



NATIONAL EDUCATION REVIEW 2016-2017

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FOREWORD

When National Education (NE) was first introduced in 1997, its intent was to instil national identity and the spirit of togetherness in our young. Twenty years after the launch of NE, Singapore and the world we now live in are very different.

Over time, perceptions towards NE have also changed. To some, our current narrative has become worn and tired, to others, propagandistic. As educators, it is important to acknowledge the need to approach NE differently – to enable and empower our students to create their own meaning of what it means to be Singaporean.

Between 2016 and 2017, we have engaged in consultations with over 2,000 young people, teachers, parents, and members of the wider society on possible approaches we can adopt in NE moving forward. While the responses were varied, there were a few key trends that emerged through these engagements.

First, our students and educators desire to have conversations about issues that matter and are of interest to them. Not everyone wants a standard answer; some want to give voice to, and listen to, different perspectives. Our students are interested, ready, and capable of having such discussions. As educators, we want to ensure there is space for such conversations, and through them, guide and nurture in students an attitude of open-mindedness, respect for others, and the skills for dialogue and deliberation.

Secondly, while schools have done good work in developing experiences around NE, some of these experiences have, over time, lost their effectiveness. Our students, parents, the wider community and perhaps even educators have come to view them with some cynicism. How can we help them navigate their own values and beliefs vis-a-vis ideas of national citizenship and identity? What can we do to facilitate experiences that empower students to find their own meaning?

Lastly, education is not an easy thing to do. It takes time to develop the capability and space for shifts to happen. Our teachers have been doing well, and we want to continue

supporting you in deepening your skills. We will continue to involve experienced educators in spearheading changes we wish to see. Collectively, as a fraternity, we should be prepared to engage students in areas with no easy answers, and defend the space that is intentionally crafted for our students and ourselves to converse on difficult issues.

These are the shifts that the NE Review recommendations hope to achieve. At the end of the day, we want our students to know two things. First, that each of them can lead a meaningful life and make a difference in their family, community or the larger society that is Singapore. And secondly, whatever the challenges, that they can improve their lives and those of the community with the will to act. That has always been the Singaporean way.

We hope that with the new recommendations, you and your schools will be enabled to design more refreshing and meaningful NE experiences for our students.

Many thanks to all the members of the committee, as well as the students, teachers, parents and citizens that have contributed many ideas, and committed much of their time and effort. I am especially grateful to all members of the Education fraternity for their work to nurture the next generation of Singaporeans and build a better Singapore.



Dr Janil Puthucheary
CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL EDUCATION REVIEW COMMITTEE
SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE,
MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION
& MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (2015 – 2018)

“The direction that NE is taking is consistent with what we’re doing as a system – emphasising more authentic learning and application of ideas. We’re talking about greater discussion of current affairs, of making NE more relevant to the lives of our students.”

– MR WONG SIEW HOONG,
DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF EDUCATION,
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION



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OUR STUDENTS'

NE EXPERIENCES TODAY

NE COMMEMORATIVE DAYS

- Total Defence Day
- International Friendship Day
- Racial Harmony Day
- National Day

These commemorative days are linked to important points in Singapore's history. Schools customise their learning activities and follow up with programmes such as the Total Defence Defenders and Racial Harmony Advocates' Camps that help to create holistic learning experiences.



NE IN SUBJECTS

Besides Character and Citizenship Education, teachers are encouraged to discuss NE-related topics across multiple subject areas. NE is more commonly associated with Social Studies, History and Geography, but it also features in Mathematics and Science lessons. For example, one Primary School teacher shared that in basic financial literacy for upper Primary, she used the 2008 global financial crisis to discuss how students' parents may have been affected, and encourage them to think about savings and sums.

DAILY ROUTINES

Flag Raising Ceremony: Students sing the National Anthem, and take the National Pledge to reinforce the values we stand for as a nation.

Everyday responsibilities: Students cultivate good habits of life, such as classroom cleaning and class duties.



CO-CURRICULAR EXPERIENCES

Values in Action: Students understand community and social needs and how they can help.

