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
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.
Lessons from the Playground

PROJECT TEAM

Principal Investigator  Michael Chia, National Institute of Education, Singapore
Collaborator  Swarup Mukherjee, National Institute of Education, Singapore

Not only does it break the monotony of the traditional school day, the gains from play extend beyond the physical: “There’s the social, the developmental, and the academic.”

Teachable Moments

Underlying PfP is the principle of ensuring the social, emotional and intellectual health of our young.

“It’s not just play; there’s all sorts of other learning that is unforced.” Mike calls these “teachable moments”. “When children play, they are in a very natural environment; it’s not threatening. Therein lies opportunity.”

So instead of getting pupils to imagine how to manage conflict, as they would in a Civics and Moral Education lesson, play time provides an authentic learning experience. “They learn about managing conflicts, how to negotiate, how to get along with different people.”

And because teachers play alongside their pupils, play time allows for rich interactions. Teachers and students can also see different perspectives of each other, thus building relationships. “It fosters a natural setting and this spills into the classroom.”

BY SHAVING

off 3 minutes from each of their 10 periods, one primary school gave its pupils a whole 30 minutes of uninterrupted play time every day, without adversely affecting lesson time.

This was a result of “PRIDE for PLAY”—a research initiative on Personal Responsibility In Daily Effort for Participation in Life-long Activity for Youths (PfP) led by Professor Michael Chia.

PfP enforces a protected time for pupils to play freely within a safe environment every day that is beyond regular Physical Education (PE) lessons.

“People think play is only for young children, but play evolves throughout a person’s lifetime,” says Mike. “PfP is about trying to maximize personal responsibility to make a daily effort for play.”

Making Time for Play

“Movement is the pre-condition for learning, the precursor of all learning, in fact!” says Mike, who is Singapore’s first Professor of Education in Paediatric Exercise Physiology.

Research shows that sitting for too long is counter-productive to learning. “What’s the point if your lesson is very interesting, but the pupils are already mentally tired?”

By enforcing a daily play time, before or after recess, Mike says, “You get their hearts beating, their blood circulating. They come back more alert because they have expended some of their nervous energy.”

Sustained Efforts

Trialled in three Singapore primary schools, PfP has seen great success. It has even received international commendation.

Mike says PfP not only contributes to the child’s whole-person development, but to the whole-school experience of learning. Having a play culture now can also effect a national sports culture in future.

“We’re fighting an uphill battle because children today are more sedentary than before. They will choose a cyber sport rather than a physical sport.”

But its success is contingent upon sustained and committed efforts at all levels. “It cannot be just PE or CCA teachers, it has to be the entire school. And it’s not just in school, it’s lifelong.”
Life Lessons in Resilience

Principal Investigator  Jessie Ee, National Institute of Education, Singapore
Co-Principal Investigator  Zhou Mingming, National Institute of Education, Singapore
Research Assistants  Lynn Chiam, Ong Chew Wei, National Institute of Education, Singapore

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) has been high on Singapore’s education agenda to help students acquire important life skills for the 21st century.

The Ministry of Education has identified five core competencies that students should possess: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship management, and responsible decision-making.

Dr Jessie Ee believes that SEL provides a foundation for 21st century skills. “It is a wonderful step to values and character development in students,” she says.

Mastering Emotions  “Human beings are emotional beings,” explains Jessie, who is Associate Professor in NIE’s Psychological Studies Academic Group. “Anything can trigger our emotions, and sometimes we might not react positively.”

Her answer is metacognition. “It’s thinking about our thinking. It relates to our conscious awareness of our emotions, feelings and reflections, and our ability to monitor our thinking as we process the situation.”

Jessie believes metacognition is a good mediator for SEL because social-emotional processes are fundamentally linked to cognitive processes. “If you are aware about your thinking, you can control your dispositions, goals and behaviours.”

As we reflect on our actions, we can view situations more rationally, solve problems more critically, and make sound decisions.

Building Resilience  Metacognition makes us more aware not only of ourselves but also of our surroundings. “It helps us to see things from different perspectives—that makes us more socially aware.”

It is this awareness that makes us concerned citizens, which in turn makes for a more civic society. “If we exercise this from young, children will be more reflective and controlled. You might have a better generation, and this will make us a better society.”

For Jessie, SEL boils down to one word: resilience. She sees a need to build resilience in our students so that they will not give up so easily.

