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The Challenge of Cultivating National and Cosmopolitan Identities Through Literature: Insights From Singapore Schools

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ABSTRACT

Since the late 20th century, scholars have called for a need to broaden the aims of teaching English Literature away from its Eurocentric focus. Much effort has also been invested in making the subject more relevant through diversifying the texts studied and connecting texts to current social and global issues. It is pertinent now to ask what the significant role of Literature is in a globally interconnected age. In particular, what do teachers believe are key philosophical objectives of teaching literature, and how does this influence the texts they select, the instructional strategies they employ, and the values they seek to cultivate in the classroom? In this article, we report on the first National Survey of Literature Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Singapore schools. First, we review four key pedagogical movements that have underpinned the teaching of literature in schools around the world: New Criticism, Reader-response Criticism, Poststructuralist Criticism, and Ethical Criticism. These respectively represent four key

constructs (text, reader, culture, and other) used in the design and analysis of our survey

instrument. Next, we report on the survey findings, focusing on Singapore as a barometer of

current trends given its identity as an Anglophone country negotiating conflicting global and

postcolonial identities with an education system that inhabits colonial traditions. We highlight

key tensions arising from the impetus to develop national and cosmopolitan identities through

Literature courses, and reflect on the implications for future directions in teaching.

Recent years have seen the study of English Literature suffer a decline in countries where the

subject was once accorded prestige and valued as a hallmark of bourgeois civility. In England,

the study of GCSE Advanced-level (A-level) English declined by 28% from 2016 to 2019

(Turner, 2019; Weale, 2019). In the United States, universities reported that the number of

bachelor's degrees in English fell by approximately 20% between 2012 and 2016 as students

opted for disciplines such as biomedical sciences and communications technologies, which

provide more guaranteed employment (Association of Departments of English, 2018; Schmidt,

2018). Similar declines in English Literature (henceforth termed *Literature* in this article[1]) have

also been observed in countries formerly colonized by the British, as they have inherited an

English system of education that was instituted as part of the civilizing mission of colonialism. In

Australia, the percentage of year 12 students studying Literature fell from 26% in 1998 to 11% in

2017, and teachers warned that the subject had reached a state of crisis after a 20-year decline in

enrollment, with many schools no longer offering the subject (Hiatt, 2018). In Malaysia, the

number of students choosing to study Literature has remained consistently small, at 743 in 2014

(Too, 2018). In Singapore, the number of students who sat for the GCE Ordinary-level (O-level)

Literature in English examination, taken at the end of secondary school, fell from 16,970

students in 1992 (48% of the cohort) to 6,000 in 2012 (18% of the cohort; Heng, 2013).

Since the late 20th century, declining enrollments have led to calls by scholars to rethink

the aims of teaching literature. This has challenged three key pillars of the traditional curriculum

related to objectives, texts, and pedagogies. In terms of objectives, scholars have called for a

shift away from aesthetic appreciation toward recognizing that texts are embedded in culture and

that students should read texts in relation to their social, economic, and political contexts, as well

as their networks with cultural traditions and audiences (Brauer & Clark, 2008). In terms of texts,

scholars have also advocated for the inclusion of newer textual modes, such as video games,

graphic novels, and hypermedia (Swenson, Young, McGrail, Rozema, & Whitin, 2006), and

highlighted the need to emphasize discourse analysis so students are equipped to read, interpret,

and criticize texts in all forms of modes and mediums (Holden, 1999; Scholes, 1998). In terms of

pedagogy, scholars, particularly from postcolonial countries, have called for a shift away from

close readings of Western canonical works to broader readings of world literature, including

translated works by writers from a wider diversity of cultures (Choo, 2016; Yeo, 1999).

Postcolonial scholars have also proposed a cosmopolitan Literature curriculum in which texts,

particularly from marginalized voices, can serve as a platform for engagement with real-world

issues of social and global justice (Choo, 2020; Poon, 2010; Too, 2018; Tope, 2018).

Concomitantly, this pluralization of Literature has been criticized by literary purists who

view the curriculum as becoming politicized for the sake of affirming the multiplicity of

identities, especially in relation to race, class, and gender. This dichotomy between the aesthetic

and political worth of literary study was visibly reignited in the late 1990s in what has become

known as the culture wars. Universities throughout the West embraced literary theory, and area

studies, multicultural, and popular culture courses became increasingly common. In response, conservatives became visibly uncomfortable with the shift away from genre and textual analysis. In his seminal work, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, Allan Bloom (1987) decried the decline of U.S. culture because colleges were liberalizing the curriculum by catering to popular taste instead of reinforcing the serious study of classical literary and philosophical works. Other allies, such as John Ellis (1997), described this phenomenon as a corruption infecting Literature and, like many in the conservative camp, romanticized a lost past in which appreciating and immersing oneself in the Great Books was the norm.

These tensions between traditional and modern approaches to teaching, canonical and multicultural curricula, and the aesthetic and political uses of literature continue to manifest in Literature courses, especially in postcolonial countries. Singapore is a particularly interesting site for study. As a global city and one of the leading financial centers in the world, the capacity to empower citizens with intercultural and cosmopolitan dispositions is crucial. At the same time, the impetus to forge a global identity contends with the concurrent push to develop a sense of national identity, particularly because the country only gained independence in 1965 following over a hundred years of British colonization. The English language was strategically used to strengthen both Singapore's global identity and its sense of national cohesiveness. On the one hand, as a global language and language of business, English was deemed important in providing citizens access to the global economy. On the other hand, English served as the lingua franca to bridge the linguistic gap among Singapore's multiracial population, comprising approximately 74% Chinese, 13% Malays, 9% Indians, and 4% Eurasians and other ethnic groups. The government thus designated English as an official language, and it continues to be taught as a

compulsory first language and main medium of instruction in all schools. Students' high proficiency in English is observed in that they have consistently outperformed their peers in native English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and United States in key international reading assessments which they have taken in English. For example, in the OECD's 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment, 15-year-old Singapore students were ranked second for reading (Schleicher, 2019), and in the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study assessment, fourth-grade Singapore students scored second highest in reading (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2016).

At the same time, the prioritization given to the English language, with its focus on reading, writing, grammar, listening, speaking, and viewing skills, has narrowly emphasized the functional and communicative aspects of language learning, with less attention paid to aesthetic and ethical-political engagements with language (Choo, 2016). This is most evidently observed in that although English language is a compulsory subject, English Literature is a marginalized subject that has faced declining enrollment over the years. One reason for this disjuncture may be due to the fact that Literature historically centered on an appreciation of Western, particularly British, texts and the cultivation of English values. It has been well documented that during the period of British colonization, Literature was used to perpetuate English values and admiration for English culture (Doyle, 1989; Hunter, 1988; Viswanathan, 1989. Thus, while the English language was seen as an important tool for constructing Singapore's image as a global city conducive to Western investments, it was not an appropriate conduit for Asian values that the government was intent on propagating. Such Asian values were better conveyed through mother tongue languages and literatures. Consequently, this led to the government's ambivalent position

toward English Literature, which manifested in a lack of commitment to promoting the subject, particularly in the early years of the country's independence.

Over the years, there has been a greater recognition that English Literature can serve to foster both global awareness and national identity. For example, one of the key outcomes of the national Literature syllabus is to develop "empathetic and global thinkers" (Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2019, p. 8) who are open to multiple perspectives alongside the development of critical readers, creative meaning makers, and convincing communicators. Complementing this is the view that Literature can enable students to explore issues of national identity and belonging and that teachers are encouraged to include Singapore literature in both the lower and upper secondary curricula. Since 2006, Singapore literature has been included in the compulsory Unseen analysis section and as part of the prose and drama texts assessed in the GCE O-level examination. The challenge is how teachers navigate the different demands of developing students' aesthetic appreciation, global awareness, and national connectedness in the Literature classroom.

In this article, we report on the first National Survey of Literature Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Singapore. First, we review four key pedagogical movements that have underpinned the teaching of literature in schools in Singapore and around the world: New Criticism, Reader-response Criticism, Poststructuralist Criticism, and Ethical Criticism. These movements have broadly lent attention to what we respectively term text-, reader-, culture-, and other-centered approaches to teaching. Next, using these as central theoretical constructs, we report on the survey findings that explore current emphases in literature teaching approaches in Singapore. The Singapore education system provides an appropriate barometer of current trends in Literature as an Anglophone country negotiating conflicting global and postcolonial identities

with an education system that has inherited colonial traditions. We devote the Results and Discussion sections to examining some of the key tensions arising from the impetus to develop national and cosmopolitan identities through Literature courses, and reflect on the implications for future directions in teaching the subject.

