CHAPTER 13

SINGAPORE: VALUES EDUCATION FOR A KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY[1]

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Introduction

Singapore is the smallest of the eleven Pacific Basin countries represented in the Sigma survey in terms of land area and population. It has a land area of 647 square kilometres. Its multiracial population of slightly over three million comprises three main ethnic groups, namely the Chinese (77.3 percent), Malays (14.1 percent) and Indians (7.3 percent), while a residual 1.3 percent is made up of Eurasians and Singaporeans of other ethnic origins. Unlike its much larger Southeast Asian neighbours such as Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, this island city-state does not have any natural resources except for its strategic nodal location and a deep natural harbour.

In the forty years since self-government in 1959, this former British colony has been ruled by the dynamic and highly proactive leadership of the People's Action Party (PAP) government led first by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and subsequently by his successor Goh Chok Tong.[2] A successful industrialisation program was launched in the 1960s. It was supported by a national education system that was oriented towards manpower planning and human capital investment. By the 1990s, Singapore had become a prosperous financial, trading and internationally oriented manufacturing centre of sophisticated products and services. Until the Asian economic crisis, which has also affected Singapore, the country has enjoyed high economic growth rates averaging 9 percent per annum since 1966 and, in 2000 it had an enviable per capita gross domestic product of around US$23,000, the highest in East Asia apart from Japan. The Singapore government is fervent about maintaining economic growth, and competing globally with other economies for high quality manufacturing investments. It seeks to 'stay ahead of the pack'. Hence, bold measures have been taken in the education system to lay the foundation for a knowledge-based economy in the approaching twenty-first century. These measures include the reduction of curriculum content, the fostering of critical and creative thinking, and the use of information technology.

The Educational System and Values Education Policy

In framing the educational and economic policies of Singapore, the PAP government has also been concerned with fostering social cohesion and developing a sense of national identity among the Chinese, Malay, and Indian ethnic communities. English was adopted as one of the four official languages besides Chinese (Mandarin), Malay,

[2] Goh Chok Tong took over as Prime Minister in November 1990.

and Tamil. It is today the lingua franca, serving as a language of commerce, techno-logy, administration and education. English is the main medium of instruction from primary to secondary schools and post-secondary education. In addition, all Singapore students are required to learn their mother tongue (Chinese, Malay, Tamil, or other Indian languages) for at least ten years in the school system. Political leaders have held strongly to the view that teaching the mother tongue in school will ensure the pre-servation of the Asian cultural heritage and moral values.

In addition, Singapore schools provide for a compulsory civic and moral educa-tion program that will be elaborated on below. Thus, even as young Singaporeans are being socialized in the education system for work and citizenship responsibilities, there has always been a great emphasis on values transmission. For this reason, effort has been made to inculcate such 'Asian' values as thrift, industry, loyalty, placing the group above the individual, etc. Hence, it can be said that the goals of the education system are to build a Singapore national identity, to preserve core 'Asian' values, and to increase the country's capacity for greater economic resilience in the international marketplace.

Senior education policy makers have recently described the period of Singapore education from 1959 to 1978 as being 'survival driven', and the period from 1979 to 1998 as being 'efficiency driven' (Ministry of Education, 1998, pp. 2-3). The 'survival driven' stage was characterized by the need to provide mass education to support eco-nomic growth and to build social cohesion. In the last two decades the school system has been restructured 'to hone the efficiency of the education system and to reduce educational wastage.' In the 1990s especially, the government has responded to key trends in the world environment by implementing new measures to maintain economic growth, and to help Singapore remain economically competitive in the global eco-nomy. The next stage of reforms, devised to support the development of a knowledge-based economy in the twenty-first century, is to implement an 'ability-driven' educa-tion system. What this term means, however, is unclear as it is still being determined and defined by Singapore educators and school practitioners.

Schools operate within a centralized and rigid structure. The curriculum is also differentiated through the practice of academic streaming to cater for students with different abilities, interests and aptitudes. Assessment and achievement testing are conducted regularly to monitor students' performance in core and elective subjects at the secondary school level. Streaming by language and academic ability is practised beginning in Year 5 (for eleven-year-olds) at the primary school. Students sit for na-tional examinations at three points of their school career, at the ages of twelve, sixteen, and eighteen.

