

The Asia-Pacific Network for Moral Education (APNME)

Reflections by

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on APNME's 2012 Conference, held in Chiayi, Taiwan

Research and Practice in Moral Education: Reflection, Dialogue, Interaction

The 7th annual APNME conference was held in Chiayi, Taiwan, from 15th to 17th June 2012. As a graduate student in the field of counselling and educational psychology, my perspectives were broadened in many respects by attending this conference.

The close relationship between moral education and counselling psychology is something that was never mentioned during my training to become a counsellor. As the importance of moral values and ethics is strongly emphasized in counselling, counsellors must maintain a high level of self-awareness and reflect on their motives, purposes and behaviour on a regular basis. For this reason I found it very beneficial to understand the educational processes in the formation of moral values, especially for those who are in positions with high ethical demands from society, such as counsellors, teachers and even parents.

During the keynote speeches on the first day of the conference, Dr. Jiaw Ouyang presented his reflections on moral education from a philosophical perspective based on his life-long work in the field, and Dr. Monica Taylor analyzed trends and tendencies in moral education research in papers published in the *Journal of Moral Education* over 40 years and her observations while editor of the *JME*. Participants were soon eagerly discussing the concepts and findings of these speeches, and it seemed to me that much effort had been made to determine what moral education is. In contrast, several questions arose in my mind: What isn't moral education? Are there specific virtues that should be encouraged or avoided in moral education? How do different cultural contexts affect moral education?

As scholars from around the world shared their findings in parallel sessions, I was surprised to discover the comprehensiveness of the field of moral education. From comparative analysis of values education to professional ethics; teaching social competence to encouraging social independence; and effects of life and death education to mindfulness practices, all these are just the tip of the iceberg in the broad field of moral education. Also, in terms of where moral education takes place, I had assumed it could happen anywhere, but from the context of this conference, it seemed that the major focus is on the teacher-student environment, and the family environment seemed to be underrated, though I think it should be equally important. If moral education could be implemented by parents in collaboration with trained professionals, would there be a positive influence on moral education? Is it possible to foresee an era in the field of moral education research

where the aim shifts from promoting the moral education competencies of trained professionals to those of parents and the family system?

The most inspiring aspect of all for me was the international nature of this conference, for I have always found it difficult to gain insights into the moral education and values of different cultures. During this conference, professionals from around the globe not only shared their research results, but also revealed how moral education is currently implemented in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, the interchange of thoughts and ideas with these professionals was even more precious, as I found I gained new knowledge and that fresh inspiration was stimulated throughout these conversations. Passion for and devotion to the field of moral education could be seen in every corner of the conference.

To conclude, I was deeply inspired by attending this conference. Unanswered questions remained, but they act as my motivation to devote more to the field of moral education. As for the greatest harvest from this conference for me, it was a solution to my question of determining what moral education is and is not: I learned that people in different cultural contexts have different values, therefore there is not only one definition of moral education.

I tried my best to transcribe my inspirations into words, but the results only expressed a small portion of how much I've gained from this conference. If the news of the APNME conference could be further promoted to students and professionals beyond the field of education, the collaboration among people in different fields of study would surely ignite inspiration and ideas to fill the heads of every participant of these conferences.