GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP
&
MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Contents

The Transformative Role of Global Citizenship Education

The world today is grappling with the paradox of digital hyper-globalization and political anti-globalization. On one hand, the pervasive dependence on social media and digital communications has contributed to greater inter-connectedness. On the other hand, there is the growing rise of economic protectionism and a resurgence of nationalism and neotribalism.

In light of these challenges, Global Citizenship Education (GCE) remains key to cultivating critical discernment, multicultural consciousness, empathetic and hospitable dispositions, particularly towards those who may be hurt by the injustices arising from globalization itself.

In Singapore, GCE is of particular importance given her multicultural population and her open economy. Historically, Singapore established her identity as a global city in the early years of her independence. In education, the development of civic, global and cross-cultural literacy is one of the key competencies in the Ministry of Education's 21st century competencies framework.

The vital ethical question for GCE is how do we prepare students to live in a diverse world of difference? More specifically, how can GCE equip students to navigate increasing instances of xenophobia, ethnocentrism and other forms of discrimination that have contributed to forms of polarizations in the world today?

GCE's transformative potential can be understood through the principle of the 3Cs—Connectedness, Care and Change.

First, GCE can provide opportunities for young people to connect with others by reading and learning about other cultures as well as by dialoguing and collaborating with others to address pressing social and global issues.

Second, GCE goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge about the world or intercultural communication skills. More significantly, it seeks to deepen students' cosmopolitan dispositions especially their care for others that goes beyond superficial sympathy to other-centric empathy.

Third, one key purpose of GCE is to empower youths to be change-makers such as becoming bridge-builders, peace-makers and proactive contributors to helping others, and not just themselves, flourish in the world.

By nurturing empathy, critical-ethical sensibilities and a spirit of collaboration, GCE empowers students not just to navigate the challenges of the future, but to collectively shape a more just, inclusive and sustainable world.

Associate Professor Suzanne Choo
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National Institute of Education, Singapore

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FOSTERING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP
in a Multicultural World

I n an increasingly interconnected world, fostering global citizenship and multicultural understanding has become even more crucial. For Singapore —a global city known for its diversity and openness—these values are fundamental to sustaining harmony and progress. In this article, *SingTeach* Guest Editor, a leading educator and advocate for Character and Citizenship Education, shares her perspectives on Global Citizenship Education. Through the lens of her 3Cs principles—Connectedness, Care and Change—she explores how education can prepare students to navigate cultural differences, confront global challenges and contribute to transformative change. Join us as we reimagine education for a more inclusive and compassionate world.

DEFINING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION (GCE)

At its core, GCE can be encapsulated by three Cs: Connectedness, Care and Change. Connectedness urges students to engage with diverse others beyond societal borders, fostering a global perspective. Care emphasizes informed empathy, encouraging students to critically analyze injustices and cultivate genuine concern for others. Change is about agency, equipping students to participate in transformative collaborations to contribute meaningfully to the world.

"This triad forms a powerful framework for nurturing ethically conscious and proactive global citizens," explains Associate Professor Suzanne Choo, who is also Head of Research at NIE's Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education. By integrating these principles into education, GCE not only broadens students' horizons but also inspires them to be thoughtful leaders who embrace diversity and work towards building a more inclusive and equitable future.

WHY GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION MATTERS

In today's increasingly polarized world, GCE holds immense relevance. With the rise of misinformation, deep-rooted prejudices and social divides exacerbated by post-truth narratives and tribalistic thinking, students need the tools to navigate complex global issues. GCE equips learners with critical thinking and empathy to engage in meaningful dialogue with those of differing views. It fosters an appreciation for cultural diversity while emphasizing a shared humanity, helping students transcend parochial perspectives.

Moreover, as globalization continues to connect economies and societies, it becomes essential for education to prepare students for a world that values interdependence and collaboration. GCE not only helps learners understand their roles in global challenges, such as climate change and social justice but also empowers them to act as agents of positive change. By nurturing these global competencies, GCE ensures students are ready to contribute to a more equitable, sustainable and harmonious world.

