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HSSE Online is a peer-reviewed electronic journal published by the [Humanities and Social Studies Education \(HSSE\) Academic Group](#), National Institute of Education, Singapore. The main purpose of the journal is to energize, inform and improve teaching practice in humanities and social studies education and to provide a venue to share ideas, research and resources that will be useful to humanities and social studies teachers and scholars. We invite you to make use of these ideas and resources as well as contribute your own

Foreword

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the introduction of Social Studies (SS) in Singapore secondary schools. Originally conceived as part of a push for National Education, SS has since expanded in ambit to address contemporary issues and to equip students with the tools of social inquiry. By bringing into conversation the voices of scholars and practitioners, this special issue of HSSE Online captures the vitality of Singapore’s present-day SS education landscape.

The first article by Aloysius Foo stands in the tradition of the sociology of education. Using the case study of a heartland Junior College, Foo challenges our assumptions about “neighbourhood schools” by highlighting the density of cultural, symbolic, and emotional capital in nonelite environments. In so doing, Foo calls on readers to focus on the strengths rather than the deficits of their respective school communities. The consummate researcher-practitioner, Foo reminds us that classrooms are, themselves, the sites of complex social phenomena, which invite self-reflexivity from SS educators.

The next two articles focus on aspects of the secondary SS curriculum, which since 2016 has been organised around the principles of Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL). Recognising the central but under-explored role of framing questions as part of IBL, Peidong Yang and Jun Yan Chua propose a taxonomy of SS inquiry questions. Collectively, the “Politician’s Question”, the “Social Scientist’s Question”, and the “Social Worker’s Question” reflect a range of approaches toward the disciplinarity of SS. Moving beyond traditional debates about the appropriate aims of SS education, Yang and Chua provide teachers and students with a heuristic for thinking about different starting points for social inquiry.

Drawing on findings from the Core Research Programme—a large-scale, cross-sectional, baseline investigation of pedagogical practices in Singapore classrooms—Fatema Anis Hussain offers insights into the reality of inquiry learning enactment in the present-day secondary SS classroom. Examining both qualitative and quantitative data, Hussain captures the complexities, challenges, and considerations in Singapore SS teachers’ pragmatic approach to inquiry learning.

Diversity and inclusion have emerged as focal issues in Singapore society of late, with significant implications for SS education. Two articles engage with these questions in the context of primary SS. Wang Yao Chang Melvin examines the effectiveness of graphic organisers in improving reading comprehension of SS informational texts in upper primary students with High Functioning Autism. His iterative, evidence-based approach reflects the deep commitment of educators to supporting students with Special Educational Needs, and to making SS accessible for all.

Using the framework of Multicultural Education, Adele Seah Pei Jia unpacks the treatment of diversity in the revised 2020 Primary Social Studies syllabus. Seah’s project grew out of NTU’s Undergraduate Research Experience on Campus (URECA) programme, which aims to promote a culture of inquiry in the most academically able undergraduate students. In the light of ongoing public debates about multiculturalism, which some commentators have attributed to generational change, Seah’s perspective on the issue as a future SS educator is especially valuable.

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The issue concludes with a review essay by Pang Wei Han, who surveys three recent works in Singapore Studies, and discusses how teachers might apply their findings as dynamic content in the secondary SS curriculum. Although SS educators unanimously recognise the importance of engaging with current issues in their classrooms, the competing demands placed on teachers can make it challenging to keep up with the rich array of social research emerging from the local research ecosystem. Both editors wished they read more extensively, and Pang has done us all a service by distilling insights from the frontiers of scholarship on Singapore.

When SS was first implemented at the Upper Secondary level in 2001, it was not without its skeptics. Twenty years on, in an increasingly volatile and complex environment, the relevance and necessity of SS is no longer in question. The range of perspectives in this issue reflect the profound belief that SS scholars and practitioners share about the importance of the subject. As they reimagine the futures of SS, the work in this volume also pays tribute to a generation of SS educators in Singapore.

Peidong and Jun Yan
Singapore
Editors, *HSSE Online*

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“Neighbourhood Schools” and Their Positive Forms of Capital in Singapore

Aloysius Foo

National Institute of Education (Singapore)

Abstract

While the term “neighbourhood school” is popularly used in Singaporean parlance as well as by academics to describe a typical, government-run school, it has not been subjected to close scrutiny. Using Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of different forms of capital and capital conversion, this article situates neighbourhood schools within Singapore’s stratified educational landscape.

Although these schools lack the privileges and recognition of elite schools, their students possess and mobilise their own forms of cultural, symbolic and emotional capital which empower them. This article is relevant for socially-conscious educators, Social Studies teachers and curriculum specialists who are keen to explore the notion of “diversity” through education and social class.

Introduction

“Neighbourhood school” is a common term in Singaporean parlance to categorise ordinary, government-run schools which are often contrasted with “elite schools”. While the term implies typicality and a sense of “average-ness”, to some people it connotes certain negative characteristics and deficiencies of its students. This term is widely used in public discourses, and is even uncritically adopted by academic studies in educational research.¹ The label has become thoroughly embedded in Singaporean culture to the extent that most

believe it is self-explanatory. Hence, few have seriously examined the *cultural* meanings of neighbourhood schools, especially from the perspectives of students’ lived experiences. This article makes an empirical contribution by highlighting two major aspects in which students’ lives and identities were reflexively shaped by their experiences in a neighbourhood school (at junior college level). Firstly, this neighbourhood school was the source of a particular type of “cultural and symbolic” capital which enabled some of its graduates, who were recipients of prestigious state-sponsored scholarships, to be valued by members of the elite. Secondly, students from this neighbourhood school drew on “emotional capital” circulating within it to forge strong bonds of friendship which made their schooling life psychologically satisfying and meaningful. Students from neighbourhood schools, contrary to popular perceptions about their deficits, can therefore command positive forms of capital which empower them.

The next section of this article will define the various forms of capital based on sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s work, and apply his concepts to the differences between neighbourhood and elite schools. The theoretical definitions will be given, and they will be subsequently substantiated in other sections. Section 3 will share the data collection method used for this article. Sections 4 and 5 will discuss the students’ possession and mobilisation of cultural, symbolic and emotional capital. Finally, the conclusion will provide suggestions for

teachers in general and Social Studies educators about the possible use of “positive” forms of capital in their classrooms.

“Capital” and Elite-Neighbourhood School Divides

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2002) argued that “capital” is manifested in three configurations – “economic”, “cultural” and “social” – and that they are mutually convertible. For example, the holder of “cultural capital” (such as professional qualifications) can convert it into “economic capital” in some circumstances (for example, by taking on high-paying occupations). Bourdieu further elaborated that cultural capital can exist in the embodied, objectified or institutionalised state. The embodied state of cultural capital refers to one’s “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (p. 282); the objectified state indicates the possession of cultural goods like artworks; and the institutionalised state reflects the credentials or qualifications conferred on the individual by authorities. Social capital is defined as the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources” (p. 286) which can be mobilised by membership in a shared community. One example is how schools can tap on their alumni network to benefit their current students. In addition, Bourdieu and other scholars (1994) also theorised “symbolic capital”, which endows the above forms of capital with prestige, recognition and value under certain conditions in specific fields. For instance, the possession of institutionalised cultural capital such as academic credentials from elite universities carries a layer of symbolic capital for the holder if society greatly recognises and even venerates elite qualifications. This symbolic capital can potentially help him to expand his social connections or improve his career prospects.

Scholars have expanded on Bourdieu’s

theory of capital conversion to elaborate about other forms of capital. For instance, Michalinos Zembylas (2007) has theorised the formation of “emotional capital” in schools and classrooms. He argued that emotional capital is “expressed through the circulation of emotional resources among teachers and students” (p. 453) and is “systematically transformed into social and cultural capital – such as stronger relations in the classroom and empowered feelings in the school community” (ibid). In his ethnographic study, teachers and students cultivate their love for their country and collective identity, and these are subsequently converted into bonds of solidarity which can be lasting and useful in future (e.g. social capital). Emotional capital is therefore significant because of its potential for conversion into other forms of capital.

Existing studies of elite schooling in Singapore have adopted Bourdieu’s conceptual apparatus to examine students’ identity formation and the reproduction of privilege and elitism (e.g. Kenway & Koh, 2013; Koh & Kenway, 2012). Similarly, a Bourdieusian framework is relevant for this article in analysing the differences between elite and neighbourhood schools (specifically secondary- and junior college-levels), as they differ due to their possession of varying amounts of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. One major difference between elite and neighbourhood schools is the possession of economic capital (by the schools and students’ families). Influenced by neoliberal logics of expanding diversity, choice and competition in the educational landscape during the late 1980s, the state created a new category of schools called “Independent Schools” (Tan, 1993), which were given additional autonomy and funding to groom academically gifted students. These schools charge higher tuition fees, in contrast to neighbourhood

schools which are obliged to follow the state's guidelines on fees. The campus infrastructure of such schools are also more expansive; a sociologist researching an elite school admitted his "moments of elite envy" due to the "opulence" of the campus (Koh, 2014, p. 208). Over the years, an over-concentration of middle- and upper-class students in the elite schools has formed. As early as 1993, educational policy scholar Jason Tan (1993) found that three Independent Schools already had disproportionately larger number of students who lived in private housing as well as parents who held university degrees and professional occupations. Almost two decades later, this socio-economic divide persisted: Singapore's former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (Chang, 2011) revealed that the majority of students who attended Independent Schools had parents who were university graduates. In contrast, the parents of most students in neighbourhood schools were non-graduates. The socio-economic profile of students in elite schools has unsurprisingly drawn criticisms as they reflect inequalities in education (Tan, 2019).

Another key difference between elite and neighbourhood schools is the possession of cultural capital. While elite schools are highly-selective and narrowly admit the top academic performers, neighbourhood schools are much less selective and admit students with a wider range of academic calibre. Crucially, the curriculum and extra-curricular activities offered by the two categories of schools differ. Besides having the autonomy to design their curriculum, most Independent Schools follow the "integrated programme", in which students skip the secondary-level national examinations (O-levels) and proceed to the A-levels or International Baccalaureate. Neighbourhood schools follow the centrally-prescribed curriculum instead. As some scholars have pointed out

(Goh, 2020; Koh & Kenway, 2012), through the educational programmes that they offer, elite schools cultivate specific characteristics among their students to prepare them for pathways to power and privilege, such as leadership, cosmopolitanism, "worlding activism", and loyalty to Singapore. Thus, economic and cultural capital – in other words, social class, academic selectivity and the (extra-)curricular opportunities – form major lines of fissures between these two types of schools.

Finally, elite and neighbourhood schools differ in their possession of social and symbolic capital. With longer histories and greater number of illustrious alumni, elite schools can leverage their social capital in a range of activities to benefit present and future students, such as through fund-raising and provision of internship opportunities. However, neighbourhood schools have a smaller amount of social capital to utilise for their students for the converse reasons. Furthermore, through their reputation and distinction for achievements –perceived as valuable in Singapore's educational and socio-political contexts – elite schools immediately command symbolic capital, which is shared by their students and graduates. In contrast, neighbourhood schools, at least on the surface, do not seem to command such symbolic capital.

In fact, some popular discourses discuss neighbourhood schools in a negative and deficient manner. For instance, in a video interview, one student mentioned that a stereotype of neighbourhood schools is that they have many "gangsters", associated with disorder and even criminality (TSL, 2018). In reflecting about her experiences in a neighbourhood school, one blogger (LLL, 2020) remembered the tight discipline regime and the strict policing of attire by her schoolteachers, which struck

her that students from neighbourhood schools were assumed to be rebellious and as requiring constant surveillance. While these popular opinions make problematic generalisations about the supposed flaws and inadequacies of students from neighbourhood schools, they are revealing of certain sentiments which still circulate in society.

However, as the socio-political landscape in Singapore continues to evolve in recent years, the discourse of “diversity” is gaining traction as different abilities and unique experiences are increasingly recognised as more important than narrow considerations of merit based solely on excellent academic performance (Ye, 2021). Consequently, what might not have been considered as part of “cultural” or “symbolic” capital in the past are now more valued by the dominant social groups. As Cora Xu (2018) argued in her work about mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong, some of their “religious” and “ethnic minority” capital were liabilities for them in mainland China, but became assets

when they studied in Hong Kong. Similarly, the capital of students from neighbourhood schools might be overlooked or waiting to be “activated” and converted to other forms of capital at the appropriate opportunity.

Data collection

This study utilised a selection of interview data generated from a graduate-level project about students’ experiences of meritocracy in Singapore, specifically their aspirations and challenges in applying for prestigious state-sponsored scholarships. These students were from a neighbourhood junior college, which I shall name “XJC”. As part of the research, their educational trajectories were also scrutinised to better understand their identities. Among these students, seven made strong explicit references to their experiences of having attended neighbourhood schools, either in XJC or in their previous secondary schools. Hence, their interview data formed the basis of findings in this article. The table below presents a summary of their demographic profile:

Table 1. Summary of participants’ demographic profile

<i>No</i>	<i>Student name (pseudonym)</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Status at point of interview in 2020</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>Cassandra</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Year 2 student</i>
<i>2</i>	<i>Aminah</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Malay</i>	<i>Year 2 student</i>
<i>3</i>	<i>Wee Ming</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>National serviceman, graduated in 2019</i>
<i>4</i>	<i>Peter</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>National serviceman, graduated in 2019</i>
<i>5</i>	<i>Rahul</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>University student, Public Service Commission (PSC) scholar, graduated in 2017</i>
<i>6</i>	<i>Ting Yee</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>University student, PSC scholar, graduated in 2016</i>
<i>7</i>	<i>Chin Teck</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>National serviceman, PSC scholar, graduated in 2014</i>

According to the definition offered in the previous section, XJC can be considered a neighbourhood school even though it is part of the post-secondary academic track which prepares students for higher education. Only established in the early 2000s, it follows the nationally-prescribed syllabus and admits students from a wide academic profile, with a huge proportion of them coming from working- and lower-middle-class backgrounds. While exact statistics are not available, this assessment was drawn from the year-long ethnography conducted in the school. Crucially, I taught in this school while carrying out the research, hence I was familiar with its context. The participants also primarily knew me as a teacher in the school, which allowed me to establish rapport with them easily.

XJC offers an intriguing site of inquiry due to its distinctive achievements in having a few of its graduates awarded the prestigious Public Service Commission (PSC) scholarships. These scholarships are awarded to pre-university students who excel in their academics and extra-curricular activities, and desire a career in the government or uniformed services. The state sponsors their tertiary education and in exchange they are contractually bonded to the state for between four and six years. Many of these “scholars” (in Singaporean parlance) are fast-tracked in their careers to fill major positions in the government, and several of them have, in the past, entered politics and risen to the upper echelons of the political elite. However, these PSC scholarships have been criticised for perpetuating elite reproduction and unintentionally marginalising certain social groups (Barr, 2014; Barr & Skrbis, 2008). Over 60 percent of the PSC scholarships are awarded to graduates of two elite schools (Ong, 2018), and neighbourhood schools like XJC are barely represented. Yet, XJC has been relatively successful in helping

four of its students to obtain the PSC scholarships in four consecutive years, which is a source of immense pride for the school. Importantly, three out of those students I interviewed credited their achievements to their experiences accumulated in the context of a neighbourhood school, specifically XJC. This points to the significance of “cultural capital” in XJC.

Cultural and symbolic capital

XJC’s students often thought that the institutionalised form of cultural capital which they held was inferior, because they were allocated to XJC due to their mediocre academic results from secondary school; and they felt a sense of uncertainty about their future academic prospects. Moreover, students acutely compared their worn-out campus environment and relative lack of extra-curricular opportunities with the grand facilities and diverse activities (e.g. fencing, arts festival) enjoyed by some of their friends who attended elite schools. On the surface, students at XJC might be missing out on the embodied cultural capital which involves the “work of acquisition” and “work on oneself (self-improvement)” (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 283).

However, XJC shapes an environment which creates its own “cultural capital” for its students. This cultural capital is increasingly valued by both the state and society due to growing concerns over socio-economic inequalities. By virtue of its lower academic selectivity and the socio-economic profile of its students, XJC serves as a meeting point for students with similar background to congregate, forge friendships and understand one another’s (similar) values, aspirations and challenges. While XJC might not “consecrate” students like that of elite schools, it indirectly and unintentionally provides opportunities for students to gain a kind of “grounded”

perspective from the “heartlands” of Singapore (Poon, 2013), especially the quotidian difficulties of life. XJC students might not recognise the value of this knowledge which they hold, but a few were successful in deploying it to gain credibility and respect from others. For instance, as a newly-minted PSC scholar, Chin Teck believed that he was “closer to the ground”. He felt that people like him and his peers had to go through struggles which graduates from elite schools might not experience, such as overcoming their psychological obstacles and the lack of opportunities that demoralised them and constrained their possibilities. “Our results don’t say we’re the best; our teachers don’t say we’re the best...we’re not going into the top-end jobs...no one expects XJC’s students to enter the scholarship system,” he ruminated. “I’m lucky enough to be in the right places.” He argued that his achievement was mostly due to him being situated in fortuitous circumstances. Indeed, even though he did not want to lead the student council, he was voted for by his peers and even persuaded by the school principal to take up this position, which subsequently allowed him to demonstrate his leadership capabilities and attract the attention of teachers, who nominated him for the PSC scholarship. He believed that he had succeeded despite the structural inequalities among schools; hence he was sympathetic to his friends from XJC who were not as lucky as him. Consequently, he felt compelled to speak up and bring greater attention to inequalities, especially during the scholarship development programme in which all the new scholars were brought together for learning and discussion:

I always come from a more grounded position...I was very, very concerned about inequality, because I recognise that coming from XJC, it was so different. You really see a completely different set of struggles...so how can

people from the top 1% of this system be able to understand them? Every time I say something or share something, I was so caught up in this (issue of inequality) ...It was something that I argue for, fought for.

Perhaps because of his different perspective and passion for the issue of socio-economic inequality, Chin Teck felt that his contributions and insights were accorded greater recognition by his fellow scholars, who were mostly graduates of elite schools. In thinking about his future career in the civil service, Chin Teck was already planning to carve out a unique identity which could possibly give him headway – a “half-outsider, half-insider, not as a full-insider”. He pointed out that while he might be rapidly fast-tracked to leadership roles, his background meant that he would not lose sight of the “ground”, and he could continue to offer his perspective to influence policy-making. This hinted at the possibility that his cultural capital could be subsequently converted to an asset which could help him to rise through the ranks of the civil service leadership. This cultural capital, while only indirectly provided by XJC, consisted of the embodied knowledge and experiences which Chin Teck accumulated in the school, and was being strategically deployed by him to sharpen his advantage vis-à-vis others.

Likewise, Ting Yee mobilised her identity as a XJC graduate to stand out among her fellow scholars, especially during their development programme in which they first interacted:

My background is closer to the ground, I would say...a majority of my peers are from (lower social classes) who had their own share of struggles...and I do empathise with them more...being closer to the ground, I kind of know where the blind spots (of policy) are.

Ting Yee therefore used her friends' struggles (similar to what Chin Teck described) and her sense of empathy with them to craft an identity of herself as being "closer to the ground". According to her, this identity enabled her to analyse the limitations of existing state policies in general. Ting Yee was an active student leader in XJC who participated in community service projects along with her friends. She also represented the school in a prestigious overseas competition. Thus, she was proud of her wide range of experiences and her ability to traverse different social fields, believing that this was one major reason for the award of the scholarship. As a result, she felt that she offered unique perspectives during discussions with her fellow scholars from elite schools, hence they began to notice her and value her insights. With satisfaction, Ting Yee recalled an episode in which her peers actively sought her opinions: "What do you think of this, you know, coming from your background? Is it different, what are your experiences like?" This "background" was, in her own words, "very, very much linked to which schools you went to"; and crucially, drawn from her vantage point in XJC. Despite being initially wary of the scholars from elite schools, whom she felt were "snobbish", over time Ting Yee broke the ice with them as she felt respected and "wasn't seen as anything less" because her identity as a XJC graduate was valued by others. Similar to Chin Teck, she effectively utilised her cultural capital to differentiate herself and stand out from others.

In addition, within the circle of PSC scholars, being a graduate from a neighbourhood school seemed to bring these XJC students additional recognition – a reverse kind of symbolic capital because their cultural capital was increasingly valued. For instance, Rahul highlighted that

many of his fellow scholars from elite schools were curious about him:

You can always see RI or HCI (referring to elite schools) kids having PSC scholarships. To them it's just another RI kid. But when they see a person from XJC who got a scholarship, it's a very different situation. They would think he's interesting, let me go and talk to him. They would ask me, 'So what did you do? What is so special about you?'

