What global citizenship means to Singapore primary students

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Abstract
ONE CHALLENGE in the crafting of a school-based curriculum for global citizenship (GC) is the wide range of conceptualisations of global citizenship ranging from the simple incorporation of group-work in class activity to the inclusion of more issues-based, justice oriented curriculum content. As schools in the small island-state of Singapore make sense of globalisation, what do pupils know or understand about global citizenship? This article reports on the findings of a qualitative study of what local and international pupils, aged 11, understand of GC in Singapore. Broadly, their understanding cohere around three themes—respect, responsibility and issues in relationships. These themes are nuanced by differences in perceptions due to the school curriculum, pupils’ ethnicity and nationality and, to a lesser extent, gender; these differences underline the need to include pupils’ voices for a more dynamic and rigorous approach in global citizenship education (GCE) curriculum development.

Introduction
Singapore has been ranked as the world’s most global and wired nation (Kearney, 2006). However, as a nation, Singapore is simply too small to function economically on its own and its government is constantly strategising to reposition Singapore in the larger scheme of global capital flows. As well, Singaporeans are reminded that “they must be firmly rooted in Singapore” (Gan, 2006, n.p.). Tharman Shanmugaratnam, a cabinet minister, commented that “as Singaporeans get exposed to and even bombarded with alternative views, ideologies, lifestyles, we have to work harder to keep a sense of shared identity amongst all our citizens and keep our society cohesive” (Tharman, 2007, n.p.). Given the proactive approach of educational institutions in Singapore, it is to be expected that ‘global citizenship’ has become a popular idea in recent educational discourse especially in schools’ mission statements and syllabi.

Education systems have long been used to promote, manufacture or legitimise national historical traditions, symbols and values (Smith, 1991; Hobsbawn, 1994). Since intended school messages are mediated at multiple levels by schools, teachers and students, local educators and policy makers need
to be well-informed regarding students' different understandings and interpretations of GC so as to make better educational decisions on GCE. Students' input strengthens the validity and effectiveness of curriculum and helps ensure that the selection of experiences and references, course content and instructional strategies are student-oriented and pedagogically more effective. However, although they should be part of the 'school-based' approach to curriculum change, students' voices are seldom heard and represented, both in classrooms and in education research.

This article reports on the findings of a study to investigate the perspectives of students in one primary school in Singapore which has made a strong commitment to educate its students for GC. What do students understand by the term 'global citizenship'? The study aligns with the constructivist perspective that curriculum planners and teachers should "seek and value the students' points of view" (Marsh & Willis, 2003, p. 199). In this perspective, students are not seen as 'outputs' or mere products of schooling and educational policies, but also 'inputs'. Students bring into the classroom their own pre-constructed attitudes, abilities, backgrounds, assumptions, life circumstances, and perspectives. These should feed into how teachers perceive their professional tasks, and how they go about their business of teaching (Osler & Starkey, 2003; Szelé Nyi & Rhoads, 2006; Yamashita, 2006).

The Singapore context

All educational programmes and curriculum design have a home and belong to a network of political, cultural, economic and historical factors that form its context. Any GCE programme formulated in Singapore has to be imagined within its network of factors and negotiate its complex cultural mix of different ethnic groups, religious faiths, cultural histories, and languages. The fostering of multiculturalism and racial harmony for internal social well-being is complemented by the emphasis on globalisation for an outward perspective through a series of policies and strategies long before globalisation and GCE became popular buzzwords (Kluver & Weber, 2003; Baildon & Sim, 2010). Nation-wide educational initiatives such as 'Thinking Schools, Learning Nation', 'Critical and Creative Thinking', 'Teach Less, Learn More', the drive to infuse Information Technology in classrooms, as well as many school-based programmes, sought to prepare the future workforce with skills deemed crucial for economic viability in a globalised world (Leong, Sim & Chua, 2011). More specifically, the inclusion of National Education and Social Studies in the national curriculum is aimed at instilling a deeper sense of nationhood and global awareness in the young (Sim & Print, 2005, 2009; Sim, 2008).