Key Movements in Literature Education From the Early 20th Century to the Present

When the concept of literature first emerged in Europe in the 14th century, its Latin root, *littera*, denoted a letter of the alphabet. In other words, *reading literature* referred to the capacity to read and comprehend words. From the 18th century, *reading literature* acquired a more specialized meaning denoting the reading of metrical composition as part of polite learning (Williams, 1977). During this period, the spread of mass education led to the systematic introduction of Literature as a subject seeking to cultivate taste in aesthetically well-written and imaginative works. Literature provided the platform to promote civility among a largely illiterate populace by developing in them an appreciation for "the best that is known and thought in the world" (Arnold, 1993, p. 37). By the 19th century, cynicism toward the church and clergy led to the decline of religious studies, and Literature was identified as an appropriate alternative for the moral education of the masses. By the 1930s, "English was not only a subject worth studying, but *the* supremely civilizing pursuit, the spiritual essence of the social formation" (Eagleton, 1996, p. 27). From this period of the early 20th century to the present, four dominant movements may be discerned—New Criticism, Reader-response Criticism, Poststructuralist Criticism, and Ethical Criticism—with each movement foregrounding text-, reader-, culture-, and other-centered objectives of teaching literature, respectively.

New Criticism: The Text-Centered Objective of Literature Education

Although aesthetic appreciation of the Great Books of the West was the cornerstone of Literature in its early years, a systematic approach to teaching literature was lacking. In the 1930s, University of Cambridge Professor I.A. Richards drew attention to the problems of interpretation and subjectivity observed in his own students. His books, *Practical Criticism* (Richards, 1929/2017) and *Principles of Literary Criticism* (Richards, 1924/2004), highlighted the need for an objective and close reading of the way language works to create and communicate meaning for intended effects. Richards, together with T.S. Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, and others, contributed to the movement of New Criticism that cemented the connection between Literature and the close, critical appreciation of literary texts. Essentially, the New Critics advanced an approach to aesthetic criticism that continues to be a fundamental part of the Literature syllabus and Literature assessments conducted by major accreditation bodies today that emphasize close reading. The philosophical premise of New Criticism is that the text and its effects are central objects to the teaching of literary criticism. As Richards (1924/2004) argued, "the two pillars upon which a theory of criticism must rest are an account of value and an account of communication" (p. 25). In other words, the student should be trained as a critic who evaluates a text on its own terms by analyzing how it communicates meaning through language and stylistic features.

The New Critics further established four key principles guiding the teaching of aesthetic criticism: the avoidance of the affective fallacy, the avoidance of the intentional fallacy, an appreciation of the aesthetics of high culture, and a regard for the position of the critic as objective and distanced. These principles were subsequently problematized by later movements, as we will proceed to elaborate, that sought to expand the scope of literature teaching in schools.

Reader-Response Criticism: The Reader-Centered Objective of Literature Education

In the 1970s and 1980s, reader-response critics challenged the view that the text is a mystical artifact to be dissected in a linear, unidirectional manner by the reader, whose mind is akin to a blank slate. The philosophical premise of Reader-response Criticism is based on the view that meaning arises from dynamic transactions between texts and readers. Louise M. Rosenblatt (1993), a key scholar of the movement, sought to problematize such dualisms as reader and text, subject and object, as they assume that each element is fixed and predefined. Accordingly, her notion of transaction encompasses a more dynamic relation in which readers and texts condition, and are conditioned by, the other in the reading process. Whereas the text provides linguistic, symbolic, and interpretive codes to guide the reader, the reader brings a reservoir of prior experiences and knowledge to create meaning (Rosenblatt, 1993). This can occur collectively among interpretive communities within classrooms (Fish, 1980). In this public space, students are encouraged to move away from impressionistic and subjective responses by justifying their opinions on logical analysis of the text. In the process, this promotes self-reflexivity as students become more aware of the limitations of their own responses as they engage with their peers.

Literary texts are particularly powerful catalysts for facilitating dialogic discussions given the incomplete writerly, as opposed to readerly, nature of literary language (Barthes, 1974). Rosenblatt (1994) distinguished aesthetic reading, which involves readers activating their prior experiences and actively transacting with texts, from efferent reading, which involves readers using texts for instrumental purposes, such as reading a recipe or a car manual. Literary texts facilitate aesthetic readings as literary language, such as metaphors, provide spaces for multiple interpretations. Through aesthetic readings of texts, students are encouraged to be active producers rather than passive consumers of meaning as they explore gaps and indeterminate

meanings in texts (Iser, 1972). The teacher's role is thus to provide opportunities for students to not merely analyze a text, but to respond to the text by connecting it to their own experiences and to actively co-construct meaning with their peers.

Poststructuralist Criticism: The Culture-Centered Objective of Literature Education

To ensure methodological rigor and consistency, the New Critics argued that, like a science, literary criticism should be focused on the text as artifact and should exclude biographical, historical, and subjective considerations. By the 1970s, this principle was attacked by Poststructuralist Criticism, which became increasingly popular in Literature courses in colleges across Europe and the United States. Meaning, as Poststructuralist critics contend, is never reduced to units of signifieds and signifiers existing in the self-enclosed text. Rather, signs exist within webs of preexisting signs in a system of relations (Derrida, 1978; de Saussure, 1986). In other words, a text emerges from culture, and the task of critical readers is to discern ideological discourses governing the structure and signification of the text. Deconstruction is also employed to undermine the text's apparent unity of meaning by highlighting contradictions, ambiguity, and gaps in meaning, thereby opening space for a plurality of interpretations (Eagleton, 1996). Ultimately, critical readings of literature provide a launchpad to critical readings of sociopolitical contexts and systems that reinforce hegemony in the forms of patriarchy, colonialism, racism, and other forms of oppression.

The popularity of Poststructuralist Criticism occurred in tandem with multicultural education and its call to democratize the classroom, so close readings of a single text perpetuated by the tradition of New Criticism was replaced with comparative criticism of texts from a diversity of cultures. New Criticism's absorption with the Great Books that was part of the standard English curriculum in colleges in the early 20th century gradually gave way to the

inclusion of multicultural, postcolonial, and Third World literatures, as well as popular culture. A key goal of multicultural education was to affirm students' community cultures alongside mainstream cultures and empower them with the knowledge and skills to succeed. This lent attention to the intersections of race, class, gender, religion, language, and so forth and how these influence student learning and behavior (Banks, 2020).

In education, critical pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy gained popularity among scholars, and these movements were undergirded by an ethics of social justice. These pedagogies drew attention to social injustices perpetuated by symbolic and institutional discourses that exacerbated inequalities and discrimination, particularly toward marginalized groups. Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was a seminal text that galvanized these movements in calling for education that "makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation" (p. 30). In this spirit, scholars have called for culturally relevant pedagogies that critique discourses of power and privilege and that promote values more aligned with students' own cultures, particularly those from underrepresented communities (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Ethical Criticism: The Other-Centered Objective of Literature Education

Toward the late 20th century, the popularity of Poststructuralist Criticism waned for various reasons. One significant turning point was the revelation that Paul de Man, a key Poststructuralist scholar, was involved in writing anti-Semitic articles for pro-Nazi newspapers. This led to misgivings about Poststructuralist Criticism because its endless deconstruction of metanarratives, its celebration of undecidability, and its infinite deferral of meaning served to mask more humanistic goals of critical reading (Gregory, 2010). As Schwarz (2001) observed, prominent

scholars became skeptical of the ends of deconstruction and began to question, "Who really reads in terms of discovering where meaning goes astray? Is that kind of engagement something other than reading, or a subcategory of picaresque reading, where the reader stands outside the text's imagined world as a carping cynic?" (p. 3). During this time, prominent scholars, such as Wayne Booth, Martha Nussbaum, and Marshall Gregory, contributed to the rise of Ethical Criticism in challenging Poststructuralist Criticism's absorption with the world of the text and its politics while excluding considerations of the connection between art and life, fiction and reality. Ethics, derived from the Greek term *ethos*, denotes character or habitual characteristics of an individual or society that persist across time. In this light, Booth (1988) introduced the practice of Ethical Criticism as tied to appraising the values, beliefs, and characteristics of individuals and societies in cultural discourses.

At the turn of the 21st century, two important edited volumes consolidated the views of prominent scholars, particularly in literary studies and philosophy: *The Turn to Ethics* edited by Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (2000) and *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory* edited by Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack (2001). Literature was perceived as a vital platform for applied ethics because, as Booth (1998) asserted, "it is in stories that we learn to think about the 'virtual' cases that echo the cases we will meet when we return to the more disorderly, 'actual' world" (p. 48). Discussions of ethics necessitated a particular orientation to others, and thus, Ethical Criticism became closely interconnected with another concept that became increasingly significant: cosmopolitan ethics.

