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What does citizenship mean? Social studies teachers' understandings of citizenship in Singapore schools

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What does citizenship mean? Social studies teachers' understandings of citizenship in Singapore schools

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One of the challenges of teaching citizenship is that it can be understood in a variety of quite different ways. Singapore has a centralized education system, where political leaders wield direct influence over citizenship education. Social studies is a major vehicle for citizenship education, with a focus on nation-building. The official discourse on citizenship, while clearly articulated, has still to be implemented by teachers. In a context made complex by globalizing forces, how do teachers understand citizenship? This article reports on social studies teachers' understandings of citizenship in Singapore schools. The study utilized a qualitative case study approach of eight teachers to provide depth and insight into their understanding. Findings revealed four themes, namely identity, participation, awareness of the nation's past, and thinking citizenry, located within the nationalistic, socially concerned and person oriented stances. This reflected a citizenship education landscape in Singapore that, despite tight controls, was not rigid, prescriptive or homogenous.

Keywords: citizenship; Singapore; social studies teachers

Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a remarkable increase in interest in citizenship education. This interest is reflected in the growing body of academic commentary on citizenship (e.g. Barbalet 1999; Kymlicka and Norman 1994; van Steenbergen 1994; Faulks 2000; Burtonwood 2003) and studies on citizenship education (e.g. Cogan and Derricott 2000; Cogan, Morris and Print 2002; Davies, Harber and Yamashita 2005; Lee and Fouts 2005), several of which were published in this journal (e.g. Hicks 2001; Davies and Evans 2002; Osler and Starkey 2003; Schweisfurth 2006; Pike 2007). While citizenship has become, as Hoffman (2004) argued, a fashionable concept, it is not widely understood (Lister 1998), not surprisingly because citizenship is a complex and flexible concept (Beck 1996; Lambert and Machon 2001; Kerr 2003; Pike 2007). Most modern states are diverse, comprising different ethnic groups that may not completely share the same sense of common citizenship. Additionally, citizenship is not so much a tangible entity as a construct in the minds of individuals (Parker 2003). Globalization further problematized citizenship as the "global" is often positioned to counter the centrality of the nation, when the latter is still commonly regarded as the basis of citizenship (Smith 1995). It is therefore difficult to describe what it means in lived experience, for citizenship can mean all things to all people. Invariably, citizens, even in the same state, will understand citizenship differently (Kymlicka 1995).

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Yet it is critical that subject specialist teachers of citizenship understand what it means. How citizenship is understood influences the approach to citizenship education (Walkington and Wilkins 2000; Lee and Fouts 2005; Pike 2007). Underlying different understandings are conceptions of knowledge and associated educational purposes believed to be important for citizenship education, each laying claim to theories of what knowledge citizens should learn, and how that knowledge is to be learnt. The extent to which the citizen's role is constructed as active or passive, radical or conservative, communitarian or individualistic, Cornbleth (1985) argued, varies in different contexts. In what follows, I examine how secondary social studies teachers in Singapore understand citizenship. Specifically, I draw on a three-year study that explored how teachers understand and put into practice citizenship education through social studies.

Conception of citizenship

Modern political systems depend for their successful functioning upon a conception of citizenship, that describes the individual and his/her relationship to the state. In its simplest form, citizenship is membership in a political community, where the citizen enjoys the rights and assumes the duties of membership (Oldfield 1998; Barbalet 1999; Isin and Wood 1999; Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2006). Unlike slaves, vassals or subjects, whose status implies hierarchy and domination, citizens usually enjoy equal and legitimate membership of the political community (van Gunsteren 1994; Faulks 2000). Sovereignty of the citizen is vital given that citizenship originated in the inception of democracy with the development of the city-state in classical Greece and Rome (Turner 1992). This means citizens necessarily play an essential role in the affairs of the community (Aristotle 1970). Generally, five categories constitute citizenship: a sense of identity, enjoyment of certain rights, fulfilment of obligations, a degree of interest and involvement in public affairs, and an acceptance of societal values. The nature of each of these parts will vary according to the political system (Heater 1990; Cogan and Derricott 2000).

