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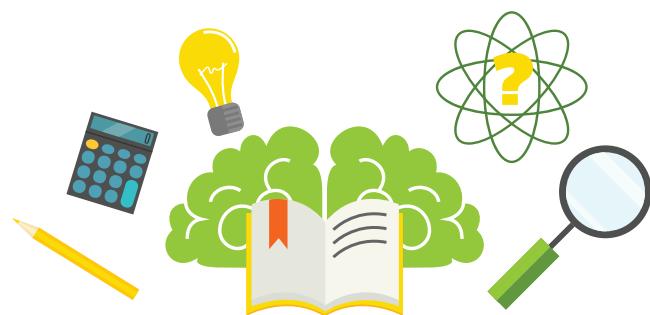
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Rethinking Education with Progressive Pedagogies

As society transforms at an unprecedented pace, education must keep up with the demands of a more complex and interconnected world. While traditional didactic teaching methods have laid a strong and valuable foundation, they may not fully prepare students for the multifaceted challenges of the future. This issue of *SingTeach* focuses on **Progressive Education**, an approach that reimagines education to centre around the learner, fostering critical thinking, civic literacy, collaboration and adaptability.

Progressive education emphasizes active learning, inquiry-based approaches, and nurturing a deep connection between students and the world around them. As Singapore continues to develop as a global hub of innovation and creativity, it is essential that we equip both teachers and learners with the knowledge and competencies necessary to thrive in an increasingly complex, unpredictable future. The emphasis of progressive pedagogy is not just on knowledge acquisition, but also on cultivating skills that will empower students to solve real-world problems, think critically and engage meaningfully with their communities.

This issue of *SingTeach* explores how educators in Singapore are embracing alternative assessments and experiential learning to enrich the classroom experience. It also examines the role of technology in education and the importance of fostering emotional connections with students, which remains a cornerstone of progressive pedagogy.

Through the lens of educators and researchers who are at the forefront of this pedagogical approach, this collection of articles will dive into the innovative practices shaping the future of education. From research-practice partnerships to community engagement, each article sheds light on the progressive shifts that are making education more dynamic, inclusive and future-ready.

As you read through this issue, I hope you will be inspired by the possibilities that progressive pedagogies hold for transforming the way we teach and learn. Let's continue to engage and empower our students in their learning, preparing them not just for exams, but for life.

Associate Professor Chua Bee Leng
Chief Learning & Innovations Officer
National Institute of Education, Singapore

Share with Us VIRTUAL STAFF LOUNGE

Virtual Staff Lounge (VSL) is a safe platform where education practitioners can share their teaching and learning experiences. It is a collaborative space where you can share innovative teaching methods and practices that you have implemented in classrooms, and/or fresh insights and perspectives that you have on the nature of teaching and learning. If you are interested to submit an article, scan the QR code below.





The Power of **PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION**

In recent decades, pedagogical approaches are increasingly being challenged by innovative, student-centred practices that emphasize the education of the whole child. Progressive education shifts the focus from rote learning to critical thinking, creativity and collaboration. This helps to prepare young people to be adaptable, lifelong learners. In this article, the guest editor of this issue of *SingTeach*, NIE Chief Learning & Innovations Officer Associate Professor Chua Bee Leng, sheds some light on the concept of progressive education and how it nurtures future-ready students in Singapore.



EMPHASIS ON ACTIVE LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE

Although there are various definitions of progressive education, a few common traits include its focus on student-centred learning and its emphasis on learning through hands-on experiences.

American philosopher and educator John Dewey believed that children are active contributors and agents of their learning, and that learning should be linked to practical social experience. His ideas and theories shaped the foundation of progressive education, emphasizing the need for education to be rooted in experience and active learning. This means that education should not be about the passive transmission of facts; rather, it should foster critical thinking, problem-solving and active engagement with the world.

“Learning is an interactive process in which students construct knowledge through experiences that are meaningful and relevant to their lives,” A/P Chua, who is from NIE’s Psychology and Child & Human Development Department, explains. “It’s about fostering critical thinking and encouraging students to take ownership of their learning journey, making it personal and transformative.”

