

## **Design of a competency-based moral lesson for teaching critical thinking skills in Vietnamese primary schools**

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This paper describes the design of a moral education lesson in accordance with a competency-based approach to teaching critical thinking for primary students. Sympathy is selected as a target moral value and used as a theme to teach critical thinking for students. By using literature on competency-based education and critical thinking as a theoretical framework and applying a design-based research approach, this study improves our understanding of how to design a model competency-based lesson and provides a specific exemplary lesson for increasing critical thinking competency in the moral education of primary students. The study suggests a program for teacher professional development using a competency-based approach to train teachers for effective implementation of the designed lesson.

### **Introduction**

Competency-based education (CBE) has become a hot topic in Vietnam in the current wave of educational innovation (Han, Nguyen, Cohen, Drabble, Nguyen, Sen & Tran, 2016). This innovative approach aims to replace the traditional, content-based approach, as stressed in the new schooling program (MOET, 2018), to better implement the mission of education: to educate and train students to become lifelong learners, capable citizens and the future labour force. Embedded into the three core competences – creativity, cooperative problem solving, and self-study – critical thinking (CT) in particular is highlighted as a competence that should be taught in the education of Vietnamese students, as it plays a key role in developing critical reasoning skills and attitudes, which can help students cope with and make decisions about life and society. How to teach CT via innovative curricula and subject lessons has become a challenging question requiring an answer from educators and lesson designers.

There is a close relationship between CT and moral education. CT is a way of thinking and moral education is a subject, but both have a function in developing children's capacity to rationalise and include a wide value spectrum (Weinstein, 1988). Though much research has been done on CT and moral education separately, little has been reported on the relationship between the two, although there has been much call to do so, as both are of current concern at all levels of education because students are supposed to develop the ability to think analytically and behave ethically (Fasko, 1994). Given that moral education is considered character education and CT is considered an important aspect of this process, researchers have implied the need for a new moral education curriculum design through which CT can be taught to develop students' thinking and cognition.

Moral education is a compulsory subject at all levels of education in Vietnam and has been the subject of increasing attention. A previous study uncovered that although CT can be implemented in current Vietnamese primary moral education, it is implemented at a low

level (Hàng, 2019). To teach CT competence to primary students via moral education curriculum, a new design for moral education lessons is necessary that appropriately applies a CBE approach.

Many educators and researchers have studied CBE to find ways of applying it to Vietnamese schooling practices. There has, however, been a serious lack of research on new designs for moral education lessons that feature a CBE approach and teach CT competence for primary students. This lack has perhaps led to confusion among educators and teachers concerning implementation of the new curricula and identification of differences between lessons applying the old traditional approach and those applying the CBE approach, as well as hindering them from making lesson plans in accordance with a CBE approach. This study is a part of a broader research project on designing moral education lessons in accordance with a CBE approach to teach CT to primary students. This study aims to answer the main research question:

How can a moral education lesson be designed in accordance with a CBE approach so that it is possible to teach CT to primary students?

To answer this question, *sympathy* is selected as the target moral value and used as the theme to teach CT. By using literature on CBE and CT as a theoretical framework and applying a design-based research approach, this study clarifies our understanding of how to design a moral education lesson in accordance with a CBE approach to teaching CT to primary students in Vietnam. The study not only helps educators and teachers in Vietnam with a specific exemplar CBE lesson that can be used as a model to design and implement other CBE lessons, but it also helps foster the teaching and learning of CT in primary schools.

## **A competency-based education approach**

Competence is understood as the ability to do something successfully in a specific context by generating and using knowledge, skills and various personal aspects such as attitudes, values and beliefs (MOET, 2018). To teach students a competence, educators suggest that students should be put into a specific learning context relevant to their daily lives, in which they are motivated to solve problems evolved from the given context by implementing activities demonstrating the target competence. The term ‘competency-based education’ is used increasingly today to refer to progressive reforms in education and has diverse definitions (Bernikova, 2017; Nyamai, Mugambi & Imonje, 2019). It is viewed by many, and with good reason, as a potential means to deliver a more effective educational experience at a lower cost (Lacey & Murray, 2015). It is believed able to develop action competencies in students and shorten the distance between the theoretical, stable and academic school lessons and real-life lessons, which are practical, lively and changeable. CBE is supported with the expectation that students can apply what they learn in schools in the rest of their daily lives and build a sustainable life for themselves and society as whole.

