

issue 62 sep 2017

# Social Studies & Citizenship Education



Big Idea

issn 2010-1031

## The Makings of an Effective Citizen

*Singapore's social and economic progress post-independence can be attributed to one important factor—her citizens. We speak to the guest editor of this issue and Social Studies teacher educator Dr Kho Ee Moi on what makes a good citizen and the important role teachers play in preparing the young to become caring contributors to society.*

Equipping our youths with the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to become active members of society is a crucial first step towards building a nation of effective contributors.

"In order to have a socially cohesive and economically prosperous country, we need to have people who can contribute effectively to society," says Senior Lecturer Dr Kho Ee Moi from the Humanities and Social Studies Education Academic Group at the National Institute of Education. "To be an effective contributor, one must be informed, interested and concerned about public life."

### Citizenship in a Global World

The idea that an interest in public issues is necessary for one to become an effective citizen dates back to ancient Greece, where the term "idiocy" was coined to describe a person who failed to demonstrate social responsibility and awareness within his or her society. Derived from the Greek word *idios*, which means "one's own", "personal" or "self-centred", the original meaning of the term "idiot" is not what it means to us today.

Although commonly used today to refer to an individual who is mentally deficient or lacks intelligence, "when the Greeks talked about the idiot, they were in fact

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- Kho Ee Moi,

Humanities & Social Studies Education  
Academic Group, NIE



An Institute of



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To nurture caring and aware citizens, Ee Moi advocates a Head, Heart and Hands approach in citizenship education.

Rather than just being concerned with their own needs, we need our students to be aware of what is going on around them.

- Ee Moi on preparing students to become caring and engaged citizens

thinking of it in terms of a citizen who was only concerned about his or her own selfish needs and selfish wants,” explains Ee Moi. “The idiot is somebody who is not interested in the public life and doesn’t care about what happens in the public sphere.”

In a world that holds much future uncertainty however, it is crucial to educate our young to take an active interest in public life and international affairs. As a global city, Singapore cannot afford to ignore global developments, be it international disputes or climate change.

“This is why citizenship education in Singapore is very important. Rather than just being concerned with their own needs, we need our students to be aware of what is going on around them,” says Ee Moi.

### Teaching against Idiocy

In his article *Teaching Against Idiocy*, Walter Parker discusses what it means to teach young people against idiocy and argues that schools are ideal sites for citizenship education.

According to Parker (2005), educating for citizenship is to inculcate in learners public virtues essential for the cultivation of democratic citizens. As a public space where diverse individuals gather, the school environment gives students the opportunity to learn to get along with and cooperate with others who may have different perspectives and values from themselves. The school is also likely a child’s “first real exposure to the public arena”, making it an ideal space to nurture social consciousness and values like tolerance, respect and dignity.

“As such, educators should recognize the important role they play in getting students to be aware of and concerned about the world around them,” says Ee Moi. For effective citizenship education to take place in the classroom, she advises educators to take a *head, heart and hands* approach.

### Nurturing Head, Heart and Hands

To *understand* objectively, to *care* and to *act* effectively—these are essentially what *head, heart* and *hands* refer to in citizenship education.

#### Head Knowledge

The *head* is the basis of citizenship. Before one can understand the meaning or significance of a situation, one has to first be knowledgeable about the issue at hand. “The *head* refers to knowledge of key issues both within the society and in the global sphere that all students need to become informed citizens,” Ee Moi explains. With that awareness, students will be better able to understand and make reasoned, rational decisions.

The study of History, Geography and Social Studies in school equips students with this knowledge base. “They learn about Singapore history and local issues such as land scarcity as well as other global developments through these subjects,” says Ee Moi. Schools also strive to equip students with critical thinking and critical literacy skills to make sense of information and assess the reliability of different sources of information.

#### Heart in the Right Place

The *heart* concerns an individual’s attitude and values. Besides having *head knowledge*, a good citizen is one who is good at heart and concerned about what is happening around him or her. As Professor Marvin Berkowitz explains in the article “Fostering Character and Values”, “We need kids to not just tell us what the core values are, but also to really care about them. Teaching to the heart is very different than teaching to the head” (SingTeach, 2014).

With an understanding of issues grounded by strong core values, students will be better prepared to contribute responsibly to society.

### It's in Our Hands

With a social conscience and the ability to think critically, the next step is preparing students for active citizenship. "We need to have participative citizens in society," says Ee Moi. Schools should encourage students to take a stand on issues and act to address them as participation will give them a voice in issues and a stake in society.