Rahul was not offended by their potentially intrusive questions, but believed they were good conversation starters which enabled him to mingle around at ease and socialise with others. He actually felt happy to be at the centre of attention and to explain how he obtained the scholarship to multiple scholars from elite schools. However, Rahul was not passively treated as an object of curiosity by his fellow scholars, instead he was leveraging this symbolic capital to break into the existing cliques, because many of them knew one another in their elite schools before obtaining the PSC scholarships. Similarly, Chin Teck and Ting Yee were given additional attention because of their background and unique contributions while having discussions with their fellow scholars. Thus, they held symbolic capital as graduates from a neighbourhood school, as greater value on their experiences was attached to them by their peers. Indeed, Ting Yee was explicitly mentioned by the PSC chairman during the awards ceremony for adding greater diversity to the scholars. These students were able to convert the symbolic capital they held into practical utility by forging new connections that might be helpful for their careers in future. It might not be unreasonable to suggest that this symbolic capital could be an asset as they rise through the leadership ranks or in the event that they enter the political arena (on the side of the ruling party), to illustrate on behalf of the

state that diversity and inclusivity still prevail.

Emotional capital

In 2017, news broke about the merger of several junior colleges – all neighbourhood schools – and this created a major outcry from alumni who were upset about the disintegration of their school cultures (Chua, 2017; Lee, 2017). This was a testament to the forging of strong bonds among students which lasted beyond their schooling years, and this in turn might be explained by the emotional capital circulating in these neighbourhood schools.

For the case of XJC, emotional capital, specifically the element of care for one another, helped to boost students' psychological well-being. While neighbourhood schools are usually perceived as academically mediocre, the countervailing element is that students are less competitive, and more understanding of one another's struggles. These contribute to the care which students demonstrate towards their peers. Cassandra's account is worth closer scrutiny because she contrasted her experiences from a more selective secondary school with that of XJC. She confessed that she had low self-esteem when she was first admitted to XJC. Coming from an above-average secondary school, she did not have good interactions with some of her classmates, whom she felt were "condescending" because of her poor academic results. As her secondary school was more academically competitive, she felt that some preferred to interact with top academic performers rather than academically weaker students like her. However, she found herself fitting in comfortably with newfound friends in XJC:

A very significant difference in the friends that I made is that they are really very genuine...because back in my

secondary school, my classmates are not really empathetic. I don't really know how to express, but the feeling, the warmth that friends in XJC give...I feel they are more empathetic.

Cassandra repeatedly emphasised that her friends were "genuine" and "empathetic", which was different from her experiences in her secondary school's more competitive environment. Through their "empathy", they were better able to understand and validate her feelings, which made her feel valued as a member of a larger community. This was crucial in uplifting her mood at this juncture of her schooling life due to her low self-esteem. Not only were her friends able to give her their sincere encouragement, but they also congratulated her on her achievements without a hint of envy, such as when she was invited by the school to participate in grassroots activities. Unlike in her secondary school where she felt inferior and looked down upon due to her poor results, Cassandra was positively affirmed as a person in XJC regardless of her academic performance, because the emotional capital of care was circulated, and collectively accumulated. Importantly, this emotional capital was engendered in a school environment that was less academically cutthroat, and where students appreciated one another's difficulties.

In addition, this emotional capital of care created a sense of familial bonding which motivated students to serve their schoolmates. For instance, Aminah was deeply impressed by the "family spirit" which seniors in XJC projected when she visited the school's Open House prior to admission. She felt immediately welcomed into the school as a new member of a "family", and later in her second year decided to serve as a student ambassador to project a similar sense of family spirit for the incoming juniors. Consequently, she

acquired “soft skills” like communication and presentation, suggesting that emotional capital could indirectly propel students to obtain tangible outcomes if properly channelled.

Similarly, Rahul recounted how he was inspired to become an orientation group leader after his enjoyable experiences in his own orientation:

There were experiences which were created in that atmosphere, which I haven't found anywhere else. That kind of camaraderie, and that kind of inclusiveness, I have not seen in any other school.

Rahul felt that the orientation helped him to forge strong bonds with his classmates, akin to that of a “family”. Like Cassandra, this emotional capital helped him to become a more self-assured and confident person, because he confessed that he was a “mediocre” and “low-profile” student previously. According to him, this personal growth eventually helped him to obtain a PSC scholarship. More importantly, Rahul's familial-like connection to XJC created by emotional capital remained even after he graduated. Along with Chin Teck and Ting Yee, he regularly returns to XJC to share tips about scholarship applications with his juniors; and in one session which I observed, he was animated and warm in responding to their questions. Thus, the emotional capital in XJC facilitated the creation of social capital for the school, as past graduates who had fond experiences returned to volunteer their expertise for their juniors. This was significant because XJC's short history meant that its social capital, especially from its alumni, was limited in the first place. The willingness of the graduates to help their juniors ultimately stemmed from the emotional capital of care which they had accumulated in XJC. Emotional capital is

not only valuable for students, but brings future value to the institution and subsequent generations of students through a process of capital conversion.

Conclusion and suggestions for Social Studies education

In a recent PSC scholarship awards ceremony, the minister-in-charge of the public service (Chan, 2019) emphasised the importance of building diverse capabilities and skillsets among future leaders of the state in order to manage the growing complexities of governance. Implicit in his exhortation was that leaders could not be drawn from the same mould. Similarly, the PSC chairman (Lee, 2018b) stressed that he was attempting to diversify the pool of candidates in the selection of scholars, including actively seeking out talented students from non-elite educational institutions, like XJC and polytechnics. This discourse of diversity did not emerge in a vacuum, but was part of a broader concern that socio-economic inequalities could potentially become divisive. As Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2018a) acknowledged in a major parliamentary speech, “keeping the social impediments down (for social mobility to continue) – is the most difficult to sustain”. He spent a substantial portion of that speech addressing the problems of meritocracy and the government's efforts to address them.

Thus, amidst this changing socio-political landscape, the embodied cultural capital of the three PSC scholars – consisting of the knowledge and experiences of interactions with their peers at XJC, who were beset by personal and structural struggles – was positively appraised and treasured by other members of the elite. Being graduates of elite schools, the other scholars might not have similar in-depth experiences as that of the three XJC scholars. Moreover, the three

scholars strategically deployed their cultural capital to differentiate themselves from their fellow scholars by offering unique insights into socio-political issues rooted in their lived experiences in a neighbourhood school. Although the PSC scholars had yet to begin their civil service careers, there is a strong possibility that their cultural capital can be converted into assets which may enable them to rise through the ranks, depending on the portfolios assigned to them. In addition, within this changing context, a graduate from a neighbourhood school can command symbolic capital as the elite appreciates and recognises the need for growing diversity in their own (relatively) homogeneous membership. Similarly, this symbolic capital can be an asset for the three scholars in their future careers as their opinions might be given greater weight because of their background.

This article also argued that neighbourhood schools can circulate emotional capital among their students, and this should not be overlooked in Singapore's hierarchal and high-stakes educational structures. With a less academically competitive environment and an awareness about their peers' struggles, students find solace in one another to face the common problems that they share. These conditions generate emotional capital which not only strengthens students' sense of self-worth and creates bonds with their classmates and the school, but can be potentially converted into tangible assets. Students gain greater self-assurance and confidence, which can help them in their post-schooling transition to higher education. Thus, the study of emotional capital rectifies the stereotypes of "deficiencies" among students from neighbourhood schools.

The findings from this article are useful for teachers in general as well as for Social

Studies educators. Firstly, educators can utilise Bourdieu's theory of different forms of capital – as outlined in section 2 of this article – to become more reflective and socially-conscious practitioners. Many Singaporean teachers might mostly conceive of students' differences in terms of their academic readiness (Heng & Lim, 2021) due to the academic orientation of the educational system, but they can go beyond this to explore other forms of differences (and inequalities). Based on anecdotal evidence, teachers in elite or neighbourhood schools are already aware about their students' socio-economic profile and the differences in opportunities across schools. They are certainly cognisant about the impact of these factors on students' educational trajectories, such as their conceptions of post-schooling pathways. But the value of this article for teachers is the use of Bourdieusian vocabulary to sharpen and refine their (sociological) thinking about structural differences in the educational system. For instance, they can think about *who* has access to *which* kind of capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic etc), and the long-term effects of accumulation (or lack thereof) of the different forms of capital on students. This sociological perspective can expand teachers' perceptions of their students. Are academically "low-ability" students unable to perform because of their innate abilities, or because they lack access to certain forms of capital at home or even in school? Furthermore, teachers can think about how they facilitate (or hinder) students' access to capital – not only in the classroom, but also in non-academic areas like co-curricular activitiesⁱⁱ. When teachers partner external organisations to help their students explore higher educational and career options, they are not merely enabling individual students to discover their interests, but are engaged in the process of building students' *social capital* which they might lack due to their

social backgrounds. Thus, this article hopes to encourage educators to reflect sociologically about their work in schools.

Secondly, while teachers in neighbourhood schools might perceive that their students are deficient in academic ability or in other areas, they can think about the positive forms of capital latent within them that might not be greatly valued according to dominant criteria. Some Singaporean teachers are effective in practising “culturally-relevant pedagogy” as they draw on their “low-ability” students’ social background and experiences as assets in their learning (Lim & Tan, 2018). As a result, students feel that they are recognised and not marginalised. Similarly, teachers can consider how their schools assist in the circulation and accumulation of capital which might not be immediately valuable in the present, but are nevertheless useful for students in their everyday life or even rewarding in the future. For instance, the cultural capital described in this article was only “activated” and valued when the appropriate opportunity arose for its possessors. Although only a few students were able to mobilise such capital, teachers can highlight to students the latent potential of their capital so that students do not always perceive themselves as being “deficient”. Moreover, in avenues like co-curricular activities or Values-in-Action (VIA) projectsⁱⁱⁱ, teachers can empower their students by inviting them to consider how their personal knowledge and experiences can be relevant assets to better improve their own communities. The findings of this article can hopefully spur teachers to think about the capital which their students possess but may not be visible to them or valued presently.

Thirdly, Social Studies educators (at the secondary level) can utilise the theoretical and empirical elements of this article to

explore the notion of “diversity” in the syllabus. “Diversity” in the present-day Singaporean context is no longer simply about “race and religion”, but includes socio-economic class, nationality, and gender. The nexus of education and social class is another entry point for the exploration of diversity, and greater attention should be paid towards it, as sociologists have found that schooling forms a strong predictor of social networks (Chua, Koh, Tan, & Shih, 2020). Educational structures can influence the formation of social identities, and the lived experiences in different school types shape students’ values and behaviour to some extent. Moreover, adolescents are very sensitive to differences between themselves and “others” at their particular stage of psycho-social development. Teachers can help their students to explore this aspect of diversity since it is directly relatable, and it is likely that students can offer perspectives drawn from their own experiences.

In fact, Social Studies educators can make use of Issues Investigation as a platform for students to explore the impact of education and social class on socio-economic mobility. For instance, students can inquire about inequalities in the educational system through broad questions like “Do schools enable social mobility?” or “Do differences in schooling matter?” They can discuss similarities and differences between their academic tracks/schools and that of others, and seek evidence to verify or challenge their observations. Stereotypes will certainly surface but these provide opportunities for clarification to deepen students’ thinking. For example, are students in neighbourhood schools necessarily deficient? Social Studies educators can play a critical role in connecting students’ opinions and observations to fundamental debates of fairness and justice in society, which are linked to topics of citizenship and

governance in the syllabus. A simple question about why elite schools but not neighbourhood schools have air-conditioned classrooms and smaller class sizes is bound to spark an interesting debate among students, because it raises questions on the use of academic performance as a criterion for differentiation of resources. Teachers can facilitate debates of who should deserve what in the educational system (and why), and encourage students to adopt perspectives different from their own in order to sharpen their perspective-taking. These issues are significant not only because they are directly relevant to students, but because schooling structures lives and identities in Singapore, such that one may argue it is imperative for teachers and students to be reflective about the positions and roles which they find themselves in.

In conclusion, through this article, and the underlying research project about XJC students' experiences of meritocracy, I hope to invigorate discussions about education in Singapore from a sociological and cultural perspective. Students might begin to imagine the potential value of their prosaic everyday experiences in an instrumentalist and hierarchal educational system which rarely recognises the myriad of cultures that can develop across different schools. Yet this is only possible if teachers can undertake a sociological reimagination of their students and find ways to support their growth.

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ⁱ Most studies treat “neighbourhood school” as a “normal” or “average” school with average-ability students; or generally representative of the larger Singapore demographic profile in terms of income level and ethnicity. A cursory search of the literature will reveal many examples. See a working paper published by Institute of Public Policy, *Parents’ perceptions of the Singapore primary school system*, by Mathews et al. (2017) as one representative work. However, there are a few studies

(with a critical orientation) which will highlight the socio-economic inequalities associated with a “neighbourhood school”. See Leonel Lim (2015)’s book *Knowledge, Control and Critical Thinking in Singapore* as a good example.

ⁱⁱ These are non-academic activities for all students e.g. sports, arts, music etc.

ⁱⁱⁱ These refer to community service projects which are tied to Citizenship and Character Education, and are mandatory for all students.

A Politician, A Social Scientist, and A Social Worker Walk into A Bar: Towards A Taxonomy of Social Studies Inquiry Questions

Peidong Yang *National Institute of Education (Singapore)*

Jun Yan Chua *Dunearn Secondary School (Singapore)*

Abstract

Inquiry-based learning has gained prominence in secondary-school humanities education in Singapore in recent years. In Social Studies (SS), the loci of inquiry learning are “Issue Investigation” as found in the 2016 Express and Normal (Academic) syllabus and “Performance Task” in the 2014/15 Normal (Technical) syllabus, respectively. Due to the relatively short time inquiry has been given explicit emphasis, to date research into this new aspect of SS education remains very limited. This paper focuses on an important yet often neglected step of the SS inquiry process—the development of inquiry questions. To explore how different ways of crafting the SS inquiry question may lead to distinct inquiry approaches and processes, a taxonomy of SS inquiry questions is proposed based on empirical observations. The taxonomy comprises three categories of questions: the “politician’s question”, the “social worker’s question”, and the “social scientist’s question”. The implications and applications of this taxonomy for SS instruction are also discussed with reference to the multi-faceted aims of SS education in Singapore.

Introduction

An inquiry approach to learning has gained traction and importance in secondary-school humanities education in Singapore in recent years. Defined by the Ministry of Education (2016a) as “a purposeful act of seeking information or knowledge, activating prior knowledge, investigating significant questions, and constructing knowledge” (p. 21), inquiry learning is said to promote “student-centred learning by creating opportunities for students to take ownership of their own learning rather than receive information purely through direct instruction” (p. 21).

In history and geography education, this shift to inquiry can be seen in the incorporation of “Historical Investigation” (HI) and “Geographical Investigation” (GI) in the respective syllabi (Afandi, 2013; Lim, 2018; Seow, Chang, & Irvine, 2019). For Social Studies (SS), the locus of inquiry learning is the “Issue Investigation” (II) component, introduced in the Express and Normal (Academic) (E/NA) syllabus of 2016. In the Normal (Technical) (NT) syllabus (2014/15), an equivalent of II is the “Performance Task” (PT), which similarly scaffolds an inquiry-based learning process for NT students.

Since the introduction of SS II and PT lagged slightly behind that of HI and GI, research on inquiry learning in secondary SS in Singapore has only begun to emerge very recently. The first author has looked into teachers' conceptions of II (Yang, 2021) and their experiences of implementing and enacting II, including the challenges and coping strategies (Yang, 2020). Despite this burgeoning scholarship, overall, there remains a significant knowledge gap from both scholarly and education practitioners' perspectives.

This paper addresses this knowledge gap by focusing on a crucial yet often overlooked step of the SS inquiry process—the development of *inquiry questions*. An interest in this issue developed as the authors respectively grappled with SS inquiry in their own ways. In conducting professional development courses on SS inquiry for in-service and pre-service teachers, the first author—an SS teacher-educator—encountered a variety of inquiry questions developed by teachers, and gained insights into some of the common experiences of teachers in relation to crafting inquiry questions. For the second author—a postgraduate student-teacher—undergoing pre-service training in SS education provided opportunities to reflect on what makes an inquiry specifically “social”, a problem which is often only implicitly alluded to in university-level courses, and frequently resolved with a “know-it-when-you-see-it” approach.

In what follows, the authors draw on their experiences as well as materials gathered in the course of their work and studies to explore *how different ways of asking the inquiry question may lead to distinct inquiry approaches and processes in Social Studies*. The next section briefly discusses the nature of inquiry as found in the Singapore secondary SS syllabi. We then foreground the importance of SS

inquiry question development by drawing on both local and some international perspectives on this matter. Subsequently, a taxonomy of SS inquiry questions is proposed and explicated by examining specimens of inquiry questions. Following that, the implications and applications of this proposed taxonomy for SS instruction are explored. Potential limitations of the taxonomy are also briefly discussed.

Background: Inquiry in Singapore Social Studies syllabi

To appreciate the nature of inquiry in Singapore secondary Social Studies syllabi, it is instructive to look at how inquiry is defined in the official textbooks. The 2016 E/NA coursebook dedicates a full chapter (i.e. *Chapter 12 Skills for Issue Investigation*, which incidentally is also the longest single chapter in the coursebook) to Issue Investigation. This chapter explains II as follows to learners:

An Issue Investigation encourages you to identify a societal issue to develop a response to. A societal issue is one that is of concern to society and people have points of view about. An Issue Investigation allows you to analyse factors and perspectives that shape the development of societal issues. Through the course of the investigation, your group will also understand the impact the selected societal issue has on society and develop possible responses and recommendations to address the issue. (Ministry of Education, 2016b, p. 367)

Following the Humanities Inquiry Approach—a common framework shared among all three secondary humanities subjects (Ministry of Education, 2016a, p. 22)—the SS E/NA coursebook suggests a four-stage cycle for the execution of II: (1) sparking curiosity; (2) gathering data; (3) exercising reasoning; (4) reflective thinking.

In the 2014/15 SS NT coursebooks (“*All About Social Studies*” 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3, 4), the emphasis on inquiry learning is not as explicit, which can be inferred from the absence of a dedicated chapter on inquiry. Instead, an equivalent of II—“Performance Task” (PT)—is interwoven in selected chapters in the NT textbooks. One key difference between PT and II is that with the former, the question for investigation is pre-formulated and presented readily to learners, whereas in the latter, the inquiry question is not pre-given, and the crafting of it falls under the “sparkling curiosity” stage of the inquiry exercise. In fact, Chapter 12 of the E/NA coursebook contains a section on how to develop the II question. (This difference may be interpreted as revealing an assumption on the part of the curriculum developers that crafting an inquiry question is an academically more demanding activity.) Consequently, the inquiry cycle for PT comprises four stages—(1) gather information; (2) analyse; (3) create; (4) reflect—more or less the same as the II cycle except for the initial stage of developing the inquiry question. It is also worth mentioning that the PT sections of the NT coursebooks demonstrate a more “scaffolded” nature, with the textbook pages doubling as worksheets.

Inquiry Questions

The above discussion highlights the crucial importance of the inquiry question for the entire inquiry learning process—after all, inquiry has to be driven by some puzzle, expressed in the form of a question. As evidenced in the following passage in the *Teaching and Learning Guide (TLG)* issued by the Ministry of Education (2016a), curriculum developers stress the centrality of the inquiry question:

Inquiry-based learning seeks to spark and build on students’ curiosity so as to create meaningful learning. Questions

are used to activate students’ prior knowledge and challenge their assumptions, as multiple perspectives are presented for their consideration, especially when exploring problematic situations. This in turn leads to the eliciting of students’ own questions out of curiosity. Thus, learning is achieved through inquiry as it is driven by teachers’ and students’ questions to investigate, extract, analyse and synthesise information regarding issues. (p. 22)

What, then, makes a good inquiry question? The SS E/NA coursebook defines a well-crafted II question as one that allows students to collect data; requires “investigation, analysis of data, and reasoning”; and which is “authentic” and “meaningful” (MOE, 2016b). Other than this somewhat general characterization, however, a gap seems to remain with regard to *how* and what *types* of inquiry question(s) can be developed.

In extant scholarship situated in contexts beyond Singapore, most approaches to inquiry question development adopt a criterion-driven framework. For example, the National Council for the Social Studies in the United States defines a “compelling question” as one that “deals with curiosities about how things work; interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts; and unresolved issues that require students to construct arguments in response” (Grant, 2013). While approaches like this are useful in highlighting the features of a sound inquiry question, they might inadvertently suggest to students that there is a singular way of framing a social inquiry. Moreover, these frameworks also have a tendency to be fairly general, with the potential to apply equally to other disciplines.

In contrast, a type-based approach to inquiry question development foregrounds

the plurality of lenses through which social issues might be investigated. In the New Zealand context, for example, Wood (2013) has developed an inductive, type-based approach to inquiry question development. Her taxonomy differentiates between “information-based questions”, “values-based questions”, and “issues-based questions”. Although Wood’s typology of questions might offer inspiration for Singaporean teachers, it is heavily influenced by the context of a “whole-school social studies focus on a local community social inquiry” (p. 23). In Singapore, by contrast, SS emphasizes national and global perspectives on contemporary issues, and therefore gives rise to some alternative types of inquiry questions which we try to make sense of through our taxonomy.

