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SUMMARY

As the world sheds new light on the role of education in readiness for the Fourth Industrial Revolution era, the Ministry of Education (MOE) stresses Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) that emphasizes inculcating its concepts and values in students to apply them in all subjects. Based on that philosophy, the MOE has planned and designed teacher education programs that strengthen teachers’ competencies to enable them to teach the national curriculum of CCE introduced in schools efficiently in 2014. Additionally, the teacher education programs train teachers to be able to guide their students to become well-rounded individuals, which are necessary for the future. On the other hand, teachers have concerns about how to deal with the tensions between state expectations and their beliefs and perspectives on the teacher education programs.

The literature exploring the characteristics of CCE yields conflicting findings, with some studies showing the role and impact of CCE on students and society (Hahn, 1998; Hess, 2002; Narvaez and Lapsley, 2008; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald & Schultz, 2001) and other studies demonstrating self-cultivation, relationship with others, and tension between self and society (Lee, 2009; Loh & Hu, 2014; Westheimer, 2009). Furthermore, the literature investigates the influences of teacher identity development through teacher education programs on student identity development that is from mutual teaching and learning between teachers and students (Palmer, 1997).

This phenomenological study focuses on the perspectives of two lower secondary teachers in Singapore on improving their competencies in CCE. The present study surveys how the two teachers from different backgrounds perceive the basic concepts of a “good person” and a “good citizen,” the philosophy and aims of CCE in Singapore, and the similarities and differences between the national curriculum, teacher
education programs, and their beliefs on practices. The findings indicate that, first, the teacher education programs provided by the state still largely focus on core subjects for teachers to train students to be better equipped with skills for national examinations. Teachers believe that CCE is still mostly indoctrinated in classrooms, while acknowledging that role modeling should be the key pedagogy of CCE. Second, the pedagogy of critical inquiry infused in teacher education programs is helpful for teachers to reflect on their identity as a person and as a teacher to be practically effective in delivering CCE, which may influence students to develop their own character and citizenship eventually.

The findings indicate that neoliberal flow in the market economy and following the national examination system, which is high-stakes standardized testing, would be the key factors widening the gaps among studies on CCE, existing teacher education/training programs, and CCE in class. The findings show that the teacher education programs play an important role in narrowing the gaps. This study suggests implications for teacher educators and curriculum developers in strengthening teachers’ competencies in CCE that should demonstrate what it means to apply the intrinsic value of CCE, to all stakeholders of education, in the midst of the unpredictable circumstances in the globalized world.