### Teachers as Role Models

To help students acquire the skills and attributes to become socially responsible citizens who care about and seek to improve their communities, Ee Moi believes that teachers themselves have to first take an active interest in social issues and contribute to society.

"Teachers play a pivotal role in influencing their students' attitudes and beliefs," she says. "Their words and actions have a great impact on students, especially primary school students."

Even though students tend to view subjects like Social Studies and Civics and Moral Education as unimportant because they are often non-examinable, teachers must realize the importance of these subjects in building character. "Not examinable doesn't mean it is not important," says Ee Moi. This makes the role of teachers all the more vital—they must work towards changing students' mindsets by making Social Studies lessons meaningful and impactful.

In school, the humanities subjects offer avenues for students to explore and reflect on citizenship issues and are paramount in creating informed, caring and active members of society. "I hope that by sharing good practices, teachers will understand how to engage students in a more meaningful way to communicate key values, concepts and understandings," says Ee Moi.

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**Kho Ee Moi** is Senior Lecturer with the Humanities & Social Studies Education Academic Group at NIE. Her research interests include social studies and history education, gender in education, and girls' education in Singapore.

## Research

### Preparing Globally-Minded Citizens

*With increasingly transnational flows of people, cultures, ideas, technology and capital, preparing our young to live in a global society has never been more important. Associate Professor Mark Baidon explores global citizenship education across three global cities to understand the challenges and opportunities teachers see in terms of preparing young people for this global context.*

#### Global Citizenship Education

Singapore being a global city presents the challenge of educating our young to live in a global society and a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. In this present landscape, global citizenship education offers a way to understand the role of citizens in a global society in the 21st century.

While some may view citizenship in national terms, focusing on local issues and patriotism, living in a global society is about recognizing that global issues like social injustice, climate change and war can equally affect us and require us to take action to resolve them.

"Hopefully teachers can have an appreciation that citizenship is multi-layered—always grounded in the local context, but also national and global," says Mark. With globalization, even our identities have become multiple and complex, derived from ethnicities, religions, political affiliations, as well as transnational influences like social media.

"Citizenship education should therefore help young people understand and address pressing social issues that are not only local, but also affecting nations and communities everywhere."

To understand how global citizenship education is viewed and taught in different contexts, Mark analyses curriculum and interviews school leaders and teachers in both international

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**- Associate Professor Mark Baidon, Humanities & Social Studies Education Academic Group, NIE**





It is important for teachers to think about the nature of critical thinking they want students to engage in, not just to be better workers, but also to challenge assumptions, think critically about policies and government decisions, and form their own conclusions.

- Mark on how teachers can help students develop critical skills for civic literacy

and local schools to observe how curriculum is implemented in three global cities: Singapore, Hong Kong and New York.

### Citizenship Education in Different Contexts

There are differences in the way young people are educated for citizenship in Asian and Western contexts, shares Mark. “While Western societies tend to have a stronger political and individual focus, in Asian societies it is about producing moral citizens, and tends to be more communitarian in nature.”

One common finding about citizenship education across the three cities is that they tend to be fairly nationalist and seek to prepare students to become productive workers and consumers. This reflects an emphasis on economic development and growth. In order to be prepared to deal with a wide range of issues however, it is important that students are able to think critically and make informed decisions about a range of complex social issues.

“It is important for teachers to think about the nature of critical thinking they want students to engage in, not just to be better workers, but also to challenge assumptions, think critically about policies and government decisions, and form their own conclusions,” explains Mark.

Take the issue of global climate change for example. For students to see how they can help address the problem requires an understanding of not just the economics, politics and history of climate change, but also the different narratives of what “progress” is.

“We have to help young people understand these multi-faceted considerations so they can take informed actions,” says Mark.

### Addressing Global Social Issues

The new issues-centred and inquiry-based Social Studies curriculum in schools strives to do this by dealing with what it means to live in a global society, not just economically, but also in terms of immigration, climate change and threats of terrorism. Investigation into key issues is also encouraged, and students are given the opportunity to conduct inquiry into issues that are important to them and the larger global community.

Some schools allow students to identify what issue they want to learn more about and take action around. Doing so acknowledges that action also involves getting students to care about these issues. “If we care about things, we’re willing to help and improve things around us,” says Mark.