Cosmopolitanism, typically translated from the Greek as citizen of the world, is rooted in the ideals of Cynic, Stoic, and Enlightenment philosophers in the West and finds resonance in

Confucian, Muslim, and Hindu philosophy in the East as well. Put simply, cosmopolitan ethics is premised on the view that moral obligation extends beyond self, family, and nation to the human fraternity in order that all persons, regardless of race, class, gender, or nationality, are accorded with equal respect and dignity. Given the propensity of human nature toward what the philosopher Immanuel Kant described as "unsocial sociability" (1963, p. 15), in which one tends to either isolate oneself from others or associate oneself with like-minded others, cosmopolitan ethics supports an aspirational goal to disrupt egoism, ethnocentrism, and all manifestations of parochialism and intolerance. Thus, the cultivation of cosmopolitan ethics has been discussed as a dispositional orientation involving a "transnational consciousness" (Papastergiadis, 2007, p. 144), a "reflective openness to the new with reflective loyalty to the known" (Hansen, 2011, p. 1), a "cosmopolitan outlook" (Beck, 2006, p. 7) encompassing an awareness of global risks along with a recognition of differences and interconnections across cultures, and importantly, the "develop[ment of] sympathetic understanding of distant cultures and of ethnic, racial, and religious minorities" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 69). Contemporary views of cosmopolitan ethics tend to resist the abstract notion of a universal identity to embrace a more pragmatic view that one may have multiple attachments to communities at home and abroad (Appiah, 2006; Robbins, 2012). Negotiating the continual contradictions and possibilities of being a "rooted cosmopolitan" (Ackerman, 1994) is thus part and parcel of the process of cosmopolitan identities continually in the making.

Literature provides an especially conducive platform for cosmopolitan Ethical Criticism. In her many essays and books defending Ethical Criticism, Nussbaum (1997) has explored Literature's potential to expand the imagination's capacity to empathize with others, arguing that "the artistic form makes its spectator perceive, for a time, the invisible people of their world—at

least a beginning of social justice" (p. 94). This expansion of the imagination requires, as postcolonial scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2012) argued, the capacity to "train the imagination to be tough enough to test its limits" (p. 290), which includes training the imagination to problematize ideological representations of others and to question the reader's own epistemological readings of others. In this light, cosmopolitan Ethical Criticism may be perceived as an extension of Poststructuralist Criticism in its quest to deconstruct truth claims of narratives and ideologies. The difference is that cosmopolitan Ethical Criticism has a more aspirational and activist dimension. The impetus to expand the imagination encompasses what Arjun Appadurai (2013) called the "ethics of possibility," involving "ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that increase the horizons of hope, that expand the field of the imagination, that produce greater equity in...a capacity to aspire, and that widen the field of informed, creative, and critical citizenship" (p. 295). Such an ethics of possibility propels real-world activism, such as transnational civil society and progressive movements driven by the hope of more democratically inclusive worlds. At its core, cosmopolitan Ethical Criticism is centered on an ethics of alterity or other-centered ethics (Choo, 2017). Appreciating the aesthetics of text, activating the reader's interactional responses, and discerning sociocultural and ideological discourses informing texts are all means to ethical engagements with the other (the stranger, the foreigner, the marginalized and silenced), as well as to disrupting processes of othering.

In summary, the four key movements of Literature from the early 20th century to the present—New Criticism, Reader-response Criticism, Poststructuralist Criticism, and Ethical Criticism—point to different emphases in teaching, namely, text-, reader-, culture-, and other-centered objectives, respectively. These objectives translate to different considerations for text

selection, instructional strategies, and the cultivation of values, although it should be noted that these are overlapping and should not be seen as discrete (see Table 1).

Method

Given the four dominant movements in Literature education, it is pertinent to ask, What is the significant role of Literature in the 21st century? In particular, what do teachers believe are key philosophical objectives of teaching literature, and how does this influence the texts they select, the pedagogical strategies they employ, and the values they seek to cultivate in the classroom? In this article, we report on the first National Survey of Literature Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Singapore schools.

Survey Development

We developed a pilot survey before administering the main survey. The constructs and items for the survey emerged from extensive literature reviews focusing on key movements that have informed Literature education. This was supplemented by discussions with scholars and policymakers in the field who have contributed to the development of the Literature syllabus and national curriculum. We first identified four main domains that categorized Literature teachers' beliefs and pedagogy. These were related to objectives of teaching literature, factors governing teachers' selection of texts; the instructional strategies, particularly questions, they employed in formative assessments that informed classroom activities; and the values they cultivated. These four domains constituted the four key sections of the survey. Next, for each section, we generated questions and items. In total, the pilot survey comprised 30 questions and 196 items organized within the four sections—Objectives (four questions, 36 items), Text Selection (seven questions, 65 items), Instructional Strategies (eight questions, 64 items), and Values (four

questions, 22 items)—along with a fifth section, Demographics (seven questions, nine items). Of these, 81 items were initially tied to five main constructs: text, reader, culture, context, and other (see Table 2 for a breakdown of the construct items across the four domains at each phase of our study).

The text, reader, culture, and other constructs were grounded on four key movements of Literature education (New Criticism, Reader-response Criticism, Poststructuralist Criticism, and Ethical Criticism) elaborated earlier in our literature review. The context construct focused on how teachers engaged students with sociopolitical and historical contexts through texts as informed by movements such as New Historicism. Although we recognized that context overlapped with the other construct (as confirmed later), at this stage, we wanted to distinguish extratextual engagements with texts (dealing with historical and ideological contexts) from engaging with the texts' ethical concerns. These construct items were answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). The remaining questions were not tied to a construct and included items related to frequency, such as how often teachers incorporated particular texts (e.g., short films, graphic novels) and pedagogies, such as literature circles or inquiry projects; open-ended questions, such as key principles guiding their teaching of literature and the literary texts taught in the past 12 months; and demographics of teachers. These questions were important in providing a contextual understanding of teachers' beliefs about literature teaching and their pedagogical practices.

The pilot survey was administered to 51 teachers via convenience sampling to collect preliminary data to test the comprehensibility, relevance, acceptability, and feasibility of the instrument, in preparation for the larger study (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The pilot data informed us about the refinements required for the items tied to each construct to enhance the

validity and reliability of the overall scale. We then revised the survey items for clarity. We removed items that we deemed repetitive and added others to accurately represent the constructs we intended to measure. Specific concerns, such as item difficulty, discrimination, and internal consistency, were considered. The final survey encompassed 31 questions and 204 items, with 83 of the items tied to the five constructs.

Data Sample

In Singapore, primary and secondary schools and junior colleges for students in grades 1–12 are centrally managed by the Ministry of Education (MOE), which also oversees key education directives and policies, the syllabus for each subject, and three key national examinations: the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) that students take at the end of primary education (grade 6), the GCE O-level examination taken at the end of secondary education (grade 10), and the GCE A-level examination taken at the end of junior college (grade 12). These high-stakes national examinations may be seen as sorting mechanisms, as PSLE scores are used to determine entry to secondary schools, and O- and A-level scores are used to determine entry to junior colleges and universities, respectively.[2]

In total, there were 144 local secondary schools in 2018 (international schools were excluded from the study). In selecting participants for this survey, the first step was to select schools instead of individual teachers because no reliable sampling frame could be established for Literature teachers in Singapore. Further, by selecting schools, we could ensure a selection of secondary schools with a representative range of academic achievement backgrounds, as gauged by the PSLE aggregate score that is published for each secondary school (MOE, 2017). The PSLE is used as a proxy measure for school academic achievement, so secondary schools that have a higher PSLE aggregate entry score range are more difficult to gain entry into. We

categorized the 144 secondary schools into four main categories (A–D) based on school type and aggregate PSLE entry scores, with category A representing secondary schools that are the easiest to gain entry to (those with the lowest PSLE aggregate entry scores) and category D representing schools that are the most difficult to gain entry to (those with the highest PSLE aggregate entry scores). Category D schools are also known as Integrated Programme schools, in which students can bypass the O-level examination to take the A-level examination directly after six years of high school. These schools typically accept the nation's academically top students. As compared with the previous three categories that have about 43 schools each, there are only 16 category D schools. These schools also tend to have a larger number of Literature teachers and classes as compared with mainstream schools. Whereas Literature is typically a marginalized subject in mainstream schools, it is conversely given more emphasis in Integrated Programme schools, and opportunities to study Literature at advanced levels are provided.

Once the population was stratified, we used a random number generator to draw a random sample of at least 10 schools from each of the four strata. Whenever schools declined to be part of the study, we randomly generated further schools within the respective categories. The selected schools were then contacted via email, and information and consent forms were distributed. From each school that agreed to participate in the survey, all Literature teachers across levels from secondary 1 to 5 were asked to complete the survey either online or on hard copy (based on the school's preference).

The main survey was administered from 2018 to 2019. For each category, there was a relatively even proportion of 30% of the total number of schools that participated in the survey (see Table 3). Altogether, 232 Literature teachers from 47 secondary schools, representing approximately 30% of secondary school Literature teachers in Singapore, participated in the

survey. The participants consisted of 41 males and 191 females. Most of the participants belonged to the age group ranging from 30 to 39 years of age. In terms of years of experience in teaching, there was good diversity, as 2% had less than one year of experience, 30% had 1–5 years, 24% had 6–10 years, 28% had 11–20 years, and 16% had more than 20 years.

