

1996

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Recommended Citation

Berlach, R. (1996). Citizenship education: Australian and Singaporean perspectives. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 21(2).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.1996v21n2.1>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.
<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol21/iss2/1>

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: AUSTRALIAN AND SINGAPOREAN PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

The issue of what it means to be a citizen of a country is currently on the educational agenda in both Australia and Singapore. It seems that over the years, both nations have realised that the schooling system is a powerful and effective vehicle through which a country's united vision can be disseminated, and through which individuals can be encouraged to make a valuable contribution to the national good. For a variety of reasons, however, the nature of a united vision appears to be problematic for both Australia as well as Singapore. With both countries being considered, this paper presents a brief history of the citizenship debate; reports on the current status of this debate; explores the place and role of the schooling system in citizenship education; suggests what the two countries have in common and how they can learn from each other; and offers suggestions for essentials which need to be incorporated into any citizenship education program which may be envisaged.

* The author is indebted to Christine Han from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, who, in her role as a consultant, willingly shared her experience and knowledge regarding citizenship education as it relates to Singapore.

What is this thing called “citizenship education”?

It has always been easier to define what is meant by a citizen than to conceptualise citizenship *per se*. The former normally refers to those individuals who are involved in and help influence a nation's decision-making process; or as Aristotle put it so many years ago, “a citizen is... one who has a share both in ruling and in being ruled” (1962: 131). A citizen, then, has a role to play in the political process. Citizenship, on the other hand, is more closely tied to a national identity than a political process. As such, the notion of citizenship has always been problematic. This is primarily because individuals, who make up the citizenry of a country, have disparate views regarding their identity depending upon where they sit on the social, economic, ethnic and religious continuum; it also depends upon what they value. As a result, some individuals, or indeed groups, may feel disenfranchised and disempowered in the adoption of a certain definition while others may feel that any definition which is mooted should always give them certain privileges and advantages because, after all, they were the original inhabitants of the country.

Governments, which attempt to encourage the development of a national culture and identity, grapple with the plethora of ideologies, systems and behaviours which, theoretically at least, express a concept of citizenship. This is done in order to maintain solidarity nationally, as well as to present a united front internationally. How successful have these attempts been at identity formation? Does one really know what it means to be an American, a Swazi, an Australian or a Singaporean? Can citizenship ever mean more than simply the geographical location where one

as it relates to Singapore.

resides, or is it something which does in fact exist in the collective unconscious of a particular people and can, if diligently sought out, be brought to a conscious level?

In painting a picture of citizenship, several factors begin to emerge. First, citizenship is not so much a tangible entity as a nebulous construct in the minds of individuals. Some may see it as patriotism or even jingoism, others as ethics and morals, some as myths and legends, while still others as mere geographic location. Second, it is an expression of individual perceptions as well as of the collective mindset of a country, of the amorphous mass we call "society". We are all citizens, but we are citizens with others, of something. As the poet John Donne stated "no man is an island entire of itself: every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main...". When considering both Australia and Singapore, such an aphorism could well be treated as an analogy.

Third, citizenship is dynamic rather than static in nature, and particularly so regarding perceptions which occur between generations. Changes in perception within a generation are less likely to occur, due in part, to the subversive role played by personal experience, private prejudice and one's historical milieu. Thus, different understandings of what it means to be a citizen of Australia are likely to be expressed, for example, by members of the Returned Services League as compared with those of the X-generation. Fourth, some will want to be responsible citizens, while others, at the risk of sounding pejorative or condescending, will prefer to be irresponsible and hedonistic ones. To paraphrase J.F. Kennedy, some citizens will ask "what can I do for my country? while others will ask "what can my country do for me?" Fifth, some will see the notion of citizen as a dictum handed down from above and one in which they have little or no say, as is the case under totalitarian rule. Others will want, and expect, a fair say in the affairs of their country, as is the possibility in more democratically orientated systems of government. Citizenship, then, is basically about an identity which individuals have regarding the values they hold for themselves, as well as for the community in which they live. By contrast, civics has more to do with understanding how one is governed, so that civic duties can be successfully executed.

