Teaching for Wisdom: The Asian Way

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知識(knowledge)に対置される知恵(wisdom)。アジアは伝統的に知恵の伝授を重んじてきたとされるが、果たして現代教育において「知恵」はどのように教えられているか。現場の教員たちの声を集め、検証した。

Abstract

In line with the growing research on wisdom as field of study in contemporary psychology, this research is a phenomenographic study of teachers' conceptions of wisdom in education. It is researched from the perspective of educators who advocate that educational goals and practices ought to be directed towards the higher goal of wisdom, which is what will truly nurture students' growth as authentic human beings (e.g. Sternberg, 2001; Maxwell, 2007; Lin, 2007), rather than aiming merely at achieving technical excellence or good academic outcomes. As teaching for wisdom ultimately begins at the level of teachers' conceptions, this research is aimed at discovering the qualitatively different ways in which teachers conceive of wisdom in education. The data collection consisted of interviews with teachers of various levels, subject areas, and years of experience. Three categories of description emerged from the data – 'Strategic Wisdom', 'Social Wisdom' and 'Transcendent Wisdom'. These were then compared with philosophical and contemporary psychological theories on wisdom. It enabled the discernment of theories and practices which were appropriate in enhancing teachers' conceptions of wisdom according to the different lenses through which they were found to typically conceive of wisdom.

Introduction

Asia as we know it today is characterized by rapid advances in technology and subsequent economic growth, but for this growth to be sustainable for future generations, education plays a key role in nurturing the minds of young people who will lead their countries into the future. Hopwood, Mellor and O'Brien (2005) proposed that sustainable development requires a strong basis in principles that link the social and environmental to human equity, in order to concentrate on well-being, rather than well-having. Mustakova-Possardt and Basseches (2014) argued for the need of greater integration of social sciences with philosophy in working towards global integrative solutions. Addressing the issue from the viewpoint of an educator, I argue that achieving shared sustainable growth at the national and international levels starts first at the personal level through education. Hence, I propose that *teaching for wisdom* is what will help students put their knowledge, skills and attitudes at the service of the common good. It fosters in them virtues, noble ideals, an understanding of what success and growth really mean, so that they can develop and use the knowledge and skills they learn to serve the common good of society as well as the world at large. In this way, students are equipped with a mindset that helps them to work towards achieving shared sustainable growth, which runs counter to technocratic ideals and efficiency-driven attitudes so prevalent in modern societies (Ball, 2003; Maxwell, 2007).

Wisdom in Asia

Wisdom has always been a valuable part of Asian history, culture and tradition. Confucian ideologies still permeate many Asian societies such as China, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore (Wang, Smyth & Tan, 2000). The Philippine culture also contains many ideals originating from Christian philosophers such as Saint Thomas Aquinas, who drew heavily from the works of the Greek philosopher, Aristotle. Finally, Buddhism and Hinduism continue to exert a great influence on the culture of Asian countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and India (Harris, 2001). These examples show Asian countries' enduring openness towards the transcendent, to noble ideals and values which concern the good of others. This, I believe, is a strength that can be harnessed to equip Asians to achieve sustainable shared growth in their respective countries.

Wisdom

Wisdom is an extremely rich and complex concept that has been defined through the ages from a multitude of perspectives. It was traditionally the focus of philosophy, however in recent decades, it has been a concept that has been widely studied in psychology as well (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Levitt, 1999). Wisdom has been defined as a metaheuristic link between mind and virtue (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Labouvie-Vief, 1990); as being superior to knowledge, intelligence and creativity (Craft, 2006; Sternberg, 2001); as being directed towards the fulfillment of the common good (Ardelt, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Deanne-Drummond, 2007; Sternberg, 2001); and as having a spiritual aspect (Bierly III et al., 2000; Rooney & McKenna, 2007; Levitt, 1999; Wink & Helson, 1997). A meta-analysis of the literature defining wisdom in psychology revealed four main dimensions of wisdom: (a) superior knowledge; (b) virtue; (c) orientation towards a superior good; and (d) spirituality (Rozells, 2011). These four dimensions were found to be consistent with conceptions of wisdom in philosophy ranging from Eastern philosophies of Buddhism and Confucianism, to classical Greek and Medieval philosophies (Rozells, 2011).

Wisdom in Education

Wisdom has always been traditionally acclaimed as the goal of education in both Western and Eastern civilizations (e.g. Confucius, Aristotle, Buddhism). However, it has been increasingly suppressed because of a growing emphasis on expertise in technical knowledge and the power that such knowledge yields, brought about by empiricism and the technical age which emphasize certainty in knowledge and objective measurement of intelligence (Eryaman, 2007; Hart, 2001; Maxwell, 2007; Rooney & McKenna, 2007; Sternberg, 2001). Teachers tend to teach to the tests, and tests rarely measure wise thinking (Sternberg, 2001; Hart, 2001). Teacher training institutes rarely emphasize wisdom in teacher education. Therefore, wisdom occupies a marginal space in teachers' classes, as teachers have little or no incentives and training to teach for wisdom.

