography addiction, and procrastination. (Jager, Interview 10, 2021.7.11)*

The students have shorter attention spans due to excessive use of the Internet. They cannot even sit quietly for a set of exam papers. The students are used to what is offered on the Internet, so they are less likely to think deeply about certain issues.

*Excerpt 173*

*The worst influence brought by the pandemic is the paralysis of their deep-thinking ability. It's detrimental to their critical thinking and deep-thinking ability. (Percy, Interview 16, 2021.7.18)*

Excessive Internet use during the quarantine time numbs the brain and the nervous system, so some start to accept the information online blindly. Online classes also negatively affect students' attention span and independent thinking abilities. Teachers think students have a hard time concentrating on the class after getting used to the availability of online entertainment resources and answers to the exercises.

Teachers think online classes are not as effective as traditional classes in school due to the fact that some students lack self-control. When they are having online classes, some students are playing online games, and some students are reading entertainment magazines. Teachers are worrying about their ability of self-control in learning declining no matter how strong self-control ability they have before the pandemic.

Online classes are way too demanding to the teachers, and teachers' content is not as attractive as professional Internet influencers.

*Excerpt 174*

*The short videos we made are much less attractive than those made by Internet celebrities with professional marketing and editing teams. Teachers are losing in the battlefield of competing for students' attention online. (Olivia, Interview 15, 2021.7.12)*

From Olivia and Nicky's perceptions, online classes are less effective than face-to-face teaching. The first reason is students are learning without companions and supervision, and the second reason is that teachers have to compete for students' attention and lose to Internet celebrities. Online classes are becoming more and more demanding for teachers.

People are losing their jobs, and it creates instabilities in building a moral education team in school.

*Excerpt 175*

*After the pandemic, almost half of our subject teachers changed. I have worked so hard to build a team in moral education. Now I have to start from scratch, which makes me feel powerless. (Brian, Interview 2, 2021.7.9)*

As mentioned before, temporary teachers are easily replaced in moments of crisis. Several temporary teachers left the school for various reasons. The school doesn't need so many teachers for online classes, or the teachers are used to staying in their hometown and finding other jobs.

There are many possible role models for teenagers online. Some of them are legal professionals, and some Internet celebrities are very inspirational.

Some Internet celebrities are full of positive energy. Some of them are great at promoting traditional Chinese culture to the world. Some have positive moral beliefs that are suitable and easy for the kids to take. The household name Liu Xiang makes the criminal law online lectures so interesting that the criminal law knowledge is popularized across different age groups and professions.

It is very hard to conclude the influence of the covid-19 pandemic given the intensity and duration of it. It is apparent that, in teachers' perception, it has both positive and negative impacts on students' moral education.

To sum up, some teachers point out that the pandemic is a blessing in disguise for teachers and parents if viewed wisely. Others think the pandemic compresses students' social circles, causes students' addiction to cellphones and the Internet. It shortens students' attention span and hurts their independent and critical thinking abilities. Teachers are also affected by the pandemic in carrying out academic and moral education classes online.

## Chapter Five Discussion

This chapter is to answer the research question, “From an ecological perspective, how is moral education being carried out and perceived by teachers in a “future” middle school in Shenzhen under the Greater Bay Area initiative?”. It covers the ecological factors in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory and teachers’ evaluations of the P school’s moral education practices.

### 5.1 Chronosystem---Constant Professional Renewal and Growth of Morality Teaching

Chronosystem regards the dimension of time, constancy or change over the life course as well as the historical context and social conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Yang, 2021). The 1978 Reform and Opening Up Policy brought a huge societal transition in China and it corresponds to the constant professional renewal and growth of morality teaching.

#### 5.1.1 *A strong foundation of morality teaching*

Three major fluctuations are identified by Lee and Ho (2005): politically oriented moral education from 1949 to 1978; moral education gradually independent from politics after 1978 to 1993; depoliticized moral education in 1993 after Deng visited south China to further economic liberalization. After the return of Hong Kong and Macau and further opening to the global world, China continues to promote patriotic education, education for democracy, and individual well-being (Lee & Ho, 2005). The curriculum standard in 2011 states that Morality and Law Basis is a comprehensive course based on students’ life and aims to promote their morality and character advancement (MOE, 2011). The curriculum standard in 2022 states clearly the objectives of the course Morality and Law Basis, to cultivate ambitious, competent, and responsible socialist successors for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The students should have the core quality of identifying with the socialist values and political system, lofty moral integrity, legal awareness, emotional wellbeing, and a sense of

responsibility (MOE, 2022). Students are encouraged to get involved with society to learn autonomously and cooperatively in diversified situations.

The Chinese government is concerned with the moral crisis raised in the past 40 years' speedy economic and social changes. Besides, traditional virtues instead of laws were utilized as the governance tool due to the long history of feudal autocracy (Yang, 2021, p. 5). This explains the emphasis on upholding the lofty socialist values and legal awareness in making the course standard.

Teachers have a general understanding of the objectives from years and years of learning throughout their student life. Some notions have been carved into teachers' minds, like the notions of being patriotic (Excerpt 2) and working for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Excerpt 3). Some teachers, especially new teachers, are not fully aware of the specialty of the course objective in Morality and Law Basis, which is that the objectives of emotion, attitude, and values are leading the knowledge and ability objectives (Excerpt 1). Teachers' attention is more concentrated on the localization of the national-level objectives, for example, the municipal characteristics, the school motto, and the actual design of the classroom activities (Excerpts 3, 4). It echoes with the research findings of Chinese scholars that teachers pay more attention to the allocation of education resources because after the Reform and Opening-up, there are mismatches between the development of the economy with society, the reform of the political system, human rights protection, and most importantly educational equity (Chen, 2018).

In the current globalization age, the Chinese people have also developed a strong consciousness of rights and boosted the courage to express appeals of their own interests (Chen, 2018, p. 171). Some teachers disagree with the predetermined objectives of moral education and morality teaching. They think that moral education shouldn't have so many purposes (Excerpt 5), be more centered on children's nature (Excerpt 6), be more

individualized (Excerpt 7), and emphasize more on the physical and psychological well-being of the children (Excerpts 9, 10).

The final level in Krathwohl's Taxonomy of Affective Learning is to equip students with "a generalized, comprehensive set of values and a philosophy of life and learning," which is the true "personal and aesthetic development" (Allen & Friedman, 2010, p. 4). Some teachers think the truth, goodness, and beauty should be the objectives of moral education (Excerpt 8), and others believe there shouldn't be any objectives at all (Excerpt 6).

### *5.1.2 The rigid content of morality teaching*

From 1978 to 2001, the curriculum "underwent several updates and resultantly became less political," and the obscured contents of moral education were "overshadowed by the contents of political education" (Gao et al., 2021c, p. 3).

With a straightforward arrangement on the national level, the 18 textbooks of Morality and Law Basis are designed and written by a group of moral education professionals in China. The set has a clear, logical progression, official language and expressions, and overall, a solid but rigid foundation of morality teaching.

Teachers point out that there are some logical contradictions in some chapters of the textbooks. One chapter is about combating and enhancing gender stereotypes simultaneously (Excerpt 11). Given that this course is designed to promote the ideology of socialist China, it is understandable that the content can be a little rigid. Teachers believe traditional philosophies, like Taoism (Excerpt 13), Tao Xingzhi's love education, and Romanticism (Excerpt 14), should be included in the textbook content.