As a result of such diversity in construct variables, citizenship needs to be seen as a broad rather than narrow concept. As such, it is expected that the notion of citizenship will only have pragmatic effect if all players see it as being undergirded by principles such as understanding, tolerance and diversity; for, without such agreement, there is no starting point for any dialogue. The self-serving bias found in individuals as well as in any community's subgroups may need to be subordinated to certain norms which relate to the common good, which make community possible, and so make citizenship workable.

So what does schooling have to do with citizenship? Much indeed! A great deal was written in the 1970s by individuals such as Illich (1970) and Reimer (1971) to the effect that schools as institutions of learning ought to be disbanded. Despite such protestations, however, schools as centres of learning and socialisation are here to stay - at least into the foreseeable future.

¹ The term "x-generation" may well be a misnomer, as is currently being suggested by many. Nevertheless, it is still a very powerful catch-word and so as a descriptive phrase may possess some value.

Schooling as a system is a powerful agent of change within the fabric of society as it is in possession of a captive audience, for, in most “First World” societies at least, children up to a certain age are compelled to attend school by law. Given the fact that an organisational structure must be in place to support such a system, it seems sensible for governments to see schools as efficient and effective conduits of what has been termed the “hidden curriculum”. Apart from their well-established role of information dissemination, schools can also be, and have been, vehicles for the transmission of values, morals, ethics and cultural mores - ingredients which ought to be included in any construction of citizenship. Once the various threads of the citizenship garment have been woven together, schools would then seem the obvious vehicles for instructing the future generation on how to wear the new apparel.

This paper attempts to grapple with understanding the notion of how citizenship manifests itself in both Australia and Singapore, as well as to explore the place of schooling in helping to further develop such an understanding. The hope is that raising awareness regarding what is happening in each country will be enriching for the citizenry of both, and so foster more informed dialogue between the two countries, as well as within each of them. As what follows will indicate, Australia and Singapore have much to learn from each other in the area of citizenship education and active cooperation should be of mutual benefit.

Historical overview

Australia

Australia’s heritage as a repository for British convicts tied the fledgling nation inextricably to British imperialism. As a result, from colonisation in 1788 onward, the epithet “Australian citizen” has had somewhat of an amorphous quality about it. Federation (of the colonies) in 1901 did little to help crystallise an Australian identity. The Fathers of Federation had such trouble with conceptualising the Australian citizen “in the face of the twin complications of monarchy and colonial status” (Saunders, 1995: 31), that the issue was left off the agenda altogether, and Australians remained “subjects of the Queen” (Australian Constitution: Section 117). In fact, the Constitution of the Commonwealth made no mention of Australian citizenship until 1948.

During the latter half of the present century, two events occurred which demanded greater clarification regarding the nature of citizenship. The first was the great influx of post-World War II immigrants which necessitated a drastic re-examination of what was known as the “White Australia” policy. Now, no longer could Australia see itself as a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) nation. With mass European immigration, the composition of its citizenry had changed the nation forever, calling for a redefinition of what it meant to be “Australian”. The second event was a concerted push by the Federal Labor Government in the first half of the 1990s to resurrect the republican agenda which was aimed at throwing off the remaining vestiges of British rule. As a consequence, a huge question had to be faced: “if we are not British subjects, then who are we?” Such a question strikes at the core of what it means to be Australian - of what it means to have an Australian **identity**.

Because the question of what it means to be Australian had not prior to the 1990s been significant politically, little was done to promote the notion of citizenship through the schooling system, and that which was promoted was done as “dry factual material with a solid moral underpinning of

commitment to ‘God, King and Country’” (Pascoe, 1995: 25). Historical evidence (e.g. O’Donnell, 1994; Civics Expert Group, 1994) indicates that a well thought-out and comprehensively integrated national approach to citizenship education has not been Australia’s legacy.

The first primary syllabus to mention civics was presented as “Civics and Morals” and was published in New South Wales in 1904. It included lessons on punctuality, patriotism, work ethic, general courtesies, and proper treatment of animals. The clear theme was one of morals and ethics. Until the 1930s, history and civics education had a prominent position in the curriculum. In the 1950s and early 1960s, citizenship education was part of the social studies syllabus, taught as civics, and took the form of students studying topics such as the workings of State and Federal parliament; the voting system; and the history of Australian politics. With the “Sputnik scare” of the 1950s, the mathematical and physical sciences began to take centre-stage, with the social science curriculum being truncated to give more space to these areas. One result was that civics seemed to vanish off the educational horizon altogether. Consequently, there has been a gap of thirty or so years in teaching about civics and citizenship in Australian schools.