Suzanne also reminds that Singapore's multicultural society and its identity as a global city make GCE particularly vital. She references a speech by S. Rajaratnam in 1972, where he focuses on Singapore's identity as a "global city" reliant on openness and connectivity for survival. However, Rajaratnam also cautioned that the more challenging task lies in equipping people with the intellectual and spiritual capacities to thrive in such a context.

"Today, the threats of xenophobia, ethnocentrism and other forms of prejudice highlight the need to strengthen multicultural dispositions among Singaporeans," she adds. GCE facilitates a pathway to building these dispositions, ensuring students are prepared for the demands of a globalized world while remaining deeply rooted in values of respect and inclusivity.

BUILDING BRIDGES IN A DIVERSE WORLD

"Increasingly today, we can observe the rise of far-right movements, aggressive wokeism and the spread of post-truths. People retreat into their own tribes, reinforcing groupthink and canceling those who hold different views," Suzanne says.

Such polarization not only disrupts social harmony but also weakens the ability of individuals to engage constructively with differing perspectives. In this context, the role of GCE becomes paramount as it teaches students to rise above echo chambers and cultivate a sense of open-mindedness necessary to navigate a complex and interconnected world. "It's about equipping learners to engage in respectful dialogue, even with those whose views diverge from their own, and finding common ground to tackle shared challenges," Suzanne adds.

For Singapore, a global city with one of the most open economies and a rich multicultural ethos, these challenges underscore the importance of fostering empathy and understanding among citizens of diverse races and cultures. Beyond teaching students about different traditions and beliefs, GCE emphasizes the

value of shared humanity. Suzanne explains that this involves instilling not just knowledge but also ethical dispositions, such as compassion and social responsibility, that are necessary for coexistence.

By building bridges across cultural divides, GCE also prepares students for leadership in an increasingly globalized world. Whether addressing climate change, economic disparities, or social justice, the ability to collaborate with people of varying backgrounds and worldviews is crucial. Suzanne highlights that, through GCE, students learn to view diversity not as an obstacle but as a strength—an asset in creating innovative solutions for a better world.

CHARTING THE PATH FORWARD

As Singapore navigates an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, the role of education in shaping empathetic and engaged citizens becomes even more critical. GCE can provide a blueprint for cultivating individuals who are not only aware of the challenges facing humanity but are also empowered to act. Suzanne underscores that this requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders in education—school leaders, teachers, policymakers and parents—working together to embed the values of GCE into all aspects of learning in schools including academic subjects, co-curricula activities and student development experiences.

Ultimately, GCE goes beyond instrumental aims by seeking to nurture a generation of bridge-builders,

peacemakers and changemakers. Suzanne adds, "Education support the development of dispositions including building critical capacities, ethical consciousness and a collaborative spirit needed to navigate a divided world."

By instilling in students the values of Connectedness, Care and Change, we can equip them to not only thrive in a multicultural society like Singapore but to contribute meaningfully to addressing problems in the global community such as climate change and threats of extremism. As educators, the opportunity to shape such transformative futures is both a privilege and a responsibility. Suzanne concludes, "When we nurture global citizens who are compassionate, informed and active, we take a vital step toward building a more just, inclusive and sustainable world."

Through GCE, we don't just prepare students for the future; we empower them to shape it. ■

ABOUT THE GUEST EDITOR

Suzanne Choo is Associate Professor with the English Language and Literature Academic Department at NIE. She is also Head of Research at NIE's Singapore Centre for Character & Citizenship Education. Suzanne's interests lie in issues related to education for global and cosmopolitan citizenship as well as ethics and ethical criticism.

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Nurturing Students to be
ENGAGED AND CONCERNED CITIZENS

The CORE Research Programme is the National Institute of Education's (NIE) flagship study that examines the nature of teaching and learning in Singapore schools. It systematically documents curriculum initiatives, pedagogical practices and student learning across a representative sample of primary and secondary schools. In this article, Dr Fatema Anis Hussain, Research Fellow at NIE, shares insights into how values of global citizenship and multiculturalism are taught in Singapore classrooms and the roles that teachers and students play in this transformative process.