Discussions about citizenship usually fall along two divides – the liberal individualist and the civic republican traditions (Heater 1990; Oldfield 1998; Kymlicka 2002). The liberal individualist tradition emphasizes status, and individual rights associated with it, where these rights are safeguarded by constitutional limits on government power. Kymlicka and Norman (1994) characterized such a conception as ''citizenship-as-legal-status''. Where participation in the political community is concerned, it is simply a right. By contrast, citizenship is an activity and a practice in civic republican tradition (Oldfield 1998; O'Connor 2004). Such a tradition emphasizes civic duty, the submission of individual interests to that of the common good and public sphere. The citizen, as Aristotle (1970) highlighted, is a political actor, and the political entity provides opportunities for individuals to serve the community. Morality is here seen as giving one's service to, and fulfilling one's duties in the community. Thus, it is basic to participate in the government of the political community, where participation is a duty, and not to engage in it is not to be a citizen. Kymlicka and Norman (1994) characterized this as ''citizenship-as-desirable-activity''.

In the citizenship discourse in Singapore, identity and participation are key themes (Hill and Lian 1995; Han 2000; Ho 2000). Since Singapore attained

nationhood in 1965, the People's Action Party (PAP) government has spared no efforts at developing a sense of national identity, grounded in a shared sense of community and belonging, shared commitment and vision of the common good, perceived to be critical given the brevity of the nation's history and the plurality of its makeup. Similarly, participation is concerned with the kinds of participation appropriate for citizens. Such preoccupation stemmed from the political leaders' belief in good political leadership than in good citizenship, as they are sceptical of the rationality of citizens, perceiving the latter's political skills as inadequate. Citizens are deemed incapable of making meaningful decisions about issues that can affect the fate of the nation. Consequently, the forms of participation made possible by the government are of a limited kind (Han 2000; Ho 2000; Tan 2007). Citizenship in Singapore is rather passive, the citizen's main role is to elect a party into power, and to cooperate with it to govern in the interests of the country. Recently, however, there has been a perception of the need for citizens to participate more actively, and efforts are made to engage Singaporeans in the discussion of national issues under Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

The Singapore context

Like all post-colonial nations, Singapore was faced with challenges when it achieved independence from Britain in 1965. It had no natural resources, and a diverse ethnic mix. Geographically, it is flanked by two Muslim nations, was threatened by communists, had an undeveloped economy with high unemployment, and many social problems. The Japanese occupation and the racial riots in the early years of independence emphasized to its political leaders that for Singapore to survive, the challenges of nation-building in developing a shared national identity, and modernizing the economy were urgent (Chua and Kuo 1991).

The PAP government consolidated Singapore's independence through the politics of survival, emphasizing economic pragmatism and rationality, built on the principles of multiracialism, meritocracy and multilingualism. For the PAP, the overriding priority has been economic growth linked to national survival. Survival became recurrent themes on the political leaders' exhortations and the goals of their exertions, and underpinned the school curriculum (Chan 1971; Chua 1995). The PAP government very early turned to schools as allies in this cause, politically, to construct a unified national system of education from the ethnically divided and politically contested provision inherited from the English, and economically, to equip skills and attitudes necessary for industrialization (Sharpe and Gopinathan 2002). The education system was centralized and brought under government control, putting into government hands an important ideological apparatus. Thus education played a crucial role in focusing efforts to build and mould a nation. Citizenship education was developed to cultivate national loyalty, patriotism, a sense of belonging, and the commitment to actively participate in the goals of national development (Green 1997). It is from this perspective that good citizenship is officially understood in Singapore.

Globalization however has led to massive changes in the social, economic and political circumstances in many countries, Singapore notwithstanding. The PAP government is keenly aware of the destabilizing effects on Singapore, but has thus far managed this successfully with pragmatic policies. But it cannot guarantee sustained

prosperity, with economic competition mounting from larger neighbours and the region's emerging superpowers. Younger Singaporeans are also more diverse, affluent, educated, mobile and demanding for choices. Pragmatic policies had also led to an increasingly disengaged citizenry, characterized as self-centred and materialistic. Such disengagement is worrying, for it suggests that younger Singapore have learnt to take citizenship somewhat for granted. Consequently, developing citizenship has become complex for the government and educators to resolve. The tension is between societal change and the PAP conservatism. The issue is how to reconcile the need for citizens' allegiance to the regime with the equally important democratic rights of participation (Ho 2000).