When a classroom pedagogy prioritizes authentic learning experience over rote learning, this means that the teaching approach emphasizes hands-on, real-world experiences and practical application over traditional methods of instruction, such as lectures and textbooks. Authenticity is also important in the design of the learning experience, encouraging learners to view a problem from multiple perspectives, generating more ideas to resolve issues, which contributes to increased motivation in problem solving.

IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

Progressive education encompasses a variety of facets that work together to create a holistic learning environment. Apart from student-centred and experiential learning, some other core facets include collaborative learning and civic responsibility.

“In the realm of progressive education, collaborative learning and civic responsibility are essential components that enhance the overall learning experience,” A/P Chua explains. “These elements not only enrich students’ academic knowledge, it prepares them to navigate the complexities of a diverse society by allowing them to work with others from different cultural and social backgrounds.”

Collaborative learning fosters social skills development, as students engage in teamwork, communication and conflict resolution with their peers. This interaction not only enriches their social abilities, it exposes them to diverse perspectives from their peers, encouraging critical thinking and a deeper understanding of complex issues. By participating in group activities, students also experience a more dynamic and interactive learning environment, which promotes active engagement and application of knowledge acquired.

Additionally, the integration of civic issues into the curriculum can help students connect their learning to real-world challenges and their communities. This connection fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility, empowering students to become active, informed citizens. As they explore civic responsibilities, students develop a greater awareness of their role in Singapore’s society and learn to recognize the impact they can have on their communities. (Go to page 14 in this print issue to read more about how one Singapore school adopted a whole-school approach to community engagement.)

Together, collaborative learning and civic responsibility not only prepare students academically, it nurtures their development into socially responsible individuals. By emphasizing these two key aspects, progressive education equips learners with the critical thinking and ethical decision-making skills necessary for navigating the complexities of modern society.

THE ROLE OF RESEARCH IN ADVANCING PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

In recent years, Singapore has been undergoing a transformative shift towards progressive education, foregrounding the importance of students’ voices and their active participation in the learning process.

One area of research at the National Institute of Education (NIE) taps on the idea of providing personalized feedback for teamwork through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The Teamwork Intelligence for Tertiary Education (TITE) is a digital formative assessment tool designed to enhance teamwork and collaboration skills among tertiary learners.



Scan the QR code to read more about TITE.



Built on an earlier project called My Groupwork Buddy (MGB) that was successfully trialled in five secondary schools, users of TITE found the personalized learning analytics dashboard particularly beneficial for tracking their strengths, areas for improvement and progress throughout team projects. This ongoing feedback helps cultivate critical thinking, self-assessment and autonomy in learners, aligning with the principles of progressive education, which emphasize personal growth, adaptability and real-world application.

“Research supporting progressive education is vital for validating effective practices, informing policy, enhancing teacher development, and promoting equity and lifelong learning,” A/P Chua shares. “At NIE, various research studies support the concept of progressive education, and the knowledge bases produced from this research can help to shape a more responsive and future-ready educational landscape in Singapore.”

Another study at NIE that supports the concept of progressive pedagogies highlights the importance of student voice. Led by Senior Education Research Scientist Dr Wong Lung Hsiang, this research aims to empower teachers to design lessons which places greater onus on students in shaping the direction of their learning. (Go to page 7 in this print issue to read the article.)

The emphasis on student voice is crucial in fostering a more inclusive and engaging educational environment. “When students feel that their opinions and experiences are valued, they are more likely to take ownership of their learning and become active participants in their educational journey,” A/P Chua says.

To this end, education research that supports progressive pedagogy plays a pivotal role in advancing pedagogical innovations, heightening students’ engagement in their learning process and enhancing student learning outcomes. “By grounding educational strategies in

empirical evidence, researchers can provide educators with valuable insight into what works in the classroom,” she adds. “As progressive education continues to evolve, ongoing research will be essential in ensuring that teaching approaches are adaptable and responsive to the needs of all learners.”

THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

Progressive education represents a transformative approach to teaching and learning that prioritizes the needs and experiences of students, making it a vital pathway into the future of learning. “By encouraging students to engage actively with their learning environments, progressive education cultivates a deeper understanding of subject matter, and assists the development of 21st century competencies, preparing our learners to face the challenges and seize new opportunities in today’s context”, A/P Chua shares.

In an increasingly globalized world, the ability to collaborate and communicate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds is essential, making progressive education a crucial framework in developing civic and cross-cultural literacy, preparing students to be future-ready individuals and lifelong learners.

In conclusion, the shift towards progressive education is not just a trend; it is a necessary evolution in the way we approach teaching and learning. By prioritizing student-centred practices, experiential and collaborative learning, social responsibility, and inclusivity, progressive education can equip students with the skills they need to thrive in a complex and rapidly changing world. ■



ABOUT THE GUEST EDITOR

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From Passive to Proactive Learners with STUDENT-GENERATED IDEAS

A student-centred classroom—one of the key tenets of progressive education—prioritizes autonomy and moves away from conventional teaching methods by emphasizing collaboration and prioritizing student voices. In such an environment, meaningful conversations between students and teachers about the learning process are central, fostering a more interactive and personalized approach to education. In this article, NIE Senior Education Research Scientist Dr Wong Lung Hsiang sheds some light on how meaningful learning occurs when students are intentionally guided to explore, adapt and refine their own ideas through his research study on Student-Generated Ideas.

CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT AS A PRIORITY

Numerous research studies in Singapore have revealed that many teachers tend to unconsciously prioritize efficiency by steering students toward the correct answers, rather than fostering deeper (socio-)cognitive engagement and exploration. This persists despite the Ministry of Education's emphasis on cultivating 21st century competencies (21CC) as a core focus of education.

“There are classrooms with the tendency to focus on getting the correct answer rather than the process of learning itself,” Dr Wong Lung Hsiang, who is from the Office of Education Research at NIE, shares. This restricts students' ability to explore, adapt and refine their ideas—key skills essential for authentic learning and innovation. Traditional methods often focus on predetermined outcomes, expecting students to arrive at specific answers.

“A transformation in teachers' and students' beliefs and dispositions towards teaching and learning is needed to ensure such critical success factors are genuinely exercised in existing and future pedagogical approaches.”

STUDENT-GENERATED IDEAS (SGIs)

This inspired him to shift the teaching paradigm from knowledge transmission to idea transformation through

a research study on Student-Generated Ideas (SGIs), a pedagogical concept that highlights how crucial the role of student-led ideas is in their learning. Through his research, Lung Hsiang aims to empower teachers to design lessons where students' contributions shape the direction of their learning.

“SGIs place students' ideas at the core of the learning process. Through encouraging continuous feedback and iteration, SGIs enable students to refine their ideas over time,” Lung Hsiang explains. This fosters a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment where students are actively engaged in the learning process rather than passively absorbing information.

By focusing on the development and refinement of students' own ideas, students engage in meaningful inquiry, which enhances their ability to connect concepts to real-world situations. This results in a more relevant and engaging learning experience for students especially because classroom talks now resonate with them at a more intimate level.

“The SGI design paradigm distills common elements from a range of (socio-)constructivist learning approaches, such as inquiry-based learning, active learning, knowledge building, productive failure, seamless learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning, computational thinking, design thinking and makers,” Lung Hsiang explains further.

Lung Hsiang describes SGI as a "design paradigm" because it transcends any single pedagogical framework, drawing key success factors from various approaches to inform and reshape teaching practices.

IMPLEMENTING SGIs IN THE CLASSROOM

In inquiry-based settings, students may feel constrained by the pressure to find the "right" answer, limiting their willingness to explore different possibilities. SGIs, however, encourage students to think creatively and consider a wide range of potential solutions. For instance, Lung Hsiang observed one Science classroom where the teacher and students were discussing plant dispersal methods and students were posed the open-ended question: "How did the plant get to the top of the building?" While their initial responses were straightforward, such as suggesting that the plant climbed the building, the open nature of the question prompted them to delve deeper and explore more complex ideas.