There is a distinct technological bias in the school and tertiary education curricu-lum. English, mathematics, science and information technology (IT) are compulsory subjects, whereas subjects in the humanities such as literature, history and geography are offered as electives at the upper secondary school level. In other words, the pri-mary emphasis in education is its utility in terms of progression to higher levels of education and career prospects. In the same vein, values being transmitted through official programs like Civics and Moral Education can be said to have a bias towards economic and technological advancement. For example, teamwork and co-operation

are encouraged, not so much as desirable traits in themselves, but for the reason of enabling future workers to be more productive in the workplace.

It could also be said that, notwithstanding official pronouncements about the desirability of the all rounded development of the individual, there is often an emphasis on academic outcomes to the neglect of the non-academic outcomes of schooling, e.g. the development of personal autonomy. This phenomenon has been exacerbated by the annual publication of school 'league tables', which has been the practice since 1992. These league tables rank schools according to their students' performance in national examinations, and are meant to spur schools towards academic excellence. The Ministry of Education also provides monetary incentives to 'value-added' schools. Many principals are therefore under considerable pressure to concentrate their efforts on improving, or maintaining, their schools' ranking positions, as they are well aware of the impact of these ranking positions on future student intakes (Tan, 1998).

With the emphasis given to academic performance, all non-academic aspects of school life have been relegated to a secondary position. Commenting on her ethnographic study of a Singapore school, for instance, Chew notes that the formal curriculum seeks to promote a certain social morality about the role and social responsibility of citizens, emphasising a group orientation where values such as care and concern for others, loyalty to the group and nation, teamwork, social discipline and cooperation are highlighted. However, she continues,

> there is a conflicting moral orientation in parts of the written curriculum that socializes Singaporean pupils to behave in a very individualistic and self-serving way in their relationships with other people. The message is clear: if an individual and a small nation-state are to survive in a highly competitive world, then they must work smartly to try to 'keep ahead of the pack' (Chew, 1997, pp. 90-91).

The school program therefore poses some serious dilemmas to its students. On the one hand, various efforts have been made over the years to inculcate the desired moral values in students, e.g., being caring, selfless, etc. On the other hand, an approach to education that is both utilitarian and competitive emphasizes a totally different set of values. Given the reward structure of the larger society, students are responding in expected ways, and the consequence is that much of the effort put in by schools to give students a balanced education is in danger of being nullified by the entrenched value system.

History of Values Education in Singapore

Few governments have been as actively involved in promoting a formal civic and moral education component in the national school system as that of Singapore. Since 1965, when Singapore attained its status as an island republic, state schools have experimented with no fewer than five locally developed values education programs. Historically, there was an earlier subject called Ethics in 1959. It was replaced by Civics in 1963 at the secondary school level for thirteen- to sixteen-year-olds. In 1973, an interdisciplinary subject for values education called Education for Living was designed for primary school children (six- to twelve-year-olds). However, it was evalu-

ated as being a weak attempt at providing moral education. Two new programs were developed and implemented by the early 1980s: Good Citizen for primary schools, and Being and Becoming for secondary schools. Before long, in 1984, a controversial Religious Knowledge (RK) program was introduced and made compulsory for upper secondary school students. Students of Chinese, Malay and Indian ethnic backgrounds were required to choose their RK subject from a range of six alternatives: Bible Knowledge, Buddhist Studies, Hindu Studies, Islamic Religious Knowledge, Sikh Studies and Confucian Ethics. Unexpectedly in 1989, the Ministry of Education decided to scrap RK as a compulsory subject. The argument was that it was inconsistent for a secular government to advocate religious education in schools. It was also thought that the RK program had the unintended effect of increasing the religious fervour of each ethno-religious community, and thus posed a threat to multiracial harmony and national unity.