Co-Curricular Activities: Students interact, bond and learn beyond the classroom.

Learning Journeys: Interactive experiences that allow students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of Singapore's history, geography and culture.

Cohort Experiences: These include level camps, P5 NE Show, Secondary 3 MOE-OBS Challenge Programme and dialogues for post-secondary students.



WHAT DOES NE MEAN TO YOU?

After 20 years of NE, what do our students and educators feel about it? We spoke to them to find out...

Our students shared that they:

- Were sceptical of NE, but took well to experiences that were highly engaging and relevant.
- Were empowered by greater voice and choice (e.g. for lessons, Values in Action programmes).
- Found learning experiences meaningful and impactful when the purpose was clear and relevant to their life and learning in school.
- Defined meaningful volunteer work by genuine impact and interactions with beneficiaries.
- Appreciated effective teachers who were able to use engaging strategies and resources, and facilitate deep analysis of issues.
- Valued open conversations on issues impacting their everyday lives such as race and religion.

Our educators reflected that:

- NE is important and there are strong structures and programmes in place.
- There is a need to sensitise students to current affairs and develop in students an understanding of their identity and conviction as citizens.
- The perpetuation of a “top-down” Singapore story had led to NE being perceived as “propaganda”.
- There was a perceived lack of space for educators and students to explore perspectives of events and issues.
- Teachers’ skills need to be deepened and a school culture supportive of NE efforts has to be nurtured.
- NE experiences should be planned in a more progressive manner across the different levels, and be pervasive across the curriculum.
- The role of the community in NE can be enlarged.



NE OVER THE YEARS



NE MESSAGES (1997)

- Singapore is our homeland; this is where we belong.
- We must preserve racial and religious harmony.
- We must uphold meritocracy and incorruptibility.
- No one owes Singapore a living.
- We must ourselves defend Singapore.
- We have confidence in our future.



HEAD, HEART, HANDS (2007)

- “Head”: Think critically about issues and arrive at a deeper understanding of the challenges facing Singapore and what it means to be Singaporean.
- “Heart”: Connect emotionally with the Singapore story in order to appreciate Singapore and have a deeper sense of belonging.
- “Hands”: Give back to society in various ways, and be empowered to contribute, create and lead Singapore’s future, in different fields of society.



CITIZENSHIP DISPOSITIONS (2017)

- A Sense of Belonging
- A Sense of Reality
- A Sense of Hope
- The Will to Act

With the NE Review 2017, the Committee revisited the purposes of National Education, and together with educators and students considered how NE could continue to develop in our students an understanding and appreciation of Singapore and citizenship in this world of complexity.

Many reflected a desire for NE to be a more aspirational and empowering process where students explore and examine their identity as citizens in relation to society and the world, and arrive at a common set of ideals and values. This process needed to allow for individual and collective sense-making.

Moving forward, we seek to build on our efforts of earlier years and develop in students the civic knowledge, understanding, skills, values, motivation and identity. This is so that they will be able to play their role well as concerned citizens and active contributors, and to co-construct the next chapter of Singapore.

NE will be anchored on the following citizenship dispositions, which enable our young to realise their part in the flourishing of their community and nation:

- **A sense of belonging:** To develop a deeper understanding of who we are, and a shared understanding of the values that are important to us as a nation.
- **A sense of reality:** To be aware of the contemporary realities — including Singapore’s constraints and vulnerabilities — which affect us as a nation amidst the backdrop of a less predictable world.
- **A sense of hope:** Having confidence and optimism in Singapore’s future and the resilience to face the challenges ahead.

Ultimately, these citizenship dispositions cultivate **the will to act:** To be active citizens who have a collective resolve and a sense of shared mission towards building a Singapore for all.

NE MOVING FORWARD

A SENSE OF BELONGING

Develop a deeper awareness of who we are as Singaporeans and as a nation

Trust and believe that there is a place for everyone

Share a willingness to hear diverse voices and to foster an attitude of openness to accept others different from us



“A simple question in a painting created by an artist more than 50 years ago (Chua Mia Tee’s *National Language Class* with the words “Siapa Nama Kamu?” on it, 1959) continues to provoke many questions – “What makes us different?” “What brings us together?” “What may tear us apart?” – about our identities, our country’s stories and the world’s many histories.”

