Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between Character & Citizenship Education (CCE) and Active Citizenry in Singapore. Character and Citizenship Education has always been at the heart of Singapore’s education system. Students learn to be responsible to family and community; and understand their roles in shaping the future of the nation. It’s not bricks and mortar that make a nation, but the bonds between people that unite them to a country. Societal changes, globalisation and technological advancements are some of the issues which pose challenges to the CCE curriculum. The three overarching big ideas of identity, relationships and choices are the core concepts in CCE to enable students to develop key understandings. This paper will analyse how these three big ideas are challenged and whether they withstand the challenges and aid in the delivery of the curriculum. The CCE curriculum is further challenged by two questions: What is the rationale for having the CCE curriculum? Whose interest does it serve? With contradictory messages of preparing students to live in global society and developing 21st century skills while emphasizing National Education and exam preparation and results, students and teachers find themselves in a “double bind. These mixed messages make it difficult to offer an education that will help young people deal with the complex shifting landscapes of knowledge and knowing that students will encounter as they move across local, global and digital landscapes. As National Education policy and educational reform and practice are not in line, educators and matured learners question how education can be opened if society is still relatively constrained. This paper will not only analyse the three big ideas of the CCE curriculum but also the challenges faced by the CCE curriculum and its overall effectiveness for the young learners.
1. Introduction

Forging a sense of national identity has been a preoccupation for the Singapore government for over four decades. This is linked to the top political leadership’s “garrison mentality” which manifests itself in a perennial concern with issues such as the country’s limited territorial and natural resources, the maintenance of the country’s economic and social achievements, and the country’s vulnerability as the only majority-Chinese state in the midst of a majority Malay/Muslim region. Not many people are aware of the external educational environment, both locally and globally. A good understanding and appreciation of the various developments that might affect the education system will place our people, especially educators in a better position to take preventive measures to safeguard our students from the effects of globalization. Globalization is an inevitable worldwide phenomenon. Regions, countries, societies, cultures and communities have become more interconnected. Effects of globalization are felt economically, technologically, socio-culturally and politically. Societies may experience a diffusion or dilution of cultural values, traditional practices, attitudes and behaviours amongst different generations.

Schools do not operate in vacuum. Schools are expected to respond to external environment. Students are exposed to the various forms of beliefs, alternative values, divergent mind-sets and different lifestyles. We have to remember that Singapore is a unique country. It is multi-cultural and multi-ethnic. The citizens are obliged to behave in a manner which does not offend or belittle the practices and beliefs of the various religious, ethnic and cultural groups. It is the government’s concern that the citizens, particularly the younger generation uphold the cultural tolerance and respect people are having for one another. Globalization should not prevent our citizens from maintaining our core values as Singaporeans. Our unique identities should not be lost in the quest for success. This is where Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) comes into contact with the constellation of various interacting factors which will eventually shape the identity of our students.

2. Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) in Singapore

As a young nation which was made up of largely migrant people, nation building was, and is still part and parcel of the education policy and system which have been designed within the context of a free open democratic society (MOE, 1966). From 1959 to 1978, the young government had to provide mass education in response to the pressing need for national cohesion and economic survival. This period was when Education was survival-driven. It progressed on to Efficiency-driven in 1979 and Ability-driven in 1997. This was the period when MOE introduced National Education in schools.

Citizenship Education has been, in some form, and overarching goal of public schooling historically in every society, as it is in Singapore today. The introduction of social studies as a compulsory and examinable subject in Singapore Secondary schools in 2001 reflects the continuous single-minded pursuit of Citizenship Education to meet perceived national needs. Citizenship Education falls under the umbrella of National Education. Citizenship, like anything else has to be learned, as young people do not become good citizens by accident. Since 1959, various programmes have been introduced by the Ministry of Education to inculcate values, skills and competencies in our students. In 1992, the civics and moral education curriculum was implemented. In 1997, the National Education curriculum was rolled out to all schools. Social and Emotional learning was introduced in 1995. The new Character and Citizenship Education curriculum, which was implemented in 2014 shifts the focus from programmes to a common
purpose. The new Character and Citizenship Education curriculum emphasizes to students the importance of being responsible to family and community; and understand their roles in shaping the future of Singapore. The emerging trends and developments that impact the Singaporean society are taken into consideration in the development of the CCE Curriculum. Societal changes, technological advancements and globalization are some of the issues being addressed. Character and Citizenship Education strives to inculcate values and build competencies in our students so that they become good individuals and useful citizens. The CCE Curriculum emphasizes the interconnectedness of the core values (Respect, Responsibility, Harmony, Integrity, Resilience and Care), social and emotional competencies (Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Management and Responsible Decision Making) and civic literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills (Active Community Life, National Cultural Identity, Global Awareness and Socio-Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness) that are critical for Character and Citizenship development of our students.