Empirically, in the Singapore SS education context, the first author has observed that, despite the centrality of inquiry question development to the inquiry process, in teachers’ actual practice, the step of developing inquiry questions seemed to receive less critical attention than the subsequent steps of data collection and analysis. In particular, it seemed to the first author that while SS teachers were often concerned with managing the *scope* of the inquiry question, they appeared less focused on interrogating the *nature* of the inquiry question, and the implications for the inquiry approach and process.

This may be partly attributable to the fact that the SS textbooks make inquiry questions readily available for teachers to use. As mentioned earlier, the NT coursebooks simply present pre-formulated questions to learners; meanwhile, although the E/NA syllabus expects learners to craft II questions as part of “sparking curiosity”, the coursebook nonetheless contains a list of “possible Issue Investigation questions” (Ministry of Education, 2016b, p. 379).

Making available pre-formulated inquiry questions as such, though no doubt helpful and convenient, may reduce or remove the incentive for teachers and students to undergo thoroughly the crucial step of inquiry question development by exercising their own critical thinking and analytical capabilities. It bears reminding that such exercise of critical and analytical thinking is meant to be an integral part of the inquiry process, and a key reason why inquiry learning is advocated in the first place.

In the next section, we unpack the step of inquiry question development and uncover some of the unexplored analytical complexities and opportunities inherent in this step. We first collate a list of SS inquiry question specimens and demonstrate that the nature or characteristics of these questions often vary. Then, based on this, we suggest a taxonomy comprising three categories of questions.

A taxonomy of SS inquiry questions: the “social scientist’s question”, the “social worker’s question”, and the “politician’s question”

Table 1 below gathers all the inquiry questions found in the 2016 E/NA coursebook (Ministry of Education, 2016b) and 2014/15 NT coursebooks (Ministry of Education, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). To this list, the authors have added a third group (“C”) containing a few specimens purposefully selected from questions proposed by student-teachers in a postgraduate pre-service course at the National Institute of Education (course code QCL52D) that the first author was involved in teaching.

Table 1. Specimens of SS Inquiry Questions

S/N	Specimens of inquiry question and source
A	Issue Investigation (II) Questions in <i>Upper Secondary Social Studies (E/NA) Coursebook</i>
A1	<i>What does being Singaporean mean to students of your school?</i> (Chapter 1, p. 27)
A2	<i>Have the integration efforts in Singapore been successful in integrating immigrants?</i> (Chapter 7, p. 248)
A3	<i>How has the spread of foreign popular culture affected Singapore’s culture?</i> (Chapter 10, p. 323)
A4	<i>Why do some Singaporeans feel that integration efforts in Singapore are successful while others disagree?</i> (Chapter 12, p. 379)
A5	<i>What can Singaporeans do to make immigrants feel welcome in Singapore?</i> (Chapter 12, p. 379)
A6	<i>Will having more integration programmes increase interaction between Singaporeans and immigrants?</i> (Chapter 12, p. 379)
A7	<i>Has the integration of immigrants in Singapore been successful?</i> (Chapter 12, p. 379)
A8	<i>How have integration efforts led by immigrants benefited them?</i> (Chapter 12, p. 379)
A9	<i>How have integration efforts by government organisations benefited immigrants?</i> (Chapter 12, p. 379)
A10	<i>How can schools contribute to the integration of immigrants in Singapore?</i> (Chapter 12, p. 379)
B	Performance Task (PT) Questions in <i>All About Social Studies (NT) Coursebooks (1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3, 4)</i>
B1	<i>Do common spaces in your school promote interaction among the different cultural groups?</i> (1A, p. 101)
B2	<i>How can we help students who are migrants integration in school?</i> (1B, p. 115)
B3	<i>How can individuals contribute to peace in Singapore?</i> (2A, p. 78)
B4	<i>How can we encourage the practice of recycling in school?</i> (2B, p. 59)
B5	<i>What do you think the government needs to spend the country’s reserves on?</i> (3, p. 82)
B6	<i>How can we improve the way we show care for others?</i> (4, p. 103)
C	Issue Investigation Questions proposed by postgraduate student-teachers in pre-service course (QCL52D)
C1	<i>Should ethnic quota for housing be abolished?</i>
C2	<i>Should there be a quota for international students in schools?</i>
C3	<i>Should there be a quota for hiring foreign labourers for companies based in Singapore?</i>
C4	<i>Should National Service be voluntary?</i>
C5	<i>Should the Presidency be reserved along racial lines?</i>

Poring over this list reveals that these SS inquiry questions are of somewhat different natures.

A majority of these questions (A1, A2, A3, A4, A6, A7, A8, A9, B1) appear as social “scientific” questions, namely

questions that primarily invite the researchers to answer by relying on empirical evidence. The clearest example is A1 (“*What does being Singaporean mean to students of your school?*”), since it is a well-defined empirical question (“*What does being Singaporean mean*”) with a

well-delimited scope (“to students of your school”). The researchers should be in relatively little doubt that they simply need to survey and/or interview an appropriate sample of students in their school, and the empirical data so gathered should allow them to answer the investigation question. Some of the other specimens here are not as straightforward as A1: for example, questions A2 and A7 are *evaluative* in nature, and thus in addition to gathering empirical evidence, answering them may also require some form of measurement or comparison (i.e. against the criteria of “successful integration”). Despite minor differences such as this, the common characteristic of this first category of questions is their *empirically driven* nature: in other words, they are basic research puzzles that *can be* answered in a relatively objective manner through empirical data. Thus, we may call this type of questions the *Social Scientist’s Question*. It is noteworthy that there is a concentration of social scientist’s questions in the E/NA syllabus/coursebook.

In contrast, a number of other questions (A5, A10, B2, B3, B4, B6) appear to be driven primarily towards some forms of desirable practical social outcome (e.g. “social integration”, “peace in Singapore”, “care for others”). These questions, often starting with the word “*how*”, are asked in a way that orients the inquirers towards finding social solutions and interventions. The nature of the social issue and the desirability of the specified social outcomes are themselves *not* the subject of inquiry or investigation, but are presented as self-evident. Instead, the aim of the inquiry is to arrive at solutions or recommendations in line with those pre-determined outcomes. Thus, this second category of inquiry questions may be viewed as guided by certain social values and visions from the

outset, whereas the inquiry *per se* becomes more practical and “problem-solving” in nature. Hence, these questions can be dubbed the *Social Worker’s Questions*. Although the term social worker may evoke the provision of direct services and casework, it is worth noting that Singapore’s definition of social work is broader and refers to a “practice-based profession that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people” (MOH et al., 2015).

In addition to the above two categories which account for the II/PT questions found in the official SS syllabi/textbooks, the authors also observed in the course of their work and study a third category of questions frequently used by teachers for SS inquiry. Illustrated by questions B5 and C1-5 in Table 1, this category of questions are highly distinct from those in the first two categories in that they are concerned explicitly with contentious and/or controversial matters of politics and policy. Typically beginning with the word “*should*”, these questions lend themselves to debate and argumentation. Often, though perhaps not always, an element of moral or political value judgement is inherent in these questions. Therefore, we refer to this category as the *Politician’s Question*. Although politician’s questions do not feature prominently in the official SS textbooks, they do seem popular among SS teachers. We surmise this is because one commonly used strategy for inculcating citizenship is to put students in the shoes of the policymakers of having to weigh difficult questions of politics and policy.

The foregoing analysis thus yields a taxonomy comprising three main categories, which we summarise and further elaborate in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Taxonomy of SS inquiry questions

<i>Type of SS inquiry question</i>	<i>Key characteristics</i>
Social Scientist’s Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A research puzzle that can be answered more or less satisfactorily with empirical evidence in the form of data and analysis of data; • Concerned with social facts and processes, and <i>why</i> and <i>how</i> they are the way they are; • Not guided explicitly by social/political/moral visions or values; • No explicit involvement of value judgement or contestation.
Social Worker’s Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on finding practical social solutions and interventions for given social issues/problems; • Not focused on questioning or deconstructing the social issues/problems <i>per se</i>; • Explicitly guided by social visions and outcomes recognised as desirable or normative; • Not concerned with questioning or contesting the guiding social visions, outcomes, and the underlying values.
Politician’s Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerned explicitly with contentious and/or controversial matters of politics and policy, with wider societal significance; • Lends itself to debates and argumentation, as it often entails trade-offs; • Answering the question may ultimately require an act of moral and/or political value judgement.

Implications for Conducting II

By providing teachers and students a common vocabulary for articulating various avenues of social inquiry, our taxonomy gives expression to the multifaceted purposes of SS education in Singapore. Although the theoretical scholarship on SS sharply distinguishes between the goals of citizenship transmission, social transformation, and social science education, in practice SS instruction in Singapore serves a combination of these functions (Adler & Sim, 2007). Depending on their specific learning intentions, teachers and students

may therefore formulate different types of inquiry questions. For example, if a school emphasizes the citizenship transmission dimensions of SS, and intends to “piggy-back” SS II with a Values-in-Action community service project (Yang, 2020), then the SS II inquiry question would likely take the form of a Social Worker’s Question. By contrast, if the school privileges social transformation as a goal of SS, and seeks to allow students to engage with contemporary debates that they read about in the news media, then the inquiry question might take the form of a Politician’s Question.

While all three types of questions can facilitate meaningful inquiry, each type of question will require a different inquiry approach and will yield different

investigation outcomes. Our taxonomy therefore provides a framework for clarifying the cognitive demands placed on students by different types of questions. We provide a non-exhaustive schema of these demands in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Cognitive demands of SS inquiry questions

<i>Type of SS inquiry question</i>	<i>Cognitive Demands</i>	
	<i>Inquiry Approach</i>	<i>Investigation Outcome</i>
Social Scientist’s Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operationalization of target concept (e.g. integration) • Design and implementation of appropriate data collection instruments • Interpretation and evaluation of data to produce <i>evidence</i> 	Valid and reliable conclusion, with some degree of generalizability
Social Worker’s Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of community needs and “pain points” • Generation and evaluation of potential solutions 	Feasible and effective recommendations which address the identified problem
Politician’s Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of stakeholders and competing perspectives • Interpretation, evaluation, and synthesis of competing perspectives 	Informed and reasoned judgement on a controversial issue

To be clear, students may use similar *methods*—such as surveys, interviews, participant observation—to address the different types of inquiry questions. However, the *application* of these methods will vary according to the type of inquiry question posed. For example, in addressing a Social Worker’s question, students may conduct interviews to better understand and

empathize with experiences on the ground. In the process, students become embedded in the communities their project is intended to serve. When addressing a Social Scientist’s question, students may similarly conduct interviews, but their approach might be more detached and “clinical”, so as to preserve a measure of analytic objectivity.

While different types of questions place different *demands* on students, the authors caution that the type of inquiry question posed does not necessarily make the II more or less *demanding*. While there is a concentration of social worker's questions in the NT syllabus/coursebooks, perhaps because they allow students to draw on practical reasoning and everyday experiences, social worker's questions also require a high level of inventive thinking as well as a sensitivity to context-specific implementation considerations. By contrast, a Politician's Question may require students to operate at a higher level of abstraction, but it does not necessarily demand the same attention to the design or enactment of possible interventions. To the extent that our taxonomy of inquiry questions is used to facilitate Differentiated Instruction, we recommend that it is used to differentiate students according to interest and learning profile, as opposed to student readiness (described in some contexts as "progress" or "ability").

Applications beyond II

While this article primarily focuses on the formulation of inquiry questions in the context of SS II, we believe our taxonomy has the potential to extend to other instructional contexts in secondary-level SS.

In the N/O-level examination, the first sub-question of the Structured-Response Question (SRQ) frequently requires students to make recommendations on a societal issue, such as plastic waste or environmental sustainability. It therefore contains features of the Social Worker's Question. Other times, the first sub-question of the SRQ requires candidates to explain the causes of a particular phenomenon, such as increased diversity in Singapore or increased healthcare spending. In such instances, students are effectively being asked to address a Social Scientist's

Question. By contrast, the second sub-questions of the SRQ requires students to explain two factors or perspectives and (for the O-level examination) to make a judgement on their relative importance. In the 2018 examination, for example, O-level candidates were asked whether they thought the government or individuals should bear the greater responsibility for healthcare costs, a prompt which evinced features of the Politician's Question. Given the pivot to standards-based assessment in the Singapore educational landscape and the corresponding increase in attention to articulating the demands of test items, our taxonomy offers a heuristic for reflecting on the role of different types of questions across the SS curriculum. Additionally, it highlights the cognitive switching required of students in managing different tasks in SS.

Beyond the specific purpose of formulating and unpacking inquiry questions, our taxonomy can potentially advance the curricular outcome of encouraging perspective-taking. By understanding that different social agents may ask different questions of the same societal issue, students can reflect on why different perspectives exist. As an illustration, in examining the issue of minimum wage legislation, a social scientist may focus on measuring a specific outcome, such as the impact on levels of unemployment. By contrast, a politician might focus on managing the trade-offs between the interests of different stakeholders, such as businesses and workers, and might also be guided by his or her ideological beliefs. The politician and social scientist may not exactly disagree, but they will nevertheless offer different perspectives, in part because of the types of question to which they each implicitly respond. This understanding offers students a more sophisticated model for explaining why perspectives differ, as compared to the

simplistic notions that sources are either “biased” or “unbiased” (Lee & Shemilt, 2004). By highlighting differing approaches taken toward social issues, our taxonomy also deepens students’ understanding of the concept of polycentric and distributed governance, which underpins Issue 1 in the SS syllabus, with its emphasis on the roles of organized groups, individuals, and the government in working for the good of society.

Limitations and cautions

Notwithstanding its potential applications, our taxonomy has several limitations, and should be used with some caution in SS teachers’ practice. First, our taxonomy might come across as essentialising, and might foster a misconception that the identity of a social agent determines the questions which or she is entitled to pose. Students might come to believe, for instance, that politicians *only* ask the Politician’s Question, or even more perniciously, that *only* politicians can ask a Politician’s Question. Like all models, our taxonomy ultimately represents a simplification (or “ideal types”) of the real world, where the boundaries between politics, research, and practice are necessarily more blurry. Just as policy debates are often informed by empirical evidence, social scientists may also build on their research findings to make political interventions in the public sphere. Similarly, the role of social workers can extend to advocating for action on wider structural issues. In organising inquiry questions around ideal types, our taxonomy could inadvertently distort the complexity of public discourse, and thereby mislead or confuse students.

Furthermore, some inquiry questions may not fall neatly into the three categories of questions we have identified. Reconsider inquiry question B2 from Table 1 (*How can*

we help students who are migrants integrate in school?). At face value, B2 presents a Social Worker’s Question. However, it is entirely conceivable that a politician or social scientist might pose the same question, except that they are likely to approach the question with a different set of priorities and considerations. A politician might be more concerned with structures and policies to promote integration in schools, whereas a social worker might be more interested in ground-up programmes and initiatives. Conversely, a social scientist may address the question by measuring the efficacy of various interventions.

Given these considerations, we stress that our taxonomy is not meant to be a straightjacket that confines the development of inquiry question into one of the three categories suggested. Rather, the taxonomy is intended to draw out the implications that different types of inquiry question may have for inquiry approaches and practices. We therefore recommend that the taxonomy be applied with a “light touch”, and urge teachers and students to avoid an overly formulaic or prescriptive approach to framing inquiry questions. Ultimately, inquiry in SS should foreground *students’ questions*; our taxonomy is more akin to a form of cognitive apprenticeship, through which students are exposed to and inducted into the process of framing questions that resonate with their interests and values.

Conclusion

Given the volatility and complexity of the twenty-first century, finding the “right” question or problem to solve is just as important a skill for students to acquire as finding the “correct” answer. In practice, however, the questions we ask are not neutral constructs that arise in a vacuum; they inevitably reflect our personal

experiences and professional interests, as well as the discursive and epistemological norms of the communities in which we are situated. Whereas inquiry learning in History and Geography tends to be governed by clearer disciplinary conventions that delimit the types of questions posed, the multi-faceted purposes of Social Studies can create divergent possibilities for the framing of social inquiry.

The taxonomy of SS inquiry questions proposed in this paper is not meant to reflect in a realistic manner the work performed by real-life politicians, social scientists, and social workers; rather, the purpose of the taxonomy is to provide an accessible shorthand for framing three distinct but interrelated types of questions that students might ask when investigating a societal issue. Through providing a common vocabulary for articulating the features of different types of SS inquiry question and approaches, it is hoped that this taxonomy will aid both students and teachers of SS in their journeys of understanding societal issues of importance.

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“So What Makes the Prime Minister’s Speech So Reliable?” - Secondary Social Studies Teachers’ Pragmatic Approach To Inquiry

Fatema Anis Hussain

National Institute of Education (Singapore)

Abstract

An inquiry-based approach in the classroom equips students with discipline-based skills, thus facilitating knowledge construction (Kidman & Casinader, 2017). In view of the curricular focus in Singapore on developing students' critical and reflective thinking skills via inquiry (MOE, 2016a), this article illustrates teachers' enactment of inquiry processes in secondary Social Studies lessons, drawing on data from a baseline study. Analysis of teacher interviews and student focus group discussions yields insights into the possibilities and challenges of employing inquiry-based learning. The article spotlights teacher-student interactions in one particular lesson as students ascertain the reliability of the given sources. The analysis reveals teachers' pragmatic, fit-for-purpose approach to selecting key aspects of inquiry-based learning, which is largely driven by time constraints and concerns about syllabus coverage and students' assessment outcomes. These findings suggest the need for greater student agency in the inquiry process as well as more opportunities for students' critical and reflective thinking, and domain-specific understandings.

Introduction

Over the past few years, inquiry has

emerged as a key pedagogical trend across a range of school disciplines. As Chomsky (2015) argues, the ability to inquire is a 21st century skill. Varied understandings of inquiry-based learning have emerged over time (Barrow, 2006) though learner-centredness, knowledge construction and problem-solving are generally regarded as key aspects of inquiry (e.g. Khalaf, 2018). As Kidman and Casinader (2017) note, an inquiry-based approach enables students' understanding and acquisition of discipline-based skills, which facilitate knowledge construction. Inquiry-based learning potentially helps students develop a 'method of intelligence' (Dewey, 1910) to address complex problems, and a disposition of reflection, which is central to inquiry (Dewey, 1933).

In the context of civics and citizenship education, an inquiry-based approach is said to foster civic consciousness among students by opening up space for reasoned deliberation of open policy questions regarding fundamental social values (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). With the school widely regarded as the primary training ground for citizenship education (Parker, 2003), the subject-domain of Social Studies is often associated with the role of equipping students with the necessary knowledge, skills and values for civic participation in democratic setups (Parker, 2011). In the Singapore context, the

secondary Social Studies curriculum envisages nurturing students as "informed, concerned and participative citizens" (MOE, 2016a, p. 3). The syllabus posits that students attain knowledge and understanding about real-world issues, and develop critical and reflective thinking skills through inquiry and authentic learning experiences. Well-facilitated discussions showcasing multiple perspectives are foregrounded to permit engagement with complex issues.

The locus of inquiry learning for Social Studies in the secondary school curriculum is the 'Issue Investigation' (Yang & Chua, 2021), and its introduction in 2016 may be seen a move to strengthen thinking skills development through inquiry-based learning (Yang, 2021). The syllabus posits a four-stage inquiry cycle for implementing 'Issue Investigation': sparking curiosity, gathering data, exercising reasoning, and reflective thinking (MOE, 2016a). From a pedagogical perspective, this article aims to unpack how aspects of the inquiry cycle become evident in teachers' classroom enactment; accordingly, the research question is: How do teachers enact inquiry in secondary Social Studies classrooms in Singapore? Yang (2021) observes the dearth of research in Social Studies from the perspective of pedagogy or teaching/learning experiences.

To address the research question, descriptive data is presented to comprehensively portray teachers' enactment of inquiry in the sampled lessons. Additionally, an illustrative vignette from one classroom is used to provide a glimpse of students 'exercising reasoning' as they engage in source-based analyses. To elucidate inquiry practices, pedagogical aspects of inquiry such as classroom talk and instructional tasks are examined. Classroom talk mediates knowledge and cognition (Mercer & Littleton, 2007;

Atwood et al., 2010), and its structure determines the space for student participation (Freebody, 2004). Tasks comprising learning activities form the backbone of classroom interactions and frame how students think and learn (Blumenfeld et al., 1987). The design and implementation of instructional tasks ascertain the quality of knowledge work students engage in (Hogan et al. 2013). Based on these theoretical premises, the article surfaces the knowledge work in the classroom in view of the talk and tasks pertaining to the four-stage inquiry cycle (MOE, 2016a). Excerpts from teacher interviews and student focus group discussions are analysed to yield insights into the possibilities and challenges of employing inquiry-based learning in secondary Social Studies classrooms.

