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## Neoliberal Education? Comparing *Character* and *Civics* Education in Singapore and *Civics* and *Citizenship* Education in Australia

- Character education focuses on the development of personal/moral values while civics education focuses on development an understanding of civic rights and responsibilities
- An exclusive character education approach towards citizenship education can inadvertently reinforce the negative effectives of neoliberalism on the society.
- Balance need to sought between developing moral and democratic values, emphasizing commonalities and embracing differences, individualism and solidarity and the extent of politics on civil life
- Advancing critical thinking solely for the purpose of achieving economic competitiveness can cripple citizens' ability to deliberate about societal issues and weaken the democratic base
- Neoliberalism can impact on citizenship education and citizenship education can in turn reinforce the impact of neoliberalism on the society.

**Purpose:** This paper compares citizenship education in Singapore and Australia. While discussions have been made about education and neoliberalism, few have explored the direct connections between citizenship education and neoliberalism.

**Approach:** Though a discussion of country contexts, citizenship education policies and curriculum, 'Character and Citizenship Education' in Singapore and 'Civics and Citizenship education' in Australia are examined to explore the meanings of 'Character education' and 'Civics education' and their connections with 'Citizenship education'.

**Findings:** The distinct use of terms for citizenship education suggests that the two countries hold different citizenship ideals. Set within the context of globalisation, the paper argues that some approaches towards citizenship education can inadvertently work towards supporting the goals of neoliberalism, which can be at odds with the classical tradition of democracy.

### Keywords:

Citizenship education, character education, civics education, values education, social studies

### 1 Introduction

A key goal of education is to prepare individuals for effective participation in democracies (Dewey, 1916; Reid, 2002). This area of learning is commonly known as citizenship education or civics education. Other terms like values education, moral education or character education have also been used to describe curricula that prepare young people for participation in societies. However, some approaches are more effective in preparing for democratic participation than others. Especially when democracy is imprecise and continuously developing (Crick, 2008; Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Giroux, 2004; Reid, 2002), it is possible for a wide spectrum of conflicting groups to claim democracy (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). Even among countries with similar political orientation and within each country, democracy can mean many things to many people (Cook & Westheimer, 2006; Zyngier, Traverso, & Murriello, 2015). Depending on their political ideologies, tensions exist between those who

view citizenship education as a form of political liberation and democratic emancipation, and those who see it as a necessary form of social control and socialization (Cogan, Morris, & Print, 2002; Crick, 2008).

In recent decades, discourses of citizenship have been influenced by globalization (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006). In Singapore and Australia, globalization has impacted citizenship education through the rise of the neoliberal ideology and consequently, the practices of governments (Baidon & Alviar-Martin, 2016; Connell, 2013; Howard & Patten, 2006; Reid, 2002; Zyngier et al., 2015). With the challenges brought on by globalisation, both countries began reconsidering the purposes of education, leading to education reforms taking place around the same time in the last ten years.

Using Singapore and Australia, two countries that purportedly champion democracy in the Asia-Pacific region as a platform for discussion, this paper considers how differences in views about democracy can influence approaches towards citizenship education. This comparison highlights tensions, complexities and contradictions involved in citizenship education by examining the relationships between character, civics and citizenship education. Discussions concur with Howard and Patten (2006) that unless countries are explicitly committed to democratic citizenship, citizenship education will be shaped by the 'dominant ideology' of neoliberalism (p. 454).

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## 2 Conceptual framework

This paper views democracy as desirable and the ultimate goal of citizenship education as effective democratic participation. Reid (2002) stresses that since educational and democratic change are inextricably linked, the way democracy is understood and practiced needs to be considered. While some consider democratic concepts as universal and without an East-West distinction, others challenge this universality with the different interpretations in Asian and Western societies (Kennedy & Fairbrother, 2004). However, Kennedy and Fairbrother (2004) raises Stein's (2002) view that it is crucial to develop critical tools to understand citizenship education from a transnational perspective, suggesting a way exists to understand citizenship education in 'the richness of its local contexts while recognizing its commonalities, shared values and aspirations in developing an intelligent citizenry' (p. 289).

This paper uses Dewey's (1934) philosophy of experience, which mandates the identification of citizenship education goals and the experiences to achieve these goals, to explore the purposes of citizenship education in Singapore and Australia. Stein's view is adopted and citizenship education goals and experiences in Singapore and Australia are discussed.

## 3 Goals and experiences of citizenship education

Although democracy can take varied interpretations, Engle and Ochoa (1988) suggest that there are basic beliefs that transcend the interpretations and it is possible to identify key competencies that citizens need for democratic participation. Classical conception of democracy has a moral ideal, viewing social life as constituted by the core values of positive freedom and political equality (Reid, 2002). Contemporary discussions about democracy largely revolve around politics and active citizenship (Crick, 2007). The underlying idea is that democratic participation should not be 'a matter of subservience to power or blind loyalty to the state', but should involve 'a willingness to be responsible for the state and to engage at all levels in the decisions that chart its course' (Engle & Ochoa, 1988, p. 18). From this perspective, the civil society is politicised and citizens participate in decision-making.