Dr Eugene Tan
Director, National Gallery
Singapore

A SENSE OF REALITY

Be aware of and understand Singapore’s constraints, vulnerabilities and contemporary realities

Have an authentic understanding of our past and present

Construct a realistic perspective of the future



“Webs are fragile things as is Singapore, given our geographical location and price-taking position in the global economy. Webs are connected to larger ecologies, as we are to our broader region and world. And, yet, webs are resilient – they can collapse with the wind, but are also quick to reconstruct, which I think captures the sort of agility Singapore should aspire to.”

Mr Aaron Maniam
Civil Servant

A SENSE OF HOPE

Show continued confidence and optimism in Singapore’s future

Develop resilience to face challenges ahead

Be empowered to seek opportunities in challenges ahead



“What endures from my own school days are bonds with classmates, NCC squad mates, and fellow prefects. We shared dreams, fears and tears. We still meet up for meals! Now, as a supervisor of schools, when I observe friendships cutting across differences – skin colour or different sectors of society, people just eating together in foodcourts or restaurants, just at ease with each other – I’m filled with hope for our future. It is a magic that every one of us must ensure will endure.”

Mdm Haslinda Zamani
Superintendent,
West Zone

THE WILL TO ACT

Embody the collective resolve and sense of shared mission

Show willingness to work towards building a Singapore for all

Play a role in the future of Singapore



“Start small. You don’t have to travel halfway across the island to volunteer at an old folks’ home for hours every weekend. You can start by reaching out to people in your community, by lending an extra hand or being someone for them to talk to. And then you can go deeper – and you’ll discover more about yourself, the people around you and learn more about the causes you care for. You might be surprised at all the good you’ll find in your community.”

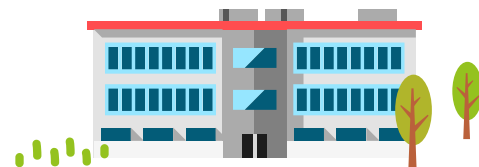
Ms Wu Jiezhen
Executive Director,
The Hidden Good

“We need to refresh the narrative to one that stimulates thinking and reflection, and not be presented as a set of conventional wisdom for students to imbibe without much thought.”

– Prof Tan Tai Yong
PRESIDENT, YALE-NUS COLLEGE
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

“How can these dispositions be achieved in schools? How can we empower our teachers further to develop their own citizenship dispositions and show conviction in their delivery of NE? The three recommended thrusts provide a practical frame for our educators to think about their own contributions to the development of the senses of belonging, reality and hope as well as the will to act. It encourages us to look for opportunities to do things differently and to do different things. More importantly, to create more platforms and space for our students to have more conversations that matter.”

— MRS TAN CHEN KEE
DIVISIONAL DIRECTOR,
STUDENT DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM DIVISION



What can we do as educators, in our classrooms, lessons or in the design of our students’ learning experiences to help cultivate the citizenship dispositions outlined? How do these dispositions translate into actions or activities in our schools? How will our new approach to NE foster these senses in our students?

The following thrusts will help guide and channel our efforts for our students to acquire and practise these senses and the will to act, which will make them future-ready citizens of tomorrow.



A SHARED AND LIVELY NARRATIVE

Moving from a top-down, state-driven narrative to a multi-dimensional Singapore Story that includes voices and experiences from our students and discussions of Singapore’s contemporary realities through issues.



EMPOWERING CITIZENSHIP EXPERIENCES

Design learning experiences that allow students to exercise ownership of the community, build stronger relationships with their peers in an increasingly diverse society and initiate ways to contribute to the nation in order to nurture a commitment to take action.



PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGED IN PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION

Make sense of our own and collective citizenship experiences to become more adept and confident in guiding your students through their NE experiences.



