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Citizenship as Curriculum Aim: Problematizing Social Studies in Singapore

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- Widespread agreement that aim of social studies is citizenship education; but no consensus on what citizenship means, nor on the implications of citizenship for curriculum and instruction
- Longstreet (1985, p. 22): ‘Citizenship may be widely accepted as the core of social studies, but it is a phantom core.’
- ‘the preparation of young people so that they possess the knowledge, skills and values necessary for active participation in society....’ (Ross, 2001, p. 20)

- ‘Give me the child of today and I’ll make you the adult of tomorrow’.
- ‘The mission of the Education Service is *to mould the future of the nation, by moulding the people who will determine the future of the nation*. The Service will provide our children with a balanced and well-rounded education, develop them to their full potential, and nurture them into good citizens, conscious of their responsibilities to family, society and country.’ (MoE, 2012)
- A constructed curriculum is problematic and contentious

- Who decides the curriculum?
 - Who are the stakeholders? Who should be interested in the curriculum and why?

- Who decides what knowledge, skills and values should count?
 - Who has the legitimate authority to select the material that will get taught? How and why are decisions made?

- What knowledge is of most worth? Whose knowledge is of most worth?
 - Whose interests do they represent?

- Issues of knowledge, selection, competing interests and power

‘The two factors in the formative influences of a young man or a young woman’s life are the home and the school. We cannot do very much about the home, but we can do something about the school.’

Lee Kuan Yew (1966)

- Traditional citizenship is predominantly nationalistic
- Membership in a nation-state, national referents
- 5 attributes: a sense of identity; enjoyment of certain rights; fulfillment of obligations; a degree of interest and involvement in public affairs; an acceptance of societal values
- Each part varies depending on the nature of the political system of which they are part
- Modern political systems depend for their successful functioning upon a conception of citizenship
 - knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that ideally citizens should possess – ‘good’ citizen

- Creating stresses in identity formation, citizenship behaviour, and sense of belonging at societal level
- World today - 'much more multi-faceted and interdependent' (Hamilton & Clandinin, 2010, p. 1227)
- Shifting scales of belonging 'producing allegiances that are multiple, flexible, and relational' (Mitchell & Parker, 2008, p. 775)
- Changing what young people need to know and be able to do to be effective and engaged citizens (Merryfield & Duty, 2008)

- Citizenship - overarching goal of public schooling in every society
 - Policy directives in order that schools create the 'good' citizen
 - Assumptions of 1) control and accountability; 2) policy when translated into the programmatic curriculum will be enacted by teachers

- Development of 'good' or 'effective' citizen – not neutral aspiration
 - Who decides? What knowledge, skills and values?
 - Are citizens encouraged to conform to authority and existing political structures, or alternatively to question and challenge them?
 - What is the balance between a nationalist agenda and a global focus?

- Citizen, Subject, Employee – what is the difference?
- ‘Unlike subjects, whose status implies hierarchy and domination, citizens formally enjoy legitimate and equal membership of a society. This status acknowledges the individual’s contribution to the community, and grants him/her autonomy through the rights he/she possesses, to express his/her agency. To be a citizen in this sense is to be able to take an active part in controlling one’s own destiny (Marshall, 1950; van Gunsteren, 1994; Faulks, 2000).’

Sim, J. B.-Y. (2011). Social studies and citizenship for participation in Singapore: How one state seeks to influence its citizens. *Oxford Review of Education*, 37(6), 743-761.

- PAP has formed the government since 1959
 - Strong state: ideology of survival, vulnerability, and economic pragmatism
- Education - primary instrument for citizenship education
 - Single-minded pursuit of citizenship education since 1959 for purpose of nation-building
- Centralized control of the school curriculum
 - All citizenship-related curricula developed by MoE
 - Co-ordinated and sustained effort to transmit the salient knowledge and values, develop the right instincts and attitudes, to help students subscribe to the beliefs and values deemed necessary for the survival of Singapore
- Tan & Gopinathan (2000, p. 10): 'The larger problem for Singapore's educational reform initiative is that Singapore's nation-building history resulted in an omnipresent state that cherishes stability and order.'

