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Student teachers' views on national education: the need for greater alignment between policy and praxis

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This study examines student teachers' views on their country and on National Education (NE), with the aim of promoting teachers' understanding of the need for NE. A forty-item survey was administered to 1650 student teachers, to assess their sense of belonging, protective attitude, perceived right, ethnic tolerance and community and political involvement, as well as their perceptions of the importance and learning outcomes of NE. Significant differences were observed between the genders and between the various programme groups in terms of the student teachers' responses, suggesting the need for a more comprehensive approach to NE in initial teacher education.

Keywords: pre-service teacher education; citizenship education; national education; educational policy

Citizenship, citizenship education and national education

Most scholars seem to agree that "citizenship" involves a bi-directional relationship between the individual and his/her community or state. In the simplest terms, it can be defined as the status of a native or naturalized member of a nation or state, by virtue of which he/she is entitled to certain rights and in return, is bound by certain obligations towards it. Marshal (1964), for instance, refers to citizenship as a status held by members of a community who have equal rights and civic obligations within that social group. He also recognized that citizenship involves "a direct sense of community membership based on loyalty to a civilization which is a common possession" (p. 92). Oldfield (1990) further elaborates on what constitutes the "rights" and "obligations". According to him, a citizen's rights include "autonomy" or the power to exert volition and "concord" or the sense of mutual reliance amongst members. On the other hand, it is a citizen's obligations to pass "judgment" or make decisions on the rules that bind the community and give it an identity.

The literature reveals that most nation states are in agreement with the concept of democratic citizenship as active participation in “carrying out the roles and responsibilities of a citizen in a democratic society” (Kerr, 2003; Sunal et al., 2009, p. 34). For countries with a history of unresolved political issues, the roles and responsibilities of a citizen go beyond those of merely maintaining a harmonious co-existence or the status quo within the nation. Thus, in Cyprus, with a long history of segregation between citizens of Greek descent and those of Turkish origins, the reformed citizenship education curriculum emphasizes on rapprochement and reconciliation of the Greek Cypriots with their Turkish counterparts (Koutselini, 2008). In South Africa, following the first democratic election in 1994, the then newly formed government noted the need to introduce democratic citizenship education in all schools if the new-found democracy was to perpetuate through future generations, and the views of scholars and teachers were sought regarding what education for democratic citizenship entails (Schoeman, 2005; South African National Department of Education, 2001).

The issues arising in Cyprus and South Africa serve to illustrate that the definition of democratic citizenship is in itself contentious, since the concepts of “democracy” and “citizenship” invariably differ across contexts and are subject to an interpretation in accordance to historical, geographical and economic factors, as well as the socio-political ideologies prevalent in any particular state at any given time (Kerr, 1999; Koutselini, 2008). Furthermore, the complexity of the issue is intensified with the delineation between “national” and “global” citizenship, fuelled by the ongoing debate on whether the focus of citizenship education should be primarily on one or the other (Woolley, 2008; Ho, 2009). In the words of Osler and Starkey (2003), citizenship is “anchored in the rights and responsibilities deriving from sovereign nation states”. However, in the context of globalization, undivided loyalty to a single nation has become somewhat dated, since

“migrant citizens tend to develop multiple loyalties and identities” (Osler & Starkey, 2003, pp. 243–244). With globalization and increasing multiculturalism in nation-states, one cannot ignore the tension between allowing the citizenry to retain its ethnic and cultural diversity and yet ensuring that the population abides by a set of common ethical principles, beliefs and aspirations (Gutmann, 2004; Banks, 2008). On the one hand, radical nationalism may promote unity but intolerance of diversity is likely to lead to autocracy and repression. Conversely, an overemphasis on diversity with no attempts at unification will lead to separatism and fragmentation of the nation-state (Banks, 2004a). The rift between nationalism and globalization is further felt when considering the universal decrees that currently form the tenets of the global citizenship movement. For instance the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), specified for all individuals irrespective of their national identity, proclaim the rights to freedom of expression, religious conviction, individual privacy, and to a lawful trial when charged with crime. However, in real contexts, these edicts are far from the realities experienced by the very people for whom they have been written (Banks, 2004b). For instance, discrimination and marginalization still occurs against students from minority groups, even within school contexts of the very nations that champion globalization and cosmopolitanism. Such conditions in schools tend to encourage allegiance to ethnic identities at the expense of loyalty to the nation of adoption, and even less so, to the concept of global, cosmopolitan citizenship. Furthermore, Chandler (2003, pp. 339–340) argues that though the intent of cosmopolitan theory is laudable, it pays “more attention to the ethical ends of cosmopolitan democracy than ...to the mechanisms and means of ensuring these”. In Chandler’s views, without an established framework for action, the “rights” of global citizens are often not within their control, but rather under the jurisdiction of a handful of power-wielding groups professing to claim rights on behalf of others. This presents the danger of undermining the traditional legal and political rights of individuals

within a sovereign and self-governed nation-state. Thus, adoption of global governance may result in greater dependency rather than empowerment of the individual citizen.

The search for a new formulation has led to the emergence of the concept of “cosmopolitan citizenship”. This construct, which attempts to define democratic status in culturally diverse communities, has been the subject of much debate in academic circles. Gilroy (1997) for instance, states that the concept of cosmopolitan citizenship enables recognition of the existence of transnational and diasporic groups and their rights. Likewise, Osler and Starkey (2003, p. 246) conceptualized cosmopolitan citizens as individuals who “will be confident in their own identities and will work to achieve peace, human rights and democracy within the local community and at a global level”. In line with the question on how citizenship should be defined in 21st C contexts, education for citizenship has faced similar dispute, especially in the rapidly expanding cosmopolitan, multicultural contexts.