The implication for citizenship education is a shift from merely teaching knowledge to emphasising individual experience and searching for practices to promote attitudes and behaviours that addresses issues of human rights and democratic citizenship (Audigier, 2000). Giroux (2004) identifies one of educators' challenges as providing conditions for students to address knowledge related to self-definition and social agency. For him,

"If educators are to revitalize the language of civic education as part of a broader discourse of political agency and critical citizenship in a global world, they will have to consider grounding such pedagogy in a defence of militant utopian thinking in which a viable notion of the political takes up the primacy of pedagogy as part of a broader attempt to revitalize the conditions for individual and social

agency, while simultaneously addressing the most basic problems facing the prospects for social justice and global democracy' (Giroux, 2004, p. 36)

In brief, 'skills of reasoning and judgement', 'dialogue' and 'discovery of 'new' knowledge' is necessary to evoke students' critical consciousness (Johnson & Morris, 2010, p. 80). This reinforced the view that democracy is not just a type of government, but also a way of living with people whose experiences and beliefs may differ with one another (Crick, 2003). As such, effective experiences for citizenship education include whole school, cross-disciplinary approaches (Cogan & Dericott, 1998; Reid & Gill, 2009; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010; Tudball & Brett, 2014), with deliberation incorporated throughout the school processes and curriculum (Cogan & Dericott, 1998; Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999; Tudball & Brett, 2014).

## 4 Neoliberalism and citizenship education

Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has become one of the dominant ideological discourses developed in response to globalisation (Baildon & Alviar-Martin, 2016). Neoliberal discourses and practices impact government policies for education and training, influencing and reconfiguring school operations in capitalist societies to produce 'highly individualised, responsabilized subjects' who are entrepreneurial in all dimensions of their lives (B. Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 248). A new political contest is created from economic market-driven globalisation, pushing an alternative global civic agenda and challenging the citizenship concept and the structures and practices of democracy (Reid, 2002). Essentially, education becomes the means to prepare students for survival in the global economy (Baildon & Alviar-Martin, 2016). The rise of neoliberalism has strong implications for citizenship education and they need to be identified to frame the analysis of citizenship education in Singapore and Australia.

Neoliberalism can create tensions and contradictions to the goal of advancing individual and social agency towards social justice and global democracy. This is because the 'capitalist economy, the rule of law, and democratic polity do not automatically go hand in hand' (Frazer, 1999, p. 6). Howard and Patten (2006) liken the effects of neoliberalism to the 'shrinking of the realm of the state' through citizen empowerment because while personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, individuals are responsible and accountable for their own actions and well-being (Harvey, 2005). In conflicts, a good business climate is often favored over collective rights, causing proponents of neoliberalism to be 'profoundly suspicious' of democracy (Harvey, 2005, p. 66). When social movements seek collective interventions, neoliberal states often use international competition and globalization to 'discipline movements opposed to the neoliberal agenda' (p. 70).

What then, are the direct impacts of neoliberalism on citizenship education? Broadly, two key influences can be identified.

First, citizenship education for neoliberal ends tends to narrow the realm of politics. The civil society is portrayed as apolitical, beyond the sphere of state authority. Active citizenship in neoliberal societies focuses on developing personal capacities as self-reliant members of the society - someone who contributes through individual enterprise and private voluntary institutions and charity is likely to become a substitute for state intervention (Howard & Patten, 2006).

Second, neoliberalism limits classroom-based exploration of societal issues (Baildon & Alviar-Martin, 2016). Although the skills of innovation, criticality or problem solving may be evident in neoliberal curriculums, these skills are 'couched within rationalisations such as preparation for work or addressing demands in the global economy' (p. 66).

With globalization, Singapore and Australia are not immune to the effects of neoliberalism (Gopinathan, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Howard & Patten, 2006; Zyngier et al., 2015). Neoliberalism has impacted citizenship education in both countries. Equally, the approach and design of citizenship education can reinforce the impact of neoliberalism, creating a cycle of supporting neoliberalism through citizenship education and neoliberalism impacting citizenship education.

## 5 Country context

Singapore and Australia are located in the Asia-Pacific region. Singapore is an Asian state with a population of 5.61 million. Australia is a Western nation with a population of approximately 24 million. Singapore's contemporary history is summarised as transitions from a British colony to self-government in 1959, being part of Malaysia in 1963 and finally gaining independence in 1965 (Chia, 2015). The Ministry of Education in Singapore centrally controls education and schools mainly work under the directives of the Ministry. Compared to Singapore, Australia has a longer history as a nation, tracing back to 1 January 1901 when the Australian Constitution came into effect. Australia was established as a constitutional monarchy and follows a federal system of government. Powers are divided between the federal and state governments. Constitutionally, state and territory governments are responsible for the regulation of school education, administration and funding of government schools. The federal government however, still maintains significant control on education through support such as funding and financial assistance.