In this instance, the "Singapore Story" is a means to rally the people (Tan 2007). The nation is an "imagined community", where affinity among fellow-members is based on imagination not substantiality (Anderson 1991). Thus, nations need to constantly "connect" its people through resonant and familiar structures. The Singapore Story is a straightforward tale that charts out how an independent Singapore overcame the odds to become a peaceful and prosperous country that is held in high regard by the international community. It serves, according to a minister, "as an instructive tool to remind our young that they cannot take security, stability and progress for granted" (Teo 2000, line 10). Implicit in the tale is the central role of the PAP government in leading Singapore from a Third World ex-colony into a successful First World nation.

Social studies is an integrated subject introduced from 2001 for all students at the upper secondary school level when students are generally 15–16 years old. It is a compulsory, examinable subject at the national examination. Social studies was developed in the context of National Education (NE), the latter was launched in 1997, which is the latest nation-building initiative that citizenship is addressed. NE is aimed at developing and shaping positive knowledge, values and attitudes of its younger citizenry toward the community and the nation, with the purpose of developing national cohesion, the instinct for survival and confidence in the future (MOE 2008). As such, social studies at the upper secondary level is a major vehicle for NE, the form which citizenship education takes in Singapore. Specifically, social studies was conceived of as a direct response to address the problem of young Singaporeans' lack of knowledge and interest in Singapore's recent history and the central issues key to national survival. The focus is on the nation, the common culture and shared values, reflecting the government's continuous pursuit of citizenship education to meet perceived national needs.

A curriculum perspective

The social studies curriculum is inherently a construction, inescapably political and ideological, reflecting a particular worldview and a dominant ideology that serves a specific interest group. The authority possesses the ideal conceptions of society and citizenship and these are to be transmitted to students in terms of salient knowledge and values, to help them become loyal believers in the particular set of truths necessary to guarantee the survival of society. In Singapore's centralized education system, curriculum development begins at the highest level of government. Citizenship education through the vehicle of social studies is carefully planned by the Ministry of Education, with clearly delineated aims and objectives to culturally

reproduce the elites' view of the Singapore society. But as curriculum writers have long suggested (Stenhouse 1975; McCutcheon 1988; Cornbleth 1990) there are large gaps between what it is intended, should happen and what actually happens in the class.

Thornton (2005) has characterized teachers as curricular-instructional gate-keepers, reflecting their well-known role as controllers of what is taught and how it is taught in classrooms. A large part of how teachers tend the gates hinges on how they understand the subject, in this case citizenship (Cornbleth 1990; Kelly 2004). The official discourse on citizenship in Singapore, while clearly articulated, has still to be implemented by teachers. What is not known is how teachers understand citizenship and give purpose to citizenship education through social studies. Bottery (2006) suggested that the interaction of global and national realities will likely lead to a heightened sense of tension for educators. Insights into teachers' understandings of citizenship will provide us a better sense of the most viable instances of citizenship education in the Singapore context.

Methodology

A case study approach was used to provide depth and insight into teachers' understandings of citizenship involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Yin 1994). Eight teachers, seen in Table 1, were purposively selected as instrumental cases from four secondary schools. Teachers with different disciplinary backgrounds were selected as this variable was expected to make a difference to how citizenship is understood, given social studies teachers majored in a range of social science disciplines. Race is an important element in Singaporean identity. Singapore has four official races (Chinese, Malays, Indians, Eurasian, with Chinese as the largest) and an ''other'' category. Teachers of different races were selected to reflect Singapore's multi-racial population. Age and gender were two other criteria, given that there were concerns that younger Singaporeans were mobile and apathetic. Furthermore, Singaporean men and women may think differently about citizenship, given men undergo a two year mandatory national military service that may be seen as socialization and citizenship duty.

The eight teachers were invited to participate in the study from four typical schools in Singapore, where the principals allowed access. The teachers participated in the study voluntarily. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews,

Table 1. Profile of the eight teachers.