CBE refers to an educational approach in which teaching and learning are designed to ensure students become proficient by advancing on demonstrated mastery of knowledge and skills regardless of time, place or pace of learning. CBE makes it possible to move students away from a content-based approach to a mastery-based approach, allowing for more personalised and differentiated learning experiences. This ensures that students develop as a whole person, fulfil their potential, succeed in building college or career readiness and life long learning, as well as taking advantage of the extraordinary technological advances in online learning for personalisation, allowing students to learn at their own pace, any time and everywhere. CBE is defined by (1) explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students; (2) students' knowledge mastery; (3) meaningful assessment that provides a positive learning experience for students; (4) timely, differentiated support based on individual student learning needs; and (5) learning outcomes emphasising a competence that include application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions. CBE has developed from a basis in the literature of social constructivism, which situates it into the tradition of Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky; CBE can be described by the following 5 principles (Beck & Kosnick, 2006):

- i. Learning is social.
- ii. Knowledge is experience-based.
- iii. Knowledge is constructed by learners.
- iv. All aspects of a person are connected.
- v. Learning communities should be inclusive and equitable.

A competence-based lesson is well structured when it uses a specific competence as a compass to design its components. It requires educational designers to have knowledge not only on the subject matter, but also on the target competence they want to develop in students. Knowledge of the target competence helps build up learning aims about competent skills and attitudes for students to achieve, as well as developing learning activities for students to do. This means that students implement learning by doing, but not learning by listening and memorising as in a traditional approach. In the other words, students learn about a competence by doing it, by practising it, by working on it. Knowledge of the target subject matter is used both as the learning aim that students need to achieve in terms of lesson knowledge and as the learning means that students need to work on to achieve the comprehensive learning aims of the learning activities. As can be seen from this description, a CBE lesson is significantly different from a content-based lesson, in which knowledge of target subject matter is centred and seems to be the sole aim for student achievement.

### **The need to teach CT in moral education lessons**

CT is a cognitive competence that is widely accepted as a key element of being fully functional in a modern complex society and an important dimension of education. Improving students' CT should be a primary goal of all educational programs (van Gelder, 2005), and the need to engage in CT should be at the core of learning and innovation

(McCollister & Sayler, 2010). CT is defined as ‘reflective thinking’ (Dewey, 1916), ‘reasonable reflective thinking’ (Ennis, 1989), purposeful, self-regulatory judgment that results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based (Facione, 2011; Watson & Glaser, 1980). A critical thinker is described as being sceptical, curious, inquisitive, open-minded, fair-minded, honest and confident (Facione, 1990). Such critical thinkers tend to raise vital questions and problems, seek and assess relevant information, analyse and evaluate information, make decisions and solve problems. They do not adhere to a right–wrong mode in assessing opinions, but often consider various views and perspectives in accepting explanations that are well reasoned. In contrast, passive thinkers tend to have a limited and egocentric view of the world, answer questions with yes or no and view their perspective as the only sensible one and their facts as the only ones that are relevant (Duron, Limbach & Waugh, 2006).

A previous study (Hãng, 2019) showed that CT can be implemented in current Vietnamese primary moral education classes, with some critical manifestations in students during classroom practices. In particular, students listen attentively, speak clearly, are honest when giving answers and remain quite fair in assessing peer opinions. However, the implementation of CT is still at a low level for the following reasons:

- i. The activity of students seeking information for learning is overlooked.
- ii. Lessons focus on teacher-led activities dominated by the teacher talking and the use of small questions to start moral education lessons.
- iii. Reproducing and static learning are fostered in students.
- iv. Correct answers and opinions are expected and appreciated more than reasonable answers and opinions.

Such findings support the idea that the application of CT to moral education is probably more difficult in Vietnam, because of the strong influence of Confucian cultural heritage. They also reinforce the suggestions that CT seems to be absent in classroom practices in Eastern countries (Couchman, 1997; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Totten, Sills, Digby & Russ, 1991) and that a traditional approach is still used, dominated by teacher- and book-centred methods (Chan, 1999; Hãng, Meijer, Bulte & Pilot, 2015; Tao, Oliver & Venville, 2013). To advance the development of developing countries and Confucian heritage cultures, CT should be stressed in school curricula, to help students avoid blindly adopting inappropriate measures that may have become institutionalised.

Moral education and CT are vital in a digital age and have become highly topical in many countries, as urgent consideration is being given to how to better prepare young people for the challenges and uncertainties of life in the currently rapidly changing world (Ichilov, 1999). To teach CT to Vietnamese students during moral education and to help them change their traditional passive learning styles towards active and critical learning, it is necessary to have new, appropriate designs for moral education lessons in which CT is directed. In this study, *sympathy* is selected as the moral value to teach students and for which to design a moral education lesson. Sympathy is defined as feelings of concern for

another person based on an understanding of that person's circumstances (Malti, Keller, Gummerum & Buchmann, 2009) or a quintessential moral emotion and a moderator of moral action (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). The feeling of sympathy may allow individuals to engage in prosocial behaviours, such as helping or sharing.