For example, Taoism beliefs like "act naturally" and Buddhism practices like "Calm Three Minutes" and "Verse of Transference" are used to "enlighten the development of student's life education in Hong Kong schools" (Lee, 2021, p. 231).

Resulting from a top-down national and social requirements, the children's personal moral



development and mechanisms of moral learning are not sufficiently considered in the content of moral education textbooks (Gao et al., 2021b, 2021c). For the new generation, the language of the textbook can be a little “old school.” It creates cognitive distance and comprehension barriers in class (Excerpt 15) and prevents students from getting higher test scores in examinations (Excerpt 16). Teachers have great ideas and creative methods in morality teaching (Excerpt 12). Still, it won’t be reflected in the textbook because these textbooks are written in a top-down fashion, and teachers have no sayings in the textbook’s content even with a clear realization of the problems in the textbook.

Teachers from other subjects, Chinese (Excerpt 17), History (Excerpt 18), English (Excerpts 19, 20), physical education (Excerpt 21), Geography (Excerpt 22), Mathematics (Excerpts 23, 24), and Physics (Excerpts 25, 26), all claim that their subjects are related to moral education. Some subjects have carefully chosen teaching and examination material (Excerpts 17, 19, 20, 20). Some relate to the teaching process, classroom management, and daily interactions between teachers and students (Excerpts 21, 23, 25, 26). There seems to be a cognitive discrepancy between young teachers and experienced teachers; young teachers have a hard time connecting moral education with the subject knowledge (Excerpts 23, 25), while experienced teachers can intersperse morality teaching in their classes naturally (Excerpts 24, 26).

### *5.1.3 Be aware of the authenticity of the advancement of teaching methods*

This study finds that there are huge differences between demonstration class and daily class in moral education. Although tremendous progress in indoctrination or rote memorization is shown in demonstration classes, it is advisable to treat the advancement of the current moral education teaching methods with caution.

I discover that demonstration classes are hugely different from daily classes in terms of material selection, teaching arrangement, class activity design, and, most importantly, the

profundity of the class (Excerpts 27, 28, 31).

Daily classes use material from the textbook and class activities proposed by the reference book. The discussion question has a clear direction toward the correct answer (Excerpt 27).

This is precisely what Piaget and Durkheim are opposing: the teaching of morality should be from cognitive understanding and explanation, not preaching or indoctrination (Durkheim, 2012; Piaget, 1970).

Teachers from other subjects also feel that demonstration classes are “glamorous illusions” (Excerpts 33). Demonstration classes use the trendy material online, interactive class activities (Excerpts 28, 31), and pre-class surveys (Excerpt 31). Demonstration classes are better organized, student-centered, and inquiry-oriented. From the judges’ comments, my winning demonstration classes have a robust design, pay great attention to arousing students’ emotions, and integrate appropriate traditional Chinese culture (Excerpts 29, 30). This is highly valued on the fourth level of Krathwohl’s Taxonomy of Affective Learning, where students are expected to conceptualize and synthesize their value system to add new affective learning outcomes (Allen & Friedman, 2010).

My “Concrete Reconstruction” teaching method is well-received by the judges for it provides better ways to teach abstract concepts in Morality and Law Basis classes (Excerpts 32).

During this class, I strictly follow Neuman’s Taxonomy of Affective learning (Neuman & Friedman, 2008), so that students get a chance to identify their existing values, clarify their feelings, modify their beliefs, and achieve affective, cognitive and behavioral consistency on their attitudes towards the Communist Party.

In conclusion, morality teaching in Shenzhen welcomes interactive class activities, innovative design, traditional cultural wisdom, and showing teachers’ vulnerability. It encourages student-centered and inquiry-based instruction in demonstration classes. Teachers are encouraged to view the students’ moral development as social intuitionists’ points of view

(Haidt, 2001) instead of the rationalist view (Kohlberg, 1984). Teachers get credit for creating a real-life situation and provoking students' emotions to form a natural "gut feeling in the mind" (Haidt, 2001, p. 825). Notice that it only means what the teachers are capable of, not necessarily what they are actually doing in daily lessons.

## **5.2 Microsystem—Teachers---Powerless Feeling and Heavy Duty**

In Microsystem, teachers, parents, peers, and schools are considered the most immediate settings where the individual is situated (Yang, 2021). This part focuses on the powerless teachers with heavy responsibilities in the current moral education system.

### *5.2.1 The understandable heavy responsibilities of moral education teachers*

Moral education begins with the teacher's exhibition of virtues and models (Noddings, 2010).

In P school, the headteachers take up more than half of the responsibility in moral education in teachers' perceptions, ranging from 50% to 80% (Excerpt 35). Headteachers' job includes teaching their subjects, managing the students, communicating with parents and school leaders, team-building with subject teachers, and taking temporary work assigned by the school (Excerpts 34, 36, 37, 38, 39), which is the content of "caring beyond the classroom" and "creating a positive moral culture in the school" (Lickona, 2009).

In new schools like P school, it means even more work for the headteachers and the subject teachers (Excerpts 34, 36, 37). Teachers have to take this job because it is a compulsory requirement to work as headteachers for three consecutive years before getting further career advancement qualifications (Excerpt 40).

However, the heavy workload is understandable through the lens of Lickona's Comprehensive Approach, in which teachers are called upon to act as caregivers, models, and mentors (Lickona, 2009).

Teachers' moral education knowledge is closely related to their previous experience (Excerpts

41, 42, 43). Their former teachers' moral education methods could affect their attitude toward the students (Excerpt 41), teaching style (Excerpt 42), and moral education beliefs (Excerpt 43). Their moral education knowledge also comes from the accumulation of effective methods in their previous teaching practices (Excerpt 44) and critical reflection of those teaching practices (Excerpt 45).

Teachers draw inspiration from their interactions with their family members, parents or husbands (Excerpts 46, 47), students (Excerpt 47), and citizens in other countries (Excerpt 48). The training courses offered by the school and Shenzhen education bureau are pretty helpful in advancing teachers' moral education knowledge (Excerpt 49). However, the courses are only for teachers, not parents, making it hard to form synthesized understandings for teachers and parents on children's moral education. This suggests another possible application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory---to examine the formation of teachers' moral education beliefs.

Teachers may experience different yet rapid development in their moral education skills as it is a common belief that "teachers' effectiveness rises sharply in the first few years of their careers"(Podolsky et al., 2019, p. 304). For new teachers, the first challenge comes from communicating with parents with diversified personalities, the second comes from managing students, and the last comes from working with the school leaders (Excerpts 50, 51).

Experienced teachers face challenges like balancing family and work and developing their careers professionally. Their moral education skills are admired as having great styles (Excerpt 53) and are quickly mimicked by young teachers (Excerpt 52). It echoes the findings of Podolsky et al. (2019) that experienced teachers confer benefits to their colleagues.