Name	Gender	Race	Age
Vind	Female	Minority	35
Peter	Male	Minority	30
Carolyn	Female	Chinese	44
Leong	Male	Chinese	31
Frida	Female	Minority	29
David	Male	Chinese	37
Ying	Female	Chinese	27
Marcus	Male	Chinese	35

classroom observations and documentary study. A total of 43 interviews, each lasting an average of 90 minutes were conducted, and 84 lessons, each lasting 45 minutes were observed. Analysis was data-driven and inductive, shaped largely by the notion of grounded theory (Glaser and Straus 1967). The constant comparative method was used by unitizing and categorizing the data, where new categories emerged, changed and were refined as the data were scrutinized many times over. Trustworthiness came from the amount of time spent in the field. Methodological triangulation of data from the multiple sources provided a validity check. Reliability was also increased through adherence to case study protocol and a development of the case study database.

Findings and discussion

Four themes emerged from the teachers' understandings of citizenship. Within these themes, teachers' understandings were found to be located in three distinct groups, characterized by a dominant nationalistic, socially concerned and person oriented stances, respectively. Among the eight teachers, four teachers, Peter, Vind, Leong and Carolyn's understandings were nationalistic, two teachers, Marcus and Frida's were socially concerned, and another two, David and Ying's were person oriented in stance. They are subsequently referred to as nationalistic, socially concerned and person oriented teachers.

Citizenship as identity

Prominently, all eight teachers viewed citizenship as identity, the concern was with "who I am, and that determines what I do". The sources of identity, however, varied. For the nationalistic teachers, identity was clearly understood as national identity, with the nation-state as the basis. It "is being Singaporean" where identity was exclusive and geographically located, as Leong explained, "Citizenship is tied to the nation; if the nation is there, we are citizens, without it, where do we belong? The nation validates us and gives us our identity". Not surprisingly, there was little understanding of the individual as a citizen. In the same vein, the nationalistic teachers never thought of themselves in ethnic terms. Particularly with the minority teachers, who seldom described their identities in terms of their race or religion, but emphasized they were Singaporeans. One of them was keen to share that, "I mix well, my best friends are Chinese". Both teachers avoided the race issue, believing it to be "individualizing tendencies". They associated national identity with the unity of the nation by engendering a strong sense of community and identification with others who have similar experiences, commitments, and aspirations. Consequently, they emphasized the commonalities at the expense of recognizing the differences, suggesting that identity was problematic.

In contrast, citizenship was not exclusively understood as national identity by the socially concerned teachers. They acknowledged multiple and overlapping identities, as citizens invariably belong to several communities, by which they identify themselves with. Noteworthy, the nation was but one of the many communities. The basic tenet was the sense of identity and ownership one feels towards his/her community through involvement. Citizenship was about stakes and ties, to be nurtured at the basic level, the community where one lives, extending outwards to the nation. Particularly in multi-racial Singapore, identity cannot be seen solely in

national terms, as one of them highlighted, "We are each Chinese, Malay, Indian or Eurasian, that's our race, our identity too, yet we are also Singaporeans". Using herself as an example, Frida explained,

> I'm Singaporean. My parents are part Chinese and Indian. My Chinese grandmothers became Muslims when they were adopted by Muslim families. My grandfathers spoke only Tamil when they came from India. They learnt Malay, living in Malay villages. I grew up taking Malay as mother tongue in school. I have multiple identities based on my race, religion and language.

Here, identity was formed in relation to difference, and unlike the nationalistic teachers, the socially concerned teachers recognized race, ethnicity, language, religion and local community as constitutive of identities. This is indicative of the emergence of new identities as opposed to national identities (Friedman 1989; Isin and Wood 1999; Baumfield 2002). Clearly, social concern characteristics included nurturing a network of relationships, respect for differences, building up common spaces and active participation in the community.

For the person oriented teachers, citizenship was integrative with their personal experiences. Starkly different was an obvious disengagement from the society in their understandings of citizenship. National identity needs to be grounded in an emotional attachment to the country, of which both teachers felt little for. Typically, both teachers sought to break out of conventions and not be limited by established views of who they can become. Consequently, they turned inwards to the self, locating the source of identity within by emphasizing personal development through promoting positive self-concept and a strong sense of personal efficacy. The idea of the good person rather than citizen was emphasized in their understandings of citizenship. Accordingly, the good person is one who has a good and moral character, while the good citizen, in this case, does what is best for his nation and community.