The remainder of this article proceeds in three sections. The first section outlines the methods employed in this study. The second section provides a synoptic overview of trends observed in secondary Social Studies classrooms. To explore these trends in greater depth, the third section offers a vignette of one teacher's practice. Finally, implications for teaching and learning are discussed in view of the curricular focus on inquiry-based approaches.

The study

This article draws on data from the Core Research Programme,¹ a large-scale research study. Data was collected (2016-17) from a nationally representative sample based on a stratified random sampling in line with the distribution of types of schools in Singapore. The sample included five Government and two Government-Aided² schools. With respect to the present article, data was obtained from classroom observations of 77 Social Studies lessons nested within eight curricular units at the

Secondary 3 level and taught by teachers in seven secondary schools. Each school nominated one Social Studies teacher with a minimum of 4 years of teaching experience. Researchers observed and video-recorded a complete unit of school curriculum work i.e. a series of thematic lessons for each participating teacher. Research methods also included audio-recorded post-lesson interviews and semi-structured teacher interviews as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with two groups of 4-5 students from every participating class. Content and thematic analyses were employed to surface key themes from the teacher interviews and student FGDs.

Lesson videos were coded (in Microsoft Excel) in five-minute intervals ('phases') based on a largely binary coding scheme (Kwek et al., 2017), which was developed and refined based on the Social Studies syllabus (MOE, 2016a), the *Guide to Teaching and Learning Upper Secondary Social Studies* (MOE, 2016b), and broader theoretical understandings. Insights from the data were also incorporated into the domain-specific coding scheme to better describe pedagogical practices in the sampled lessons. Coding analyses at the phasal level recorded whether an instructional event happened (or not) during a 5-minute phase. Coding indicators (not mutually exclusive) included pedagogical aspects such as student learning activities, classroom talk, inquiry processes, and knowledge focus (see Appendix A and Appendix B). Inter-rater reliability was monitored, and validity of the codes was reinforced through intensive discussions among the coders and engagement with domain experts. SPSS was used for compilation and statistical analyses of the coded data. The descriptive data presented subsequently is drawn from coding analyses of lesson videos.

Inquiry in Singapore classrooms

Analysing the descriptive data from the sampled lessons using a range of coding indicators offers insights into the pedagogical aspects of the four-stage inquiry cycle (MOE, 2016a). As Table 1 shows, teachers stimulate students' curiosity by inviting students to brainstorm ideas, activating their prior knowledge, and introducing stimulating materials. In contrast, students' questions seldom provide the initial impetus for inquiring into issues.

Table 1. Secondary 3 Social Studies inquiry: Sparking curiosity (2016/17)

Inquiry: Sparking Curiosity	% Occurrences in all Phases Secondary 3 (N=758)
Ideation; Exchange of Ideas; Visualise Ideas	20.5%
Access Prior Knowledge	17.4%
Stimulus to Engage Interest	14.1%
Students Ask Questions	0.9%

Table 2 illustrates the patterns pertaining to data gathering. For the most part, students are presented with data. They spend more than half their lesson time generating data such as by making notes and accessing additional information based on the given sources. About one-third of the lesson phases show students making careful observations of the data to surface key ideas or themes. Far less time is spent on processing the information based on domain-specific criteria such as reliability and validity.

Table 2. Secondary 3 Social Studies Inquiry: Gathering data (2016/17)

Inquiry: Gathering Data	% Occurrences in all Phases Secondary 3 (N=758)
Data is Presented; Resources Provided	50.0%
Process information/data based on Criteria	17.2%
Make Careful Observations	34.4%
Data Generated by Teacher/Students from Sources	55.5%

Exercising reasoning denotes making sense of the data and extracting relevant information by deliberating on the evidence and arriving at informed understandings. Secondary 3 students spend more than one-fifth of the lesson phases engaging in data analyses, and 15% of the lesson time is spent on textual analyses (Table 3). Notably, critical analysis of the data, which entails questioning implicit or latent perspective/s is almost absent. Summarising ideas is relatively frequent at this stage of the inquiry cycle but students have very few opportunities to consider plural perspectives and evaluate alternative sources. In terms of communicating findings, there is modest evidence of students explaining and justifying their knowledge claims.

Table 3. Secondary 3 Social Studies inquiry: Exercising Reasoning (2016/17)

Inquiry: Exercising Reasoning	% Occurrences in all Phases Secondary 3 (N=758)
Data Analysis/Analyse Arguments	22.7%
Deep Analysis/Critical Analysis	3.7%
Text Analysis/Identify Techniques	15.4%
Perspective Taking/Consider Multiple Perspectives	4.5%
Evaluation/Evaluate Alternatives/Usefulness	3.4%
Justify Explanations or Claims	8.6%
Synthesize or Summarise Ideas	13.7%

Table 4 reveals that reflective thinking is the least emphasised aspect of the inquiry cycle in secondary Social Studies lessons. Students are seldom required to reflect on the inquiry process and findings, or on their own learning. Also, they hardly (re)consider their underlying assumptions or beliefs.

Table 4. Secondary 3 Social Studies Inquiry: Reflective thinking (2016/17)

Inquiry: Reflective Thinking	% Occurrences in all Phases S3 (N=77)
Meta-learning: Reflect on Learning Process	3.0%
Meta-Inquiry: Reflect on Findings, Inquiry	1.1%
Meta-self: Reflect on Own Beliefs/Assumptions	0.8%

The above findings are noteworthy given the curricular focus on students acquiring the disposition of reflective thinking and the importance of metacognition in student learning. Broadly speaking, inquiry is teacher-directed with teachers inclined to ask guiding questions and furnish sources. In contrast, students have negligible input in determining the inquiry focus or making decisions about data sources. Students have opportunities to analyse sources, but they seldom justify knowledge claims, consolidate their findings or engage in reflection (Kwek & Hussain, 2019). As discussed later, these findings suggest that overall, teachers adopt a pragmatic stance towards inquiry. Examinable aspects such as source-based analyses are far more emphasised than those that are perceived to be unrelated to summative assessments. In this context, the following vignette showcases one teacher's attempts to enhance her students' understanding of the domain-specific criterion of reliability, as students hone their skills for the mandatory 'Source-Based Case Study' component in the national examination.

A vignette from Ms Lee's classroom

This section focuses on the classroom enactment of Ms Lee (pseudonym), a young graduate teacher with less than two years of teaching experience, teaching an 'Express'³ class of 21 students at the Secondary 3 level in a 'neighbourhood' Government school (see Foo, 2021). A total of nine lessons themed 'Citizenship and Governance' were observed in the initial academic term (January-March 2017). The vignette below comprises excerpts from the third lesson, which is based on an inquiry question: *Is there too much restriction on freedom of speech in Singapore?* The lesson objective is to equip students with the skills of analysing sources and drawing evidence-based conclusions based on reliability.

At the outset, Ms Lee highlights the need to evaluate multiple perspectives in relation to an assertion statement. Students are required to use the given sources (in their worksheet) and explain the extent to which they agree with the assertion statement: *Strong control over free speech is beneficial for Singapore.* In groups, students examine the four text sources provided and attempt to rank the given sources from the *most reliable* to the *least reliable*. Each group indicates their responses, which Ms Lee documents on the whiteboard. Three of the five groups in the class deem that the most reliable source is Source A - an adaptation from a speech made by Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong at an Inter-Religious Organisation anniversary dinner (May 2015). Subsequently, Ms Lee questions her students about the bases of their evaluation (Extract 1).

Extract 1.

1. T: Why is this (Source A) the most reliable?
2. S: There are a lot of examples and evidence.
3. T: Ok. But other sources also have evidence? They give example of Amos Yee, not bad right? They give example of White Paper policy, not bad right? So why the other sources cannot, why must this source?

The teacher offers a counter-argument about the reliability of Source A by pointing out the 'evidence' in other sources (Turn 3). Subsequently, she questions another student about her group's response of 'A' as the most reliable source. As evident from Extract 2, Ms Lee asks a supporting question: *So what makes the Prime Minister's speech so reliable?*

Extract 2.

1. T: Y. you chose 'A' right?
Why you chose 'A'?
2. S1: Made by Prime Minister?
3. T: So what makes the Prime
Minister's speech so reliable? So
special that you think he's the
most reliable?
4. S2: Because he's Lee Hsien Loong.

Clearly, students believe that Source A is the most reliable given that it a speech made by an authority figure (Turns 2 and 4). The issue of reliability is further problematised over the course of whole class interactions as the teacher probes deeper to elicit student responses. Ms Lee attempts to surface her students' reasoning by following up with clarifying questions, which permits them to explain their choice of 'A' as the most reliable source (Extract 3).

Extract 3.

1. T: So what about Lee Hsien
Loong that makes him reliable?
2. S1: He's the son of Lee Kuan Yew
(Students laugh)
3. S2: He's trusted by Singaporeans?
4. T: He's trusted by Singaporeans.
Why do you think he would be
trusted by Singaporeans?
5. S3: Government.
6. T: Oh because he's the
government? So if it's the
government you can trust what
he says la?
7. S1: He's the Prime Minister!
8. T: He's the Prime Minister so
definitely whatever he says is
correct?
9. S4: He's the most reliable but his
words may not be correct.
10. T: Oh wait, wait! There's a
difference between correct and
reliable - what's the difference?

11. S4: Reliable but not hundred percent
correct.
12. T: So wait, wait - someone said
something about Trump. Donald
Trump - he is the
most reliable President!
(Students express disagreement)

Ms Lee's students attribute reliability of the PM's speech to his lineage as well as trust in the government. One student differentiates between reliability and accuracy (Turn 9), and the teacher reiterates the point (Turn 10) followed by the student's brief explanation (Turn 11). Subsequently, the focus shifts to the then-American president, Donald Trump. In spite of his position as an elected leader, students disagree with their teacher's assertion about Trump being reliable (Extract 4). The discussion continues and one student brings up the role of heredity.

Extract 4.

1. T: But you said based on title?
Based on the title, you are the
head of the country like what
they say (Teacher points to a
group of students) means you are
the most reliable la!
2. S1: Teacher, the Americans elected
Trump so =
3. T: = Ya so someone said there also
because PM was also elected by
Singaporeans just like Trump
was elected by...So since most
people elect him means he's the
most reliable!
4. S: He has the genes.
5. T: Genes ah? You want to play
genes ah? Ok! You are trying to
say - how many of you - your
parents didn't graduate from
university? (Show of hands from
students)
6. T: That means all of you ah y'all
will never ever graduate from
university? He said ah not I say

ah! Because you don't have the genes. Ah so the context ah.

Arguably, Ms Lee's questioning allows her students to consider the issue of reliability in greater depth; students have the space to understand that being the elected head of a country does not constitute a criterion for reliability (Turns 1 and 3). To counter her student's point about the role of genes (Turn 4), Ms Lee emphatically claims that students whose parents are non-graduates are not likely to graduate (Turn 6). The teacher then weaves the issue of reliability with a context familiar to her students. Specifically, she draws on students' participation in a co-curricular activity (CCA) in school to help them grasp the notions of bias and personal interest, which are pertinent to the issue of reliability (Extract 5).

Extract 5.

1. T: Ok which CCA are y'all from?
2. S1: Canoeing.
3. S2: Soccer.
4. T: Canoeing, soccer. Y'all know which CCA am I from? I am from floorball. And recently, did you'll hear the announcement or not? Floorball won 8-6 ok, don't play, play ok this school! It's strong you know, we won 8-6! Let me tell you ladies and gentlemen, floorball is the best CCA in North Star School! Ok it's the best! (Students laugh)
5. S1: Unreliable!
6. T: Why unreliable? Why are you sure I'm unreliable? Why?
7. S2: Because you are from floorball.
8. T: So?
9. S: You are biased...
10. T: Why am I biased?
11. S: You are from that CCA!
12. T: I am from that CCA. I want to promote my CCA and so I have a personal interest correct? Wouldn't he (PM) also have a personal interest? He's from the government. What do you think he would say about the laws that the government came up with?
13. S: Vote for me! (Teacher and students laugh)
14. T: Well, it's not during elections so it's not so accurate there but he's talking about his laws, you see ah (Teacher reads from Source A: *In such an environment, we cannot afford liberal positions. We will not hesitate to act firmly when necessary. We will make no apology.*) So he's talking about his laws to control speech. I am not going to make any apology. I will not hesitate to act firmly. Who came out with the law?
15. S: Government.
16. T: The government. Who is Prime Minister?
17. S: Government.
18. T: He's part of the government. Don't you think he may have a personal interest?

Based on Ms Lee's exaggerated claim about floorball being the 'best' CCA in the school (Turn 4), students are able to comprehend how bias and personal interest relate to the reliability of a given source (Turns 2, 4, 5 and 7). The teacher then consolidates her students' understanding by explicitly linking the CCA scenario with the issue in focus, which allows them to consider whether the PM's speech about government regulations is reliable (or not). Towards the end of the lesson, the focus shifts to Source B, which is an article posted by a university professor on his website. The teacher highlights the varying perspectives presented in the source - the professor acknowledges the benefits of the government's White Paper but also

concedes the misuse of freedom of speech. The teacher hastens to conclude the lesson “in view of time” and proceeds to demonstrate how to analyse Source A based on the *Message-Audience-Outcome* heuristic taught earlier.

Discussion

As a whole, the vignette offers a microscopic glimpse of how teachers employ the recommended inquiry approach in Singapore’s examination-driven and time-starved classrooms (Loh, 2013). With reference to the domain-specific criterion of reliability, Ms Lee's students investigate the issue of freedom of speech in Singapore by drawing in aspects of trust in authority figures, popular appeal, personal interest and bias. The teacher problematises the notion of reliability with a pertinent supporting question: *So what makes the Prime Minister’s speech so reliable?* The teacher’s focused line of inquiry surfaces insights, which permit her students to grasp the complexity of ascertaining whether a given source is reliable (or not). Students have room to state their viewpoints and are able to detect the flaws in particular lines of argument. The teacher also links the focal issue with the familiar CCA context, which helps her students grasp how personal interest possibly affects the reliability of a given source. Evidentially, Ms Lee tapped on the CCA example in order to “connect with them” as her academic department had decided on making issues more relatable for students via the *connect-extend-apply* strategy (post-lesson interview). Table 5 shows that in more than three-fifth of the lesson phases, teachers enable students’ conceptual understanding typically by weaving factual knowledge with examples and analogies (see Appendix B).

Table 5. *Secondary 3 Social Studies: Knowledge focus (2016/17)*

Knowledge Focus	% Occurrences in all Phases S3 (N=758)
Factual Knowledge	55.1%
Conceptual Knowledge	62.9%
Procedural Knowledge	47.5%
Epistemic Knowledge	9.6%
Metacognitive Knowledge	6.9%

While Ms Lee’s students have room to examine a range of criteria associated with reliability, the teacher shies away from explicitly linking reliability with broader understandings of how knowledge is constructed and validated in the discipline. Each discipline has a particular way of structuring content and methods of inquiry (Baildon & Damico, 2011). In this case, students lack the space to see how domain-specific criteria and standards (e.g. validity, reliability) facilitate knowledge construction in the discipline, enabling one to distinguish knowledge from mere information, opinion or belief. Effectively, the knowledge focus in Ms Lee’s classroom remains largely procedural, with the primary focus on equipping students with the skills of source-based analyses, which forms a key assessment component. Overall, procedural knowledge is evident in 47.5% of the lesson phases while only about one-tenth of the lesson phases show evidence of epistemic knowledge, which pertains to construction and validation of knowledge in the discipline (Table 5).

Over the course of the classroom

interaction, the teacher invites students to present and clarify their viewpoints. Even so, closed questions form the bulk of the teacher's questioning. The sampled lessons show that teachers' closed questions are far more frequent than open questions: 58% and 22% of the lesson phases respectively. Again, Ms Lee's students generally offer brief albeit well-considered responses, which is reflected in the overwhelming presence of students' short responses. Arguably, the frequency of the teacher's closed questions and students' short responses in Ms Lee's classroom resemble an Initiation-Response-Evaluation or IRE (Cazden, 1988) interactional pattern, with little room for students to initiate queries or explore fresh perspectives. Overall, whole class discussions are evident in only about one-tenth of the lesson phases whereas IRE sequences are observed in about two-third of the lesson phases. Notably, the FGDs reveal that secondary Social Studies students hope for more discussions and debates and generally less focus on content and examinations.

The vignette provides a snapshot of source-based analyses in one classroom but reflects broader trends of secondary teachers' enactment of inquiry in Singapore classrooms. Ms Lee's students barely surface any query as they exercise their reasoning in working through the sources. Similarly, the 'sparking curiosity' stage reflects a dearth of student questions in the observed lessons (Table 1). One student mentioned that he did not raise queries as his teacher "has a syllabus to cover ... If we are to do that, then they don't have enough time." Absent student initiations, classroom talk is largely steered by the teacher. Students generally lack opportunities to reflect on the inquiry process or findings as well as their own learning, as evident in the weak evidence of metacognitive knowledge (Table 5). The minimal presence of student questions and reflection tasks implies that

Ms Lee's students have few opportunities to make their thinking visible to other classroom participants as a form of public reasoning (Hattie, 2009). The teacher's classroom enactment belies her pedagogical beliefs: "... to get students to question each other's thinking and responses," which she admits "requires a lot of skills" (end-of-unit interview).

The foray into Ms Lee's classroom surfaces the possibilities and constraints of enacting inquiry in secondary Social Studies lessons. Teacher participants reported "running out of time" especially in terms of engaging students in discussions, which may be broadly attributed to heavy teacher workloads and results-oriented, top-down hierarchies in schools (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). Ms Lee noted that owing to "manpower shortage" and "limited time," teachers in the school had not been able to provide students the opportunity of "going out and getting them to investigate an issue." Similarly, the teachers in Yang's (2020) study reported time constraints, which, combined with their exam-driven pragmatism and perceptions of the overwhelming scope and depth of inquiry, hindered the implementation of inquiry processes. They "watered down" (p. 21) 'Issue Investigation' by assigning the inquiry question to students, making the sources readily available, or tasking students to construct sources in a way similar to those used for the source-based case study in the examination papers. Teachers may understand the value of inquiry but inquiry-based approaches may conflict with content coverage and assessment preparation (Barton & Levstik, 2003).

The extent to which Ms Lee's classroom enactment aligns with the curricular focus on inquiry is debatable. Unsurprisingly, her lesson objective is "killing two birds with one stone" (post-lesson interview): teaching

her students the criterion of reliability, which ties in with the *Message-Audience-Outcome* heuristic students need to learn for their examination. The teacher's efforts to equip her students with critical thinking skills while ensuring assessment preparation seemingly reflect her realistic appraisal of implementing inquiry: "... inquiry in a very simplistic method of studying sources that is given to them." She raises a pertinent issue from a practitioner's perspective: "I think there needs to be more clarity on what inquiry is ... It's a really huge inquiry question" (end-of-unit interview). Yang (2021) notes that Social Studies teachers' varying interpretations of inquiry have resulted in different models of 'Issue Investigation' being presented to students. Broadly, findings from the Core Research Programme suggest that teachers take a pragmatic, fit-for-purpose approach to selecting key aspects of inquiry-based learning in terms of their classroom enactment, based on institutional requirements and/or classroom contexts (Kwek, 2021).

Implications and Conclusion

Overall, this study surfaces some key strengths of the inquiry cycle as enacted in secondary Social Studies classrooms in Singapore. Teachers stimulate students' curiosity through ideation, activate their prior knowledge and use various stimuli. Students frequently engage in inquiry processes such as data analyses and textual analyses. Given the curricular focus on students' critical and reflective thinking, understanding of societal issues and appreciation of multiple perspectives (MOE, 2016a), several key areas for improvement emerge:

1. Students need to play a more significant role in ascertaining the inquiry focus, making decisions about the data sources, and having a

say in the design and outcomes of the inquiry process. Students require more opportunities to raise queries and issues of interest for discussion and deliberation. Teachers need to further "re-conceptualise their roles to encompass those of being a co-learner, a learning guide, and a facilitator" (Deng & Gopinathan, 2003, p. 60) to concretise the curricular aims of inquiry-based learning.

2. Students need more opportunities to justify epistemic claims as well as engage in critical analysis of the data and in perspective taking. Beyond an emphasis on procedural skills, inquiry entails a stronger focus on the *methods* by which knowledge is developed and validated in a discipline (Mansilla, 2005). Disciplinary practices such as argumentation, corroboration and justification facilitate the development of students' disciplinary understandings about the dynamic and provisional nature of knowledge.
3. Students' reflective thinking needs to be strengthened via stronger emphasis on tasks that permit reflection and sharing of reflection with peers, thus facilitating deep and meaningful learning (Garrison & Akyol, 2015). Students' metacognitive learning, which entails knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition (Flavell, 1979) needs to be emphasised further. Additionally, students require more space to reflect on the inquiry process and findings, and importantly, to (re)consider their own beliefs and assumptions in the light of emerging understandings.