As GCE is accorded a more central focus in many schools in Singapore, it is important that educators and policy makers have a clear understanding of the many differing intents of GCE so as to set clearer goals and outcomes for it. As noted earlier, schools have been quite proactive in educational change and GC values and goals have been given prominence in their mission statements and programmes. Currently these align with the most common conceptualisation of GC—utopian and humanist ideals for universal understanding. However, recent social policies have to be taken into account more seriously. Within the local context, the most sensitive development in the socio-political landscape concerns two government policies—the influx of foreign talent and an aggressive push to increase the local population through immigration. The government in 2007 set a target population for Singapore of 6.5 million by 2050 (Mah, 2007). The effects of this aggressive policy of rapid population growth through immigration impinge on the day-to-day existence of local Singaporeans and exert great strain on the social fabric particularly in housing and education. GCE curriculum development will have to negotiate these changes in the social landscape and, especially, in classrooms with children of Singaporean citizens, new migrants and expatriates.

Approaches to global citizenship education

There is "by no means universal agreement that the notion of global citizenship even makes sense, let alone being something that we can sensibly educate people for" (Haydon, 2006, p. 461). Until recently, the idea of citizenship is accepted as individuals in a country who are entitled to the civil, social, cultural and political benefits of that country, i.e. citizenship is synonymous with nationality and loyalty to the state. This allegiance, long taken for granted, is undermined by economic and political migration, expanding international streams of capital, multilateral trade flows and the spread of communication links. This network of causes contributes to differing perceptions of globalisation (Davies, 2006). The literature on national and global citizenship stresses the
need for educational reforms so that schools can meet the challenges of these new global realities (Castles, 2004; Noddings, 2005; Suarez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007; Banks, 2008; Merryfield & Duty, 2008).

Globalisation, as a concept, has a range of meanings and forms. Bottery (2006) suggested six specific forms of globalisation: environmental, cultural, economic, demographic, political and American. Each definition presented different developmental directions for schools and educators. Davies (2006, p. 5) called for a typology of approaches to prevent the term GCE from becoming just "a linguistic fancy which deliberately transposes a national political reality to a wider world order". Current deliberations on GCE fall into three general approaches which again affect choice of pedagogy (Warren, 1991; Gaudelli & Femeukes, 2004). The most common approach to GCE focuses on responsibility and respect (Nussbaum, 2002; Osler & Starkey, 2003; Sheppard, 2004; Cornwell & Stoddard, 2006; Haydon, 2006; Landorf & Nevin, 2007; Merryfield & Duty, 2008). The proponents of this approach place different emphases on GC. Haydon (2006) stresses the need for educating for respect as the basis of GCE. The UNESCO GCE programme views GCE as "Education for Tolerance, Peace, Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship"; education is the central pillar to promote such values in ethical and responsible participants in the global community (Landorf & Nevin, 2007).

This approach is mostly philosophical and utopian and its advocates insist that "it is precisely the recovery of (such) utopian thinking that provides the necessary critical perspective upon our communities, civic ideas and practices" (Stokes, 2004, p. 22). Sheppard (2004), and Osler and Starkey (2003) include the importance of viewing personal aspects of interpretations and motivations in GCE. Cornwell and Stoddard's (2006) more liberal version of GCE emphasise that responsibility and respect should not result in the inability to be different and to articulate the differences in opinion. Nussbaum (2002) further reiterates the importance of liberal education and the ability to reason. The pedagogy based on this first approach entails exposing pupils to other cultures in the world that might otherwise be absent in their imagination altogether.

The second approach to GCE focuses on the survivability of self, especially in terms of economic function and employability (Bremer, 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007). This approach stresses the students' ability to think critically so as to make sense of and therefore manage the real issues of their world. It emphasises communication skills to improve the interactions with people of other diverse backgrounds, language skills as being fluent in more than one language is fast becoming a prerequisite in the global environment, and collaborative skills for employment and social interaction. The approach also emphasises the ability to work with technology and to be critical consumers of media. Information Technology infused lessons, cooperative learning and collaborative learning are its preferred pedagogies.