Both nations are characterised by multi-cultural migration and seek to cope with the changing natures of their societies and economies brought on by globalisation and immigration. It is crucial for both countries to stay socially cohesive and economically competitive (Heng, 2012; MCEETYA, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2011). In recent years, Singapore and Australia have been working towards establishing closer economic and social ties. Despite the close relationship shared and largely similar economic and social challenges, the two countries continue to hold very different political ideologies.

Political ideologies influence how democracy is viewed and the forms that citizenship education takes. Australia is a liberal democracy (ACARA, 2015) while Singapore has been alluded with the civic republican (Sim & Print, 2009) or communitarian tradition (Chua, 1995). This means that the society's conception of the good can take precedence over the individual rights of citizens (Peterson, 2011). For Singapore, the conception of the good is rooted in the 'survival' ideology, emphasizing social cohesion and economic growth.

While the Australian democracy is based on the Westminster model (ACARA, 2012), Singapore leaders have consistently emphasized that the Westminster model is not appropriate for all and that nations must be allowed to develop their own forms of human rights - a form that takes into account the cultural context for its expression (Gopinathan, 2007). The neo-Confucian ideology is 'a sensible alternative framework for socio-economic and political organisation' for Singapore (p. 59).

Singapore leaders have also consistently emphasized the 'survival' rhetoric because she is a small island with no natural resources except a strategic location (Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004). Singapore is heavily reliant on external trade, which forms a major component of her economy. At independence, Singapore was fraught with crises, student unrests, strikes and racial riots and Singapore had to face the 'triple challenges of nationalism, decolonization and communism' (Chia, 2015, p. 31). These challenging experiences provide the context for emphasising a sense of vulnerability and survival in the years that follow. It is this deep sense of vulnerability in Singapore's economic and geo-political milieu and the fragility in social fabric (Chia, 2015), that education becomes an integrative mechanism to serve two key purposes - develop social cohesion 'by ensuring continuing collective commitment to the nation and active participation in the goals of national development' and promoting economic development 'by providing skilled human resources' (Green, 1997 p. 60).

In this way, the neoliberal discourse is reinforced through Singapore's 'survival' rhetoric. Gopinathan and Sharpe (2004) notes two features of Singapore education that are particularly relevant to nation-building efforts - the policy of *meritocracy*, which promised opportunities for everyone based on merit and the *bilingual* policy which is associated with social and moral education programmes in school. However, despite their success in securing economic progress and social cohesion for Singapore, these policies appear to set the scene for either a 'shrinking of the realm of state' or a limitation of citizens' role in thinking critically about social issues.

First, policies of meritocracy are important for wealth generation and ensuring economic competitiveness for Singapore. During the economic crisis of Western capitalism in the 1980s, Singapore policy makers easily identified with the new right conservatives' neoliberal sentiments that the ideology and institutions of progressive welfare states were responsible for inefficient governments and a lack of economic competitiveness

(Gopinathan, 1996). For example, instead of opting for comprehensive schooling to enhance equity, Singapore implemented the streaming system to channel students into different academic pathways according to their academic performances at school (Gopinathan, 1996). This created contradictions between policies of meritocracy and moral/civic education as meritocracy intensify individualism and challenges the formation and action of group allegiances (Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004). The neoliberal rhetoric is reinforced through 'heightened competition and individualism', and individual reponsibilization reduces social responsibility to produce entrepreneurial subjects best suited for the neoliberal workplace (B. Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 254).

Second, East- West distinctions were drawn early to attribute Singapore's success to a framework of basic Confucianism ethics and tightly-knit Asian family structures (Gopinathan, 1995). The bilingual system was introduced to ensure that Singaporeans knew their traditional Asian values and cultures. According to Chia (2015), the Singapore government believes that mother tongue languages support Asian values and therefore, are the best mediums to teach moral and civic values and instil loyalty and a sense of belonging to Singapore. While English is the medium of instruction in schools, citizenship education was taught in mother tongue languages.

Singapore political leaders believe that Asian cultures and traditions are inimical to Western liberalism and so, Western liberalism is undesirable for Singapore. As revealed by a former Cabinet Minister, 'more and not less authority and discipline are necessary' if Third World societies are not to 'relapse into anarchy as modernization gathers pace' (Gopinathan, 1995, p. 17). This explains why Singapore leaders favour a strong paternalistic government for rapid economic development and view liberal democracy as an impediment to economic growth (Chia, 2015). The use of the 'survival' ideology to control citizen dissent is typical of neoliberal governance. The effect of such beliefs on the Singaporean citizenry is that the population has been 'largely depoliticized in the belief that political argument, debate and opposition are destabilizing and detract from more pressing issues of economic growth and national unity' (Baieldon & Alviar-Martin, 2016; Gopinathan, 1995, p. 17). In this way, citizens are discouraged from participating in critical debates about social issues.