In summary, the findings presented here reflect a gulf between educational reforms and classroom realities, which continue to be largely teacher-centred with a focus on content coverage and examination success (Deng & Gopinathan, 2016). The findings foreground the potential role of students in inquiry-based learning as well as the need for more opportunities for students to engage in critical analysis and reflective thinking and to deepen their disciplinary understandings. Equipping students with discipline-based skills to facilitate knowledge construction (Kidman & Casinader, 2017) demands a conceptual shift from didactic, transmissive and results-oriented classroom practice to viewing all students as capable of learning through inquiry (Costes-Onishi et al., 2020). Drawing on the Core Research Programme findings, Kwek (2021) argues for a stronger focus on the epistemic stance of inquiry to better equip students with future-oriented competencies including "all of thinking, reflecting, judging, insight, feeling and imagination" (Jackson, 1998, p. 29, as cited in Johnston, 2002, p. 10). By providing a valuable empirical base of secondary Social Studies teachers' enactment of inquiry processes, this article paints a lucid picture of the opportunities and possible challenges of realising the curricular emphasis on inquiry-based learning in Singapore classrooms.

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do not necessarily represent the views of NIE.

Notes

1. The 'Core Research Programme' is a large-scale research study in Singapore, which aims to provide policymakers and researchers well-informed, timely and evidence-based baseline descriptions and evaluations on the state of pedagogical practices in schools, and a systemic description and measurement of curriculum and reform initiatives. The research programme comprises Core 1 (2004-2007), Core 2 (200-2014), and Core 3 (in progress) including the OER 25/15 KBK project from which the present data is drawn.

2. Based on the regulating body of the school and the degree of financial assistance received, primary and secondary schools in Singapore are categorised as Government, Government-aided, or Independent schools. The curriculum, study materials, examinations, fee structure etc. in Government schools are fully regulated by the Government. Government-aided schools have some degree of autonomy but function according to Government regulations. Comparatively, Independent schools have greater autonomy.

3. Based on their performance in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), students are enrolled for 4-5 years of Secondary education in the Express, Normal (Academic) or Normal (Technical) stream. This system of streaming based on academic ability is being phased out by 2024. From 2020, full subject-based banding has been implemented, which allows secondary students to study different subjects according to their strengths and interests.

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APPENDIX A

Four-stage Inquiry Cycle (MOE, 2016a) (Kwek et al., 2017)	
Coding Indicator	Description
Sparking Curiosity	
Ideation; Exchange of Ideas; Visualise Ideas	Invite or brainstorm ideas, opinions; build on, connect and explore ideas; interactive exchange of ideas in a whole class/group setting
Access Prior Knowledge	Access students' prior relevant knowledge to help scaffold or model ideas/concepts
Stimulus to Engage Interest	Activities or materials that trigger or activate students' readiness or eagerness to learn
Students ask Questions	Invite students to surface queries; students initiate questions to their teacher or peers
Gathering Data	
Data is Presented; Resources Provided	Teacher provides students with the information or materials to work with
Process information/data based on Criteria	Students work through the data or information based on domain-specific criteria such as reliability, relevance, validity etc.
Make Careful Observations	Examine the data in detail to extract relevant or key ideas
Data Generated by Teacher/Students from Sources	Classroom participants access the sources of information and produce additional data
Exercising Reasoning	
Data Analysis/Analyse Arguments	Question or critically examine the data; analyse arguments; detect errors in logic or reasoning
Deep Analysis/Critical Analysis	Question what is not obvious or explicit in the data; examine or discuss omitted or hidden perspectives
Text Analysis/Identify Techniques	Identify techniques used by authors/illustrators to influence readers (e.g. imagery, stance-taking, persuasion) in view of purpose, audience and context
Perspective Taking/Consider Multiple Perspectives	Consider multiple perspectives even beyond lesson contexts; debate about plural often, contradictory viewpoints on issue/s
Evaluation/Evaluate Alternatives/Usefulness	Assess the utility, reliability or applicability of source/s; consider other viable sources of information
Justify Explanations or Claims	Support statements with evidence; surface the rationale for the derived understandings
Synthesise or Summarise Ideas	Consolidate key ideas; propose resolution; present findings

Reflective Thinking	
Meta-learning: Reflect on Learning Process	Reflect on one's learning process including activities, organisational structures etc; invite reflection about the process, purpose or value of learning
Meta-Inquiry: Reflect on Findings, Inquiry	Reflect on the different stages of the inquiry process as well as the inquiry output and outcomes
Meta-self: Reflect on Own Beliefs/Assumptions	Reflect on one's own pre-existing beliefs or assumptions; consider personal 'truths' in the light of emerging understandings

APPENDIX B

Knowledge Focus (Kwek et al., 2017)	
Coding Indicator	Description
Factual Knowledge	Knowledge of facts, definitions, terms, details
Procedural Knowledge	Knowledge of procedures, algorithms, steps, skills; how to do something
Conceptual Knowledge	Knowledge of meaning of concepts/ideas, relationships between facts/concepts/ideas within a larger structure
Metacognitive Knowledge	Knowledge of cognition; knowing when or why to use strategies; learning to learn
Epistemic Knowledge	Knowledge of the nature of the discipline, disciplinary standards to establish knowledge

Improving Reading Comprehension of Social Studies Informational Text for Upper Primary Students with High Functioning Autism

Wang Yao Chang Melvin

Rosyth School (Singapore)

Abstract

One of the main barriers to teaching Social Studies to students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) pertains to their limited ability to read and comprehend written informational text. This study investigated the use of graphic organiser instruction to promote improved informational text comprehension for three upper primary students with High Functioning Autism (HFA). Student participants were introduced to the specific vocabulary terms in the graphic organiser in three stages: introduction of the vocabulary word and its definition; deductive teaching of concepts through the use of examples and non-examples; and student practice. Subsequently, all three students were instructed to read adapted passages on Singapore history and complete the modified graphic organisers. The effect of the intervention was then assessed within the context of a multiple-probe design across participants, using quizzes that measured performance through multiple-choice and open-ended test items. Results demonstrated that the intervention improved students' reading comprehension.

Introduction

Learning to read for understanding can

be challenging even for the neurotypical child. According to Singh et al. (2020), proficiency in reading is largely determined by five key skills: phonemic awareness (the sensitivity to the sound structure in oral language), phonics (the skill to correlate sounds with symbols to decode unknown words), fluency (the ability to decipher text quickly and with accuracy), vocabulary (the knowledge of word meanings), and reading comprehension (the ability to process text, understand its meaning, and fuse it with one's prior knowledge). Of these five key skills, reading comprehension is arguably the most challenging to master because an individual has to decipher sound-symbol relationships (i.e. phonics and phonemic awareness) with speed and accuracy (i.e. fluency), while making sense of the different word meanings (i.e. vocabulary) within a given context (Singh et al., 2020). Against this backdrop, even competent readers are challenged by the increased cognitive demands of reading comprehension, as they become exposed to different writing genres and as texts grow in difficulty (Randi, Newman & Grigorenko, 2010; Williamson, Carnahan & Jacobs, 2012).

This inherent complexity in learning to read for understanding is further magnified in students with ASD. ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised

by persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across different contexts, and it can come with or without accompanying intellectual and/or language impairment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Individuals on the autism spectrum exhibit a full range of abilities and those who possess an intelligence quotient in excess of 70 are described as “high functioning” (Kishore, 2012, p. 385). However, no matter where they fall on the spectrum, studies have found that children with ASD generally display average to above average intact word decoding accompanied by poor levels of reading comprehension, because they often struggle to move their attention from word-level reading to text comprehension (Dyson, 2015; O’Connor & Klein, 2004; Patti & Lupinetti, 1993; Randi, Newman & Grigorenko, 2010).

Deficits in reading comprehension are a cause for concern because the ability to independently access informational text to acquire knowledge is a critical aspect of content area instruction in the upper primary levels and beyond (Gajria, Jitendra, Sood, & Sacks, 2007). This is of particular relevance to Social Studies classes because students often read informational text sources, such as textbooks and articles, to acquire concepts that would be discussed, applied and assessed in a variety of ways (Bulgren, Deshler & Lenz, 2007; Gersten, Baker, Smith-Johnson, Dimino & Peterson, 2006). However, the tendency for Social Studies instruction to become a “textbook based curriculum” (Okolo, Englert, Bouck & Heutsche, 2007, p. 4) also means that students with ASD often experience pervasive difficulty understanding what is taught in class.

In Singapore, one in 150 children has autism, a rate slightly higher than the World Health Organisation’s global estimate of one in 160 children (Steering Committee on

the 3rd Enabling Masterplan, 2016). Given that global trends favour inclusive education, more and more students with ASD, especially those with non-impaired levels of cognitive functioning, are expected to attend mainstream schools in the foreseeable future (Poon et al., 2014). As such, it is of concern that mainstream educators in inclusive classrooms often struggle to provide effective intervention to address difficulties in reading comprehension for students with ASD (Chiang & Lin, 2007), a requisite skill that many educators assume their students possess. With reference to primary Social Studies education, it is crucial to close this competency gap to ensure that students with ASD are given the same opportunities as other students to develop into “informed, concerned and participative citizens” (MOE, 2012, p. 6).

Reading Comprehension Challenges for Students with ASD

Research into reading comprehension difficulties faced by students with ASD has led to the development of several explanatory frameworks, such as deficiencies in Executive Functioning, Weak Central Coherence and Theory of Mind. There is general consensus that deficits in Executive Functioning (EF) affects an individual’s ability to plan, organise or put in place processes that support self-monitoring and self-correction, thereby impeding their ability to integrate or make connections between information across paragraphs or experiences (Attwood, 2008; Carnahan & Williamson, 2010; Carnahan, Williamson & Christman, 2011). On the other hand, Weak Central Coherence (WCC) may contribute to reading comprehension difficulties as it is characterised by attention to minute details, often at the expense of recognising big ideas, thus impacting one’s understanding of the text in its totality (Happé & Frith,

2006; Quill, 2000). Lastly, Theory of Mind (ToM) is the ability to imagine and understand that different people have different thoughts and feelings, and that the actions taken by a person are often influenced by these individual thoughts and feelings (Firth & Firth, 2006). Specific effects of ToM on reading comprehension include difficulty in drawing inferences about the motives of characters and the actions they are likely to take based on their emotional states (Atkinson, Slade, Powell & Levy, 2017). While these explanatory frameworks are useful in helping us understand the unique difficulties that students with ASD experience with reading comprehension, it is important to note that not all of them struggle with the learning difficulties highlighted by theories of EF, WCC, or ToM highlight.

To compound matters, informational text sources may present additional reading comprehension challenges for students with ASD. Informational text generally deals with unfamiliar content and comes in a variety of text structures (e.g. compare-contrast, cause-effect and problem-solution), making it more challenging to read than narrative text which tends to have fewer and more consistent text structures (Carnahan, Williamson, Birri, Swoboda & Snyder, 2015; Williams, 2005). Furthermore, informational text can also be particularly challenging for struggling readers because it often contains a high density of ideas, low-frequency technical words that are uncommon in everyday language, and a tendency to include details irrelevant to the main ideas found in the passage (Lee & Spratley, 2010).

The Use of Graphic Organiser Instruction

Many studies conducted with students with learning disabilities (LD) suggest that the use of graphic organisers (e.g. story

maps, semantic maps and cognitive maps) improves students' text comprehension through the use of lines, arrows and spatial arrangement to create a meaningful framework, helping readers connect existing knowledge to new information (Darch & Eaves, 1986; Fisher & Schumaker, 1995; Wittrock, 1992). In a synthesis of research studies focusing on various informational text reading interventions on students with LD, the authors found that graphic organisers produced the greatest effects on their reading comprehension levels (Ciullo, Lo, Wanzek & Reed, 2014; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams & Baker, 2001). In a comprehensive review of the research literature focusing on the use of graphic organisers to enhance comprehension of informational text by students with LD, Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek and Wei (2004) discovered that semantic organisers and cognitive maps provided the greatest support.

While the above studies clearly support the effect of graphic organisers on students with mild learning disabilities, there is good reason to believe that even students with severe learning disabilities can benefit from graphic organiser instruction. There is plenty of evidence to support the premise that students with ASD display relative strengths in visual processing (Allen, Lincoln & Kaufman, 1991; Dawson, 1996; Rumsey & Hamburger, 1990), which would most likely translate into enhanced learning via graphic organiser instruction. Moreover, since students with ASD often display deficits in working memory (Williams, Goldstein & Minshew, 2006), graphic organisers can help reduce the cognitive load on the brain by helping students recall what they read and provide them with a way to organise the information (Senokossoff, 2015), thereby freeing up space in the working memory to continue to learn. This notion is further supported by other studies

where graphic organisers were successfully used to improve the reading comprehension of students with ASD across other subject disciplines (Bethune & Wood, 2013; Bishop, Sawyer, Alber-Morgan & Boggs, 2015; Carnahan, et al., 2015; Connelly, 2016; El Zein, et al., 2016; Knight, Spooner, Browder, Smith & Wood, 2013; Williamson, Carnahan, Birri & Swoboda, 2015).

Although research has demonstrated that graphic organisers can support reading comprehension and benefit students with ASD in other learning contexts, there have

been no published experimental research studies investigating the effects of graphic organiser instruction on the reading comprehension of Social Studies informational texts in primary school students with HFA. This study was therefore designed around the following research questions: What are the effects of graphic organiser instruction on the comprehension of adapted Social Studies informational texts among upper primary school students with HFA? What are participants’ perceptions of the efficacy of using graphic organisers to acquire Social Studies content?

Method

Participants and Setting

TABLE 1. Participant Demographics.

Participant	Age	Grade	Gender	Race	Classification
“Megan”	10	Primary 4	Female	Chinese	HFA
“Keane”	11	Primary 5	Male	Chinese	HFA
“Calvin”	11	Primary 5	Male	Chinese	HFA

The participants in this study were three upper primary students with HFA, attending a mainstream co-ed primary school in Singapore. The student participants comprised one female and two males, between 10 and 11 years of age. Table 1 shows the demographic information for each participant. These student participants were selected for the intervention as they displayed deficits in the different levels of reading comprehension (e.g. content recall and accuracy, inferential-making and evaluative thinking) based on teachers’ evaluation of their work samples. Written parental consent and student assent were obtained prior to the start of this study.

All participants in this study were

confirmed by their teachers to (a) possess average to above average word reading accuracy and fluency to ensure that they could sufficiently participate in informational text reading, and (b) experience persistent challenges in comprehending written text sources. Given the non-examinable nature of Social Studies in mainstream primary school education, none of the participants received instruction on taking a Social Studies quiz prior to this study.

This study focused on the content found in the Primary Four and Five National Social Studies curriculum, which covers Singapore’s history from the pre-colonial period to the years after independence. More specifically, the nineteen

informational texts and quizzes used in this study each covered a different key event in Singapore's history linked to different units in the Primary Four and Five National Social Studies curriculum. For instance, one informational passage covered the fall of Singapore to the Japanese (refer to Appendix A). Prior to this study, students were not explicitly taught how to draw inferences when reading Social Studies passages.

All baseline, intervention and post-intervention sessions were conducted in an air-conditioned resource room generally used by teachers to conduct small group meetings. The implementation of the baseline and treatment phases was carried out in a one-on-one setting with Megan (pseudonym). At the request of parents, Keane and Calvin (both pseudonyms) were each accompanied by two school-recognised learning buddies as co-participants in the experiment. To ensure procedural uniformity across all three student participants, the implementation of the baseline and treatment phases for both boys was similarly conducted on a one-on-one basis. As for their learning buddies, they received no specialised help or attention from the teacher interventionist other than the basic instructions given at the start of each quiz.

Due to constraints in timetable scheduling, each student participant was assigned a different teacher interventionist. However, the interventionist assigned to each student remained the same throughout the entire study. Each teacher interventionist met his/her assigned student participant three times a week to conduct a one-hour session on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Measures

The 8-item Social Studies quizzes used

in the baseline and intervention phases were worth 8 points (score range = 0–8), with a 1-point value assigned for each item. Due to the lack of standardised Social Studies content measures, this study relied primarily on researcher-developed measures similar to other studies investigating the effects of graphic organiser instruction on informational text comprehension (Dexter & Hughes, 2011).

The quizzes were designed to measure the extent to which student participants retained and retrieved the historical content presented to them during each baseline and intervention session. Five questions on the quiz were multiple-choice questions which measured factual recall and literal understanding of the text. Specifically, student participants were required to use textual evidence to identify main ideas, locate specific details and summarise content. These questions correlated with the Primary National Social Studies curriculum's goal of equipping students with the skill to identify and access information for "accuracy" and "relevance" (MOE, 2012, p. 47). The next two questions on the quiz were free response items, which required students to analyse a short extract from the passage before answering inferential questions such as, "Why do you think racially-mixed leaders were sent to calm the people during the 1964 racial riots?" and "How did people in the past see National Service?" These questions were associated with the Primary National Social Studies syllabus' goal of developing "well-substantiated conclusions" through "inference" (MOE, 2012, p. 47), requiring students to use textual evidence to analyse a historical event (i.e. problem and solution, cause and effect) and explain the relationship between ideas. The final item on the quiz was aligned with the Primary National Social Studies curriculum's strand of developing "well-constructed explanations" through "evaluation" (MOE,

2012, p. 47). For instance, one question asked, "Using information from the passage, explain why you agree or disagree with the statement: The British should not have surrendered Singapore to the Japanese."

As a control for potential uneven difficulty across test measures, an experienced primary Social Studies Gifted Education Programme (GEP) teacher who was not associated with the study reviewed each quiz. Feedback from the GEP teacher confirmed that each quiz measured content relevant to the reading passage, and questions were organised in the same order (literal, inferential, evaluative) across measures. Most importantly, there were no issues pertaining to unequal difficulty across all the quizzes used in this study.

Procedural Fidelity

To ensure some degree of procedural fidelity, all three teacher interventionists were given the same instructional script consisting of the procedural steps. However, there was no independent observer measuring procedural integrity in any of the sessions during the baseline, intervention or post-intervention phases of the experimental study due to timetabling constraints.

Social Validity

Following the study, a one-hour semi-structured qualitative group interview was conducted with all three student participants. The questions asked during the interview focused on collecting information about the degree of satisfaction with and perceived efficacy of intervention. Students were also asked to share any insights on the graphic organiser's ease of use and possible areas of improvement for future investigations.

Experimental Design

The multiple-probe experimental design was used to evaluate the effects of the graphic organiser instruction on participants' comprehension of informational text. Baseline lessons were designed to replicate typical Social Studies reading in class. Once the results of the four baseline quizzes stabilised for each student, treatment was initiated with the lowest performing participant. The next lowest performing student received the treatment once the previous student undergoing treatment displayed a positive upward trend across at least three quizzes during the intervention phase with no intersecting data point between baseline and treatment (Byun, Hitchcock & Ferron, 2017). This process continued until all student participants received the treatment.

At this juncture, it is important to point out that the multiple-probe design inherently controls for threats to internal validity (e.g. history, maturation and instrumentation). The introduction of the treatment intervention at different points in time ensured that specific changes were not caused by extraneous events, while the relatively short length of the study reduced the likelihood for maturation to have an effect. The threat of instrumentation was also controlled by ensuring that the types of questions and level of difficulty were equivalent across the different quizzes. Furthermore, given that all lessons and quizzes were implemented in an identical sequence across student participants, any unequal difficulty present in the quizzes would most likely be reflected in the results of all three student participants.

Procedures

Baseline. Lessons carried out with students during the baseline phase were conceptualised and designed such that they replicated typical classroom instruction involving Social Studies informational text.

The baseline procedures for each session conducted with student participants were as follows:

1. The teacher went through the definition of each key vocabulary term found in the text, before instructing the student to look through the passage once again to identify any other words that he/she does not understand. Following which, the teacher provided a synopsis to the informational text such as, “In today’s lesson, we will read about the first air raid on Singapore. We will learn about the reasons why locals were unprepared, what happened after the air raid and how prepared Singapore is today.”
2. Next, the student and teacher orally read the informational text. The student and teacher alternated reading responsibilities for each paragraph in the given text source. Corrective feedback on word reading errors was provided whenever necessary.
3. The 8-item quiz was administered.

Graphic organiser training. Prior to the treatment intervention, a one-hour graphic organiser training session was carried out individually with each student participant to teach the key vocabulary words found on the graphic organiser (refer to Figure 1 below). The graphic organiser and vocabulary words used in this study were adapted from

two existing research studies exploring the effect of graphic organiser instruction on Social Studies expository text comprehension on middle school students with severe ASD (Zakas, Browder, Ahlgrim-Delzell & Heafner, 2013) and upper primary students with LD (Ciullo, Falcomata & Vaughn, 2014). The vocabulary words selected for this study were *event*, *people*, *location*, *time*, *detail* and *inference*. The graphic organiser training session featured the following steps:

1. The teacher interventionist used a set of PowerPoint slides to systematically instruct the general definition of each key vocabulary term (refer to Figure 2 below).
2. Subsequently, the teacher used the deductive teaching approach to introduce and reinforce understanding of key vocabulary terms found in the graphic organiser using examples and non-examples (refer to Figure 3 below).
3. Standardised corrective procedures were also put in place. For instance, the student would receive immediate praise after every correct response. If the student answered incorrectly, the teacher would follow up by saying something like, “Give the definition of event. Is this a picture of an event?” Once the student responded with the correct answer, the teacher praised the student.