Citizenship as participation

Participation is another theme, where all eight teachers understood in terms of civic republican tradition. Inherent in this is the notion of active citizenship. For the nationalistic teachers, good citizens were to participate actively in nation-building, where "there are duties citizens have to carry out, obligations to fulfil, and responsibilities to perform for the nation", and these were non-negotiable as they were fundamental to the survival of the nation. What participation entails to the nationalistic teachers varied. For Peter and Vind, participation "need not be serving as grassroot activists, but one who knows and has an opinion on issues in Singapore. If the need arises, he/she can give feedback". Participation is about knowing, that forms the basis for action when necessary. They focused on the acquisition of facts, and teaching students in a highly structured way to write well argued essays. Leong and Carolyn equated participation with contributing to the nation, "like giving back to society", where contribution is a more reflective form of participation. Their lessons emphasized understanding rationales of policies, and their pedagogical preference included simulation activities and structured group work.

The socially concerned teachers described participation as a social obligation to be exercised for the common good. The nation was not the primary reference.

Instead, participation focused on the community at the level where one lives and then extending out. Participation meant active involvement by engaging in issues, and taking initiative on matters concerning the community, as "the more you participate in the community, the more you feel belonged". Both teachers spoke in terms of student decision-making within the schools and performing community service as means by which students can develop citizenship knowledge, skills and attitudes. Social issues were the mainstay of their teaching, where cooperative learning structures were often used for students to address issues together. Teachers aimed at fostering interdependence and collective efforts, negotiating and valuing diverse viewpoints. The socially concerned teachers took seriously the responsibility to model participation with examples of their own individual efforts, distinguishing them from the nationalistic teachers who referred to participation with little lived experiences.

The person oriented teachers viewed participation in narrow and functional terms such as voting and law abidingness. The context did not facilitate citizens to be actively participating, for the state was conceived as paternalistic and authoritarian, constantly disciplining its citizens through its harsh laws and strict rules, intended to socialize citizens to be accepting and acquiescent. Instead, they felt society would be better served with people who were confident, responsible and of good character. Hence, teachers provided opportunities for individual growth and self-fulfilment, such as emphasizing meaning-making and multiple pathways of knowing in lessons.

Views of citizenship participation between the male and female teachers differed. The men saw participation as an obligation and duty, influenced by the National Service experience. Leong explained, "National Service is about the citizen's duty to defend the land". The nationalistic male teachers were positive about their military duty. Peter shared,

> What I've gone through in the army left a powerful impact. It's a feeling of strength in unity because you see the safety in soldiers coming together to train to defend Singapore.

In contrast, the socially concerned and person oriented male teachers generally felt less positive about military duty. David said, "I think of duty. Because I am a citizen of Singapore, I have National Service and the reservist obligation for the next 10 years". Duty was a course of action imposed by law, an imposition on one's freedom and was burdensome. In contrast, the women referred to participation as a citizenship responsibility rather than duty. Participation is being a useful and grateful citizen, and often associated with voluntary work, as Carolyn highlighted, "To participate means to volunteer and responsibility to help the less privileged in our society".

Amongst the three groups, the socially concerned teachers were the most articulate about how their political science and sociology training influenced their understanding of citizenship. Frida shared, "They taught me to look critically at society. I learnt about feedback and participation in policy-making. I am more informed, analytical, and know how to be involved". For the others, disciplinary background did not make a difference, instead the impact on citizenship was person-specific and circumstancial.

Participation was not seen as a political skill. Teachers generally avoided the political dimension of participation, except for the socially concerned teachers who chose to tackle political issues as they occurred. But they were conscious to

participate within system confirming ways. Active citizenship therefore serves the *status quo* by trying to encourage participation in the established social order, rather than questioning it.

Awareness of the nation's past

Singapore's leaders have approached the issue of forging a national identity and promoting national sentiment through various trajectories, the discursive use of history is one (Chua 1995; Hill and Lian 1995). NE emphasizes the Singapore Story, the government's version of the nation's past. The Singapore Story focuses on events related to the development of nationhood from the dominant political viewpoint. Without fail, all eight teachers mentioned that awareness of the history of one's country was an important criterion for citizenship. It is the basis of shared collective memories, with teachers acknowledging its role in developing the national identity.