With this flexibility, students may choose from a wide range of topics to research and take action. Some may choose to investigate the impact of the K-pop phenomenon on Singapore culture; others may find themselves inclined towards heavier topics like poverty or discrimination.

Although many of these global problems can seem daunting or impossible to manage due to their complexity, global citizenship education should guide students to start looking at what they can do locally to understand and address these problems.

### Action at the Local level

“Global citizenship education is always local, because these issues impact us at the local level,” shares Mark.

There is always action that can be taken at the local level, whether in schools or local communities. With technology and social media allowing us to easily connect with people across contexts, these actions can also have transnational impact. This allows like-minded people to come together to bring about change, not just locally but also globally.

Mark cites the example of the transboundary haze problem in Southeast Asia. As local consumers, we can be more informed and refrain from buying products from companies that have contributed to the problem, work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to address the issue, or draw on local research to better understand the problem.

At the end of the day, teachers need to start thinking about the opportunities there are for students to be involved. “They have to engage their students, get them to care, and help them realize they are empowered to take action to make a difference,” says Mark.

With a range of global issues confronting us, the need to continually prepare our young to understand these issues and take informed actions is imperative. Teachers play a big role in nurturing not just critical thinkers, but also caring and moral people who can be responsible global citizens.

**Mark Baidon** is Associate Professor and Head of the Humanities and Social Studies Education Academic Group at NIE. His scholarly interests focus on ways to support Social Studies inquiry practices and 21st century literacies in new global contexts.

## Classroom

### Trailblazing Humanities Lessons

*Schools have begun to realize that the usual pen and paper approach is not enough to engage students in the learning of humanities subjects. One school that has tried to keep the subjects relevant and relatable through innovation is Clementi Town Secondary School. Teachers from the Humanities department share how they literally blazed new trails to bring their subjects to life, exposing students to important local and global issues, and nurturing in them a concern for their surroundings.*

Observing that students often struggle to see how the humanities connects to the real world and is relevant to their lives, the Humanities department at Clementi Town Secondary School (CTSS) decided to explore alternative teaching strategies to foster interest in the humanities.

“We wanted to re-engage our students, and at the same time emphasize the acquisition of critical thinking skills,” says Mdm Yehidaah Beevi d/o Shaik A.

Despite conducting learning journeys to expose students to issues on the ground, teachers at CTSS found it difficult to capitalize on teachable moments because of large class sizes. A review of their Social Studies curriculum in 2008 found that the students had difficulty with certain skills like cross-referencing and trouble with particular topics as a cohort.

“We decided to re-look how we did our learning journeys and reach out to students through the ways they learn best,” says Yehidaah. “Our students like hands-on experiences and are comfortable with technology, so we decided to find a way using technology.”

#### **Inquiry-Based Mobile Trails**

This led to the school’s first digitally integrated trail at Bukit Timah Nature Reserve that focuses on developing students’ historical investigation and geographical investigation skills.

“We wanted students to experience nature because they found the subjects dry when we taught the syllabus in the classroom,” shares Mdm Tay Soo Chin Emmeline. “Students were excited about the trail and felt they learned a lot more through it. They liked that they were able to see and feel what they were studying about.”

#### **Developing a New Appreciation for Our Surroundings**

Encouraged by positive feedback, the teachers decided to create a heritage trail in the Clementi area near the school that would address topics students struggled with in the Social



*Humanities teachers from CTSS find that heritage trails have changed their students’ perspectives of humanities subjects and helped them gain a better understanding and appreciation for their surroundings.*

## Online Extras!

Read more about the Bukit Timah Nature Trail and Clementi Town Heritage Trail in the online version of *SingTeach*.

It is interesting to see the students picking up these inquiry skills quickly through the trail. They respond with wonderment at learning something they never knew about a place so near to them. With technology, the process is fun and relevant.

- Tay Soo Chin Emmeline  
on the positive response of  
students to the Clementi Town  
Heritage Trail

Studies curriculum, particularly the topic of social cohesion in Singapore. National Education (NE) Student Ambassadors helped to curate the trail by conducting first-hand interviews with residents, identifying significant places in Clementi and digging up historical nuggets.

"We chose to create a trail in Clementi because many students are from this neighbourhood. We thought it might be an interesting way to get them to learn more about their neighbourhood. At the same time, it shows them that history is not limited to what they learn in their textbooks. It could be as simple as where they live," says Ms Sheetal Madhukar Sonawane.