Instead of providing direct answers, the teacher facilitated the conversation by posing thought-provoking questions and encouraging students to expand on one another's ideas. As the discussion unfolded, students began refining their classmates' suggestions and considered more intricate possibilities, such as the plant being carried by an animal or purposefully planted by a human, to explain how it reached the top of the building.

In this student-centred approach, the teacher's role shifts from being a knowledge dispenser to a facilitator of learning. As Lung Hsiang notes, "Teachers are co-creators in this process. Through strategic questioning and providing appropriate scaffolding, teachers help students refine their ideas, while keeping the learning experience structured and purposeful." This positive shift addresses a significant issue in traditional classrooms: the overemphasis on finding the "right" answer.

Lung Hsiang's research findings reveal that students engaged in SGI-based learning develop not only greater cognitive skills but also a heightened enthusiasm and investment in their learning process. In the example of the plant dispersal lesson, students initially sought straightforward solutions but were guided to explore more nuanced explanations, showing their growing enthusiasm and commitment as they actively refined their ideas.

This iterative process underscores the SGI approach's focus on the cognitive journey of generating, testing and evolving ideas, fostering more authentic and meaningful learning experiences, central to the concept of progressive education.



Scan the QR code to read more about the major challenge of applying constructivist and student-centred methods in the classroom.

REFLECTIONS AND THE FUTURE OF SGIs IN EDUCATION

Reflecting on the project, Lung Hsiang finds the most rewarding aspect to be the transformation in students' attitudes.

"When students are encouraged to explore their ideas without the fear of making mistakes, they become more engaged and invested in their learning," he shares. "It's been incredible to see students take ownership of their ideas and develop the confidence to evolve them." He also observes that teachers have adapted well to their new role as facilitators, which has been both surprising and rewarding.

Looking ahead, Lung Hsiang envisions SGIs playing a pivotal role in the future of education. "As educational technologies evolve, I see artificial intelligence-powered tools supporting both teachers and students in real-time idea generation and evolution." He further explains that "the SGI approach complements Singapore's move towards blended learning by integrating technology to support idea evolution, both inside and outside the classroom."

This approach can lead to more personalized and scalable learning experiences, where students take an active role in shaping their own educational journeys. By empowering students to become the architects of their own learning, SGIs foster a sense of independence and responsibility. Furthermore, the focus on collaboration and student voices is at the heart of progressive education, where the goal is to prepare learners for lifelong learning, critical thinking and adaptability in an ever-evolving world. ■



ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE

Wong Lung Hsiang is a Senior Education Research Scientist at the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He also serves as an Adjunct Professor at Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia. His research interests include seamless learning, student-generated ideas, computer-supported collaborative learning, technology-enhanced language learning, artificial intelligence in education and student-generated ideas. Notably, he is a leading researcher in mobile seamless learning, having developed the influential "10 Dimensions of Mobile Seamless Learning" (10D-MSL) framework.



Beyond Memorization:

Implementing Progressive Approaches in the History Classroom

Progressive pedagogies emphasize that education should be an active and constructive process for learners. Key characteristics of progressive pedagogies include student-centredness, and inquiry-based and interdisciplinary learning. How can such approaches be applied to the way history is taught and learnt? In this issue of *SingTeach*, Mr Melvin Chan, Lead Teacher (History) at Chua Chu Kang Secondary School, shares more about the school's signature History programmes that place students at the heart of the learning process.

A CROSS-SCHOOL INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

There is a misconception that learning history is all about accumulating and memorizing facts about the past. Mr Melvin Chan, Lead Teacher (History) at Chua Chu Kang Secondary School (CCKSS), wants to change how society perceives History as a subject.

“It is important that society, including our young learners, understand history through the lens of its philosophical nature, historiographical changes and interdisciplinary discourse,” he says.

A conversation with a History colleague from Clementi Town Secondary School on the teaching and learning of history sparked an idea of a cross-collaboration project between teachers and students of both schools.

“We had a common interest to promote students’ collaborative agency towards disciplinary growth and mastery of history,” he explains. “After many brainstorming sessions, we embarked on a programme called ‘The History Times’, where students are tasked to produce a history newsletter and share their findings, approaches and masteries to the community.”

STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOM

Progressive approaches to education prioritize learning through experience and place students at the centre of the learning process. At CCKSS, all History lessons are grounded in the social constructivist approach, with inquiry-based learning—strongly supported and anchored by Knowledge Building (KB) pedagogy—as well as elements of collaborative and crossover learning infused into the way teachers teach History.

“CCKSS has adapted and localized the 12 KB principles into 3Cs—‘Centrality of students’ voices’, ‘Culture of build-on’ and ‘Course of rising above,’” Melvin states.

“*Centrality of students’ voices* refers to putting student voices at the heart of the lesson, *culture of build-on* refers to students gathering data and exercise reasoning, while *course of rising above* refers to students engaging in reflective thinking,” he adds.

With these pedagogical underpinnings in mind, the combined History team from both schools engaged in a few rounds of initial dialogue and conversation to come up with a lesson plan for “The History Times” programme. They conceptualized the 4Cs of “Connect, Comprehend, Conceptualize, Create”.

Connect

Students present a historical figure in their preferred mode. They then use the KB scaffold in the Knowledge Forum, an online platform to facilitate KB inquiry, and rethink their ideas. Based on their revised interests, students are grouped accordingly. Since this activity is conducted online, teachers from both schools create a *Zoom* platform and facilitate ice-breaker activities.

Comprehend

Students engage in curated activities, such as conducting historical research and attending guest speaker sessions, with teachers guiding them toward a deeper understanding of the topic they are researching on.

Conceptualize

In each of their groups, students start building on their ideas, conceptualizing and theorizing to develop a unifying theme that synthesizes their diverse perspectives. Each group shares the progress made on the Knowledge Forum and cross-group collaboration is encouraged. Teachers are on hand for online consultations and feedback.

Create

Each group creates their own history newsletter and submits a draft for peer review by another group. After incorporating the necessary revisions, the teachers conduct a final review. Once approved, the newsletters are ready for presentation.

“This programme is open to all interested Secondary 3 History students, including those from the Express

Scan the QR code to find out more about the 12 KB principles.



and Normal Academic streams as well as those taking Core History and Elective History. We usually take in a maximum of 20 student participants with 5 teachers in charge,” he elaborates. “For 2023, the newsletter focused on the theme ‘The Interwar Period.’”

CULTIVATING HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN STUDENTS

Unlike traditional approaches to teaching and learning, progressive education regard knowledge as dynamic, shaped by context and arises through the learning process. Melvin is heartened to see that students are capable of not only going beyond memorization of historical facts, but also equally competent in stepping out from the perspectives of hindsight and concept of determinism.

“When the students presented their ‘The History Times: The Interwar Period’ newsletter, they were able to deduce that ‘Every historical period deserves to be studied on its own’ and ‘The Interwar Period should not be overshadowed by the idea of wars’. This shows that they can understand that history is never static and that historians should not practice determinism when analysing historical period,” he says.

He also emphasizes that teachers should not underestimate youths’ adaptability to new learning approaches as well as their cognitive advancement. He advocates adopting a less didactic pedagogical approach to the teaching and learning of history, with a focus on incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum.

“This project shows that students are capable of effectively using the KB scaffolds to advance their group’s historical knowledge and understanding. These series of cognitive build-ons facilitate the various moves towards the integration of historiography and an interdisciplinarity approach to each group’s inquiry theme,” he remarks.

The success of this programme has inspired other teachers in the school to adopt aspects of progressive pedagogies such as KB and crossover learning in the subjects they teach.

“It is important to crystallize the key essences of the pedagogical mechanisms underlying these approaches so that colleagues will not feel overwhelmed,” he advises. “Distilling the KB principles into the 3Cs, for

instance, simplifies the approach and builds confidence among teachers.”

Moving forward, Melvin hopes to scale up the cross-community history work. “Our team hopes that more cross-collaborations with colleagues from the history fraternity will occur,” he shares. “We are also in the midst of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the formative feedback and build-on process.” ■



Scan the QR code to read more about CCKSS’ second History programme —the “Heritage Curatorship and Immersion Programme”.