Fortunately, in recent years, there has been a revival of the need for more higher-reaching aims in educational agendas brought on by educators and psychologists who advocate the teaching for wisdom as opposed to the focus on the mastery of an extant knowledge base (Eryaman, 2007; Craft, 2006; Hart, 2001; Maxwell, 2007; Phelan, 2005; Sternberg, 2005). These educators are now coming to realize that the prior focus on developing students' intelligence, and then subsequently, in developing critical thinking and creativity, are still insufficient to provide for the holistic education of students (Sternberg, 2005). Wisdom is necessary so that students use their intelligence and creativity for their own good and the good of others. This effort, however, has just begun, as can be evidenced by only a limited number of studies and published works that explore wisdom in the context of education.

A review of studies related to wisdom in education revealed that the four dimensions of wisdom mentioned above could also be used to categorize conceptions of wisdom in education. With reference to the first dimension of wisdom as superior knowledge, Rooney and McKenna (2007) recommended that students need to access knowledge bases which are transcendent, universal and uncertain. Other researchers (Chua, 2006; Deane-Drummond, 2007; Halpern, 2001; Hart, 2001;

Iredale, 2007; MacIntyre, 2009; Maxwell, 2007) went one step further. They argued that in addition to considering these more 'uncertain' knowledge bases, curricular knowledge needs to be subordinated to philosophical and theological wisdom. Still others argued for the creative exploration of knowledge within the limits of rationality and a normative system of values (Craft, 2006; Halpern, 2001). Drawing from Aristotelian concepts, Halverson (2004) stressed the importance of 'practical wisdom' ('phronesis') which marshals knowledge ('episteme') and techniques ('techne') to respond appropriately to specific contexts. Finally, Eryaman (2007) proposed an ethical dimension in teaching, recommending the consideration of ethical principles which translate into ethical actions and virtues.

With regard to the dimension of wisdom as virtue, Van Manen (1994) argued for the need for teachers to acquire 'pedagogical virtues'. Other virtues emphasized in teaching were prudence (Deane-Drummond, 2007) and 'heartfulness' (Hart, 2001). Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990) enumerated various wisdom-related qualities that would be desirable in a teacher. Several authors also suggested strategies which teachers can use to help their students develop virtues to foster the development of wisdom (e.g. Halpern, 2001; Deane-Drummond, 2007; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Hart, 2001). These included strategies such as modelling wisdom, and imparting wisdom through a 'master-pupil tutelage' which is similar to mentoring and fostering service and care for others. Finally, authors also proposed the need to emphasize virtues as educational goals (Deane-Drummond, 2007; Hart, 2001; Lin, 2007).

With regard to the third dimension of wisdom as the orientation towards a superior good, all the authors above argued that wisdom, rather than technical, functional or pragmatic knowledge, should be seen as the ultimate goal, or 'superior good' of education (Craft, 2006; Deane-Drummond, 2007; Eryaman, 2007; Hart, 2001; Rooney & McKenna, 2007). In addition, others highlighted the differences between education aimed at wisdom, and education aimed at functional or technical efficiency and accountability. These authors argued for the urgent need of a paradigm shift in educational goals from serving technical-rational and functional ends such as efficiency and accountability, to embrace more humanistic ends of addressing global problems (Iredale, 2007; Maxwell, 2007), and helping people live more meaningful and authentic lives out of a respect for human dignity and freedom (Chua, 2009; Ball, 2003). Lin (2007) urged for the need of a new form of education – education for love, peace and wisdom – which emphasizes compassion, love, respect and peace. Finally, Chua (2006), drawing from Finnis' theory of basic goods (1980), proposed a framework of education for human rights, wherein schools ought to be open to respecting and promoting the rights of their students to seek basic goods (which in sum, constitute the common good of the school community), without denying them rightful access to any one of them.