Modern life makes sympathy even more necessary. The world is facing problems such as disasters, poverty, crimes, accidents and dilemmas, and people tend to live more individualistically since the ego has become the primary focus. It cannot be said that such problems will not occur or not affect certain people in the world, but rather that everyone on earth will be directly or indirectly affected by them. Moral education must therefore provide the appropriate character vaccine to ensure the healthy functioning of the individual throughout life, especially in adverse situations (Al-Mabuk, 2014). Although sympathy may seem to be a natural, reflexive reaction, people are not born knowing when, for whom and in what circumstances sympathy is appropriate (Clark, 1997). Sympathy is stressed in student lessons at schools because students can be effective moral agents. In the new education program and in the innovative moral education curriculum, sympathy is highlighted and embedded into the moral value of humanity, which is one of the core characteristics to develop among students in Vietnam (MOET, 2018).

It is possible to teach CT to students by educating them about sympathy, due to the relationship between CT and moral education, in which sympathy is a category of morality, and also because of commonalities between CT and sympathy: both require individuals to put themselves into another's context to understand that person's feelings and thoughts and to adjust their own behaviours accordingly; both help students develop their own cognition skills and character.

## **A design-based research approach**

To design a competence-based moral education lesson on sympathy to teach CT to students, a design-based research approach (Bulte, Westbroek, De Jong & Pilot, 2006) and a curriculum perspective (van den Akker, 2003) are adapted and applied. In this paper, *ideal design of lesson* is understood as vision, rationale or basic philosophy that underlies a designed lesson. In this case of lesson design, the ideal design of lesson is from the perspective of a CBE-based approach and CT education in moral education. *Formal design of lesson* is understood as intentions specified in lesson documents and/or materials. The model of CBE-based lesson design, showing the relationship between lesson design elements, is shown in Figure 1. A lesson design includes the elements: (1) Educational goals, (2) Learning outcomes, (3) Lesson framework, in which the lesson framework is set up with 4 phases:

- *Phase 1:* Problem identification
- *Phase 2:* Exploration
- *Phase 3:* Problem solving
- *Phase 4:* Follow-up