A SHARED AND LIVELY NARRATIVE

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE NOW?

Discussions of current affairs and/or social issues are already taking place in:

- Social Studies
- Geography
- General Paper
- Project Work
- Applied Learning
- Languages
- Economics

WHAT IT WILL LOOK LIKE

Dedicated space in CCE lessons and curriculum to discuss contemporary issues with specific reference to citizenship.



WHAT IS MY ROLE? WHAT SHOULD I DO?

To enable lively and constructive discourse, teachers are encouraged to:

- Keep pace with emerging trends/issues that are relevant and impact our students
- Facilitate and guide students in expressing their ideas in different ways – Verbal, Written, Artistic etc.
- Have dedicated time for discussions on contemporary issues that are significant and relevant to our students' life experiences.
- Craft discussions from students' perspectives and points-of-view.
- Provide a safe space for different perspectives to be shared and discussed.
- Provide opportunities for students to form personal viewpoints and opinions after considering and understanding different perspectives.

“THE STORIES THAT CAN BE USED [TO EXPLAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF NE] SHOULD BE POWERFUL REAL-LIFE STORIES ABOUT HUMAN TRAGEDIES OR CRISES. STORIES ABOUT HOW SINGAPOREAN MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS LOST THEIR LIVES IN SAVING OTHERS DURING THE SARS CRISIS, FOR INSTANCE. IT IS THE EMERGENCE OF THIS HUMAN SPIRIT AT ITS HIGHEST POINT THAT NE TRIES TO INSPIRE IN YOUNG SINGAPOREANS.”

– Ambassador Mohammad Alami Musa, Head Of Studies, Inter-Religious Relations In Plural Societies Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN SCHOOL

At Swiss Cottage Secondary, as part of the school's Global Perspectives Programme (GPP), students engage in various learning activities such as role-play, debates, and simulation exercises where they carefully considered responses in discussions of various issues. Conducted for all lower secondary classes, students are encouraged to explore multiple perspectives – personal, local, national and global and communicate their ideas with confidence, articulate a well-considered position on an issue, and actively initiate suggestions for possible social action and change.

For example, students role-played different perspectives on global immigration and discussed its pros and cons. More than simply having fun, students learned critical thinking skills as they researched the topic and drew parallels to what is happening locally. They also developed greater empathy for others as they gain understanding through different perspectives. This collective experience led to an exercise where students wrote notes of gratitude to thank migrant workers for their contributions to Singapore.

The HOD leading the programme, Ms Mini Sathiya Sidhan, says, “GPP is a very responsive curriculum. It provides opportunities to explore and implement a more value-centric curriculum which provides a lot of leeway for teachers to inculcate character values and nurture key 21st century skills.”



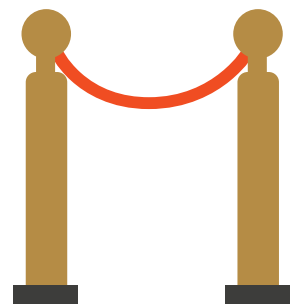
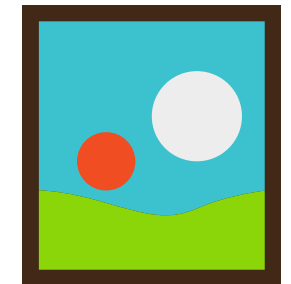
BRINGING MUSEUMS TO CLASSROOMS

What was the meaning behind “*Self Portrait (No More Tears Mr. Lee)*” by Jason Wee that hangs in the Singapore Art Museum (SAM)? What was the artist trying to say? How could something similar about our history be told through a 10-year-old's artwork?

The Primary 4 students at Lianhua Primary were among a group from 15 schools that piloted the museum-based learning experience in 2016. Before the SAM visit, students discussed in groups the possible meanings and interpretations of select artworks, and were guided on museum etiquette, the role of museums and the people who work there.

Then, during the visit, students learnt how Jason Wee used non-conventional materials to create the portrait. They were challenged to work in groups to create a quick portrait of a person that they respected, using bottle caps, before presenting why they felt that person had contributed to Singapore.