Traditionally, the role of citizenship education is to “ensure that young people understand their present and future roles within the constitutional and legal framework of the state in which they live” (p. 244). The current challenge in these societies is to find a citizenship education framework that is able to address the differences within the communities and to promote unity amidst the high degree of cultural diversity. Thus the role of cosmopolitan citizenship education is not only to ensure that young people know their roles and responsibilities, but to equip them with the necessary understanding and competencies to live together harmoniously in spite of their cultural differences, and in the midst of what Held (2002) calls “overlapping communities of fate”, areas of shared interest (geographical, societal, ideological and virtual) which span across cultures and promote interdependence. However, Osler & Starkey recognized the need “to establish a sense of solidarity with others in our own communities” before one can “feel and express a sense of solidarity with others elsewhere” (p. 252), hence citizenship should not imply a rejection of

national citizenship but rather the establishment of connections between community, national and global contexts. In their concluding remarks, these authors upheld the notion of cosmopolitan citizenship education as “equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them to make a difference” (p. 252) and to be active participants in shaping their future and that of the world. Moreover, in their studies on immigrant youths in the U.S., other researchers found that it is possible for an individual to differentiate between identity and citizenship (Maira, 2004; El-Haj, 2007; Nguyen, 2008). For instance, they identified themselves as Palestinian, Vietnamese or Pakistani *and* US citizens. Even as the debate continues between supporters of nationalism and those favouring cosmopolitanism, some writers (Davies, 2006; Banks, 2008) advocate that despite the existing tensions, there is a place for all three approaches, nationalism, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism to co-exist. The identity of an individual is, after all, the product of influences from his/her culture and ethnicity, national and citizenship status, as well as the broader impact of global forces. Banks (2008) proposed that “if students are to attain clarified and reflective cultural, national, regional, and global identifications and to understand how these identities are interrelated and constructed” (p. 135), citizenship education should be ‘transformative’ in nature, and should involve “civic actions designed to actualize values and moral principles and ideals beyond those of existing laws and conventions” (p. 136).

Kerr (1999) highlighted three existing approaches to citizenship education, namely education *about* citizenship, *through* citizenship and *for* citizenship. Citizenship education can thus be viewed as a continuum of student engagement, with education *about* citizenship at the starting end, whereby students are simply provided with factual knowledge of the historical, political and socio-cultural aspects of their nation. Education *through* citizenship however, requires more active engagement on the part of the student, since it entails participation in community-based projects and activities to reinforce citizenship knowledge.

Education *for* citizenship, at the high end of the continuum, encompasses both the knowledge and practice of citizenship, as well as the acquisition of skills, values and attributes enabling students to function as active and responsible members of society. The challenge lies in finding a suitable model for a comprehensive, yet practice-oriented curriculum.

In Singapore, where the present study was conducted, the need to embrace the notion of cosmopolitan citizenship in the nation state was clear to many, even way before the adoption of this concept in western globalized contexts. Currently, the Singapore demographic profile comprises 73.5% Chinese, 13.0% Malays, 9.4% Indians and 4.1% other races. There is thus a constant need to ‘address the differences within the communities and to promote unity amidst the high degree of cultural diversity’, as in the edict of cosmopolitan citizenship, was and remains a priority in Singapore’s agenda.

The concept of National Education (NE), stemming from the broader view of citizenship education, was introduced in schools in 1997. NE was conceived as a more focused attempt to address three main issues: the ignorance amongst the younger citizens of the recent history of the nation, the need to transmit the instincts and attitudes that have contributed to its success, and the preparation for a global future. The then Prime Minister Goh argued that knowledge of post-war history was important for the understanding of the nation’s constraints and vulnerabilities and, as the current Prime Minister Lee puts it, for all Singaporeans to “bond together as one nation, or maintain the will to survive and prosper in an uncertain world” (Lee, 1997). Thus, one of the main objectives of NE is to disseminate the Singapore story, as the ignorance of Singapore history will “hinder our effort to develop a shared sense of nationhood” (Lee, 1997, p.1). There is the need to “remind our youth about how Singapore became an independent nation and about her vulnerabilities, constraints...to prevent a sense of complacency and entitlement” (Committee on National Education, 2008, p.1). The aim of NE is thus to “develop national cohesion, the instinct for survival and

confidence in the future by fostering a sense of identity, pride and self-respect as Singaporeans ...and by instilling the core values of the Singaporean way of life, and the will to prevail, that ensures society's continued success and well-being" (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Furthermore, in the midst of globalization, more Singaporeans have opportunities to live, work and study abroad, hence the need to strengthen "heartware and rootedness" amongst Singaporeans, to ensure that they will still consider Singapore their home and ensure its continued success and well-being (Committee on National Education, 2007, p. 6).

The NE programme has retained aspects of the traditional approach with its strong focus on building a sense of rootedness to the country and a deep understanding of its unique history and geopolitical circumstances, with the underlying implications on the role of each citizen in the sustenance of the nation's current socio-economic status and welfare. Yet, the NE framework has elements of cosmopolitan citizenship education in the sense that it prepares young citizens towards their roles in a multicultural society by nurturing a sense of identity, and by imparting core values such as resilience and respect for self and others, thus engendering national cohesion and harmonious living within a pluralistic context. In addition, other concepts of cosmopolitan citizenship are instilled in the key NE messages. For instance, aspects of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, n.d.) are considered in the NE edict on the need to 'uphold meritocracy and incorruptibility' and to 'provide opportunities for all, according to their ability and effort' (Ministry of Education, n.d.). In addition, the idea of global citizenship was revisited in the recent refinements made to the NE programme (Ministry of Education, n.d.), whereby in 2007, the Committee on National Education made a recommendation to "strengthen the Singapore identity through meaningful opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges and international exposure". Provisions were made for more students to go on overseas study trips to heighten their awareness of Singapore's

position in the global context, and their own role as a citizen of their country and of the world.