THE CORE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Launched in 2004 after the establishment of the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP) at NIE, the CORE Research Programme is currently in its fourth iteration (CORE 4) and led by the Centre Director of NIE's Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, Dr Dennis Kwek. In this iteration, the programme has a stronger emphasis on the learner's perspective and aims to generate substantive improvements in education. This large-scale study, designed to examine actual classroom practices in Singapore, seeks to answer three questions:

1. How do teachers teach?

2. Why do they teach the way they do?

3. How do students learn?

"The broad objective of CORE is to provide policymakers and researchers with well-informed, timely and evidence-based baseline descriptions and evaluations on the state of pedagogical practices in Singapore schools," Dr Fatema, who has been part of the CORE research team, shares.

Since its inception, the programme has evolved through four phases—CORE 1 (2004–2007), CORE 2 (2009–2014), CORE 3 (2015–2023) and CORE 4 (2023–present). CORE 4 takes a closer look at the instructional core (City et al., 2011) of teaching and learning, prioritizing learner perspectives to drive meaningful improvements. This impact is made possible through a tight research-practice-policy partnership between NIE and the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE).

"In Phase 1 of CORE 4, we examined Primary 5 Social Studies classrooms across 22 schools, observing 170 lessons," Fatema explains. Data collection methods included classroom observations, teacher interviews, focus group discussions with students, and surveys for both teachers and students.

VALUES ARE BOTH TAUGHT AND CAUGHT

Focus group discussions with Primary 5 students revealed that they often learn values like respect, harmony, resilience, responsibility and collaboration in Social Studies lessons. Students also noted that the lessons emphasize respecting cultural diversity, considering multiple viewpoints and open-mindedness.

"The students also highlighted that teachers emphasize other merits such as care for the community and the environment, and exercising integrity," Fatema adds.

The team also found that 15% of the lessons emphasized civic literacy, and the focus on global literacy was stronger (27% of the lessons). Primary 5 Social Studies teachers frequently connected concepts across different contexts, drew on personal experiences, and encouraged students to do the same—strategies essential for fostering cross-cultural literacy.

The Social Studies curriculum (MOE, 2020), which focuses on understanding Singapore and Southeast Asia, includes topics like physical environments, customs and traditions. Through classroom talk and the tasks students engage with, teachers often emphasized respecting different cultures and appreciating other beliefs and customs. About 15% of the lessons explicitly focused on fostering social cohesion and cross-cultural understanding.

"We find that teachers clearly emphasize the need to respect different cultures especially when travelling, and

being appreciative of beliefs, customs and traditions," Fatema says.

To spark curiosity, teachers used methods like tapping into students' prior knowledge, incorporating engaging materials like videos and anecdotes, and framing lessons with open-ended questions. "Values are both taught explicitly and caught implicitly through the teacher's actions and classroom environment," Fatema adds.

DEFINING CHALLENGES AND EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES

Fatema notes that the findings highlight significant trends. For instance, while students are engaged in 90% of the lessons—often initiating questions and comments—they rarely bring up current affairs or sensitive topics for discussion.

"There is a bright side to this observation," Fatema shares. "The good news is that students are engaged in 90% of these lessons where they will initiate a question, comment, or remark on their own, without an explicit stimulus by the teacher." Students sharing on their own is necessary in developing cognitive engagement. The team also observed that teachers play their part by increasing the frequency of asking more open-ended questions rather than closed questions in a whole class setting, compared to an individual or group context.

The team frame their findings in line with the curricular focus and the 21st Century Competencies (21CC) framework (MOE, 2023). The findings indicate that skills and values such as communication, personal responsibility (i.e., in the use of information), informed decision-making and individual empowerment (i.e., making a change/difference) are hardly emphasized.

"From a multicultural perspective, we need to create more opportunities for students to engage with value-laden issues openly," Fatema says. However, she acknowledges that it requires training and willingness on the part of both teachers and students to address controversial and sensitive topics in the classroom.