3. Active Citizenry

Active Citizenry, like globalization attains a phenomenal status Active Citizenry is related to shifting notions and definitions of citizenship and citizenship education. Its usage is entwined with the progress of citizenship education. However, we can preliminarily sum up that Active Citizenry is fundamentally about engagement and participation. It deals with both civil and civic society. Active Citizenry is linked to a more participatory form of citizenship and citizenship education which involves the development of citizenship education as an active process in a range of contexts in and beyond schools. In view of globalization and retention of roots and values, we can closely associate it with social cohesion and reinforcement of sense of national identity or patriotism. There is no universally accepted definition of “Active Citizenry”, but rather a series of competing emergent definitions.

4. The 3 Big Ideas – Identity, Relationships and Choices

The three overarching big ideas of Identity, Relationships and Choices serve as the core concepts in Character and Citizenship Education. These three big ideas enable students to have key understandings of the importance of Citizenship education and the justification of Active Citizenry in the context of globalization. Identity, Relationships and Choices, are interconnected and impact one another.

- Identity
  Having a sense of identity is the fundamental pre-requisite for anyone to understand where they are coming from and what needs to be done on their part to stay rooted to their beliefs. It is about embracing a set of values and ideals. A well-developed identity gives one a sense of one’s strengths, weaknesses, and individual uniqueness. Students are able to achieve self-knowledge, take responsibility for their actions and relate well with others. Identity is a complex concept to comprehend. Eventually, students have to come to terms with the complexity of identity and the role it plays in shaping perceptions and relationships

- Relationships
  Relationships engage children in the community to help them define who they are what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people. Social constructivists advocate that cognitive development originates from interaction with others. Relationships are
fundamental to life. They change over time too. Students who understand this will find it easy in managing relationships.

- **Choices**
  Values guide one’s choices and choices reveal a person’s character and value systems. Choices, which influence one’s behaviour, are based on values. Choices are platforms that enable students to apply and clarify their values. Choices shape character. Choices also affect self and others. A student who realises this will wary of his actions and seeks to conduct him or herself in a manner most appropriate.

### 5. Challenges Facing The 3 Big Ideas

This is perceived to unsettle and destabilise local culture, values and identity. The problem is Singapore doesn’t have a choice. It has to globalise because of its small size. It is too small a nation to function economically on its own. It has to work with globalisation by inventing ways to cooperate with capitalism’s presence. Yet, at another level, it also has to counter the backlash of globalisation through the inculcation of citizenship ethos and values that are perceived to be eroding. It’s not just a challenge but a constant war fought on a daily basis.

The practice of developing and delivering active citizenship and encouraging active citizenry within and beyond schools is dependent on a number of issues. Kennedy (2006) draws a helpful distinction between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ components of citizenship. Active citizenship is a mixture of active and passive components dependant on the cultural and historical context of countries and their approach to citizenship education. In Singapore, definition of what it means to be an active citizen have different “drivers” and lead to an emphasis on more ‘passive’ components of citizenship. The development of active citizenship is underpinned by a desire to nurture a sense of belonging to nation, and a moral obligation actively to contribute to society and the building of the nation’s future. This indicates that active participation, at least in part, is about developing a sense of patriotism in young people, a moral obligation, and an emphasis on social cohesion.

The meritocratic conception permits educational inequality to result from differences in talent and effort but not from social class background. The radical conception permits less. It adds talent to social class background as a morally impermissible source of educational inequality. The use of the words radical and talents here is very important when discussing social class differences in education system because we can come to terms with the fact that differences in education provided to children based on social class backgrounds is not something very new. The quality of education is compromised from the age of 5. When pupils start their primary school journey, they are indeed starting at different talent levels.

Sociological studies in the United States and United Kingdom have shown that education tends to reaffirm class inequalities “far more” than it acts to change them. In Singapore, we can say that the situation is no different. Mark Lim Shan-Loong (1998) reports that school leavers of better primary schools have higher chance of entering university because of the better facilities and conducive environment provided by the school. Children from better primary schools also tend to perform better in their PSLE examinations due to the conducive learning environment and also due to the high motivation level which arises out of the fact that they are studying in a good school. On the contrary, children from the not so good schools would not have the same level of confidence and motivation. They then go on to normal neighbourhood schools which are not as good as the ones pupils go to after having achieved good PSLE results. This also results in social class gap.
6. Conclusion

Contemporary literature on citizenship and active citizenship commonly distinguishes between three politico-philosophical understandings of citizenship, each of which contains a different understanding of active citizenship. The liberal understanding conceives of citizenship as a legal status. Citizen action is limited to a small range of democratic tasks, such as voting, which remain optional rather than compulsory. The communitarian understanding views citizenship differently – as a practice rather than a status. The mutual relationship between the individual and the state is emphasised, as are notions of community and the common good. The civic republican conception of citizenship similarly emphasises practice, but its distinction lies in the commitment to the civic, rather than just civil, engagement of citizens. Despite the usefulness of these conceptions, which provide a starting point for understandings of citizenship and active citizenship, the distinctions between liberals, communitarians and civic republicans are, both in theory and practice, increasingly blurred.

7. References

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