

## **Curricular-Instructional Gatekeeping in Singapore: How Teachers Enact Social Studies and Give Purpose to Citizenship Education**

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### **KEY IMPLICATIONS**

- Many teachers are nation and character-centric in their conceptions of citizenship.
- Teachers adhered to boundaries when engaging in controversial issues.
- There is a need to nurture more critically-reflexive teachers.

### **BACKGROUND**

This study focused on how Singapore teachers enact the social studies curriculum and give purpose to citizenship education, using the concept of the teacher as a curricular-instructional gatekeeper. It provided a detailed description on the conceptualizations of citizenship among social studies teachers. The Singapore context is characterized by the dominant role of the institutional curriculum in terms of the centralized system of education, the role of the Ministry of Education, and the prescribed curriculum and examination. Unlike studies carried out in the United States that ignored the role of the institution, the negotiation of the institutional curriculum was foregrounded in this study.

### **FOCUS OF STUDY**

This study provided portraits or detailed description, analysis and explanation of the

conceptions of citizenship and enactment of social studies by experienced social studies teachers in Singapore. More specifically, the research questions were: (1) How do teachers conceptualize citizenship?; and (2) How might one distinguish one conceptualization from another?

### **KEY FINDINGS**

The 25 teachers fell into three citizenship typologies: character-driven citizenship, social-participatory citizenship, and critically-reflexive citizenship. Character-driven citizenship can be described as citizenship exemplified by being a person of good character and high morals. Most teachers subscribed to this type of citizenship. They saw their role as teacher-citizens as being moral guides to their students. Qualities such as loyalty, resilience, and kindness were valued and upheld in their own lives. Social/participatory citizenship involves active participation in the social life of the community. Two teachers held this particular citizenship conception. These teachers cared that students were useful citizens and emphasized the connection between knowledge and action in citizenship. Critically-reflexive citizenship involves deep political awareness, a strong belief in fairness and justice, and a critical examination of not just the systemic structures and relationships in society, but of the self as part of this system. Five teachers exemplified critically-reflexive citizenship.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Social studies must not only be a socializing force to induct children into existing cultural values, behaviours, and practices, but it also must act as a counter-socializing force, a platform for students to think about the root causes of problems, and for them to challenge existing social, economic, and political norms as a way to strengthen society (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). Most governments are inclined to keep the status quo and avoid confronting structural injustices. But we argue for a greater emphasis on critically-reflexive citizenship education. Critically-reflexive citizens are committed to the improvement of their pluralistic society and serve as thoughtful and constructive critics of public policies and practices.

## PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 25 teachers from 16 schools who were purposefully selected based on years of

experience, ethnicity, and gender. To ensure inclusivity, the participants come from government, government-aided, and Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used the multiple case study design, a multisite qualitative approach (Stake, 1995). It involved over a year of intensive participation in the field. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The raw data were read multiple times for possible interpretations, and hand-coded and aggregated into meaningful categories.

## REFERENCES

- Engle, S.H., & Ochoa, A.S. (1988). *Education for democratic citizenship: Decision making in the Social Studies*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Stake, R.E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc.

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