The findings indicate a gap in emphasizing skills such as informed decision-making, personal responsibility and empowerment to drive change, which are key to enabling civic participation especially so in a multicultural society like Singapore. However, the increased use of open-ended questions, student initiations and multiple perspectives in classrooms shows promise.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH IN SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOMS

The CORE Research Programme offers a comprehensive view of Singapore's education landscape. Its findings inform strategies for professional development and highlight areas where pedagogical practices can evolve.

"There's an increasing emphasis on 21CC, such as critical and adaptive thinking," says Fatema. "Teachers are encouraging students to engage with different perspectives and tolerate ambiguity—essential skills for navigating complex issues."

While assessing the impact of values education remains a challenge, teachers observe changes in students' behaviour as an indicator of learning. Fatema emphasizes the value of both explicit teaching and implicit modeling in instilling these values.

Through the CORE Research Programme, NIE continues to provide actionable insights that empower educators to nurture students as engaged, thoughtful and socially responsible citizens. The ongoing focus on global citizenship and multiculturalism ensures that Singapore's education system remains responsive to the challenges and opportunities of an interconnected world. ■

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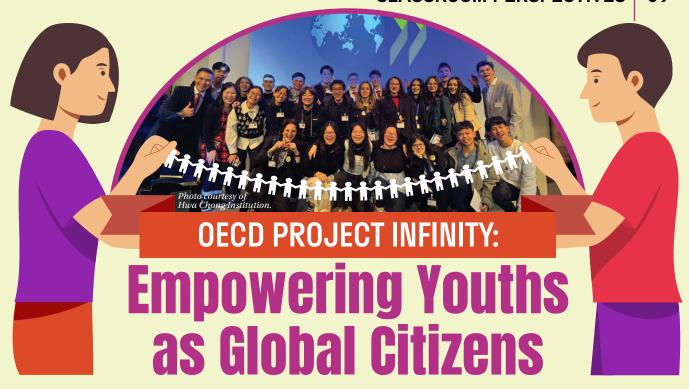
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ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE

Dr Fatema Anis Hussain *is Research Fellow at Asian Languages & Cultures, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University. As part of the CORE Research Programme, Fatema has been involved (2010-2024) in baseline studies of pedagogical and assessment practices across a range of subject domains at the primary and secondary school levels in Singapore. Fatema's doctoral work was a designed-based research study focused on student feedback practices and beliefs about feedback in EL classrooms. Her research interests include social studies, assessment, metacognition, classroom talk including teaching of controversial issues, and teachers' professional development. Recently, she has co-authored a book chapter on formative assessment practices in primary science classrooms (Hussain & Kwek, 2024).*

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Photo courtesy of Hwa Chong Institution.

OECD PROJECT INFINITY:
Empowering Youths as Global Citizens

Grounded in the belief that youths are the changemakers of tomorrow, "Project Infinity"—an initiative launched in 2023 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—brings together students and teachers from over 100 schools worldwide. As these students forge closer connections online, they tackle issues within their local communities and gain insights into challenges faced by the broader global society. Two teachers from Hwa Chong Institution, one of the participating schools in this initiative, share with us their experiences.

ENHANCING STUDENT AGENCY

"Project Infinity is underpinned by key constructs of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Learning Compass, a learning framework that identifies key competencies students need to thrive in an increasingly complex and evolving world," Dr Edwin Lim, Lead Teacher (Character & Citizenship Education) at Hwa Chong Institution (HCI), shares.

He notes how Project Infinity has an overarching focus on student agency, competencies and well-being—which are also key concepts central to the Learning Compass. "The main goal of Project Infinity is to empower students to apply and demonstrate agency-building competencies in practical, real-world contexts working towards the well-being of their school and society," he says.

Adopting an interdisciplinary project-based learning approach, Project Infinity saw HCI students undertaking projects that connected them with underprivileged children and Vietnamese migrants in Singapore as well as their own HCI peers.

"Education is not only about academic success, but it is also about empowering individuals to lead flourishing, fulfilling lives and contribute to a more inclusive society," he emphasizes.

NURTURING YOUTH LEADERSHIP THROUGH COMMUNITY PROJECTS

"Schools involved in Project Infinity are first organized into clusters, with each cluster comprising a number of schools from different countries," Mrs Lim-Huang Shufen, Subject Head (Chemistry), explains. "HCI, the sole representative from Singapore, has been grouped with schools from Estonia, Israel, Romania and Ukraine."