The National Education Programme

In Singapore, a two-pronged approach was adopted in the implementation of NE. These included (i) the development of students' "awareness of facts, circumstances and opportunities facing Singapore, so that they will be able to make decisions for their future"; (ii) the development of students' "sense of emotional belonging and commitment to the community and nation" (MOE, n.d.).

The key messages of NE are delivered informally through the many programmes and activities organized on a regular basis in the schools. Thus the NE curriculum comprises three domains of application. Firstly, education *about* citizenship involves infusion of NE content in the informal curriculum by enhancing student awareness through four core NE events commemorated annually in all schools. These have been identified as key defining moments in the history of the country and include "Racial Harmony Day" (to celebrate Singapore's multicultural fabric and cohesion), "Total Defence Day" (to commemorate the fall of Singapore to the Japanese during World War II), "International Friendship Day" (to promote students' understanding of Singapore's relations with other nations and to nurture friendship and collaboration with them) and National Day (to commemorate Singapore's declaration of independence from Malaya). Secondly, social awareness is also enhanced through "Learning Journeys", trips undertaken out of schools, both locally and overseas, by both students and their teachers to enrich and extend their experiences and understanding of the world around them. Thirdly, educational institutions at all levels engage their students in "Community Involvement Programmes", whereby students are given the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of voluntary projects and activities aiming to benefit communities in need of assistance. The aim is to develop social cohesion and the sense of social responsibility.

Although most analysts would agree with the original intent of NE, some have legitimate concerns over its implementation. Koh (2006) for instance, claims that both students and teachers don't take national education seriously as it is not an examinable subject and is thus viewed as an add-on. Although there is no common formal NE programme across all levels of schooling, NE content is taught implicitly through subjects such as social studies, civics and moral education, history, geography and the general paper. Social studies, for instance, was introduced as a platform for the dissemination of the national education messages and is taught as a required course at both primary and secondary levels, with its curricula and syllabi specifically designed to include NE messages. While it remains as a non-examination subject at primary level, social studies is formally assessed at secondary level in the high-stakes General Certification of Education (GCE) O level exams. Koh further argues that the NE syllabus is too narrowly focused towards reflecting government political ideology and agenda, and so might generate students who tend to conform to what they are told, rather than "making informed judgment about long-term changes in the country and the world" (p. 367). Finally, there is the issue that "as a curriculum package, NE has not responded to what globalization means for the construction of youthful identities" and has not taken into consideration the role of the young in "constructing their preferred identities, whether this is inspired by their consumption of global /regional popular cultural forms and practices or transient youth subculture practices" (p. 363). Although Koh's arguments were legitimate at the time when they were formulated, attempts have been made to prevent at least some of these forebodings from turning into reality. In fact, NE was launched as one of three initiatives of a broader vision and education policy,

“Thinking Schools, Learning Nation” (TSLN) crafted as the master plan charting the course for Singapore schools in the 21st century and launched by then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in 1997 (Goh, 1997).

The two other TSLN initiatives were (i) the nurturing of critical thinking and (ii) the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in schools. If administered effectively, both of these would eventually generate students who would be able to “make informed judgment about long-term changes in the country and the world”. A decade after the launch of TSLN in the late nineties, the impact of the ICT initiative is palpable. Young Singaporeans and even their not-so-young parents are avid consumers of ICT products. Many are consummate users of Web 2.0 technologies, connecting to the rest of the global citizenry through Facebook, Twitter, blogs as well as professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn.

The critical thinking initiative however, has taken longer to show tangible results. The critical thinking programmes adopted in schools seem to stem from a combination of three approaches (Koh, 2002):

- 1) the philosophical approach with its application of logic and argument analysis as taught in the Knowledge Inquiry curriculum at A-level;
- 2) the psychological approach with its focus on cognitive problem solving, e.g., in project work conducted at all levels of schooling;
- 3) the nurturing of critical thinking dispositions and the “critical spirit” (Ennis, 1987; Siegel, 1991, p. 18).

As the critical thinking initiative was launched in conjunction with the ICT Masterplan and the NE programme, it was envisaged that developing critical thinking skills amongst students, would subsequently promote a culture of critical thinking permeating all domains of life. The expectation is that students would be able to demonstrate critical thinking in all spheres of learning, including NE. As schools generally have the autonomy to design their own NE programmes, the infusion of critical thinking in NE remains within the purview of the school authorities and NE committees.

There are evidences that the current generation of young Singaporeans are not “parochial citizens who reproduce Government policy and ideology” (Koh, 2006, p. 367). In the aftermath of the May 2011 General Elections, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had this to say in his National Day Rally speech 2011:

This time there were more diverse views which were expressed a lot more strongly, not only in rallies but also on the Internet, in the social media and SMSes, all the new technology offerings... They [concerned Singaporeans] do not agree with everything the government has done or is doing but they acknowledge the good work and the progress and they are concerned that we should make things better and not throw the baby out with the bath water. (Lee, 2011, pp. 1–2)

New initiatives in NE

Prior to its launch in 1997, a committee chaired by Mr Lim Siong Guan, then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, was set up to study and make recommendations for the implementation of NE. Ten years later, a new Committee on National Education, chaired by Minister of State for Education, RAdm (NS) Lui Tuck Yew, was set up to review the NE programme and its implementation. The committee consulted stakeholders such as school leaders, teachers, students, parents, representatives from welfare organisations and non-government organisations, and sought the latter’s views on various aspects of the NE initiative (Committee on National Education, 2007, p. 1).