The third approach to GCE claims to be more transformative (Kurth-Schai & Green, 2003; Castles, 2004; Gore, 2004; Thomas et al., 2006; Banks, 2008). This approach focuses on providing time for students to listen to and to debate the ideas, knowledge and beliefs that they and others hold. It includes "a focus on culture that will more likely result in and encourage appropriate and ethical civic action" (Gore, 2004, p. 14). Political education plays a major role in the pedagogies of choice in this approach. So too would justice and praxis-oriented activities, such as service-learning, minority-rights and action-related pedagogies.

However, globalisation is not all economic gain; it exerts its own costs on society. Kluyver and Weber (2003) noted that globalisation could lead to "a weakening of social cohesion and a pragmatic attitude toward the collective good and self-sacrifice" (p. 372). Koh (2006, p. 357) claimed that Singapore is faced with "a Hobson's choice as it has to work with globalisation by inventing ways to cooperate with capitalism's presence and yet also counter the negative effects of globalisation through the inculcation of citizenship ethos and values which are in danger of being eroded by globalisation". Schools play a crucial role in working for globalisation as well as in 'working against' globalisation.

While there are many versions of GCE (Sears & Hughes, 1996; Castles, 2004; Széle Nyi & Rhoads, 2006; Banks, 2008), there is a lack of literature on the key approaches in programmes in planned curricula, programmes that have already been implemented, and reports on the results of such programmes. Many studies that continue to focus on the state and policy level miss an important component of the equation, that is, the experiences of teachers and pupils engaging in GCE. Such studies are useful as their findings enable policy makers, curriculum designers and other decision makers to better understand the
very group they are working for. Locally, besides Sim’s (2008; Sim & Print, 2009) and Ho’s (2010) study of Singapore teachers’ and adolescents’ perspectives of citizenship, there has been no study of teachers’ or pupils’ perceptions of GC. Therefore there is a need to address this knowledge gap.

The study
This study is conducted in an established local co-educational primary school in Singapore which has taken a dedicated approach to GCE. Because of the nature of the research questions, a qualitative instrumental case study design was selected (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1995). Data collection was by means of focused group discussions, followed by individual interviews with several students. Data analysis was conducted by constant analytic induction.

The school and its global citizenship programme
For the past six years, the school has made a strong commitment to educate its students for GC. The school’s vision is ‘The Making of Global Citizens’, and according to the school’s website (which has to remain anonymous in order to protect its identity), the aspiration is to nurture students “who think globally and act locally” and to develop them holistically into “independent learners, creative thinkers and responsible citizens”. From the framework presented on their website, these aims are closely aligned with the objectives and content found in the Ministry of Education National Education and Social Studies curricula, with the added emphasis on environmental awareness and international student integration.

Many programmes are being implemented to achieve the vision alongside the national curriculum. For example, the school conducts four overseas trips annually to countries such as China, Indonesia, Malaysia and South Korea for students of different grade levels. These trips seek to nurture international awareness in students through experiencing and appreciating the rich diversity of cultures and opportunities in the world. Another programme, ‘Multilingualism@School’ seeks to develop students’ sensitivity to cross-cultural languages. Fifteen minutes have been set aside every Thursday morning for students to learn conversational phrases in the chosen languages for the year. For 2010, the school chose Korean and Nepalese as there was a sizeable group of Korean and Nepalese students studying in the school.