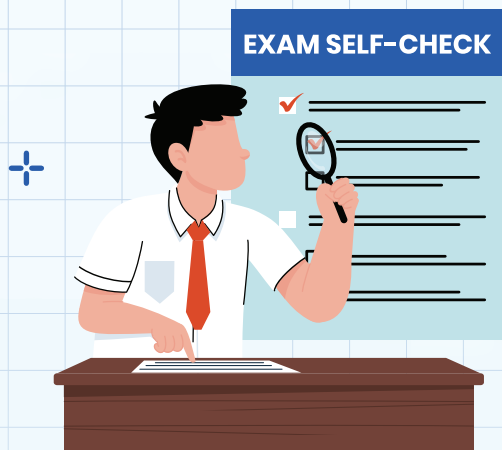


Scan the QR code to view resources related to “The History Times” and “Heritage Curatorship and Immersion Programme”.



ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE

Melvin Chan is Lead Teacher (History) at Chua Chu Kang Secondary School. He is a prominent leader and co-founder of the Knowledge Building Community in Singapore. He has written and presented at numerous educational conferences on his practitioner papers that ranges from pedagogical practices in history to structures and processes in professional development.



A Progressive Approach to Student Assessment



One of the key characteristics of student-involved assessment is the shift in focus from traditional, teacher-driven evaluations to collaborative, reflective and dynamic assessments where students play an active role. This aligns closely with the core principles of progressive education which emphasizes a learner-centred approach, the value of the learning process and collaborative learning. Dr Wong Hwei Ming, Assistant Centre Director at NIE's Centre for Research in Pedagogy & Practice, Office of Education Research, shares with us insights from her research on student-involved assessment and feedback, as well as her reflections on the relationship between student-involved assessment and progressive pedagogies.

CAN YOU SHARE WHAT THE DEFINITION OF STUDENT-INVOLVED ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK IS, AND SOME EXAMPLES OF THOSE?

Student-involved assessment and feedback refers to the involvement of students in the assessment and feedback process, where they actively participate in various ways such as:

- Evaluating their own work (self-assessment against a set of criteria)
- Setting learning goals for improvement
- Reflecting on their learning (experience) and revising their work based on the criteria
- Assessing their classmates' work (peer assessment based on the same set of criteria)
- Providing and receiving formative feedback to improve performance and work towards their goals

From 2020 to 2022, I conducted a study that focused on how to build teachers' and students' capacities in student-involved assessment in primary classrooms and also explored how to better engage primary school teachers and students in this area. The study revealed that by involving students in the assessment process, it empowers them to take ownership of their learning,

understand the assessment criteria and use feedback to improve their work. It also showed that student-involved assessment can provide teachers with the necessary pedagogical tools to engage their students further. Additionally, it highlighted that providing meaningful feedback helps students stay on track academically while sustaining their motivation and enthusiasm for learning (Wong et al., 2023a). It also affords them the opportunity to engage more deeply with the concept of what it means to manage their own learning (Wong, 2023b).

FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW, WHY IS STUDENT-INVOLVED ASSESSMENT CONSIDERED A PROGRESSIVE PEDAGOGY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING?

Student-involved assessment aligns neatly with the core principles of progressive education which emphasizes student-centred learning, active learning and engagement, critical thinking and self-regulation, collaboration and the development of skills relevant to students' lives in and outside of school. Let me explain further.

Student-involved assessment embodies student-centred learning as it actively engages students in the

assessment (and feedback) process, allowing them to take ownership of their learning. It shifts the emphasis from teacher-centred assessment to one where students play a greater and critical role in assessing their own learning and that of their peers based on a set of criteria.

Self-assessment allows students to critically review their own work and make decisions on their progress as well as areas of improvement. This not only nurtures their self-regulation and self-management skills, but also increases their engagement with the learning process. Peer assessment gives them the opportunity to learn how to critically assess their classmates' work and appreciate different perspectives. It fosters collaborative learning and builds a community of learners among themselves in the class. Both forms of assessments provide students with a deeper understanding of the topic they are working on and further develop their analytical skills.

The skills honed through self-assessment and peer assessment are not only relevant in the classroom but are also essential life skills that students can apply in various personal and professional contexts beyond school.