Putting this into perspective, two generations (as defined by years of compulsory schooling) have been through the nation’s educational system without being exposed to what civics and citizenship are all about. Consequently, it could be argued that, for many, civics is little more than compulsory voting and citizenship little more than possessing an Australian passport. Such ignorance has, in fact, been confirmed by recent research (Phillips, 1995; Print, 1995), with perhaps the most damning indictment coming from the Civics Expert Group (1994, *Summary*: 6),

Only 19 per cent of people have some understanding of what Federation meant for Australia’s system of government. Only 18 per cent know something about the content of the Constitution. Only 40 per cent can name the two Federal houses of parliament, and only 24 per cent know that senators are elected on a state-wide basis. Sixty per cent have a total lack of knowledge about how the Constitution can be changed, despite having voted in referendums. Only 33 per cent have some knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of citizens; for most, citizenship is a abstract concept which is never given much thought.

Recent years, however, have seen a resurgence of interest in matters relating to civics and citizenship education. In 1994, being made aware of the paucity of students’ knowledge about their own country, and the longer-term ramifications of such a deficit for the fabric of society, the then Prime Minister, Paul Keating, formed the Civics Expert Group, with the brief of recommending “a non-partisan program to enable all Australians to participate more fully and effectively in the civic life of our country, and thereby to promote good citizenship” (Civics Expert Group, 1994, *Summary*: 2). A report entitled *Whereas the People...* was produced, with 35 broad recommendations being made. The overall thrust indicated that there was an immense need for the formation of a national approach to civics and citizenship education in Australia.

A quantum leap in the importance of this area was noted when the report made the suggestion that civics education was as important as the study of English and mathematics in the curriculum of Australian schools, thereby virtually reversing the decision that had been made during the “Sputnik era”. The Federal Government responded to the report by allocating \$25 million in the 1995-1996 budget, to be spent over four years, for addressing the recommendations raised by the

Civics Expert Group. The report generated such interest that the Australian College of Education (ACE), in November 1995, organised a national conference to consider the matters it raised, together with related issues such as ethics, morals, and religious education. Some 175 delegates from around Australia, representing primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions, attended the three-day conference.

Among other things, the ACE Conference noted that the Civics Expert Group's Report was well overdue; that a non-partisan approach was indeed the most desirable way to address the situation; and that teachers would need to be inserviced and resourced before curriculum implementation could take place. With reference to the final point, conference delegates were informed that the Curriculum Corporation (a federally co-ordinated but quasi-private body) was well poised to take up the considerable challenge of producing syllabus materials (Boston, 1996). Such a task, however, seems mammoth, especially considering that the Civics Expert Group indicated (1994, *Summary*: 15), that materials should support:

the provision of a mandatory ten-year program of preparation for citizenship. Some major initiatives will need to be taken in the production of age-appropriate learning resources for students, in a variety of media. Teachers will require not only new and innovative teaching resources, but also support materials to facilitate the assessment and reporting of student achievement.

The history of education in Australia indicates that certain concerns have been peripheral and ephemeral while others have had more of an enduring quality about them. Despite the resurgence of interest in civics and citizenship education, it would be easy to allow this newly restored impetus to fade into the background of the educational milieu, as past experience indicates that this is not an area which has ever had a high educational profile. Such a fear is exacerbated by the fact that a new government has been elected since the release of the *Whereas the people...* report. The saving grace is that the present government had agreed to support a non-partisan approach during its time in Opposition, and it is hoped that such a commitment will endure. Further, it is hoped that **all** members of parliament will endorse the comments made by the previous government's Minister for School, Vocational Education and Training, that "civics and citizenship education is about regaining pride in our heritage, in our achievements and in our nation. It is about understanding what it means to be Australian" (Free, 1995: 6). If such an ethos is maintained, civics and citizenship education, once established as a mandatory curriculum area, should endure well into the foreseeable future.

