

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN MORAL EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Moral feeling, moral thinking and moral acting are aspects in Moral Education for Malaysian schools. Students are encouraged to practice what they learn within and outside the boundaries of the class room. In the year 2000, there were shift in assessing teaching and learning of Moral Education in which equal weightage were given to the cognitive/moral thinking aspect, as well as moral feeling and moral acting. This has resulted in an assessment paper for Moral Education requirement focusing upon practical work students carry out, based on themes taught in the classroom. Policy makers together with Malaysian Examination Board produced a comprehensive syllabus and formative assessment sheets to assess students involvement in the implementation of the new system. Unfortunately, at this initial stage many flaws were found and policy makers need to reassess before it becomes "settled", given serious backfire from teachers and students concerned.

INTRODUCTION

Moral Education in Malaysia is part of the school curriculum from pre school right up to secondary and college level. This subject emphasizes the spiritual, family, environmental, social and humanitarian aspects in the total development of the individual. School-based assessment is implemented at pre school, primary and lower secondary level through observation, written and oral tests. A centralized examination was introduced in 1993, in the public examination known as Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education Examination). (Report on Regional Seminar on Values Education in ASEAN; 1994). The paper is known as Moral Knowledge 1225/1.

In the year 2000, a shift was made in the assessment where equal weightage was crucial for the three aspects taught in the classroom; moral thinking, moral feeling and moral action. Since these aspects were taught in the classroom, it is practical to assess all three aspects in school based or central examinations. Thus, another paper, Moral Knowledge 1225/2 was introduced.

The practical or project component, titled Moral Education 1225/2, is the second paper of the Moral Education subject in the Malaysian Certificate of Education. Moral Education 1225/1 is a written paper conducted in a formal assessment setting. The Moral Education 1225/2 however aims to focus on moral

thought, feeling and actions of the students other than acquiring the knowledge, understanding and skills through the teaching and learning of Moral Education in the classroom.

Moral Education 1225/2 Paper: Project Work

According to the document produced by the Malaysian Examination Board, Ministry of Education Malaysia (2004), Moral Education 1225/2 is a formative assessment which aims to guide, develop and expand the moral values in students according to their individual capacity. The evaluation is to be carried out through two methods.

- i. Sahsiah* (Personality) - reporting on the moral feeling and act while communicating, making decisions and solving matters.
- ii. Iltizam* (Commitment) involvement and being responsible in carrying out daily work and social service. Reports from daily activities and social service will be compiled and documented as a folio.

Beginning January 2004, the Moral Education Project Work was implemented in all secondary schools. The Malaysian Examination Board (2004) outlined that the Project Work has to be collaborated between the Malaysian Examination Board, State and District Education Departments, school administrators, heads of social science departments and the Moral Education teachers. The early planning established the overall aims, which are to ensure the realization of formative assessment in a more

systematic and organized manner. The Project Work also aims to evaluate and assess the achievement of Moral Education holistically. It also aims to instill good virtues among students and provide them with ample opportunities to bring out their strengths and self development in the process of carrying out the project work (Malaysian Examination Board, 2004).

In implementing the Moral Education Project Work, the Ministry of Education stated that the Project Work would be criteria for all students who will be sitting for the Moral Education 1225/1 as a prerequisite for certification purposes. The Project Work would be executed at school level starting from form four till students complete their form five. Students would have to complete their Project Work as required and verified by the school administrator. Evaluation and assessment would be carried out by teachers teaching Moral Education. These teachers would have to plan the process and activities for the Project Work for all the students whom he or she is teaching. Evaluation will be based on the format given by the Malaysian Examination Board. The students will be assessed twice in form four and twice in form five for recording purposes but teacher can evaluate students according to his or her schedule.

A number of principles underpinned the process and product of the Project Work. From the outset, the Project Work provides ample opportunity for students to develop their level of *sahsiah* and *iltizam* in line with the aims of the Moral Education. (Syllabus for Moral Education, 2003). The Project Work also intends to be seen as producing good practice rather than being perceived as another means of assessment.

Problem statement

Since this is the first time that Moral Education project work is implemented in Malaysia as part of a national school assessment, this paper intends to explore the views of teachers and students involved directly with the practical component or Project Work. This is seen as a beginning of collecting evidence on the nature and validity of the Project Work for improved practice and implementation.

Research methodology

The discussions in this paper are based on observations and interviews conducted with teachers and students who were directly involved with the Moral Education Project, conducted by the Malaysian Examination Board, Ministry of Education Malaysia.

There were 50 participants from forms 4 and 50 from form 5, they were from urban and rural schools in Peninsular and East Malaysia. 10 teachers teaching Moral Education were also interviewed. There were no differences between male and female students as they were chosen in random.

Findings/issues

Almost all the secondary schools carried out the Project Work as and when directives are received from the Ministry of Education and passed on to the state, district, right down to the school level. Moral Education teachers who knew about the Project Work started to brief their students on the project work and some even started to get their students to complete a few social service assignments.