The committee found that the NE programme has yielded some measures of success, namely in inculcating pride in being Singaporean and in promoting awareness and appreciation of the value of NE and its contribution towards racial and religious harmony. The stakeholders were particularly satisfied with the programme components that required active student participation, such as Community Involvement Programmes, Learning Journeys and the commemorative events. The downside is that the NE programme was unevenly administered in the schools, leading to disengagement and cynicism amongst the parties involved. This was exacerbated by the segmentation of the programme into three different themes (Love, Know, Lead Singapore) at primary, secondary and tertiary levels

respectively, leading to the inadvertent overemphasis on some outcomes and the exclusion of others at each of the three levels (pp. 3–7).

The committee thus suggested more opportunities for active student participation and leadership, and that NE should be conceptualized with respect to the “Head, Heart, Hands” framework to be conceived as a continuum cutting across all levels of schooling, hence enabling participants to build on their knowledge, affiliation and engagement as a citizen over the years (p. 7). More importantly, the committee stressed the importance of educators in shaping students’ NE experiences “through the latter’s enthusiasm and commitment to NE, the way they planned and conducted NE programmes, involved community partners, and interacted with students on a day-to-day basis” (p. 5). The suggestions were to “deepen the conviction and commitment of educators to nurture Singaporean citizens with a strong sense of belonging for Singapore”, and to “enhance the knowledge, skills and interest of educators in delivering NE through professional development, starting at pre-service training” (p. 9). The current study thus builds on these premises to search for a better understanding of pre-service teachers’ views on Singapore and on NE, as a first step towards developing their competence and inclination to conduct NE programmes in their future schools.

The role of teachers

Although many countries have well-established citizenship education policies drafted by their education ministries, scholars assisting in the process are quick to realize the unique role of teachers in determining the success of the relevant programmes. As a matter of fact, teachers do not passively translate policies into action but have the ability to mould the implementation process (Bell & Stevenson, 2006; Sim & Print, 2009) in accordance to the way in which the policies are presented and interpreted (Ball, 1993). Furthermore, teachers’ understanding of a policy is affected by their prior knowledge, values and emotions (Spillane et al., 2002). Thus, the success of a policy is largely dependent on the value and meaning that

teachers attach to it and whether they feel a sense of ownership towards it (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves et al., 2001; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005, Sim & Print, 2009). In addition, teachers reflect their values through their teaching, the material and content they choose and the way they engage and interact with students (Gudmundsdottir, 1990; Arthur, 2003; Leenders et al., 2008).

The success of citizenship education programmes thus depends to a large extent on the effectiveness of the teachers in imparting, not only the necessary knowledge and skills, but also the right value systems to their students. It is therefore imperative that the development of any citizenship education programme should take into account teachers' understanding and perceptions of citizenship, to promote their awareness of these perceptions, and if necessary, to provide them with the support needed to fulfil their role in instructing and role modelling democratic and/or cosmopolitan citizenship. A number of studies have been conducted to investigate teachers' perceptions of citizenship and citizenship education in their respective contexts. The findings revealed mixed responses on the part of teachers. In the Netherlands, Leenders and her colleagues (2008) found that the citizenship orientations of the teachers were linked to their educational goals, age groups and type of schools and teaching subject. A study conducted on elementary pre-service teachers from a south-eastern university in the USA revealed that the pre-service teachers had a superficial understanding of democracy, democratic citizenship education and the pedagogy for engaging students in the latter (Sunal et al., 2009). In the UK, a high percentage of teachers felt inadequately prepared to teach citizenship education (Kerr et al, 2003; Ireland et al., 2006). In addition, Oulton et al. (2004) not only reiterated the teachers' self-perceived insufficiency in preparedness, but they also argued that the teachers felt constrained in their ability to discuss controversial issues in the classroom. In addition, in countries like USA,

Japan and Australia, there were no systematic training programmes to prepare teachers for the teaching or facilitation of Citizenship Education or related subjects (Nelson & Kerr, 2006).

In Singapore, the context of this research, the National Education (NE) curriculum was introduced to inculcate a sense of national identity and pride in students (Wang et al., 2006). This poses an additional challenge to teachers who “must feel passionately for the country before they can teach with conviction”, as the then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong stated in his speech at the 1996 Teachers’ Day Rally (Goh, 1996). This presumes a link between teachers’ patriotism, defined as “loyalty to a particular nation” (MacIntyre, 2003), and the effectiveness with which the National Education curriculum is delivered.

NE in Initial Teacher Education

Currently, student teachers gain exposure to NE through both formal and informal curricula. Formal training is provided through the Social Studies courses for those who opt for them as part of their curriculum studies. For most of the student teachers, however, NE is experienced informally through a number of events and activities in the course of their programme. For instance, aspects of NE are highlighted through events and activities such as the National Day Observance Ceremony, NE exhibitions and NE seminars. In addition, NE was made pervasive to all student teachers through a year-long service- learning project, Group Endeavours in Service Learning (GESL), aimed at fostering collaboration, empathy, and respect for diversity. The student teachers would have been educated *about* citizenship through their primary and secondary schooling, and they would have experienced education *through* citizenship when taking part in GESL. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether the current initial teacher education framework offers sufficient opportunities to provide education *for* citizenship. Furthermore, since the launch of NE in the late nineties, the impetus of ‘national’ agenda has evolved into one for a “global” agenda in many parts of the world and with this, the concept of citizenship education has broadened into one of global citizenship education. It

is perhaps timely to review how NE is presented in initial teacher education and to consider how the existing framework could be refined to cater for a 21st Century landscape.