On the cognitive level, teachers may entertain different levels of cognition on moral education. They have unrealistic expectations for being headteachers (Excerpts 54, 55) and different attitudes toward moral education methods, with young teachers struggling with class

regulation and implementation (Excerpt 56) and experienced teachers trying to motivate students in positive class culture (Excerpt 56). They also have differences in their metacognition of moral education (Excerpt 57) and the roles of moral education teachers (Excerpt 58).

This study does not support my initial assumption that the more experienced teachers have deeper cognition levels than the novice teachers. Many young new teachers' moral education beliefs can be much more sophisticated and up-to-date. However, it tends to be true that with more experience, teachers' cognition level of moral education progresses at a faster pace than their former selves.

### *5.2.2 Lack of institutional protection creates insecurity*

The study shows that teachers are powerless in the current moral education system.

The first vulnerable feeling comes from working with an unstable moral education team where teachers hold different moral education beliefs and attitudes (Excerpt 59). Teachers also feel powerless when their rights are violated and they don't have a suitable platform to defend themselves (Excerpts 60). School leaders tend to protect students more than the teachers. School leaders should try to establish a harmonious school culture with a high level of innovation, affiliation, and justice (Wang, 2019).

Thirdly, they feel powerless dealing with doting parents when they are incredibly protective and defensive of their kids' moral misconduct (Excerpts 61, 62, 63). Fourthly, the unique traditional Chinese family bonds and noticeable income gap in Shenzhen are not something the teachers could change in a short time (Excerpt 65). Lastly, due to the lack of a precise future arrangement in the students' moral education system, teachers can only hope their moral education endeavors are good enough to see the students through the next chapter of their life (Excerpts 66, 67). The government should put moral education on an important

agenda and give a bigger portion in every educational level, from primary school to higher education (Maharani, 2020).

There are huge differences between permanent and temporary staff, such as income differences (Excerpts 68, 69), training opportunities, housing subsidies, and promotion opportunities (Excerpt 68). The permanent teachers show different attitudes in communicating with teachers with different statuses; for example, they adopt a long-term oriented attitude toward other permanent teachers (Excerpts 70, 71). Thus, temporary teachers must foster an active image in carrying out the leader's moral education strategies to get the school leaders' notice. Or else, their disagreement with school leaders' moral education ideology may not get their contract renewed, and they would be replaced by other more obedient teachers (Excerpts 72, 73). On the other hand, some teachers believe the differences are not as significant as the economic background amongst teachers and their career development plan (Excerpts 74, 75). It is a consensus among the participants that a high turnover rate creates instabilities in school moral education. They are not satisfied with the school and the education bureau's management methods and call it "expecting teachers to eat 'capitalistic grass' and produce 'socialistic milk' simultaneously (Excerpt 75).

### *5.2.3 Teachers' desperation for other stakeholders' involvement*

The current classes in P school have an average of 40 people in each classroom. Teachers think students with similar moral development stages should be put together, given the difficulty in evaluating students' moral development stages, it has little practicability to the school (Excerpt 76). Policy-makers and educators should have a change of mindset in reforming the evaluation system in moral education (Huo & Xie, 2021).

Secondly, teachers hope students can take more initiative in their moral cultivation (Excerpt 77). Teachers can be role models or torchbearers in moral education and exuberate invisible influence, which is more effective than lecturing and indoctrination (Excerpts 77, 78, 79).

Thirdly, teachers think too many factors influence the children's moral cultivation and prevent them from being what they want to be (Excerpts 80, 81). There are too many low-quality and repetitive moral education activities (Excerpt 81) and not enough outreach activities from the society, like the fire department, prison system, court, military training center, and other government offices (Excerpts 82, 83).

Lastly, parents are not receiving sufficient moral education training, resulting in inconsistent teachers' and parents' moral education beliefs, which is not conducive to forming a closed circle for children's moral education (Excerpt 84).

### **5.3 Microsystem--- The P school---“All That Glitters is not Gold”**

The school is considered “the second most important space after home” in the Microsystem (Campos-Gil et al., 2020, p. 3). After the data analysis in chapter four, the school's moral education activities are found to be not as glamorous as it is. In teachers' perceptions, the “glittering” moral education activities are not always “gold.”

#### *5.3.1 The large scale of P school's moral education activities*

The P school's moral education activities are pretty ambitious and inclusive; for instance, the SPECIAL life education in the first week includes safety education, patriotic education, engineering, artificial intelligence, etiquette, and creativity, and more than 40 moral education activities spreading out through the whole semester (Excerpts 85, 86). This large scale of moral education activities takes up teachers' time and asks ordinary teachers to contribute indiscriminately to the success of extracurricular activities.

Some teachers think they are working as free labor to do things unrelated to their subjects and professions (Excerpt 87, 90). Teachers, especially headteachers, believe they have taken up enough moral education responsibilities, so the school should only focus on a few high-quality and traditional moral education activities that have proven effective in students' moral

education, like the red song competition (Excerpts 88, 89).

On the other hand, the principal has already realized the problems of excessive moral education activities, but it is not easy for all the activities to halt suddenly, given a large amount of attention they attracted for the promotion of the school (Excerpt 91).

### *5.3.2 Being photogenic as the primary concern of the moral education activities*

The school pays great attention to the psychological problems of the students (Excerpt 92); however, to what extent the school cares is decided by individuals' passion and sense of responsibility (Excerpt 93). Not everyone cares about the actual implementation of moral education in the school, even with constant reminders from the principal that everyone is a moral education agency to the students (Excerpt 94). It is true not only from middle leaders to the service team of security guards and cleaning ladies (Excerpt 95).

Teachers think the school pays too much attention to being photogenic, so there will be glamorous reports of moral education activities (Excerpts 96, 97). The main reason comes from the deviated top-level design, which is not based on the actual need of the students. An effective moral education activity should have a bottom-up decision-making process (Excerpt 98), or it may leave an impression of bureaucratism and formalism on teachers and students for its ineffectiveness in reaching students' hearts (Excerpt 97). Just as Meindl et al. (2018) claimed, prepacked moral education at school has a weak influence and limited effectiveness. In teachers' perceptions, focusing on the perfect presentation of moral education activities is a problem prevalent in schools in Shenzhen (Excerpt 99), resulting from the pressure of being the pilot demonstration area of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The school's moral education principle, "to love the students," is way too elusive and not practical (Excerpt 100). On the contrary, researches show that emphasizing a few specific virtues, like self-control, gratitude, and humility, could increase the effectiveness and the efficiency of moral education in a school (Meindl et al., 2018). The moral education training



in this school is also highly theoretical and not practical, which is not enough to help teachers deal with the daily masses in moral education (Excerpt 101). In school culture theory (Coleman, 2013), there should be tangible methods under the guidance of the school's values and vision. Currently, the vision is "loving the students," which is quite elusive in itself. Teachers feel powerless and unoriented without applicable training to carry out this vision.

#### **5.4 Mesosystem---Stuffy School Culture Shaped by School Management Style**

Mesosystem deals with the link between two or more microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The following section talks about the interrelations between the school leaders and the teachers.

##### *5.4.1 Being a transformational leader without sufficient support*

In Kohlberg's Just Community school, teachers and adults are expected to set up moral exemplars and students engage in moral discussions with their peers (Sukma et al., 2019).

The adults need to live out their moral stance through moral behaviors. The principal openly states her moral education philosophy, to love the students, to integrate extensive learning material into the curriculum, and to view the students' growth in an ecological system.