The participants
The school is sited near a Gurkha camp and a small Korean community, and consequently, there are quite a few Nepalese and Korean students in the school. Due to the problems of timetabling and the constraints presented by a busy school schedule, we were only able to invite students from one Primary Five, mixed ability class to participate in the study. A total of 35 students, aged 11, volunteered to participate in this study. Eight out of the 35 were international students from China, Korea, Malaysia and Nepal. Data were obtained primarily from focused group discussions (FGD) and follow-up individual interviews by one of the authors of this article. For FGD, the students were divided into four groups of eight to 10 students comprising both boys and girls, local and international students. Each group met once for FGD that lasted about 90 minutes. After the FGDs, the researcher asked for volunteers to participate in the individual interviews. Ten students volunteered to be interviewed individually, including four international students from China, Malaysia and Nepal.

Data collection and analysis
Students were asked to bring an object, picture or photograph that represented what they understood as GC. The FGD started with each student giving a three-minute presentation of what they understood by GC and their choice of objects, pictures or photographs to represent this. After the presentations, students were invited to ask each other questions and/or to comment on various statements made. For example, the researcher probed the students with questions such as: How does the object you have chosen show global citizenship? When you say ‘different races’, can you tell me more how this shows global citizenship? Students were interviewed individually on a separate day to clarify and probe deeper into what they had said earlier in the FGDs.

With the permission from the students, the FGDs and the interviews were recorded and both were transcribed in full. The researcher who facilitated the FGDs helped to identify the students and what they said for the purpose of data analysis. However, the identities of the students remained anonymous in reporting the findings for this article. Analysis was data-driven and inductive, shaped largely by the notion of grounded theory and its attendant constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). During
the data analysis process, we coded the raw data, including researcher notes as well as transcriptions of the FGDs and interviews, with the help of Microsoft Excel. Initially, themes and categories were drawn from the review of literature and the school’s GC framework. Through categorical aggregation, we collected the data into categories so as to allow relevant meanings to emerge. We then identified patterns across these categories, while also keeping in mind the fact that meaning could also be drawn from a single instance (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Methodological triangulation of the data from FGDs, interviews and researchers notes together with member checking, maintained the credibility of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Three themes emerged from the discussions by the 35 students: respect and tolerance of other cultures, responsibility for the environment and good understanding of personal and international relationships and interaction. It was also found that there was differentiated impact in GCE between local ethnic majority and minorities, and between local and international pupils. These 35 students also held discernable attitudes and opinions regarding their learning. In the discussion that follows, these findings are analysed according to the three approaches in the literature review to explore the strengths and weaknesses in the school’s GCE programme.

Respect: A culture of tolerance

The most common way with which the children responded to the question “What does it mean to be a global citizen?” was to emphasise the need for tolerance for cultural differences. As one student put it, “there are different races of people come together as one… come together and communicate with each other and share with each other about their country, religion and culture”. For these 11 year-olds, cultural identities were expressed most often through fashion, food and festivals. When asked in the individual interviews, all 10 students confirmed that they understood culture as peculiar practices of ethnicity, like “eating with bare hands (for ethnic Indians and Malays) or chopsticks (for ethnic Chinese)”, or whether some “wear sari, cheongsam or baju kurung” (traditional ethnic costumes of the different ethnicities found in Singapore). In their presentations and interviews, it was found that students rationalised the need to know each other’s culture and to respect each other’s culture in order to avoid conflict. Conflict was usually imagined as fights, especially fights between the different ethnic groups. For one student, being a global citizen meant “working together and not fighting with each other because we are of different races”. Further, another student observed that “the different races don’t fight among themselves”. Though the avoidance of racial conflicts was noted by almost all the participants, such an emphasis on racial harmony was heard more from students from the local ethnic minority. Students also seemed to be very aware of differences in ethnicity and its dynamics in their daily interactions and made explicit references to their experiences outside school as often as they referred to experiences within school. One student made this connection based on this observation — “I think I am a global citizen because I am a Punjabi… sometimes I walk with friends who are Chinese, Malay, Indian and other people”.