Last but not least, spirituality was also recognized by several authors as an important aspect of wisdom in education. Hart (2001) proposed an added way of knowing which comes more directly and quietly, an 'inner guidance' which also needs to enter the dialogue as recommended by mystics and contemplatives (Hart, 2001). Similarly, Lin (2007) advocated for the need of a spiritual dimension in education that focuses on the essence of students as thinking, feeling, loving and compassionate beings. In terms of how spirituality can contribute to the content of knowledge taught, Deane-Drummond argued that theological wisdom is important in education as it is a voice that is often marginalized and excluded from educational agendas, particularly in higher education (2007). She discussed ways in which theologically-informed wisdom can be applied to enrich education. Similarly, MacIntyre (2009) claimed that it is indispensable that theology, or at least a secular version of theology, be taught at the university level, because he believed that theology is what unifies the various disciplines and orders the curriculum to appropriately reflect the order of knowledge in the universe (MacIntyre, 2009). Finally, Chua (2006), in advocating religion as a basic human good, argued for the need for schools to offer students the option of studying religion or theology as a subject, as well as the respect for religious points of view in the teaching of other curricular subjects.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to discover the qualitatively different ways in which teachers conceive of and experience wisdom in education in an Asian context. This is because if teachers are to teach for wisdom, they should firstly have clear conceptions about what wisdom is, and what it means to teach for wisdom. Finding out about teachers' conceptions of wisdom would give us an insight on how teachers' conceptions of wisdom in education are manifested in an Asian context. Subsequently, by comparing their conceptions of wisdom with the established theoretical bases of wisdom, we can discover how their conceptions can be enhanced by building upon the various conceptions they have, which serve as starting points on their journey towards teaching for wisdom. Hence, the research question for this study was: What are the qualitatively different ways in which teachers conceive of wisdom in the context of education?

Methodology

A qualitative approach was taken to enable greater flexibility and openness in exploring these 'lenses' through which teachers perceive wisdom in education. Specifically, this study employed a phenomenographic approach to collect and analyze data obtained from the participants. Phenomenography seeks to discover the qualitatively different ways in which people conceive of and experience a phenomenon. It is particularly suited to concepts that are complex and can be viewed from multiple perspectives, because it seeks to capture a snapshot of the range of different ways in which a particular phenomenon is conceived (Marton, 1981). Phenomenography's outcomes are essentially pragmatic: to discern what theories and practices will work best to enhance people's conceptions of a phenomenon in a particular setting, we first need to survey the ground and know what people are thinking. In this study, this would mean discovering the qualitatively different ways in which 'wisdom in education' is conceived and experienced by Singaporean teachers in order discover how their conceptions of wisdom in education can be enhanced.

Data for this study was collected in Singapore, an Asian country that has experienced significant growth in a variety of industries in recent decades. Twelve (5 male, 7 female) teachers of various levels, subject areas, race and years of experience were interviewed in-depth about their conceptions of wisdom in education using a semi-structured interview format (see Appendix I). Participants were selected in order for the sample to have as large a variation in characteristics as possible, so as to capture a diversity of ways in which wisdom could be conceived. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were given the interview questions a week beforehand to prepare for the interviews. Interviews were conducted one-on-one, lasted an hour on average and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Data was analyzed using a phenomenographic approach. Transcripts were read and re-read, and categories that emerged from the data were tested and re-tested to see if they could sufficiently capture the qualitatively different ways in which the teachers conceived of 'wisdom in education'. All this occurred in a recurring and cyclical fashion till all the categories were stable and distinct from each other.

Results

Participants' experiences of 'Wisdom in Education' were found to comprise three categories of description: *'Strategic Wisdom', 'Social Wisdom'* and *'Transcendent Wisdom'*. The findings provided a map of the various ways in which 'wisdom in education' was experienced by the participants. Teachers' experiences of wisdom in the educational context comprised both how wisdom was important for themselves in their profession, as well as how they claimed to develop wisdom in their students.

Category 1: Strategic Wisdom

In the first category, 'Strategic Wisdom', the teaching profession is experienced as an arena for professional advancement, which emphasizes quantitative evidence of technical expertise in teaching, the possession of a rich knowledge base, excellent cognitive skills (e.g. problem-solving, critical thinking, logical analysis,

strategic planning and decision-making) and the efficient management and use of resources. These guide the teacher to act in a logical, practical and efficient manner, as well as defend his or her own interests, in order to increase his or her chances of achieving success in the teaching career.

Teaching for 'Strategic Wisdom' emphasizes quantitative evidence of students' academic achievement and the acquisition of knowledge and the development of cognitive skills which teachers believe are highly applicable for life, and will stand students in good stead, professionally, in time to come. The teacher focuses on helping students to achieve good academic outcomes and enhancing their problem-solving and other cognitive skills which they believe are of foremost importance, not only for their academic subjects, but also for life in general.

Having clear and strategic professional goals and career plans, as well as a strong focus on achieving them, form an important part of this category. In A.'s quote below, she describes an incident where she was advised by a more senior teacher about how she should act.

A: She listed down what I need to do in school to be part of the team. She was very clear in how she…in fact she was very, very candid about it. She said that "If you want to have a good career path, you need to do this". Yeah. She said "There's no beating around the bush. We won't try and pretend that it's a perfect world. This is what you need to do. You need to be seen, you need to be heard," you know. (…) And yeah, she was rising up the ladder very fast and she did it with everybody's respect, you see.

Furthermore, in line with having a strategic outlook, the teacher also has clear priorities about how to maximize the allocation and use of resources (e.g. staff, funds and other material resources) to carry out educational initiatives. In the quote below, P. is pleased that his school has been allocated funding to get external vendors to train students, rather than have the teachers do it. Such strategic planning in the use of funding and resources thus maximizes the utilization of their teaching expertise.