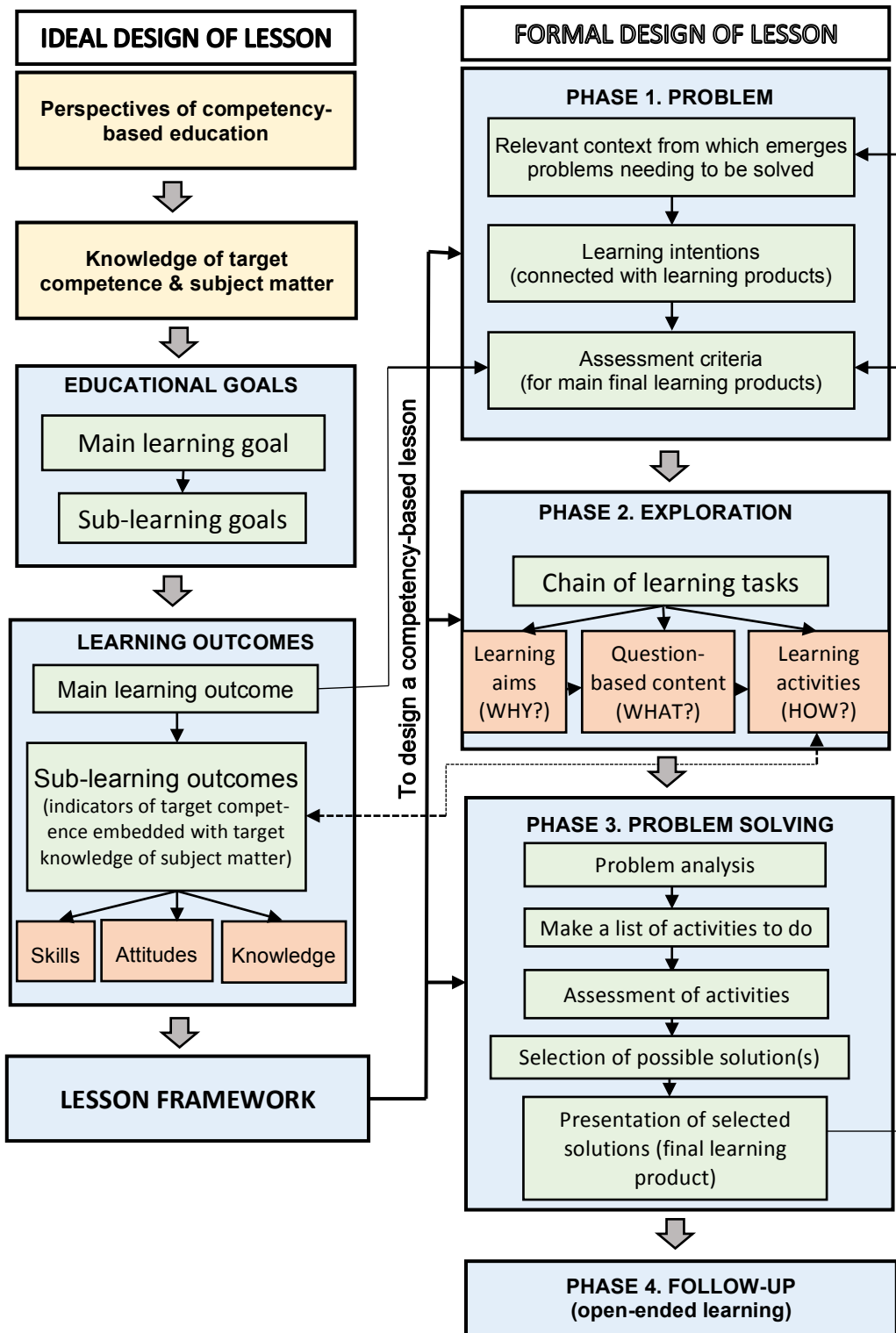


Figure 1: A design-based approach for a competency-based lesson

Figure 1's design-based research approach is applied to design a model for a CBE-based moral education lesson on sympathy to teach CT for primary students.

### **Educational goals and learning outcomes**

Educational goals are determined by identification of a specific competence and knowledge of a target subject matter to be developed in students. Based on the determined educational goals, learning outcomes can be determined, leading to an action competence to solve a realistic problem. In this case of lesson design, educational goals and learning outcomes are towards CT and sympathy.

### **Lesson framework**

The lesson framework is developed from a design-based approach for a competency-based lesson (Figure 1), and also adapted from the practical inquiry model developed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000). The lesson framework comprises four interrelated learning phases, described below.

#### *Phase 1: Problem identification*

This phase provides a learning context related to sympathy that raises problems students need to solve by applying CT as taught in the lesson. This comes from the proposition that CT is promoted by active learner participation in a social context, and that CT in learning is practical inquiry (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). To encourage students to implement CT activities in moral education classroom practices, the teacher should start a lesson by presenting a learning problem rather than small isolated questions. Solving a situated problem can encourage students to undertake practical inquiry and think more deeply about how to achieve reasonable solutions. A learning context for a lesson about sympathy needs to meet the following criteria:

- i. Contains problems students need to solve that require them to think deeply, seek information and knowledge, cooperate, argue, synthesise and analyse, so they can accomplish the goals of the lesson and develop their CT skills;
- ii. Is relevant and familiar to students, that is, something they encounter in their daily lives; and
- iii. Is practical, because by solving relevant problems, students achieve knowledge, skills and attitudes that are applicable for solving real-life problems they may encounter outside of school.

In this phase, the learning intentions and assessments for final learning products are also provided to students so that they can prepare and be more autonomous in their learning.

#### *Phase 2: Exploration*

During the exploration phase, a chain of learning tasks is designed and structured by the three interconnected elements: (1) learning aims; (2) question-based content; and (3) learning activities. The learning aims are consistent with the educational goals of the lesson and govern the determination of learning content and learning activities. Learning

tasks are interconnected, and the learning activities of each of the learning tasks should be linked to the learning outcomes of the lesson because of a causal relationship between them: learning activities result in learning products, which manifest learning outcomes. By implementing learning tasks, students can achieve the educational goals and learning outcomes of the lesson.

Question-based content aims to lead students to profound knowledge about sympathy and also allow the dilemma to evolve within them. It directs students towards knowledge that helps them learn to view issues from different perspectives and promotes CT activities such as inquiry, cooperation and argumentation. Because closed-ended questions and simple yes–no questions are not particularly effective in developing CT among students (Duron et al., 2006), learning content for the learning tasks should be oriented towards core open-ended questions for students to answer. To answer orienting core questions that evolve during the content of the lesson, students need to engage in various interactions with different forms and channels of information and knowledge during the learning tasks. This approach supports and provides an open and active learning style that highlights inquisitive activities and learning processes other than rote memorisation. Indeed, this approach can replace traditional educational approaches, in which information and knowledge are provided in texts and students do their learning mostly by reproducing what is written in the textbooks or transmitted by the teacher. Knowledge provided in texts – which should be educational, developmental, appropriate to the lesson aims and expressed coherently, clearly and understandably – contains the lesson content and can be a means for students to implement sub-learning activities to construct their own knowledge and learn about CT.