Students reported that they enjoyed their out-of-classroom learning experience and the viewing of “actual artworks”.





EMPOWERING CITIZENSHIP EXPERIENCES



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE NOW?

Cohort and school-based experiences through various platforms such as:

- NE Commemorative Days
- Learning Journeys
- Co-Curricular Activities

WHAT IT WILL LOOK LIKE

A coherent array of student experiences through the entire 10 to 12 years of education.

Variety of experiences according to profile, needs and interests.

More choice and autonomy created to allow for greater exercise of ownership.



WHAT IS MY ROLE? WHAT SHOULD I DO?

To create empowering citizenship experiences, teachers are encouraged to:

- Leverage on existing experiences to continue to develop students' competencies.
- Tailor programmes and experiences to the unique needs of student profiles.
- Allow for greater student voice and autonomy in deciding the nature of their experiences and opportunities, and then in turn, explore a range of ideas that are of interest to them.
- Design experiences that will provide immersive settings and hands-on opportunities for students to own and apply their learning.
- Work with community partners to enhance learning experiences of the students.

GETTING YOUR NRIC: A SCHOOL EVENT

Ping Yi Secondary School holds a ceremony for their students receiving the NRIC. Students of different races and ethnicities are chosen to represent their classmates on stage, to receive their NRICs from the Principal. Mr Samuel Wee, Senior Teacher (History), also gives a presentation on how the different races contribute to Singapore, through their food, occupations or values. After the ceremony, booths are set up at the canteen for the rest of the students to collect their identity cards from the CCE teachers.

The school wanted, deliberately, to make this a symbolic event, so they created a different experience for their students to allow them to reflect on citizenship and what it means. "The students really look forward to receiving their NRICs," says Mr Wee. "We tell them it's now your turn to give and contribute to the nation."

LOVE MY COMMUNITY, LOVE MY COUNTRY

A primary-school project called "I LOVE Jurong" provided a platform for Rulang Primary School students to celebrate the vibrant spirit of the community and place through song, writing and multi-media presentations. It allowed the Primary 6 pupils to present and share their views and feelings about Jurong – its past, present and future, in a trail and interactive exhibition.

To extend the learning to the rest of the school community, the project was presented during the school assembly by the NE Pupil Ambassadors. Part of the research on Singapore Pioneer Leaders (Dr Goh Keng Swee and Dr Ho Kah Leong), guided by NE Coordinator, Mr Dev Anand, was published as a learning booklet in 2016 that is currently being used to augment the Primary 4 Social Studies curriculum. It aims to impress upon the pupils the importance of building a gracious community in Jurong. Also initiated by the pupils, a consolidated brochure was printed and distributed to the community.

Science HOD Mr Goh Wei Howe, who is in charge of "I LOVE JURONG", said, "We are heartened that our pupil researchers had the tenacity and resilience to get their facts right; they verified Internet research, checked reference books in the library and interviewed senior residents."



EMPATHY, PLANNING AND COMMUNICATING

"We wanted to come up with a tier-based, sustainable programme, which would inculcate empathy in our students and incrementally develop their planning and communication skills," shared Mr Goh Yoon Keong, Subject Head/CCE of Anderson Secondary School.

Thus the Intergenerational Learning Programme was born in 2016, in partnership with Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP) and Family Central. For two weeks at the start of term 2, Secondary 2 students work with student leaders from NYP on ways to work with the elderly. Anderson Secondary's students, in turn, design courses to teach the elderly how to use smartphones, converse in basic English and try line dancing under their Form Teachers' guidance. Mr Goh added, "To ensure some level of autonomy, we would like the students to plan further Values In Action projects on their own. We plan to continue working with our stakeholders, NYP and Family Central, and we wish to explore if parents can be involved."





PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGED IN PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE NOW?

Professional Learning Committees/ White Space / Professional development opportunities that are more geared towards deepening of disciplinary knowledge and pedagogy, and may be specifically subject based.