Figure 1: Graphic organiser template used in study

EVENT (e.g. What is this passage talking about?) The first Air raid on Singapore		
PEOPLE (e.g. Who are involved?) Sir Shenton Thomas, the people of Singapore, the officer in charge of the city lights.	LOCATION (e.g. Where did this take place?) Singapore: Chinatown, Raffles Place, Keppel Harbour	TIME (e.g. When did this take place?) 4am, 8 December 1941.
DETAIL (1) (e.g. What can you describe about the event?) Sir Shenton Thomas ordered the island's first complete blackout exercise.	DETAIL (2) (e.g. What can you describe about the event?) The air raid siren was not sounded on time because Sir Shenton Thomas did not allow people to turn it on without his permission and the lights of the city remained switched on.	DETAIL (3) (e.g. What can you describe about the event?) Singapore is now more prepared for war. Students are now taught the six Total Defence pillars in case of another war. And all HDBs now have bomb shelters to act as a panic room.
INFERENCE (e.g. Highlight anything you find interesting in the passage. Circle the clues. Label it.) a) b)	What do you think it means? a) The Japanese cannot see the island so they cannot find a place to bomb and if the lights were switched off, it can act as a sign to the Japanese that Singapore had been abandoned. b) The officer is an irresponsible person.	
HOW THIS CHANGED SINGAPORE AND PEOPLE'S LIVES Singapore is more prepared for war as the people are taught the six Total Defence pillars so people are aware of what to do.		

Figure 2: Definition of key vocabulary

Event

An event is **something important** that had taken place in the **past**.

Figure 3: Examples and non-examples

Event



British surrender to the Japanese

Treatment intervention. The following procedures were used for each session of the treatment intervention phase:

1. The reading procedures used in the treatment phase were identical to baseline procedures.
2. After reading the informational text, the teacher instructed the student to complete the graphic organiser. Other than filling in the *inference* section on the graphic organiser, the student completed the other sections independently with no help from the teacher. Only one error correction question was provided for each wrong inference written on the graphic organiser. For instance, when the student identified the extract (“Although it started to rain after 10.30am, the military units participating in Singapore’s first National Day Parade continued to march on.”) and wrongly inferred, “The men were tired”, the teacher immediately followed up by asking, “Why would the men continue to march in the rain if they were tired?” This element of the study was influenced by a strategy introduced in another research study on teaching children with ASD to answer inferential questions (Hundert & van Delft, 2009).
3. Lastly, an 8-item quiz was administered.

Results

The data in Figure 4 reflects the results for all three student participants aggregated across baseline and treatment phases as measured by a pre/post-test. For greater clarity, the data contained in the graph above has been converted to percentages in the following paragraphs.

Megan was the first student to receive treatment due to her consistent low scores. She correctly answered between two and three questions (range = 25% – 37.5%) for each baseline quiz, with an average comprehension level of 31.6%. Once treatment was administered, there was a significant change in her results, with Megan correctly answering between six and eight questions (range = 75% – 100%) and attaining an average comprehension level of 87.5%. An estimated 177% improvement in mean quiz scores was observed from baseline to treatment with Megan.

Keane was the second student to enter intervention. He correctly answered between three and four questions (range = 37.5% – 50%), with an average comprehension level of 46.9%. Similar to Megan, an immediate improvement in results was observed once he received treatment. Keane correctly answered between seven and eight questions (range = 87.5% – 100%), attaining an average comprehension level of 96.3%. An estimated 105% increase in mean quiz scores was observed from baseline to treatment with Keane.

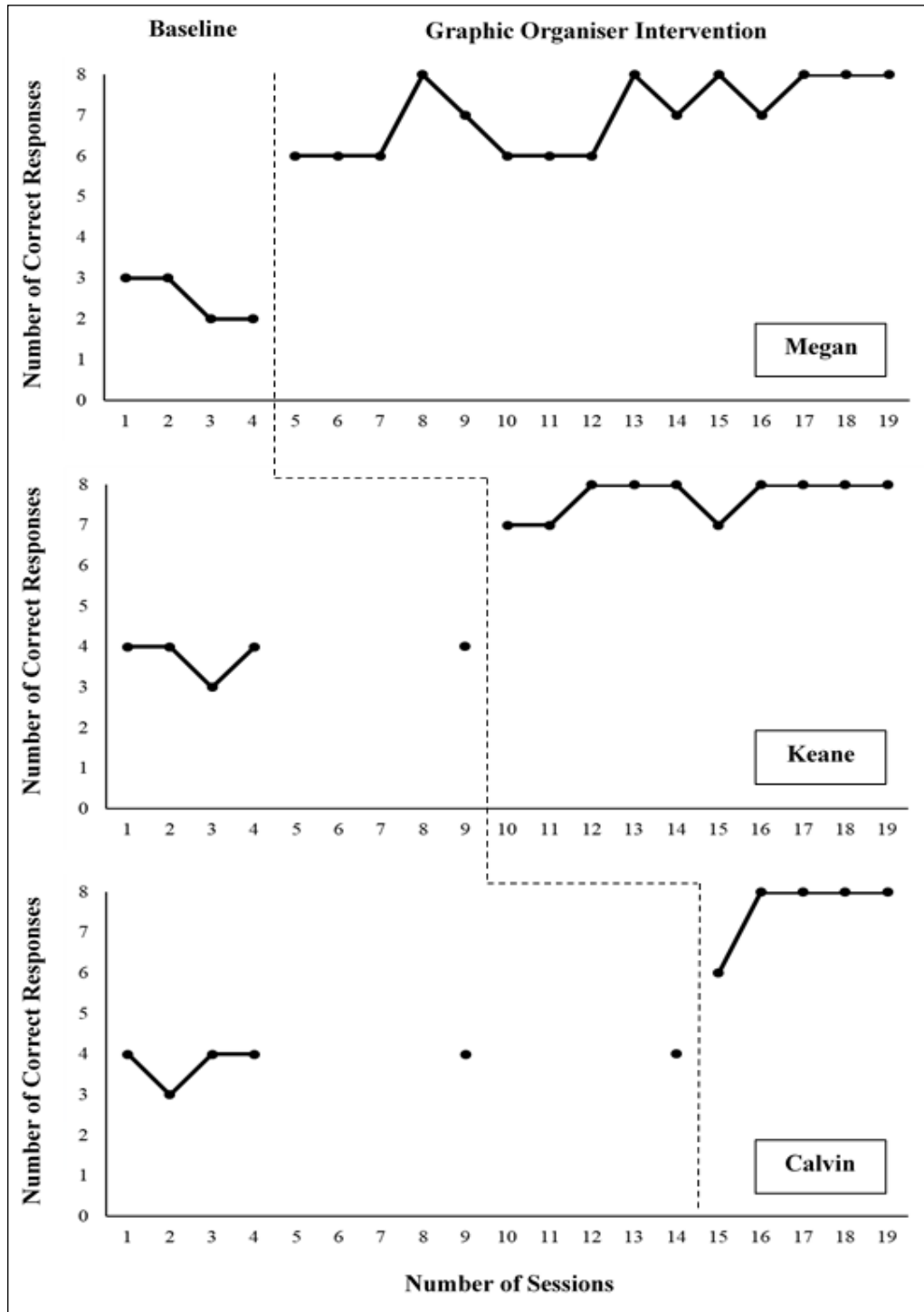
The third student to enter intervention was Calvin. Identical to Keane, he correctly answered between three and four questions (range = 37.5% – 50%), with an average comprehension level of 46.9%. Once Calvin received the intervention, there was a similar, abrupt spike in his quiz results. Calvin correctly answered between six and eight questions (range = 75% – 100%), achieving an average comprehension level of 95%. Calvin achieved an estimated 103% improvement in mean quiz scores from baseline to intervention.

Overall, all participants in this study posted consistently higher scores during the treatment phase as opposed to during the baseline. Positive changes only occurred

after the graphic organiser intervention was introduced. Student participants in this study also attained percentage of non-overlapping data (PND) of 100%,

indicating that the intervention was effective and had positive effects on their reading comprehension levels

Figure 4: Informational text comprehension scores



Social Validity

The researcher subsequently carried out a one-hour semi-structured interview after

the experiment to assess social validity from the student participants' perspective. Students unanimously described the graphic organiser tool as "super good" and as containing "useful guiding questions". They shared that the intervention tool helped them "remember things" and "organise information so that it is easier to understand". This is aligned with research which suggests that high-functioning children with ASD benefit from graphic organiser instruction, because they struggle with recalling what they read and organising their thoughts into a coherent whole (Senokossoff, 2015; Stringfield, Luscre & Gast, 2011).

When they were asked to consider how the graphic organiser could be improved, Keane shared that the informational text passage tended to contain "a lot of information", and he was "often confused" about which detail was important enough to be written down on the graphic organiser. The other two student participants also nodded in agreement. To address this concern, future research should include questions (e.g. Why did this event happen? What happened during the event? How did the event end?) in each of the three *detail* boxes to help students sequentially and systematically work through a passage about a historical event. Research has found that students with HFA are able to improve their reading comprehension when given cognitive scaffolds in the form of questions (Senokossoff, 2015).

Discussion

This study supports existing research on using graphic organisers to teach Social Studies content to middle school students with ASD (e.g. Zakas et al., 2013), and extends those findings to include primary school students with HFA. The empirical data collected in this study also adds to the limited literature on using visual supports to

improve reading comprehension of students with HFA. More specifically, the results of this study clearly demonstrate evidence of a functional relationship between graphic organiser treatment and improved performance. After implementing the graphic organiser intervention, all three participants immediately displayed improvement across the three types of questions (literal, inferential, evaluative), leading to a sharp increase in test scores between baseline and post-intervention.

Many children with ASD, including those who are high-functioning, display preference and strengths in the ability to attend to visual stimuli (Mesibov & Shea, 2010), have difficulties with working memory and information processing (Verta, Geurts, Roeyers, Oosterlaan & Sergeant, 2006) and tend to benefit from concrete visual supports. Capitalising on their preferred learning modality, this study used graphic organiser instruction to provide a framed outline of the basic elements of an informational text on events. This framed outline most likely eliminated the need for students to hold each element in working memory while trying to figure out how they are connected to one another as they are responding to the questions in the quiz. The usefulness of the graphic organiser is also further affirmed as all three student participants frequently referred back to the graphic organiser during the experiment.

A study by Jahr (2001) found that students with ASD were able to provide appropriate answers to novel questions after they were introduced to "wh-" questions (i.e. who, what, when, where and why). Similarly, this study inserted generic "wh-" questions in the graphic organiser template to provide additional cognitive scaffolds to help student participants organise their understandings and recall important information from the text.

Students' poor performance in the inferential and evaluative type questions (refer to Figure 5 below) contributed to their low baseline scores. However, it is important to note that their subsequent improved performance in the last three questions of each quiz in the intervention phase (refer to Figure 6 below) was most

Figure 5: Baseline quiz answers

7. Study the extract below and answer the question that follows. [1m]

"For officer cadets, physical training would begin at 7.30am and end at 1am."

What does the above tell you about the "physical training" in National Service?

Officer Cadets will begin physical training at 7.30am to 1am

8. State in the box below whether you agree or disagree with the statement, [1m] then give one reason why you think so.

"Today, National Service is seen as something that all men in Singapore must go through."

Agree / Disagree	Reason based on the passage
Agree	It is said that today all men must go for National Service.

Limitations

Notwithstanding the promising results, there are several limitations to this study. First, it lacks generalisability. This study focused on students with HFA. As such, findings may not be applicable to those who have a different level of the condition. There were also only three students involved in this study; hence, findings should not be assumed to apply to other students. For results to be generalisable, a functional relationship has to be established across five single-case design studies that involve at least twenty participants, and are led by at least three separate teams of researchers (Maggin, Cook & Cook, 2018). Systematic replication of the study

likely attributable to the graphic organiser intervention. That is because Megan only received six prompts throughout the whole intervention phase to help her correctly fill in the *inference* section of the graphic organiser, while Keane and Calvin did not require any.

Figure 6: Post-intervention quiz answers

7. Study the extract below and answer the question that follows. [1m]

"The city lights also remained switched on during the air raid. The officer in-charge of the city lights had gone to the cinema and taken the keys with him."

What does the above tell you about the "officer in-charge"?

The officer in-charge was an irresponsible man.

8. Study the statement below and answer the question that follows. [1m]

"Singapore is more prepared for war."

Agree / Disagree	Reason based on the passage
Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The people of Singapore have learnt the Total Defence Pillars so they are aware of what to do in case of war. There are bombshelters in every HDB.

involving more teams of researchers and larger groups of students with HFA is needed for future research.

Second, the intervention procedures could have been implemented with a greater level of treatment integrity. A single teacher interventionist should have implemented the baseline and treatment phases for all three student participants throughout the entire study. An independent observer should also have been present to measure the integrity with which the experimental procedure was administered to ensure that accurate conclusions, involving the functional relationship between dependent and independent variables, can be made.

Third, it is difficult to conclusively determine which component of the intervention procedure was effective at improving student participants' performance. Was it the availability of the graphic organiser? Was it the provision of error correction prompts? Or was it the combined effects of both of these? Future research could focus on separately evaluating the effects of each of the components mentioned above.

Conclusion

Many children with ASD display a unique reading profile characterised by an average or above ability to decode at the word level, but face difficulty comprehending connected text. This deficit in reading comprehension is typically underpinned by delayed language development, social skill impairments and poor working memory.

Although there is no demonstration that student participants were able to apply their learning to circumstances that they are likely to encounter in natural learning environments, results nonetheless suggest that some students with HFA may be able to benefit from graphic organiser instruction to help them better cope with the demands of reading Social Studies informational text sources. Over time, teachers should consider using a fading procedure with the graphic organiser tool to encourage students to generalise the planning skills to situations in which a graphic organiser is not available. All in all, general education teachers can be encouraged that as long as quality instruction is provided, even students with ASD can be successfully assimilated into mainstream Social Studies classrooms.

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Appendix A: British Surrender of Singapore Informational Text

British Surrender of Singapore in 1942

After the fall of Bukit Chandu on 14 February 1942, the Japanese attacked Alexandra Military Hospital. They killed over 320 staff and patients. To make matters worse, the Japanese continued their attacks on the British throughout the night.

By the morning of 15 February 1942, the situation in Singapore had become difficult for the British. There was only three days' worth of food. The main reservoirs were all in the hands of the Japanese. There were also many soldiers who were dead or injured from enemy bombing. This led General Percival to hold a meeting at 9.30 a.m. at Fort Canning with his senior commanders. He suggested two options. The British can either try attack the Bukit Timah region to take back the reservoirs and food supplies, or surrender to the Japanese. After a fierce discussion, everyone present agreed that it was not possible to beat the Japanese. They felt it was better to surrender.

A group of people was selected to go to the Japanese headquarters. It consisted of a senior staff officer, the colonial secretary and an interpreter. They set off towards the Japanese carrying the British flag and a white flag to discuss the terms of the surrender. However, they returned with orders that Percival himself and his staff officers had to go to the Ford Motor Factory, where General Yamashita would lay down the terms of surrender. A further requirement was that the Japanese flag had to be displayed on the tallest building in Singapore, the Cathay Building.

Percival officially surrendered to the Japanese shortly after 5.15 pm on 15 February 1942. The surrender of the British started a period of great suffering for the people of Singapore. Till today, some believe that the British should not have surrendered Singapore to the Japanese.

Passage adapted from:

Ho, S. (2013, July 19). *Battle of Singapore*. SingaporeInfopedia.

https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2013-07-19_113523.html

Multicultural Education: An Analysis of the 2020 Primary Social Studies Curriculum

Adele Seah Pei Jia

National Institute of Education (Singapore)

Abstract

Multicultural Education (ME) teaches learners to overcome differences in areas like culture, ethnicity, and social class. By equipping learners with the cultural knowledge, skills and dispositions to embrace diversity, ME enables individuals to navigate an increasingly complex world. Given the limited local research on ME, this paper examines how elements of ME have been incorporated into the 2020 Primary Social Studies (PSS) curriculum in Singapore. The study revealed that the PSS curriculum comprises a wide variety of multicultural elements. At lower primary, these elements focus on building personal and cultural knowledge. In contrast, at upper primary, such elements are introduced as mainstream academic knowledge. The study further found that the PSS curriculum adopts a contributions and additive approach to implementing ME. However, Singapore's unique ideology of multiracialism also influences the PSS curriculum, placing PSS in tension with social action and transformative approaches to ME. The implications of these findings on teaching and learning are discussed.

Introduction

The Promise of Multicultural Education in Singapore

Multicultural Education (ME) is premised on the belief that all students

should have an equal opportunity to learn in school (Banks, 2019). ME aims to facilitate understanding between diverse groups by restructuring school curricula to enable students to “acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to function in an ethnically and racially diverse nation and world” (Banks, 2019, p. 11).

Given Singapore's status as a multi-ethnic nation, ME has the potential to nurture citizens who interact skillfully with one another when encountering sensitive or controversial topics. Issues of diversity, such as those relating to race, have been a topic of contention in Singapore recently, as seen from discussions about the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others) system (Chua, 2021), the concept of Chinese privilege (Yuen, 2021), and the continued existence of race-based government policies (Lai, 2021a).

Furthermore, Institute of Policy Studies surveys on race, religion, and language have noted the existence of intergroup fault lines (Mathews & Chiang, 2015). These fault lines predate Singapore's independence, with the experience of the 1950 Maria Hertogh riots, the 1964 communal riots and the 1969 race riots suggesting that “race can be contributory tinder for public disorder” (Vasu & Ahuja, 2018, p. 31). While race-related unrest subsided after independence, race and racism remain live issues in Singapore society. A 2016 study revealed that almost

half of the Singaporeans surveyed thought of others as racist (Mathews & Pereira, 2020). More recently, in June 2021, a racist outburst by a polytechnic lecturer against an interracial couple demonstrated the risk of latent tensions spilling over into disruptions to the public peace (Lai, 2021b). Racial differences are just one of many points of contention in Singapore society: in January 2021, for instance, LGBTQ activists staged a public demonstration against transphobia in schools outside the Ministry of Education (MOE) Headquarters building, illustrating the rise of sexual orientation and gender identity as terrains of social debate (Ang, 2021).

To help students navigate intergroup differences, Manning, Baruth and Lee have espoused two goals for ME (2017, p. 5):

- “Teach learners to recognize, accept, and appreciate differences in culture, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, religion, special needs, and gender.”
- “Instil in learners...a sense of responsibility and a commitment to work toward the democratic ideals of justice, equality, and democracy.”

Though MOE does not adopt an explicit ME framework, its position towards ME can be gleaned from its Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes. The framework consists of core values to “shape the beliefs, attitudes and actions of a person” (MOE, 2021a), one of which includes “harmony”, which is exhibited when students “promote social cohesion and appreciate the unity and diversity of a multicultural society” (MOE, 2021a). This is similar to the goals of ME espoused by Manning *et al.*

While elements of ME are found in current initiatives in Singapore schools,

such as National Education (NE) and Character and Citizenship Education (CCE), ME represents a conceptual frame for integrating disparate programmes, by ensuring students’ everyday learning experiences reflect the diverse reality of Singapore society. Furthermore, ME moves beyond promoting cross-cultural understanding by also empowering students to work for social justice and transformation. As a construct, ME is both descriptive and prescriptive: it presents a framework for analysing existing curricula, but also proposes interventions for practice and programme design.

Research Study and Objectives

This study leverages ME as an interpretive framework for unpacking MOE’s 2020 Primary Social Studies (PSS) curriculum, while drawing on ME research to propose further refinements to PSS. It aims to answer two questions:

1. What are the multicultural elements incorporated into the MOE’s PSS curriculum?
2. How are these multicultural elements to be taught as suggested in MOE’s teaching and learning packages for PSS?

This study bears a twofold relevance. First, every student undergoes six years of compulsory education, including PSS. Despite this, local research on SS education generally focuses on the Secondary curriculum. Second, literature on ME is often focused on the American experience. As possibly the first study to examine the revised PSS curriculum from the perspective of ME, this paper addresses both these gaps.

To this end, this study involved a qualitative analysis of the PSS curriculum by examining the 2020 PSS syllabus prescribed by MOE. This included categorizing and thematizing the syllabus

according to a synthesized framework (Figure 1) in a chronological order (lower primary to upper primary), to uncover emerging patterns in relation to ME content and ME pedagogical approaches.

