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in Singapore

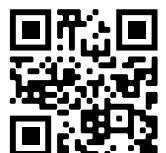
Character and Citizenship Education in Singapore



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Strengthening Character and Citizenship Education

In response to societal changes and technological advancements, the role of education is undergoing a transformative shift. It is evolving from a mere preparation for the workforce to a more profound focus on nurturing the flourishing of individuals and society. Within this context, Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) comes to the forefront of education, as it provides an integrated approach to cultivate students' values, character, social-emotional well-being, and citizenship dispositions. The deliberate effort to strengthen CCE in Singapore has resulted in the recent establishment of the Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education (SCCCE), the first of its kind in the region dedicated to advance research and professional development in the field of CCE.

In this issue of *SingTeach*, CCE educators and professionals share their insights regarding the significance of CCE in the current context of Singapore, taking into account the evolving landscape of student profiles and demographics, the increase in global interconnectivity and conflicts, and the widespread use of social media and digital tools. Establishing a strong anchor of values serves as a bedrock for our students to navigate this ever-changing world. This calls for prioritizing CCE education and innovation in CCE pedagogies.

As outlined in the CCE 2021 Curriculum Framework, the implementation of CCE must become a school-wide, intentional effort. It should extend beyond dedicated CCE lessons to encompass the creation of a caring and enabling school culture. In this issue, educators reflect on how CCE is implemented in our secondary schools and junior colleges via frameworks like Character First Education, and programmes like Life Coaching.

It is important to note that certain aspects of CCE implementation remain challenging for our educators. For instance, a study featured in this issue reveals that while Singaporean teachers are investing time and effort into modelling and explaining positive values, relatively less focus is given in equipping students with the skills to analyse how their own values are shaped. These findings underscore the need for continuous commitment to CCE research and professional development.

Professor Tan Oon Seng

Centre Director

Singapore Centre for Character & Citizenship Education
National Institute of Education

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Collaborate with Us EDUCATOR-RESEARCHER CONNECT

The Educator-Researcher Connect (or ER Connect) is a platform that aims to bridge researchers from the National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore, and local teachers and school leaders in an effort to deepen, enhance and advance education research in Singapore. If you are interested to collaborate and be part of any NIE research project(s) listed in the ER Connect, based on your school's or your needs, please get in touch with the relevant Principal Investigator directly.

Find out more by scanning the QR code below.



THE CRUCIAL ROLE

OF CHARACTER AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN SINGAPORE

In the dynamic landscape of modern education, Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) stands as an essential pillar in nurturing well-rounded individuals. Rooted in the belief that education extends beyond academic achievements, Singapore has long recognized the importance of equipping students with values, ethics and civic responsibility. In this article, Director of the newly established Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Professor Tan Oon Seng, sheds some light on the significance of CCE, its implications on a nation's progress, challenges faced by educators and the evolving dimensions that warrant special attention.



SIGNIFICANCE OF CCE IN SINGAPORE

“When our society weathered the challenges of the pandemic here in Singapore, we relied on two foundational characteristics: science and social responsibility,” Prof Tan, who started off his career as a teacher in 1983 and was former Director of NIE from 2014 to 2018, recounts.

Singapore is recognized as a country that always strives for scientific, technological and digital advances to propel the nation forward. “And equally important as seen in the COVID-19 crisis is the character and citizen aspects of social responsibility that enabled us to overcome challenges. As such, the realities of today’s world call for education to enhance both adaptability and foundations,” he adds.

The intentionality to flourish character, well-being and citizenship led to the establishment of the Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education (SCCCE), the first of its kind in the region. Officially launched at the recent Ministry of Education’s Teachers’ Conference and ExCEL Fest on 30 May 2023, SCCCE was launched by the Minister of Education Mr Chan Chun Sing who emphasized that education in Singapore faces two major challenges in the coming years, firstly, a more connected yet more fragmented world around us, and secondly, an increasingly diverse population.

Borrowing an analogy from genomics, Prof Tan alludes that “every society needs to constantly be aware of their ‘DNA’, namely, how people perceive their Democratic values, National citizenship and Affiliations.” “As a democratic society, we nurture in every generation

the ideals of respect, justice and equality. Through the pandemic, our collaborative efforts as a community demonstrate our national identity, as citizens across ages, workers and professionals arise to cooperate and to serve each other. We also need to strengthen our sense of belonging—how people build Affiliations—especially in a new era of social media where misinformation can influence our social compact,” said Prof Tan.

