

## Series Four of Student-centered Education Innovation: Experimental Education and Diversity

(Courtesy of Guan Ying Chen at the Division of Junior High, Elementary School and Preschool Education)



Experimental education has been practiced in Taiwan for many years from institutional development at the early stage to the establishment of the Experimental Education Act today. To demonstrate education innovation as well as diversity and citizens' rights to education, the Ministry of Education hosted a press conference on "Experimental Education- Display of Diversity" on January 17, 2018, which is the fourth press conference under the theme of "Student-centered Education Innovation." At the press conference, Wen Chung Pan, Minister of Education, and Chien Kuo Chiu, Director-General of the K-12 Education Administration, expounded on the development and implementation of Experimental Education, and invited the Yueming Elementary in Yilan County, and the Evergreen Lily Elementary School in Pingtung County, the Leichuan Waldorf School, the Hushan Experimental Elementary School in Tainan City, and the National Chiao Tung University to elaborate on the concepts of experimental

education and present their achievements from diverse learning, and to guide people to experience the effectiveness of experimental education.

Taiwan's experimental education started with the Forest School, established by the "Humanistic Education Foundation," in 1990. Since the Educational Fundamental Act was promulgated and implemented in 1999, the act has become a source of encouragement for private education, protection of learners' right to education, and establishment of educational experiment regulations, all the while many education concepts and alternative education ideas were flourishing. After the three experimental education regulations, which is the Experimental Education Special Act, were announced in 2014, the space for the practice of specific education concepts was expanded tremendously, parents' school choice rights and students' learning rights gradually received attention, many education concepts and alternative education ideas were thriving, and students with different personalities, needs, and potentials had more diverse and flexible learning channels to develop in their own ways. The three regulations have been implemented for three years, and the number of people participating in experimental education has increased year by year. As of the first semester of the academic year of 2017, seven schools have commissioned private organizations to undertake experimental education; as high as 4,841 had participated in the non-school experimental education model; 51 public schools and three private schools have implemented experimental education programs in school. Among them, 16 schools are the major indigenous peoples' schools, which shows that the adoption of the three regulations is also the turning point for the transformation of indigenous peoples' schools.

To encourage innovation and promote the diversified development of overall education, the Ministry of Education has set up an experimental education promotion center, established a teachers' support system in the field of experimental education, organized a camp for the review committee to reach a consensus, compiled experimental education guidance manuals, provided relevant grants and subsidies, and promoted empowerment-oriented experimental education for indigenous peoples. On top of that, to address the needs at educational sites and respond to the needs for the development of experimental education, the Ministry of Education put forward the

amendments to the three regulations based on the ideas of “friendly assistance, flexible relaxation, and diverse innovation,” and they were rectified by the Legislative Yuan after the third reading on December 29, 2017 with the main points elaborated upon below:

First, the School-based Experimental Education Regulation:

It applies to both public and private schools from junior colleges down to senior high schools. The permitted number of participating students has increased to 600 from the original 480, while increasing the percentage of public schools to undertake school-based experimental education. In addition to the major indigenous peoples’ schools, the upper limit of the number of the competent authorities handling experimental education at each stage shall not exceed 15%, up from the original 10%, but the percentage must not exceed 10% at the national level.

Second, the Regulation for Public Senior High Schools, Junior High Schools, and Elementary Schools to Commission Private Entities to Undertake Experimental Education:

This regulation extends to public senior high schools and regulates that each competent authority should provide the equivalent fees to the entrusted schools for staffing, and update relevant provisions for flexible use of funding.

Third, the Implementation Regulation for Non-School Experimental Education at the Stages of Senior High Schools, Junior High Schools, and Elementary Schools:

This regulation aims to protect students’ rights to study in experimental education programs and streamline the paperwork that experimental education programs should submit, all the while obligating experimental education groups and organizations to adopt the reporting mechanism that ordinary schools employ to ensure students’ safety.

The Ministry of Education noted that the amendments this time stated clearly that the definition of specific education ideas of school-based experimental education should put students at the center, respect students’ multi-cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and diverse intelligence levels, as well as promote the development of diverse education, and that curriculum development, teaching, teaching materials, teaching methods, and assessment planning shall be developed to guide students to learn in a

way that suits them most. Take the five schools that were invited today for example, they demonstrated the education concepts of marine education, democratic and ethnic education, Waldorf education, ecological education, and the implementation of experimental education in the university. The specific education focus of the Yueming Elementary School in Yilan County is marine education. The opening of the press conference featured a play staged by the school's fifth and sixth graders conveyed the school's education philosophy: "to make life different" and demonstrated its achievements of marine exploration education; the Evergreen Lily Elementary School in Pingtung County is an indigenous peoples' experimental education school, which puts emphasis on both democratic and ethnic education. At the venue, its teachers and students formed an arc shape in front of their booth, which managed to convey the concept that teachers and students were on an equal footing and that learners were the main characters; meanwhile, they demonstrated the ideas of "the childhood mountains and forest: holistic aesthetic" and "Rinari Tribal Education" through dialogue. The 11<sup>th</sup> graders at the Leichuan Waldorf School introduced their plant observation course verbally, and then incorporated what they had learned into singing with guitar playing in the background, which demonstrated the entire process of integrating the observation course and art creation and showed Waldorf's core value: "holistic development." The Hushan Experimental Elementary School in Tainan City started off the performance by its drum team. Through the dialogue between its students and docents, it showcased the features of its Eco-school program; National Chiao Tung University introduced the ideas and customized curriculum planning of its Flow program, which was launched in the Academic Year of 2018, to demonstrate that experimental education has been extended to universities.

The Ministry of Education stated that the amendments to the three regulations focused on the improvements of both the quantity and quality, extension upwards to colleges and universities, provision of more diverse space for experimental education, increasing the resources from the public sector, and strengthening the professionalism and functionality of the review committee as a gatekeeper of educational quality. To encourage innovation and promote the diversified development of overall education, the Ministry of Education will continue to build an experimental education support

system, through establishing a system to accompany and counsel experimental schools, strengthening the training system for experimental educators, providing relevant financial support, and developing empowerment-oriented experimental education for indigenous peoples. Hopefully, through the development of experimental education that serve to unlock students' potential, our country's education will turn over a new leaf. The Ministry of Education emphasizes that experimental education is like the R&D department of education. After promoting the innovative concepts of education in specific schools on a small scale, positive outcomes will further spread and affect the education within the system, which will foster innovation, flip education, enhance the diversified development of education with innovative thinking, and meet the diverse needs of the society.