In a study conducted with pre-service student teachers, Wang et al. (2006) found that the latter displayed various combinations of different patriotic profiles, and that there was a tendency for high patriotism to be associated with positive views of citizenship and high importance attached to NE. Although these authors provided a valuable insight into the stance of pre-service teachers on national identity and education, it has also raised new issues that need to be considered. For instance, the factors contributing to high patriotism, and hence a positive stance towards NE, are yet to be determined. Furthermore, if initial teacher education programmes are to effectively prepare future teachers in facilitating NE, it is necessary to identify what contributes to divergent views on NE. Koh (2006) argues that the emphasis and publicity given NE has in part, contributed to its being associated with government propaganda (information used by the ruling party to promote its cause or viewpoint). Most of the teachers currently in service were born in the post-independence period and thus the Singapore story may be as remote to them as it is to their students. In addition, upon attaining the age of 18 years, all male Singaporeans and second generation permanent residents have to serve up to two years of mandatory National Service. One can foresee that the experience in the military might cause the males' views on NE to be markedly different from those of their female counterparts. Although these assertions are plausible, they have yet to be verified. This study aims to fill this empirical gap by exploring the views of teachers on their affiliation to Singapore, and hence their views on the NE initiative. Although conducted in the context of Singapore, we believe that this study will contribute to a broader global perspective and will be of interest to an international audience, since it builds on the framework proposed by UNESCO (1995) for Education for peace, human rights and democracy. This framework outlines the objectives, implementation strategies and policies

that are fundamentally for the delivery of cosmopolitan, democratic citizenship education (Osler & Vincent, 2002) at institutional, national and global levels. In brief, it has three broad areas for development: (i) to inculcate an awareness of universal values, recognition of the value of freedom and the respect for the diversity of individuals and cultures; (ii) to nurture the ability to make informed choices and of resolving conflicts in a peaceful manner and (iii) to cultivate sentiments of justice, solidarity and civic responsibility at national and global levels, with due commitment to the protection of one's cultural heritage and living environment.

Knowing teachers' stance towards Singapore will be an indication of the extent to which they are receptive to the NE initiative and their willingness to teach it. The views of pre-service teachers were sought as this study aimed to provide baseline data on their initial perceptions of citizenship issues and NE, so as to inform teacher educators of what should be taken into consideration in the design of a suitable pre-service training programme to assist future teachers in the facilitation of NE in schools.

This study thus aimed to address the following research questions:

- 4) What were future teachers' views on their civic affiliations to Singapore?
- 5) What were future teachers' views on National Education (NE) at the start of their teacher education programme?
- 6) Were there any significant correlations between future teachers' civic affiliations to Singapore and their perceptions of NE?
- 7) Were there differences between the various programme groups in terms of their views on civic affiliations to Singapore and on NE?
- 8) Were there any gender differences between future teachers in terms of their views on civic affiliations to Singapore and on NE?

The student teachers involved in this study would have participated in most, if not all, of the above activities and events in the course of their own schooling. It is logical to presume that their current views on Singapore and on NE would arise from their own personal experiences while growing up as a citizen and/or resident of the nation state. These experiences would, in turn, influence the way they facilitate NE and the undeniable

impression they would leave on their future pupils. The next sections give an outline of how student teachers' views were captured and analysed.

Methodology

Participants

This study involved the participation of a total of 1650 future teachers in Singapore. The demographic data of the participants is shown in Table 1 below.

[Insert Table 1 here]

The future teachers who participated in this study were enrolled in four different teacher education programmes offered at the institute of teacher education. Two programmes, the two-year Diploma in Education (DipEd) and the four-year Bachelor of Science in Education (BSc), offer training to A-level or polytechnic graduates to teach in the primary (elementary) schools. The Post-Graduate Diploma in Education programme offers a year-long training course to university graduates, in preparation for primary (PGDE Primary) or secondary (high) school teaching (PGDE Secondary). The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 51 (Mean = 24.64, SD = 5.54).

Assessing future teachers' perceptions

Procedures

A forty-item survey was administered to the entire cohort of student teachers at the start of their programme. We used seven-point Likert-type scales, ranging from one (Not true at all) to seven (Very true) for item scoring. The participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time. The questionnaire was administered by research assistants in a quiet setting. When completing the questionnaire, participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and were encouraged to ask questions if necessary.

Measures

Views on Singapore

A total of 22 items, adapted from the IEA Civic Education Study (Husfeldt, Barber & Torney-Purta, 2005), were used to assess student teachers' views on their civic affiliation to Singapore. Table 2 shows the organisation of the survey items and subscales in relation to the specific domains of development outlined in the UNESCO framework on Education for peace, human rights and democracy (1995).

[Insert Table 2 here]

Specifically, in terms of national solidarity and civic responsibility, five items measured their sense of belongingness (e.g., 'If I have children, I would like them to grow up in Singapore'), and three items assessed their protective attitudes towards Singapore (e.g., 'We should prevent other countries from trying to influence political decisions in Singapore'). Four items were used to measure their perceived rights to freedom and informed choice (e.g., 'In this country, people are able to write to a newspaper about social or political concerns'). Four items assessed community involvement (e.g., 'I participate in activities that benefit people in the community or society'). Three items were used to measure their political engagement (e.g., 'I follow political issues in the newspaper, on the radio or on TV'). Finally, three items assessed their appreciation of cultural diversity in terms of their attitude towards other ethnic groups (e.g., 'I befriend people from other ethnic or religious groups').

Perceptions of NE.

A total of 18 items were used to assess student teachers' perceptions of NE in Singapore. Specifically, six items were constructed to assess their perceived importance of NE in supporting UNESCO's education for peace, human rights and democracy (e.g., 'NE in schools is important for preserving racial and religious harmony'). Six items were used to assess whether they considered NE to be a form of propaganda (e.g., 'NE is a form of propaganda'). For this subscale, the items were reversely scored. Lastly, the student teachers'

perceived learning outcomes of NE in promoting cosmopolitan citizenship were assessed using another six items (e.g., “Through NE, students become more aware of how Singapore developed as a nation”).

Data analysis

The preliminary analysis of the data involved the computation of the overall means, standard deviations and the Cronbach’s alphas of the subscales. In the primary analysis, we conducted a Pearson bivariate correlation analysis to assess correlations between the subscales in the survey. In addition, we also carried out a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to examine differences between the responses of the different programme groups and genders.