“It is most timely that we renew our diligence to address the nurturing of virtues for the next generation as individuals, fellow human beings and members of society,” Prof Tan, who is currently leading the Centre, shares.

ROLE OF EDUCATORS IN CCE

Central to CCE is the belief that educators play a pivotal role in shaping the character of their students. By integrating values education into their teaching strategies, teachers can create environments that foster empathy, integrity and responsibility.

“Teachers are the real catalyst for effective CCE and there is a great need to equip them with CCE pedagogy, facilitation skills, and the understanding that CCE is not just taught but largely caught through school culture and school climate as well as teachers’ role modeling,” Prof Tan explains. “We hope to strengthen teachers’ understanding and competencies in terms of both depth and breadth in the nurturing of the values of character, resilience, intra and interpersonal intelligences, well-being, active citizenship and future readiness.”

While the benefits of CCE are undeniable, educators encounter a myriad of challenges in its effective

implementation. CCE is not just about the curriculum, lessons and programmes. For example, there is a need for a consistent and coherent ecology of positive relationships and empowerment of student voices. Fostering character is not a one-time endeavour; it requires sustained effort and reinforcement throughout a student's educational journey. Understanding the changing profile of our learners and having dialogue and conversations necessitate creative and engaging approaches to maintain students' interest.

Understanding that character education and social emotional learning as complementing academic rigor is an important perspective. Educators must strike a delicate equilibrium between preparing students for academic success and instilling essential life skills and values. This requires innovative curriculum design and collaborative efforts among educators, parents and policymakers.

"People who enter the teaching profession do so with a purpose of influencing and making a difference to the lives of students. The schools are the frontlines in impacting our future generations," Prof Tan asserts. "The CCE Centre hopes to collaborate with schools to explore and innovate learning in areas pertaining to CCE that meets the needs and aspirations of our students."

INSTILLING VALUES A CONSTANT IN CCE

In the face of a rapidly changing world, educators must adapt their approach to character development. However, according to Prof Tan, one thing remains a constant despite all the shifts: values.

"During my Teacher Education Deanship years, I coined the V³SK model which puts values as the core of our profession. As a thought-leader for the OECD Education, whenever I speak for the Singapore education system, I have always highlighted only one thing, which is values," Prof Tan shares.

According to him, the most important value for teachers is the care for the learner to build in him or her dispositions and attitudes that will help them thrive in all circumstances. As such, the cultivation of values stands as a crucial cornerstone in education, equipping students with the ethical compass needed to navigate life's myriad challenges.

"It is always a joy to see how schools come up with great ideas to inspire and encourage their students in character and citizenship, from caring for the most disadvantaged in their immediate communities to experiential learning and service learning," Prof Tan adds.

Through the cultivation of values like integrity, empathy, responsibility, resilience and accountability, educators can empower students to navigate the complexities of the world with wisdom and grace. In doing so, they foster a generation of citizens poised to contribute positively to society and lead lives of significance and meaning.

FUTURE OF CCE IN SINGAPORE

CCE is the bedrock upon which Singapore's education system stands. It empowers students to navigate the complexities of the world with integrity and empathy.

"With the changing landscape of social media and demographics, it is timely to re-think and reset education. In Singapore, where her people has thrived on pragmatism and balancing the best of East and West, education has entered a new phase of Values-driven and Student-centric development," explains Prof Tan. "The primary aim of education is to flourish the individual through building character virtues that recognize self-awareness of disposition, interests and aptitudes as well as nurturing of virtues of care, respect, harmony and plurality."

Through research in CCE, Prof Tan also hopes to capture even more strongly the cases of effective CCE, and address areas of pedagogy and approaches for character, well-being and citizenship development across all levels of learning.

As the landscape of education continues to evolve, so too must our approach to character development. Through the collective commitment to CCE, Singapore charts a course toward a future where character and values stand as pillars of strength in an ever-changing world. However, its effective implementation is not without challenges, requiring a concerted effort from educators, researchers, parents and policymakers.

As Prof Tan aptly puts it: "We hope to be a hub that brings the best experts from around the world to Singapore. We also aspire to contribute our thought leadership to build a better world." ■

Scan the QR code to read more about the V³SK model.