Singapore

Han (1995) noted that, over the years, two main themes had endured with regard to citizenship in Singapore. The first was concerned with identity (personal-ethnic, national) and the second with the kind of political participation that was appropriate for citizens, given the extant cultural, social and political climate, and the economic realities of the country. It would be true to assert that the political leaders in the People's Action Party have always regarded citizenship education as an important vehicle through which a country's united vision could be disseminated. Hence, over the years, unlike the Australian scene, close attention has been given to citizenship and citizenship education at a very high level of political concern.

The conception of citizenship in Singapore falls into the category known as “civic republicanism”, in that the sense of civic duty and responsibility is seen as being of paramount importance. A fundamental aspect of civic republicanism is the idea that citizens have duties to fulfil, these duties pertaining to “anything to do with defining, establishing and sustaining a political community” (Hill and Lian, 1995: 244-245). The working-out of such a philosophy in Singapore can clearly be seen in the words of Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who stated (*The Straits Times*, 1991:1) that:

Every schoolboy or schoolgirl should grow up with a common understanding of the basic facts of political life - that Singapore is small, that it depends on exports to other countries to make a living, that it is through ceaseless endeavour and the pursuit of excellence that (Singapore) can do well and get ahead.

Such an approach may draw the criticism that citizenship education is made the servant of economic rationalism; however, given the pluralistic nature of Singaporean society, such an approach may be justifiable. Han (1996:52-53) suggested that:

An end like economic development is one of the few goals on which a plural society can agree, and it is difficult to fault such a goal. After all, few will disagree that economic development, and the improvement in standard of living it brings, is a desirable objective. However, there is a question of whether this goal should be achieved at the expense of all other considerations, including that of principle; and, if not, what these non-violable considerations are... As it is, pragmatism and the ultimate goal of economic development has a hegemonic position in Singapore. In other words, it has become a widely accepted - even the primary - conceptual framework within which individuals think and work. Evidence of the acceptance of this conceptual framework can arguably be found in the prudent and instrumental rationality of schoolchildren in Singapore.

Because of the keen government interest in citizenship over the years, it is not difficult to trace the development of citizenship education in Singapore since it became a sovereign state in 1965. Between 1959 and 1966 citizenship education was taught as *Ethics*, and in 1967 the curriculum was renamed and revamped as *Civics* (secondary school) to deliberately place the emphasis on values such as patriotism, loyalty and civic consciousness (Ong, 1979). The subject was made compulsory in all schools. The primary school counterpart, *Education for Living*, was introduced in the 1970s and was an attempt at proactive planning in the face of impending economic changes. *Civics* was taught as part of the history and geography curriculum.

A significant document entitled *Report on the Ministry of Education* (Goh Keng Swee, 1978) emphasised the need to teach values which were responsible for economic success, which would bind the people together, and which would continue to ensure the country’s survival and success. The report was introduced (1978:1) with the words:

a society unguided by moral values can hardly be expected to remain cohesive under stress. It is a commitment to a common set of values that will determine the degree to which people of recent migrant origin will be willing and able to defend their collective interest.

The phrase “people of recent migrant origin” signalled the possibility of societal disintegration if active steps were not taken to unite members of the new citizenry. The Goh Report, as it came to be known, also highlighted the need to prevent the “deculturalisation” of young Singaporeans, by teaching them “the historical origins of their culture” (1978: 1). There was also the suggestion that there should be a retention of the “best features of [the] different ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious groups” (Lee Kuan Yew, 1979: iv-v). The value system, then, was to be communitarian in orientation.

The Goh Report was followed by another *Report on the Ministry of Education* (Ong Teng Cheong, 1979) which identified a number of moral values and concepts to be included in citizenship education programs. Among other things, children were to be taught:

1. *Personal behaviour*

- (i) Habit formation (e.g. diligence, courtesy and thrift);
- (ii) Character development (e.g. integrity, honour, the spirit of inquiry, obedience, self-discipline, filial piety, respect for elders and tolerance).

2. *Social responsibility*

- (i) Sense of belonging to the community (e.g. civic consciousness, respect for others, respect for law and order and group-spirit);
- (ii) Respect for cultural heritage (e.g. understanding and appreciation of one’s cultural heritage and beliefs, and that of others).