Whilst tolerance for cultural differences was evident, interestingly, students disagree as to how an ideal global citizen should react to those who do not possess GC values. When the question emerged about how a global citizen should react if others were not kind to him or her, students were clearly split in their opinions. Whereas one student held that “a global citizen has a caring heart and cares about others, races and religion… You must be kind to unkind people until the unkind people change”, another countered — “I disagree. If somebody is unkind we should also be unkind to them to teach them a lesson”. Notably, those in favour of teaching the ‘unkind’ a lesson by returning the ‘unkindness’ were often boys and those in favour of still being kind regardless of how unkind the others were, were girls. These findings show that students’ understanding of GC as culture, conflict and its resolution and moral action was being guided by the Social Studies curriculum content they were taught but this understanding was also influenced by ethnic identity and gender.

Responsibility: Brown and green issues in pollution

The second most common way participants responded to the question of what it means to be a global citizen was to point to the issue of pollution. It should be noted here that environmental topics of pollution and conservation were totally absent in the international students’ FGDs. Among the local students, one gave an elaborate explanation thus:
I think GC is about pollution. Because factories produce toxic waste and dump it into the water bodies. Then the toxic wastes pollute the water bodies and all the water animals inside die because they eat the pollution. People also litter and the fish and the marine animals think it is their food and they go and eat it so therefore they die.

The participants mentioned more brown issues of pollution such as waste disposal, recycling, electricity conservation and management of industrial toxic waste than green issues of habitat and species conservation. Though their knowledge on global catastrophes was far from accurate and coherent, it was clear that they held the idea that a global citizen is responsible for the health of the planet. Students cited global warming as the cause for droughts and earthquakes and also cited the depletion of the ozone layer as the cause of global warming.

Their responses showed that some had a better grasp of the problems than others but in general the students had good knowledge of the causes of natural disasters and man-made environmental degradation and were able to connect this GC topic to what they learnt in science lessons when discussing environmental problems. However, the examples they gave appeared to be learned and when it came to their own environmental consciousness, some practices were still being negotiated. One student said, quite disarmingly, “I only eat turtle soup once a year”!

It would be interesting to look into how students related their own environmental consciousness to their everyday practices and teachers resolved these moral bargains and inconsistencies.

**Relationships: Personal and international understanding**

As was to be expected, given the international and multi-ethnic nature of the school population, the theme of international relationship and international friendship occupied a great deal of the students’ attention. These relationships can be further classified into several sub-themes: relationships between countries, international trade, and the role of languages in these relationships. Taken together, these sub-themes emphasise students’ own awareness of the economic and cultural implications of GC in the local context. Students imagined inter-state relationships as how relationships amongst two friends would be. Their descriptions almost always included the need to help each other when one was in need of help as with relationships at the playground or in a classroom. As one local student said, “When Indonesia was affected by tsunami, we sent our soldiers to help, we donated money, clothes... we must help our neighbours so that when we need help next time, they will help us”.

Another student cited how Singapore and Malaysia “are neighbours but sometimes they also have friction over the water issue...” They tended to imagine international relationships as always in a constant state of motion, with friendships frequently made and broken. Again, this understanding of the world is very similar to studies on how students view their own social universe where friendship is “constantly in motion” and “friendship relations are formed, sustained, or split up on a regular basis” (Chan & Poulin, 2007, p. 579). One student gave an example of harmonious relationship as teamwork in class and linked this to “being friends with other countries such as in ASEAN”.

Even at this young age, students were able to question the utopian ideal of harmonious international relations and were able to manoeuvre cognitively between their own ideals and what was actually happening. The economic basis of this consciousness was clearly set out in the examples students gave. For example, students were aware of the existence of competition between states and were prepared to explore how countries can react to such competition. Commonly cited was the example of China, as one student pointed out, “It’s like now every country wants to befriend China”.

The students were also aware of the unequal distribution of wealth amongst countries and the lack of help the economically well-off were rendering to the poor. This help was viewed by them in terms of food or aid. The reasoning for the need to help others though, can be said to be both altruistic as well as self-serving as this aid was seen as not just a moral duty but also as a kind of credit or commodity to deposit now so as to draw upon when they themselves or their country are in trouble in the future.