Middle leaders are expected to provide strategies for her ideology to be implemented. She has a clear picture of the challenges for the middle leaders and handles them with a job rotation strategy.

At the same time, the effect on teachers is not positively precepted as they intended. Teachers worry about middle leaders only focusing on their seasonable responsibility, thus, creating instability and inconsistency in the school's moral education practice (Excerpts 102, 103). To be a transformational leader, second-order changes and support should be provided rather than merely direct control and constant supervision (Yulianti et al., 2021). Good leaders change organizations; great leaders change people (Gu, 2011).

Teachers complain that middle leaders are not working closely with other middle leaders (Excerpt 105) and are meddling with ordinary teachers' teaching practices unprofessionally (Excerpts 104). However, in transformational leadership theory, the principal should be "building collaborative structures" (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 19).

Teachers think that middle leaders are the communication bridge between teachers and the principal, which to a great extent affects whether the principal has a negative or positive impression of them (Excerpt 106). Especially when middle leaders bury potential dangers caused by students' moral misconduct without noticing the principal, students may lose valuable chances for their moral growth and development (Excerpt 107).

To be a transformational leader, the principal should also provide "individualized support," "modeling behavior," and "demonstrating high performance expectation" (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Leithwood & Duke, 1998). Now the principal is trying to make a change through motivational speech and setting a vision and belief system for the school; however, without sufficient support from the middle leaders, immediate communication with the teachers, and positive examples from the principal, the transformational process is struggling in making substantial progress. Without personal connection and active communication, she is not being the transformational leader who is supposed to be "providing up-to-date information, considering individual members' needs, and sharing power with members" (Lee & Kuo, 2019, p. 94).

#### *5.4.2 Dissatisfactions towards an unharmonious school culture*

According to the affective-events theory proposed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996, p. 13), teachers' job satisfaction is under the influence of accumulated work events happen in the work environment, which shape their affective disposition, attitudes, and behavior of an individual.

The P school is strongly motivated to get a good reputation as a new school. It means more

requirements for teachers and more opportunities as well (Excerpts 108, 109, 110). It seems like schools in Shenzhen are all very anxious about being famous, competitive, and distinctive (Excerpt 110).

Firstly, the school pays excessive attention to asking the students to follow the school's rules (Excerpt 111). Then, when it comes to resolving conflicts between teachers and students, middle leaders tend to bend the rules for the students and parents (Excerpt 113) and ask the teachers to apologize to the students (Excerpt 112). In the safety bubble created by the school for the students, middle school students lose the chance to see the harsh reality of society, which endangers their reverence for laws and regulations (Excerpt 114).

Secondly, the administration centers are not straightly named and have vague responsibilities and divisions of labor in moral education (Excerpt 115). Teachers feel tremendous pressure and psychological burden by the power moves from the school in carrying out moral education, such as the on-watch system (Excerpt 116), convenient management (Excerpt 117), and compulsory participation (Excerpt 118). Teachers are not receiving enough recognition from the principal, which intensifies the school culture and might dampen teachers' enthusiasm for moral education in the long run (Excerpt 119).

Thirdly, the principal is expected to be responsible for a fluent communication channel (Excerpt 120) so that the incidents that are out of the power of headteachers and middle leaders won't be buried unattended (Excerpt 121). When these kinds of events happen, it won't "make the teacher feel substantial job satisfaction" (Kouni et al., 2018, p. 158).

Additionally, teachers think the school shouldn't be anyone's vanity fair, and the school's reputation is formulated by parents and society's compliments, not self-glorification (Excerpt 122). Teachers are concerned that speciosity only cultivates students' attention to tokenism and formalism, leading to hypocrisy and superficialness, the opposite of morality cultivation (Excerpts 122, 123). After all, the principal should "positively affect the school climate and

students' modernity development" (Wang, 2019, p. 339).

Affective experiences are positively related to job satisfaction (Burić & Moè, 2020; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Currently, after experiencing unharmonious school culture, teachers are not showing strong job satisfaction. People are at the heart of any organization, particularly a school, and it is only through changing people, nurturing and challenging them, helping them grow and develop, and creating a culture in which they all learn---that an organization can flourish (Hoerr, 2005, p. 7).

### **5.5 Mesosystems--- Inconsistency in Moral Education Beliefs from Parents**

The last part talks about the interrelations between teachers and the school in Mesosystems, and this part focuses on the interrelations between the family, the school, and society.

#### *5.5.1 Cultivating private morality as the goal of family education*

The social problem in the community is frequently the result of a lack of understanding among everyone (Maharani, 2020). In teachers' perceptions, parents only focus on making money and leave their children's moral education at the mercy of their peers and society (Excerpts 124, 125). Teachers believe the home should not present elements of chaos because the house "represents a model of physical, social, and temporal stability" in children's development (Campos-Gil et al., 2020, p. 9)

Some parents inherit unsuitable moral education methods, and they should learn more about communication skills instead of resorting to violence (Excerpt 125).

Teachers understand the significance of harmonious family bonds on children's long-term emotional wellbeing and morality cultivation (Excerpts 126, 127). Similar to the proposal of Huo and Xie (2021, p. 526), parents should act as the "guardians of children, gatekeepers for information safety."

At the moment, they think family education is filled with unnecessary tension (Excerpt 128)

and toxic emotions, like negative labeling (Excerpt 129), refusing to admit SEN students and worrying about the stigmatization of having an SEN student than finding proper and timely treatment (Excerpt 130). Teachers, particularly parents, should try to balance children's feelings and impulses with love, care, trust, and patience, just as smartly channeling the flood instead of simply blocking the flow (Huo & Xie, 2021).

Parents explain that the heavy workload in Shenzhen forces them to sacrifice quality time with the children and trust the school entirely for their children's academic and moral education (Excerpts 131, 132). They sometimes ask the grandparents to take care of the kids. However, different education beliefs and generation gaps make family moral education much more complicated and fragile (Excerpt 133).

It is the parent's responsibility to shape children in a socially accepted way (Noddings, 2010). Teachers think cultivating "private morality" should be the goal of family education, and developing "public morality" should be the goal of school education (Excerpt 134). The parents' committee is very supportive of the school's moral education strategies (Excerpt 135). Not all parents show up at the weekend school to learn about carrying out moral education in families, especially SEN students' parents (Excerpt 36). Teachers think some parents are not implementing what they have learned from the weekend school (Excerpt 137) and merely counting on teachers and the school (Excerpt 138).

Wang (2017) proposes that parents should encourage children to give their opinion and honor it by engaging in a dialogic interaction on children's moral transgression. However, the study finds that in China, reporting children's misconduct in school may trigger domestic violence, so teachers think it would be meaningless to communicate with parents like that (Excerpt 139).

### *5.5.2 Boat analogy---A community with a shared future*

Metaphor has much wider entailments than we think, because it embodies our physical and emotional experience, which is structured and defined metaphorically in our human conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). From the metaphors for the relationship between parents, children, teachers, and society from teachers, we can see that teachers think that the developmental process of children's morality is closely related to their parents (Excerpts 140, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147). Parents should be in the dominant position as cooperative and strategic partners (Excerpts 141, 142, 147) for the relationships between caregivers and children are crucial in their moral development, as shown in Carol Gilligan's ethics of care and Attachment theory (Gilligan, 1993; Govrin, 2014). Confucianism believes it takes a very long time to build one's morality, so it is the parent's job to set up a sustainable and uplifting family environment with them being the epitome of what they teach (Wang, 2017).

