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The varied dimensions of character and citizenship education in the prism of values in grades 1-2 in primary education in Singapore

Wartości w edukacji obywatelskiej oraz kształtowaniu charakteru w klasach 1-2 szkoły podstawowej. Przykład Singapuru

Abstract: The article begins with a review and analysis of the literature on Character and Citizenship Education in Singapore in grades 1-2, with particular reference to values in education. The understanding of values in terms of Marwin Berkowitz, Fritz Oser and Wiel Veugelers is the theoretical basis of the article.

The analysis of curriculum began with a review of the literature on values in education. The next stage was to analyse the curriculum along with its *Core Values* (Respect, Responsibility, Resilience, Integrity, Care and Harmony), embodied in the five domains, its three *Big Ideas* (Identity, Relationship, Choices) and its guiding principles in grades 1-2. Education here comes across as an interaction between various sets of teachers' values and the ongoing construction of students' values. The key part of the study is to analyse the Singaporean Character and Citizenship Education, principally its parts which involve the *Core Values*. *Key Understandings* and *Key Questions* make it possible for students to become involved in the variance of values in a constructive and critical manner. Documents concerning the subject of

the analysis were studied by means of a problem method, which is based on an educational phenomenon examining various consistent factors related to time and society.

Keywords: Character and Citizenship education, values in education, Asian values, Singapore.

Introduction

Singapore, or the Lion City (the name comes from two Sanskrit words: *siMha-* lion and *pura* - city) is a city-state in Southeast Asia. It is famous across the world for its extremely fast economic growth, as well as for its world-class education system. The country arouses interest of researchers, who look for the determinants of both its economic and its educational successes recognised in the 1990s. Contemporarily, Singapore has fascinated researchers since 2015, when it achieved a leading position in PISA in all researched areas. We are aware that educational success is a result of many different factors (Nowosad, 2022a). The aim of the study is to review one part of Singapore's educational miracle.

Namely, in this work we want to draw attention to the importance of human capital, the country's only resource. We will focus on the role of values in education, especially in grades 1-2 of the primary level. These years are probably the most significant in the development of children's sense of spiritual, moral, social morality (OFSTED, 2004, p. 4) and character building.

It is worth to mention that Singapore's independence in 1965 came in the face of political, economic, ethnic and religious chaos. The 1950s and 1960s were turbulent decades in which the nation was born in pain. The consequences of World War II, including the process of decolonisation, pushed Singapore to the brink of economic disaster. The withdrawal of the English from the island and the closure of the largest British naval base in the region only intensified social unrest reinforced by ethnic and cultural differences. The expulsion of Singapore from Malaysia added insult to injury and it seemed impossible to see even a trace of the economic leap that was to take place over the next 30 years, a leap which lifted Singapore out of the third world and up to the leading position of the first world.

In his memoirs of that period, the Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew emphasised the drama of the situation: "We were asked to leave Malaysia and go our own way with no signposts to our next destination. We faced tremendous opportunities with no chance of survival. I set out on a journey along an unmarked road to an unknown destination" (Lee Kuan Yew, 2000,

p. 19). There was a breakthrough moment which Lee used as a turning and an entry point for change. The concept of Singapore as a nation did not exist, and in order to survive, it had to evoke a strong sense of national identity in the minds and hearts of newly defined Singaporeans. It is often compared to a herd which must have the ability, the endurance and the social cohesion to survive. Thus, the future of Singapore was full of problems, but Singaporeans had the will to overcome them.

The concept of social cohesion through the principle of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity became the main strategies adopted by the government in the process of building the nation out of a social melting pot of diverse immigrant population who spoke different unrelated languages. Multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity became cornerstones in the process of building an integrated society. The country is often referred to as "Instant Asia", as it hosts so many of Asian ethnic groups. Therefore, a highly pragmatic nation-building educational policy became a response to the challenges. Its pillars have since occupied a key place in the country's educational policy, meant to involve Singaporeans in global challenges of the new order (Nowosad, 2021, p. 127-129).

Education has now adopted a set of regulations recognised as *Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes* (MOE, 2020, p. 1), which promotes lifelong learning and encourages the deepening of the acquired skills during adult life. These initiatives have become pillars of the next phase of Singapore's educational policy.