Apart from analyzing the syllabus document, the PSS curriculum was also analysed with reference to MOE resources such as the PSS Teaching and Learning Guide (TLG), textbooks and activity books for Primary 1 to 5. Primary 6 materials were not analysed as they will only be released in 2022.

A Synthesized ME Framework for Analysis

Based on the literature on ME, I propose a conceptual framework consisting of two dimensions of ME (ME1 and ME2), which are of particular relevance to teaching ME to young children. Figure 1 shows how ME content can be integrated with pedagogical approaches that scaffold the teaching of ME to suit the needs of young learners. In ME1, content and knowledge construction draws on Banks’s Five Knowledge Types (personal and cultural, popular, mainstream academic, transformative academic, and pedagogical knowledge) as the basis for

ME content. In ME2, pedagogical approaches are drawn from Gay (2002), Banks (2019) and Wardle (2009). Each approach helps teachers to decide on how to organize ME content for their lessons, depending on student and teacher needs.

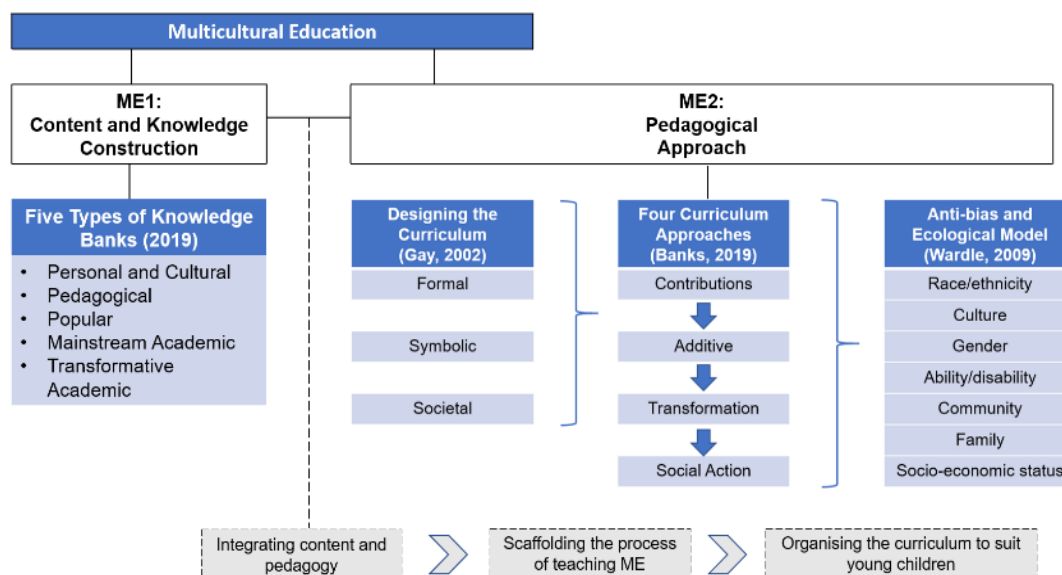
Findings and Discussion

ME1: Content and Knowledge Construction

Based on the analysis of the PSS syllabus document and resources, students are exposed to a wide variety of multicultural elements which promote the teaching of ME for young children from P1 to P5.

In Primary 1 and 2, multicultural elements are strongly present. Primary 1 students are first introduced the concept of personal identity, followed by social identity (i.e. how their identity is shaped by family, friends, and society). For example, the textbook chapters “Please Call Me Priya” and “Fauzy’s Hidden Talent” enable students to learn the differences between themselves and others, in terms of aspects of their personal identity (e.g. names, physical features, ethnicity, interests). The

Figure 1: Overview of ME for young children



syllabus extends their learning in Primary 2 to a wider social circle, when students learn to recognise the diversity of Singapore society in terms of different customs and traditions. In the chapter “New Boy on the Block”, students learn about the Chinese New Year festival and its associated practices through the perspective of a Eurasian boy character. Similarly, in the chapter “Experiences that Unite”, students learn about traditional games and snacks, with a focus on stereotypical foods that the different local communities eat. In the activity book, students then complete the worksheet “Celebrating Festivals”, where they match the festivals to a representative image, to help them recognise iconic symbols from such festivals. Such activities shape students’ understanding of customs in Singapore, adding to their cultural knowledge of different groups in the community. These multicultural elements in turn constitute personal and cultural knowledge, which refers to the explanations and interpretations students glean from their own experiences with their family and community (Banks, 2019). Emphasising personal and cultural knowledge at an earlier stage provides scaffolding for students to acquire other forms of knowledge (e.g. mainstream academic knowledge) in the upper primary levels.

In contrast to the lower primary levels, multicultural elements are conspicuously absent in Primary 3, where the learning focus is on the environment of Singapore. Students learn about places in Singapore, the conservation of resources to protect the environment, and responses to the country’s challenges in land, housing and transport. These chapters hone in on individual and collective efforts to enact positive change in the community. As a result, there may be missed opportunities in this segment of the PSS curriculum to account for multicultural elements, as they relate to the natural and built environments. For example, multicultural content relating

to race/ethnicity and inequality in socio-economic status can be explored in the chapter of “From Kampung to Flat”, where students learn about public housing and the communities they live in.

At upper primary, students revisit multicultural concepts like community and culture in greater depth. However, such content is introduced as mainstream academic knowledge, which refers to the theories and explanations of traditional and established knowledge which are internalised and accepted by most university researchers (Banks, 2019). At Primary 4 and 5, students are introduced to historical content, in chapters such as “Lives and Contributions of Settlers in Singapore (1819 to 1930s)” and “The fall of Singapore and the Japanese Occupation”. Students learn about contributions of early settlers (e.g. Tan Tock Seng, Syed Omar bin Ali Aljunied, Veerasamy Naidu) through the streets, buildings and places named after them. They gain cultural awareness of how places in Singapore have come about, and how racially diverse individuals contributed meaningfully to the country’s development. Various individuals (e.g. Lieutenant Adnan bin Saidi, Lim Bo Seng, Elizabeth Choy and Mamoru Shinozaki) and their contributions during the Japanese Occupation are also surfaced, enabling students to develop an awareness of how Singapore managed the challenges of war. In echoing the orthodox historiography of Singapore’s development, multicultural content evolves from personal and cultural knowledge to mainstream academic knowledge. Nevertheless, the PSS curriculum stops short of imparting transformative academic knowledge, which consists of concepts and explanations that challenge mainstream academic knowledge and thus enriches historical and literary conventions (Banks, 2019, p. 80).

Ultimately, multicultural content in the PSS curriculum evinces a traditional

approach to citizenship education (Banks, 2006). This finding is unsurprising in the light of existing research on SS and multiculturalism. In the Singapore context, SS is used by the state to “promote a particular vision of the nation-state, identity-building, and the creation of a sense of historical consciousness” (Ho, 2016, p. 92). For PSS teachers, this raises a profound question: Should multicultural content be used to promote the values underpinning of ME, or should they be used to promote a state-sanctioned version of harmony and multiculturalism? Given the shifting social consensus around such issues, teachers will have to exercise their agency to mediate the tension between these imperatives.

ME2: Pedagogical Approach

In terms of pedagogical approach, the PSS curriculum predominantly adopts a contributions and additive approach. The contributions approach is reflected in the type of content that students learn, such as activities that celebrate holidays, heroes, and special celebrations (Banks, 2019). At Lower Primary, students learn about commemorative occasions like Racial Harmony Day, as well as cultural festivals like Chinese New Year and Christmas. In P4, the chapters “The fall of Singapore and the Japanese Occupation” and “Journey towards Independence” allow students to learn about the various community and political leaders who have contributed to Singapore’s development. By contrast, the additive approach is introduced in P4 and P5, with ethnic content integrated into an overarching national narrative which traces Singapore’s trajectory from past to present.

This approach does not align with “purist” approaches like Banks’s, which call for a social action approach toward ME. This might be partly attributed to the inquiry-based approach taken by the PSS curriculum, which stands in tension with a social action approach. Whereas the social

action approach mainly focuses on students making informed decisions and addressing social issues of their choice (Banks, 2019), an inquiry-based approach focuses on students learning to ask questions, seek answers, and drawing conclusions using reliable evidence. Through this, “inquiry facilitates the students’ own reflective thinking and understanding” (MOE, 2020, p. 52). Instead of a strict focus on promoting social justice, an inquiry-driven approach enables students to develop a deeper understanding of their own personal beliefs and assumptions. “Process-oriented” and “discussion-oriented” (MOE, 2020, p. 52) learning thus diverges from an outcome-focused social action approach.

Nevertheless, an inquiry-based approach can still support the goals of ME, as the PSS curriculum aims to nurture students into becoming critical thinkers capable of making responsible decisions in society (MOE, 2020, p. 51). This is not incompatible with the goal of “(instilling) in learners...a sense of responsibility and a commitment to work toward the democratic ideals of justice, equality, and democracy” (Manning et al., 2017, p. 5).

A reliance on a contributions and additive approach might also be explained by the developmental needs of young children. As Banks’s research on ME mainly focused on young adults, his espousal of a social action approach may not be as appropriate for young children, who may not entirely comprehend the complexities of issues relating to inequality, prejudice, lack of representation, and disenfranchisement (Wardle, 2009). Strictly classifying the PSS curriculum into Banks’s four content integration approaches risks neglecting the need for a process-oriented curriculum for young children, who are still in the midst of understanding their own thinking and beliefs about the world.

Perhaps more significantly, Singapore’s

brand of multiracialism—organized around the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others) model—heavily influences the conception of race and ethnicity in PSS. From a ME perspective, such a narrow ascription of culture to race is problematic because it does not take into consideration intra-racial differences. An earlier study on teachers' perspectives towards ME and diversity in Singapore by Alviar-Martin and Ho (2011) found that narrow understandings of diversity fail to capture individuals' unique identities, which may in turn limit transformative ME. They note that the "CMIO model hinders multicultural education by subsuming citizens into four racial groups, disregarding nuances of identity based on linguistic, religious, or cultural affiliations, and overlooking the unique identities and experiences students bring to schools" (p. 133).

The application of the CMIO model onto multicultural elements in the PSS syllabus is apparent as early on as in Primary 1, where students are implicitly introduced to the four main races via the Big Books, which are reading materials used to explore concepts through engaging storylines accompanied by visuals. Each Big Book in P1 corresponds to a main character who is racialised as either Chinese, Malay, Indian or Eurasian. The stories revolve around the main characters: Priya (Indian), Fauzy (Malay), Jamie (Chinese), Edward (Eurasian), Jessie and John (Chinese). As such, students are implicitly introduced to multiracialism in terms of the four main races of Singapore – Indian, Malay, Chinese and Eurasian. Although these materials are useful in providing for a fair representation of most students in Singapore, it fails to represent students from inter-racial households. This phenomenon is seen again at upper primary, with students learning the contributions of early settlers, where each respected contributor belongs to one of the four major racial groups of Singapore. Hence, there is an overt focus on applying the CMIO model

when explicating the concept of race/ethnicity in the curriculum.

The conflation of race and culture also appears in Primary 2, where students have to identify the customs and traditions that belong to the different communities in Singapore. For example, students learn about various multicultural festivals like Hari Raya, Pongol, Christmas, Easter and Chinese New Year. However, such festivals may easily be misunderstood as racial festivals in Singapore. For example, Chinese New Year is celebrated by the Chinese in Singapore, Hari Raya is often celebrated by Malay-Muslims, and Pongol is often celebrated by the Tamil-Hindu community. As such, there is a risk that multicultural festivals may be framed as stereotypically racial events.

Furthermore, the link between one's racial identity and stereotypical cultural markers is also made apparent and reinforced through the suggested activities in PSS. For example, under the chapter "Please Call me Priya", students have to complete a follow-up activity worksheet titled "Knowing Myself". In this worksheet, they are introduced to stereotypical foods that belong to each race, like roti prata, chicken rice and satay, and are required to select their favourite food from this list (and if not, to suggest their own). Since this chapter also focuses on identity, students may be led to believe their racial identity is clearly connected to a particular cultural food as suggested by the textbook. Hence, there is a possibility that students ascribe cultural foods to one's race, which is problematic from an ME perspective as it promotes a narrow definition of one's identity.

The continued influence of multiracialism on the 2020 PSS curriculum constitutes a major factor for the lack of a transformative academic approach in the PSS curriculum. This points to the instrumental role that teachers play in either

maintaining or debunking the equivalence between multiculturalism and multiracialism. It falls on PSS teachers to be mindful of the nuances of identity before teaching chapters that engage with “race/ethnicity.”

Considerations for Teaching and Learning

Based on the above discussion, a curriculum that implicitly takes its understanding of multiculturalism as multiracialism could affect how teachers deliver the content of ME to their students. Ho, Hong and Gilbert (2017) question if it is adequate for teachers to teach ME based on superficial and outdated understandings of multiculturalism, especially when one considers that the student population is becoming more diverse, with students from mixed-race families and immigrant homes.

Studies by Banks (1991) and Okoye-Johnson (2011) suggest that ME has the potential to bring about positive changes in students’ racial attitudes. In Singapore’s context, a transformative approach to ME could play a pivotal role in correcting misconceptions about race and culture in Singapore. In order to do so, teachers first need to be aware that multiculturalism in Singapore is heavily influenced by the notions of multiracialism, and then refine their own understandings of multiculturalism to avoid conflating multiculturalism and multiracialism.

Furthermore, teachers should be mindful of the limitations to a traditional approach to citizenship education in the PSS curriculum. According to Banks (2006), globalisation has brought about more diverse individuals whose loyalty cuts across various dimensions. Consequently, “multicultural citizenship” (Kymlicka, 1995 as cited in Banks, 2006, p. 194) might be a more realistic goal, as it acknowledges that citizens have overlapping commitments to their own cultures as well

as the nation state. Hence, PSS teachers should consider the demographic profile of students in their classes before teaching chapters that espouse national ideals.

Finally, the overt focus on a contributions and additive approach makes students aware of diversity, without necessarily transforming their thinking towards multiculturalism. As such, teachers can consider adopting a transformation approach, where appropriate, in order to encourage students to become critical thinkers. For example, teachers may integrate transformative knowledge by conducting inquiry-based discussions about local social issues, such as racism and discrimination against persons with disabilities, where more contemporary case studies of intolerance have surfaced. For example, these activities could be introduced in P5, as an extension to the chapter on “Building a Cohesive Society”, after students have learnt about historical race riots in Singapore. Such discussions could aid students in developing transformative knowledge, as students learn how to show respect and appreciation for diversity in cultural practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study had revealed the ways in which the PSS curriculum incorporates ME, with a wide range of ME elements being promoted and appropriately selected for primary school students. However, these elements are limited as they only provide a glossary view of what “multicultural” means—a longstanding trend which has yet to be broken in the local SS curriculum. Ultimately, PSS is constrained by the national outlook, as it draws upon notions of multiracialism and falls back on the narrative of a nation-state vulnerable to racial tensions in order to highlight the importance of racial harmony. If teachers neglect other aspects of multiculturalism, this could potentially impede the effectiveness of ME and the

achievement of its goals. Hence, greater teacher support is needed to ensure effective delivery of ME in the PSS curriculum, such that teachers themselves become more conversant with issues of multiculturalism, and not limit students' understanding of multiculturalism to multiracialism. This would, in turn, pave the way for the goals of both ME and PSS to be achieved.

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“This Is What Social Studies Can Look Like”: Adapting Recent Work in Singapore Studies for The SS Classroom

Pang Wei Han

Raffles Institution (Singapore)

Hard at Work: Life in Singapore. Edited by Gerard Sasges and Ng Shi Wen. Foreword by Teo You Yenn. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2019.

They Told Us to Move: Dakota - Cassia. Edited by Ng Kok Hoe and The Cassia Resettlement Team. Singapore: Ethos Books, 2019.

Eating Chilli Crab in the Anthropocene: Environmental Perspectives on Life in Singapore. Edited by Matthew Schneider-Mayerson. Singapore: Ethos Books, 2020.

According to the Upper Secondary (Express/Normal Academic) Social Studies Teaching and Learning Guide, dynamic content “refers to knowledge needed for students to amplify and deepen their understanding of the core content” and “can take the form of examples found in the Coursebook, or can be examples derived from discussions and explorations students undertake in school and outside of school” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 12). This review article was conceptualised with the intention of supporting Social Studies educators by supplementing their toolkit of dynamic content and sources. In addition to presenting an overview of three recently-published texts in the field of Singapore Studies, I will draw linkages with key concepts in the SS curriculum and suggest potential pedagogical approaches to leveraging these texts in the classroom. In keeping with the renewed emphasis on Character and Citizenship Education (CCE), I also remark on how the texts can tie in with various CCE strands, including Values-in-Action, Education and Career Guidance, and discussion of contemporary

issues.

The first of these texts is titled *Hard at Work*. By telling the “mundane reality of what people do to make a living” (p. xxiv), the volume presents extraordinary insight into the “wide-ranging story” (p. xxi) of Singaporeans’ lived experiences. *Hard at Work* provides a counter-narrative to state-centric accounts of Singapore’s development, in which the developmental state’s policies and leaders are valorised. Instead, *Hard at Work* tell the stories of ordinary people who, by working “more than residents of any other OECD country” (p. xx), contribute their labour to nation-building.¹

To this end, the collection features sixty interviews with individuals from a diversity of occupations in Singapore society. Conducted between 2014 and 2017 by undergraduate students from Sasges’s sociology course at the National University of Singapore, these interviews are organised and curated into thirteen thematic chapters, ranging from “Caring” to

“Learning” and “Recycling and Cleaning”. The intentional commitment to diversity shines through in the stories that *Hard at Work* has elected to tell, which include “more visible occupations” (p. xxi) such as teacher, doctor and hawker as well as “less obvious ones” (p. xxi) such as tattoo artist, funeral director and drag performer, and even occupations in the informal economy, such as bet collector, academic ghostwriter and Thai disco singer.

Instead of presenting each interview as a transcript, *Hard at Work* intentionally stitches them together to form a first-person monologue, as if the interlocutors “were talking directly to the reader” (p. xxi). The book also omits academic analysis and reflective commentary, and thus places the interviewees’ experiences at the centre of the work. This in turn allows the reader to form their own conclusions from the ethnographic data in the text. For SS teachers, the vignettes in *Hard at Work* can be shaped into authentic sources for students to engage with. The first-person narrative and jargon-free style ensures that the sources will be accessible and age-appropriate for most learners.

The interviews under the theme of “Protecting” most directly respond to Guiding Question 3 in Issue 1 of the SS curriculum, which focuses on the “role of government in working for the good of society” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 16). A police officer shares the emotional labour of working to protect victims of domestic violence, child abuse and suicide, as well as the trauma that results: “Even after you finish your shift you still think about this child and you ask yourself, ‘Did I do enough? Did I do it right?’ ” (p. 245). Despite the toll on mental health, the police officer shares that many other officers “just lie” (p. 246) during mental health evaluations, because “they need their salary for their families” (p. 247). By engaging

with this perspective, students gain deeper insight into the painstaking work that goes behind maintaining internal order and ensuring justice for the residents of Singapore (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 16).

Given the range of occupations featured in *Hard at Work*, teachers may also draw on the resource to teach Issue 2, Living in a Diverse Society. Socio-cultural and socio-economic diversity manifest in two main ways in the text. First, the stories provide insight into how race and religion influence lived experience. For example, the Wedding Groomer shares the impact of religious rituals in wedding ceremonies. Interestingly, he highlights how the rituals that he practices were originally “a Hindu tradition” but has now transformed into the “Islam way” (p. 320), revealing evidence of cultural exchange and hybridisation in Singapore. Many vignettes also discuss the impact of race on interactions in the workplace. For instance, the Investigation Officer shares that his department is predominantly Chinese, which compels him to assimilate by learning how to speak Mandarin (p. 255). He expresses his displeasure when his colleagues assume that “all Malays should be the same” (p. 257), treating him as “the token Malay” (p. 257) to answer questions about Islam. Similarly, the Student Care Teacher notices the “tension between Malay and Chinese” (p. 176) colleagues at the student care centre, leading her to conclude that “the Chinese people here don’t...actually like the Malays” (p. 176).

Second, the text also discusses the impact of nationality on experiences of work. The vulnerability of Suryanti, a 39-year-old Indonesian domestic helper, is captured in her account of a former employer who “was fierce like a lion” and constantly “scream[ed] at [her] until the whole block can hear” (p. 144). Further,

some of her employers “don’t give [her] enough food” (p. 144) or expect her to “buy [groceries] using [her] own money” (p. 145). The Bus Captain, who travels daily to and from Johor Bahru, expressed his frustration at the two- or three-hour traffic jams along the Causeway. The fatigue compounds the intensity of long driving hours and the management’s demands for punctuality, which creates a stressful and potentially unsafe work environment for the Bus Captain. The vulnerabilities and challenges of these “lower-skilled” migrants stand in stark contrast to the comfort and luxury of the expatriate community in Singapore. The Stay-At-Home Father highlights the “relocation package” (p. 155) that his wife’s job entitled her to, which includes sponsored condominium rental. To that end, he notes that as expats, they “certainly have a higher quality of life than [they] did in London” (p. 157). Similarly, the Paralegal notes that her expatriate bosses’ relocation packages include rentals in penthouses and international school fees for their children, as well as business class flights back to their home countries (pp. 280-1). In discussing the influx of immigrants into Singapore as well as the resultant impacts on socio-economic diversity, these accounts can deepen students’ understanding of inequality in Singapore as intersectional.