Learning activities are connected to learning content and should be designed and organised in a way to engage students in learning, exploit students' experiences, stimulate them to ask questions and think independently and thoughtfully. Because CT is understood both as a learning product and process, and as being individualistic but also social (Hằng, 2019), students should be encouraged to make judgements, conclusions or claims based on evidence and within a specific communicative context and should be encouraged to question, interpret, analyse, evaluate, make inferences and explain, all of which are conceptual and contextual activities, showing the careful consideration upon which judgement is based (Facione, 1990; Watson & Glaser, 1980). Learning activities also need to be diverse and practical so they can stimulate a positive, active and open learning atmosphere among students. Students can have different learning experiences, feel engaged and independent in their learning and pursue their different learning styles, such as visual learning, auditory learning, kinaesthetic learning.

Learning activities should follow a logical structure, so students can approach knowledge from specific to general, from physical to abstract, which promotes their inquisitiveness. Embedded into sub-learning activities are sub-questions that students need to answer. Such sub-questions are systemic and require students to engage in CT activities. The implementation of CT in this way aligns with a social constructivist approach: students learn CT by doing CT. Students are immersed into a classroom culture that supports CT



activities, so they can attain not only the target knowledge about moral values but also CT competence to solve the lesson's given realistic problems. Learning activities for the lesson on sympathy could include some of the following:

- Searching for information on the Internet, in newspapers and books or from peers and other people;
- Sharing experiences;
- Reading news, paragraphs, poems, stories and lyrics;
- Looking at photos or watching a video;
- Going on a learning excursion or field trip;
- Making and colouring drawings;
- Giving titles to stories;
- Writing papers or proposals;
- Making commitments;
- Filling in given tables or graphics;
- Role playing, imagining;
- Discussing, questioning and answering;
- Doing presentations;
- Solving problems.

#### *Phase 3: Problem solving*

This phase has a close relationship with the problem identification phase and is also successively connected with the previous phase of exploration. Problem solving can be understood as a big learning task separate from the previous learning tasks, because of its higher level of difficulty and complexity. By completing the previous learning tasks, students are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be applied to solve problems in this phase. Problem solving is the key activity of the CBE-based lesson and can provide learning products resulting from practical inquiry or CT that manifest what students have learned in previous tasks and how CT activities are implemented. To solve problems, students need to follow the steps that represent CT activities, including: (1) problem analysis; (2) making a list of activities; (3) assessing the activities; (4) selecting a possible solution; and (5) presenting the selected solutions. By following this step-by-step approach, students not only solve problems appropriately, they also reinforce what they learned from previous phases and therefore develop greater CT competence.

#### *Phase 4: Follow-up*

This phase helps students apply to their daily life practices what they have learned in the lesson. It supports open-ended learning and connecting school lessons with the students' life outside school. It is an optional phase for the lesson on sympathy.

The above lesson framework is used to develop a specific design for a moral education lesson on sympathy, to teach CT to students. The specific lesson design is described below.

## A. Educational goals

### 1. Main goal

Students build CT competence by learning about sympathy.

### 2. Sub-goals

- i. Students develop CT skills by completing the following activities: searching for information, analysing, synthesising, inferring, reasoning, arguing, assessing and problem solving about sympathy.
- ii. Students develop CT attitudes such as open-mindedness, fair-mindedness, courage, honesty, inquisitiveness, respect for others' different opinions during their communication and interaction about sympathy.
- iii. Students achieve profound knowledge about sympathy, know how to be a sympathetic person, and develop a good lifestyle, positive thinking and desire to contribute to a better life.

## B. Learning outcomes

### 1. Main learning outcome

Students are able to give plausible solutions for given relevant problems related to sympathy by applying CT competence and knowledge on sympathy based on the lesson.

### 2. Sub-learning outcomes

To achieve the above main learning outcomes, students are expected to achieve the sub-learning outcomes of knowledge, skills and attitudes as expressed in Table 1.

Table 1: Learning outcomes of the CBE-based lesson on sympathy to teach CT

CT competence		
Skills	Attitudes	Knowledge about sympathy
<i>Students can do the following activities:</i>	<i>Students can show the following attitudes:</i>	<i>Students can demonstrate the following knowledge:</i>
a. Searching and collecting information and knowledge from various sources (books, Internet, conversations with teachers, peers and others...)	a. Being courageous and confident to speak personal opinions	a. Characteristics of sympathy and sympathetic people
b. Analysing, synthesising, inferring from existing knowledge during the process of problem solving	b. Being open-minded and independent enough to express personal propositions and opinions	b. Similarities and differences between sympathy and pity
c. Providing reasons and evidence for explanations and solutions	c. Being inquisitive in learning	c. Activities that show sympathy
d. Asking questions in discussion	d. Being fair-minded and objective when assessing and evaluating others' opinions	d. Meaning and impact of sympathetic activities
e. Viewing issues from various perspectives	e. Being respectful of different opinions	e. Ways to implement sympathetic activities
f. Assess claims and solutions	f. Staying concerned before making a decision and problem solving	f. Good and bad sides of giving sympathy
g. Adjusting behaviour suitably		g. Situations where concern is needed before giving sympathy
		h. Commitment to implement sympathetic activities
		i. Appropriate solutions for some specific real-life situations related to sympathy
		j. Wishes to share with and help unfortunate and poor people/animals

### C. Learning phases

To achieve the learning outcomes, students engage in four learning phases, as represented in Table 2.