With the scrapping of RK, a revised program called Civics and Moral Education was developed between 1992 and 1995, and implemented in primary and secondary schools (Chew, 1998). Today, it is still part of the official instructional program. It is taught for three weekly periods (of thirty minutes each) in primary schools in the student's mother tongue, and two weekly periods at the secondary level, largely in the English medium. The name given to that program reflects its content and themes: to foster cultural and religious appreciation; to promote community spirit, to affirm family life, to nurture interpersonal relationships, and to develop commitment to nation building. In contrast with the prior values education programs, the subject is formally assessed and graded in schools. Civics and Moral Education teachers are required to plan assessment activities for each year level. Students are awarded letter grades based on their effort in carrying out a variety of group projects, as well as their individual performance in class tests. Students are required to take such classroom activities seriously and to pass the subject at the end of each school year.

The experimentation with new values education programs has not ended. In July 1996, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong announced the launch of a new component, National Education, which is designed specifically to teach students knowledge and values that are perceived to be needed for the country's survival in the twenty-first century. The explicit purpose of the new program is "to develop national cohesion, the instinct for survival and confidence in the future, by a) fostering a sense of identify, pride and self-respect as Singaporeans, b) by knowing the Singapore story – how Singapore succeeded against the odds to become a nation; c) by understanding Singapore's unique challenges, constraints and vulnerabilities... and d) by instilling the core values of our way of life, and the will to prevail, that will ensure our continued success and well-being" (Ministry of Education, 1997).

What then is the likely consequence of the official attempts to promote values education? As has been noted, the education system is heavily biased toward the economic and technological; at the same time, there is a stated concern about core values, centering not only on such traditional notions as 'Asian' values, but also for utilitarian purposes. Added to this is an education system characterized by a high level of selectivity, and a drive to increase the manpower potential of the schooling population. Taken together, all this means that there are conflicting messages for both schools and

students. Hence, while the avowed aim is to create a caring ethos and to provide for the all-round development of the student, what results is a high degree of competitiveness and individualism. In other words, given the conflicting messages and demands made on schools and students, this is a pragmatic response on their part. The debate in Singapore echoes in some senses the wider debate in international perspective (see for instance Kennedy, 1997; Lo and Man, 1996).

Discussion of such issues as rights and obligations, public versus private interests and the dilemmas of values education in a multicultural society, finds resonance in the Singapore case.

Profile of the Respondents

For the Sigma survey in Singapore, questionnaires were sent out to forty-two respondents who had been identified from among the 'elite' in Singapore. Thirty-two percent of these were from educational institutions, 24 percent were leaders of related Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), and 16 percent were academic leaders; 4 percent were from the central educational elite, while the remaining 24 percent were evenly divided among religious leaders with education positions, politicians, and values/moral education specialists. Hence, the respondents were dominated by people in educational institutes, while leaders of related NGOs and academic leaders formed two other large groups.

The respondents were overwhelmingly reformist in their outlook (64 percent); this group was followed by the conservatives (20 percent) and moderates (12 percent) respectively. Radicals made up the smallest group (4 percent). It should be noted, however, that in Singapore the range of attitudes from 'reformist' right through to 'radical' probably rests right of centre relative to that in some other countries. Hence, an individual considered moderate in Singapore might be 'conservative' in the US, while one considered 'radical' in Singapore might be 'moderate' in the US.

Twenty-five people responded to the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 60 percent. The ratio of men to women was 2:1. The average age was about forty-five years. However, this might be misleading as the mode was fifty.

Findings

Why Should There be Values Education?

The respondents gave strongest support for improving values education to serve the following purposes: providing a foundation for spiritual development, increasing the sense of individual responsibility, and improving the respect and opportunities extended to girls and women (Table 13.1). Indeed, the most persuasive reason for improving values education in Singapore today was to 'provide a foundation for spiritual development', while the least persuasive was to 'foster economic development'.

Table 13.1 Reasons for Improving Values Education

Reasons for improving values education	Average ranking (in terms of decreasing importance)
To provide a foundation for spiritual development	2.63
To increase the sense of individual responsibility	2.88
To improve the respect and opportunities extended to girls and women	2.96
To encourage greater civic consciousness and thus strengthen democracy	3.0
To provide a guide for behaviour in daily life	3.25
To promote world peace	3.42
To develop an appreciation for our heritage and to strengthen national identity	3.54
To combat the recent trends of ecological abuse	3.67
To promote pride in local communities and community life	3.75
To help each young person develop a reflective and autonomous personality	3.88
To combat the tendency for social prejudice and to promote greater tolerance for ethnic, language and racial groups	3.88
To promote more orderly and caring school communities and thus facilitate learning	3.92
To help youth interpret the values transmitted by the mass media, the Internet, and other information technologies	4.21
To strengthen families	4.50
To promote the values of justice and equity	4.54
To combat juvenile delinquency including bullying, gang violence, and drug abuse	4.71
To foster economic development by strengthening values such as hard work, creativity, and individual competitiveness	4.75

