

Exploring Learning Spaces in School-based Co-curricular Activities

Chong Sau Kew and David Hung Wei Loong

KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. Relooking at school-based co-curricular activities (CCAs) as a site of advanced, sophisticated and expanded learning spaces that can enhance classroom academic learning.
2. Repositioning competition and winning as collective rather than as an individual goal within the contexts of caring relations and mutual extensions of dignity and respect.
3. Creating greater connectedness between learning in academic curriculum and CCA curriculum or other after-school or out-of-school organised activities as ways of widening pupils' contexts of learning and acquiring literacies.

BACKGROUND

The research project was motivated by the state's interest in CCA as an integral agent for providing holistic education (MOE, 2010) and for developing pupils' life skills and character (Ng, 2008; Heng, 2011). Contrasting this growing interest in the developmental opportunities which CCAs offer is the paucity of school-based CCA research in Singapore. While there had been studies done on CCA at the National Institute of Education (NIE) in the past decade, none has explored the relationship between learning in CCA and literacy education through the textuality of learning contexts or through the social uses of literacy. The project addresses this research gap. It also demonstrates a case of how CCA participation can be conceptualised

beyond building dispositions and how literacies and learning acquired from CCA experiences can be taken up in classrooms where academic curriculum commonly prevails.

FOCUS OF STUDY

The research project investigates how participation in and experiences of CCAs can contribute to the development of learning, including literacy learning. Specifically, it examines the ways in which teachers engage pupils with learning in their CCAs and how various skills, competencies and knowledge can be developed through their CCA participation.

KEY FINDINGS

- A range of learning opportunities were found in the CCAs under study. The work pupils engaged were technically sophisticated (e.g., designing and manufacturing a miniature car for a national competition, and creating a video clip) and were undertaken in a disciplined way, often generating further learning that took them to various spaces such as competitions, workshops, classrooms and after-school lesson at tertiary institutions, and interacting with people of relevant expertise.
- The learning opportunities can be broadly classified as contexts for (a) knowledge and skills acquisition, and (b) identity exploration where the latter is often constituted in the former.

- Pupils' acquisition of skills and knowledge from their CCA sometimes prepares them for academic learning in formal contexts (e.g., understanding concept of aerodynamics in Physics and map reading skills in Geography). Conversely, CCA also serves as an authentic platform for pupils' purposeful uses of academic learning and literacies such as writing to potential sponsors an official e-letter and preparing a brief video clip where specific words were selectively used as captions or to reflect the gist of the scenes depicted in their video clip.
- CCA serves as a site for promoting social integration through bonding and friendship that comes from pupils working collaboratively. This phenomenon was more evident with pupils from the Normal stream, including those who progressed to the Express stream from their Normal (Academic) course, and those who were new to the educational system in Singapore.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

- Re-visioning CCAs as productive contexts of social relationships where building dispositions occurs as an indispensable product of CCA participation rather than as an alternative site for building dispositions.
- Re-examining the curriculum content for mastery of knowledge and skills for lifelong learning since CCA as a site has great potentials to developing the skills required for workforce.
- Exploring the role of community of practice more dynamically among pupils, specifically in scaffolding "novice" pupils into the learning and/or practices of CCA skills, academic curriculum and the 'soft' skills of character

development. This is premised on our understanding of the findings that *all* pupils are novice learners at some points of their schooling.

POPULATION

Two schools participated in this research project. A pilot study was conducted in one government secondary school near the main study school which had a higher than national average number of pupils enrolled in the less academic stream—the Normal stream. A total of 230 participants from the two schools took part in the research.

RESEARCH DESIGN

An ethnographic perspective to research and concepts grounded in New Literacy Studies and social learning were adopted to investigate this study. Multiple research tools like participant observations, semi-structured interviews, observational fieldnotes and photographs of artefacts were used.

REFERENCES

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About the authors

CHONG Sau Kew and David HUNG Wei Loong are with the National Institute of Education, Singapore.

Contact David Hung at david.hung@nie.edu.sg for more information about the project.

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