3. *Loyalty to the country*

- (i) Love of country (e.g. sense of national identity, upholding the democratic system, patriotism, and justice and equality);
- (ii) Spirit of nation building (e.g. appreciation of the pioneer spirit of one’s forefathers and of their contribution to nation building, and understanding of the internal and external threats to Singapore’s survival and prosperity).

The *Good Citizens* and *Being and Becoming* syllabuses were introduced in the 1980s and were a direct response to the Ong Report. Initially, religious knowledge was introduced to complement civics and moral education but, as Han (1996:15) pointed out, such an emphasis was subsequently removed:

In 1982, the Religious Knowledge component was made compulsory for secondary school pupils. They had to choose one of several options offered, including Bible Knowledge, Islamic Religious Knowledge, Buddhist Studies, Hindu Studies, Sikh Studies, Confucian Ethics, and World Religions... By the end of the decade, however, Religious Knowledge was all but abandoned when it was made a non-compulsory option in schools... In 1989, political leaders expressed concern

over the increase in evangelical fervour, assertiveness and competition for converts among the religious groups.

Further legacies of the *Being and Becoming* syllabus were, first, the introduction of the values clarification approach of Raths, Harmin and Simon (1978). Such an approach attempted to syncretise the values of the various ethnic and religious groups found in the country. Second, shared values were presented via illustrated stories within the framework of the children's own ethnic culture (i.e., the Chinese, Malay and Tamil *Good Citizens* texts often used different illustrations to make a similar point). Third, the four teaching approaches adopted were the Cultural Transmission, Consideration, Cognitive Developmental and Modified Values Clarification Approach. More will be said about these later.

The most recently introduced syllabus (1992) and the one presently in use, is that entitled *Civics and Moral Education*. Prior to its implementation, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong told Parliament that political values such as democracy and good government would be included in civics lessons (*The Straits Times*, 1991:1). This new program was based on the Shared Values Approach and also included participation in nation-building and appreciation of major religions and races. Added to these specifics, there was some emphasis on citizenship education, on learning about the culture and values of one's own ethnic group. Such an emphasis marked a move away from the dogmatic approach found in past programs.

The various programs over the years have not been entirely successful in reaching desired outcomes because of the conflicting messages which children received. On the one hand, they were exhorted by teachers, and taught in civics and moral education lessons, the virtues of selflessness and of putting the community before the self. On the other hand, they were placed in a selective and highly competitive school system. It was also a system in which those who were more individualistic and hence, able to compete more effectively, tended to do better in examinations. Given these conflicting messages, it was inevitable that children were faced with frequent dilemmas in terms of how they were to resolve conflicts of interest.

The place and role of schools in citizenship education

There is no doubt that information regarding civics and an understanding of citizenship can be gained from a variety of sources. The media undoubtedly play a role in information dissemination, as does printed text (e.g. the Australian Electoral Commission publication *The People's Say: Elections in Australia*, 1994). Political party propaganda also contributes (especially around election time), as do the views of "significant others" within the individual's circle of influence. The schooling system as a societal institution, however, is possibly the most appropriate vehicle for providing information about the civic process as well as training in citizenship. It is (or at least ought to be) an effective conduit for the transmission of a particular society's knowledge, skills, values, and beliefs; it reaches all children and many adults at any given time; it possesses a well-established infrastructure; and finally, it provides opportunity for students to test values and beliefs from within the barriers of a physically and emotionally safe environment.

There is another, more compelling reason, why children ought to be instructed in civics and citizenship in school. The earlier that a country's citizenry understands and appreciates its role, the sooner it can effectively contribute to the national good. As Thompson (1996:49) correctly

pointed out, “Citizenship is not something that happens after leaving school. It is learnt and practised daily in every transaction and deed”. As such, citizenship must be practised **in** school, and this must be done in what Mellor (1996:74) calls an “interactive rather than cerebral” fashion. Learning of facts and numbers has its place, but active participation (in school government for example), is far more effective in teaching children about the political system and the rights and responsibilities of all citizens.