Parents will face the test of society with the students in the end. Society is the judge of the moral education results and the examiner of the moral education quality (Excerpts 142, 143). Gan's research (2009) disapproves Littlewood's prediction of Asian learners: East Asian students will expect the teachers, as the holders of superior knowledge and authority figures, to be responsible for learning assessment. Similarly, the metaphors show that teachers believe it is the society, not the teachers, that are the evaluator of the success of children's moral education. Currently, parents, particularly fathers, are not paying their fair share of their children's moral education (Excerpts 139, 145). Even worse, some toxic family education poses challenges for the school and teachers (Excerpts 140, 145, 147). Be aware that unhealthy and insecure attachment could increase the risk of developing emotional and social adjustment problems in children's future lives (Benoit, 2004). Fathers should be more involved in their children's moral education, improving their self-esteem, self-worth, and social competence (Lam et al., 2012).

Teachers should be outsiders or consultants because they are not facing society's challenges after graduation (Excerpts 139, 142, 143, 145), like football coaches or boat trackers.

Teachers also stress the inner cognitive drive of the students. Dreams, ambitions, and self-agency are the primary driving force in students' moral advancement (Excerpts 144, 146, 147). They need time and space to grow at will and should be appreciated, not judged (Excerpts 144, 145, 147, 148), as their emotions are essential driving forces in moral judgment from the social intuitionist views (Greene & Haidt, 2002).

Lastly, teachers think society needs to have a much looser and relaxed attitude toward the success of students' moral education. Teachers should be able to work on improving their teaching competence before being asked to be active participants in moral education in the school (Excerpt 149).

In conclusion, all the metaphors, especially the boat analogy, tree analogy, and the disco ball analogy, suggest a common belief that all the stakeholders in children's moral education are a community with a shared future.

## **5.6 Macrosystem---Social and Cultural Influence as the Cornerstones**

Macrosystem is a much broader social and cultural context that encompasses the other systems, such as the organizational and political contexts, economic system, and dominant beliefs and ideologies (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Yang, 2021). This section discusses the society and Chinese culture's influence on children's moral development.

### *5.6.1 The invisible yet powerful impact of society and culture*

Teachers think schools select only the cultural essence and filter out society's negative influence, so they still have great significance in connecting students with the outside world (Excerpt 150). On the other hand, the current moral education model is not flexible, heavily relies on the school (Excerpt 151), and carries out fixed goals set solely by the government

(Excerpt 152). The current law system is not detailed enough to care for teenagers' emotions when no severe physical damage is involved (Excerpt 153). When students have serious psychological issues, the school is not eligible to recruit more professional psychological consultants or get the help they need from the government to handle the students' problems (Excerpts 154, 155). When social organizations want to cooperate with the school, their promotional material is neither suitable nor effective in solving the most urgent and current problems, like online scams or juvenile delinquency (Excerpt 156).

Society is not implementing efficient measurable strategies to uphold a tight alliance between parents and the school (Excerpt 157). Otherwise, the school only pays attention to students graduating on time, and parents are not given enough time to sort out a better solution for their children's psychological issues (Excerpt 158). As equity-oriented school leaders, they should enact all successful leadership practices, especially in building productive partnerships among parents, schools, and the larger community, encouraging teachers to engage in forms of instruction with all students that are both ambitious and culturally responsive (Leithwood, 2021).

Lastly, the school culture is under the influence of traditional Chinese culture. Teachers are expected to act like saints. Meanwhile, little protection is offered to them when parents file complaints to the educational bureau (Excerpt 159).

#### *5.6.2 Shenzhen---The city with great potential in moral education*

In teachers' perceptions, Shenzhen's characteristics significantly impact the implementation of moral education in this city (Excerpt 160). Firstly, the school wants to adopt innovative moral education methods to make itself a household name (Excerpt 160). Secondly, Shenzhen's income differences and living conditions are causing trouble for schools' moral education (Excerpts 161, 162). Shenzhen has to provide decent accommodation to residents at all levels of society so that moral education is not curbed by the living environment and



income differences (Excerpt 163). In teachers' perceptions, students have little understanding of educational inequality in Shenzhen and entertain unrealistic expectations (Excerpt 164).

Thirdly, Shenzhen's social atmosphere needs to be more supportive and tolerant of moral education results in schools (Excerpt 165). The city has very limited high schools and student quotas, which creates a rat race for parents and students (Excerpt 166, 167). Taking the educational differences and inequalities in the GBA, it is even more impossible to surmount the class differences for children in this area (Excerpt 165).

However, Shenzhen has excellent potential to be the point of breakthroughs in China's moral education model (Excerpts 166, 167, 168, 169). Shenzhen launched an ambitious and heroic comprehensive evaluation system for moral education; despite its failure in allocating the resources efficiently and fairly, it is the first attempt to provide an alternative to accessing moral education results and process (Excerpts 166, 67).

Shenzhen has a mature system of grid management which has already shown its capability in the city's quick reaction and containment of the Covid-19 pandemic (Excerpt 168).

Moreover, people living in this city genuinely love this migrant city. They are confident and passionate about the city's future and their lives in this city (Excerpt 169).

### **5.7 Exosystem---The Covid-19 Pandemic as a Blessing in Disguise**

The Exosystem does not directly affect the individual but influencing the Microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Yang, 2021). During the two years' research journey, China and the whole world is under the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is considered "a blessing in disguise" in teachers' perceptions.

Some teachers point out that the pandemic has potential to positively affect children's moral development, for it brings about longer quality time, independent learning opportunities, and a chance to observe society and the government (Excerpt 170). If used wisely by parents, it could be highly motivating to the children's morality advancement. In the meantime, students

can get inspirational information online that is conducive to their moral advancement (Excerpt 170).

Others think the pandemic compresses students' social circles (Excerpt 171), exposes the children to the dark sides of the Internet (Excerpt 172), and jeopardizes the children's attention span and abilities to think independently and critically (Excerpts 172, 173).

Teachers also have to face the challenges of delivering attractive online classes to a group of easily distractable teenagers (Excerpt 174). Teachers, especially temporary teachers, are quickly replaced during the pandemic, which creates instabilities in the moral education teams in the school (Excerpt 175). The easy accessibility of online news of preferred, even personalized information feeds falsely leads the reader to a biased situation where common moral values cannot penetrate (Maharani, 2020).

## Chapter Six Future considerations

### 6.1 Schools or an Alternative Moral Education Model

Chinese schools play multiple roles in children's character formation, the moral teacher, government educational policy implementer, academic educator, and strangely housing price determiner.

Moral education at school is characterized as traditional, close-minded, manipulative, and disassociated with children's nature. Chinese scholars (Cheng, 2019; X. Wang, 2017; Yang, 2021) still believe that moral education in China is centered on the political indoctrination of socialist values and rigid behavioral training. Being obedient to authority is the primary quality of a student, and this trait is trained day after day by reciting moral rules and behavioral principles (Qi & Tang, 2004).