Third, nation building based on the survival ideology explains the emphasis on 'moral understanding and promotion of social cohesion through appreciation of national traditions and goals and the meaning of citizenship' (Green, 1997 p. 61). The survival ideology serves as 'the basic concept for the rationalisation of state policies that extend beyond economics to other spheres of life' (Chua, 1995, p. 4). Chua elaborates that if a measure of social control is shown to contribute to economic growth, it is considered as necessary to Singapore's survival. Such approaches are again, typical of neoliberal societies. The survival ideology, based on social cohesion and economic progress, ensures that the integrative purposes of education continue to be

reflected in the form that citizenship education takes today. It stresses the importance of survival in the market place by emphasizing citizens' responsibility to self, fellow citizens, and the state, thereby shrinking the scope of state intervention and limiting citizens' critical involvement in society.

In Australia, neoliberal educational policies started emerging more prominently in the early 1990s and impact on Australian education in a variety of ways. Similar to Singapore's policies of meritocracy, the effect of state and national testing contradicts the 'inclusive character of educational relationships' (Connell, 2013, p. 106). Connell (2013) elaborates that 'respect and trust are undermined by the jockeying for position in competitive markets' (p. 106). Instead of working for the common interest and self-knowledge of the society, the education system looks for ways to 'extract private advantage at the expense of others' (p. 106).

Second, Australia's increasing competition between school sectors creates more market-driven imperatives in education, especially when there is considerable distinction in school fees among school sectors (Connell, 2013; B. Davies & Bansel, 2007; Reid, 2002; Zyngier et al., 2015). The neoliberal education agenda is held accountable for developing 'highly individualised, responsibilized subjects' needed in neoliberal societies (B. Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 248). It threatens to turn public education into a 'residualized' system, which becomes 'a safety net for those who could not afford private education' (Reid, 2002, p. 575). These education initiatives further impact the goals of education, school configurations and the practices of teachers, threatening to break down community values and cohesion in Australia (Macintyre & Simpson, 2009). It also threatens to turn away from the concept of collectively provided and owned community facilities and infrastructures that exist for the benefit of all', challenging the concept of citizenship, the structures and practices of democracy and declining the public sphere (Reid, 2002, p. 578).

However, unlike the Singapore leaders who appear to be unified on their views on national policies, the concept of democracy, citizenship and policies on citizenship education, Australia's policies on civics and citizenship education is characterised by a mixture of 'consensus and division' (Macintyre & Simpson, 2009). The well-documented struggle over the development of suitable content for the history and civic education curricula is an example of neoliberal influence (Zyngier et al., 2015). Yet, there is some comfort in the existence of continuing debates among people with different ideologies, which demonstrates qualities of a liberal democracy that values critical deliberation.

## **6 Implication for citizenship education in Singapore and Australia**

### **– Educational developments in the last ten years**

Responding to the changing contexts of the two countries, education is identified to play key roles in preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges. The last decade sees Singapore and Australia going through



education reforms around the same time. Both countries recognise that globalisation and immigration bring new challenges and education needs to be responsive to these new demands. (MCEETYA, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2014). Both countries identify the need to prepare students for economic competitiveness and social cohesion and attempt to involve the wider community in this endeavour.

The latest reform in Singapore began with the introduction of the 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies (21CC) framework in 2009, which underpins holistic education in schools. Similarly, Australia redefined her educational goals in the Melbourne Declaration in 2008. These goals guide the development of the Australian Curriculum. In the 21CC framework and the Melbourne Declaration, 'active citizenship' is emphasised. Both countries identify concepts such as cross-cultural skills, global awareness and civic literacy as important educational goals. However, the concept of 'active citizenship', which guides citizenship education, appears to be interpreted differently in Singapore and Australia. The following sections use the goals of citizenship education and the identified experiences to explore the interpretations of active citizenship in the two countries.

### **7 Goals and experiences of citizenship education in Singapore and Australia**

Recent education reforms in Singapore and Australia are prompted by internal and external transformations happening in both countries. Internally, both countries are experiencing changes to the composition of the population, brought on by immigration and changing demographics. There is increasing pressure to forge a greater sense of national identity. Several significant political and social events brought changes to their economic, political and social structures and orientation. Externally, globalisation increased the sensitivity for both countries to establish stronger ties, socially, politically and economically with each other, and with the rest of the world. Heightened concerns were also raised over national security with increasing threats of terrorism.