P: *(refers to being in-charge of the audio-visual club in his school)* I joined this year. And next year, we will have – this IDA *(Information Development Authority of Singapore)* – they are going to be pumping money into the school, to have a proper program. So they will have vendors coming to teach the kids and all that. That should be the right way.

R: Teaching them what?

P: Oh, teaching them, for example, film-making, videography, you know, stuff like that, managing the stage, you know, for concerts and stuff like that. Get the experts to teach. There are many schools that are employing coaches, like for example, basketball coach to teach, rather than get a teacher to teach, you know. We are specialist teachers, but not basketball players.

Similarly, the teacher also strategically plans where to draw the boundaries when relating to students. Such a measure appears to be necessary in the teaching profession, since oftentimes, teachers are expected to perform a multitude of tasks that take a lot of time away from their actual teaching, and thus need to limit time spent on 'non-professional' activities which take up extra time. Also, since teachers are in a position where they could be heavily depended upon by students, participants such as E., felt that it was important for a teacher to set such boundaries in order to preserve their "space and authority", and thus not spend excessive time and energy on their students yet still gain their respect.

E: Yeah, but I won't want to buy them favor, and "Hey, let's go for lunch," No, no way. I won't go all out of the way, "Eh, after school I see you", that kind. I think that I still need my space and our authority and so on.

In terms of how they saw wisdom as relevant to their teaching of students, participants who viewed wisdom in education from a Strategic perspective associated wisdom with successful educational outcomes, seen largely in academic terms. For example, in the first

quote below, P. expresses that wisdom is what leads to success, based on academic performance.

> P: We look back again at this question of success. One was the quantitative evidence that I told you. One more is the observation that we see. And from my observation, the kids these days are actually wiser, because they are able to – for example, giving them project work, they can to speak up in front of a group, they are confident. They are given exposure to do that, practice and stuff like that in class. They are able to carry themselves pretty well, they are knowledgeable thanks to the internet age, also.

It is not surprising, therefore, that he believes that schools are basically meant "to teach you and achieve results" so that "you get on in life".

> P: After all, a school basically is to teach you and achieve results. Correct? Can you say that? Yeah. Because once you achieve these results, you get on in life, and then you can build on that, right? (…) I think that the fact that you are here, pursuing your degree, you must give credit to your teachers in your previous school who have honed your thinking, made you think sharply, because by challenging your intellect, you see.

Category 2: Social Wisdom

In the second category of description, 'Social Wisdom', the teaching profession is experienced as a community of practitioners who strive to identify themselves with established professional practices and values, so as to attain harmonious relationships with colleagues, students and their parents, through good communication skills, the adherence to a system of shared values, as well as the consideration of the consequences of one's decisions and actions on others. Adopting a perspective of 'Social Wisdom' also means that the teacher focuses on the acquisition of and identification with knowledge, established norms of practice and 'mainstream' values that are recognized as being important in one's professional and social community,

and is open to learning from others.

Teaching for 'Social Wisdom' emphasizes the development of students' values, social and emotional skills, and the consideration of their decisions and actions on others within their community, all of which are founded upon socially-recognized values. Learning through social interactions is emphasized, as teachers believe that acquiring good social skills and good values are important goals in education.

Firstly, a consistent feature of teachers' conceptions of wisdom that came under this category was their focus on social interactions and communication with others, which they believed was of great importance in the teaching profession. For instance, in the example below, C. believed that having good academic results or IQ does not necessarily mean that one will be a good teacher, since interactions with people form an important part of the teaching profession. Similarly, in the second quote, S. recognizes that social interactions are a necessary aspect of one's job as a teacher.

> C: No matter how smart they are, even if they come in with fantastic university, A level, university results, that is just IQ. Because you're not just doing a job for yourself. You are doing a job that involves interaction with other people.

> S: Because this world is no longer a single world. You cannot work alone. You need everybody.

In addition, teachers who viewed wisdom in education from a Social perspective recognized the importance of considering the consequences of one's actions on others. For example, W. mentioned the following:

> W: I'll ask them "why do you think you did this?" "And how do you think it makes me feel?" So, at least in that hope of it, they'll think that, you know, their actions have consequences on people around them.

In addition, 'Social Wisdom', embraces values and ways of interacting with others which are socially acceptable. Thus, an important way in which one acquires the knowledge of these values is through experiences of interacting with others, as S. notes below:

S: Because everything comes with experience. If you acknowledge that this is important, if you acknowledge that this is the way I should interact with the people around me, and this is the acceptable level of acceptance from others, I guess this is wisdom.

Finally, in teaching for 'Social Wisdom', teachers focused on developing students' values as well as their social communication skills to enhance their treatment of others. This can be seen in the quotes below.