Out of 50 HCI students who interviewed to be part of Project Infinity, 12 were selected and divided into three global teams (GT 1, GT 2 and GT 3). "Each team began with a kick-off meeting via *Zoom*, where students introduced themselves and shared insights about their countries, cultures and traditions, before progressing into project discussions in subsequent meetings" she says.

Photo courtesy of Hwa Chong Institution.

Drawing from the 11 key dimensions identified by the OECD Better Life Index as contributors to well-being (such as education, health, environment and life satisfaction), each team selected one area as the focus of their project.

GT 1

"GT 1 focused on tackling educational inequality," Shufen shares. "The HCI students from this group centred their efforts in helping local children from less privileged or low-income families enhance their digital literacy skills."

The students partnered with the Providence Care Centre in Jurong to organize workshops during the November school holidays. "The initiative received positive feedback from both the participants and the centre, prompting a second round of workshops during the following March school holidays," she remarks.

To extend the impact within their own school community, the students are developing instructional packages for their schoolmates on the effective use of common applications such as *Padlet* and *Kami*.

GT 2

"GT 2 focused on improving life satisfaction," Edwin shares. "The HCI students decided to focus on supporting the children of Vietnamese migrants in Singapore."
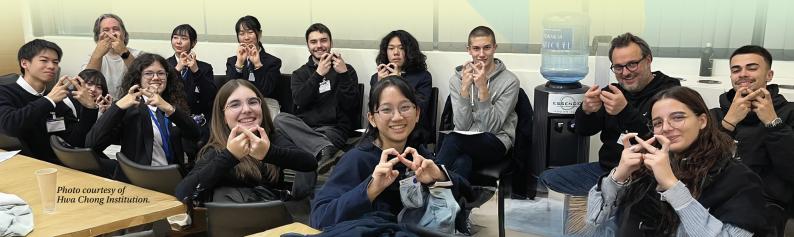
The students applied positive psychology concepts, including the PERMA™ model, to motivate and help the children with their academic performance and overall well-being. With the knowledge and experience they gained, the HCI students went on to extend their efforts to the broader school community by conducting workshops on well-being for their schoolmates as well as volunteers.

"In the workshops for their schoolmates and volunteers, the students introduced the principles of positive psychology, explained the PERMA™ model and PROSPER framework, and guided the participants in discovering how to apply these models to enhance their own well-being," Edwin explains.

GT 3

"GT 3 focused on jobs and income. The HCI students decided to work on building financial literacy among their schoolmates," Edwin says.

The HCI students organized financial literacy workshops for their peers and invited financial experts to share their expertise. To extend their reach, they also leveraged social media to promote the workshops and share key takeaways that they have learnt.

Photo courtesy of Hwa Chong Institution.

WHY GLOBAL COMPETENCE MATTERS

HCI collaborated with the Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education to track and evaluate students' growth in their values, intercultural competencies and global citizenship development.

One notable observation is that the experience has broadened the HCI students' perspectives and exposed them to the various challenges their global counterparts are facing.

"For example, through their interactions with students in Ukraine, they learn what it is like living amidst a conflict and having to sit through lessons while hiding in an underground bunker for safety, where electricity and Internet connection are regularly disrupted," Edwin says. "This cultural awareness fosters empathy among students, allowing them to forge deeper connections with others."

Shufen echoes this sentiment and hopes that the HCI students' involvement in the three community projects will shape them to become future leaders who create meaningful and lasting impact within their communities and beyond.

"Building empathy among students cultivates a sense of responsibility and compassion. This emotional connection can inspire them to advocate for social justice and contribute positively to the betterment of society," she remarks.

The experience has also strengthened HCI students' global competencies, including their ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries.

"They have learnt how to adapt their communication styles and engage with people from various backgrounds, which are essential skills in today's globalized workforce," Edwin says.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Project Infinity culminated in a year-end global event that was held at the OECD HQ in Paris, France. "The 'OECD Students and Teachers Summit', held in December 2024, gave students the opportunity to showcase the projects they have been working on," Edwin shares. "The event also featured a multi-stakeholder dialogue where stakeholders discussed and reflected on the lessons learnt and the implications on education policy internationally."