WHAT IT WILL LOOK LIKE

A safe space created for educators to have dialogues on citizenship and citizenship-related issues.



WHAT IS MY ROLE? WHAT SHOULD I DO?

To develop new pedagogical approaches, teachers are encouraged to:

- Understand our own citizenship journey and experience, and our values, attitudes and beliefs.
- Share and discuss ideas and experiences with colleagues and fraternity within a safe space provided.
- Deepen skills for facilitation.
- Reflect on the effectiveness of teaching practices to gain knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- Acquire and apply appropriate strategies actively through a continuous process of application and reflection.
- Put into practice learning from various professional development opportunities such as workshops and seminars.

“WE CAN’T EXPECT EVERY TEACHER TO BE COMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT RACE, RELIGION OR WHATEVER TURNS UP AS THIS WEEK’S HOT TOPIC ON SOCIAL MEDIA. HOWEVER, THE YOUNG PEOPLE WE MEET IN SCHOOLS, ITES AND POLYTECHNICS HAVE SAID AGAIN AND AGAIN THAT THEY APPRECIATE IT WHEN THEIR TEACHERS MAKE A SINCERE EFFORT TO MAKE NE REAL. TEACHERS HAVE A LOT ON THEIR PLATES. BUT IF THIS IS IMPORTANT, IT NEEDS TO BE DONE WELL TOO.”

— Mr Alan John
Director, Temasek Foundation International-IPS
Asia Journalism Fellowship



PROFESSIONAL DIALOGUES

Are our teachers ready to facilitate meaningful student discussions on contemporary issues? At St Hilda’s Secondary School, Mr Emen Low, Mr Seow Whei Jie and Ms Poh Shi Hui conducted a half-day training workshop for fellow teaching staff focusing on ways and applications of various facilitation strategies to be used in class.

Teachers experienced how they could bring out multiple perspectives from the students, as well as highlighting critical thinking skills. They also got to share and discuss their own opinions on Singapore’s positions on a range of local, regional and global issues.

Such skills and knowledge would help the teachers enrich discussions within their CCE classes, promoting engagement and interest in contemporary issues.

“THE DESIGN OF OUR NE EXPERIENCES MUST HAVE THE BOLDNESS TO ALLOW CHOICE TO OUR YOUNG CITIZENS, TO ALLOW THEM TO OPERATE FROM THEIR OWN CONVICTIONS AND FIND THEIR OWN PERSONAL MEANING. IT IS ULTIMATELY THE OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG CITIZENS TO LIVE OUT THEIR CHOICES THAT WILL TRANSFORM NE EXPERIENCES.”

— Mr Tong Yee, Founder and Director, The Thought Collective

TEACHING WITH STORIES

Star singer Siti Nurhaliza (also known as “Asia’s Celine Dion”) had to sell kueh to help support her family. This story helped Telok Kurau Primary School (TKPS) teacher Mr Faizal to encourage his own CCE students. “I shared that different people will have to overcome different challenges but if one is willing to work hard and take failures as part of the process, he/she will eventually see success,” said the Senior Teacher. He also facilitates discussions with the students on how they can apply the lessons from the stories to their own lives.

Since 2014, as an East Zone Centre of Excellence for CCE, TKPS has also been organising storytelling workshops to encourage and equip teachers to use storytelling as a pedagogical approach in CCE. The workshops are conducted by a veteran storyteller and have been very well received. Teachers have given feedback that the narrative approach helps to bring CCE lessons to life and the students are better able to identify with the lessons and remember them as well.



TAKE THE NEXT STEP

What we do today and in the future, will shape who we are and how we will live tomorrow. As a fraternity, we have many opportunities to continue in our efforts in changing, adapting and growing our approach to NE. For us to be able to have such conversations about NE in 2018 attests to the journey that Singapore, Singaporeans and our education system have made over the past four generations. Yet, while it is important for us not to lose sight of the good work that has gone on before, how will we — students, teachers, citizens of Singapore — write the next chapter of our Singapore story?

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AND TOOK PART IN THE REVIEW PROCESS.





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SINGAPORE