Hence, spiritual development was considered the most important reason, while the use of values education to promote economic success—and, perhaps, the utilitarian attitude to values education underlying this—was not supported. Given the emphasis in Singapore on national economic success, this result was unexpected. Perhaps the high ranking given to providing a foundation for spiritual development reflected a feeling among the elite that there had been too little emphasis on this, and that the situation needed to be redressed. The low level of support given to fostering economic development would also be consistent with this theory. Its being placed as the least important consideration in improving values education could have been a reaction to the wide coverage already accorded it, not only in schools, but also in the media. Indeed, one respondent, commenting on the need consistently to emphasize values, wrote about the way in which societies, such as Singapore, which placed a high premium on material success created 'negative impact' on values development.

Given the emphasis in Singapore on individual responsibility, it comes as no surprise that this was ranked second. However, considering that Singapore is a secular society, and that the emphasis has for the most part been on secular civic and moral education, the high level of support for values education to provide a foundation for

spiritual development was unexpected. Also unexpected was the choice of the third most persuasive argument, since gender equality has had little emphasis in civics and moral education in Singapore.

It is also interesting to note that, while the reason 'to combat the tendency for social prejudice and to promote greater tolerance for ethnic, language and racial groups' was given an average ranking (3.88 in a range of 2.63 to 4.75), there was least disagreement on this (s.d. = 2.74). The reason, 'to combat the recent trends of ecological abuse', which was given a similar ranking, showed the widest disagreement (Mean = 3.67; s.d. = 5.88). These may be two important issues for values education policy in the near future.

What Should be Taught in the Schools?

With regard to the percentage of time for values education in *specific classes*, the suggestions ranged from 0 percent to 50 percent. The average percentage suggested was approximately 16 percent (i.e. about a sixth of the total time), although the largest number of people put the figure at 10 percent.

In other words, respondents felt that slightly more time should be dedicated solely to values education than is the current practice (of three half-hour periods a week or 7.5 percent of curriculum time). However, it is pertinent to note that, with the introduction of the National Education Curriculum in 1997, a concerted effort has been made to implement values across the curriculum; time has also been set aside to promote the values associated with the National Education plan in the informal curriculum.

Table 13.2 Themes

Themes	Average Ranking in terms of decreasing importance (1 to 7)
Moral Values	1.56
Civic Values	1.72
Family Values	2.00
Values of Diversity and Multiculturalism	2.24
Values of Personal Autonomy and Reflection	2.48
Work Values	2.48
National Identity and Patriotism	2.80
Peace and Conflict Resolution	2.80
Democracy	3.00
Ecological Awareness	3.00
Global Awareness	3.20
Gender Equality	3.60
Religious Values	4.52

With regard to the themes that respondents felt required the greatest emphasis in schools, the four most highly ranked were moral, civic, family, diversity and multiculturalism values (Table 13.2). This result, particularly the high placing for moral and civic values, comes as no surprise since values education in Singapore has always been couched both in terms of civic and moral education. Indeed, civic values had the

smallest standard deviation (s.d. = 0.94), indicating general agreement among the respondents. Similarly, family, diversity and multiculturalism values received a high degree of emphasis, both in schools and in the media.

The school and, specifically, the classroom, were considered to be the most effective setting for teaching civic/national values, and second only to the home and family for moral education.

Values of personal autonomy and reflection came next, and were ranked above work, national identity and patriotism related values. This low ranking may be because the latter two have already received wide coverage in schools; while the emphasis on the first two may be an attempt to redress the situation in Singapore where there has been little emphasis on these aspects.

While there was a high degree of support for improving values education for the purpose of proving a foundation for spiritual development, it was felt that religious values should not be handled by schools. Indeed, there was strong consensus that religious groups and institutions and the home and family (52 percent and 40 percent respectively) constituted the two most effective settings for religious instruction; in contrast, none of the respondents cited religious instruction within the classroom or school as the most effective setting.

