

vol
05 | 20
12

re*in*eed

research in education at the National Institute of Education, Singapore

citizenship
education

■ contents

Editorial 02

Lessons from the Playground 03

Life Lessons in Resilience 04

Social Problem-solving Skills through Gaming 05

Building Character from the Inside Out 06

Citizenship Education in Dynamic Times 08

Diversity in the Singapore Classroom 10

Research Highlights 11

Editorial



Asst Professor Jasmine Sim
Asst Head, Graduate Programmes
Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
National Institute of Education

CITIZENSHIP DISCOURSE in the past prioritized rights, responsibilities and political participation. Recent discourse, however, has seen a shift towards emphasizing values and character. Education for citizenship has been transformed in the last decade by globalization. Today, our world is much more multi-faceted and interdependent than before. This has foregrounded concerns about morals, values and responsibility, especially in relation to the environment, international finance, communication and new media, and issues of equity and social justice. Globalization is changing what young people need to know and be able to do in order to be effective citizens.

How to educate for effective citizenship depends on recognizing the assumptions behind the goals of such education. What does the effective citizen look like in “new times”? What knowledge, skills, values and dispositions are necessary for effective citizenship? What factors and conditions facilitate such development? How do we educate students in ways that will develop and promote national identities while also trying to educate students to be more cosmopolitan and global in their outlook and skills? There are longstanding tensions between educational agendas that regard knowledge or praxis as the primary tools for citizenship education. This issue features six different projects that attempt to put the theory–practice nexus into action to address different aspects of citizenship in “new times”.

Michael Chia, Jessie Ee and Vivien Huan focus on students and learning. Their projects provide a

refreshing take on how we can develop students’ social, emotional and intellectual health. Lee Wing On, Jasmine Sim and Kim Koh, and Ho Li-Ching and Theresa Alviar focus on teachers and pedagogy. They explore how teachers understand and put into practice contested concepts of citizenship and diversity. We also feature NIE’s service-learning and character-building programmes, helmed by Vilma D’Rozario and Low Ee Ling, and the objectives and the beliefs behind them.

A few commonalities cut across these projects. First is the focus on developing what Lee Wing On* calls “future-oriented citizenship”. Second, research into education for citizenship often involves multi-disciplinary lenses. Third, as Education Minister Heng Swee Keat* reminded us, citizenship education is like growing a bamboo tree—we will not be able to see the results overnight. The impact will take time to manifest, and it requires alternative ways of evaluating. Finally, these projects explore citizenship attributes that facilitate our students to be dynamic and open to diversity, and to see the meaning of citizenship in daily living. A better understanding of the socio-emotional self can lead to more conscious behaviour and action to actively contribute to the community. It is in this way that values and character are intimately connected with citizenship. ■

**Prof Lee spoke about the concept of future-oriented citizenship in his keynote speech at the inaugural Character and Citizenship Education Conference held in November 2011 in Singapore. Minister Heng used the bamboo tree analogy in his opening address at the same event.*

EDITORIAL TEAM

Lee Wing On
Lin Ai-Leen
June Teng Poh Hoon
Vinothini Muneaswara
Jarrod Tam Chun Peng

ReEd (*Research in Education*) is a research bulletin aimed at sharing our research contributions with the global community. This is an initiative of the Office of Education Research at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore.

For enquiries, email ailen.lin@nie.edu.sg

Building Character from the Inside Out

Re

PROJECT TEAM

Programme Leaders Vilma D’Rozario, Low Ee Ling

Staff Phyllis Kok, Stephane Cheung, Nurul Shaheerah Bte Kamas Ali, Raminah Bte Silap, Managa Edhurajan, Tan Hui Ling, Tan Bueh Hua

IT ALL began in 2002, when two student teachers volunteered to organize a trip overseas to serve a community in Sikkim. Enriched by what they had experienced, the two boys started NIE’s Service Learning Club upon their return.

It wasn’t long before service learning caught on and the idea of Group Endeavours in Service Learning (GESL) was mooted. The rest, as they say, is history.

Service Learning Today, GESL is compulsory for all who enrol in NIE’s initial teacher preparation programmes. Working in groups of 20 for up to 9 months and mentored by an academic staff member, student teachers plan outreach programmes to meet real needs in a local community.

The goal of GESL is perhaps best summed up in these words by Tim Stanton, one of their consultants from Stanford University: “I serve so that I may learn from you. You accept my service so that you may teach me.”

The experience gives student teachers opportunities to acquire values like empathy,

collaborative learning and social responsibility. “We give our student teachers the opportunity to reach out to and engage the community,” explains Associate Professor Vilma D’Rozario.

The initiative is also closely aligned with MOE’s 21st century competencies and student outcomes (see Figure 1), specifically the development of social and emotional learning.