M: Yeah. I think… I believe that for myself, I don't really want to just teach academically, because anybody can do that. I think the important thing there is to impart some kind of life skills and values.

S: The pedagogy is one thing, and the content knowledge is one thing. But I guess the most important thing is social skills.

This focus on socially-related goals in teaching in 'Social Wisdom' contrasts with teachers' focus on developing students' problem-solving skills in 'Strategic Wisdom' that was described previously, as well as helping them to live virtuously and morally and contribute to the common good, which was the main focus in 'Teaching for Transcendent Wisdom', as described below.

Category 3: Transcendent Wisdom

In 'Transcendent Wisdom', the teaching profession is experienced as a means for carrying out one's mission in life, where one finds personal fulfillment in freely committing oneself to serving the common good of students, colleagues and humanity at large, or fulfilling one's vocation in life, and inspiring others to do the same. Adopting a perspective of 'Transcendent Wisdom' means that the teacher is open to the knowledge of transcendent realities such as the existence of God and a universal moral law which frames his or her overall perspective in life. This perspective, which is oriented towards seeking an ultimate good in each concrete situation, guides the teacher to act virtuously, particularly with those virtues that are related to the teaching profession, as well as morally. This, therefore, may lead them to decide and act in ways that transcend established educational goals, practices and priorities, and at times, even contradict them.

In teaching for 'Transcendent Wisdom', the teacher views the development of students' virtues, morals and knowledge of transcendent realities as being of foremost importance in students' education. He or she inspires them make the most of their lives by aiming for higher goals such as living virtuously, developing their talents, and serving the common good of humanity. In addition, teacher also makes himself or herself available to listen to students and offer them advice, has hope in the potential of each student, and trusts in their ability to decide and act for themselves, even if they should make mistakes.

A distinctive aspect of 'Transcendent Wisdom in Education' was that teachers saw their job as a means of serving the common good, while at the same time giving personal fulfillment to their life. These teachers' personal goals were aimed at providing direct service to their students and colleagues, and indirectly to humanity at large. Such a compatibility between personal goods and the common good is possible because of the pursuit of an ultimate good, which puts in order these intermediate 'goods'. These can be seen in the quotes by C. and A. below.

C: When you contribute to the common good, you are also contributing to yourself also, and to your family. In my own small way, I feel as a teacher, if I can do a good job in the class, that is 40 students there, in one class. Then you 40 times the number of classes I have.

A: So, which is why I'm trying to make my career something that will achieve this goal of giving back a little bit. It's a very lofty ambition and I know somewhere along the way, I'm going to begrudge the little pay or something…I don't know! I'm just hoping I can strike a balance between the material world and giving back to society. Trying to balance both at the same time.

Similarly, in the quote below, C. shared how

rewarding it was for her to be a teacher, especially teaching in neighborhood schools where the challenge often lay not only in helping, but in first convincing students that they could live upright and noble lives. Her focus is on seeking the overall good of her students, which may, at times, entail having to correct or address contrary desires in them. She expresses her genuine belief in the potential of each student and emphasizes how personally fulfilling she believed her job as a teacher was.

C: You know, I like helping people, alright, and like I say again, you know, I really like to be a teacher, alright, because constantly, I'm in contact with people. And the fact that I teach mainly neighborhood schools, that is even more rewarding. But of course, it's a struggle, you know. At first, they don't know, they cannot see this, they are bitter. So they cannot understand where you are leading them. They cannot understand, they said "I mean, I already failed all my life already, one more year wouldn't hurt, you know." But having taught for so many years, I've gone through, like bringing them right through, and then they come back to tell me, ah, that is very rewarding! They come back to tell me things like they are glad that I was strict with them, they were glad that I would not allow them to lie and to cheat, and not close a blind eye. So that is very rewarding.

In addition, teachers who viewed wisdom in education from a Transcendent perspective were also guided by a spiritual perspective to see a deeper meaning behind their profession. They saw their profession as a vocation that they had in life, to contribute towards the welfare of their students, colleagues, and ultimately, humanity at large. For example, E. and Y.'s quotes below describe their spiritual motivations for wanting to be teachers based on their religions of Buddhism and Christianity, respectively. Their quotes reflect how their knowledge is framed by transcendent truths, which are characteristic of wisdom conceptions within this category.

E: Yes. OK, the Buddha said, "Be a light to yourself." That means you guide your own path, OK. For me, I want to be a light in a dark room. So if, should my students be ignorant, they are in darkness, I want to be the light that gives them warmth and to guide them, so that once I light up every heart, it can spread. So that is how I can see my mission in life.

Y: You know, but now when I come back and I look back, I say, "Ok, God, you've given me all this, so what am I supposed to do with it?" And it's a very important question to ask. It's a very important question to ask. So, I think I'll think about it. This is the conclusion that I have. Why else be a teacher?