Preliminary Data Analysis

Following Hopwood and Donnellan's (2010) recommendation about the need to cross-validate factor structures, we subjected the data from the main survey to several rounds of exploratory factor analysis, which showed that four constructs—text, reader, culture, and other—clustered distinctly, whereas the context construct clustered with items from the other construct. Furthermore, an inspection of the scatterplot from Cattell's scree test revealed a clear break after the fourth factor. Given that our scholarly research also supplemented the fact that engagement with sociopolitical and historical contexts (context construct) is integrally connected with ethical engagement and social justice (other construct), we decided to utilize only four constructs—text, reader, culture, and other—to analyze the data. The pattern matrix from the exploratory factor analysis showed that 10 construct items overlapped with others, with some items having factor loadings below .40. Thus, we removed these items, leaving 73 construct items tied to the four constructs.

We assessed the suitability of data for factor analysis with the 73 items. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of .3 and above. In relation to the Objectives, Text Selection, Instructional Strategies, and Values sections of the survey, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value ranged between .79 and .88, exceeding the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's test of sphericity showed statistical significance in relation to the four constructs within each domain: Objectives ($\chi^2 = 4,292.94$, $df = 595$, $p < .001$), Text Selection

($\chi^2 = 853.22$, $df = 55$, $p < .001$), Instructional Strategies ($\chi^2 = 1,347.48$, $df = 45$, $p < .001$), and

Values ($\chi^2 = 1,559.88$, $df = 136$, $p < .001$). The four constructs (text, reader, culture, and other)

explained 52%, 69%, 79%, and 61% of the variance for the four domains (Objectives, Text

Selection, Instructional Strategies, and Values), respectively. The four constructs showed

sufficient validity and reliability across the four domains and was interpretable and consistent

with the initial conceptualization of the constructs.

We then conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the factor structure of the

scores obtained from the survey using AMOS. We used maximum likelihood estimation to

estimate the CFA model in this study because it is regarded as a robust method for moderate to

large sample sizes (Brown & Moore, 2012). Upon performing the initial CFA, it was found that

several items did not fit the model because their parameter estimates were less than .40 and so

we removed them. Thereafter, we performed CFA with the remaining 45 construct items. Results

showed that all the standardized factor loadings were statistically significant and substantial

(>.61). This model fitted the data well for each domain: Objectives ($\chi^2 = 117.17$, $df = 71$,

Tucker–Lewis index [TLI] = .96, comparative fit index [CFI] = .97, root mean square error of

approximation [RMSEA] = .053), Text Selection ($\chi^2 = 61.20$, $df = 29$, TLI = .93, CFI = .96,

RMSEA = .069), Instructional Strategies ($\chi^2 = 93.24$, $df = 30$, TLI = .93, CFI = .95,

RMSEA = .096), and Values ($\chi^2 = 82.81$, $df = 38$, TLI = .90, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .071).

The reliability coefficients for the four constructs (text, reader, culture, and other) are

included for each domain in Tables 4, 6, 8, and 10 (subsequently discussed). According to Hair,

Black, Babin, & Anderson (2010) and Nunnally & Bernstein (1994), a Cronbach's alpha of

above .6 and .7 indicates acceptable and good levels of internal consistency, respectively. Across

all four domains (Objectives, Text Selection, Instructional Strategies, and Values), the reliability

coefficients for each construct ranged from .60 to .97, indicating good reliability and internal consistency. This was with the exception of the reader construct in the Text Selection domain (α = .34), which could be due to the way teachers interpreted the items belonging to this construct. In this article, we focus on presenting and discussing the results from the 45 construct-related items.[3]

Results

Objectives of Teaching Literature

The results, summarized in Table 4, show that teachers consider equipping students to connect text to human concerns, such as human dignity, inequality, discrimination, and suffering, as the primary objective of teaching literature (other construct: $M = 4.69$, $SD = 0.56$). This is followed by equipping students to reflect on the connections between text and their own lives (reader construct: $M = 4.60$, $SD = 0.52$) and equipping them to analyze the author's craft (text construct: $M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.56$). Overall, items in the text construct are rated highest, followed by items in the reader construct. The attention to textual appreciation and personal response aligns with the emphasis in the high-stakes national O-level Literature examination, in which the first two objectives are for students to "demonstrate, through close analysis, knowledge of the literary texts studied" and to "respond with knowledge and understanding to literary texts" (Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board, 2020, p. 3).

The past decade has seen growing interest in Singapore literature, and the MOE has taken steps to promote the teaching of local literature, such as by including a Singapore poem in the compulsory Unseen analysis section of the examination paper, but the least important objective is tied to the culture construct *($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.71$)*. We conducted a one-way within-subjects

analysis of variance (ANOVA) to evaluate whether there are significant differences among the four constructs. The results indicate that there is a significant difference in Literature teachers' responses in relation to the four constructs, Wilks' $\Lambda = .67$, $F(3, 228) = 37.97$, $p < .001$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .33$. A post hoc test using the Bonferroni procedure indicates that there are significant differences in teachers' perception of the objectives of teaching literature in relation to the text and culture constructs ($p < .001$), the reader and culture constructs ($p < .001$), and the other and culture constructs ($p < .001$). Thus, teachers view equipping students to appreciate local literature, to connect texts to issues in Singapore, and to be sensitive to issues of discrimination in Singapore society as lowest in terms of priority.

The interconstruct correlation coefficients are presented in Table 5. The effects for the positive correlations between constructs range from $r = .38$ to $r = .59$, which can be considered medium in magnitude (Cohen, 1988). There are moderately positive correlations between the text and other constructs ($r = .59$, $p < .01$), the reader and other constructs ($r = .56$, $p < .01$), and the culture and other constructs ($r = .55$, $p < .01$). This supports the view that the dominant objective of textual appreciation is connected to broader goals of reading for critical discernment and awareness of universal and global issues.

Text Selection

As shown in Table 6, when selecting the types of texts to use in their classrooms, teachers tend to focus on text-related items ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.54$) entailing how stylistically rich the texts are and their potential in providing opportunities for students to conduct literary analysis on the texts. Teachers also value the importance of examining underlying values and intentions in the texts (other construct: $M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.67$) and the need for students to make connections from what they read to their current interests (reader construct: $M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.68$).

It is also noted that items belonging to the culture construct ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.76$) are again rated least agreeable, which means that teachers do not view the selection of texts for study as primarily driven by a need to deepen understanding of their own society. A one-way within-subjects ANOVA indicates that there is a significant difference among the four constructs, Wilks' $\Lambda = .67$, $F(3, 229) = 37.55$, $p < .001$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .33$. A post hoc test using the Bonferroni procedure indicates that there are significant differences in factors influencing teachers' selection of texts in relation to the text and culture constructs ($p < .001$), the reader and culture constructs ($p < .001$), and the other and culture constructs ($p < .001$). This finding is intriguing because in one frequency question included in the survey, texts selected from Singapore (95%) far surpass texts from the United States (78%) and the United Kingdom (75%). It is perhaps the case that teachers view Literature as more connected to the development of global awareness rather than social engagement. This is also echoed in the MOE's Literature in English syllabus, which outlines the development of empathetic and global thinkers as one of the key outcomes of Literature courses.

The interconstruct correlation coefficients show significant positive correlations between constructs—text, reader, culture, and other—ranging from $r = .18$ to $r = .46$, which can be considered small to medium in magnitude (Cohen, 1988). There is a moderately positive correlation between the reader and other constructs ($r = .46$, $p < .01$; see Table 7). This suggests that the selection of texts is driven by the desire to help students make connections between themselves and current issues in the world.

Instructional Strategies

Teachers' responses, summarized in Table 8, show that the types of instructional strategies that teachers employ tend to support text-related items ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.65$) and reader-related

items ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.76$). For example, the top three questions are those related to requiring students to analyze plot, character, setting and atmosphere, and themes (text construct); to give a personal response to the text (reader construct); and to analyze the author's style (text construct). This provides empirical evidence concerning the impact of high-stakes examinations in influencing the kinds of questions asked in the classroom.

Of least concern are questions related to the culture construct ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.06$), especially questions that require students to make connections between the text and communities and issues in society. Once again, the one-way within-subjects ANOVA indicates that there is a significant difference among the four constructs, Wilks' $\Lambda = .43$, $F(3, 229) = 100.81$, $p < .001$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .57$. A post hoc test using the Bonferroni procedure indicates that there are significant differences in the kinds of questions teachers ask in relation to the text and culture constructs ($p < .001$), the reader and culture constructs ($p < .001$), and the other and culture constructs ($p < .001$).