Table 2: Learning phases of the CBE-based lesson on sympathy to teach CT

Phase 1: Problem identification						
How should one react to beggars?	Big questions	Learning intention	Learning assessment			
Lan goes to the zoo with her class. When Lan is standing alone waiting for her teacher and classmates, a beggar comes and asks for money. Lan has a small amount of money in her pocket. This money was given to her by her mother in case it's necessary. Lan thinks the beggar is miserable. Lan is confused. She does not know what to do.	1. What would you do if you were Lan? Why?	1. Discuss with peers in groups and role-play to solve the problem: What would you do if you were Lan? Why?	Below is the table of indicators to assess students' CT manifested in their final learning products related to problem solving.			
				2. Do you think beggars should be given sympathy? Why or why not? What should one do and how?	2. Write a paper to express personal views on beggars and propose solutions for the problem of beggars in society.	
	No.	CT indicators				Assessment level
	1	Student to generate information and knowledge				1 2 3 4 5
	2	Student to analyse information and knowledge				1 2 3 4 5
	3	Student to run interference				1 2 3 4 5
	4	Student to provide reasons and evidence for explanation or claims				1 2 3 4 5
	5	Student to view issues from various perspectives				1 2 3 4 5
	6	Student to evaluate issues and assess solutions		1 2 3 4 5		
7	Student to propose solutions	1 2 3 4 5				
8	Student to indicate his/her own behaviour adjustment	1 2 3 4 5				
<i>Note: 1 – not at all; 5 – very well</i>						
Phase 2: Exploration						
Learning tasks	Learning aims	Questions-based content	Suggested learning activities			
1. Explore characteristics of sympathetic people	Students to recognise characteristics of sympathetic people	a. What are the characteristics of sympathetic people? b. What are some examples of sympathetic people in real life or sympathetic characters in stories/movies? c. What are the similarities and differences between sympathy and pity?	i. Students to read a short passage about sympathetic people and answer elaborative questions ii. Students to write out words that are characteristics of sympathetic people iii. Student to distinguish 'sympathy' and 'pity' iv. Students to seek for examples of sympathetic people and share with the class			

2. Recognising subjects needing sympathy	Students to recognise subjects (people and animals) who need to receive sympathy	<p>a. What are the characteristics of people/animals who need to receive sympathy?</p> <p>b. Should a beggar receive sympathy? Why?</p>	<p>i. Students visit an orphanage or nursing home (or watch a video about unfortunate people/animals) and share their thoughts about what they see, what they know, what they think and what they feel</p> <p>ii. Students to look at a photo collection (either self-collected or collected by the teacher) of miserable and poor people/animals and share their thoughts and feelings</p> <p>iii. Students to read a poem about the diversity of being, in which the diversity of people's lives is included, then determine what is the main meaning of the poem</p>
3. Exploring the meaning of helping and sharing in life	Students to explain why they need to help and share	Why do we need to help and share with miserable and unfortunate people and animals?	<p>i. Students to read a short story about a kind beggar and answer elaborative questions</p> <p>ii. Students to read a short story about the good impact of sharing and give a suitable name to the story</p> <p>iii. Students to explore the meaning of a statement/idiom about the meaning of sharing</p>
4. Exploring sympathy activities	Students to determine activities that show human sympathy to miserable and poor people and animals	What are activities that show human sympathy?	<p>i. Students to look at a photo collection of people doing sympathetic activities and answer elaborative questions</p> <p>ii. Students to read a story about a specific person who gives unconditional helps to others and answer elaborative questions</p> <p>iii. Students to draw a 'sympathy tree' on which the fruits are sympathetic activities</p> <p>iv. Students to watch a video clip showing the meaning of sharing and giving</p> <p>v. Students to share their understanding of the statement: <i>Give a man a fish, you can feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish, you can feed him for a lifetime</i></p>
5. Exploring situations require thought before giving sympathy	Students to recognise situations that need concerns before giving sympathy	<p>a. Should we always give sympathy to all miserable and poor people? Why?</p> <p>b. What specific situations require before giving sympathy? Why?</p>	<p>i. Students to discuss and answer the question: "Should we always give sympathy to all miserable and poor people? Why?" and share their existing knowledge about people who take advantage of sympathy to defraud or do bad things</p> <p>ii. Students to read an article about a bad fake beggar and answer elaborative questions</p> <p>iii. Students to discuss reactions and solutions to a specific real-life dilemma related to sympathy</p>