Teachers who viewed wisdom in education from a Transcendent perspective also strongly believed that teaching for wisdom was of prior importance in the education of students, more so than teaching knowledge and skills. For example, Y. mentioned the following:

Y: I try to tell my students all the time that, you know, you can grade women in three categories, and they overlap. But I'll say, let me bridge the three categories. They're little kids, so you explain to them (…) So I try to tell them very simply, in a very secular way, because we're not allowed to say God in the classroom. Content gets you your exam grades, gets you your certificates, gets you your job interview, right? The skills get you your job, and the wisdom gets you to keep the job, and get promoted.

R: But when you talk to them, do you actually say the word wisdom, do you say, like, life, or…

Y: No, I say wisdom.

R: You actually use the word "wisdom"?

Y: Yeah, and I tell them…yeah, and they ask me, "So, you know, what's wisdom?" And I say "Almost everything. You know, how you live your life, what your life is about, how do you want to spend the rest of your life, what does it mean to you, what you value."

Y.'s conception of wisdom is clearly Transcendent,

although he did not feel comfortable enough in his context to mention God in the classroom. However, he still uses the word "wisdom" in the classroom and expressed how he saw it as a priority in education over content knowledge and skills.

Discussion

Teachers are a group of people who may offer very meaningful insights into the concept of wisdom. (Staudinger, Smith & Baltes, 1992). The results of this study gave rise to three unique categories that represented Asian teachers' conceptions of wisdom, which were quite different from wisdom categorizations in the literature. Each of the categories are discussed below in comparison with the theoretical bases of wisdom, with recommendations on how teachers' conceptions of wisdom can be enhanced.

Strategic Wisdom

When seen in comparison with the literature, this category contained elements which were often opposed, or at best, did not correspond with scholarly conceptualizations of wisdom in education. Perhaps the best representation of this category in the literature was Ball's (2003) account of 'performativity', which, he argued, was directly opposed to wisdom. Ball argued that an excessive emphasis on performance monitoring, performance management, technical efficiency as well as meeting measurable outcomes and improving outputs – what he coined as 'the terrors of performativity' – were contrary to authenticity and freedom (2003). Ball noted that within the performativity paradigm, new ethical systems based on institutional self-interest, pragmatics, and performative worth were introduced (2003). He called this 'the ethics of performativity', which were contrary to traditional ethics of performance judgment, co-operation and honesty (Ball, 2003).

Another feature of this category was its strong emphasis on excellence in quantifiable outcome measures such as test scores and teachers' performance appraisals. However, attributing such technical and pragmatic ends to education stood in stark contrast to many authors' conceptualizations of wisdom in education. These authors proposed instead, that education be aimed at higher goals, even though they were less quantifiable, such as the development of virtues and ethics (Hart, 2001; Eryaman, 2007), addressing more universal concerns such as serving the common good (Sternberg, 2001; Deane-Drummond, 2007) and addressing the problems of humanity (Maxwell, 2007), as well as building peace among nations (Lin, 2007).

On the whole, the findings within this category clearly give evidence that a culture of performativity (Ball, 2003) pervades the Singapore education system and influences the ways in which teachers think about the goals of education. For teachers whose predominant view about education is a 'Strategic' one, educational goals go no further than achieving academic success. As a logical consequence, they did not report feeling constrained by such a culture, as opposed to those who viewed wisdom from a more Social or Transcendent perspective, but rather, they saw its benefits.

Nevertheless, 'Strategic Wisdom', as articulated by the teachers, consisted of some positive aspects which could serve as starting points for developing 'Transcendent Wisdom', which most resembled the theoretical and philosophical definitions of wisdom. One aspect was teachers' recognition of creativity as an important skill that students ought to develop. These skills were recognized by some authors to be related to teaching for wisdom. For example, Hart (2001) noted that an emphasis on creativity and artistic expression in education opened up a 'space' for wisdom to develop. Sternberg (2001) proposed that the development of intelligence and creativity in students ought to culminate in teaching for wisdom, and Craft (2006) argued that a having 'wisdom framework' was the best way to teach creativity. Hence, the acknowledgement of the importance of developing creativity could liberate students from excessively linear modes of cognition which can then lead them to discover more transcendent truths about reality.

In addition, developing creativity could also open teachers and students to explore alternative goals in education which may be well worth seeking. Indeed Chua (2008) recommended 'goalless designing' and

'playful seriousness', which were precisely aimed at helping educators and students become more creative in their choice of goals in life, within the limits of rationality. In this way, recognizing the importance of creativity could be the key to liberate teachers from excessively pragmatic and results-driven concerns, as well as a rigid sense of accountability, which are characteristic of a culture of performativity (Ball, 2003). However, for this to occur, creativity needs to be seen – as Chua (2008) rightly pointed out – *within the boundaries of rationality*, where knowledge is subordinated to ultimate truths about reality. This again underscores the importance of conceiving creativity – and indeed, education as a whole – within a framework of wisdom, if the move towards creativity is to be of any true benefit to the educational community.