The interconstruct correlation coefficients show strong positive correlations between the culture and other constructs ($r = .67$, $p < .01$) but no significant correlation between the text and culture constructs ($r = .02$, $p > .01$; see Table 9). This suggests that even though text analysis-type questions dominate the questions that drive instruction in the classroom, these tend to focus on the aesthetic aspects of texts rather than textual analysis of the representation of local culture and communities in the texts.

Values

Based on the mean score summarized in Table 10, in terms of the values that are important to the teaching of literature, teachers tend to rate items for the other construct ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.43$) most highly. Teachers prioritize empathy ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.49$) and openness ($M = 4.57$, SD

= 0.51), which relate to the other construct, and persuasion ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.60$) and

independence ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.55$), which relate to the reader construct. Whereas openness,

persuasion, and independence suggest a relevance to literary interpretation and essay-writing

skills, teachers' emphasis on empathy reveal their desire to go beyond literary and affective

engagements with texts to effect a change in students' attitudes toward otherness and diversity.

Whereas empathy is valued by teachers, the survey indicates, however, that teachers do

not place as much significance on empathy in relation to communities in their own culture.

Overall, the culture construct ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.76$) is rated least agreeable, especially in relation

to values of social responsibility and national belonging. The one-way within-subjects ANOVA

shows a significant difference among the four constructs, Wilks' $\Lambda = .49$, $F(3, 228) = 79.58$,

$p < .001$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .51$. A post hoc test using the Bonferroni procedure indicates that

there are significant differences in teachers' perception of values important to their teaching of

literature in relation to the text and culture constructs ($p < .001$), the reader and culture constructs

($p < .001$), and the other and culture constructs ($p < .001$). The results point to a preference for a

more holistic view of values and a more cosmopolitan approach to responsibility and belonging.

Teachers prioritize empathy at a distance or empathy toward communities beyond the nation. For

example, in follow-up interviews, one teacher mentions that she aims to "develop students to be

sensitive to underlying ideologies and agendas which drive a message and to encourage them to

be empathetic to people living in countries, contexts, and circumstances different from their lived

experiences."

The interconstruct correlation coefficients show moderately positive correlations between

the reader and other constructs ($r = .50$, $p < .01$), the text and other constructs ($r = .50$, $p < .01$),

and the text and reader constructs ($r = .51$, $p < .01$; see Table 11). This suggests that the values of

textual appreciation and reader-response values which teachers seek to inculcate are more closely related to empathy and openness toward others in the world rather than in one's own country.

Differences across groups

We conducted an independent samples *t*-test to examine differences across two groups: teachers from government/government-aided schools (group 1) and teachers from Integrated Programme (academically high-performing) schools (group 2). Findings show that across all four sections of the survey (Objectives, Texts, Instructional Strategies, and Values), there is a significant difference for both groups in relation to the text construct.

In relation to the Objectives domain, teachers in group 2 ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.41$) tend to place more emphasis on the text construct, focusing on text analysis, as compared with teachers in group 1 ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.52$), $t(114) = 3.66$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.53$. The Cohen's d indicates a medium effect size. Teachers in group 2 ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 0.39$) also place more emphasis on the other construct as compared with teachers in group 1 ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.52$), $t(121) = 4.65$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.66$. The Cohen's d indicates a medium effect size. There is no significant difference between the two groups in relation to the reader and culture constructs.

In relation to the Text Selection domain, teachers in group 2 ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.51$) tend to place more emphasis on selecting texts in relation to the text construct, focusing on texts that afford more opportunities for students to appreciate stylistically rich works of literature, as compared with teachers in group 1 ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.54$), $t(230) = 3.02$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.47$. The Cohen's d indicates a medium effect size. Teachers in group 2 ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.45$) also place more emphasis on the other construct, selecting texts that provide more opportunities to discuss foreign cultures and world issues, as compared with teachers in group 1 ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.58$),

$t(230) = 2.32$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.38$. The Cohen's d indicates a medium effect size. There is no significant difference between the two groups in relation to the reader and culture constructs.

In relation to the Instructional Strategies domain, teachers in group 2 ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.53$) tend to place more emphasis on questions related to the text construct, focusing on analyzing plot, character, setting and atmosphere, author's style, and themes, as compared with teachers in group 1 ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.67$), $t(113) = 2.99$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.43$. The Cohen's d indicates a medium effect size. There is no significant difference between the two groups in relation to the reader, culture, and other constructs.

In relation to the Values domain, teachers in group 2 ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.43$) tend to place more emphasis on values associated with the text construct, focusing on cultivating taste, discernment, appreciation of ambiguity, and context, as compared with teachers in group 1 ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.51$), $t(230) = 3.19$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.51$. The Cohen's d indicates a medium effect size. Teachers in group 2 ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.40$) also place more emphasis on the other construct, focusing on values such as empathy and openness to other cultures, as compared with teachers in group 1 ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.43$), $t(230) = 2.17$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.34$. The Cohen's d indicates a medium effect size. There is no significant difference between the two groups in relation to the reader and culture constructs.

In summary, these data show that teachers in group 2, from Integrated Programme (academically high-performing) schools, tend to emphasize more traditional text analysis approaches, text selection, and instructional strategies, which align with their objectives and values of teaching. At the same time, these teachers also encourage engagement with global issues through texts as compared with teachers in group 1, from government/government-aided schools.

Additionally, we conducted a one-way ANOVA test to compare three different groups: novice teachers (five years or less of teaching experience; group A), experienced teachers (between six and 10 years of teaching experience; group B), and highly experienced teachers (11 years or more of teaching experience; group C). In relation to the Objectives and Text Selection domains, no significant differences are found across the three groups. However, in relation to the Instructional Strategies domain, there is a statistically significant difference in the culture and other constructs as determined by the one-way ANOVA, $F(2, 229) = 3.50$, $p < .05$, and $F(2, 229) = 3.99$, $p < .05$, respectively. A Tukey post hoc test reveals that there is a significant difference between group A ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.15$) and group C ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.05$) in relation to the culture construct ($p < .05$) and between group A ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.95$) and group C ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.90$) in relation to the other construct ($p < .05$). This indicates that highly experienced teachers tend to ask more questions that connect texts to social and global issues, whereas the novice teachers appear more concerned with text-centered questions, perhaps because these mirror questions in formal assessments.

In relation to the Values domain, there is a statistically significant difference in the culture construct as determined by the one-way ANOVA, $F(2, 229) = 7.60$, $p < .01$. A Tukey post hoc test reveals that there is a significant difference between group A ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.83$) and group C ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.65$) in relation to the culture construct ($p < .001$). Teachers in group C tend to reinforce values of national belonging and social responsibility as compared with teachers in groups A. One possibility is that the novice teachers, who are generally younger, may be more skeptical about values tied to national identity, as compared with highly experienced teachers from an older generation.

Discussion

There are three key findings that emerge from the first National Survey of Literature Teachers'

Beliefs and Practices in Singapore, which highlight tensions related to national identity, national

belonging, and elitism. Although evidenced in Singapore, these issues are perhaps symptomatic

of postcolonial nations that are trying to forge a more cohesive sense of identity through

integrating local literature into the curriculum, while at the same time grappling with the

momentous weight of the Western canon that has been historically recognized as the standard

barometer of exemplary writing.

Tensions Between National and Global Identity

The first key finding highlights how the issue of forging a sense of national identity through

Literature remains a significant bone of contestation in postcolonial countries such as Singapore.

As observed from the survey, across all four sections concerning Objectives of Teaching, Text

Selection, Instructional Strategies, and Values, engagement with local culture is rated lowest by

teachers. Historically, it was only quite recently that Singapore literature became more

prominently featured by the regular inclusion of locally written texts in the set text list for study

in the national examination (Palaniappan, 2020). In contrast, the Western canon has been

dominant in the English curriculum during the colonial period and in the years following

Singapore's independence. For example, between 1990 and 2013, 65% of the set texts for study

in the examination were by writers who originated from the United Kingdom and the United

States, whereas 14% and 10% were by writers originating from Africa and Singapore,

respectively (Choo, 2016). The most frequently included writer was William Shakespeare,

followed by Arthur Miller. Compared with Europe and the United States, where rich literary

traditions have developed across the centuries, postcolonial countries such as Singapore have

gained independence only recently, from the mid-20th century. Naturally, they may project less confidence in their own literatures. Consequently, the Literature curriculum may remain more world-centric than nation-centric, where the notion of a worldly perspective is more closely akin to a Western-centric one. Thus, it is not surprising that Literature teachers in Singapore have a stronger preference for selecting texts through which more opportunities can be given to engage students with global issues rather than local issues.