ABOUT THE GUEST EDITOR

Professor Tan Oon Seng is Centre Director of Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education. He is also Dean of Special Projects at the National Institute of Education, Singapore. In 2022, Prof Tan was presented the Nanyang Distinguished Alumni, the highest award by Nanyang Technological University, Singapore for alumni with outstanding contributions nationally and internationally.

Teachers' Perspectives

IN VALUES EDUCATION



Adopting a whole-school approach to Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) involves developing an interconnection between the school curriculum and CCE. The act of imparting the right values to learners can be integrated into every subject discipline, with every teacher taking on the role of a CCE teacher. Associate Professor Suzanne Choo from NIE believes that more intentional efforts can be made to integrate the teaching of school subjects with values education. She shares more about her research study that explores teachers' perception of the connection between values and their teaching subject, and the pedagogical approaches they employ to engage students with values in their lessons.

IMPORTANCE OF VALUES EDUCATION

In 2020, the Ministry of Education launched a refreshed Character and Citizenship Education syllabus (CCE2021) with the aim to “anchor our students on a strong foundation of moral values, good character and resilience” as well as “encourage them to play a more active role as citizens of Singapore” (MOE, 2020, para. 3).

Associate Professor Suzanne Choo from NIE's English Language and Literature Academic Group observes that values education, as emphasized in CCE2021, “is more urgent and needed than ever before.”

“While we are living in an age of ‘hyper-globalization’ and global interconnectivity, the world is also being pushed further apart as evidenced by rising instances of racism, xenophobia and all other forms of intolerance today,” she says.

Suzanne highlights that while there have been multiple studies exploring the connection between values and CCAs, experiential and outdoor learning, less research has been conducted into the ways values have been integrated into the teaching of academic subjects.

“My research study examines values pedagogy in Singapore,” she explains. “More specifically, it explores what teachers believe are important character competencies they hope to develop in students, and how they do so through classroom culture, lesson planning and lesson enactment.”

THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF VALUES

Suzanne shares that the study focuses on two key dimensions of values—the personal and the relational—adding that these are facilitated along three levels.

“The first is the *awareness level* in which teachers make students aware of positive or negative values as well as personal, national or global values,” she says.

“The second is the *analytical level* in which teachers equip students to analyse how their personal or relational values are shaped or applied, and the social and global contexts informing these values. The third is the *agency level* in which teachers empower students to take action to apply constructive values to fulfil their purposes in life or take action in society and the world to help others flourish,” she continues.

FINDING OUT WHAT TEACHERS THINK

Consisting of two phases, Phase 1 of the research study involves a national survey of 598 teachers from 10 secondary schools who teach a variety of subject disciplines, while Phase 2 involves qualitative observations of classrooms.

The survey conducted during Phase 1 reveals that teachers place the most importance on the *awareness level* in their values pedagogy, with empathy, respect and moral sensitivity being the most important character dispositions they emphasize in the classroom.

“In classroom culture and lesson planning, teachers integrate pedagogies that enable students to be aware of good personal and relational values such as respect and sensitivity to others who are different as well as the consequences of their actions on themselves and others,” she shares.

During classroom lessons, teachers also encourage students to be aware of external influences shaping their values, awareness of Singapore’s values as well as current issues in the world.

“In terms of pedagogy, it is heartening to see how teachers are moving away from didactic teaching of values,” she remarks. “It is encouraging to see teachers taking the time and effort to model or demonstrate good values and explain the importance of particular values for students’ growth.”

However, the survey also found that teachers place the least emphasis on *analytical* engagements with values, especially in terms of metacognition, that is equipping students to analyse how their self-understanding and self-concept are formed.

“In classroom culture and lesson planning, least importance is placed on studying factors that give rise to peer conflicts or influence students’ behaviour and beliefs,” she shares. “Students should be given more opportunities in the classroom to evaluate how their values have changed, how their perspectives are shaped, as well as the underlying agendas of various groups.”

THE FUTURE OF VALUES EDUCATION

“It is apparent that teachers are well-versed in a repertoire of pedagogical approaches that help students become more aware of positive values and shared societal values,” Suzanne remarks.

Moving forward, there is also a need to also consider how to scaffold values pedagogy from the awareness to the analytical and agency levels.

“It is crucial that teachers empower students with the ability to infuse ethical analysis and deliberation as they engage with values,” she recommends.