HOW DOES STUDENT-INVOLVED ASSESSMENT GIVE STUDENTS EMPOWERMENT AND AGENCY IN THEIR LEARNING?

Student-involved assessment empowers and gives students agency by allowing them a more involved and active role in their learning process. Students' sense of ownership over their learning is nurtured as they shift from being passive recipients of knowledge to active participants who set their own learning goals.

Through self-assessment, students develop critical thinking and reflective skills when they analyse and identify their strengths and areas of improvement. Peer assessment also enhances these skills and in addition, fosters collaboration and communication skills through the provision of feedback to their classmates. When students are involved in assessing their own work and their classmates' work, they take on responsibility for their own learning, while gaining independence and confidence.

Students become more engaged and motivated when they see the results of their efforts, which further encourages a deeper commitment to their studies. When students are engaged in peer assessment, a sense of community and shared responsibility are encouraged, collaboration is strengthened and communication skills are also enhanced.

Student-involved assessment transforms students into empowered, active, motivated and reflective learners who are deeply involved in their learning

journey, making it a more meaningful and personalized learning experience.

WHICH AREAS OF ASSESSMENT DO YOU THINK MERIT FURTHER ATTENTION AND RESEARCH? WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

My research into student-involved assessment has shown that when implemented properly, it has the potential to empower students, develop their critical thinking, increase their sense of ownership and responsibility in learning, as well as enhance communication and collaboration skills through peer assessment.

However, further research is needed. For example, studies can be conducted to explore the various factors which can affect the uptake of student-involved assessment by students and in turn, its effectiveness. These factors include student self-efficacy and confidence, student motivation and engagement, social and cultural influences, among others. By understanding these factors, we can gain insights into how to better design and implement student-involved assessment that cater to diverse needs, thus increasing uptake and making the assessment, feedback and learning processes more impactful and meaningful for the students. Longitudinal research on student-involved assessment could also provide valuable insights into the long-term impact on student learning. ■

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ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE

Wong Hwei Ming is Senior Education Research Scientist and Assistant Centre Director at the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, Office of Education Research, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She has more than 18 years of experience in education research, mainly in the area of assessment practices and assessment literacy, and has also worked on many projects including MOE-commissioned projects. Besides conducting research, she also teaches an elective in the Management and Leadership in Schools programme and conducts a 10-hour Professional Development workshop twice annually for the Ministry of Education.

Nurturing Future-Ready Learners Through Community Engagement



Building strong school-community partnerships is essential for fostering civic literacy and social responsibility in students. This article highlights the importance of community engagement in education, highlighting how meaningful collaborations can enhance learning experiences and shape socially conscious individuals. Through insights from a school leader and key personnel from Zhenghua Primary School, we explore strategies for encouraging teachers' commitment to community programmes, the challenges in designing impactful initiatives and how these partnerships can promote active citizenship. By centring learning on real-world experiences, these efforts contribute to the concept of progressive education, where students are empowered to engage critically and compassionately with society.



Mrs Constance Loke
Principal

WHY IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AN IMPORTANT FACET OF THE SCHOOL?

At Zhenghua Primary, we believe in preparing students for life through holistic experiences that develop their 21st century competencies (21CC). Community engagement is key to this, as it enriches learning and provides authentic contexts for students to practice these competencies. For instance, through our Values-in-Action programme, students interact with the elderly and migrant workers, applying their communication and collaboration skills. In our Applied Learning Programme, they address climate-related community needs, going door-to-door to encourage energy conservation.

These experiences make learning relevant and meaningful. By engaging with the community, students begin to see themselves as active citizens who can contribute positively to the community. This fosters civic literacy and a sense of belonging, helping them understand that they have a voice, and they are never too young to make a difference.

Our school operates within a larger ecosystem. While our internal resources may be limited, community partnerships open doors to resources, expertise and networks that would otherwise be out of reach. These meaningful collaborations not only support students' holistic development but also enhance the vibrancy of our school and the broader community, strengthening the fabric of our society.