In the open-ended question of the survey that asked teachers to summarize key principles or philosophies that guide their teaching, common responses stressed the worldly nature of Literature, that it provides "a window to the world," and that it is important to help students "understand people, issues and situations beyond our own realm of experience." Beyond the worldly value of Literature, teachers also emphasized its universal appeal. For them, Literature allows students to "appreciate the many nuances found in human relationships" and to "understand and empathize with the human condition." That Literature primes students to engage with cultures beyond national borders is corroborated by the national Literature syllabus that highlights how Literature "raises awareness of the range of perspectives that human beings— separated by time, space and culture—are capable of developing. This increased awareness promotes empathy and global awareness" (Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2019, p. 6). The syllabus encourages teachers to connect texts to self, other texts, other readers, and the world. Making connections to Singapore society is not a discrete domain of response but a subset of engaging with the world. This implies that even when engaging with local literature, students are to adopt more universal, transnational ways of reading communities and issues in their society.

What continues to ground this worldly/Western-centric approach to Literature is not only the deep-seated roots of a colonial curriculum but also the continued drive to reframe the nation so it projects a global, rather than a parochial, image. Following Singapore's independence, the government sought to brand Singapore as a "global city, an ecumenopolis or world-embracing city" (Rajaratnam, 1972, p. 3). However, constructions of this image of Singapore as a global city were underpinned by economic reasoning so the city-state would become "the most open and cosmopolitan city in Asia, and one of the best places to live and work" (Economic Review Committee, 2003, p. 5). Discourses of economic crisis and national vulnerability have been commonly employed to justify a neoliberal ideology (Koh, 2013), and major education policies are typically directed at the upgrading of human capital to meet the economic demands of globalization. The priority given to the English language as a first language and the main medium of instruction in schools was important in empowering Singapore citizens to participate in the global economy, as well as in attracting foreign, mainly Western, businesses and multinational corporations to invest and set up their organizations in the country.

Along the lines of this logic, exposure to world and Western literature would cultivate taste and greater attunement to diverse cultures, one of the hallmarks of a global citizen. In education, the rhetoric of developing cosmopolitan, global citizens has gained traction, partly driven by transnational organizations, such as the OECD and the World Economic Forum, that have propelled governments to empower citizens to thrive in the global economy. The challenge, however, is that because most formerly colonized countries only gained independence in the last 50–60 years, the compulsion to construct a global identity may negate the important work of national identity formation. This entails consolidating narratives of what belonging to a nation means; exploring connections among national history, place, and identity; and strengthening

commitment and responsibility to the diverse communities that make up a nation. Today, terms such as *nation* and *national identity* are looked down on as parochial or, at worst, tribalistic, in opposition to more fashionable notions of global and cosmopolitan identities. Yet, for many postcolonial countries with relatively short histories, more concerted investments in exploring national history and issues, including relations among diverse communities and migrant groups shaping multiple national narratives, are important in understanding the country's place in the larger global landscape.

Tensions Between Agentive and State-Centric Constructions of National Belonging

The second key finding highlights the disconnect between Literature and the cultivation of national belonging. One reason for this is that teachers have less autonomy in developing a sense of national belonging, especially in countries with strong state forms of governance such as Singapore (Gopinathan, 2007). In the arena of politics, Singapore has been governed by a single party since its independence. In the country's early years, the founder of the party, Lee Kuan Yew, consolidated its power through a centralized control of the media, financial institutions, education, military, and civil service. Because of this, Singapore is sometimes labeled a patriarchal and hegemonic state (Chong, 2006). Education remains an important conduit through which ideals about national belonging are envisioned and communicated in a top-down manner. Discussions about national values and identity have been managed by the government, particularly through its values education program, which has undergone at least seven revisions since independence. From 2014, the articulation of official values in all primary and secondary schools has occurred through Character and Citizenship Education (CCE), which centers on six core values: respect, responsibility, resilience, integrity, care, and harmony (MOE, 2012). These values are a derivative of the Shared Values and Singapore 21 vision articulated by the

government (Lim, 2015; Singapore 21 Committee, 1999). At the same time, scholars have noted how these shared values align with Confucian ethics and how the government has used this to privilege a communitarian ideology and support authoritarian rule (Chua, 1997; Englehart, 2000; C. Tan, 2012).

In the area of values education, the government has mandated that every teacher should integrate these core values and CCE into teaching. As the former minister of education said, "every school experience can be a CCE lesson, and every teacher can be a CCE teacher" (Ong, 2020, para. 92). Whereas current reform efforts in values education have sought to encourage teachers to engage students with contemporary issues, including topics such as media, race, and religion, teachers have long been unaccustomed to engaging students with a critical discussion of values. One reason is because historically, teachers have been encouraged to support state-defined national values, and CCE has been perceived as a means through which the government can foster national cohesion through ideologies of communitarianism and multiracialism (Choo, 2015; Sim & Ho, 2010; C. Tan & Tan, 2014; T.W. Tan & Chew, 2004). The use of stories is a common tactic to convey values but often occurs in didactic and instrumental ways to "facilitate the internalization of values" and "to help students understand the need to practise good values" (MOE, 2012, p. 31). The idea of good values assumes a dualistic notion of values, that they are either good or bad, which discounts the possibility that values are multidimensional, conflicting, and evolving. Rarely are students prompted to critically question the formation of values; to investigate the historical, philosophical, and political underpinnings of values; or to have the agency to discover and create values.

A second reason is that there are implicit out-of-bound markers, which are invisible boundaries designating topics that are off-limits in public discussions, particularly in relation to

sensitive issues dealing with politics, race, gender, and religion. Various journalists, artists, and literary writers have been publicly chastised and some even persecuted by the government for transgressing these boundaries in their works. Because these out-of-bound markers are deliberately vague, civil society advocates have argued that this stifles critical discussion of policies and promotes self-censorship (T.H. Tan & Mahizhnan, 2008). Consequently, teachers may retreat to discussing safer, more neutral topics in the Literature classroom, such as issues related to family life, urbanization, and the appreciation of national and cultural symbols such as the Merlion, the official mascot of Singapore. For example, one of the frequency-type questions in the survey asked teachers about the themes they had discussed in their Literature classroom in the past year. Whereas 98% had discussed themes related to relationships with others (family and friends) and 84% had discussed issues related to growing up, childhood, and adolescence, only 56% had discussed power/politics and 25% had discussed religious conflict. Safer topics, such as those related to family and adolescence, however, have less relevance to the dimensions of identity that matter (e.g., class, ethnicity, sexuality), rendering them less impactful in deepening students' sense and understanding of national belonging.

The challenge for Literature educators, then, is to consider how literary texts can provide an important launchpad to developing metacognitive understandings of values. One of the most common questions teachers ask in Literature classrooms has to do with analyzing characters and how they develop in relation to social situations. When examining how characters negotiate ethical dilemmas in fictional worlds, how they navigate social systems and conventions, and how sociopolitical values influence behavior and attitudes, students are in effect observing the nature of identity formation. Teachers can then have students extend such analysis to reflecting on the nature of values and the formation of identities in their own society. In this way, the literary text

becomes the catalyst to critical examinations of values and identity construction. This metacognitive analysis of values provides an impetus for students to progress beyond being passive receivers of values transmitted by teachers to becoming active agents who are able to critique, as well as construct, values they believe are significant to the flourishing of their own lives and the lives of others in their society.

Such an agentive perspective of values resonates with the Soka tradition of value-creating pedagogy. In response to the authoritarian government of the 1930s, three main Japanese philosophers—Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda—stressed the importance of human agency in practicing and creating values through authentic social and intercultural relationships with others, as opposed to a prescriptive teaching of values (Goulah & Ito, 2012). For this to occur, Literature teachers need to provide opportunities for students to question and inquire into political systems and cultural practices that influence narratives of national belonging. Teachers must also have the boldness to allow the confrontation of contentious concerns of injustice and inequalities, especially the kinds of systemic discourses that normalize the oppression of marginalized and migrant groups. Only in this way can engagements with national belonging go beyond superficial notions of racial harmony to more active promotions of inclusivity.

Tensions Between Literature Education for Cosmopolitan Elites and Rooted Heartlanders

The third key finding from the survey highlights the disjuncture between government/government-aided and Integrated Programme (academically high-performing) schools, with the latter catered to an educated elite. The implication is that elite students are offered a more traditional curriculum encompassing texts that are more complex and aesthetically richer, alongside pedagogies that prioritize critical analysis and evaluation of texts.

This finding aligns with qualitative studies that have shown how schools function to sort students into distinct roles through curricular differentiation. For example, studies have shown how, in Literature classes, teachers of elite students tend to place more prominence on developing students' analytical skills and seek to expose them to global issues through Western canonical texts, whereas teachers in mainstream or heartland schools tend to focus on the heart (empathy and personal response) and seek to connect students to local issues, as these are deemed more accessible (Choo, 2020). Similarly, in a study on Citizenship education in Singapore, it was found that elite students tend to be given more opportunities to critique social issues and tensions, and they are strongly encouraged to apply critical reasoning, as compared with mainstream students (Ho, 2012).