Learning in Communities Perhaps a more important objective of GESL is that it prepares them for their role as teachers in time to come. “How can our student teachers expect to teach the kids these values if they themselves haven’t gone through the experience of service learning?” GESL provides just such an opportunity for them.

“It’s *service* to the community as well as *learning* from the community. The community becomes your teacher,” explains Vilma. “You’re not doing something to them, but you’re doing something *with* them, and you learn in the process.”

“In finding out more about the community, they learn more about the community and about themselves,” she adds. These are best learned by

The team from the Office of Teacher Education, led by Vilma and Ee Ling (back row, 3rd and 4th from left).



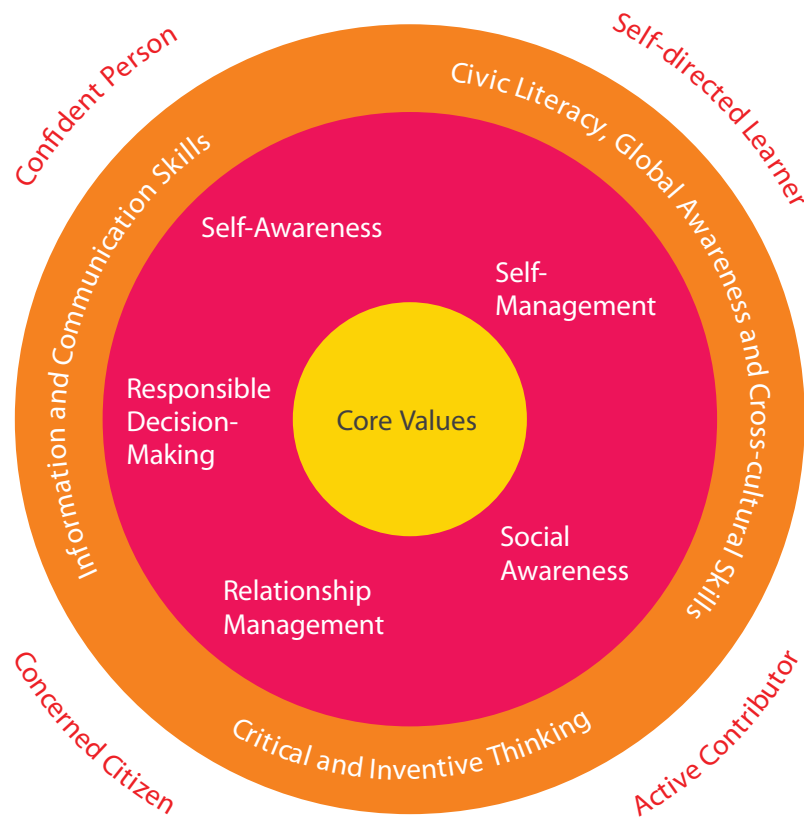


Figure 1. MOE's framework for 21st century competencies and student outcomes.

doing rather than taught in a classroom teaching: "You can't really teach those things."

It's a reciprocal process, she says. "Respect the people you serve, humble yourself to learn from the community, so the people you serve are your teachers. Once they can grasp that, they learn so much from the community."

Heart Work "Every group has their story," shares Vilma, who is also Sub-Dean of Student Counselling and Liaison in the Office of Teacher Education, which runs these programmes.

One group decided to reach out to migrant workers in Singapore when they discovered this overlooked community. Interacting with these down-and-out workers dispelled many wrong assumptions and gave the group a different view of these people.

Another group planned a 4-day programme for a children's home. The experience so inspired them that a few wanted to continue serving there after the project ended.

Stories like these, and the overwhelmingly positive feedback, affirm that they're doing something right. "I believe that in order for a person to grow, you have to have experiences where you serve," says Vilma. "You will never be able to learn it in a classroom. You have to experience it."

Growing the Self Since 2004, over 15,000 students have been involved in service learning projects through GESL. But reaching out to the community is only one side of the coin. Another initiative in NIE's efforts in character building is the Meranti Project.

Named after a native hardwood tree to symbolize resilience and hope, Meranti is a compulsory 2-day experiential programme to help our student teachers look within and reflect on what it means to be a good teacher.

"We encourage them to look through their life journey and to reaffirm their choice to teach," explains Vilma. "They are asked to think about how they can be part of MOE's vision for the teaching service to *lead, care, inspire.*"

The programme also reinforces the importance of national education, especially in the context of increasingly diverse classrooms. Student teachers are asked to reflect on how they can "give life" to the values they seek to impart.

Working in tandem, GESL and Meranti have clearly been helpful for our student teachers in building character. "They don't believe it until they are in it," notes Vilma. "Once they are in it, then they see its worth, and they see how they can use their takeaways later on when they teach." ■