Values and Education

Because of the pace of technological advances and global changes, the continuity of values is significant in the 21st century. According to Berkowitz (1995) and Oser (1996), values investigate subjective judgments (attitudes) and behaviour. They reflect the significance and respect that somebody gets in return and are acquired as genuine opinions and criteria which build a society. As human beings gradually evolve, there are always questions about values, such as: *What are we? What's life? What's the value and function of knowledge?* (Coser, 1977).

Berkowitz (1996) adds that in order to develop morality in people's judgments and actions, only central values like justice and well-being are needed, and that there is no need for multiple values. Due to their characteristics of usefulness, Berkowitz (1997) divides values into regulative and meta-moral. Currently, values in education are being discussed throughout the Western world and in Asia (Stevenson et al.,1998). Also, different

terms are used to refer to the tradition and the theoretical position of values (Veugelers, 2000), such as *values education, character education, moral education, personal and social education, citizenship education, civic education, religious education, moralogy* or *democratic education*. In Finland, scientific publications typically make use of the terms *moral education* or *ethics*. The US and Singapore publications use the term *character education*, whereas in Scotland and England there is *values education* (Munn, 1995; Halstead and Taylor, 1996). In the European context, it is usually *civic education* (Starkey, 1991; Birzea, 1994).

Singapore introduced the term *Asian values* into the education system. Adopted in the 1990s, it was first used by such scholars as Vickers and Fisher in 1999, Khoo in 1999 or Xu in 2005. The specificity of the Singaporean approach lies in the distinction between Asian values and Confucian values. As Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong explained, Confucian values have a more specific cultural reference, i.e. they are found in East Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and also Singapore. Asian values are a broader concept, because Asia is a huge area, which also includes India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Muslim countries. The inclusion of Asian values as a foundation of Singapore's national identity was meant to be a way of integrating Singapore's culturally diverse population. Thus, analysing values takes into account their cultural embeddedness and their socio-political context specific to Singapore, best expressed in educational programs.

Research questions and methodology

In order to present the values in Singapore's curriculum for primary grades 1-2, we formulated the following research questions:

1. What values, big ideas or key questions are included in the curriculum?
2. What are their strengths and weaknesses within the curriculum?
3. What role does the national curriculum play in the global success of Singaporean education in the 21st century?

The main focus of our study was to analyse values in *Character and Citizenship Education 2012,* especially in its parts covering the teaching content, which are applicable to all schools in Singapore. As mentioned, our analysis of the curriculum began with a review of the literature on values in teaching. The next step was to identify how values in grades 1-2 in Singapore were addressed.

We made use of a problem method to study documents concerning educational change (Wodak and Krzyżanowski, 2008, p. 156). The method is nested in an educational phenomenon which is placed in time and related to society. From this perspective, it contrasts different views, regularities and principles. Also, we aimed at using primary rather than secondary sources in this article, i.e. appearing in different places and at different times. Materials accessed in the Ministry of Education in Singapore constituted the most important stepping stone of the analysis.

Values of basic education in Singapore

Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) has been a significant part of Singapore's education system since 1959. Its key programs have been recommended and implemented in order to inculcate desired values, habits and key competencies for students to become good individuals and useful citizens. The values were supposed to integrate the multicultural society, strengthen social commitment and support national loyalty. As a result, various value-based citizenship education programs, such as *Ethics* (1959), *Civics* (1967), *Review of the Moral Education* (1978), *Good Citizens* (1981), *Education for Living* (1973), *Religious Knowledge* (1984), *Civics and Moral Education* (1995), have been launched in Singapore since 1959.

The National Education (NE) initiative was introduced in schools in May 1997. In 2012, previously implemented programs were revised and new solutions were introduced. This way, a new phase of educational reforms, referred to as student-centred and values-based, was introduced (2012-2018). In the following years, the combination of education and values was emphasised and rebalanced content, skills and personality development was reinforced to achieve a more holistic education.

There is no doubt that CCE takes contemporary trends and global developments into account, all of which contribute to the development of the CCE curriculum. Character and Citizenship Education in Singapore occupies a central place within the *Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes*. It places emphasis on "the interconnectivity of core values, on social and emotional competencies as well as on civic literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills which are critical for character and citizenship development" (CCE, Syllabus, Primary, 2012, p. 5). The curriculum also designates the main objectives of particular school subjects and incentivises teachers to use new project-based and collaborative methods.