The distinction between cosmopolitan elites and heartlanders has been observed in political discourses as well. In a well-known speech, then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (1999) identified two important groups in Singapore society: cosmopolitan elites, who have an international outlook, command a good income, and have the capacity to contribute to the production of goods and services for the global market, and heartlanders, whose orientation and interests are local and whose "skills are not marketable beyond Singapore" (p. 23). Heartlanders are predominantly working class; they have less means to travel and adopt more parochial and conservative worldviews. Beyond political discourses, the English Language syllabus also makes a distinction between these two groups. In the 2010 English Language syllabus, the desired outcomes for English-language proficiency state that "at least 20% will attain a high degree of proficiency in English. They will help Singapore keep its edge in a range of professions, and play an important role in teaching and the media" (Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2008, p. 6). Meanwhile, the syllabus states that the

majority of our pupils will attain a good level of competence in English, in both speech and

writing. Some in this group who have a flair for the language will find this an advantage in

frontline positions and various service industries. (p. 6)

The implication is that an elite class conversant in English and able to engage critically with the

subtleties of the language can keep Singapore ahead in this globally interconnected age, whereas

the rest merely need to be equipped enough to have the capacity to communicate functionally

and transactionally in their localized workplaces.

Part of the logic governing the distinction between cosmopolitan elites and rooted

heartlanders is premised on economic reasoning. As a tiny city-state with no natural resources,

Singapore's government has continually emphasized the importance of investing in human

capital to meet the economic demands of globalization (Gopinathan, 2007). As globalization has

come under pressure given the COVID-19 pandemic and rising nationalism worldwide, the

prime minister recently reiterated that Singapore "has to up its game, raise its capabilities and

bring in new investments that will connect it to centres of vibrancy and prosperity worldwide,

and enable it to make a contribution to [globalization's] growth" (Hussain, 2020, para. 2). In

major policy initiatives, considerations about enhancing Singapore's global identity have

overridden national identity. In education, for example, the bilingual policy was instituted the

year after independence and prioritized the English language as a first language over other

locally ethnic languages. This was based on the view that English is a global language necessary

to enhance Singapore's competitiveness. Similarly, a major policy, launched in 1997, that has

informed the direction of education—Thinking Schools, Learning Nation—was justified on the

basis of "an intensely global future, with diminishing barriers to the flow of goods, services and

information" (Goh, 1997, pp. 3–5). To fulfill the state's globalizing ambitions, there is a need to

empower the linguistic capabilities of the cosmopolitan elite class. A capacity to appreciate the Great Books, particularly from the West, becomes symbolic of prestige and taste in high culture. Indeed, this resonates with Yale scholar Harold Bloom's (1994) point that literary study "always will be an elitist phenomenon" (p. 16) and that only a privileged few will have the intellectual acumen to access it. Subjects such as Literature thus provide not merely an avenue to equip this elite group with critical and analytical thinking; they also afford the group cultural capital.

Linguistic bias at the level of English-language policy and literary practices perpetuates not only the perception that heartlanders are less capable of engaging in critical, rigorous thought, it also diminishes the perceived quality of local literature. For example, one of the open-ended questions of the survey asked teachers to list the literary texts they had taught over the past 12 months. Seventy-eight percent of teachers from government/government-aided schools (categories A–C) had taught a local text as compared with 60% from elite Integrated Programme schools (category D). Furthermore, students from these elite schools were exposed to a wider range of world literature. Because students in these schools can skip the national O-level examination that mainstream students take at the end of secondary school, they are not constrained by the text lists determined by the MOE. Popular texts taught by teachers in these elite schools that were not included in mainstream schools included those featuring canonical writers from around the world, such as Charles Dickens, E.M. Forster, Henrik Ibsen, Philip Larkin, and Adrienne Rich. Meanwhile, teachers in mainstream schools taught a much wider range of local poems, short stories, and plays as compared with teachers in elite schools. This conveys the impression that local texts lack the level of quality as compared with texts from established authors around the world that elite students study.

The challenge for Literature teachers is how to disrupt binaries between cosmopolitans and heartlanders, world literature and local literature. Students in academically high-performing schools need exposure to not only world literature but also local literature so they learn to think and feel from the perspectives of disadvantaged and marginalized communities within the nation that local texts often provide. Students in mainstream schools need to be equipped to critically engage with global issues through an exposure to literary texts in diverse places to develop a cosmopolitan consciousness. This empowers critical dispositions and cultural capacities to participate in the opportunities available in the global marketplace. Training mainstream students to conduct critical close reading of the nuances of language is also fundamental to supporting what Freire (1970) termed *conscientization*, referring to a critical consciousness of how poor, oppressed, marginalized, and working-class groups are exploited by systems and structures, which leads to concrete action for liberation. Literacy is a crucial catalyst when reading the word translates to reading the world and its injustices (Freire, 1985). Another effective way of disrupting local/global dualisms is to lend greater attention to transnational identities through texts that highlight the intersecting influences of the plurality of cultures within and beyond the nation.

Conclusion

The National Survey of Literature Teachers' Beliefs and Practices marks a significant first step in providing empirical evidence of the philosophy and pedagogies of Literature teachers in Singapore. The four constructs—text, reader, culture, and other—informing the design of the survey were derived from historical examinations of key movements and theories in Literature. Survey findings highlight how the teaching of literature has shifted away from a purely text-

centered approach that focuses on an aesthetic appreciation of canonical texts. The evidence shows that text analysis continues to dominate teaching objectives, considerations of text selection, and instructional strategies. However, the insistence on active reader response and the capacity of students to formulate an independent opinion are almost equally valued. Both the capacities to read deeply into the nuances of language and to deliver an independent, informed response provide compelling reasons for Literature's significance, particularly in helping students navigate the proliferation of misinformation in a post-truth age.

While governments have invested heavily in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics subjects, particularly during the global pandemic, more attention needs to be paid to the long-term repercussions of social distancing and the closing of national borders worldwide. It is here that Literature can play an important role in facilitating cosmopolitan empathy. The survey highlights how teachers perceive that the most important objective of Literature is tied to deepening engagements with human concerns, with empathy as the key value emphasized. Indeed, it is this exposure to diverse narratives of otherness that is important in facilitating interruptions of cultural stereotypes and critiques of systemic injustices while developing multidimensional ways of seeing the world. Yet, to be cosmopolitan-minded is also to be conscious of everyday globalization or globalization occurring not as an abstract, ephemeral phenomenon outside the nation but as part and parcel of local realities in the here and now. This means that looking ahead, Literature teachers will need to engage with a more glocalized (Roudometof, 2016) understanding of national belonging that involves examining how global forces intersect in and through the local. This could encompass using literary texts as a launchpad to historical inquiry into the continued impact of global imperialism, such as British colonialism and its lasting legacies in postcolonial contexts. It could also encompass explorations

of the narratives of transnational communities, such as foreign laborers and immigrant communities, that shape the evolving, heterogeneous identity of the nation. Such explorations should occur in tandem with examinations of the influence of transnational corporations on local culture, such as the ways global capitalism fuels forms of inequality and oppression within the nation. These pedagogies essentially mean that questions about local/global culture dynamics and ethical concerns should be foregrounded alongside text- and reader-centered approaches that tend to be more popularly employed in teaching. Such engagements would invigorate Literature's significance in education today by tapping into its niche as a launchpad for critical dialogue about what it means to live hospitably and inclusively with diverse and multiple others in an interconnected age.

Notes

[1] In this paper, the term "Literature" is capitalized where it refers to the subject taught in schools. Where it is not capitalized, the term refers to literary texts.

[2] In Singapore, PSLE scores have been used to sort students into three different streams in secondary schools: Express, Normal (Academic), and Normal (Technical). The majority of

students are placed in the Express stream, in which they take the GCE O-level examination at the end of four years of secondary education. Streaming has been part of Singapore's education system for the last 40 years, but the MOE announced that by 2024, this will be replaced with subject-based banding in which students would not be placed into academic streams at the secondary level but can instead take subjects at lower or higher levels depending on their academic capacity.

[3] Data of the non-construct items of the survey are available in our report: https://nie.edu.sg/literaturesurvey.