Results

Psychometric properties of measurement tools

To examine the factorial validity of the measurement tools, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) on the survey items. EQS for Windows 6.1 was used with Maximum Likelihood method as the estimation method.

The results of the CFA on views of Singapore supported the five-factor structure; $\chi^2 = 695.31$, $df = 140$, $p < .001$, NFI = .895, CFI = .914, IFI = .914, and RMSEA = .049, 90% CI of RMSEA = .045 to .052. Cronbach alphas for sense of belonging, protective attitude, perceived right, community involvement and political engagement were .78, .60, .63, .68, and .70, respectively, for the present sample. For views on NE, the results of the confirmatory factor analyses indicate that the three-factor model fit the data quite well [$\chi^2 = 612.72$, $df = 97$, $p < .001$, NFI = .946, CFI = .954, IFI = .954, and RMSEA = .057, 90% CI of RMSEA = .052 to .061]. The alpha coefficients for the measures were as follows: importance of NE = .89, learning outcomes of NE = .89, NE as propaganda = .61.

Descriptive statistics from the survey data

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation for the views on Singapore and perceptions of NE subscales. High mean scores indicate positive views towards the country and the teaching of NE. In this study, mean scores (\bar{x}) equal to or below 2.3 ($\bar{x} \leq 2.3$) are designated as low, since on the Likert-type scale, scores ranging from 1 to 2.3 imply that the respondent disagrees what is stated in a particular item. Moderate mean scores, $2.3 < \bar{x} \leq 4.6$, imply that the respondent agrees in part with the item statements. High mean scores, those above 4.6 ($\bar{x} > 4.6$) imply that the respondent is in full agreement with the statements. As shown in Table 3, in terms of their views on Singapore, the participants were most strongly supportive of ethnic diversity in the country. They also held high positive views in terms of their sense of belonging to Singapore and the need to protect it. They held moderate views in terms of perceived rights, community involvement and political engagement. In terms of their perceptions of NE, the participants strongly agreed that it was important and that it promoted the specified learning outcomes. They were however, somewhat divided in their views on whether NE was a form of propaganda.

[Insert Table 3 here]

[Insert Table 4 here]

Correlates of views on Singapore and on NE

Table 4 presents the correlations between the variables used in assessing the participants' views. For the interpretation of the correlation coefficients (Cohen, 1988), low correlation is taken as $-0.30 < r \leq 0.00$ and $0.00 \leq r < 0.30$; moderate correlation as $-0.50 < r \leq -0.30$ and $0.30 \leq r < 0.50$; high correlation as $-1.00 < r \leq -0.50$ and $0.50 \leq r < 1.00$.

In terms of the future teachers' views on Singapore, there was moderate correlation between the future teachers' sense of belonging and all other variables except "political engagement" and "ethnic tolerance". Similarly, moderate correlation was observed between

(i) “Protective attitude” and “ethnic tolerance” and “sense of belonging”. (ii) “Perceived right” and “community involvement” and “sense of belonging”; (iii) “Ethnic tolerance” and “protective attitude”. Low correlation is observed for all other variables. These findings support the view that a sense of belonging to the country does not necessarily translate into an interest in political issues or a tolerance of cultural diversity, but it does imply a greater feeling of protectiveness as well as a greater sense of one’s rights as a member of the community.

In terms of the future teachers’ perceptions of NE, “importance of NE” and “learning outcomes” correlated moderately with “NE as propaganda”. There was high correlation between “importance of NE” and “learning outcomes”. Moderate correlations were obtained between perceived importance of NE and all variables pertaining to “views on Singapore”, except “political engagement” and “ethnic tolerance” for which the correlations were low. The same was observed of the correlates between “learning outcomes” and the “views on Singapore” subscales. On the other hand, low correlation was obtained between “NE as propaganda” and all subscales for “views on Singapore”, except “sense of belonging” for which the correlation was moderate. This supports the earlier work by Wang et al. (2006), who showed the tendency for high patriotism to be associated with positive views of citizenship and high importance attached to NE. On the other hand, the current research shows no conclusive findings in support of Koh’s (2006) views of NE being associated with government propaganda.

Multivariate test outcomes

Programme groups

Table 5 shows the mean scores obtained from the four teacher education programme groups for the views on Singapore and perceptions of NE subscales. The future teachers from the Diploma programme had the highest mean scores for “sense of belonging”, “perceived right”,

“community involvement”, “ethnic tolerance”, “importance of NE”, “NE as propaganda” (reversely scored), and “learning outcomes of NE”. The PGDE (Primary) future teachers obtained the highest mean scores in “protective attitude”. The PGDE (Secondary) future teachers had the highest scores for “political engagement”.

[Insert Table 5 here]

A one way MANOVA was conducted with programme as the independent variable and views on Singapore and NE as the dependent variables. The result of the multivariate test showed F to be significant at the .05 level, Pillai’s Trace = .17, $F(27, 4878) = 11.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$. The univariate tests of between-subjects effects for each survey subscale showed that the between-groups difference in terms of ‘views on Singapore’ was highest for ‘community involvement’ ($F=14.10$, $\eta^2=.03$, $p < .001$) and significant for all the dependent variables, except “ethnic tolerance” for which it was lowest and not significant ($F=.58$, $\eta^2=.00$, $p =.63$). In terms of the “perceptions of NE”, high and significant between-groups differences were obtained for “importance of NE” ($F=51.21$, $\eta^2=.09$, $p < .001$), “learning outcomes of NE” ($F=61.78$, $\eta^2=.10$, $p < .001$), and “NE as propaganda”, ($F=12.92$, $\eta^2=.02$, $p < .001$).