Discussed at the summit, besides the OECD Learning Compass, was the upcoming OECD Teaching Compass, a professional development framework currently being designed for teachers.

"The OECD Teaching Compass highlights the types of capacities teachers need in order to empower their students to flourish in a rapidly changing world. Built around the three pillars of teacher agency, well-being and competencies, the Teaching Compass emphasizes that teachers are central to educational innovation and impact, and the need for capacity building and lifelong learning," Edwin remarks.

The OECD work in 2025 will focus on the applications and implications of generative AI on student and teacher agency, competencies and well-being.

"It's exciting to be part of this international networked learning community of educators who are shaping the future of education and skills together. It's an open, inclusive global family, and any of our Singapore teachers and school leaders who are keen to learn or contribute are welcome to participate," he concludes. ∎

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEES

Edwin Lim is Lead Teacher (Character & Citizenship Education) while Lim-Huang Shufen is Subject Head (Chemistry) at Hwa Chong Institution.

Empowering Students for a Changing World:
A Global and Social Justice Perspective

Professor Wiel Veugelers, a renowned expert on citizenship education from the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht, offers fresh insights into the evolving concept of citizenship in today's interconnected world. Beyond political engagement, he emphasizes the growing importance of cultural, social and environmental dimensions in shaping global citizens. Drawing on his extensive research and cultural comparisons, he explores diverse approaches to global citizenship. In this excerpt from his talk at the recent joint conference by NIE's Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education and Seoul National University's Character Education Research Center, he inspires educators to present varied perspectives while empowering students to become thoughtful, inclusive contributors to global democracy.

DEFINING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

As part of my membership of the Programme Advisory Committee of the International Study on Citizenship Education, the definition of citizenship education I have come up with comprises three parts.

Firstly, education for citizenship is about acquiring the abilities and attitudes necessary for an individual to **participate** in political and civic life on a local, national and global level. The second part of citizenship education is about learning to **relate to others**— particularly to those with different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Lastly, there is the **direction, or purpose**, that can imply concerns for the sustainability of humanity, the planet and of democracy.

EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP

The concept of citizenship has changed over the past decades; I call this a deepening of the concept of citizenship. At first, citizenship was only formulated on a political level and was about political life. However, nowadays it is also about the social and cultural life, about how to live together, about what our cultural heritage is, and about things like our important books and our language. The social and cultural levels, and even our relationship with nature, have become part of citizenship over time. I refer to this as the process of deepening. Deepening means that citizenship focuses strongly on the identity development and character development of the people.

Traditionally, the concept of citizenship was about the nation and the region, but the concept has been broadening from the national and regional to the global level. With the broadening of the concept of citizenship, global citizenship has also grown to be a big concept that includes many aspects of our life and that also influences the identity development of young children, young people and future citizens.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF GLOBAL CITIZENSHIPS

After doing some research projects on global citizenship education, studying the literature and doing some empirical studies, I have been able to distinguish three difference types of global citizenship.

First, we have an open global citizenship. This is a neoliberal market ideology of openness, open to the world and other cultures, and very market oriented.

It's not very easy to find real philosophers of this kind of global citizenship.

Next, we have a moral global citizenship. This type of citizenship is about appreciating diversity, enhancing humanity, and taking care of the world, and is a moral call for a better world for all of us. This is articulated in particular by Martin Nussbaum and by David Hansen of Columbia University.

The third one is what I call a socio-political global citizenship. The moral global citizenship has been criticized due to not being political enough, and that global citizenship should also challenge power relations and ask for social justice. As such, the socio-political global citizen is more oriented to change power relations. This type of citizenship tends to be influenced by people like Paulo Freire and Chantal Mouffe.

RESEARCH AND FINDINGS ON GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

In an interview with 10 Dutch teachers, I presented the different orientations of global citizenship to them and asked them about what they thought.