			iv. Students to give their opinion about two pieces of advice: (1) Always help miserable and poor people and (2) Always beware of strangers
6. Exploring the good and bad sides of sympathy	Students to recognise good and bad sides of sympathy giving	What are the bad and the good that sympathy giving can bring?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Students to share good and bad things that occurred in their own experience of giving sympathy</li> <li>ii. Students to fill in a table of good and bad sides of sympathy giving for subjects: (1) those who give sympathy, (2) those who receive sympathy and (3) community and society</li> </ul>
7. Exploring warnings prior to implementing sympathy	Students to recognise what should be done and what should be avoided on implementing sympathy	What should be considered before giving aid to miserable and unfortunate people and animals? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Students to read a story about a nice miserable beggar who receives different reactions from people and share their opinions about each reaction</li> <li>ii. Students to discuss advice for solving a problem about charity: <i>Student A wants to support a call to give unused clothes to poor students. She has many unused clothes, but many are very old and torn. Should she give her torn clothes to poor students? Why?</i></li> <li>iii. Students to fill in a table of things that should and should not be done when giving sympathy</li> </ul>
8. Exploring real life situations and ways to give sympathy appropriately	Students to recognise some daily life situations related to sympathy and to determine ways to give sympathy appropriately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Which real life situations require sympathy?</li> <li>b. What ways of giving sympathy are appropriate for each situation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Students to list common real-life situations that require sympathy</li> <li>ii. Students to provide solutions for common specific situations that require sympathy</li> <li>iii. Students to listen to a song relevant to sympathy and explain its message</li> <li>iv. Students to make drawings promoting sympathy in life</li> </ul>
9. Commit to being sympathetic	Students to commit to show sympathy to miserable and poor people/ animals	How will you commit to show sympathy to miserable and poor people and animals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Students to share activities related to sympathy that they have done</li> <li>ii. Students to write their own commitment to be sympathetic and explain why</li> </ul>

## Phase 3: Problem solving

Learning aims	Questions-based content	Learning activities
• Students to provide plausible solutions to Lan's beggar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What will you do if you were Lan in that situation?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Activity 1: Analyse the beggar problem</i></p> <p>Students to discuss with peers and answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What do you think about the beggar?</li> <li>b. What causes make people become beggars?</li> <li>c. What can happen to a beggar?</li> </ul>

problem by applying the knowledge, skills and attitudes from previous learning tasks • Students to show their desire for a beautiful world containing human sympathy and how they can contribute to that world	Why? b. Do you think beggars should be given sympathy from other people? Why or why not? What and how can the problem of beggars be solved?	d. Who can become a beggar? Why do you think so? e. What would you do if you were a beggar? Why? f. What are good sides and bad sides of begging for oneself, for others and for society?  <i>Activity 2: Make a list of activities in response to beggars</i> a. Students to answer the questions: What activities should you do when meeting a beggar? b. Students to make a list of all activities and reactions that people could use to respond to beggars.  <i>Activity 3: Assess the responses to beggars</i> Students to determine good and bad sides of the listed activities and fill in the table below:																	
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th rowspan="2">No.</th> <th rowspan="2">Activities</th> <th colspan="2">Assessment</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Advantages</th> <th>Disadvantages</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>Give money to the</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>beggar</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>...</td> <td>...</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		No.	Activities	Assessment		Advantages	Disadvantages	1	Give money to the			2	beggar			...	...	
No.	Activities	Assessment																	
		Advantages	Disadvantages																
1	Give money to the																		
2	beggar																		
...	...																		

*Activity 4: Determine possible solutions to the problem of beggars*

Students to answer the following questions:

- a. How would you want to be treated if you were a beggar? Why?
- b. What should you and others do to avoid becoming a beggar? How?
- c. What should be done to reduce the number of beggars in society? How?
- d. What are better jobs that a beggar can do instead of begging? Why? How can beggars be helped?

*Activity 5: Propose select solutions to the beggar problem*

- a. Student to discuss in groups and then role-play: What would you do if you were Lan? Explain why.
- b. Students to write a paper showing their personal opinion about beggars and proposing solutions to deal with the problem of beggars in society.

Phase 4: Follow – up (optional)

Learning aim	Questions-based content	Learning activities
Students to apply what they have learned in the lesson into practice	What can you do to help beggars or poor people in your living area?	Students to work in groups and set up a small project helping beggars or poor people in their own community

## Discussion and conclusions

This paper describes how a moral education lesson can be designed in accordance with a CBE approach to teach CT to primary students. It uses sympathy as a specific moral topic for the lesson design to teach students via learning activities that contain CT activities. In such a lesson, students are immersed into interactive contexts with structured learning activities that require them to do various cognitive activities and practical inquiry; thereby they can learn about CT by implementing CT as in a social constructivist way that is effectively helping them construct knowledge for themselves (Beck & Kosnick, 2006). The lesson design is meaningful to help develop CT among students and supports education to educate lifelong learners and prepare future capable citizens.