Reflecting further, Suzanne highlights the importance of ethics and ethical literacy, the latter of which encompasses practices of thinking, relating, communicating and collaborating with others to promote greater empathy for others and constructive strategies to tackle injustices in the world. If every teacher is a CCE teacher, then teachers need to intentionally integrate ethical literacy in their teaching subjects. She reiterates the need to develop further research and professional development in this area.

“Ethical literacy cuts across all disciplines and grounds our pursuit of knowledge and acquisition of competencies,” she explains. “It is premised on a vision of human society grounded on the flourishing of self and others. ■

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ABOUT

THE INTERVIEWEE

Suzanne Choo is Associate Professor with the English Language and Literature Academic Group at National Institute of Education, Singapore. Her most recent book is Teaching ethics through literature: The significance of Ethical Criticism in a global age (Routledge, 2021). She is interested in issues related to education for global and cosmopolitan citizenship particularly in relation to literature education as well as ethics and ethical criticism. She is the Principal Investigator of an ERF project titled “Investigating Enactments of Values Pedagogy in Two Schools in Singapore” [OER 08/21 SCSL]. Her website is <https://suzannechoo.com>.

SINGAPORE CENTRE FOR CHARACTER AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION



The Centre seeks to advance professional learning and research in Character and Citizenship Education to support the development of children and youth in Singapore and beyond.

Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) is a multi-disciplinary field of study that comprises character, well-being and citizenship education. It encompasses moral, intellectual, civic and performance virtue, which is supported by social-emotional competencies. Over time, it enables our learners to habitualise and internalise the values and put them into practice in a pro-social and contributing way. Good character underpins citizenship and provide the lever for human and societal flourishing.

- 1 Strengthening Research-Policy-Practice Nexus**
- 2 Teachers as catalyst for change**
Strengthen Educator Confidence and Competencies through professional learning

QUICK FACTS ABOUT SINGAPORE CENTRE FOR CHARACTER AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION (SCCCE)