The nationalistic teachers emphasized the Singapore Story. None of them found the subject matter problematic, but were accepting of the Singapore Story as the definitive nation's past. Reality was accepted as that which the authorities constructed to meet predetermined needs. The teachers were consumers of the meanings and conclusions given in the subject matter, regarded as the medium for socializing students, guiding present and future behaviours grounded in the past experiences of the society. Peter's statement was typical, "Without common experiences to pull us together, we need to create the Singapore Story to make us emotionally attached to Singapore". Leong added, "We can't do without an official history. We are vulnerable, once we are not careful, our neighbours can stomp us. Knowing the Singapore Story makes us aware we need to protect our sovereign country".

In contrast, both the socially concerned and person oriented teachers did not favour a single official version of the nation's past. The socially concerned teachers problematized the construction of the Singapore Story. They saw gaps in the selection and presentation of the subject matter, found to be propagandistic. While the national agenda was important, "just as important is to understand the shortcomings. If the government seriously wants to engage citizens, it needs to be more upfront". They were more tentative in their treatment of the Singapore Story, emphasizing the validity of multiple understandings of the events.

Similarly, the person oriented teachers emphasized the need to consider the historical phenomenon from more than one point of view, paying attention to personal histories. They were keen to enlarge the scope of the Singapore Story to include the ordinary voices. The official history always attributed Singapore's success

> to the wisdom of the government. But without the will of the people to carry the policies through, it's not possible. We need to show that ordinary people are critical to the success of policies.

Citizens, they understood, need to develop confidence in their own meaning-making. If common people were shown to be involved in social change, then citizens will regard themselves as valued individuals within the society. Thus the person oriented teachers were not mere consumers of the conclusions of others, but also producers of knowledge and meanings for themselves.

Thinking citizenry

The teachers associated citizenship with thinking. Most immediately, the arrest of the Jemaah Islamiah members in Singapore had jolted teachers into realizing the criticality of thoughtfulness. It was no longer sufficient for citizens to be compliant. With the rapid development of communications, information increases exponentially as it becomes easily accessible. Consequently, citizens are exposed to different media, and bombarded with all kinds of information and influences (Buckingham 2000). In this context, it is imperative that citizens are discerning and discriminating. The capacity to think and question, and not be easily accepting assumes critical importance. Teachers' understandings also suggested that thinking should not be confined to the elites, ordinary citizens who formed the bedrock of society must be able to think through issues, weigh evidence and understand the consequences of their actions.

For the nationalistic teachers, thinking was ultimately circumscribed by the needs of nation-building. The nationalistic stance emphasized thinking, informed by the human capital ideology, as the basis for progress for the nation. Progress was considered in economic terms, with reference to the new work-order. Underlying the teachers' conceptualization of thinking is the notion of the worker-citizen. Thinking was skills-based, and seen in terms of the cognitive aspects of problem solving, focused on mastering skills, processes and procedures "to create new knowledge and products, and solve difficult problems in the workplace". The teachers were concerned that thinking was doubled-edged, and worried about crossing the "out-of-bound" markers with divergent thinking. Not surprisingly, the political dimension of thinking was avoided in teachers' discourse.

The socially concerned teachers associated thinking with informed and responsible participation, within the communities where one lives. It was not reckless but considered participation, where citizens know how to reason and deliberate on issues. Without thoughtfulness, feedback and debates would deteriorate into an exchange of groundless opinions. From this perspective, the socially concerned teachers believed thinking to be the key to a more active and concerned citizenship. A citizen with a repertoire of thinking skills would be sufficiently confident to "take the initiative to question, reason and search for alternatives to problems". Consequently, they would be more inclined to organize themselves to address issues affecting their community. They did not avoid straying into the political dimension, but felt that when equipped with thinking skills, citizens are able to participate in the political process in an informed and responsible manner. Noteworthy, thinking was "a set of tools for dissecting and assessing the validity of claims", and thus a way to counter propaganda.