The CCE 2012 curriculum includes the *Core Values*: Respect, Responsibility, Resilience, Integrity, Care and Harmony, which seem to be

indispensable for forming desirable personality profiles. It assumes that people establish respect when they rely on their own intrinsic motivation. Responsibility derives from one's recognition of duties to "oneself, one's family, community, nation and the world, and fulfils one's responsibilities with love and commitment" (CCE, Syllabus, Primary, 2012, p. 5). Such integrity, infused with ethical principles and personal courage, makes it possible to stand up for a righteous cause and feel the kind of care which predisposes to kindness and compassion in global and communal contexts. Resilience means that when full of optimism and with the right resources, people are able to overcome life obstacles, because they are emotionally strong in the face of challenges. Harmony denotes promotion of inner happiness with social cohesion, in which they acknowledge not only the unity, but also the diversity of a multi-cultural society. These core values guide students to distinguish between right and wrong, as well as help them to make informed choices and understand their roles within the society.

The CCE syllabus takes values-driven education and age-appropriateness into consideration. The document also stresses the right to good education based on various developmental theories, such as Jean Piaget's *Theory of Cognitive Development*, in which development incorporates changes in cognitive process and abilities, with the concrete operational stage starting at the age of 7 and concluding at the age of approx. 11. CCE also incorporates Lawrence Kohlberg's *Theory of Moral Development,* because according to Kohlberg, "moral judgement develops along a three-level, six-stage continuum. Each of the three levels; pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional, is composed of two stages, which describe the structure of thinking used by individuals when reasoning through a moral dilemma" (1971, p. 36).

The CCE syllabus also emphasises the right of each child to receive good education, so it makes use of Jean Piaget's and John Dewey's *Cognitive Constructivist Theory,* with its main goal for children to "become autonomous, life-long learners whose thoughts and actions are guided by reason, conviction and commitment" (2012, p. 41). Taking all of this into account, basic education designs and strengthens the conditions of independent learners who are responsible for their own education.

There is also Erik Erikson's *Theory of Psychosocial Development* in the CCE curriculum, as "it makes use of eight stages through which a healthily developing human should pass from infancy to late adulthood" (p. 42). The document also draws from Lev Vygotsky's *Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development,* with its emphasis on social interactions impacting learners'

cognitive development. Vygostky used the term *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) to define learning in which learners control tasks with the assistance of adults and the term *zone of actual development,* describing what learners can do on their own (independently). As a result, learners perceive a variety of values in their lives and are able to think about them in a critical way.

The *Five* domains of basic education in the CCE in Singapore

Education, which is perceived as a place for constant interaction between various sets of teachers' values and the ongoing construction of students' values, involves not only core values as part of *The Singaporean Character and Citizenship Education* study, but it also involves *Five* domains which make it possible for students to be involved in the variance of values in a constructive and critical manner.

The CCE document incorporates the *Five* domains for 1-2 grades:
1. Being who I am and Becoming who I can be (Self),
2. Strengthening Family Ties,
3. Fostering Healthy Friendships and Team Spirit (school),
4. Understanding Our Community and Building an Inclusive So-ciety,
5. Developing a Sense of National Identity and Nation Building (p. 12).

The objective of the first domain is to improve the perception of *Self*, to understand that everyone is unique and has their own patterns of presenting what they like, their skills and strengths. It includes understanding of varied positive and negative emotions and methods of their management. It contains *Knowing my Priorities* to understand the significance of designing learning objectives, *Changes in Life* to understand the processes of changes in their lives, how to overcome them and how and where to look for help, *Knowing Myself* to build „positive statements about oneself" (2012, p. 14). There is a focus on values in this domain, like the responsibility to care for one's life and well-being or to make decisions, as well as *Respect for Self*, understood as "resilience demonstrated through having emotional strength, self-efficacy and belief in one's competences, self-discipline, courage and perseverance to face changes and challenges, as well as self-motivation to achieve goals" (2012, p. 16).