Schools, however, must never become places of indoctrination. If civics and citizenship education are to be taught as an integral part of the curriculum, this must be undertaken in an unbiased and non-partisan fashion. The very ethic of a democratic system of government demands such a commitment. Accordingly, resource materials must be non-political and unbiased, and presented in a way which covers essentials without compromising individual freedom. In this regard, it largely falls to teacher preparation institutions to provide the sort of instruction and materials which will enable classroom practitioners to teach civics and citizenship in ways which will not attract the epithet “indoctrination”.

Citizenship: what Australia and Singapore can learn from each other

Despite differences in the conceptualisation of citizenship in Australia and Singapore, strong similarities can nevertheless be identified. As such, each nation may be enriched by exploring the other’s struggles in the arena of citizenship education by considering the policies and strategies which have been implemented to deal with various issues as these arose.

Commonalities

In the first place, Australia and Singapore are relatively young countries, both only having achieved sovereign-state status in the twentieth century (1901 and 1965 respectively). As such, many individuals can articulate more easily what it means to be a British subject in Australia and British or Malaysian subject in Singapore, than what it means to be a citizen of Australia and Singapore respectively. The notion of citizenship, then, is still an emerging one for both countries and each can identify with the other in the struggle for a national identity.

Secondly, as Lee Hsien Loong, cited earlier, asserted, everyone should grow up with a common understanding of the basic facts of political life.

Similar overtones have been heard in Australia: Kalantzis, for example (1992-93: 29) wrote:

The fact is that Australia is a liberal democratic state with a small and vulnerable economy in a region of states that are booming economically but which do not have liberal democratic traditions.

In both countries, “smallness” seems to be coupled with “vulnerability” and both seem to believe that such a disadvantage may be compensated for by emphasising economic growth. So in Singapore, there exists within the mind of the People’s Action Party a pragmatism which uses vigorous economic development as a focus for a united, national agenda (Han, 1996); and in Australia, economic rationalism has become a focus for both the present as well as the previous government. Implicitly at least, there appears to be an understanding in both countries that a good citizen is one who works hard to fuel the country’s economic machinery.

In the third place, both countries acknowledge cultural and religious plurality to be a given and recognise that for any meaningful dialogue to transpire, a “shared values” rather than an “enforced rules and moral principles” approach needs to be adopted. Toleration in areas such as race, religion, cultural tradition, and political preference must form part of the fabric of any school civics and citizenship curriculum. For Singapore, the four approaches recommended by Ho Soo Guang (1992) may be a starting point for curriculum planning: the Cultural Transmission approach (passing on cultural mores via story-telling); the Consideration approach (empathically considering others); the Modified Values Clarification approach (assisting with the formation of independent judgement); and the Cognitive Developmental approach (*a la* the moral reasoning of Kohlberg).

Australia has yet to develop a model but perhaps an approach approximating the recently-proposed Western Australian *Agreed Minimum Values Framework* (Wallace, 1995:2) for “the teaching of values and religious teachings” in schools may be applicable to civics and citizenship education. The framework revolves around the three domains of ultimate values (those evoking united agreement), democratic values (arrived at by negotiated agreement), and educational values (the knowledge and ethics of instruction). Regardless of the model which may finally be settled upon, Millar’s (1995) insistence on the use of public deliberation to develop a consensus regarding national culture and identity would appear sound, given the commitment of both countries to a democratic form of government.

Fourthly, the Australian Civics Expert Group concluded that “In contrast to most other countries, we have seldom experienced a challenge to the legitimacy of our civic order or resorted to violence. The political process has operated peacefully. The rule of law abides. There is a high level of toleration and acceptance” (1994, *Summary*: 3). The same may be said for the situation as it currently exists in Singapore. Although the Australian system is formed around the notion of liberal democracy and the Singaporean around civic republicanism, or perhaps what Chan Heng Chee (1993) termed “Asian Democracy”, both countries are politically stable and thus provide a potentially rewarding environment for the exploration of issues relating to civics and citizenship.