The experience is also a chance to build identity as the opportunity to uncover the history of their neighbourhood helps students gain a deeper appreciation for their lived environment. "In this way, building a sense of Singaporean identity starts from home and school," says Sheetal.

With their teachers' guidance, students learn to analyse the data collected and how to cross-reference different sources (e.g., archives, notes, interviews, and pictures), skills that are transferable to their examinations.

"It is interesting to see the students picking up these inquiry skills quickly through the trail. They respond with wonderment at learning something they never knew about a place so near to them. With technology, the process is fun and relevant," says Emmeline.

### Building Awareness of Global Issues through Photojournalism

Photojournalism is another initiative that CTSS introduced into its Humanities curriculum to expose students to topics and issues beyond their textbooks. Started in 2008 as part of the Global Watch programme, the programme engages upper secondary pupils in inquiry-based project work. Students research global issues ranging from war and revolution to environmental issues, health and women's role in politics to construct stories through photos, presentations, roleplays, documentaries and creative first-hand accounts of eyewitnesses that reflect their learning.

"As the Social Studies curriculum requires students to analyse source-based questions and decontextualized elements, they will benefit by knowing what is happening in the world around them," says Yehidaah.

Emmeline adds, "At the same time, we want them to practise the inquiry-approach and put together all the data, research and photos to tell a story and educate others."

Students are briefed on the project at the beginning of the semester and work in groups to complete the project that culminates in a photojournalism exhibition held in conjunction with the National Education Commemorative Days. To keep the initiative fresh and relevant year after year, the teachers constantly think about how to improve the exhibition while ensuring it aligns with the Humanities syllabus.

### From Informed to Active Citizens

This year, in alignment with the syllabus that now includes discussion-based pedagogies, a new exhibition format was introduced. "Instead of just viewing their friends' exhibits, we hope to facilitate more conversation through a conference-style day where students conduct workshops their friends can sign up for," shares Ms Ee Wen Lin Sandy.

As the syllabus moves towards investigation of social issues and developing responses to these issues, the project now also involves students brainstorming strategies to solve problems. "This is where active citizenship comes in," says Sandy. Beyond understanding these issues, students are encouraged to go a step further to consider possible solutions. "Learning to critically think about and evaluate solutions really helps re-focus students."

With greater emphasis on helping students to become informed, concerned and participative citizens, it is vital that they are both exposed to social issues and equipped with the necessary critical skills to solve them. This is something the school continues to work towards through its innovative programmes.

Sheetal explains, "These programmes have existed since 2008 and are still in place because we refine and adjust them according to the needs of our students. What is important is to always seek to improve. The programmes may take different forms and have different names, but as long as they are relevant, the curriculum innovation will stay."

**Yehidaah Beevi d/o Shaik A** is Head of Department (Humanities), **Sheetal Madhukar Sonawane** is a History and Social Studies teacher, **Tay Soo Chin Emmeline** is Senior Teacher (Geography), and **Ee Wen Lin Sandy** is Covering Subject Head (Humanities) at Clementi Town Secondary School.



# Building Character for Citizenship Education and Success

*As a young boy, Mr Sulaiman Bin Mohamad Yusof faced emotional challenges and struggled academically. Today, he is Principal of Naval Base Secondary School. Sulaiman attributes his success to one important factor—having the right attitude. He thus understands the importance of having a strong character education programme in school and how it impacts citizenship education and ultimately, individual success.*

### Why do you think character education is important?

My belief in the importance of character education stems from personal experience and observations of students and fellow educators who have become successful individuals.

During my growing up years, I faced many difficulties at home and school—I lost my father when I was 10 and struggled academically in secondary school. Nevertheless, I was able to overcome these challenges and get to where I am today not only because of the guidance my teachers provided, but also because of my character traits that brought out the best in me.

Beyond personal experience however, I have also observed that character attributes play a greater role than inborn talents and socioeconomic background in enabling many of my past and present students, and colleagues to overcome challenges and achieve success. So it is really about having the right attitude for success.

### How does Naval Base Secondary School promote character education?

At Naval Base Secondary School, we believe that a strong character education programme facilitates the holistic development of students by imparting the values and attitude that would enable them to achieve success and impact others positively. This belief is encapsulated in our vision “Leaders of Character, School of Excellence” and we enact this by making character education the heartbeat of school leaders, teachers and programmes we offer.