The large proportion of time spent at school determines the importance of school influence on students' moral education. The current research shows that moral education in school has its limitation.

First, it cannot undertake and complete the task of moral development of students without cooperation from family and support from social institutions. Psychological professionals are needed to support students' challenging times in school (Huo & Xie, 2021).

Second, the dramatic social transformation is too powerful to be blocked at the school gate. The current school system cannot "resolve the ethical problem of social development" (Qi & Tang, 2004, p.478).

Third, it heavily depends on the principal's personal aspiration and moral education beliefs, which triggers teachers' emotional and physical burden, job dissatisfaction, and a high turnover rate in this case.

People are more interested in their personal interests than collective interests. The rise of materialism, the deterioration in human relationships, and the collapse of traditional Chinese

values greatly challenged the current Chinese moral education (Qi & Tang, 2004).

The new tide of traditional virtue-centered and school-based value indoctrination is doomed to fail in the escalating moral disorders in Chinese society.

It is high time to think about the limitation of schools and start to think of an alternative model which might include or exclude schools as the primary location for moral education.

Future endeavors should be made to answer questions like:

*What does a possible alternative moral education model look like?*

*What are the potential benefits of building an alternative moral education model?*

*What kind of social, political, and economic conditions are required in this model?*

*How should an alternative moral education model be built in reality?*

*How can the effectiveness of this model be monitored and evaluated timely?*

## **6.2 Top-down or Bottom-up Decision Making**

This study clearly depicts that mainland moral education is under close monitoring of the Party by implementing a top-down standardized continuum in the education system, from the MOE, Shenzhen bureau of education, and the school level to teachers. In fact, emphasizing a few specific virtues, such as self-control, gratitude, and humility could increase the effectiveness and efficiency of moral education in a school (Meindl et al., 2018). Scholars also draw attention to that values obtained in school have less important than values conveyed by friends and mass media nowadays (Maharani, 2020).

In China, there are laws established and implemented by the government on the surface and the underground “sub-rules” work so efficiently that they are imprinted in Chinese society and people’s minds. The P school is trying multiple things to set it apart from other schools in this area; however, they are all under the general guidelines of the higher-level educational bureau. Policy enactment is not the primary focus of a successful school principal’s work

(Gu, 2011). School leaders should examine both internal and external contexts and make context-sensitive decisions instead of relying on a prepacked repertoire of strategies and expecting others to adapt to them. After all, school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning (Leithwood, 2021).

This study also shows the vulnerability of being a temporary teacher in this school. The school should invite teachers to participate in the decision-making process that determines their stay because whether the teachers will stay or not is determined by the teachers' perceptions of their work conditions and the school's leadership decisions (Urick, 2020).

Similar to some participants in this study, there are teachers making a “positive relation between students with good academic achievements and good characters” (Huo & Xie, 2021, p. 522). Family support and involvement convey the value of education and the school's influence on their children. At the same time, the power of moral education in school is also limited without an ethical environment created by family, school, and friends (Yang, 2021). Early at the beginning of this century, Li et al. (2004) raised concerns that examination pressure, bandwagon effect, sexual behavior, mental illness, and suicides are the primary pressure sources for teenagers. Yu and Wang (2020) warn us that social media and cellphone addictions might bring more depression and pressure rather than happiness to teenagers. This study shows that family support and involvement could amplify or undermine the effectiveness of the school's moral education.

However, families and schools have no strong bond or joint force. At the same time, the power of moral education in school is also limited without an ethical environment created by family, school, and friends (Yang, 2021). Thus, the students are forced to cultivate a “double personality” at school and home (Qi & Tang, 2004, p.475). An appalling “5+2=0” effect appears, which means five days of school moral education and two days of family education equals no moral education at all.

At the same time, the frontier teachers and headteachers have accumulated many issues worthy of going into detail and handling immediately. Moral education's content and practice are prioritized and executed more and more specific and detailed on the lower level (Li et al., 2004). However, the reality is that teachers' appeals are not heard and paid enough attention to under the current top-down decision-making model.

Chinese moral education has a history of top-down reforms rather than a bottom-up approach (Huo & Xie, 2021). The social problem in the community is frequently the result of a lack of understanding among everyone (Maharani, 2020). Suppose the government and the school leaders still refuse to consider students', parents', and teachers' appeals and start making bottom-up fashion decisions. In this case, people will become more distant from the current model of moral education.

After this study, I determined to find answers to the following questions:

*What are the differences between students' appeal and the course standard?*

*How can a comprehensive bottom-up decision be made strategically?*

*Is the rational decision-making process in management applicable in education?*

*What liability do the stakeholders have in making a bottom-up decision?*

### **6.3 Capitalist Employees or Socialist Teachers**

After hearing teachers' appeals, a question surfaces: in strong economic development zones like Shenzhen in GBA, can teaching be just a regular job that is only under the governance of law departed from the traditional Chinese cultural requirements?

It seems like a contradiction is going on in the current Chinese middle school management. To be an effective transformational leader, the principal has to relinquish the authority and elicit teachers' potential motivation (Lee & Kuo, 2019). Also, top-down administrative promotion of the government imposes an over-standardization on moral education, which is

not conducive to flexibility and autonomy of schools (Tang & Wang, 2021). The traditional top-down Oriental Confucianism model is still the “main mode in the primary and secondary school environment” (Wang, 2019, p. 339)

Furthermore, there is a conflict between the need for legalization in society and the moral requirements for teachers in Chinese traditional culture. Socialism has dominated Chinese social, political, cultural, economic, and educational terms (Li et al., 2004). Society needs to set up more detailed laws to ensure the rights and interests of teachers, in a sense, to give teachers the right to be indifferent. It takes the burden of moral education off the teachers, and they can focus on their subject teaching.

Traditional cultural relics like Confucianism not only influence how teachers think of the current school management and moral education model but also affect how students think of moral education. The traditional Chinese character education, centered on Confucian thinking, aims at being a tool of governance of the society and nation in the highly divided ancient China. Li (2011) noted that China has been experiencing a massive transformation in economy, technology, information, and innovation, but the outdated traditional moral values put a curb on people’s minds, which was strictly governed by conventional virtues in the old time.

Confucian thinking still has practice values inside and outside the classroom. To teach a child, one must take the child’s interests and aptitude (Wang, 2017). This means moral educators need to choose appropriate methods to nurture the child, like the growth of grass and trees. The positive aspects of traditional virtues and culture should be rediscovered, made use of, and integrated going forward because “some elements of traditional culture can make up for the shortcomings of modernity” (Tang & Wang, 2021, p. 738).

Lessons must be drawn from the ten years’ cultural revolution and other national turmoil because of the ideological war on whether education must serve politics (Li et al., 2004).

Chinese people must be aware of the potential of an even harsher polarized ideological war between the far-reaching impactful traditional Chinese cultural relics and the classical Marxism, Chinese characteristics socialist theories, and westernized management methods. As we all know, China acquired market mechanisms from the West to build socialism with Chinese characteristics. The widening gap between the rich and the disadvantaged group has triggered anger and tension in society. With excessive information and an irrational desire for fortune, China is arguably a place of moral chaos nowadays (Yang, 2021). While the COVID-19 pandemic has been roaring for the last three years, the whole world's moral values and political disputes are on display on a daily basis. Chinese moral values have been challenged by the world on such a large scale, and the people of this country are at a loss of how to select rationally in such complicated globalization. An ethical world order is in desperate need to counteract to the moral disorders brought by modernity.