Predicting Achievements  Research shows that SEL influences academic achievement in the long run. The benefits of building resilience early extend even to students’ working lives. “If we build students’ confidence, they can recognize their strengths and choose the right jobs, and thus won’t job hop.”

“It is important that parents and teachers recognize that SEL is the way to go,” Jessie stresses. “They need to affirm and guide them in their strengths, and how to self-manage their emotions.”

The role of teachers cannot be underestimated. Teachers need to believe in SEL and have high SEL themselves in order to infuse these skills into the content knowledge they teach.

“For some teachers say they can’t see the benefits of SEL in the short term, but values and character take time. If they infuse it into daily lessons and living, it will help.”

While it may take a bit of effort, Jessie sees SEL as a necessity. “It’s not just for enhancing character and values, but for developing the whole being. It prepares them for the 21st century. It’s for everyday living!”

Empowering Metacognition through Social-emotional Learning
IS IT possible for students to learn social skills through gaming? Some teachers may hesitate to agree but not Dr Vivien Huan. In fact, she’s creatively and confidently using game technology to aid the socio-emotional development of the IT-savvy generation.

To hone the social problem-solving skills of pupils, she and her colleagues have developed a computer game called Socialdrome®.

Teaching through Games Socialdrome is targeted at 9- to 12-year-olds. It is based on a training manual for school counsellors by educational psychologist Rebecca Ang from the Nanyang Technological University.

The game requires players to navigate around an island and complete 10 missions to obtain the formula and ingredients for a magic potion. Each mission has key learning objectives, such as recognizing and managing emotions, co-operating with others, and handling difficult situations.

The team wanted a fun medium that would captivate children. They even got 12 pupils to test the game prototype to ensure that the game design is child-centred. Their suggestions were incorporated into refining the game.

Helping Kids Early Having worked with at-risk teenagers, Vivien is interested in helping kids who struggle with anger or anxiety problems.

“If they’re helped earlier, then they may not have to succumb to expressing their anger in the wrong way and hurting people as a result,” she explains.

As juvenile crimes typically peak at the age of 15, Vivien aims for early intervention. Socialdrome is her response.

“We need to help these kids instead of waiting for them to get into trouble, and then try to help,” she says. “By then, it’s too late.”

Learning Life Skills For Vivien, this is a natural progression. “We flip books; they slide pages,” she says of the children today. Even 5-year-olds are downloading apps on smartphones. To reach out to these digital natives, we have to keep up with the times.

“We don’t want a game for a game’s sake,” she adds. The goal is to provide a well-rounded education for our pupils in the 21st century, and that means not just coaching pupils academically but imparting essential soft skills that strengthen their character.

Socialdrome has been rolled out to schools and the team is now evaluating the data and feedback. Vivien is excited to see if the game will really benefit pupils.

“We don’t want to just build on their cognitive capacities. We want to build their character as well,” adds Vivien. “Ultimately, it’s to let kids acquire good social skills that will carry them far in life.”
Building Character from the Inside Out

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
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.”


Teachers as Active Agents

For a start, a large-scale survey has been carried out to understand teachers’ perceptions of citizenship education. This is followed up by interviews with selected teachers as well as classroom observations later on.

The research team asked teachers what they thought were the most important qualities of a good citizen, and were reassured to find that teachers still value “traditional values” like behaving morally and ethically, tolerating diversity, and being responsible to the family.

From prior research, Jasmine has found that teachers are not passive recipients of policy. They are curriculum gatekeepers—active agents who interpret the various policies in their own terms and assign different levels significance to the curriculum.

“No classroom is the same,” says Prof Lee. “Different teachers may interpret a policy differently.”

Practising Citizenship

Citizenship also has a personal dimension, notes Prof Lee. “That means, how the teacher demonstrates himself or herself as a role model, someone the students would look up to so that they would feel convinced.”

Their findings so far indicate that teachers do not participate actively in their communities, even though they teach their students to.

This finding has intrigued them because it was also found to be true of teachers in other countries—including the US, UK, Australia, China and Russia, where this survey has been administered—not just in Singapore.

“It has a lot of pedagogical implications because teachers are asked to teach something they don’t do,” says Prof Lee.

Assessing Character

While it is still early days, the team is excited about what they will find. They hope to identify a collection of good practices that they can share with the teaching community.
“This project will allow us to know how well our teachers are teaching CCE in a very complex cultural context,” says Kim. In addition, she says the project will help inform policymakers as well as improve teacher education in NIE.