There are two components embedded in “Leaders of Character”—performance character (e.g., diligence, grit, resilience) and moral character (e.g., integrity, respect, generosity). These are adapted from Thomas Lickona’s and Matthew Davidson’s (2005) *Smart and Good High Schools: Integrating Excellence and Ethics for Success in School, Work and Beyond*. Students need to have a good balance between performance and moral character to become leaders of character.

Our Learning for Life Programme, which promotes character education through sports, centers on the belief that success is about doing our best and having peace of mind rather than being better than others. Physical Education teachers and teachers in charge of sports Co-Curricular Activities emphasize the importance of sportsmanship and giving our best, which relates to the balance between performance and moral character. For instance, a sportsman who wins a competition by cheating may have performance character but not moral character. In contrast, a capable sportsman who does not win a competition but plays fairly and gives his best exemplifies the balance between performance and moral character.

### What is the role of teachers and school leaders in Naval Base Secondary School in fostering character development?

Teachers are the key drivers of character education in the school and efforts to develop the character of students begin with strong teacher-student relationships. They achieve this by treating students with respect in the same way that they would also want students to respect them. When teachers set good examples, students are better able to connect with them and this connection enables both parties to work in tandem to bring out the best in students.



Teachers are the key drivers of character education in the school and efforts to develop the character of students begin with strong teacher-student relationships.

- Sulaiman Bin Mohamed Yusof  
on the role of teachers in  
shaping students' character

## Online Extras!

Read more about the role of Humanities in Character and Citizenship Education in the online version of *SingTeach*.

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### Sulaiman Mohamad

**Yusof** is Principal of Naval Base Secondary School. He was formerly a History, Social Studies and English Language teacher and had a stint at the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Planning & Development Division, where he was part of the team that developed and implemented the Upper Secondary Social Studies curriculum. He was conferred the President's Award for Teachers in 2006 for promoting innovation and the use of information and communications technology in the teaching and learning of History and Social Studies.

My colleagues and I also believe in disciplining with dignity when we take action against transgressions that students commit. This means that we try to understand the thoughts, feelings and actions of our students but also communicate the consequences of the offence so that they do not make the same mistakes again. This balance between showing empathy and being firm has enabled us to maintain good discipline in the school.

Another aspect of character development the school focuses on is helping students identify and build on their strengths. Before meeting students with disciplinary issues, I will speak to their teachers to find out what their strengths are and when I subsequently speak to them, the first question I will ask is: *What are your strengths?* I had a student who told me he had no strengths and when I listed his strengths, he broke down—that moment marked the start of his turnaround in character.

### What is the relationship between character education and citizenship education?

Character education and citizenship education overlap in many areas and it remains an open question as to whether character education is part of citizenship education or vice versa.

Both character education and citizenship education focus on imparting the right values and attitudes in the individual, family and community. They also share the approach of helping an individual to develop an attribute such as resilience and subsequently extending these efforts to the family and community. When we get to the community level, we are effectively embarking on citizenship education.

Students, however, have to be anchored in good character in order to appreciate the lessons of citizenship education. Otherwise, they can be misguided by the developments and events that citizenship education covers such as the threat of terrorism and racial conflicts in the world. For instance, a lesson on the 1964 race riots in Singapore may negatively excite students instead of convey the importance of safeguarding racial harmony because their values have not been grounded in the right direction from the outset. Values inculcation is thus also a key component of citizenship education.

Ultimately, character education and citizenship education are equally important but the success of citizenship education very much depends on whether students are rooted in good character.

### What advice do you have for fellow educators who wish to incorporate character and citizenship education (CCE) into the classroom?

Set aside time to understand the purpose of CCE and its importance for students. This would give you conviction and clarity about CCE, which is key to conducting an effective lesson for students.

To make CCE lessons relevant and impactful for students, tell stories. In fact, students tend to find CCE lessons engaging and meaningful when teachers share personal stories and experiences because they make the lesson more relatable to students. Apart from personal stories and experiences, you can also share the experiences of your colleagues and friends or use fictional stories to convey the importance of specific values.

Lastly, never teach with the sole aim of getting students to score well in examinations. In Social Studies, for instance, focus on making the learning experience enjoyable and developing students' passion for the subject by making it relevant and alive. Some ways to accomplish this include incorporating ICT-based games or group-based activities into lessons. We should also ask thought-provoking questions to challenge and encourage students to think deeply and inspire curiosity in them. If we can make students excited and curious about the subject's content, we would have succeeded in nurturing their passion for the subject.

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