The second domain, *Strengthening Family Ties* suggests indispensable knowledge to build up family relationships and to understand their signi-ficance in life. It puts emphasis on family and its care as well as on build-ing positive, respectful relationships. This domain emphasises the need for

Conflict Resolution, and *Responsible Decision Making,* according to the value system and observations how our decisions influence other people. This part of the document stresses the importance of "responsibility within family, care for thoughts, feelings and concerns, as well as harmony and respect for others at home" (2012, p. 18). It takes empathy into consideration, as well as confidence that people can change something in their families.

The third domain, *Fostering Healthy Friendships and Team Spirit* (school) contributes to students' knowledge of building their new relationships and their ability to work in teams in terms of taking turns, abiding by rules and listening to other students. As a result, students acquire skills which enable them to build and maintain positive relationships, as well as to show care and speak in an appropriate way. Consequently, students are taught how to be respectful, responsible in making their own decisions and how to live in harmony with other students. They know how to make new friends, communicate with their peers and participate in school events.

The fourth domain, *Understanding Our Community and Building an Inclusive Society*, enables students to understand the richness of cultural events in Singapore and to live their lives in harmony with other cultures and nationalities. Students acquire knowledge which helps them respect other races and views. They study how to understand different socio-cultural perspectives, how not to judge, how to try to appreciate diversity and how to put themselves in other peoples' shoes with their feelings and emotions.

The fifth domain, *Developing a Sense of National Identity and Nation Building*, teaches students about Singapore's heritage, its culture and identity with respect to multiple cultures. Students acquire knowledge about the five pillars of defending their country, i.e. how to care "for their country, for their loyalty to Singapore, for their responsibility towards Singapore, (2012, p. 27) and their respect to its identity".

Values and guiding principles of the subject Character and Citizenship Education in Singapore in grades 1-2

Values, big ideas, key understanding, key questions and domains seems to be the principles in CCE 2014 syllabus in Singapore. The document introduces guiding principles for teaching and learning (2012, p. 9), in which it focuses on every teacher who is a CCE teacher. Consequently, according to the first principle: *Spirit of resilience, care and compassion for others,* according to which, teachers in Singapore are responsible for being role models who create opportunities to shape core values in students, developing their confidence and self-worth (2012, p. 9). The second guiding

principle: *Values are both taught and caught* appears to be a strong point of the curriculum due to its function. If students see values in their schools, the values are assimilated. The level of teacher-student relationships predisposes each student's process of basic character development. As a result, values are both learnt and observed by students.

The third objective of the guiding principles for teaching and learning is to engage students in the varied modes of delivery. They learn values in the activities which involve skills practice, role modelling created by teachers and supportive reinforcement in each lesson. Teachers design time for learning experiences, such as the four National Education commemorative days, Values in action (VIA), as well as curriculum-related activities involving values, knowledge and attitudes. The fourth guiding principle for teaching and learning: *Parents as key partners* sees parents as navigators of their children's growth. It is common for many school activities to involve home-school collaboration. As a result, it contributes to healthier and better learning, "more positive attitudes and behaviour" (2012, p. 9).

Table 1. The guiding principles for teaching and learning in CCE 2012 in Singapore

Character and Citizenship Education 2012	Guiding principles for teaching and learning
Step 1	Teachers are responsible for being role models who create opportunities to shape their students' core values.
Step 2	"Values are both taught and caught".
Step 3	„to engage students in the varied modes of delivery"
Step 4	„Parents as key partners" who are like navigators of their children's growth.

Source: Character and Citizenship Education in Singapore, 2012, https://www.gcedclearinghouse.org/sites/default/files/resources/2014-character-citizenship-education-eng.pdf (accessed 27.02.23).

On the other hand, the CCE includes *Three Big Ideas* (Identity, Relationship, Choices) to allow students to develop key understandings. Identity embraces a set of values and ideals to develop a sense of students' strengths, weaknesses, and uniqueness (Marcia, 1966). It helps in self-understanding, especially for children between the ages of 8 and 11, and gives them a sense of competence, before moving towards identity formation in adolescence (Erikson, 1950). Additionally, students achieve self-knowledge and are able to feel responsible for their actions and relationships. They study how to

differentiate the relationship between values, choices and behaviours and how to build up their sense of identity.

When engaged in Relationships (the second *Big Idea*) children find it easier to define who they are, who they become, and why and in what ways they are significant for other people. Vygotsky (Dolya, 2010, p. 9), Bandura (1977) emphasise that interaction with others influences cognitive development. In this way, the environment of relationships which children experience affects all aspects of their development, especially their cognitive, social, emotional, physical and moral development.