Another positive aspect was teachers' emphasis on the acquisition of a rich knowledge base and cognitive skills that would be beneficial for themselves and their students in life. Thus, the value that teachers place on the pursuit of knowledge could be a starting point for them to acquire more multi-disciplinary and synthetic ways of thinking and knowing, which, according to Deane-Drummond (2007), opens them to a greater sensitivity to the complexity of truth. Such an endeavor, assuming that one humbly submits to ultimate truths about reality, could eventually lead them to discover true wisdom, which, according to Aquinas, differs from science in that it looks at things from a greater height (Hart, 2001). Hence, the value placed on the pursuit of knowledge in 'Strategic Wisdom' could serve as a pathway for developing knowledge as how it is seen in 'Transcendent Wisdom'. Knowledge then becomes not only a good to be pursued, but also a good to be perfected.

Social Wisdom

'Social Wisdom' also did not correspond much to the conceptualization of wisdom in education in the literature. However, in its emphasis on developing social communication skills, emotional regulation, and the consideration of the needs of others, it did resemble the views of Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990) and Fink and Garner (2008). In addition, its focus on empathetic dealings with others resembled Hart's (2001) personal quality of 'heartfulness'. Furthermore, its emphasis on achieving harmonious dealings with others, somewhat resembles Lin's (2007) recommendation that education be directed towards 'love, peace and wisdom'.

However, all these authors' conceptualizations of wisdom incorporated spiritual and transcendent elements, whereas 'Social Wisdom' was based instead upon socially constructed knowledge, subjective well-being and feelings. Nevertheless, they are similar in terms of the importance given to social interactions with others, and these aspects could, therefore, be built upon to open teachers' mindsets to the idea of 'Transcendent Wisdom', which more closely represented wisdom theories in the literature.

'Social Wisdom' was also found to incorporate some elements of performativity (Ball, 2003), which was contrary to the conceptualization of wisdom in education in the literature. Indeed, a key aspect of performativity was that individuals and organizations tended to scramble to take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of appearances (Ball, 2003). This was seen in participants' desires to "make all the 'right' decisions", and "not make any enemies". Such practices, according to Ball (2003), results in a kind of "values schizophrenia" whereby authenticity within educational practice is sacrificed for impression and performance (Ball, 2003). This can produce a lot of anxiety and insecurity in teachers and is contrary to the claims of many authors who proposed for authenticity and freedom to be necessary conditions for wisdom (e.g. Ball, 2003; Hart, 2001).

This category's heavy focus on meeting others' demands or trying to conform oneself to established educational goals and practices, at times, led teachers to be resigned to a defective balancing of goals in wisdom. This caused them to neglect important intrapersonal interests. For example, teachers often had no time for themselves and found their job "draining". Such were the consequences of having socially determined goals as a main focal point in wisdom.

One way in which acting according to socially

defined values and communicating effectively with others could lead teachers to develop 'Transcendent Wisdom' is by means of welcoming and accepting (transitional) hypocrisy, as proposed by March (1994). Teachers who viewed wisdom mainly from a Social perspective tended to refer to morality and character in terms of 'values'. This could be due to a dominant discourse on 'values' in the Singapore educational system. Chua (2009) pointed out that it may be sensible to welcome and even promote such 'politically correct rhetoric' in the hope that it can serve as a transition to teachers subscribing to such non-academically oriented goals. He argued that as a person exposes himself or herself to these new goals and rationales, he or she may perhaps come to see the reason for such non-performative goals and their attractiveness.

Another significant aspect of 'Social Wisdom' worth mentioning was the importance that teachers placed on giving good example to students. Owing to the fact that in 'Social Wisdom', much importance is placed on the consequences of one's decisions and actions on others, realizing how much influence teachers had on the lives of their students gave them the impetus to try to improve themselves, in order to give a good example of upright conduct to their students. This could be another starting point for teachers who saw wisdom from a 'Social perspective' to adopt a more 'Transcendent perspective', if they could be helped to see that being 'good' involved more than simply adhering to socially-constructed values, but to virtues and more objective moral principles, which were characteristic of 'Transcendent Wisdom'. In fact, giving good example to students was also a strategy identified by teachers who taught through 'Transcendent Wisdom'. Furthermore, developing good social and emotional skills in order to deal peaceably with others could also serve as starting points for developing virtues. For example, to relate well with others, having self-control and self-mastery to regulate one's emotions correspond to virtues such as temperance and fortitude. They could be helped to discover that virtues are not simply socially constructed concepts, but stable dispositions of character that are in themselves, morally good, and pre-dispose individuals to act according to them.