During interview, the Moral Education teachers and students were asked, what they knew about the Project Work. One teacher from Malacca who planned and carried out a few assignments summed up views of many others:

We the Moral Education teachers don't really know what the Ministry wants us to do in the Project Work. So after the students' final examination, I planned a few social service projects and got my students involved. I collected reports and got students to prepare the portfolios. If it can be used for alternative assessment I will use it next year when they are in form five.

Most of the other Moral Education teachers, were not sure of what to expect and played the 'wait and see' game. And they were worried about the changes which were coming about. Change in schools and systems are mostly difficult and complicated. (James and Connolly, 2000). Teachers of Moral Education were aware of the changes to the Moral Education assessment paper for the

Malaysian School Certificate implemented in 2004. They were however waiting for the official directive from the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education directive

In the Malaysian education system, directives come from the Ministry of Education through certain channels as the Examination Board which is a long and tedious process. It is not surprising therefore that when the directive was issued by the Malaysian Examination Board through the Ministry of Education to all secondary schools teachers began to worry about the assessment for Project Work. The Project Work was to be carried out in form four and form five. Teachers were worried because their students would be entering form five and they have not carried out any Project Work in form four. One teacher from Kuala Lumpur commented:

We are really worried as this is formative assessment but we need to send the reports to the Examination Board. So we need to keep records. But we did not receive the circular earlier and we did not plan any project or community service when the students were in form four. Now that it's going to be school holidays and when the students come back, they will be in form five, there's no way we can carry out four projects in one year as the students have other subjects to study as well.

Implementing the Project Work

However, in early 2004, when the Moral Education teachers were busily preparing the schedule for the students to carry out their Project Work, another directive was sent to all schools stating that students in form five in the year 2004 need not do the Project Work required in form four. However students in form four in 2004 need to complete the Project Work for form four and form five. So, teachers who carried out the Project Work with their students in form four felt that it was not fair for their students to complete all the projects, while teachers who played the 'wait and see' game felt relieved that they were not too ambitious. One particular teacher from Selangor put it this way:

Even if the assignments that my students carried out in form four will not be used for the formative assessment, I don't mind because all of us, including my school administrator had a taste of what Project Work is and we did benefit from it. At least the students realized that whatever they studied in the Moral Education classroom can be carried out outside the classroom.

The Project Work that students are expected to carry out are based on the themes taught in the classroom. For example, in form four and form five, students need to be involved in four social work activities that are directly linked with three themes learnt in the classroom. They are: one activity for self development, one activity for family and two activities for environment. Student are required to submit evidences such as certificate of appreciation, letter of acknowledgement, pictures or any other materials that can be accounted as evidence of involvement in the Project Work (Malaysian Examination Board, 2004). Though the instructions are clear and the procedure sounds feasible, the students and teachers saw the whole Project Work Paper as a "tiresome burden". Firstly, there was no trial run for the Project Work and teachers of Moral Education who were not trained to teach the subject were not sure of how to plan the task for the students. Since the form five students were required to complete only two projects, some teachers took it easy, thinking that they can complete the project within a week or two.

As one student said:

We have been informed that we need to complete a project work for Moral Education but until now my Moral teacher has not briefed us. I see my friend from another school going to the Recycle Centre every weekend and he says he's doing a Moral project. I asked my teacher but my teacher said the project work will come later.

However, in certain cases, teachers who were carrying out Project Work at their own capacity, could plan and carry out the Project Work effectively. They discussed with their students, got them into groups and made them come up

with their own projects, budget and procedures to carry out the projects. One teacher from a girls' school mentioned:

I have been carrying out similar community service programmes with my students every year after their final examination. Since now, the whole procedure is formalized and need to be documented; I don't think it will be a problem for my students.

Students who do not excel in 'scoring' for the Moral Education 1225/1 written paper find the Project Work worth the while. Partly, they are able to contribute to group discussions and suggest places to go for their Project Work. Another reason is they are able to do most of the job or work assigned to them. As one teacher in a boys' school said:

My students, who are weaker in their Moral exam in class and their daily work, find the Project Work enlightening. At least here, they can prove to their friends that they are of use and they actually enjoy doing the Project Work. Some of them work part time so their activity for their self development is what they are doing in real-life everyday. But I have problem with my smarter students who feel that Project Work is a waste of time and they should be concentrating on more important subjects such as Math and Science.