For Australia, concerns have also been raised over the legitimacy of her democracy, threatened by a civic deficit among young Australians (Civics Expert Group, 1994). Additionally, tensions exist among those who claim the need for commonalities among Australians in the name of harmony and social cohesion, and those who criticise this emphasis for narrowing the definition of Australian citizenship (Howard & Patten, 2006). It is recognised that while the Australian society has accommodated diversity, it failed to respond to it with a 'new and richer concept of citizenship', which involves a strong grasp of decision-making processes where differences are negotiated and resolved (Civics Expert Group, 1994, p. 4). Nevertheless, the perceived emphasis on commonalities appears to have shifted in the last five years with the introduction of the new Australian Curriculum. Ways to address this concern through Australian schooling have been to teach about democracy in a non-partisan, informed and balanced way to help young people learn about democracy

and its base so that a strong democracy, one resilient to all forms of extremisms can be sustained (Print, 2015).

In contrast, Singapore emphasizes commonalities - the importance of moral values, such as respect, responsibility, care and appreciation towards others to help citizens become socially responsible (Ministry of Education, 2011). The Minister of Education emphasized that a sense of shared values and respect is needed for citizens to appreciate and celebrate Singapore's diversity so that they can stay cohesive and harmonious (Ministry of Education, 2011). He elaborated that Singapore needs values of citizenship and wants 'men and women who are willing to step forward to risk their lives' for the nation. Strong common values and emotional attachment to Singapore will enable citizens to stay successful as one people, one nation.

From this perspective, Singapore differs from Australia in her approach in dealing with the demands of growing diversity and globalisation. While Australia focuses on building a stronger democracy that 'negotiate and resolve' differences, Singapore emphasizes shared values and a commitment to the nation. Interestingly, the concept of 'active citizenship' is stressed in the recent education reforms in both countries. How does 'active citizenship', and consequently, citizenship education compare in both countries?

In Singapore, active citizenship is encompassed in the 21CC framework to provide guidance for the reform. The student outcomes are listed as 'confident person', 'self-directed learner', 'active contributor' and 'concerned citizen' (Ministry of Education, 2014). Although Lee (2015) sees all of these as citizenship outcomes, the 'concerned citizen' outcome provides information most related to this discussion on 'active citizenship'. A '*concerned citizen*' is rooted to Singapore, has a strong sense of civic responsibility, is informed about Singapore and the world, and takes an active part in bettering the lives of others around him (Ministry of Education, 2014). The Minister of Education stresses a strong nation-centric agenda:

"Our education system must...nurture Singapore citizens of good character, so that everyone has the moral resolve to withstand an uncertain future, and a strong sense of responsibility to contribute to the success of Singapore and the well-being of Singaporeans." (SDCD, 2014)

The reform sees Singapore education transiting from the 'ability-driven' phase to the 'student-centric, values-driven' phase. Two areas are emphasized - developing students holistically (moral, cognitive, physical, social and aesthetic) and 'sharpen[ing] the focus' on values and character development (Ministry of Education, 2011). The focus on 'character' and 'values' is emphasized by the new subject 'Character and Citizenship Education' (CCE) introduced to replace Civics and Moral Education in the formal curriculum. Together with the 'Values in Action' programme, which aims to 'foster student ownership over how they contribute to the community', CCE cultivates 'values and commitment to Singapore and



fellow Singaporeans' (Ministry of Education, 2015) so that students become 'good individuals and useful citizens' (SDCD, 2014, p. 5).

Without reference to sustain Singapore's democracy in policy and curriculum documents, such as the 21CC framework or the CCE syllabus, one may wonder if Singapore is committed to democracy. However, there are indications to suggest the commitment. In the national pledge that all Singaporean students have to recite every school day, the concept of '*one united people, regardless of race, language or religion, to build a democratic society, based on justice and equality*' shows similar democratic values in the Melbourne Declaration.

The Melbourne Declaration encompasses the development of 'active and informed citizens' in Goal 2. In addition to the qualities of Singapore's 'concerned citizen', 'active and informed' citizens in Australia also need to 'have an understanding of Australia's system of government, history and culture' and be 'committed to national values democracy, equity and justice, and participate in Australia's civic life' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 9). Australia's concern with sustaining the wellbeing of her democracy is reflected in the Declaration. The reform sees civics and citizenship education developed as an identified subject in the Australian Curriculum. Civics and Citizenship education in the Australian Curriculum (ACCC) emphasizes the understanding of Australia's federal system of government, derived from the Westminster system and the liberal democratic values that underpin it, such as freedom, equity and the rule of law (ACARA, 2015). It aims to help students understand 'how the system safeguards democracy by vesting people with civic rights and responsibilities' and how laws and the legal system protect people's rights and how individuals and groups can influence civic life' (ACARA, 2015).

Both Singapore and Australia recognize whole school, multidisciplinary approaches to citizenship education. Singapore adopts a 'Total Curriculum Approach', in which all subjects work towards achieving the student outcomes, (Lee, 2015). Australia made curricular arrangements to integrate citizenship learning across the curriculum through its cross-curricular priorities and general capabilities, which are key citizenship elements (Tudball & Brett, 2014). This implies that citizenship learning can be integrated throughout, and be supported by the school systems and curricula in Singapore and Australia.