Transcendent Wisdom

'Transcendent Wisdom' most closely resembled the conceptualizations of wisdom in the literature. It corresponded to the views of many authors who stressed the importance of knowledge about spiritual and transcendent realities (Deane-Drummond, 2007; Hart, 2001; MacIntyre, 2009; Lin, 2007), and that technical and scientific knowledge be intellectually subordinated to moral principles of conduct (Craft, 2006; Halpern, 2001) and even philosophy and theology, and that these ought to serve as overarching frameworks for one's perspective in life (Maxwell, 2007; Deane-Drummond, 2007; Chua, 2006).

Allowing teachers and students the freedom to explore and pursue educational goals other than merely academic achievement was recognized in the literature as being characteristic of wisdom in education (e.g. Chua, 2009; Hart, 2001; Halverson, 2004; Ball, 2003). This was also seen in the data where teachers argued for the need for parents, teachers, and even students themselves, to acknowledge a greater diversity of educational or even non-educational goals which were worth seeking in life. This arose from participants' desire to pursue the overall good of students, which were at times, contrary to socially acceptable policies and practices. Participants claimed to experience tensions between their personal goals and that of their school or the educational system. However, at the same time, they viewed that it was possible for teachers to rise above these contextual constraints, precisely because they recognized that they had the freedom to decide for themselves and were not bound or conditioned by social or other obligations, as in 'Social Wisdom'. An example of this can be seen in Y. who found ways to develop students' spiritual beliefs even though he was not allowed to talk about religion in the classroom, and E., who recognized the need to choose "to make our own space to really step back and reflect" amidst the hectic life of a teacher, which rarely afforded opportunities for reflection.

In 'Transcendent Wisdom', dealings with others such as rectifying one's wrongdoings, apologizing and making peace with others, as well as exercising self-discipline, self-mastery and not reacting to every impulse (Hart,

2001) went beyond developing social and emotional skills, because they were oriented towards higher ends such as morality, the acquisition of virtues, and/or the good of others. This could potentially serve as a starting point for teachers who view wisdom in education from a Social perspective, as mentioned previously.

Teachers also recognized virtues an important part of wisdom in education. This corresponded to the views of several authors such as Van Manen (1994), who proposed the need for teachers to develop 'pedagogical virtues'. He argued that cultivating virtues was preferable to the alternative of a 'moral principled model', because teachers rarely had the opportunity to step back and 'reflect in practice', given the rush of daily interactions with their students (Van Manen, 1994). Hence, 'pedagogical virtues' could be an interesting aspect of wisdom that would be of benefit for teachers to develop. In fact, some of the pedagogical virtues which Van Manen (1994) proposed, such as patience, trust, and believing in children, were also identified by the teachers, thereby providing empirical evidence for his claims. In addition, participants also recognized the need for the virtue of prudence, which according to Deane-Drummond (2007), enables teachers to engage with the overall goal of the subject or topic taught, asking broader questions about social justice.

Teachers also transmitted knowledge about morality by infusing them in the curriculum subjects. For example, two teachers used examples of the lives of famous composers and scientists in order to help their students to see that morality, and not just success, was an important aspect of one's life. This also corresponded to the views of many other authors who proposed that students be helped to see that knowledge and educational goals are to be viewed within a rational perspective of ethics and morality (Craft, 2008; Chua, 2008). This corresponds to many authors (Sternberg, 2007; Hart, 2001; Halpern, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990) who argued that 'wisdom' is best taught as infused within the normal curriculum subjects and in day-to-day classroom experiences, rather than as a subject on its own.

Finally, teachers also stressed the importance of being a good role model of virtue and upright morals, in order to develop wisdom in their students. They also believed that school administrators and leaders encouraged generosity in their staff when they led by service, which was essentially giving good example of virtue and morals. This corresponded to several authors' recommendation that teachers use 'role modelling' to develop virtues in students in order to foster in them the development of wisdom (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Hart, 2001). These and all the other examples cited by teachers who viewed wisdom from a 'Transcendent perspective' provide helpful ideas on how teachers can be trained to teach for wisdom.

Conclusion

The insights gained from the current study would be able to inform educational policy and teacher training so that students would be equipped with virtues and a mindset to be able to make responsible choices about how to use the knowledge and skills they acquire in school. They will be able to make good judgments about complex issues in life and be better able to identify and solve problems in real-world contexts using an ethical framework, in order to contribute to the common good, thereby working towards shared sustainable growth in the future.

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Appendix I: Interview Questions

1. Is wisdom important to you as a teacher? Why?

2. Does it relate to your teaching and about you as a teacher? How?

3. Who in your teaching career can you describe as particularly wise? What is it about this person that makes you think he/she is wise?

4. What aspect/s of wisdom do you think is important in the teaching profession, if any?

5. Does your professional environment (cultural, social, institutional) contribute to wisdom (in yourself and in your students)? Why?