What actually took place in most schools was, the Moral Education teachers used the trial and error method to execute the Project Work. They could not ask their colleagues for advice and suggestions, for their colleagues too were not sure of what was actually the right procedure. Finally, the most serious flaw that took place was that teachers and students were more concerned about the product rather than the process of the whole Project Work. Since the Malaysian Examination Board required certain evidences that the Project Work was carried out, teachers and students were all going out to collect these evidences. To obtain a good grade for materials, students have to obtain three to four photographs and a certificate of acknowledgment or a certificate of appreciation for every activity that they are

supposed to carry out. Some teachers found these requirements very absurd while others had to spend quite a fair amount of money on films and developing photographs. One teacher in a rural area in East Malaysia said:

I practically took photographs for all my students as they all could not afford to buy a camera. But I can't be going to their homes to take photographs of their activities for self development. So they lost their marks in one activity. Not because they did not carry out the activity but they had no camera to take snapshots of what they were doing. It is not fair for these poor kids.

On the other hand, students in urban areas had all the modern technologies like digital cameras, printers to print their certificates and all. Though some of them carried out the activities planned, the others did some 'shooting' where parents, siblings, teachers and friends become their alibis. One student in a high school commented:

My teacher planned one day for us to clean the school and our classroom. On that particular day, we came with suitable attire for a 'gotong-royong' but most of the time, students were busy taking shots of themselves sweeping, and cleaning the school. One particular incident that I saw was when this friend of mine practically took out all the rubbish out of the waste paper basket, put it into the garbage plastic and told me to take a photograph of him, as if he had gone around the school to collect the rubbish. When I told him it was not right, he said who cares. What they want is evidence so we give them evidence that we are cleaning the environment. At the end of the day, our Moral Education teacher gave us all a certificate of appreciation each for cleaning the whole school and we(the students) had a good laugh coz' most of us hardly did anything.

Some of the teachers who were interviewed commented that they had no choice, but to force students to complete their activities within the school compound. At least the

teachers knew that the students carried out some activities. Since their heads of department were also pressured by state and district officers for the students' evaluation sheets to be completed in a short duration, teachers had to rush and complete the Project Work within a short period of time. They felt guilty too especially for giving grades on the 'sahsiah' (personality) component. Here the Moral Education teacher had to report on the personality of the student. Evaluation in this component is solely based on the observation of the teacher. The teacher had to observe different aspects of learning and the attitude of each and every student. Observation is based on three important components. Firstly, "self-development", where students must be able to show they have communication skills in applying moral values. Students are also expected to have understanding and cooperative skills in group work and communication. Second is "democracy", where students instill and are able to apply moral values in decision making situations. Students need to reach a common understanding in coming to a final decision. The third component is "peace and harmony". Students must show that they have problem solving skills based on moral values. Students must also prioritize aspects of peace and harmony in solving a certain issue (Malaysian Examination Board, 2004).

Teachers who carry out the observations have to perform their duties informally, not all at one time, not evaluate all three components at one go but, do frequent observation to assess the best achievement of each student. Teachers find these tasks very demanding and time consuming. Not only do they have to observe the students but also to do frequent observations to award the best grade for their individual achievement. As one teacher from East Malaysia comments:

I don't mind observing my students. But I have 120 students taking Moral Education in form five. And this is not my only subject. I also teach English Language. So I hardly have time to observe my students especially outside the classroom. And in the

classroom, how many students can you observe in two 80 minutes lesson per week? Sometimes I feel very guilty because when I write the grades down, I can't recall the students. What more about their character and attitude. This way of assessment is not suitable especially when we have so many students to teach. But I feel Project Work is good for the students to apply what they learn in the classroom in their daily lives.

Discussion

With all these backfires and flaws as well as some positive comments from the students, the Project Paper needs to be seriously looked into. One particular student who wrote in the local newspapers said that he preferred doing social service for Moral Education for he could really apply the values learnt in the classroom compared to just studying and bringing it out in a written examination. He mentioned that before they began enjoying the holidays, they dropped at a childcare centre for the poor, where his group helped to clear up the place and had fun playing with the children there. It made his whole group realize that they were extremely fortunate to have been born into families that are well-off, with parents who love and care for them, unlike the children in the childcare who were left at the centre while their parents work hard to make ends meet.

According to Tessmer (1993), benefit from a formative evaluation effort is particularly warranted when the designer is new to the practice of instructional design and the content is also new to the designer or the team. When the instructional strategies are experimental, then the accurate task performance is important. Opportunities for revision should also be there. In the case of the Project Paper in Moral Education 1225/2, students as well as teachers were not clearly briefed of the rationale and the procedure of the whole assessment. They were expected to execute the planned evaluation without allowing space for any trial and error period.

Conclusion

To conduct formative evaluation, general steps such as: plan the evaluation, introduce the evaluation to participants, conduct the evaluation, gather and organize data, make database revisions and evaluate revised version (Tessmer, 1993) should be adopted. In the case of Moral Project Work in Malaysia, teachers and students do recognize the benefit of Moral Project Work. The Ministry of Education needs to recognize and overcome the flaws at this initial stage of implementing the project work as part of national school assessments. In addition all agencies at all levels need to work together and be collaborative if students are to benefit from the project.

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