A further commonality, but on the negative side (and, for this reason, one which needs to be addressed by both nations), has to do with people’s perception of politicians. In Australia, it was recently stated that a “barrier [to civics education] is community pessimism about public life. There is a general cynicism towards politicians and alienation from politics...” (Civics Expert Group, *Summary*, 1994: 7). A similar view, essentially one approaching apathy, exists among many Singaporeans. First, with regard to this “cynicism towards politicians” as expressed by the Civics Expert Group, perhaps amelioration could begin with the politicians themselves adopting a code of practice which is expected of professional people in general. The citizenry of both countries look to politicians for leadership by example, and expect their elected leaders to model expected standards. Perhaps a change in behaviour during such events as campaigning and parliamentary debating would provide the motivation necessary for many to become proud of their leaders and so their nation. Second, the feeling of “alienation from politics” spoken about is more difficult to ameliorate. Such a feeling may stem from a perceived impotence regarding the degree of influence that citizens can **really** have over political decision-making. Perhaps Lucas’s (1976) notion of a participatory democracy in which citizens mould and help develop a common,

national culture with which they can genuinely identify and feel a sense of ownership about, is worth exploring in this regard.

Finally, both countries currently view the need for civics and citizenship education positively, not wanting to sail down the river of pessimism which sees the task of schools as plugging holes in the sinking vessel of citizenship. Both have adopted a proactive stance toward citizenship and both are keen to build on the strengths which already exist. Both are also aware that ethnic culture and identity need to be preserved in any dialogue regarding civics and citizenship education.

Differences

One way of attempting to instil a sense of citizenship in Singapore has been to maintain the policy that, other than in exceptional circumstances, all males complete two years of obligatory national service from the year they turn eighteen. Australians, on the other hand, tend not to react positively to military conscription in any form, as was clearly attested to during the years surrounding the Vietnam war of the 1960s and 1970s. Regardless of what one thinks of the morality of mass conscription, such a mechanism may be a way of instilling a sense of unity and national pride in the young. Australia has no comparable “rite of passage” for facilitating a national identity in its young people. Perhaps the current endeavour of creating a compulsory and comprehensive citizenship curriculum for schools will help to redress this shortcoming.

The Report of the Civics Expert Group concluded that “The approach to civics education in many countries is distinguished by its strong moral emphasis - often the result of religious belief” (1994: 33). Although religious beliefs in Singapore are diverse, a moral ethos does seem to permeate the culture and so filter down through the schools. Han (1996) has indicated that citizenship education and moral education have always been seen by the political leaders as being integrated, and the curriculum has generally reflected this outlook, the ideal citizen often being described in moral terms. As a result, there is also a greater confidence among Singaporeans *vis-a-vis* Australians, of the “rightness” of the moral values which they hold. Uncertainty tends not to exist, for example, over the use of soft drugs, homosexuality or single parenthood. More recently, there has been the introduction of the Shared Values approach. Such values are supposedly drawn from the different moral traditions found in Singapore, that could be held by all regardless of belief, and could be interpreted in terms of one’s individual religious beliefs.

In Australia, however, where, in times past, the Christian value system with its solid moral base permeated society (and by extension the schooling system), the introduction of a “free, compulsory, and secular” public school system meant that civics education was no longer tied to a particular value system. Such a shift is somewhat understandable in light of the religious plurality which now exists in Australia; however, the void left by the removal of the Christian value system is one which, to the present time, remains unfilled. The Civics Expert Group itself concluded that civics education will be “unsuccessful unless it makes explicit the values implicit in citizenship” (p. 1994: 34). Agreed! The question which arises is, of course, “whose values”? If citizenship education is to have a moral base, and it is strongly advocated in this paper that this needs to be so in order for individuals to live as a society, then essential values need to be determined by a consensus approach in which every citizen’s opinion is valued.

With regard to authority, those with legitimate power are generally accorded higher status in Singapore than in Australia. In Singapore, deference to authority is somewhat of an expectation whereas in Australia “bucking the system” and “cutting down tall poppies” seems to be a national pastime. It seems to be the case in Singapore that the interests of the community are seen as being of greater importance than those of individuals or groups. In Australia, on the other hand, with its ethos of greater egalitarianism, individual rights tend to be given more emphasis than those of the community or group. Each country’s perception of the importance of society *vis-a-vis* the individual no doubt colours its conceptualisation of citizenship, depending upon which is given the greater emphasis - rights or responsibilities.