The trend of citizenship education, where children's independent social position, personality, rights, and obligations are highly emphasized, is expected to happen as the consumer-driven market economy has shattered the base of the traditional Chinese social bands. It opens up space for new kinds of human relationships to grow, whose participants are expected to be equal, liberal, democratic, and self-motivated; however, "how this will be played out on the ground largely remains to be seen (Li, 2004).

For the CPC party, ideology comes first, and education must serve politics because it is the central task. The reality shows that moral education need to be more fundamental and long-term oriented rather than the short-term political expediencies of the ruling party. We should teach students how to deal with moral dilemmas and political endorsement, rather than indoctrinate pre-set answers to all problems in the classroom.

In a word, Chinese schools and society should treat Chinese moral education teachers with a socialist mindset. Currently, schools enjoy the convenience of managing employees by the



modern westernized capitalist management models. The conflict between the modern management model and ancient sentiments can only gradually swallow the teachers' enthusiasm to become caring teachers. Using the participant's words, you cannot expect teachers to eat "capitalist grass" and produce "socialist milk."

Now is the time to think about how to treat teachers with modern capitalist management methods or traditional Chinese cultural beliefs with a future-oriented socialist mindset. The following questions are worth looking into in the future:

*What affects Chinese moral education teachers' job satisfaction?*

*What are the differences between being a teacher in ancient China and modern times?*

*Are Chinese youngsters enthusiastic about choosing teaching as a future career?*

*How are the middle leaders impacting the success of school governance?*

*Can you be a transformational leader in Chinese educational settings?*

*What dilemmas are the middle leaders facing currently, and how can they be solved?*

#### **6.4 Ecological System Theory for General or Specific Purposes**

Yang (2021) examined the Chinese school-based moral education system by using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory in which he pointed out that contextual factors other than school need to be stressed to establish a moral ecology system for students to flourish morally.

The current research indicates that the social nature of the problem is swept under the carpet, and the rootless policy choices and excessive emphasis on shaping students' behavior in the school make things worse. Chinese moral education system still falls into what Kohlberg (1984) had criticized: training of behaviors and inculcation of values, neglecting the contextual factors shaping a person's character more than one's personal moral decay (Yang, 2021). The affective domain in a class is usually poorly conceptualized, highly individualized, and difficult to assess directly (Allen & Friedman, 2010).

Bronfenbrenner (2005) stated that insufficient policy support for the family lead to the misbehavior of children. This issue is extremely true in China, 61 million left-behind children are left unsupervised without moral guidance. Teachers and parents' stress comes from the 40% high school enrolment rate in Shenzhen, due to limited student capacity, which is simply outrageous. The rest of them have to go back to their hometown to become left behind children in high schools.

As shown in this study, social, cultural, and political contexts have crucial impact on children's moral development in mainland China. With the help of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory, a suggestion could be made to the government, putting moral education on an important agenda and giving bigger portion in every educational level from primary school to higher education. In a mature ecological system, students should be able to change their attitude, behavior and habit when interacting with the society by using moral values that is suitable with the local community.

Meindl et al. (2017) finds that the prepacked moral education at school has a weak influence due to the fact that its effectiveness is limited. Methods in moral education should be welcomed in personal, political, and global levels (Noddings, 2010). To be more effective in moral education, schools can focus more on the implicit or "stealthy" practices rather than the explicit moral education. It has stronger social influence and it arouse less psychological reactance.

Teenagers are in a phase of "don't tell me what to do", so direct intervention may backfire. Emphasizing a few "master" virtues, like self-control, gratitude, and humility, could increase the effectiveness and the efficiency of moral education (Meindl, 2015).

The social nature of the problem is still not going through the thick school walls smoothly with the lens of this theory. Or, more likely, the contextual factors are so subtly intertwined that this theory cannot detect them. The complex social, historical, cultural, political,

economic, and educational contextual factors are too intricate to be encapsulated in a single ecological theory with five clear-cut levels.

From the research, I propose that Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory could be applied to examine moral education implementation in China, better with a much narrow focus, like a certain virtue of the students. When going into the research field with a focused lens, researchers can better understand how this particular virtue, namely gratitude, integrity, creativity, self-discipline, compassion, determination, patriotism, forgiveness, charity, diligence, patience, humility, courage et al., is affected and cultivated at different levels.

*Is focusing on specific virtues makes it easier for schools to succeed in moral education?*

*Is it applicable to use Ecological System theory to examine the process of children's certain characters, like self-control, gratitude, and humility?*

*Can the Ecological System theory be applied to examine the school culture?*

*Can the Ecological System theory be applied to examine the academic results?*

I hope one day people could start to tell the new version of the "Blind Men and an Elephant," especially people involved in moral education in GBA.

*Once upon a time, there were six blind men. They are touching different parts of the elephant to describe what an elephant looked like.*

*The man who feels the body says, "Hey, guys, I felt something big and strong like a wall." Others shouts, "It might be the body."*

*The one who feels the tusk says, "Hey, guys, I felt something sharp and pointy like a spear." Others shouts, "It might be the tusk."*

*The one who feels the leg says, "Hey, guys, I felt something round and steady like a pillar." Others shouts, "It might be the leg."*

*The one who feels the ear “Hey, guys, I felt something wide and soft like a fan.” Others shouts, “It might be the ear.”*

*The one who feels the tail says, “Hey, guys, I felt something short and curly like a rope.” Others shouts, “It might be the tail.”*

*The one who feels the trunk says, “Hey, guys, I felt something long and flexible like a snake.” Others shouts, “It might be the trunk.”*

*Then, everyone suddenly wakes up to reality and shouts simultaneously, “It is a giant and beautiful elephant.”*

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1 The interview protocols

1. What are your academic and moral education responsibilities?
2. Is your subject related to moral education?
3. Have you ever received any help in conducting moral education?
4. Did you ever encounter any moral misconduct of the students?
5. How did you deal with it?
6. Why did you choose to deal with it like that?
7. How do parents affect the success of school moral education?
8. Are these effects controllable, and how?
9. Who takes up the most responsibilities for moral education in our school?
10. What are your comments on the moral education activities in our school?
11. What is the influence of the pandemic on moral education?
12. What is the perfect moral education model in your mind?
13. What is your metaphor for the relationship between students, teachers, parents, school, and society?
14. Is there anything special about carrying out moral education in Shenzhen?

## Appendix 2 A Sample of a Theme “The perfect moral education mode”

1.

"Methodologically, what is inculcated should be a natural growth process of individual psychology. Cognitive development is not equal to moral development. (Participant 17, 2021.7.20)

*(Participant 17 Psychology Teacher, Location: 3-3, founder: WANG; 2021.7.20 14:10)*

2.

"Less is more!"

*(Participant 17 Psychology Teacher, Location: 10-10, Founder: WANG; 2021.7.20 14:12)*

3.