Different interpretations of 'active citizenship' suggest that the two societies see democracy differently. Although citizenship education has nation-centric agendas in both countries, they differ in their purposes. For Singapore, focus is on the nation's economic success and the wellbeing of Singaporeans (Heng, 2012). For Australia, focus is on the wellbeing of her democracy (ACARA, 2015). The different views about democracy influence the approaches to citizenship education. Singapore favours the character development approach by inculcating a 'good sense of self-awareness and a sound moral compass', hence '*Character and Citizenship Education*' (Ministry of Education, 2014). Australia

emphasizes the development of competencies for democratic participation by teaching civic rights and responsibilities, hence '*Civics and Citizenship Education*' (ACARA, 2015).

The next section raises questions about the goals and experiences of citizenship education in both countries, in relation to the goal of enhancing self-definition and social agency to support social justice and global democracy. It discusses how the design of citizenship education may work to reinforce the neoliberal agenda.

### **8 What values, whose values and for what purpose?**

Values are mentioned in the 21CC framework and the Melbourne Declaration. Although values are more explicitly listed in the 21CC framework, it is important to note that in Australia, a set of nine values was identified in the 'Framework for Values for Australian Schooling', introduced to schools in 2005 (DEEWR, 2005). Values such as freedom and equity in the framework are also listed in the ACCC curriculum. Values are deemed important for active participation in Singapore and Australia. However, different purposes are identified for learning values. In Singapore, values are necessary to shape one's character, which shape one's beliefs, attitudes and actions (SDCD, 2014). In Australia, values are needed for democratic participation (ACARA, 2015). While values play important roles in the educative process and the development of democratic societies (Print, 2000), values education has been particularly contentious in Australia. In contrast, values education is more straightforward and less challenged in Singapore.

In the 2014 review of the Australian Curriculum, the issue with 'the lack of explicit values foundation' in the development of the curriculum was raised (DET, 2014, p. 2). In liberal democracies like Australia, values education can be highly controversial as any attempts to define common values in a pluralistic society is also likely to be divisive (Macintyre, 1995). This can explain why Australia has had a history of 'shying away from teaching values, and has clung to the myth of value neutrality' (p. 15). For a lack of explicit values foundation to be raised in a situation where values exist but perhaps, not as explicitly as in Singapore, questions can be raised about the intention of the comment. Suspicions over whether such concerns are politically motivated can exist as it is possible for nations to use citizenship education to support political agendas (Tudball & Henderson, 2014). On the other hand, explicitly stating a set of shared values is less challenged in a civic republican (or communitarian) society like Singapore because it is perceived to be of utmost importance for the nation's survival (Ministry of Education, 2011). Since values and citizenship education are intricately linked, the issue is perhaps, not entirely about how explicit values are in the Australian Curriculum, but to consider how the *commitment* to democratic values to foster the wellbeing of Australia's democracy can be made clearer as the foundation of Australian education so that the teaching of values does not become a piecemeal approach towards citizenship education.

Another issue with values in citizenship education is whether an exclusive commitment to developing moral/personal values for character development is enough to build democratic citizenship. Although citizenship has a significant moral content (Heater, 1990), moral values are not essentially about democratic citizenship (Westheimer, 2015). While possessing these character traits is desirable and makes one a good neighbour, it is not enough to promote social actions, political engagement and the pursuit of just and equitable policies (Westheimer, 2015). Such approaches make one a good citizen in a democratic state, but not necessarily an active one because citizens are not learning to 'work with others on any matters that effect public policy' (Crick, 2007, p. 243). Such approaches risk positioning citizenship education as part of the broader didactic politics of neoliberalism. Citizenship education can 'be-come a tool for promoting private competencies upheld by neoliberalism' (Howard & Patten, 2006, p. 472). This raises an alarm for Singapore's citizenship education as the country's exclusive focus on developing character may encourage passivity rather than democracy (Westheimer, 2015), reinforcing the effects of neoliberalism.

This issue stems from the different inspirations that character education and citizenship education are drawn from (I. Davies, Gorard, & McGuinn, 2005, p. 348). Character education, as with Singapore's CCE, is primarily concerned with morals while citizenship education focuses on application in social and political contexts. When limited attention is given to political literacy in character education, values are used exclusively for the developing morally upright citizens. Whether an exclusive 'character' focused approach is adequate as citizenship education should be reflected.

### 9 Curricular arrangements for citizenship education and its implications

Singapore and Australia attempt to implement cross-curricular approaches to citizenship education. However, there are stark differences in educators' reactions to this approach. While it has marked 'a new frontier in how citizenship education could be implemented' in Singapore (Lee, 2015, p. 104), Australian educators raised questions about the effectiveness of a cross-curriculum dimension in all subjects and how it can fit into an already overcrowded curriculum (DET, 2014). How does Singapore cope with Australia's concern?