Post-hoc comparisons with the Tukey HSD test were carried out to assess the significance of the mean differences between the programme groups. Table 6 shows the pairwise comparisons between the groups with mean differences that were significant at the .05 level. Generally, the mean differences were significant between the PGDE (Secondary) group and the other programmes, showing that the PGDE (Secondary) future teachers held views on Singapore and on NE that were fairly distinct from the rest of the future teachers.

[Insert Table 6 here]

Gender

Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics for the views on Singapore and on NE as sorted out by gender. The male student teachers had generally higher mean scores for almost all of the variables investigated, except for “ethnic tolerance”, for which the mean score was higher amongst the female members.

The outcome of a one way MANOVA, with gender as the independent variable and views on Singapore and NE as the dependent variables, showed F to be significant at the .05 level, Pillai’s Trace = .06, $F(9, 1615) = 11.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$. For the views on Singapore, the tests of between-subjects effects showed that the differences between the genders were high and significant for “perceived right” ($F=9.53$, $\eta^2 < .01$, $p = .002$), and “political engagement” ($F=86.15$, $\eta^2=.05$, $p < .001$). In terms of the views on NE, a high and significant between-groups difference was obtained for “importance of NE” ($F= 5.61$, $\eta^2 < .01$, $p = .018$) and “learning outcomes” ($F= 9.97$, $\eta^2 < .01$, $p = .002$).

[Insert Table 7 here]

Discussion

This study sought to further the understanding of student teachers’ views on their civic affiliation to Singapore and on NE, and to investigate the links (if any) between them. This is in view of finding ways of re-affirming or improving the future teachers’ awareness of the relevance of NE as a taught subject. The data showed that generally, the future teachers were appreciative of their country, had adequate understanding of its constraints and needs and were aware of the importance of NE in the curriculum. However, further analysis of the data showed that there were significant differences in the perceptions of student teachers across programme levels, as well as between the genders.

General findings

The findings on the future teachers' civic affiliation to Singapore showed that they were highly supportive of its cultural diversity and the need for ethnic tolerance. They also had a strong sense of belonging and protectiveness towards the country. Thus, at the start of their initial teacher education programme, student teachers were generally positive in terms of their affiliations to Singapore, and they were supportive of the teaching of NE in schools. However, they were less decisive when it came to translating their thoughts and sentiments into action, showing only moderate inclination towards political engagement and community involvement. The student teachers were also divided in their views on 'NE as propaganda'. The study also showed that future teachers' views on NE, namely on its importance and learning outcomes, correlated moderately but significantly with their views on Singapore, in particular their sense of belonging and protective attitude towards the country, as well as their perceived rights and community involvement. This suggests that it is perhaps opportune to bring some refinements to the NE programme at pre-service level. With reference to Kerr's model (1999), a way forward would be to change the focus from an approach that centres on education about citizenship and through citizenship, to one that is predominantly education for citizenship. Thus, beyond creating awareness of citizenship and nation building issues, teacher education could provide more opportunities for future teachers to put their knowledge and beliefs into practice and to actively contribute towards an informed and engaged citizenry. Adopting a person-centred, pro-active approach would allow future teachers to gain first-hand experience of what they would have to teach their students, hence improving their understanding of the need for NE in the school curriculum.

Group differences

Gender differences were observed in the survey responses of the participants, with the male student teachers obtaining higher mean scores than their female colleagues, for all of the variables except "ethnic tolerance". It is likely that the male future teachers, for whom the

experience of national service was undeniable, would have felt a stronger sense of nationalism than their female colleagues.

Significant differences were observed between the various programme groups in terms of the student teachers' views on Singapore and on NE. Student teachers in the Diploma in Education programme had the highest overall mean scores, suggesting that they were the most positive in terms of their views on Singapore and their support for NE. The PGDE (Secondary) group however, generally had the lowest overall means and showed significant differences from the other programme groups. One could suggest that the variations in responses to the differences in age and educational experience between the various groups. The Diploma and Degree student teachers were generally younger ($M = 23.5$ yrs) than the PGDE (Secondary) participants ($M = 28.0$ yrs). Unlike their Diploma and Degree counterparts, the PGDE (Secondary) students had gone through university and hence might have, through their prior training, acquired a more critical stance towards social, national and political issues than their younger colleagues. However, it is worth noting that the PGDE (Primary) students, who were also university graduates and older in age ($M = 30$ years), differed from their colleagues in the Secondary stream, in that they were more positive in their views on Singapore, and more supportive of NE. Hence, the between-group differences might be due to variations in the emphasis given to citizenship or national issues in the teacher education curricula offered to the programme groups. Further explorations into the matter are required before one could determine the actual causes for these observed differences. For instance, the findings of this study could be substantiated by some qualitative data, such as focus group interviews conducted with representatives from each of the teacher preparation programmes. A content analysis of the teacher education curricula of the various programmes, specially pertaining to NE components, could provide additional information on factors influencing student perceptions.

Conclusion

This study explored future teachers' views on their civic affiliations to their country and their perceptions on National Education. The findings showed that generally, future teachers had strong affiliations to Singapore and had a good understanding of the groundings for a cosmopolitan, democratic citizenry, in particular the need for mutual tolerance and respect in a culturally diverse society. There was also adequate support amongst future teachers for the implementation of NE in Singapore schools. Nevertheless, the study showed that more could be done to encourage the future teachers to adopt a more proactive stance towards political engagement and community involvement. Current citizenship education programmes, in Singapore and elsewhere, tend to pay more emphasis on education *about* and *through* citizenship, hence nurturing the requisite civic awareness and disposition. However, educators should uphold the provision of education *for* citizenship if future generations of teachers and their students are to be able to seamlessly translate their thoughts and beliefs into action.

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Table 1. Demographic data of participants.