These teachers found an open and more global citizenship important, but not so much a socio-political citizenship. Several teachers said that they know values are always embedded in social and political relations, but they preferred to focus on the moral level and were reluctant to focus explicitly on political values and on more transformative ideas, in particular.

The more I thought about it, the more I felt I could understand them. In the Netherlands, and many other countries, it is not common to speak a lot about social and political power relations. They do not play much part in the formal curriculum and are not commonly practiced in schools. As such, individual teachers end up not paying much attention to social and political power relations. However, it is my opinion that teachers should still show that the socio-political global perspective is still a part of global citizenship education. I do not ask them to support this idea, but to at least pay attention to it.

In another research I conducted, I used my moral and citizenship students from the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht and reached out to students from the citizenship education programme at Yogyakarta State University. I then asked these two groups of students about how important they find the three different orientations of global citizenship, articulating more on the socio-political global citizenship aspect.

Based on my findings, the Dutch and Indonesian students did not have many differences in their opinion of open global citizenship and moral global citizenship. Interestingly, I found that the Indonesian students were far more socio-politically oriented than the Dutch students. While the Dutch students wanted to stay more on the moral level, the Indonesian students wanted to go beyond and focus on the socio-political level.

This shows the importance of operationalizing global citizenship. Often, many people say that the Western people are more aligned with global citizenship than those from the global south. However, my findings showed that the Indonesian students were more politically engaged than the Dutch students. As such, it really highlights the importance of articulating what you mean by global citizenship and global citizenship education.

DEVELOPING GLOBAL CITIZENS

To develop global citizens, we can look into the different elements of democracy.

First, we have the freedom of speech that allows people to develop autonomy. Next is that active participation and engagement in political life, civil society and in the community. Lastly, we can gather individuals from all levels of society to foster deliberation and dialogue and build consensus with one another.

Developing global citizens in this manner can help to make society larger, richer and more inclusive by giving everyone a chance to participate in democracy and in society. However, it is important to realize that people have different ideas and practices of democracy.

It is also important to note that the educational ideologies of each society shape and influence the global society.

Overall, it is important to have a pedagogical strategy for global citizenship education. I think it is very important that teachers show different perspectives in all kinds of ways, show that the political aspect is indeed part of citizenship education, and focus on the values embedded in social and political power relations. Lastly, teachers should show different perspectives without taking a strong political stance, thus giving the students the democracy and possibility to articulate their own position. ■

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Professor Wiel Veugelers is a leading scholar and educator specializing in global citizenship and citizenship education. His work focuses on fostering active participation in civic and political life, promoting democracy and social justice, and nurturing intercultural understanding. Veugelers has extensively researched the evolution of citizenship concepts, highlighting the interplay between cultural, social and political dimensions. Through his studies, he emphasizes the importance of moral and socio-political perspectives in education, advocating for pedagogical approaches that empower students to critically engage with global issues and develop as responsible, inclusive global citizens.

Cultivating Cultural Intelligence for a
Globalized Future

I n an increasingly interconnected world, cultural intelligence—the ability to understand, appreciate and collaborate across diverse cultures—has become a necessary skill. Recognizing that schools play a crucial role in cultivating culturally responsive and inclusive environments, Alexandra Primary School has developed an initiative under its Learning for Life Programme that aims to nurture civic literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural competencies in students. Two teachers from the school, Kavitha Annadhurai, Head of Department (Character and Citizenship Education), and Priscilla Chiang, Head of Department (English Language), share more about the initiative and how it prepares students for a globalized future.

Kavitha Annadhurai
Head of Department
(Character and Citizenship Education)

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS TO LEARN ABOUT DIVERSE CULTURES, AND HOW DOES THE SCHOOL ENCOURAGE THIS?

In today's global landscape, cross-cultural competency is essential for fostering understanding and global citizenship. As part of Alexandra Primary School's Learning for Life Programme (LLP), we have developed an initiative called the "Cultural Intelligence (CQ)—The Code of Life". It is designed to empower students with 21st Century Competencies that are vital for navigating culturally diverse environments, such as civic literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills.