They also hope that their findings would provide insights on how citizenship can be assessed, which is something the teachers have expressed concerns over.

“It is not as straightforward because these are attitudinal perceptions,” explains Prof Lee. “While cognitive tests have an indication of right and wrong, we cannot be absolutely sure whether a particular attitude is right or wrong, or the degree of right and wrong.”

Prof Lee argues that citizenship attributes are closely related to 21st century skills. Understanding the assessment of citizenship may suggest directions for measuring 21st century skills.

He says, “We hope that we can take citizenship education to a whole new level.”
Diversity in the Singapore Classroom

PROJECT TEAM

Principal Investigator  Ho Li-Ching, National Institute of Education, Singapore
Co-Principal Investigator Theresa Patricia Alviar, National Institute of Education, Singapore

SINGAPORE SOCIETY brims with diversity. Think of the many languages, religions and ethnic groups that co-exist. This diversity is seen in our classrooms as well. It is now common for students in local schools to learn alongside peers from countries like China, Korea, the Philippines and Australia.

How are teachers dealing with diversity in the classroom? And how is this diversity changing the dynamics in schools? These are questions Dr Ho Li-Ching and Dr Theresa (Tracey) Alviar want to find answers to.

Multinational Classrooms  “The widely accepted definitions of diversity in Singapore usually centre on the CMIO (Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others) model,” says Tracey. But with more foreigners settling in Singapore, we’re also fast becoming a “multinational” society.

And while diversity in the Social Studies curriculum still focuses on race and religion, many teachers are also looking at diversity in more “expansive” terms, such as socio-economic status and gender.

The typical classroom today may have a mix of students with different values and understandings on all of these issues. What impact will this have on our society? How should teachers deal with these differences?

“I do genuinely feel that it’s important for these issues to be dealt with in schools,” says Li-Ching, who used to teach Social Studies in a secondary school.

They also want to give teachers a chance to voice their concerns about teaching diversity and multiculturalism. “I enjoy talking to these teachers and seeing how they really care about their students,” says Tracey.

Some may wish to venture beyond race and religion when teaching about diversity but face curricular, systemic and societal constraints. Whether they have the support of the school management, for example, is an important factor. Time, or the lack of, is another.

Teaching Diversely  Li-Ching’s advice to teachers is to “tap on their own experience and draw parallels to the Singapore experience, so that students are looking at the larger, broader issues.”

This is an important first step in improving the way we are educating our students to be citizens of a diverse society and helping them find their place in a global world context.

“Teaching Diversely” is one of the strategies suggested by Ho Li-Ching and Theresa Alviar, co-principal investigators of a research project funded by the National Institute of Education.

They hope their research will add to the discussion on diversity in the Singapore classroom.
In the News

CCE Conference 2011

The inaugural Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) Conference was held on 8 and 9 November 2011, on the theme of “Active and Concerned Citizens: Building Character for Community”. Jointly organized by NIE and the Ministry of Education, the conference highlighted the importance of engaging stakeholders in synergistic efforts to nurture our students to be good citizens. Slides of the various presentations, including Prof Lee Wing On’s keynote speech “Education for Future-oriented Citizenship: The Implications of Education for the 21st Century Competencies”, can be downloaded at www.cce2011.nie.edu.sg.

Award-winning Research

In 2010, PRIDE for PLAY® won the World Leisure International Innovation Highly Commended Award. It is one of only two research projects in the world that received this commendation. The World Leisure International Innovation Prize seeks to recognize organizations that have implemented creative solutions which foster local, national and international leisure opportunities for the benefit and development of individuals and communities. Projects were benchmarked and assessed by an international panel against six criteria—innovation, quality, clarity, simplicity, impact on participants, and sustainability.

Publications on CCE

Journal Articles

Last year was a productive year for NIE colleagues Jasmine Sim, Theresa Alviar and Ho Li-Ching. These are some of the recent publications arising from their work in citizenship diversity and multicultural education:


Edited Books

How are students in Asia and the Pacific taught to be effective citizens? Citizenship Pedagogies in Asia and the Pacific (2010), edited by Kerry Kennedy, Wing On Lee and David Grossman, provides insights based on 13 case studies from across the region. This volume is the third in a series on citizenship education published by Springer and the University of Hong Kong’s Comparative Education Research Centre.