The paper provides a model of CBE-based lesson design, and a specific exemplary moral education lesson that can be applied in classroom practices to teach CT to primary students in Vietnam, and also in other Confucian heritage cultures. It also provides insights for educators and teachers into how to design CBE-based lessons that are meaningful when implementing CBE curriculum innovations, not only in moral education but also in other subjects. The paper is an active response to the call for research on innovative lesson designs to teach CT for students in order to improve their learning and thinking skills (Hằng, 2019). Also, it fills an educational research gap in the relationship between CT and moral education, supporting the suggestion about investigating how CT and moral education are related (Fasko, 1994).

The lesson design shows how a CBE-based lesson is different from a content-based lesson, as well as how CT can be taught to students in a moral education lesson on sympathy. The designed lesson can be taught for students at age 10 to 11 because at that age, students have backgrounds in thinking skills and knowledge of societal issues good enough for them to learn about CT and sympathy, and to solve the problem related to beggars, as presented in the lesson. To teach such a designed lesson effectively in classroom practices in Vietnam, Vietnamese students need encouraging to think independently, speak what they think, share their different opinions, and stay open-minded to another's ideas. They also need practice in assessing another's ideas based on the idea's reasonableness and possibilities rather than adhering to a 'correct-wrong mode'. In this way, students can change their old habits of passive learning and gradually become critical learners.

To apply the CBE-based lesson design reported in this paper to the practices of primary school moral education in Vietnamese culture, the role of teachers is crucial, as they are considered to be the most influential factors in educational change (Duffee & Aikenhead, 1992). Many studies have shown that teachers' actions in classrooms are largely determined by their knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning (Loughran, Mulhall & Berry, 2004). Teachers frequently do not implement teaching and learning materials that contradict their ideas about content and how it should be taught (Cotton, 2006). Therefore, the application of this design in the Vietnamese context requires a teacher professional development program.

To teach CT to students as in the designed moral education lesson, it is necessary to provide Vietnamese teachers with intensive training so they understand the ideas behind this lesson approach and design. Teachers need professional development about both the CBE approach, and CT competence and moral education knowledge (in this case, sympathy). This kind of lesson design is new to teachers in Vietnam and different from the more familiar and traditional content-based lesson designs, in which information and knowledge are often already provided in textbooks for teachers to transmit and for students to reproduce (Hàng, 2019). To teach this CBE-based lesson, teachers, too, need to be equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding CT and moral education to be flexible and effective in organising and conducting the lesson, so they model CT in their interactions with students. This training can be done through a teacher professional development program in which a CBE approach is used as a target learning goal while providing teachers with an opportunity to learn, practise and experience CT. In such a program of teacher professional development, knowledge of the establishment of learning communities with a facilitator and the teachers as critical co-designers (Hàng, Bulte & Pilot, 2017) should be applied to empower teachers to teach the designed innovative lesson. When both teachers and students have developed CT skills, teaching and learning practices in Vietnam will have undergone significant changes and will thus meet the requirements of educational innovation.

Given that changes of students' learning depend significantly on teachers' ways of teaching, Vietnamese teachers should be the ones who implement changes first in their teaching practices, to promote students' learning in accordance with a CBE-based approach. Without the teachers' acceptance and without the necessary changes in the practice of CT teaching in primary moral education, the application of the design leads to the state of *a new bottle but old wine* [*bình mới rượu cũ*]. There is a need for an evaluation of the design as the next step in this research. Further studies are also necessary to examine how the CBE-based lesson design supports Vietnamese students in learning CT in moral education classroom practices. Accordingly, assessment criteria (Figure 1) should be applied for measuring the extent of CT that Vietnamese students achieve through the implementation of the designed moral lesson. Such studies are believed to bring not only new insight on operational CBE-based moral lesson designs, but also on teaching and learning that supports CT for Vietnamese primary students. Providing a concrete lesson design, this study is the first stage in contributing to the development of a knowledge base for the design of appropriate moral lessons to teach CT for primary students in Vietnam in accordance with a CBE approach.

## **Acknowledgements**

This research is funded by the Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) under grant number 503.01-2017.01. The author would like to thank NAFOSTED and Associate Professor Dr Vũ Quốc Chung at Hanoi National University of Education in Vietnam for their support in conducting this study.



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**Please cite as:** Hằng, N. V. T. (2020). Design of a competency-based moral lesson for teaching critical thinking skills in Vietnamese primary schools. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(1), 115-133. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier30/hang.pdf>