The students’ description of the poor was often in the third person, while they viewed themselves as the giver of aid. In their depictions, the students superimposed their own reality and ideals upon the lives of the poor that they were supposed to save, prescribing their lifestyle and standards to those who needed help. Unable to imagine a world different from theirs, students drew on stereotypes and media portrayals of the poor. They expressed a lack of confidence in the poor, especially in their ability to think. Such prescriptions reflected their own perception of what was needed by those who must be perpetually
led and the assumption that their own lifestyle and consumption patterns were not problematic. As one student noted, “Maybe if people work hard and are more resourceful, they won’t be so trapped in poverty”. Such preconceived ideas and attitudes would need to be discussed and guided in GC programme.

Though students argued over whether English has become the lingua franca of global communication, they showed awareness of the role of language and the ability to communicate with each other in the process of globalisation. Students therefore linked GC with the ability to communicate in a common language and most considered English currently as that necessary medium and appeared eager to stretch themselves in expression. One student ventured to describe his friend as being “pugnacious” for “getting angry too easily”. Students were also aware of the correlation of global linguistic dominance and global economic dominance. Several students pointed out that “many Chinese in China are learning to speak English”. Similarly, a Chinese student shared the importance of mastering English in the interview—“because if I speak English, I can be understood by more people”. Most rationalised the dominance of English as an unavoidable fact of globalisation. They viewed learning English as a privilege and frequently linked the ability to learn English with a person’s social economic status. None of the participants are native speakers of the English language and their perception of the need for “Market English” (Narkunas, 2005, p. 31) would have most likely come from both the planned curriculum and as well as the experienced curriculum of the education system they are in. They were also aware that resistance to the linguistic hegemony of the English language exists and were able to list and explain its existence as well as why such a resistance can sometimes fail amongst the linguistic subalterns. The social and economic advantages of bilingualism and cultural understanding were singularly absent in their responses to this aspect of global citizenship.

Differences in perceptions of GC among international students and Singaporean students

The insights from the group of international students showed distinct differences in their experienced curriculum in comparison with those of the three groups of Singaporean students. Although the sample size is small and limits generalisability, the findings give us an insight into possible GC teaching, learning and research.

Among these students, given that they are foreigners or to-be citizens, economic and social concerns which touched them personally were the most paramount. By contrast, the GC topics of pollution and conservation were totally absent in their group discussions. For these students, global friendship was much more important and for this their lack of familiarity with local colloquial English was a handicap.

The international students were more aware of the economic complexities of wealth distribution and were more sensitive to the issues associated with it. Such discussions, like the local debate on the treatment of foreign workers that was being focused by the local print media in the weeks of the FGDs, were absent amongst the local students. The international students were able to point to social injustices in many other issues such as inequality and discrimination in employment, wages and housing.

Student attitudes towards GCE

One finding that could be cause for concern and may be in need of attention is the slightly superior tone evinced by some students regarding GCE. The participants in these discussions seemed to view themselves as adhering more closely than others to the ideals of GC, and in their descriptions of GC there was an eagerness to tell others that they already knew what it was. Only one participant openly admitted that “I am not certain what global citizenship is and I want to learn more about it”. Those holding a know-it-all attitude may not feel any obligation to learn more or to improve their own ethical conduct or the moral values that they themselves confidently propounded. This could be quite limiting for new experiences that contradict their own ideals might easily be brushed aside and rationalised as unethical or irrelevant. However, it has to be said that for some, there was also earnestness in their recognition of the importance of educating others who did not subscribe to their notions of GC and their relative powerlessness to change the world. Students also recognised the possibility of enacting laws in order to achieve their vision as well as the complexities and debates of such measures.

Discussion of findings

The following discussion analyses the findings in relation to the three approaches elaborated earlier to examine areas where GCE was essentialised and treated as content knowledge and areas with potential
for meaningful student engagement with global issues. Three aspects of GCE in this study suggest themselves—firstly, the didactic nature of the curriculum and pedagogy. Secondly, students' understanding did chart the progressive development of the GCE curriculum from the utopian model to the economic functional model to the social justice model as they became more aware of the relevance of the programme to their own personal situation. Finally, the rich potential in the diversity that was found in the classroom which bodes well for GC curriculum that enables these young minds to explore ideas for a better future that they can look forward to and help create.