SCCCE is the first of its kind in the region, and perhaps even in the world



Officially launched on 30 May 2023



Located in NIE



Led by Professor Tan Oon Seng

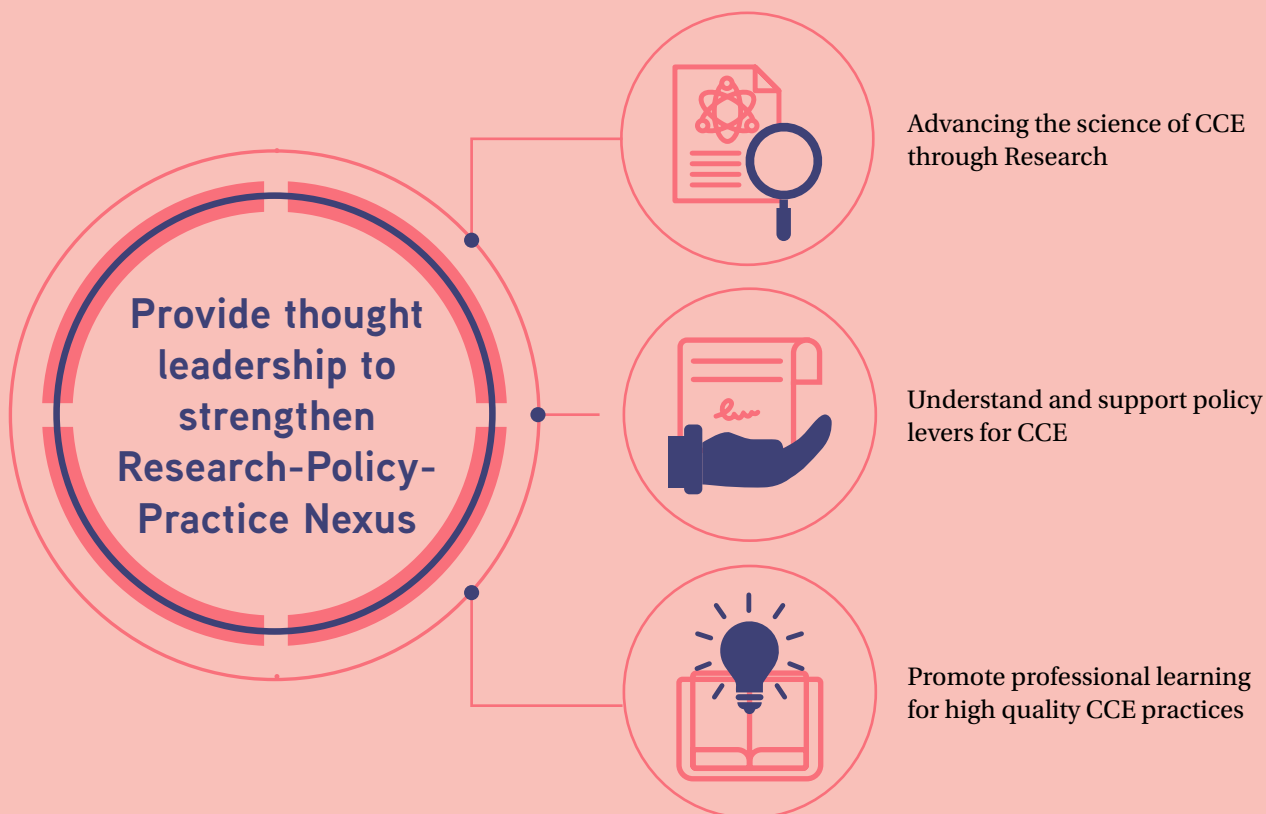


2 Fun facts on SCCCE's logo

- 1** The logo is based on the iconic Tembusu Heritage Tree in Singapore Botanic Gardens, our UNESCO World Heritage Site. It has a unique lower lateral branch which makes it easily recognisable.
- 2** The Tembusu Heritage tree has a unique ID, HT 2001-26, and is featured on the back of our Portrait series, Singapore 5-dollar note.

Providing thought leadership in CCE

The Centre will act as a hub to bring together local and international experts as consultants and collaborators for CCE research and professional learning.



Advocate CCE within and beyond education



Empower educators as catalyst for change



Strengthen culture and climate for immersive learning of CCE



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CHARACTER AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN SINGAPORE

Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) has been present in Singapore's education system since before the nation's independence. While the curriculum has evolved and transformed over the decades, the main goals of CCE remain the same. It has been a key to the holistic development of Singaporean students' values, character, social-emotional well-being and citizenship dispositions. Ms Loh Wee Cheng, Divisional Director of Student Development Curriculum Division 1 at the Ministry of Education, shares with us the significance and uniqueness of CCE in Singapore's context, the key principles which form the foundation of CCE, as well as her thoughts on the newly-launched Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education and its potential to bring CCE to greater heights.

What is the significance of Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) in the context of Singapore's education system? How does it contribute to the holistic development of students?

CCE is at the heart of education in Singapore.

If you have visited the Ministry of Education's (MOE) Heritage Gallery in recent years, you may have come across some artefacts relating to the history of CCE in Singapore. In 1959, MOE published a syllabus for *Ethics* that aimed to inculcate ethical values and lay the foundation to nurture students into self-respecting individuals and good citizens.

After Singapore's independence, *Civics* replaced *Ethics* in 1967 as a compulsory subject. As a young nation, it was apt for us to focus on patriotism and civic consciousness then. Over the decades, since our nation-building years, various programmes and initiatives such as *Education for Living*, *Good Citizen*, *Being and Becoming*, *Religious Knowledge*, *Civics and Moral Education*, *Social-Emotional Learning*, as well as *National Education* were implemented which contributed to the development of character and citizenship dispositions, and life skills in our students.

While the emphases may have shifted with every review cycle, the main goals of CCE remain unchanged. *How do we equip our students with sound values, knowledge and life skills? How do we develop good character in our students and to prepare them to be citizens, rooted to Singapore and play an active role in improving the lives*

of others? As educators, these questions remain just as important and relevant today.

Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian and many others – every Singaporean child grows up knowing the major ethnic groups here. As a multiracial, multireligious and multicultural nation, we cannot take our state of peace, stability and harmony for granted. This is why in Singapore, schools are a valued space to integrate our multicultural community with an emphasis on shared values and to nurture active and committed citizens who are rooted to our nation. This is why we hold steadfast to the idea of “schools being a common space”.

Could you highlight some key principles or values that form the foundation of CCE in Singapore? Why do we keep hearing that every lesson is a CCE lesson and every teacher is a CCE teacher?

An important feature of CCE2021 is its implementation as a school-wide curriculum that helps students develop a strong identity, manage their relationships effectively and make healthy and good choices. This means that CCE is enacted not only during CCE lessons, but also encompasses the culture that every school aspires to foster—a caring and enabling school environment. It is a place where teachers care for their young charges and desire to help every learner develop their potential regardless of their background and starting point.