Choices (last *Big Idea*) are significant because they reveal students' character and value system. Choices contribute to particular behaviour and are embedded in values. Students should learn about values to make choices (Berkowitz, 2005). In the face of pressure and temptation, choices are indispensable in helping students to act upon values.

Core concepts in CCE in Singapore

If students have a sense of identity, they embrace a set of values and ideals. Consequently, a well-developed identity predisposes a sense of strengths, weaknesses, and individual uniqueness. According to Lickona (1991), studies which examine the correlation between values, choices and behaviour attest that values contribute to better self determination and enhanced sense of identity. According to CCE curriculum in Singapore, relationships enable students to become engaged in the community, to designate who they are and how and why they are significant in others's people lives. Children learn about their world as an environment of relationships and experience how these relationships influence all aspects of their cognitive, social, emotional, physical and moral development.

The CCE curriculum also includes *Key Understandings* and *Key Questions,* which are helpful in unpacking the *Three Big Ideas* (Identity, Relationship, Choices). *Key Understandings* are prepared to enable students to understand that "identity is complex" and builds perceptions and relationships. According to the document, Relationships are fundamental, life-changing and inspirational. Hence, *Key Questions* "guide students to develop *Key Understandings*" (2012, p. 11). *Key Questions* related to *Identity,* such as *Who I am?, What is different about me?, How do I see people and the world around me?* (2012, p. 11), make better understanding of habits, values and attitudes possible, whereas *Key Questions* related to *Relationships* guide students how to build relationships in their lives. *Key Questions* related to *Choices* support students in making appropriate choices in their lives and

guide them in developing good character and useful citizenship in the contemporary, globalised world.

Discussion

Values, Character and Citizenship Education have always been important aspects in Singapore's education policy, which has been crucial at every stage of the country's development. The country's Prime Ministers have always emphasised the importance of values for young nations, whose culture and sense of identity were not yet fully developed. In 1997, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong explained that cultural development and a sense own national identity are the right cure for Singapore. These arguments resulted from Lee Kuan Yew's, the first prime minister called the father and founder of modern Singapore, vision for the nation. Lee believed that economic criteria, together with culture and religion, influence the development of national cohesion and a sense of belonging. Education was to serve to achieve the goals.

Character and Citizenship Education is inscribed into the social process of passing education onto other people, in which one generation pays a certain price to see the next generation succeed in life. Character and Citizenship Education is an element of a deliberately implemented educational process (Nowosad, 2022b). It is ingrained in Singapore's onward journey through the involvement of individuals in global challenges facing the nation, into the future of the country and the next generations.

In Singapore, just as in Finland (Suwalska, 2021, 2022a, 2022b), it is believed that the first two years of school are the most significant in the development of children's moral sense. This process is closely related to students' emotional and social development (Dunn, 1988).

Strengthening education in Singapore can be viewed as an endeavor to pay back future generations for what the present generation owes to the previous one. In this sense, the world appears as a synthesis of the past which affects the future. Values lead to choices and choices not only reveal character but also the value system in Singapore. Choices influence people's behaviour and have roots in values. In this way, according to CCE, students need values to make choices and to understand why certain choices are right or wrong. Singaporean teachers inscribe their students into their country's values and teach them how to become good citizens in a multicultural society.

Children learn about values not only in their homes, but from their peers, the media, and local communities. They arrive at schools with a catalogue of various values from their experiences at day-care centres or

preschools. Consequently, primary schools supplement and develop values that are omnipresent in the society. Therefore, Singaporean students acquire the ability to resolve conflicts ethically and learn the courage to defend what is good, which in turn enables them to make decisions dependent on ethical thinking and their capacity for putting themselves in other students' shoes.

Finally, there is a question about the future of Singapore, about its future path. According to Simon Long, the greatest threat facing Singapore today may be the complacency of citizens, i.e. their belief that their political choices which have proven effective for so long will make it possible to maintain this path of development.

It is difficult to predict today what direction the educational policy will take in achieving quality and effectiveness, as well as in triggering the ability to develop, but it can be supposed that the values (CCE) will continue to prevail in the country's educational policy.

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