Didactic ventures: Curriculum and pedagogy

The case study school appeared to have an integrated approach to GCE as the ideas in the programme were also reinforced in other school events and disciplines. Much of the programme content, reported in students' FGDs aligned with the ideas of the social-moral approach in GCE cited in the review of approaches to GCE.

Most significantly, it seemed to be deeply ingrained in all the participants that 'culture', be it their own or those of others, was something already fixed and unchanging, static and ossified. Students' identification of cultural identities with fashion, food and festivals may be due partly to the mandated National Education core events that all schools in Singapore must observe, such as Racial Harmony Day, International Friendship Day, and other school activities and events aimed at fostering racial harmony and international understanding (MoE, 2012).

As Adler and Sim (2008) have argued, racial harmony in the context of National Education is not teaching for an understanding of diversity, rather, it is to socialise students into the set of core societal values. This implies that knowledge and values are not regarded as problematic, but fixed and to be transmitted to the students.

By the end of Primary Five, the students were so well-informed in the 'essential characteristics' of the cultures that exist in Singapore such that these can be said to be successfully essentialised in their imaginary. It also has to be noted that the participants who frequently mentioned international relationships and trade were the same ones who just recently participated from a school trip to China. Adams (2008) pointed out how seeing other cultures first hand can really be an effective method in teaching GC. These participants were the most enthusiastic when they explained about international relationships and trade. Curriculum designers would have to include a variety of activities in their formulation of GCE since not every student will have the means for such cultural encounters.

Materials selected for the curriculum appeared to determine how concepts of 'culture' and 'conflicts' were imagined. For example, topics about the racial riots in Singapore and also during the early years of Singapore's independence were taught in the Primary Five Social Studies syllabus. The frequent reference to the Social Studies textbook pointed to the more dominant role of Social Studies in influencing the perception of the participants in GC, as compared to other subjects taught in the school's curriculum. Science too played an influential role with frequent references made by the students. This integrated approach is in line with other studies which highlight its benefits (Adams, 2008; Akinoglu, 2008).

The didactic and moralistic approach taken on culture, conflict, environment awareness and moral behaviour can be surmised from students’ responses. It is likely that this was the position chosen by the school's GCE curriculum designers as well as the attitude and perspective of the teachers delivering them. That students had the happy illusion of knowing it all indicated that the stress was on content rather than process. However, it should also be noted that students were also aware of the more demanding aspects of GC. These concerns have implications for the GCE curriculum which should seek to engage students with content and pedagogics that challenge their mental schemas so as to encourage thinking rather than deliver pre-approved content that were deemed appropriate for the students (Bremer, 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007).

Dynamic possibilities: Economic viability and social justice

Although it is inevitable that the most general and universalist approach to GCE monopolises more curriculum content and instruction, there is also evidence that economic considerations and social justice were present in students' minds in their responses.

From the perspective of the economic viability approach, there is ample evidence that students' appreciation of relationships emphasised economic
and cultural aspects of GC (Bottery, 2006). They were aware of the correlation between global linguistic dominance and global economic dominance and the importance of English for communication, employment and trade. One obvious limitation in their understanding was the weak linkage of this linguistic need to bilingualism and to the role of cultural understanding and conflict resolution in economic exchange.

More interestingly, some of the responses suggest a GCE that is relatively transformative in character (Kurth-Schai & Green, 2003; Castles, 2004; Gore 2004; Thomas et al., 2006; Banks, 2008). This indicates that engaging in inquiry into social justice is not beyond their ken. Perhaps due to the circumstance for their being in Singapore foreign students were more conscious of the issues and problems of global interaction. The nature of fair behaviour in children has come under close scrutiny by researchers, especially economists in the past few years (Sutter, 2003). The idea of reciprocity has also been proven to exist in children (Dahlman et al., 2007). It has been found that children and teenagers reject unequal offers much more often than older students, affirming the observations made during these FGDs, that for these students, real outcomes are relatively more important than good intentions. Fair behaviour can be included in the formulation of GCE since the students viewed GC as a form of interpersonal relationship.