Every educator in Singapore knows that CCE lessons provide a powerful opportunity for meaningful discussions and



learning of important values and skills. This foundational know-how has to be taught and reinforced through our daily interactions with our students, their participation in school life through co-curricular activities (CCAs), community service and other student development experiences. What often helps students internalize their learning are their personal reflections, sense-making and applying what they have learnt in authentic situations.

Hence the adage: “Every teacher a CCE teacher”. As CCE teachers, each and every one of us plays a pivotal role:

- a) When we rally our class to show care for a classmate who was absent due to a family bereavement – this is when they learn empathy, compassion, and the importance of supporting one another through difficult times.
- b) When we design learning experiences to take our students out of their comfort zone—think outdoor camps where they shower words of encouragement to a teammate who is hesitant to take the first step before a looming rock-wall.
- c) When we deliberately inject obstacles into group tasks so that students have no choice but to “be creative and think out of the box” and consider alternatives.
- d) When we prepare our young charges for a visit to an unfamiliar setting such as a seniors’ activity centre—where the lesson is not just to know, recognize and practise patience, respect, and empathy, but to also make a connection to others who are different from themselves.

If I have to use language familiar to educators, I would say that our syllabus documents summarize these principles—that guide the teaching and enactment of CCE—very succinctly:

- **Student-Centricity:** We place students at the heart of all our efforts in CCE and seek to understand their needs and interests when designing learning experiences, focusing on student engagement and voice.
- **Intentionality:** We design and carry out learning experiences within and outside the classroom with intentionality, and do not leave learning of values, social-emotional (SE) competencies and citizenship dispositions to chance.
- **Coherence:** The educational experience that we provide in our schools for our students needs to facilitate the development of character and citizenship dispositions and SE well-being, in a coherent way across the total curriculum.

Can you share more about MOE’s CCE2021 endeavour, and what are some synergies between SCCCE’s work and CCE2021 endeavour?

There are so many questions the SCCCE can explore and facilitate conversations around:

- In today’s VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) world that is threatened by geopolitics and partisan interests, what are the values that we hold dear, and which hold us together, not only as a nation, but as a member of the global community?
- In a world of woke culture and social justice where our young clamour to be heard, how do we guide them to build trust and understanding, to navigate differences and exercise their agency in a constructive way?
- Knowing that they will face the demands and stressors of modern-day life, how can our young continually build up their internal reservoir of purpose and resilience, and thrive?

SCCCE has the potential of developing CCE as a cross-disciplinary field of study. In my mind, it probably is the first in the world. The setting up of SCCCE reinforces our intentionality to strengthen character, well-being, and citizenship dispositions in our education endeavours for all our learners. Our aspiration is for the SCCCE to strengthen the nexus of research, policy and practice, where its research can inform the work of policymakers, curriculum designers, school leaders and teachers.

And of course, true to the purpose of NIE, the SCCCE will be a hub for teachers’ professional development in CCE whether you are a student-teacher just starting on your journey or a seasoned educator. ■

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Ms Loh Wee Cheng discusses the unique aspects of CCE as a field of study and the end goal of CCE.




Scan the QR code to find out more!



ABOUT

THE INTERVIEWEE

Loh Wee Cheng is the Divisional Director of Student Development Curriculum Division 1 at the Ministry of Education. She oversees a team of curriculum specialists and educators in the design and enactment of the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) curriculum, which seeks to inculcate important values, develop social-emotional competencies, as well as to build a sense of national identity in students. Before her current portfolio, she had the privilege of learning from fellow educators, experienced school leaders, curriculum specialists and educational psychologists in the areas of CCE, gifted education, and special educational needs.



Cultivating Futureproof Skills in Today's Learners

Boon Lay Secondary School (BLS) is redefining education by placing character development at the forefront of its Character and Citizen Education (CCE) curriculum. Based on a Character First Education framework, BLS designed a flagship CCA-Centric Model that involves cross-stream and cross-level discussion which aims to create stream-blind learning experiences that promote social mixing. The school's Head of the CCE Department, Mr Hoon Yeng Wei, shares with us more about what this model entails and the positive impact the curriculum has brought not just to the students but the community.

FOSTERING SELF-AWARENESS AND SOCIAL AWARENESS

"In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the focus has shifted from mere academic achievement to the holistic development of young individuals," Yeng Wei remarks. "As such, at Boon Lay Secondary, we firmly believe in a Character First Education, and fostering self-awareness and social awareness is pivotal in shaping well-rounded students."