Grouping		Percentage (%)	Mean age
Programme	Degree (BSc)	25.7	22
	Diploma (DipEd)	23.7	25
	PGDE Primary	15.0	30
	PGDE Secondary	35.6	28
Gender	Male	28.5	29
	Female	71.5	25

Table 2. Survey items, subscales and corresponding domains in UNESCO framework.

No. of survey items	Subscale	UNESCO framework domain
	Views on Singapore	
5	Belonging	
3	Protective attitude	
4	Community involvement	
3	Political engagement	
4	Perceived rights	
	Ethnic tolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice, national solidarity & civic responsibility
3	(appreciation of cultural diversity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making informed choices & peaceful resolutions of conflict
	Perceptions of NE	
	Importance of NE (in supporting UNESCO framework)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of universal values • Recognition of the value of freedom
6		
6	NE as propaganda (reversely scored)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for diversity of individuals and cultures
	Learning outcomes of NE (in promoting cosmopolitan citizenship)	
6		

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for participants' views on Singapore and on NE.

	Mean	Std. deviation	N
Views on Singapore			
Belonging	5.32	1.02	1650
Protective attitude	5.86	.83	1650
Perceived rights	3.95	1.02	1650
Community involvement	4.24	1.12	1650
Political engagement	4.24	1.26	1650
Ethnic tolerance	6.24	.77	1650
Perceptions of NE			
Importance	5.22	1.00	1638
Propaganda	4.56	1.09	1637
Learning outcomes	4.91	1.06	1637

Note: High mean scores are boldfaced.

Table 4. Correlation matrix of variables.

		Correlations								
		Belonging	Protective attitude	Perceived right	Community involvement	Political engagement	Ethnic tolerance	Importance	Propaganda	Learning
Belonging	Pearson Correlation	1								
	N	1650								
Protective attitude	Pearson Correlation	.438**	1							
	N	1650	1650							
Perceived right	Pearson Correlation	.374**	.296**	1						
	N	1650	1650	1650						
Community involvement	Pearson Correlation	.325**	.243**	.362**	1					
	N	1650	1650	1650	1650					
Political engagement	Pearson Correlation	.033	.085**	.169**	.254**	1				
	N	1650	1650	1650	1650	1650				
Ethnic tolerance	Pearson Correlation	.235**	.314**	.184**	.205**	.143**	1			
	N	1650	1650	1650	1650	1650	1650			
Importance	Pearson Correlation	.488**	.389**	.408**	.365**	.071**	.260**	1		
	N	1638	1638	1638	1638	1638	1638	1638		
Propaganda	Pearson Correlation	.377**	.235**	.276**	.170**	.003	.144**	.417**	1	
	N	1637	1637	1637	1637	1637	1637	1636	1637	
Learning outcomes	Pearson Correlation	.467**	.357**	.444**	.391**	.075**	.198**	.879**	.417**	1
	N	1637	1637	1637	1637	1637	1637	1637	1636	1637

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Moderate and high correlations are boldfaced.

Table 5. Mean scores obtained from the four teacher education programs.

	Mean scores for programme			
	Degree (N = 420)	Diploma (N = 391)	PGDE (primary) (N = 248)	PGDE (secondary) (N = 577)
Belonging	5.30	5.55	5.39	5.19
Protective attitude	5.87	5.96	5.99	5.72
Perceived right	3.98	4.08	3.99	3.80
Community involvement	4.31	4.50	4.19	4.05
Political engagement	4.08	4.13	4.10	4.50
Ethnic tolerance	6.20	6.26	6.25	6.25
Importance of NE	5.11	5.59	5.55	4.91
NE as propaganda	4.53	4.77	4.74	4.38
Learning outcomes of NE	4.81	5.40	5.15	4.55

Note: Highest mean scores are boldfaced.

Table 6. Post-hoc comparisons showing significant differences between program groups.

Dependent variable		Mean Difference		
	(I) prog	(J) prog	(I-J)	Sig.
Views on Singapore	Degree	Diploma	-.25	.003
	Belonging	Diploma	Diploma	-.36
PGDE Sec		PGDE Pri	-.20	.049
Protective attitude	PGDE	Degree	-.14	.030
		Diploma	-.24	.000
	Sec	PGDE Pri	-.27	.000
Perceived Rights	PGDE	Degree	-.18	.034
	Sec	Diploma	-.28	.000
Community involvement	Diploma	PGDE Pri	.31	.003
	PGDE	Degree	-.27	.001
	Sec	Diploma	-.46	.000
Political engagement	PGDE	Degree	.42	.000
		Diploma	.37	.000
	Sec	PGDE Pri	.40	.000

Ethnic Tolerance P > .05 for all pairwise comparisons

Views on NE				
Importance	Degree	Diploma	-.48	.000
		PGDE Pri	-.44	.000
	PGDE Sec	PGDE Sec	.21	.005
Propaganda	PGDE	Diploma	-.68	.000
	Sec	PGDE Pri	-.65	.000
	Degree	Diploma	-.24	.010
Learning outcomes	PGDE	Diploma	-.39	.000
		PGDE Pri	-.36	.000
	Degree	Diploma	-.60	.000
		PGDE Pri	-.34	.000
	Diploma	PGDE Sec	.26	.000
		PGDE Pri	PGDE Pri	.25
PGDE Sec	PGDE Sec	.85	.000	
PGDE Pri	PGDE Sec	.60	.000	

Table 7. Gender mean scores.

	Mean scores	
	Male (N = 463)	Female (N = 1162)
Belonging	5.34	5.33
Protective attitude	5.90	5.85
Perceived right	4.07	3.90
Community involvement	4.30	4.23
Political engagement	4.68	4.06
Ethnic tolerance	6.23	6.24
Importance of NE	5.32	5.18
NE as propaganda	4.62	4.55
Learning outcomes of NE	5.04	4.86

Note: Highest mean scores are boldfaced.