- How does social studies develop students for their role as citizens?
 - What is the nature of social studies?
 - What is the conception of citizenship?
 - Are students respected as ‘citizens’ or treated as ‘subjects’?
- Focus on social studies at upper secondary

- Course of study / 'the course to be run' vs Experience
- Prescribed/Intended/Explicit vs Lived

- Social studies implemented in 2001, is a vehicle for NE in the formal curriculum
- NE launched in 1997: Problem = ‘Serious gap in knowledge’

‘This ignorance will hinder our effort to develop a shared sense of nationhood. We will not acquire the right instincts to bond as one nation, or maintain the will to survive and prosper in an uncertain world’
(Lee Hsien Loong, 1997, n.p.)
- Underlying cause: globalization threatens nation-building
- Subject matter of social studies is the ‘Singapore Story’

1. understand the issues that affect the socio-economic development, the governance and the future of Singapore;
2. learn from experiences of other countries to build and sustain a politically viable, socially cohesive and economically vibrant Singapore;
3. develop thinking and process skills which are essential for lifelong and independent learning;
4. have a deep sense of shared destiny and national identity;
5. develop into citizens who have empathy towards others and will participate responsibly and sensibly in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society; and
6. develop into responsible citizens with a global perspective. (MoE, 2008, p. 3)

- Desired outcome:
 - Pupils to be ‘more informed about Singapore’s achievements and limitations and have confidence in her future’ (MoE, 2001, p. 3),
 - Prepare them to adopt a more participative role in shaping Singapore’s destiny in the 21st century

- Acquisition of knowledge can enhance awareness, but does not necessarily predispose one to participate
 - active approach to learning, open classroom climates, opportunities to discuss controversial issues, more likely predictors of future civic participation (Hahn, 1999; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Hess, 2009)

- How is social studies taught?
 - Learning about citizenship; Learning for citizenship; Learning through citizenship

- Nationalistic, communitarian and civic republican features
 - Nation as prior to other communities
- Government not people as apex and centre
 - Government-people relationship = parent-child
 - People are like subjects, loyalties shown in support of government policies, and are reciprocated by protection and provision
- Emphasizes responsibilities and duties > Rights hardly mentioned
 - Null curriculum (Eisner, 2002)
 - Is intent to develop citizens, whose possessions of rights implies agency (Faulks, 2000) or train 'serviceable subjects'? (Wringe, 1992, p. 31)
 - Reference to individual made in the context of nation

- Common good narrowly defined in terms of national interests
 - 'to build and sustain a politically viable, socially cohesive and economically vibrant Singapore' (MoE, 2001, p. 3).
 - E.g. Northern Ireland, and British welfare system
 - Limits opportunity to participate, raises the bar for participation, as issues at stake concern the survival of the nation
- Common good involves contested values, different ideas about 'the good life'
 - Assumption that national interests always reflect the interests of the citizenry
 - Does the state have the right to teach students to believe in a particular way of living?
 - Undermines citizenship, that individual has the ability to make judgements about their own lives
- Common Good = equally shared and mutually acceptable among members
 - Deliberation is the substance of citizenship (Parker, 2003)

- Good political leadership is more important than political participation
 - The ideal citizen participates by supporting and co-operating with the government

- Social studies textbook explains the 'need to create communication channels' (MoE, 2007, p. 26)
 - E.g Feedback Unit, 1985
 - Channels allow citizens to give feedback and suggestions, but are attempts to 'direct' dissent and dissatisfaction through institutions that either the state controlled or had the potential to depoliticize policy debate (Chua, 1995)
 - Views are frequently expressed from the standpoint of petitioner, rather than a position of agency
 - Citizen participation is gestural framed by discourse of existing ideological framework
 - If it is still up to the government to be the final arbitrator of the common good, then participatory opportunities are sources of social control

- Social studies curriculum articulates a dialectical tension
 - Globalization is divergent, developing citizenship of the variety favoured by the government is convergent
 - Tension is between societal change and the PAP conservatism.
 - Issue is how to reconcile the need for citizens' allegiance to the regime with the equally important right to a more flexible and relational form of identity, participation and affiliation

- Curriculum for cultural reproduction – is this adequate in developing citizens for 'new times'?

- Social studies curriculum is not neutral, but a construction that serves particular purposes
 - What should students learn as part of their education as citizens? What knowledge is of most worth? Whose interests are being served?

- If social studies aims to develop citizens, then students ought to be given opportunities to question and deliberate on these taken-for-granted questions