According to Yeng Wei, who has been teaching for 16 years, these qualities serve as the cornerstones of personal growth and responsible citizenship. Through the Character First Education framework, the school instils vital Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and interpersonal skills. These equip students with the tools they need to build positive relationships and make responsible decisions.

One key strategy employed by BLS is the *Mentoring for Growth* initiative within the context of Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs). Yeng Wei describes it as a process where senior students take on the role of leaders and

mentor their younger peers, which helps foster positive relationships through role modelling.

"This not only benefits the juniors but also contributes to the personal growth and development of the seniors themselves," he adds. Thus, this mutually beneficial arrangement plays a pivotal role in cultivating a sense of unity and trust within the student community.

WEAVING CCE INTO THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Every BLS experience is a CCE experience. This is the belief that the school's CCE department's overarching philosophy revolves around. With that, CCE is seamlessly integrated into both the formal and informal curricula at BLS.

"We intentionally integrate CCE principles in key student development experiences and integrated programmes," Yeng Wei explains. "We also leverage a Design-Thinking approach to take on the perspective of the learner."

As such, CCE lessons are designed to be engaging and interactive, focusing on group activities and team-building exercises that nurture qualities such

as cooperation, communication and empathy. These lessons further instil the importance of working harmoniously within a group, fostering a sense of responsibility towards both their peers and the broader community.

“Through these activities, students not only enhance their interpersonal skills but also develop a strong sense of community,” Yeng Wei emphasises.

THE CCA-CENTRIC MODEL

At the crux of BLS’s CCE curriculum is its unique CCA-Centric Model that offers two structures for CCE delivery: CCE-Level and CCA-Family.

The CCA-Family structure involves the delivery of CCE curriculum within the CCAs that students join, thereby promoting interaction and learning between the BLS juniors and seniors in a stream-blind manner that promotes social mixing. This is further expanded through the CCE-Level structure that pairs two disparate CCAs together for greater gender and racial representation (e.g., Boys’ Brigade and Contemporary Dance), which fosters a deeper appreciation for diversity and varied perspectives.

BLS’s CCA-Centric Model underscores the school’s commitment to holistic education that goes beyond the traditional boundaries of academic learning. “Both structures promote social mixing, enabling our students to live out the school value of respect as they demonstrate appreciation for diversity and social cohesion,” Yeng Wei reiterates.

STRATEGIC COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

BLS’s commitment to CCE extends well beyond classroom boundaries by embracing the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which seeks to harness a community’s existing strengths and resources for positive change.

The school partners with external organizations like Down Syndrome Association, Fei Yue Community Services and more for its Values in Action (VIA) programme. “The synergy of these collaborations enables students to build connections with their partners and empowers them to adeptly employ technology and creativity to address tangible real-world challenges using Design-Thinking,” Yeng Wei explains.

POSITIVE IMPACT IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL

One of the most tangible outcomes for Yeng Wei is when he sees “students coming forward to seek advice and help for their peers,” which he claims are testament to their increase in self-confidence and moral courage.

Students who have displayed such moral courage, such as sharing with teachers their concerns about their

peers, are affirmed through Project P.R.A.I.S.E., which facilitates positive relationships between staff, students and parents by highlighting and sharing students’ good deeds and actions. It is also a sign of “the rise in intrinsic motivation for students to learn and articulate their perspectives during CCE lessons,” he adds.

The VIA programme’s influence has garnered recognition from BLS’s partners, notably exemplified by the SafeHearts@Boon Lay project. “Our students have significantly expanded the reach of the SafeHearts programme, shedding light on the crucial lifesaving skills of CPR-AED and first aid within the Boon Lay community through innovative prototypes and digital outreach.”

This initiative highlights technology’s crucial role in promoting awareness while simultaneously reinforcing students’ commitment to enhancing community safety measures and emergency response capabilities.

Another instance within the SafeHearts programme highlights the ingenuity of BLS students. “I was impressed with a group of students who utilized the Design-Thinking methodology to understand the challenges faced by children in practising CPR on the actual CPR manikin,” Yeng Wei shares. “The group proceeded to understand their needs and created a bottle-stuffed manikin suitable for children to practice CPR on.” Through this inventive problem-solving process, the group not only addressed a practical need but also cultivated essential 21st century competencies (21CC). ■

Yeng Wei shares more about BLS’s future vision for its CCE curriculum.