Consistent with the person orientation, the basis for thinking was "to add value to the person for his/her own sake". The person oriented teachers used terms such as "persons" and "folks", rather than "citizens" in relation to thinking. This suggested a private and personal, rather than public focus to thinking. The teachers maintained a specific orientation, focusing on the individual than the common society, where personal development was emphasized over the common good. But this was not to discount the common good, as the person oriented stance emphasized the development of the person as a basis to attain the common good. Similarly, the teachers seldom linked thinking to formal citizenship activities such as collective participation for causes. Instead, developing thinking skills was to help "ordinary

folks'' be more informed ''about things around so they can lead more fulfilling lives, and be more savvy in their daily transactions''. Nonetheless, they were not discouraging of thinking that would lead to collective action, but it was not their focus.

Conclusion

Despite a highly prescriptive citizenship education through the social studies curriculum that focused explicitly on the nation, this study did not identify homogenous understandings of citizenship amongst the teachers. Four broad themes, namely identity, participation, the nation's past and thinking citizenry cut across the eight teachers' conceptualizations of citizenship. But within these themes, teachers held varied orientations to citizenship, and a number of them conceptualized citizenship in ways different from the official discourse. These orientations were characterized by the nationalistic, socially concerned and person oriented stances, respectively. Importantly, these variations operationalized Thornton's (2005) concept of the teacher as the curricular-instructional gatekeeper within the social studies curriculum even in a tightly controlled education system in Singapore. It moves away from the idea of the ''teacher-as-curriculum conduit'', and re-situates the teacher as ''curriculum agents'', whose practice ''is intellectual, moral and inventive'' (Parker 1987, 7). This showed that Singapore teachers were neither disinterested nor compliant citizenship educators.

There was a lack of focus on the global dimension of citizenship in teachers' discourse. The impact of global connectedness did not influence how teachers understood citizenship identity. While references were made to multiple identities with the socially concerned and person oriented stances, none related it to the links between their own lives, and those of other people throughout the world. Instead, the idea of multiple identities were geographically bound to Singapore. Nationalistic goals and objectives of citizenship education are important, but to centre citizenship only on borders, nation and nationality will no longer be tenable. Global issues, trends and events have a major impact across the planet, and it would be a mistake to see them as issues that only occur elsewhere, and therefore not relevant to our own communities (Hicks and Holden 2007). A blinkered view of citizenship is dangerously myopic in an age where fortunes and misfortunes of nations are more intimately linked than ever before.

The teachers' understandings of citizenship can be summarized as largely conforming and reforming curriculum positions (MacNaughton 2003). The nationalistic teachers displayed a dominantly conforming position in their understandings of citizenship. Teachers understood nationalism to be support for the nation and nation-building. Citizenship education was a process of socialization that emphasized social and cultural reproduction. The socially concerned and person oriented teachers displayed a dominantly reforming position. The former focused on improving and renewing society by developing rational individuals capable of independent thought, while the latter focused on personal growth, the by-product of which was the betterment of the society. The reforming position was unlikely to challenge the *status quo*, as such a position worked towards incremental changes within the socio-political milieu.

It was not surprising that none held a transforming position premised on confronting injustice and resisting oppressive ways by challenging power relations

(MacNaughton 2003). Given the social and political development of Singapore, policies have always sought incremental and not radical changes. While the government has been authoritarian, it has not been repressive in many ways. The government has taken care of what it sees as the needs of the people. It has transformed the material conditions of the population, by delivering material returns and raising the standard of living of Singaporeans. The acceptability of authoritarianism by the people is through ideological consensus (Chua 1995). People were generally supportive of the government's vision of progress for the nation. Hence, the teachers were reluctant to question the meaning of citizenship in ways that were critical of the system. Consequently, teachers understood citizenship in relatively "safe" approaches within the *status quo*. Hence, teacher curricular-instructional gatekeeping was played out within two system confirming positions, rather than to confront structural issues or questions of systemic injustices.

Finally, findings from this study revealed a broadening perspective of citizenship superseding national loyalty. Not to recognize the variety of understandings of citizenship risks reducing the meanings that students acquire, ignoring civic realities, and alienating otherwise engaged and passionate citizenship educators. The social studies curriculum becomes parochial, breeding insular citizens when the globalized context urgently calls for citizens to understand and recognize diversities, alternative visions of the world and multiliteracies (Rossi and Ryan 2006). Social studies teacher education may do better to admit the variations and complexities in teachers' understandings of citizenship, and help them handle such variations meaningfully.

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