Finally, teachers tend to be held in higher regard in Singapore than in Australia. This undoubtedly is a reflection of how, in both countries, power and authority in general are perceived. With regard to children’s rights and responsibilities, the former are stressed in Australia and the latter in Singapore. Respect for teachers is an expectation in Singaporean schools whereas in the Australian educational milieu, respect is something which has to be earned rather than merely expected.

Essentials for a citizenship education curriculum

On the strength of the preceding discussion, it would be in the interests of both Singapore and Australia to consider the following aspects prior to either revamping or developing a citizenship education curriculum. Although specifics would need to be elaborated, the following five general points are seen as essentials if meaningful dialogue is to occur within both countries.

Essential 1

A national rather than a state or regional approach is required for a national identity to be achieved. Any endeavour at creating such an identity must be explicitly non-partisan as any notion of citizenship must transcend party-political ideologies. Political parties are ephemeral, citizens remain.

Essential 2

A national identity may imply many things. What it does not imply, however, is universal conformity. Individuals are just that, and this individual identity in areas such as culture and religion must be respected regardless of how citizenship is conceived. The process of “citizen shipping” must never imply cloning or indoctrination. Such a commitment may mean elaborating a set of agreed values regarding a common culture which are as “thick” as possible. Anthony Smith (1991: 11) describes a common culture as a set of civic ideologies, “a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind the population together in their homeland”.

Essential 3

A national approach must acknowledge the fact of moral pluralism, and the attendant idea that there exist in any society legitimate (albeit different), moral codes; while at the same time recognising that common core values are indispensable. Citizenship, by definition, implies some sort of moral underpinning, for we are all citizens together, of something. How can any group of

people live together as a society if at least some agreed-upon values, standards, rules and courtesies do not exist? It is the degree and interpretation of such agreement which is reflected in the level of social cohesion and strength of national identity. Apart from agreed values, however, there exists a range of sub-group and personal value systems which need to be tolerated if the various members of the society are to engage in harmonious coexistence. Such toleration must be included in any charting of a national identity.

Essential 4

The “how” of citizenship education needs to be carefully thought through if any school-based program is ever to meet with success. Progressively structured and integrated programs must be created; curriculum materials need to be developed and disseminated; teachers need to be in-serviced and motivated; and pre-service teacher education courses must include a substantial citizenship education component. An ill-conceived program or a premature attempt at implementation may end up being nothing more than yet another exercise in wasting taxpayers’ money.

Essential 5

Neither the process nor the content must be allowed to be hijacked by those proffering alternative agendas such as feminism, republicanism, socialism, environmentalism, multiculturalism, postmodernism, and other similar “isms”. Such single-faceted agendas, regardless of how important they may be in and of themselves, present an insufficiently comprehensive platform from which to launch a debate on citizenship education. Universally accepted (perhaps moral) values seem to be a better starting point. In this regard, it is incumbent upon the government of the day to ensure that any citizenship education program which is embarked upon represents agreed **community** concerns.

Concluding remarks

It could be said that citizenship education has to do with a country’s citizenry developing an understanding about the kind of life which is worth living, about developing a common and national identity, and about being proud of who they are and of the country in which they find themselves. Perhaps Eva Cox, who presented the 1995 Boyer Lectures entitled *A Truly Civil Society*, is right in asserting that a correct understanding of civics stresses the concept of “social capital”, that is, of personal relationships rather than things. She argued that, above all else, human beings value “connectedness” and “relationships”, which, she contended, are the glue which holds a society together. Material prosperity, self-seeking competitiveness, and academic credentialing, may be unsatisfying attempts at filling a void left by the industrial revolution, namely, the perceived loss of community (connectedness) and family (relationships), which at their core reside in moral values.

In responding to the needs of civics and citizenship education, it is incumbent on governments to consider people above all else. People must be placed ahead of party politics, economic interests, and lobby group pressures, for such aspects are merely shells which contain the heart of a nation. The heart of any nation is its citizenry. In sharing the same etymological root, the terms “civics” and “civilisation” (*L. civis* = “citizen”), suggest that a truly civilised society, to paraphrase Cox, is one in which citizens appreciate, exercise, and modify their civic rights and responsibilities

because they understand that the civic structure exists to help provide them with a sense of citizenship. In this task, the institution of schooling has a great deal to offer.

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