HOW CAN SCHOOL LEADERS ENCOURAGE TEACHERS TO HAVE GREATER COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

At our school, we encourage teachers to commit to community engagement by helping them see its value and purpose, especially in supporting student-centric pedagogies and developing 21CC. Teachers understand the significant impact community partnerships have on students' holistic development through authentic learning opportunities. For example, when students perform as artists, dancers or musicians at events like the Bukit Panjang Passion Arts Festival, they build confidence and a stronger connection to their community. Similarly, interacting with elderly residents and migrant workers helps them develop empathy and communication skills.

We also empower teachers by giving them autonomy in selecting community partners and planning engagement activities, ensuring alignment with

the school's goals. This balance of autonomy and support fosters ownership, allowing teachers to apply their creativity and expertise in crafting meaningful experiences for students.

To further encourage commitment, we actively affirm and celebrate the efforts of teachers who work with community partners. This recognition creates a supportive environment where teachers feel valued and motivated to continue contributing to the community.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY PARTNER FOR THE FIRST TIME?

When establishing a community partnership for the first time, there are key aspects to consider to ensure a meaningful and sustainable collaboration.

Shared goals and values: Both the school and community partner should prioritize the well-being and development of students and the community. This alignment helps create a shared purpose and ensures that both parties work towards mutually beneficial outcomes. For example, in the Bukit Panjang Passion Arts Festival, our shared goal is to bring arts to the community, fostering a sense of belonging and community spirit.

Mutual benefits: A successful partnership should offer value to both the school and the community. While students gain valuable skills like 21CC and develop confidence, the community also benefits. For instance, the community becomes more vibrant through arts activities, the elderly remain socially engaged and awareness of important issues like water and electricity conservation is raised.

Sustainability: Long-term success requires clear roles, communication and ongoing evaluation. It's important to consider the resources, time and effort needed to maintain the partnership, ensuring it can evolve and continue benefiting both the school and the community as needs change. This approach promotes growth and long-lasting collaboration.



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HOW DOES ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY HELP IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS INDIVIDUALS?

Engaging with the community plays a crucial role in developing socially conscious individuals. It provides students with opportunities to interact with diverse social, cultural and religious backgrounds. Through activities like Values-In-Action projects, students learn to serve others, gaining awareness of their needs and the challenges they face, which fosters empathy and

compassion. For instance, when our student leaders engage with migrant workers in the Bukit Panjang community, they discover their hopes and aspirations, as well as the obstacles they encounter.

Active community participation helps students understand their role in promoting societal well-being, enhancing their civic literacy and instilling a sense of civic duty. They realize that they can make a difference, regardless of their age. This encourages them to take active, constructive roles in improving their school, community and nation, reinforcing their responsibility to contribute to the greater good.

Additionally, community engagement empowers students by allowing them to plan programmes and activities. This process develops their leadership, collaboration and problem-solving skills. For example, Primary 5 students collaborate to design and implement meaningful activities for the elderly.

Ultimately, these connections foster a sense of belonging, deepening students' commitment to social causes and supporting their ongoing efforts for positive change.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE TEAM WHEN DESIGNING COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES FOR STUDENTS?

Designing community programmes that are genuinely helpful can be challenging. Our team carefully aligns community initiatives with the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) learning outcomes and the developmental milestones for emerging 21CC. We also gather community feedback to ensure that programmes benefit both students and the community.

It is essential to allocate time for students to research and engage with community stakeholders, identifying meaningful issues while addressing real community needs. Teachers also need time to facilitate student planning. Given their busy schedules, finding this time without adding stress can be difficult. Therefore, our community programmes must be flexible enough to fit within school timetables. We utilize existing platforms such as Assembly Talks, Form Teacher Guidance Periods and Self-Directed Learning Days to allow students to connect with the community and discuss their initiatives. Additionally, students leverage technology for research and collaboration.

Assessing the success of these community programmes poses another challenge, especially in measuring long-term impacts on both students and the community. Tracking progress and evaluating effectiveness can be difficult, particularly for intangible outcomes like social skills and 21CC. To address this, we've developed differentiated 21CC rubrics for self-assessment and peer assessment, communicated to students from the start to clarify expectations and goals. ■

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