Finally, the stories in *Hard at Work* reflect the complexities of globalisation, which forms the thrust of Issue 3 of the SS curriculum. Educators could utilise the interviews to develop nuance in how students understand the driving forces of globalisation. For example, the Aircraft Maintenance Engineer’s work in ensuring the flight-readiness of airplanes (pp. 215 - 219) as well as the Able-bodied Crew Member’s work on the ferry (pp. 219 - 225) empowers the movement of people and goods across international boundaries, thus facilitating the interconnections and

interdependencies that define globalisation. In addition to telling the stories of the Maid or the Thai Disco Singer, who move across boundaries to work in Singapore, *Hard at Work* also discusses the work of the middlemen, such as the Hostess Agent, who hires Thai women and facilitates their travel into Singapore to work in discos (pp. 266 - 273). This emphasis on the agents of globalisation gives abstract and impersonal economic concepts a human face.

With its varied content, *Hard at Work* presents opportunities for differentiated instruction, by presenting meaningful choices for students to engage with stories that are “of genuine interest to them” (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 52). For example, in discussing the influence of race on the lived experiences of workers in Singapore, students could choose from the experiences of the Police Officer, the Investigation Officer, the Barber, the Tennis Coach, the MRT Station Usher and the Student Care Teacher. One of Tomlinson’s suggested strategies to differentiate content by interest—the Interest Center—could be applied (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 54). Students could select the occupation that they are interested in and embark on an inquiry to learn more about how aspects of identity (race, religion, nationality, or gender) influence the experiences of someone working in a specific role. Students can also extend their interest by applying these concepts to other contexts. For example, a meaningful extension might be to encourage students to interview someone who works in the particular field that the student is interested in to write up a mini ethnography. Using *Hard at Work* as a model for social inquiry, students could embark on a meaningful and differentiated Issues Investigation experience.

Beyond the SS curriculum, *Hard at Work* could also inform teachers in programme design for Education and

Career Guidance. The interviews in the volume allow students to gain deeper insights into the world of work. For example, the physical and emotional burnout experienced by the Doctor (pp. 298 - 303) and the Nurse (pp. 303 - 309) can allow students to better understand the challenges faced by healthcare workers. Students will also be exposed to unorthodox career trajectories, such as that of the Tattoo Artist (pp. 324 - 331) or the Wedding Groomer (pp. 318 - 324). In both these interviews, the interlocutors shared the importance of connections with mentors who taught them the skills needed to thrive in their careers. In this way, students will better understand the requirements to enter various industries. Ultimately, by exposing students to the challenges, successes and struggles of people in different parts of Singapore society, *Hard at Work* enables students to reflect on their own personal futures, even as they grow into empathetic citizens.

Whereas *Hard at Work* uses the workplace to explore various social issues, *They Told Us to Move* centres home as a site of contestation. The volume relates the aftermath of a government decision to redevelop Dakota Crescent. Residents, many of whom were elderly Singaporeans living in rental flats, were notified in 2014 that they had two years to resettle to the nearby neighbourhood of Cassia Crescent. In the volume, readers bear witness to the emotional, logistical and financial challenges arising from this resettlement exercise. Readers also learn about the process through the lens of the Cassia Resettlement Team (CRT), a group of volunteers dedicated to supporting the Dakota residents in their transition between these two spaces. These volunteers not only served the residents by cleaning their homes or accompanying them on doctor appointments, but also helped to advocate for their needs by “work[ing] closely with

public agencies to highlight the personal circumstances and institutional barriers that residents face” (p. 14). By offering a ground-up perspective on the experiences of Dakota residents, *They Told Us to Move* forges deeper nuance and insight into Singapore’s narrative of development.

The collection features nine interviews with residents of Dakota Crescent and others who are deeply rooted in the community, such as Roger Neo (or Ah Leong, as the residents fondly address him), the Centre Manager for Tung Ling Community Services in Dakota. The interviews reveal the resettlement exercise to be bittersweet. Residents expressed grief and sadness towards the loss of their existing social connections and bonds with their neighbours, as well as a sense of helplessness in the face of inevitable state action. At the same time, they were quietly hopeful that the move would bring a better living environment.

Each interview is accompanied by a reflective essay, written by the CRT volunteer who had befriended and collaborated with that resident. In their reflections, the CRT volunteers vulnerably articulate the emotions they experienced during their time working with the Dakota residents. Their heartfelt desire to serve and connect shines through amidst the bubbling frustrations of the residents. Additionally, the volunteers also provide insight into how informal social support networks (such as CRT or Roger’s Tung Ling Community Services) supplement the rigid institutions of formal government support programmes.

Each chapter of *They Told Us to Move* ends with an analytical essay by academics from “diverse fields spanning sociology, anthropology, gerontology, social policy, public administration, history, architecture and cultural studies” (p. 3). These academic responses help to locate the lived

experiences of the Dakota residents in the larger contexts and discourses of inequality and social justice in Singapore.

For SS teachers and students, *They Told Us to Move* captures the core concepts of trade-offs and citizenship in Issue 1: Exploring Citizenship and Governance. By appreciating the experiences of the Dakota Crescent residents, students can deepen their understanding about the impact and consequences of every government decision. This allows students to authentically appreciate the diverse perspectives of the stakeholders who are disproportionately affected by these choices. For Izzah, a “proud mother of five children” (p. 19), the relocation not only meant that her family would “leave [their] old memory” behind (p. 25), but also meant that her children will lose the open spaces where they can “run around” and be “like kampong kids” (p. 21). The decrease in the size of apartments from the Dakota Crescent to Cassia Crescent meant that the elderly Peng had to throw away many of her belongings, which “really breaks [her] heart” (p. 72). More heartrendingly, Peng questions if she should be sent to Sabah and thrown away (p. 72). For 90-year-old Tong, the relocation meant a loss of independence since he “can’t manage it [him]self” (p. 95). Not only did he require “help from the charity” (p. 96) to make the move, he articulated a deep fear of falling because of the “change of environment” (p. 96) and loss of the familiarity of Dakota Crescent. The lived experiences of the stakeholders in Dakota Crescent bring nuance and depth to our understanding of the challenges in making decisions for the good of society.

Further, *They Told Us to Move* reveals the limits to which citizens can “influence government decisions” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 16). When asked about her understanding of the reasons behind the relocation, 71-year-old Wan simply

concludes that:

The government says they are going to redevelop this area, so they are asking us to move. They want to make other changes to this area, so we have no choice but to move. What can you say? Cannot say anything right? As long as they give you a place to stay, you should be happy. (p. 172)

This sense of helplessness and the inability to influence the government’s decision is echoed by Chin, who tells the interviewer:

Of course I can’t bear to leave. But what can we do? They told us to move, so we have no choice. Who are we? They are the government? What are we, what can we say? There is nothing to say. (pp. 45-6)

While many of the elderly Dakota residents felt disempowered to influence governmental decisions, individuals with greater cultural capital were able to speak up for the conservation of Dakota Crescent. Bilyy Koh—who had lived abroad for more than a decade and experienced other countries’ efforts to preserve their intangible cultural heritage—launched the Dakota Adventures fortnightly trail to raise awareness about the “value of heritage,” so that the government will reconsider their decision because “belonging is always very important to the citizen and that gives us a pride to be a Singaporean” (p. 200). Similarly, the Save Dakota campaign, started in 2014 by architect Jonathan Poh, drew up a “redevelopment proposal that factored in the preservation of some of the landmarks in the estate” and pitched it to the local Member of Parliament (p. 214). Students can reflect on how a person’s social and cultural capital might empower them to have more influence on governmental decisions, and consider how

Singapore can grow to become more inclusive of the voices of the vulnerable.

Finally, *They Told Us to Move* provides students with a case study of how individuals can form organised groups to contribute to the needs of society. The Cassia Resettlement Team's reflections reveal the struggles and challenges that they faced, as well as their determination to serve the Dakota Crescent community. In her reflection, young Junior College graduate Vanessa Lim describes how she has learned to move beyond seeing elderly people as merely those "who need help" in order to appreciate how they are "tenacious, lively, and constantly strive to be self-dependent" (p. 58). Similarly, having spent time building trust with the Dakota Crescent residents, Jingzhou does not see the residents as "clients" or "beneficiaries", but as friends who "care and love one another deeply" and as "social creatures who seek dignity and meaning in life" (p. 32). As she reflects on the challenges of working with Mano, "the hard-to-love resident [she] still love[s] anyway", Sammie concludes that "service is not just about responsibility and should also stem from love" (p. 235). To that end, the volunteers at CRT "simply push the boundaries of what [they] can and cannot do, challenging [them]selves to meet new challenges and navigate new systems [they] encounter along the way" (p. 235).

From a pedagogical perspective, the structure of the book allows for differentiation of content according to students' readiness and interest. The interview transcripts are lightly edited to "preserve the original voices" (p. 2) of the Dakota Crescent residents and are thus easily accessible to students who might have weaker language abilities. In contrast, the academic essays, if reproduced directly as sources for student consumption, would be suited for students who are reading at a

higher level.

Given the current Covid-19 pandemic and the Ministry's strategic shift towards the implementation of e-pedagogy (MOE, 2020), *They Told Us to Move* also serves as a powerful resource because of its potential to be incorporated in blended learning. *They Told Us to Move* can be taught together with *Between Two Homes*, a digital exhibition that sought to record the histories and memories of Dakota Crescent. The *Between Two Homes* exhibition begins with an imaginative exercise, prompting students to step into the perspective of the Dakota Crescent residents. An interactive map of Dakota Crescent presents students with photos, videos, and soundscapes of everyday life in the community. Following that, students receive HDB's letter notifying them of the impending relocation, and thus have to make one of three choices: to rent at Cassia Crescent, to buy a flat at Cassia Crescent, or to relocate elsewhere. This sets the context for students before they engage with the stories of the residents (told through photographs and videos).

Figure 1 Empathy and imagination exercise on *betweentwohomes.sg*.



Figure 2 Interactive map on *betweentwohomes.sg*.



Beyond the SS curriculum, *They Told Us to Move* would be valuable for teachers planning and executing VIA programmes. The volunteer reflections could allow students to gain a deeper insight into the realities of serving different communities. Importantly, the CRT volunteers work not only to care for the elderly residents of Dakota Crescent; they also hope to “transform the world we live in through acting together with others”, forming a “public demand for social and political transformation, and in it a different promise of community and the future to come” (p. 108). By taking on a broader perspective to their volunteering efforts, students see that they have the power to imagine and create a more caring and inclusive society. These reflections are empowering and inspiring, and students will do well to engage in such conversations in their own VIA projects.

While *Hard at Work* and *They Told Us to Move* both hone in on the built and human environment, *Eating Chili Crab in the Anthropocene* presents twelve essays (written by university students) about Singapore’s relationship with the natural environment. This collection represents a critique towards the outdated view of the environment as “external, distant, beautiful, boring and seemingly irrelevant to our day-to-day lives” (p. 10) and environmentalism as “an optional, niche interest that one can choose to enjoy, or not” (p. 10). Through their work, Schneider-Mayerson and his

students hope to show that “everything is environmental” (p. 10), where seemingly disparate fields, such as trade, education, and health, are connected to and intersecting with the environment. *Eating Chili Crab in the Anthropocene* is groundbreaking in its attempt to analyse Singapore’s relationship with the environment through this humanistic lens, employing approaches from history, philosophy, and cultural studies to understand the deeper desires, values and priorities that undergird Singapore’s policies and systems. By revealing these insights, the authors present alternative viewpoints in response to Singapore’s developmental narratives and invite readers to create a different future for Singapore.

Although the essays are not overtly arranged or organised in any particular manner, *Eating Chili Crab in the Anthropocene* can broadly be divided into three themes. The first group of essays discusses how Singaporeans interact with the diversity of non-human lives on the island. This includes the Sri Lankan mud crabs (more famously known as the Chili Crab), Asian small-clawed otters, long-tailed macaques and the ubiquitous Javan mynahs. The second group of essays examines the forces that have led to Singapore’s growth and development and brings to light heretofore hidden costs and undisclosed trade-offs. These include Fu Xiyao’s essay on the displacement of the Orang Laut community to build Semakau landfill as well as Sarah Novak’s research on Singapore’s importation of sand from neighbouring countries and the resulting environmental harm. Finally, the third group looks towards the future and articulates their vision, that “another garden city is possible” (p. 241). From rethinking aviation to decarbonising the economy to reimagining education, this final series of essays prompts readers to reimagine the future and to take steps towards its

actualisation.

Incorporating *Eating chili crab in the Anthropocene* in the SS classroom might require educators to modify the essays to suit the readiness levels of their students. That said, three specific essays resonate strongly with the SS syllabus and could be adapted for engaging and meaningful discussions in the classroom.

First, Fu Xiyao's "Dumpster Diving in Semakau: Retrieving Indigenous Histories from Singapore's Waste Island" presents an interesting case study of trade-offs created by Singapore's economic development. Fu argues that the construction of Semakau landfill, necessitated by Singapore's consumerist culture, came at the expense of the Orang Laut who lived in the islands of Pulau Semakau and Pulau Seking. To Singaporean students, the Orang Laut should be familiar as they feature in the Secondary 1 History syllabus. As indigenous sea nomads, the Orang Laut played a significant role in the development of Temasek in the 14th century, using their place-based knowledge to navigate the seas and facilitate trade. Fu laments that the forcible relocation of the Orang Laut "terminated the indigenous islanders' intergenerational memory of living at sea" (p. 102). Fu's research reveals "the richness of local history" in these indigenous communities as well as the "grief of loss" that they experienced due to these forced relocations. As former Nominated Member of Parliament and co-director of the play *Tanah • Air*, Kok Heng Leun, says, "If it were me, I would be angry forever, deeply hurt" (p. 105). The trade-offs for the Orang Laut are articulated clearly and painfully by Fu:

In 1993, Minister for the Environment Mah Bow Tan announced the plan for the gargantuan landfill complex. Dr. Kanwaljit Soin, the first female

Nominated Member of Parliament, appealed to the government to save Pulau Seking from obliteration. She highlighted that the island preserved Singapore's cultural heritage from before colonisation. The government rejected her appeal, citing the additional \$130 million that would be needed to change its landfill plan. (p. 103)

On the surface, the trade-off presents as a choice between economic development and the conservation of cultural heritage for the Orang Laut. However, Fu argues that the larger trade-off lies between the logics of capitalist consumption and the indigenous community's knowledge and connection with natural world. It is in the light of this brutal trade-off, which has led to the "history of the indigenous islanders...[being] erased by the construction of Semakau landfill", that she "grieved for the environmental, social and cultural losses in the name of development" (p. 115). This deeper history of the Orang Laut and their displacement is an integral part of the story Semakau landfill. Before bringing students on their next Learning Journey to visit Semakau landfill, teachers would do well to read this chapter and provide their students with the island's larger historical and cultural contexts.

Secondly, Lee Jin Hee's "Javan Mynahs, "Invasive" Species and Belonging in Singapore" presents an opportunity to expand students' understanding of xenophobia. Lee argues that the Javan mynah's status as an "invasive" species provides a convenient justification for the Agri-food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) to "set giant net traps to capture and 'humanely euthanise' the mynahs with carbon dioxide" (p. 139). Lee questions if the AVA would resort to euthanising Javan mynahs because of noise complaints by residents if they were considered "native" birds. To that end, Lee challenges the false

dichotomy of “native” and “invasive” species since “ecosystems are dynamic and constantly changing” (p. 142) and especially because many ecosystems in Singapore, such as the reservoirs, reclaimed land, and built-up areas are themselves “artificially engineered environments” (p. 143). Lee concludes that “there is nothing ‘natural’ about determining what can legitimately belong or not” since these boundaries of “belonging” are socially constructed (p. 145) and often used to justify the exclusion and elimination of certain groups. Lee parallels this fear of the “invasive” Javan mynah to the rise of xenophobia both in Singapore and around the world. She points out the irony that “Singapore, a country largely made up of the descendants of immigrants, seems to harbour a fear of foreigners” (p. 149) but also acknowledges that this “sense of vulnerability” and “ideology of survival” have been a crucial part of the construction of Singapore’s national identity (p. 149). By exposing our students to Lee’s essay, we prompt them to reflect on their understanding of what it means to belong (our national identity) and what it means to exclude (our rising xenophobia and fear of the other).

Third, Sarah Novak’s “To Build a City-State and Erode History: Sand and the Construction of Singapore” illuminates the forces of globalisation. Novak describes the importance of sand in Singapore’s development. Sand is a crucial element in the building of skyscrapers in the Central Business District and HDB buildings in the heartlands. Sand is also essential for land reclamation, which has helped Singapore grow from 590 square kilometres before independence to over 720 in 2017. The crux of Novak’s argument—and its resonance with Issue 3’s core concern around the uneven impacts of globalisation—stems from the source of the sand. “Whose sand am I standing on” she asks, “and what were

the ecological and social costs of bringing it here” (p. 69). Although exact numbers are unreported, Novak’s research has revealed that Singapore has historically imported sand from Malaysia and Indonesia; more recently, we have imported sand from Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, and the Philippines (p. 69). The sand mining activities in these areas have created existential threats for the communities living there. As Novak puts it, “sand mining is a zero-sum game: in order to gain it, someone else has to lose it” (p. 69). It is a trade-off on a globalised scale: Singapore’s development comes at the cost of environmental destruction and displacement for our Southeast Asian neighbours. Yet, the global nature of this trade-off renders it distant and invisible for Singaporeans.

In adapting *Eating Chili Crab in the Anthropocene* as dynamic content for the Social Studies syllabus, I would recommend the use of experiential learning to spark curiosity and deepen the authenticity of our students’ inquiry. Many schools already organise learning journeys to the Semakau landfill, and that experience can be framed through the broader historical context of the Orang Laut. This learning journey could be paired with Zero Waste experiments (in which students consciously minimise waste and compete by seeing who produces the least amount of waste in a week) so that students can appreciate how much they consume. Due to the ubiquity of Javan mynahs, students will have no difficulty participating in observations of the Javan mynahs in HDB blocks and hawker centres. By taking note of their behaviours and the interaction between humans and these “invasive” species, students can draw deeper insights into ideas of belonging and othering. Finally, the opportunity to visit Singapore’s beaches (possibly as part of VIA projects such as beach clean-ups) offers students a

chance to physically interact with the powerful resource of sand. By posing the same question that Sarah Novak asks, “whose sand am I standing on?” the teacher can lead students to think critically about their environment.

For CCE teachers looking to engage students in discussions of contemporary issues, *Eating Chili Crab in the Anthropocene* would come highly recommended. Nationally, PM Lee’s National Day Rally speech in 2019 placed the climate crisis in mainstream public discourse. As more students learn about the impending existential threat posed by the climate crisis, *Eating Chili Crab in the Anthropocene* adds value to their learning by articulating different perspectives and cultural contexts, which teachers can utilise to deepen students’ understanding of the issue and sharpen their approach to enacting change. A teacher who reads *Eating Chili Crab in the Anthropocene* would empower students to go beyond the traditional 3Rs (reduce-reuse-recycle) and imagine new ways of living and being that can transform society as we know it. Further, with the rise of eco-anxiety and eco-grief amongst the younger generation (i.e. a sense of sadness or fear towards the climate crisis), teachers can point to *Eating Chili Crab in the Anthropocene* as a manifestation of community and solidarity.

It is my hope that by exposing our students to the stories, experiences and wisdom encapsulated in the three texts reviewed in this article, we can better prepare them to become “citizens of tomorrow” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p.

6). By delving into the environmental research in *Eating Chili Crab in the Anthropocene* and appreciating the globalized diversity in *Hard at Work*, students will grow to “understand the interconnectedness of Singapore and the world they live in” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 6). By reading the narratives of the Dakota Crescent residents and hearing the reflections of the CRT volunteers, students will grow to become “informed, concerned and participative citizens” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p.6). Crucially, despite their varied subject matter, one similarity unites these three texts: they are primarily written by young people, not much older than secondary school students. By engaging with this material, students can realise that they, too, have the power to create knowledge. By validating the experiences and life-worlds of youth, these works show our students that they can take ownership of their learning and serve as creators of knowledge. This democratization of knowledge production in turn models the norms of democratic citizenship that undergird Social Studies. This is what Social Studies can look like.

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ⁱ Singapore is not an OECD country, but enjoys a standard of living comparable to most OECD members.