CCE in Singapore is mapped to 'Civic Literacy, Global Awareness and Cross-cultural skills' in the 21CC framework. However, relationship was not drawn between CCE and the 'Critical and Inventive Thinking' competency. Developing 'skills of reasoning and judgment', 'dialogue or argument' and 'discovery of 'new' know-ledge' (Johnson & Morris, 2010, p. 80) have not been raised in Singapore's CCE syllabus. Instead, experiences identified for character and citizenship development are identified as 'instruction, skills practice, role modelling by teachers or peers, and positive reinforcement during structured lesson time and teachable moments' (SDCD, 2014, p. 9).

The implication is that the role of counter-socialisation is de-emphasized in CCE and 'creative and critical thinking skills' are narrowly defined by an instrumental discourse of academic achievement (Lim, 2014). It reveals a pragmatist and instrumentalist intention for promoting critical pedagogy in Singapore - one that 'does not accommodate the critique of the political economy and society (Koh, 2002, p. 263). In this way, the neoliberal agenda is reinforced through the discouragement of critical deliberation of societal and political issues. Students will not be adequately prepared to 'acknowledge fully other forms of identity, agency, affiliation or aspirations available to young people in Singapore' and to 'think critically about complex issues central to living in a diverse global society' (Baillon & Alviar-Martin, 2016, p. 69).

### 10 What is the role of Social Studies?

Social Studies is 'an equal partner' in educative efforts towards citizenship (Engle & Ochoa, 1988, p. 122). In Australia, civics and citizenship education was mainly delivered through the humanities and social sciences subjects before the Australian Curriculum was implemented. With the Australian Curriculum, ACCC is introduced as an identified subject. In late 2015, a new Humanities and Social Sciences subject replaced ACCC in the primary years, after feedback of an overcrowded curriculum was heeded. A close relationship between Social Studies and civics and citizenship education is recognized.

However, the interrelationships between social sciences, humanities subjects and citizenship education are rarely discussed in some countries (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). This briefly describes the current situation with Social Studies in Singapore. CCE and Social Studies are two subjects that exist together in the Singapore curriculum. Although Social Studies identifies its role as '*aspiring towards the educative growth of the Social Studies learner as an informed, concerned and participative citizen...*', no connection is made with CCE and vice versa, in the syllabuses. CCE and Social Studies appear to be unconnected in their roles towards citizenship education.

The inquiry approach is identified to support the learning and development of critical thinking skills in the Social Studies syllabus documents. While there is minimal reference to developing critical thinking in the CCE syllabus, this gap appears to be addressed by Social Studies. Social Studies, delivered through inquiry, provides 'the focal point for thinking, as pupils will investigate, extract, analyse and synthesize information' (CPDD, 2012, p. 6). One can only speculate why the important role that Social Studies plays in citizenship education is not highlighted in the CCE syllabus documents, especially when such documents are important in guiding teachers' work in citizenship education.

Could the exclusion of Social Studies from the CCE syllabus be to distinguish critical thinking from the development of 'character' and 'citizenship'? After all, what would it look like if students 'investigate, extract,



analyze and synthesize' the core values in CCE? The values are likely to be challenged. Could the exclusion be to delegate different subjects to support the development of different competencies, to make the overall curriculum more manageable? This however, will go against the 'Total Curriculum Approach' as not all teachers will be responsible for developing either the 'active, informed and concerned' citizen in Social Studies (CPDD, 2012) or the 'good and useful citizen' in CCE (SDCD, 2014). This is especially a problem when Social Studies is taught by English-medium teachers while CCE is taught by Mother Tongue teachers and they rely on different syllabus documents for guidance.

## 11 Conclusion

Citizenship education in Singapore and Australia reinforced the highly contested and contentious nature of citizenship and citizenship education. With globalization, the need to stay socially cohesive and competitive in the global market is paramount. However, simultaneously achieving social cohesiveness, economic competitiveness and a healthy democracy can be challenging. The increasingly dominant neoliberal discourse impacts how societies approach citizenship education. Citizenship education can in turn, reinforce the impact of neoliberalism, which in many ways, is at odds with the classical conceptions of democracy. The negative effects of neoliberalism need to be resisted as they can threaten the foundation of democracy, and discourage citizens from exercising self-definition and social agency towards social justice and global democracy.

Singapore's 'survival' ideology provides her political leaders the legitimacy to reject liberal democratic concepts. Citizenship education in Singapore encourages active citizenship through character development. 'Character and Citizenship Education' replaced Civics and Moral Education in the reform. Although a new term is introduced, civics education, citizenship education and moral education remain 'as one and the same' (Chia, 2015, p. 182). It emphasizes the cultivation of shared values and takes on a depoliticized form. There is danger in adopting the exclusive character education approach. It makes citizenship education highly vulnerable to the negative effects of neoliberalism through the depoliticised portrayal of the civil society, which in turn discourages citizens' critical deliberation and involvement in societal issues. In this way, the democratic base, which requires citizens' active participation in societal issues, can be easily weakened.