Table 13.3 Agglomeration Schedule

Stage	Cluster Combined		Coefficients
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	
1	Moral Values	Family Values	19.00
2	Ecological Awareness	Global Awareness	26.00
3	Civic Values	Values of Diversity and Multiculturalism	35.00
4	Values of Personal Autonomy and Reflection	Peace and Conflict Resolution	46.00
5	National Identity and Patriotism	Work Values	56.00
6	Values of Personal Autonomy and Reflection	Civic Values	61.50
7	Values of Personal Autonomy and Reflection	Democracy	77.25
8	Gender Equality	Ecological Awareness	90.00
9	Values of Personal Autonomy and Reflection	Moral Values	93.90
10	Values of Personal Autonomy and Reflection	National Identity and Patriotism	112.29
11	Values of Personal Autonomy and Reflection	Gender Equality	131.59
12	Religious Values	Values of Personal Autonomy and Reflection	247.75

A reason for the view that religious values should not be handled by schools could be the belief that, in a multicultural country like Singapore, religion might be divisive

and, hence, what should be taught should comprise universal values. As a respondent put it:

> While all religions preach and teach us to be good, there are elements in the principles of every religion that are fundamentally sectarian and so, potentially divisive in nature. So while I believe we should promote understanding and respect for different religions, religious values should not be the mainstay of our Values Education.

> We should base Values Education on universal values such as hard work, self-discipline, love of family, respect for neighbour, love of country, love for peace and harmony in the context of our multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious societies.

Whatever the case may be, the general view was that the school's role in values education should be primarily secular in nature.

Table 13.4 Hierarchical Cluster Analysis

(Dendogram using Average Linkage Between Groups Rescaled Distance Cluster Combine)

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C A S E                  0     5    10    15    20    25
Label Num                      +---------+---------+---------+---------+---------+

Moral Values                   -+---------------+
Family Values                  -+ I
Civic Values                   ---+-----+ +---+
Diversity and M                ---+ +---+ I I
Personal Aut and          -----+---+ +---+ +---+
Peace and Conf            -----+ I I I
Democracy                      -------------+ I I
National Id and                ---------+-----------+ +-----------------------+
Work Values                    ---------+ I I
Ecol Awareness            -+-------------+ I I
Global Awarene            -+ +---------+ I
Gender Equality                ----------------+ I
Religious Values          -------------------------------------------------+
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While the sample size of twenty-five respondents is rather small, *Agglomerative Hierarchical Cluster Analysis* using SPSS was carried out because it was felt that the patterns that emerged could be illuminating.[3] The clusters could reflect archetypes that

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[3] Cluster Analysis seeks to separate data into constituent groups. The clustering technique used is an Agglomerative Hierarchical, specifically, the Complete Linkage Technique. In this method, the individual statements or variables (not the respondents or cases) are classified into groups, and the process repeated at different levels to form a tree (dendogram graph) through a series of successive fusions of the variables into groups. The groups, which initially consist of single variables, are fused according to the distance between their nearest members.

would be recognisable to those familiar with the distinct value orientations found in Singapore (see Table 13.5). Tables 13.3 and 13.4 show how the individual statements combined to produce the various clusters.

Visual inspection of the dendogram indicated the broad clusters identified in Table 13.5. We found, for instance, that those who supported the teaching of moral values also tended to support the teaching of family values. Both these sets of values are emphasized in schools and by government policies. Hence, it is not surprising that these are related in the mind of this category of respondents. These respondents may align themselves with more 'traditional' positions on values education. An interesting question would be why they might do so, and the extent to which they might have been influenced by the government's views of values education.

Table 13.5 Cluster Analysis

Groupings of Themes
Moral Values
Family Values
Civic Values
Values of Diversity and Multiculturalism
Values of Personal Autonomy and Reflection
Peace and Conflict Resolution
Democracy
National Identity and Patriotism
Work Values
Ecological Awareness
Global Awareness
Gender Equality
Religious Values

Those who supported the teaching of national identity and patriotism also tended to support the teaching of work values. These are two sets of values that are strongly encouraged by the political leaders, and in schools. This group may represent those who endorse a 'nationalistic' position in values education. As with the earlier group, it is not known why they might do so, or the extent to which they might have been influenced by the government's views of values education.