Through the initiative, students engage in authentic experiences that empower them to communicate effectively, collaborate meaningfully and resolve conflicts in multicultural contexts. Activities include the Values-in-Action (VIA) programme, where students participate in cultural exchanges with local and international schools, and contribute to community efforts. These interactions make learning deeply relevant, enabling students to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world applications. By fostering these competencies, we prepare students to adapt and thrive within and beyond Singapore's multicultural society.

WHAT IS A KEY TAKEAWAY FOR STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE LLP?

The LLP's initiative that focuses on CQ is centred on four key factors of Drive, Knowledge, Strategy and Action—which are meaningfully integrated into our school's curriculum and co-curriculum. Each component is tailored to students' developmental stages to ensure relevance and impact. The various dimensions of culture are explored through an Integrated Social Studies curriculum, hands-on VIA projects, and local and international exchange programmes. For example, participating in National Education (NE) commemorative events helps students develop a sense of civic pride and cultural awareness. These opportunities provide a stimulating environment where students practise empathy and adaptability.

By actively engaging in such experiences, students internalize these skills, becoming empathetic and culturally adept individuals. These attributes not only prepare them for future challenges but also foster a mindset that values diversity and inclusion in all aspects of life.

Priscilla Chiang
Head of Department (English Language)

HOW DO YOU THINK DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF OTHER CULTURES CAN PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE?

Developing CQ equips students with the skills needed to navigate an interconnected world with confidence and competence. Our LLP emphasizes that culture encompasses more than nationality or ethnicity—it includes differences in age, gender and social roles, among others.

Using the C.A.R.E. model—Curiosity, Awe, Respect, and Engagement—students cultivate CQ Drive, which motivates them to interact meaningfully across cultures. These interactions are grounded in the school values of harmony, respect and empathy, reinforced through daily activities and developmental experiences.

Through CQ Knowledge, students deepen their understanding of cultural norms and values, enabling them to strategize thoughtfully for diverse contexts. For instance, they learn to consider the dietary preferences of others or adapt their communication styles during engagements. Finally, applying these strategies leads to CQ Action, where students navigate cultural differences with flexibility and skill.

This comprehensive approach fosters mutual respect and highlights shared values, enabling students to collaborate meaningfully across diverse groups.
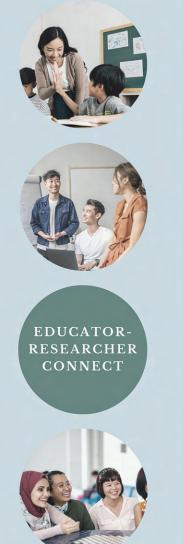
CAN YOU SHARE A STORY OF HOW THE LLP HAS HELPED STUDENTS CONNECT WITH OTHERS FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS?

A memorable example is the Primary 5 VIA project, where students interacted with elderly participants. To prepare, they practised speaking in Chinese dialects, anticipating this would enhance communication. However, they quickly adapted to using English when they discovered it was more effective for engagement.

This shift demonstrated the students' ability to think adaptively and respond to real-time situations. Moreover, they displayed patience and encouragement while guiding the elderly through craft activities, fostering a positive and inclusive atmosphere. Their sincere efforts were evident in their supportive tone and heartfelt praise for the elderly participants' work.

The elderly participants frequently express their appreciation, often returning enthusiastically for future events. These meaningful interactions highlight the importance of empathy, adaptability and cultural awareness, underscoring the LLP's impact. By fostering these qualities, we aim to nurture students as cultural brokers who can bridge divides and contribute to a more harmonious world. ∎

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Educator-Researcher Connect

The Educator-Researcher Connect (or ER Connect) is a platform that aims to bridge researchers from the National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore, and local teachers and school leaders in an effort to deepen, enhance and advance education research in Singapore. If you are interested to collaborate and be part of any NIE research project(s) listed in the ER Connect, based on your school's or your needs, please get in touch with the relevant Principal Investigator directly.

The list of research projects on the ER Connect page will be refreshed periodically. We encourage you to share about ER Connect with your fellow colleagues in your school. We hope that providing such information will serve to reduce the research-practice gap and inspire you to embark on an education research journey alongside NIE experts.

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