In Australia, with concerns over the wellbeing of her democracy, the need to develop 'active and informed' citizens is emphasized. A new *Civics and Citizenship Education* subject is introduced in the Australian Curriculum. In addition to acting morally and ethically, active and informed citizens in Australia must also understand Australia's system of government, history and culture and be committed to the national values of democracy, equity and justice, and participate in civic life. Contrary to Singapore's depoliticized approach, politics is extended into civic life in Australia. However, the

teaching of values remains contentious. Questions remain about 'what values' and 'whose values' and consequently, there is a need to emphasize the role of values in supporting the Australian democracy in the Australian Curriculum (Chia & Neoh, 2017).

Citizenship education in Singapore and Australia highlight the tensions between emphasizing commonalities and embracing differences, developing moral and democratic values, promoting individualism and solidarity, and the limits of politics on civil life. An unbalanced focus leads to inefficient approaches to citizenship education for democratic ends. Instead of arguing for an East-West distinction, deeper reflections are needed to consider how a balance can be achieved between the ends of the tensions because exclusive focus on either end is insufficient to prepare students effectively for democratic participation. Citizens need moral and ethical foundations to guide their decisions in effecting social change. At the same time, they need the civic knowledge and skills to put their intentions into action.

Singapore needs to consider how these discourses can be balanced so that the curriculum can facilitate the deliberation of multiple perspectives regarding issues of citizenship and identity (Alviar-Martin & Baidon, 2016). The current approach can inhibit the 'flourishing of a critical type of mentality that challenges entrenched constructions of citizens as economic and nationalistic subjects' and 'risks excluding cultural minority and low-income groups' (p. 20). Critical thinking used only for promoting economic competitiveness reinforces the neoliberal agenda and cripples citizens' self-definition and social agency to address issues of social justice and global democracy.

In Australia, with renewed focus on citizenship education through the new Civics and Citizenship Education subject, cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities, great potential exists for citizenship education to empower students with competencies to participate actively in her democracy. The challenge for Australia is to negotiate the struggles existing between federal and state policies for civics and citizenship education and with school implementation and practice. Achieving success for civics and citizenship education in Australia will require commitment to the liberal democratic concepts throughout the Australian Curriculum. Additionally, strong and continuing commitment from federal and state government authorities, school leaders and expert teachers is needed to firmly embed citizenship learning within the whole school culture, the curriculum and communities (Tudball & Brett, 2014).

Looking forward, taking a relationalist stance can help to strive towards harmonizing the different discourses to promote a broader range of interests and agendas (Alviar-Martin & Baidon, 2016). The implication is for Singapore and Australia to consider how the important roles that critical thinking and deliberation play in contributing positively to societal improvement can be reiterated through their curricula. Commitments need to be given to promote critical thinking and deliberation as



'a value indicative of an inclusive society', and not for serving the dominant utilitarian agenda of neoliberalism (Alviar-Martin & Baidon, 2016, p. 20). Curricula need to provide opportunities for students to consider how societies can promote inclusion for all individuals. The challenge is for educators to find meaning ways to engage students in deliberations and discussions of a variety of pertinent societal issues so that they can be exposed to diverse perspectives and in the process, learn to negotiate their personal values and construct their own understandings of citizenship through democratic dialogues. This requires citizenship education to balance the development of moral, ethical and democratic values. Both democratic values such as justice, equality and freedom and personal/moral values such as respect, tolerance and compassion need to underpin the processes of deliberation and discussion. From this perspective, character and civics education work together to politicise the 'personal' when citizens commit to negotiating and resolving differences democratically while ensuring that in the process of addressing differences and promoting inclusion, the liberties other citizens are not overlooked.

Finally, returning to Giroux (2004), educators are reminded of the purpose of citizenship education to support individual and social agency to address basic problems of social justice and global democracy. Experiences are needed to 'revitalize the language of civic education as part of a broader discourse of political agency and critical citizenship in a global world' (p. 36). While neoliberalism have benefitted countries like Singapore in terms of economic progress, and who in turn, argues against the applicability of liberal democratic concepts in Asian societies, discussions in this paper highlighted the vulnerabilities that societies may face for rejecting them totally. Societies risk becoming susceptible to the negative impacts of neoliberalism, which promotes individualism over solidarity, minimises citizens' critical involvement in the society and weaken the democratic base. The challenge remains for these concepts to be accepted as the basis for democracy and for education systems to be explicitly committed to these concepts, lest citizenship education becomes the tool to reinforce the effects of neoliberalism.

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