Scan the QR code to read all about it.



ABOUT

THE INTERVIEWEE

Hoon Yeng Wei is Head of Character and Citizenship Education Department at Boon Lay Secondary School. He has been teaching for 16 years. He sees Character and Citizenship

Education as crucial in nurturing students who are not only academically proficient but also empathetic, responsible, and ethical citizens in a world where character and values are increasingly important. He firmly believes that teachers, through their dedication and heart work, play a pivotal role in shaping the character and future of our students.

LIFE COACHING

Helping JC Students Navigate Life



Eunoia Junior College's unique Life Coach programme gives each student the opportunity to be matched with a "Life Coach"—a role held by dedicated members of the teaching staff. The Life Coach provides each student with individualized in-person support and regular guidance as he/she navigates junior college life. Two teachers from Eunoia Junior College share their insights and discuss their experiences, challenges and perspectives as Life Coaches.



Tan Fangxi
HOD (Character &
Citizenship Education)
Eunoia Junior College

What are the key benefits that the Life Coach programme brings to students at Eunoia Junior College (EJC)? How does it contribute to holistic student development?

The JC experience can be quite intense for students over the span of two years. Students face numerous demands during this time, including heightened academic rigor, active involvement in CCAs and leadership roles, as well as participation in various programmes within and outside of the college. It is easy for them to burrow deep into the different aspects of school life and lose sight of the broader perspective. Yet, at 17 and 18 years old, they are at the cusp of young adulthood. Many of them will start to question why they are doing what they

are doing, and they will soon find themselves needing to contemplate their answer to this question in order to make significant decisions about the next steps of their lives. With the Life Coaching programme in EJC, we seek to engineer opportunities for our students to pause, take a step back and reflect on who they are, what they stand for, who they want to be, and how they can work towards that.

This endeavour may not come naturally to all students. To support them, every student has the opportunity to be paired with a trusted adult from the junior college community who will walk this journey with them as their Coach. Establishing a human connection in this process of understanding and self-discovery makes the journey less intimidating and lonely. It also motivates students to embark on this journey with greater enthusiasm and take more responsibility for it.

Students connect with their Coaches through conversations, during which, the Coaches will provide a listening ear, offer different perspectives, ask difficult questions, challenge assumptions, and work together with the students to co-create strategies to move forward. Through this process, students are encouraged to explore various facets of themselves as individuals, beyond the context of being students solely focused on excelling the 'A' Levels



examinations. While the coaching experience occurs during the students' time at EJC, they can also acquire skills of self-awareness and self-directedness, which are essential for personal growth beyond their school years.

How do you tailor your guidance as a Life Coach to meet the unique needs and goals of each student?

Engaging in coaching conversations isn't always straightforward. They demand readiness, understanding and a willingness to connect from student and the Coach. It may not come naturally, even if we are working with a student whom we have regular contact, as the nature of these conversations can be (and to some extent, should be) quite distinct from the day-to-day school experiences.

As a Coach, one of my top priorities, especially during the first conversation, is to evaluate the readiness of the student I am working with. I achieve this by actively listening to what the student says, and how he/she expresses himself/herself during our conversation. Similar to our approach as teachers in the classroom, we need to listen to understand rather than listening solely to respond. This is followed by asking probing questions to delve deeper into the responses and uncover the underlying values and beliefs. The depth of this probing depends on the readiness and openness of the student. At the same time, coaching is not just about one single conversation,

but is about a longer-term process. Typically, to assist them in progressing after the coaching conversation, I assign some simple tasks. These tasks may involve deeper reflection on discussed issue, researching an unfamiliar topic that surfaced during the conversation, or to work on chipping away at an unproductive habit we identified.

At times, students approach me with topics that I am not familiar with. At times like this, I will need to remind myself and the student that the role of the Coach is different from that of a teacher. A teacher is traditionally seen as the knowledge base, and the one possessing all the answers, which is the antithesis of a Coach. A Coach works in a more level partnership with the student to co-create change. Consequently, I shift the locus of control to the students, enabling them to steer the process towards gaining deeper understanding of the topic, clarifying its personal significance, and focus on asking the "why" questions to probe and deepen the exploration. ■

The second teacher we interviewed, Azhar Amin, also shares with us his views and perspectives as a Life Coach.

Scan the QR code to find out more!



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