Respondents who supported civic values also supported the values of diversity and multiculturalism, of personal autonomy and reflection, of peace and conflict resolution, and of democracy. Accordingly, the ideal citizen envisioned by this group of respondents is a tolerant, peaceable member of a multicultural society, who supports conflict resolution. The group supporting such values would not be associated with a passive form of 'Asian' democracy (or soft authoritarianism), but rather with a view in which the citizen is seen as an active participant. The inclusion of personal autonomy and reflection in this combination of values, and the form that this should take, should perhaps be seen in this light.

Each fusion decreases by one the number of groups, and proceeds until all the statements are clustered. The Complete Linkage method was used as the values attributed to the statements are ordinal, and it avoids having too many small clusters.

At the same time, it could be said that values of ecological, global and gender awareness have received attention relatively recently, particularly in Western countries, and these are generally associated with 'political correctness'. Not unexpectedly, therefore, those who supported one set of these values tended to support the other two as well, and—in a relatively conservative society like Singapore—these values received relatively little support from the respondents.

With regard to controversial issues in values education, respondents felt that schools should place strong emphasis on teaching children the value of critical thinking; indeed, this theme was given the highest ranking of all (see Table 13.6). It is unclear whether this result was a reflection of support for the Singapore government's current emphasis on critical and creative thinking as a means to maintain the competitiveness of the Singapore economy. Considering that a fairly high degree of importance was given to personal autonomy, as seen earlier, it is possible that the respondents believed that it was important to teach critical thinking to go along with values such as personal autonomy and reflection; such a view might be perceived by some to be 'Western' in nature.

Table 13.6. Controversial Issues

	Controversial issues	Average Ranking in decreasing order (1 – 7)
Most important	Schools should teach each child the value of critical thinking.	1.44
.	It is best for schools to teach common values to all children without differentiation on the basis of class, ethnicity, or religion.	1.68
	Schools should encourage empathy for people of different ethnic, language and social backgrounds and create opportunities for growth through shared experiences.	1.68
	Schools should foster values supporting the family, such as respect for parents, fidelity, and taking care of children and elders.	1.68
	Girls have essentially the same talents as boys and should be given equal opportunities and encouragement in schools.	1.84
Least important	Girls are destined to have significant home-building responsibilities and the schools should prepare them for this future.	5.12
	Schools should help young people appreciate the essential role of unions in guaranteeing safe work conditions and fair wages.	5.12

Apart from teaching the value of critical thinking, areas to which respondents felt schools should also give strong emphasis included teaching common values to all children, encouraging empathy for people different from oneself, and fostering such values as supporting the family, fidelity, and taking care of children and elders. Indeed,

there was strong agreement among respondents with regard to encouraging empathy for others (mean = 1.69; s.d. = 0.90). In other words, there is the belief that schools should prepare children to live in a multicultural society, as well as to foster the values associated with an 'Asian' society.

Respondents thought that the fostering of gender equality, in terms of girls being given the same opportunities and encouragement as boys, should also be emphasized. At the same time, it was felt that there should not be a strong emphasis on schools preparing girls for home-building. Overall, therefore, there was a sense that greater emphasis should be given to gender equality, and to preparing children for a future where this is practised.

The widest range in views occurred in responses related to the question of whether schools should help children understand they have the right to be happy (mean = 4.20; s.d. = 2.20). According to 'traditional Asian values', rights should not be emphasized over obligations; at the same time, the individual pursuit of happiness as a goal might also be frowned upon. Among our respondents there are some who would be in disagreement with this position.

Values that respondents considered should be given most emphasis comprised elements that were drawn from different sources, (e.g. from what is commonly regarded as traditional or 'Asian' values, from ideas generally considered to be 'Western', and from the values needed specifically for living in a multicultural country). Views with regard to the societies that are important and relevant to include in the Singapore curriculum provide further evidence of this.