Only by ensuring fairness and justice through the system can students' moral education grow up. (Participant 17, 2021.7.20)

*(Participant 17 Psychology Teacher; Location: 15-15; Founder: WANG; 2021.7.20 14:15)*

4.

Interviewer Wang: So, I am asking you the last question, you imagine a perfect model of moral education, or education as well, who would be involved in that model?

Interviewee: Well, I think the middle management of the principal, the teachers of all subjects, the parents, and even some psychological experts in the society, should be involved.

Interviewer Wang: What kind of partnership is it? Who's responsible for what, how they should be assigned, and now you've designed the best one.

Interviewee: If you want to design this, I think the principal's words should be decided on the core of the moral education of the school, for example, what is your program? It needs to be determined, that some encouragement and support should be given to moral education workers, otherwise, their conscience will be cold.

Interviewer Wang: That's a good point, the conscience will be cold.

Interviewee: Then the principal should also create a better campus environment, there should also be a warm place, or arrange the course of moral education in curriculum arrangement, or some relaxation courses directly, then the middle managers, I think if you want to do the moral education well, it must set up some indicators on moral education. That is, how to assess them, how to count them when things are unresolved. " I think the principal's words carry great power in the whole moral education system of the school. Teachers' contributions should be recognized publicly, and some encouragement in this part should be given to moral education workers, otherwise, their conscience will be cold. It should be a warm and welcoming place. The school culture needed to be much more relaxed than now. I think there should be some relaxation courses in moral education. (Participant 13, 2021.7.11)

*(Participant 1; Location: 59-64; Founder: WANG; 2021.7.11 18:56)*

5.

Interviewer Wang: Test who is the leader right, and what do the middle leaders solve?

Interviewee: Yes, for example, the moral education working group. Lots of the hidden danger is buried. One boy cyber bullied another girl in my class, so she reported him to the head teacher, then to the moral education office. They are too busy and it didn't cost serious damage. I don't think that principal knows about this. When facing these problems of moral education, they can deal with what can be dealt with and put aside what cannot deal with. There should be one of those principal's mailboxes where you send it directly to the principal, and then the principal gets to know that there are a few things to do, so that if they don't do it, the principal knows. The principal, he, cares about this school, but some of the employees they won't care as much. Right? (Participant 13, 2021.7.11)

So it goes directly to the principal, and then the principal sends out the assignment, it doesn't mean much trouble to the principal, let the principal know about it so that it can be carried out.

So now it's about whether it's buried a lot in the middle layer. The hidden danger is buried, yeah, so it's not good. Well, I think the family committee is quite important, and the family committee must be expressing positive energy, including like those in our class, in the matter of changing teachers, the school arranges the wrong things, if there are individual parents inside leading a bad rhythm. setting up a bad example, it could be very troublesome. But if that adds a few for special positive energy, first of all, it is to make up the atmosphere, and then everybody else usually follows. And I thought it would be nice to have parents volunteer. "

*(Participant 13; Location: 65-68; Founder: WANG; 2021.7.11 18:56)*

6.

Interviewer Wang: I don't quite understand. It's just a teacher. He mastered this kind of professional. Can I say that he is a very professional person, and then he gives some directional guidance to students when they need it, but he does not interfere with students too much, and let students grow freely?

Interviewee: Yes, and in the process of students' growth, for example, whether they are wrong or right, they should come out of their thinking or practice, rather than being told by others. In this case, there's more.

I think we should "give life back to the child", and let him practice and explore by himself. There are too many voices to him. The teacher thinks he should behave like this, and the parents think he should behave like that. These cause chaos in children's minds. why can't the children have their own life? (Participant 14, 2021.7.11)

I don't think you need to set up a lot of people, because in children when children are young, you set a lot of people, too much voice to him, is the real cause the child thought chaos, that kind of downfall, I feel well, like this too, want to let children, because of you, you said that you are right, you said you he is right, even if you are right to teach him, You say you want to listen to the opinions of others, but after listening to the opinions of others, each has its view ah, then you have to tell the child, ah, this opinion is wrong, we do not listen to, that is not you see the contradiction, so the wrong before and after. So, I thought, let's just coach the kid and let him explore for himself, let him decide, is this right or wrong, don't judge him, you don't say this is right, this is wrong, you let him go to hell. "

*(Participant 14; Location: 67-69; Founder: WANG; 2021.7.11 18:58)*

7.

Interviewer Wang: You are a successful moral person. What virtue does this child have?

That's it.

Interviewee: Well, I think it's better to have a small class system. We should have a small class and not have too many students. It's kind of like meritocracy, but you can't have too many people, and then. (Participant 15, 2021.7.12)

*(Participant 15; Location: 96-97; Founder: WANG; 2021.7.12 17:36)*

8.

Interviewer Wang: Is it like we've grown in a row of leeks?

Interviewee: It's like a kid growing up with a dog.

Interviewer Wang: We are this child, but the dog slowly grows into a person, right?

Interviewee: It's the companionship because I'm young.

Interviewer Wang: Are we dogs or people?

Interviewee: Haha, we should be human, is to highlight the relationship of the company.

Because we're young, maybe when we get older, my point of view will be different. My view now is more that education is a kind of companionship. Then can we say to guide him to grow, or accompany him to grow?

Interviewer Wang: Can you say that a blind person is half of a guide dog or a lonely old man?

Interviewee: Not really. You have to be poetic, don't you? That's the relationship between the sun and the sunflower. I want him to grow towards me.

Interviewer Wang: Parents are fake sun? Is there much sun in the sky?

Interviewee: No. There is one sun. That is, there is only one truth, and our teacher represents the truth to some extent, and then the sunflower is born to the sun, in fact, we just want him to believe in our that set, and then grow towards us. This metaphor is advanced. What about parents?

Interviewee: What our teacher represents? To some extent, he is not just a teacher, he is the truth. Of course, you can oppose the authority, because some teachers are not the truth, because they are engaged in their own subjective, it does not represent the truth.

Can we say that the sun seems to be a luminous thing, but our teacher will strive to do that light, is one of the lights, he is very bright, it is also a ball of light? Disco of a ball, a glitter, our teacher is one of the glitters, let him emit light. Let the students follow it. The one that turned him toward us. That's it because when we teach them knowledge again, we just want them to learn this thing.

Interviewer Wang: The Internet?

Interviewee: It's the orioles on the road that want to tempt him and harass him.

Interviewer Wang: Parents should also be a part of this light?

Interviewee: But it depends on what kind of parents you are. Some parents are light, and some parents are darkness itself. When parents are clouds or darkness itself, the other light must be bright enough, or the child will go astray.

In moral education, the relationship between the teacher and the students is like a kid growing up with a dog. It is all about companionship. Teachers are the kid growing to be an adult, students are the dog growing to be a kid. It's a circle.

Or, students are the sunflowers, and to some students, the teachers are the sun. There's only one son---the truth. Right now, the sun is more of a luminous thing, a disco ball.

Teachers are one of the glitters emitting light. Some parents are light, and some parents are darkness itself. When parents are clouds or darkness itself, the other light must be bright enough, or the child will go astray. (Participant 15, 2021.7.12)

*(Participant 15; Location: 112-129; Founder: WANG; 2021.7.12 17:39)*