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TABLE 1

Objectives, Skills, and Pedagogies Associated With the Four Literary Movements

Construct	Text	Reader	Culture	Other
Key movements	New Criticism	Reader-response Criticism	Poststructuralist Criticism/multiculturalism	Ethical Criticism
Objectives	The teaching of literature is aimed at developing students' appreciation of the craft of writing.	The teaching of literature is aimed at developing aesthetic engagement between reader and text that includes connecting texts to readers' imaginative and creative responses.	The teaching of literature is aimed at developing students' capacity to engage critically with cultural discourses along with social justice concerns.	The teaching of literature is aimed at cultivating informed ethical understanding and empathetic engagements with others in the world.
Dominant skills	• Analyzing plot, character, setting and atmosphere, themes, form, and style • Analyzing literary devices and their effects • Tracking the development of characters and events • Supporting opinions through informed analysis of texts	• Finding joy in reading • Connecting texts to one's prior experiences • Providing personal and imaginative responses to the text • Responding within an interpretive community of other readers	• Deepening understanding of one's own culture or the diversity of cultures within one's society through texts • Connecting texts to social issues and social justice concerns • Analyzing how narratives of the nation are constructed through texts • Analyzing the representation of social groups in texts	• Analyzing ideological values, biases, and stereotypes in texts • Connecting texts to global concerns • Comparing ideas from a diverse range of cultural perspectives • Connecting texts to ethical concepts and universal human concerns, such as justice, truth, and dignity
Common pedagogies	• Plot mapping • Annotating the text • Close reading with particular attention to style • Peer and whole-class discussions on the text	• Literature circles • Socratic circles • Exploratory talk • Diary entries • Personal reviews • Performance-based activities, such as role-play	• Place-based learning • Culturally responsive pedagogies • Reframing the text from the perspectives of marginalized communities or providing counternarratives	• Inquiry projects connecting texts to real-world issues • Intertextuality • Public service campaigns • Simulated forums • Ethnography

TABLE 2

Breakdown of Construct Items According to Research Phase

Research phase	Text	Reader	Culture	Context	Other	Total
Pilot survey	16	16	16	16	17	81
Final survey	16	16	18	17	16	83
Exploratory factor analysis	16	15	16		26	73
Confirmatory factor analysis	10	9	10		16	45

TABLE 3

Number of Schools and Teachers Participating in the National Survey of Literature Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Category	School type and aggregate PSLE entry score	Number of secondary schools in Singapore in 2018	Number of secondary schools that participated in the survey	Number of teachers who participated in the survey
A	Government/government-aided secondary schools with the lowest aggregate PSLE entry scores (188–193)	42	13 (31% of category A)	61
B	Government/government-aided secondary schools with average aggregate PSLE entry scores (194–223)	43	16 (37% of category B)	53
C	Government/government-aided secondary schools with above-average aggregate PSLE entry scores (224–250)	43	13 (30% of category C)	63
D	Integrated Programme schools with the highest aggregate PSLE entry scores (245–264)	16	5 (31% of category D)	55
Total		144	47	232

Note. PSLE = Primary School Leaving Examination.

TABLE 4

Objectives of Teaching Literature

Question 1. In your opinion, how important are the following skills in your teaching of Literature? (5-point Likert-type scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*)	M	SD
Text (α = .79)	4.53	0.51
1a. Literature education equips students to analyse the author's craft.	4.54	0.56
1b. Literature education equips students to synthesise elements and ideas from different parts of the same text.	4.52	0.56
Reader (α = .67)	4.49	0.46
1c. Literature education equips students to reflect on the connections between the text and their own lives.	4.60	0.52
1d. Literature education equips students to explore ideas through dialogue with others.	4.53	0.55
1e. Literature education equips students to creatively express their ideas and interpretations about a text.	4.34	0.68
Culture (α = .87)	4.09	0.71
1f. Literature education equips students to appreciate literature about Singapore.	3.95	0.83
1g. Literature education equips students to connect texts to issues in Singapore.	4.15	0.76
1h. Literature education equips students to be sensitive to issues of discrimination in Singapore society.	4.17	0.79
Other (α = .90)	4.48	0.51
1i. Literature education equips students to question assumptions and bias.	4.53	0.64
1j. Literature education equips students to consider how contexts (historical, economic, political, social) shape the text.	4.38	0.65
1k. Literature education equips students to question the underlying ideology that the text is promoting.	4.32	0.72
1l. Literature education equips students to perceive issues from a different cultural point of view.	4.48	0.57
1m. Literature education equips students to connect texts to current issues in the world.	4.47	0.62
1n. Literature education equips students to connect texts to human concerns such as human dignity, inequality, discrimination, and suffering.	4.69	0.56

TABLE 5

Correlations among constructs for Objectives of Teaching Literature

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Text	1			
2. Reader	.44**	1		
3. Culture	.38**	.47**	1	
4. Other	.59**	.56**	.55**	1

**Correlations are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.

TABLE 6

Text Selection

Question 2. To what extent do the following factors influence your choice of texts? (5-point Likert-type scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*)	M	SD
Text (α = .76)	4.33	0.54
2a. I select texts that provide opportunities for students to appreciate rich, well-written works of literature.	4.34	0.60
2b. I select texts that provide opportunities for students to analyse word choice, imagery and other literary techniques used for effect.	4.32	0.60
Reader (α = .34)	4.04	0.53
2c. I select texts that provide opportunities for students to connect what they read to their current interests.	4.08	0.68
2d. I select texts that provide opportunities for students to co-construct responses through dialogue with their peers.	4.00	0.67
Culture (α = .87)	3.77	0.76
2e. I select texts that provide opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of issues in Singapore.	3.85	0.84
2f. I select texts that provide opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of ethnic or other groups in Singapore.	3.67	0.88
2g. I select texts that provide opportunities for students to value Singapore literature.	3.79	0.82
Other (α = .71)	4.18	0.56
2h. I select texts that provide opportunities for students to examine underlying values and intentions in the text.	4.29	0.67
2i. I select texts that provide opportunities for students to discuss the ways particular race, class, gender or other groups are represented.	4.08	0.78
2j. I select texts that provide opportunities for students to relate literature to current problems facing the world today.	4.16	0.64

TABLE 7

Correlations among constructs for Text Selection

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Text	1			
2. Reader	.25**	1		
3. Culture	.18**	.35**	1	
4. Other	.32**	.46**	.37**	1

**Correlations are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.

TABLE 8

Instructional Strategies

Question 3. In any given year, how often do you ask the following kind of questions in weighted formative or alternative assessment (e.g., projects, presentations, portfolios, etc.)? (5-point Likert-type scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*)	M	SD
Text ($\alpha = .60$)	4.33	0.65
3a. Questions that require students to analyse plot, character, setting and atmosphere, and themes	4.51	0.66
3b. Questions that require students to analyse the author's style	4.15	0.87
Reader ($\alpha = .63$)	3.86	0.76
3c. Questions that require students to give a personal response to the text	4.22	0.81
3d. Questions that require students to demonstrate a creative response to the text	3.49	0.96
Culture ($\alpha = .97$)	2.93	1.06
3e. Questions that require students to make connections between texts and issues in Singapore	2.96	1.06
3f. Questions that require students to make connections between text and communities in Singapore	2.90	1.09
Other ($\alpha = .88$)	3.39	0.91
3g. Questions that require students to uncover negative or problematic values underlying the text	3.16	1.10
3h. Questions that require students to consider biases and stereotypes in the text	3.53	1.02
3i. Questions that require students to explore how the text connects to contemporary issues in the world	3.32	1.10
3j. Questions that require students to explore ethical concerns in the world (e.g., unjust treatment, discrimination, inequality)	3.55	1.02

TABLE 9

Correlations among constructs for Instructional Strategies

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Text	1			
2. Reader	.23**	1		
3. Culture	.02	.37**	1	
4. Other	.16*	.41**	.67**	1

*Correlations are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. **Correlations are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.

TABLE 10

Values

Question 4. To what extent do you agree that the following values are important to your teaching of literature? (5-point Likert-type scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*)	M	SD
Text ($\alpha = .73$)	4.22	0.50
4a. Taste—Capacity to appreciate the aesthetic quality of a text	4.07	0.72
4b. Discernment—Capacity to perceive the way the text is influencing the reader	4.36	0.66
4c. Ambiguity—Capacity to perceive ambiguity and contradictions in texts	4.24	0.69
4d. Contextual perspective—Capacity to situate the text within broader contexts (e.g., social, cultural, historical, political)	4.22	0.64
Reader ($\alpha = .69$)	4.39	0.50
4e. Persuasion—Capacity to convey a convincing argument supported by evidence from the text	4.40	0.60
4f. Independence—Capacity to formulate an individual response to the text	4.39	0.55
Culture ($\alpha = .81$)	3.82	0.76
4g. Social responsibility—Capacity to contribute to one's society	3.97	0.83
4h. National belonging—Capacity to see oneself as connected to the people in one's country	3.67	0.82
Other ($\alpha = .71$)	4.52	0.43
4i. Imagination—Capacity to wonder and explore new ways of seeing life	4.33	0.61
4j. Empathy—Capacity to put oneself in the shoes of others	4.66	0.49
4k. Openness—Capacity to be open and willing to accept differences	4.57	0.51

TABLE 11

Correlations among constructs for Values

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Text	1			
2. Reader	.51**	1		
3. Culture	.33**	.18**	1	
4. Other	.50**	.50**	.31**	1

**Correlations are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.