The clustered results, in decreasing order of perceived importance place Singapore, China and Malaysia in the first cluster as societies that should be given the greatest prominence. This is only to be expected, given the ethnic makeup of Singapore. The 'Western' countries of the U.S. and the U.K. were placed in the second cluster, together with Japan and Indonesia. Indeed, the U.S. was ranked above the two Asian countries in that cluster, while both the U.S. and U.K. were also ranked above Thailand and Korea. Despite the fact that these were 'Western' countries, the respondents felt that the U.S. and U.K. were important, and their customs relevant, to Singapore. In general the values that were held in high regard by the respondents were drawn from both East and West and similarly, the societies and customs deemed to be relevant to Singapore are both Eastern and Western. There is a view, commonly presented in Singapore, in which the country is seen as being an 'Asian' society, where 'ethnic' values should be drawn from traditional Chinese, Malay and 'Indian' sources. In contrast, the picture that emerges from the study is a complex one where the set of values that should be taught is drawn from diverse sources, with the unstated possibility that these might interact to produce further complexities.

Regional Values

Respondents were, as a whole, ambivalent with regard to whether there was a distinctive set of Asian values (mean = 3.36), and whether schools should make an effort to teach Asian values (mean = 3.36). In fact, the widest range of views was found for the latter (s.d. = 2.00). There was some disagreement as to whether Confucian and

Asian values were essentially the same (mean = 4.48), and there was also an appreciable range of views on the issue (s.d. = 1.98).

Looking more closely at the notion of Asian values, half the respondents (56 percent) thought that there was a distinctive set of Asian values, although a quarter (24 percent) gave a neutral rating of 4 on a scale of 1 to 7. Sixty percent agreed that schools should make an effort to teach Asian values, while 24 percent disagreed. Only a third (32 percent) of the respondents agreed with the proposition that Confucian and Asian values were essentially the same, while 52 percent disagreed.

A possible explanation for the ambivalent response to the question concerning whether there was a distinct set of Asian values was that the views with regard to 'Asian' values are too complex to be expressed within the constraints permitted by the question. One respondent wrote:

> Asians, particularly Singaporeans, tend to pitch Asian/Eastern values against Western values. Basically, the values are the same except for emphasis, and neither is superior.

In other words, the respondent was stating his dissatisfaction at the way 'Asian' and 'Western' values were expressed in polarized terms, and disagreeing with the inclination to make one appear superior to the other. Hence, given the perceived frequency with which 'Asian' values are pitted against 'Western' ones, and despite the support for 'Asian' values expressed earlier, respondents might have been wary about expressing a belief in a distinctive set of 'Asian' values, and for schools to teach these.

How Should Values Education be Conducted?

An overwhelming majority of respondents (76 percent) disagreed with the proposition that values education should only begin in secondary school after young people had had a clear idea of what they believed to be important. Three-quarters of respondents also indicated very strong agreement with the notion that values education should begin at an early age since the foundations of values were established in early childhood. There was, therefore, a high degree of support for the view that the school was an appropriate and important socialising agent, especially where relatively young children are concerned.

Almost two-thirds of respondents disagreed with the idea that students of different academic abilities should undergo different values education programs. Three-fifths of respondents agreed that values education should be integrated throughout the curriculum instead of being taught in separate subjects. In other words, more than half the respondents would disagree with the practice of teaching Civics and Moral Education as a separate subject.

With regard to perceptions of the most effective settings for religious education, there was—as has been noted—strong consensus that religious groups and institutions (52 percent), as well as home and family (40 percent), constituted the two most effective settings for religious education. Especially interesting was the fact that none of the respondents cited religious instruction within the classroom or school as the most effective setting.

Similarly, the two top choices for the second most effective setting for religious education were home and family (44 percent), and religious groups and institutions (32 percent). Once again, relatively low priority was given to school and classroom.

When asked which groups should receive the most exposure to religious education, there was no consensus of opinion. However, high school, secondary and primary groups received the highest total percentage ratings among the top three groups. The four top choices for the group that should receive the most exposure to religious education were: pre-schoolers (28 percent), primary (24 percent), university (24 percent), and secondary (16 percent).