The findings also suggest that differences do exist in students’ conception of issues in GC. An example would be the different ways the boys in the study conceptualised the idea of justice, as compared to the girls. The discussion on gender differences in forgiveness, i.e. whether boys display more justice-based morality and girls a more warmth-based morality, has been covered elsewhere quite extensively (Miller et al., 2008; Toussaint & Webb, 2005). This finding does highlight the need for curriculum designers to be aware that gender differences do influence perceptions of GC and the potential these differences have in students’ reactions towards selected content and forms of pedagogy.

Knowing that students are able to apply abstract concepts such as social injustice to their own local context and even to international politics, teachers could look more closely into providing opportunities and assistance for examining social realities critically, such as providing time for students to listen to and debate the ideas, knowledge and beliefs that they and others hold (Gore, 2004). Further research could inquire into the feasibility of “scaffolding conscientization” (Sleeter et al., 2004, p. 81) at the primary school level, for a better formulation of a curriculum of GC.

Problem or potential: Richness in diversity

The combination of didactic guidance and discursive exploration in the GC classroom opens up many possibilities for curriculum designers and teachers of GC. On the one hand, the GC curriculum could aim to cultivate values and attitudes for a docile and disciplined law-abiding labour force. On the other hand, from the data gathered, there appears to be much potential for an expanded GC curriculum which honours the ethnic, cultural and gender differences of the students as well pose real world challenges and issues which have begun to engage these young citizens and migrants.

The curriculum content for the education of the global citizen must include the issues that are often associated with GCE. The data gathered from these FGDs suggests that even if educators decide not to include these, intentionally or not, students would already have linked them on their own circumstances. Because the students of today will become the citizens of the global world of tomorrow, it is important that curriculum content be relevant to them and that the pedagogy is dialogic in nature so as to allow students themselves to explore solutions to global problems.

One major area in need of sensitive handling is obviously the different perspectives on issues in GC interaction among those in the ethnic minority and between local and international students in the classroom. So far, the essentialising of culture has rendered its diversity into static rituals and practices whereas their role in a rapidly changing world can be more fully explored. Along the same lines, the roles and functions of language and bilingualism in social and economic encounters also need attention. The pedagogical stance could also shift from didacticism to active participation and inquiry for a more stimulating and fulfilling experience for teachers and students. Besides paying more attention to students’ identities and needs, teachers will also have to give guidance and demonstrate by example how the ideals of GC can be realised. Such mutual support, among teachers and students bodes well for school-based curriculum development (Leong et al., 2011).
Conclusion

From the data gathered from this case study on GCE, what is most evident is that students experienced a curriculum which stresses respect, responsibility and relationships in cultural, political, ethical and moral spheres. The curriculum also made them more aware of economical survivability especially in terms of language skills and employability. There are signs of a more justice-oriented stance on global issues, though this is detected more strongly in the international students and less among the Singaporean students. Overall, the GCE programme in this primary school has helped these students form a more positive and optimistic attitude towards these issues.

Singapore's educational landscape has developed an increasing awareness of the need to prepare global citizens. The pedagogy for GC cannot be the straightforward inculcation of an ideal character in the minds of the students free of the issues and the complexities that GC entails. While there are merits of developing the GCE framework at the school level, free from the prescription of a central authority, it can be almost as disastrous if such an endeavour does not receive the expert guidance needed to help teachers address issues and differences of opinion in meaningful ways so as to encourage active participation and lifelong learning. By being inclusive and listening to students' voices, teachers and curriculum developers uphold the promise of school-based curriculum development.

References