With regard to the most effective settings for civic/national values, the school and classroom assumed a more important role compared to the teaching of religious values. However, it was clear that respondents thought that other institutions and means played an important role as well. The top ratings for the most effective setting for civic/national values were: school and classroom procedures (32 percent), classroom instruction (24 percent), home and family (20 percent), and the media (12 percent).

There was a lack of consensus as to which groups should receive the most exposure to civic/national values. High school, secondary, and primary groups, as in the case of religious education, were cited most often among the top three choices. The four top choices for the first ranked group were: primary (32 percent), secondary (20 percent), preschoolers (16 percent), and young children (12 percent).

The settings that received the highest rankings as being most effective for moral education were home and family, and the school. Most of the other settings were seen as irrelevant. The percentage ratings for the most effective setting were: home and family (64 percent), classroom instruction (24 percent), and school and classroom procedures (16 percent).

As in the case of religious education and civic/national values, there was no clear consensus as to which groups should receive the greatest exposure to moral education. Primary, secondary and high school received the highest overall percentages as groups that should receive the most exposure to moral education: primary (52 percent), young children (28 percent), and pre-schoolers (12 percent).

Discussion

While our intention was not to construct a picture of the 'product' of values education, a clear position emerges as a result of our survey and forms the basis on which the choices may be made with regard to values education. The position that emerges is that of citizens who may

- be capable of spiritual development,
- have a sense of individual responsibility,
- have respect for women,
- have civic consciousness,
- have a respect for democracy,
- be able to think critically, and
- have empathy for others, regardless of their background.

The important values that such an individual would hold include

- Moral Values,
- Civic Values,
- Family Values,
- Values of Diversity and Multiculturalism, and
- Values of Personal Autonomy and Reflection.

Among other things, such a person should also hold in a lesser degree values needed for economic development, such as hard work, creativity and individual competitiveness.

It could be said that the values that such 'modern' individuals would hold should constitute a blend of traditional of 'Asian' values, and 'Western' values, as well as the values needed specifically for living in a multicultural society like Singapore. It is uncertain whether such a blend is internally consistent, or how comfortably the elements sit beside each other. However, there is the hint of a notion of a diverse and rich set of values that might interact in complex ways.

With regard to the relative emphasis that schools should give to the different themes, moral and civic values were considered to be highly important, followed by family, diversity and multiculturalism, and personal autonomy and reflection related values. At the same time, the role of schools is seen as laying the ground for spiritual development, without fostering religious values. This could be because schools were considered ineffective for this purpose; alternatively, there could be concern that religious values might be divisive in a multicultural society and, hence, that universally held values would be more appropriate. Finally, it was felt that schools should place strong emphasis on teaching children the value of critical thinking, and of preparing them to live in a multicultural society, as well as in an 'Asian' society.

Respondents thought that slightly more curriculum time (10 percent to 16 percent, compared to the current figure of 7.5 percent) should specifically be set aside for values education. Interestingly, a majority (60 percent) felt that values education should be integrated throughout the curriculum instead of being taught in separate subjects. There was strong agreement that values education should begin at an early age, as is the practice in Singapore, and that students of different abilities should not undergo different values education programs. Finally, it was felt that the school was an effective setting for civic/national values and moral education, but not for religious education.

There is a degree of divergence between the goals for individuals and the role of schools emerging from our survey and that envisaged and promoted by the authorities regarding values education. For instance, the ranking of the values of personal autonomy and reflection above those of work, national identity and patriotism related values are contrary to the official position. Indeed, these responses may be an attempt to redress the current situation where there has been little emphasis on nurturing individuals' habits of personal autonomy and reflection. Similarly, the strong emphasis given to gender equality seems to run counter to current views and practice in a coun-

try where, despite the avowed position of ensuring equal opportunity, official policy enshrines the man as the head of the household.[4]

The overall goal for individuals is, to form a more autonomous, critical thinker perhaps beyond what official policy might support. Given the proposed emphasis on such values as gender equality, personal autonomy and reflection, the picture that emerges may be more 'Western' than the authorities might deem appropriate for an 'Asian' society.

Whatever the case may be, there appears to be a degree of tension between what members of the elite conceive to be the ideal product of values education, regarding the role of individuals and schools, and what the authorities might deem desirable.

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[4] For instance, the policy gives employed men medical benefits for their children but denies similar benefits to employed women.