

## **Parallel Session**

Room 4: Singapore and Thailand

### **Topic 1: Character and Citizenship Education Pioneering New Formats, Competency-Based Learning & Alternative Pathways**

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## **CURRICULUM VITAE**



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### **About the Presenter**

Nallu Dhinakharan is currently the Subject Head of Character and Citizenship Education in the Ministry of Education, Singapore. He also serves in various capacities as a Central Executive Committee Member in the Singapore Teachers' Union, the National Trade Union Congress Workplace Safety Sub-Committee and the Singapore Indian Education Trust.

A passionate researcher in Cultural Geography and the Humanities, Nallu's scholarly works have been cited in works on the South Asian diaspora in Singapore as well as the performance of the Tamil culture in Singapore. For the purpose of this conference, Nallu is exploring the various opportunities available in the CCE 2021 Syllabus of Singapore. As a practitioner of the CCE 2021 Syllabus as well as a professional who strategizes the enactment of the curriculum in the context of his school, Nallu offers a wholesome perspective on the opportunities presented by the curriculum.

As a hobby, Nallu is also a passionate theatre maker with a proven track record in the Arts scene, both as a practitioner as well as an administrator. He passionately co-founded Agam Theatre Lab in 2019 and continues to be a Director in a non-executive role. Agam Theatre Lab is the only Indian Theatre organisation in Singapore with the IPC status and is also a charity known for its strong governance and has strived to push the boundaries of Tamil theatre in

Singapore. In 2024, Agam Theatre Lab became the youngest Theatre organisation in Singapore to win the Straits Times Life! Theatre Award for Best Ensemble for its November 2023 play titled 'Double Murder in the Green Mansion'. This was also the first time a Tamil theatre production received the award. The play was also nominated in a total of three categories – also a first in the Tamil theatre scene in Singapore.

# STU SINGAPORE TEACHERS' UNION

Character and Citizenship Education  
Pioneering New Formats, Competency-Based Learning & Alternative Pathways

*By Nallu Dhinakaran*



# **CHARACTER AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: PIONEERING NEW FORMATS, COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING AND ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS**

## **Abstract**

In the evolving landscape of education, the integration of new educational formats, competency-based curricula, and alternative education models has become essential for fostering holistic development in students. This paper explores the transformative approaches adopted in Singapore's Character and Citizenship Education (CCE), presenting a comprehensive overview of innovative teaching methods, competency-based frameworks, and alternative education models.

The paper begins with an introduction to Singapore's education system, emphasizing its dedication to Character and Citizenship Education (CCE). In the section on new educational formats, the paper examines the implementation of blended learning, flipped classrooms, and digital platforms in CCE. Case studies from schools illustrate the successful integration of these methods, showcasing increased student engagement and deeper understanding of moral and ethical issues. The competency-based curriculum section delves into the framework and principles guiding Singapore's CCE. It outlines specific competencies targeted, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and ethical reasoning, and provides examples of project-based learning and assessment strategies that demonstrate real-world applications.

Alternative education models, including experiential learning, service learning, and outdoor education, are explored for their role in holistic education. The paper highlights the benefits and positive outcomes of these approaches through examples from Outward Bound Singapore and other schools, supported by research findings on their impact on student development.

The paper concludes with future directions, addressing emerging trends in education such as the use of artificial intelligence and the integration of global citizenship themes in CCE. The need for continuous innovation and improvement in educational practices is underscored to prepare students for a rapidly changing world. It provides valuable insights and practical examples to inspire and inform educational practices across the ASEAN region.

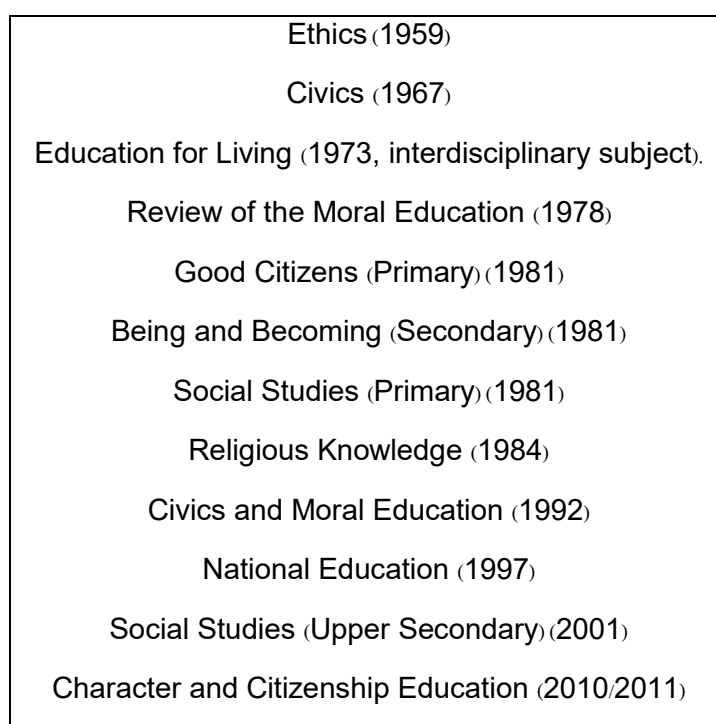
## **Key Words**

Student-centric, Active Citizenship, Enablers, Future-readiness, Student Developmental Experiences

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It can be argued that moral education should be a core feature of any school curriculum. In the case of Singapore, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has introduced 'Character and Citizenship Education' (CCE) in all government schools in the country since 2014. The desired outcome of CCE is to "inculcate values and build competencies in our students to develop them to be good individuals and useful citizens" (MOE, 2012a, p. 1; MOE, 2012b, p. 1). The cultivation of values and competencies is not achieved through didactic or indoctrinatory ways. Instead, schools are expected to promote reflection in students.

To set the context of CCE in Singapore, it is important to look at how it was implemented in schools since Singapore's self-governance in 1959. A values-based education has always been an essential component of schooling for students in Singapore. Lee (2012) lists the following values education programmes that were implemented in schools in Singapore over the years. This can be seen in Figure 1 below.

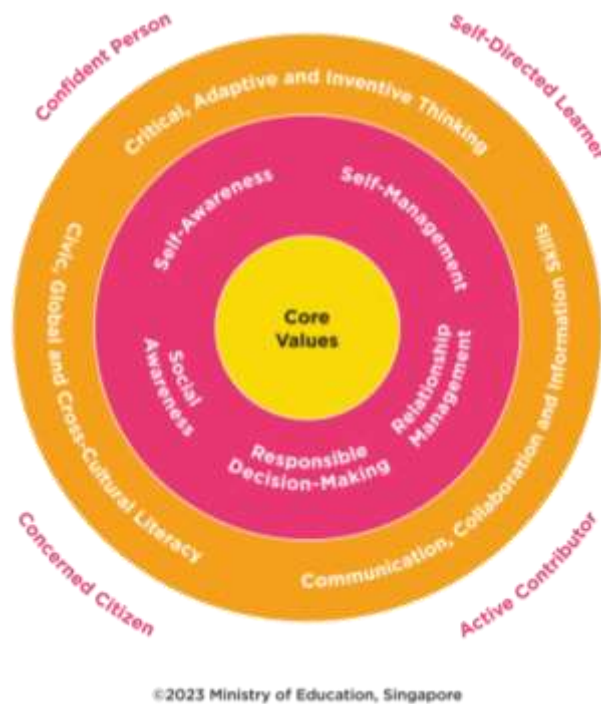


**Figure 1**

Following Singapore's independence, Civics became a mandatory subject in 1967, replacing Ethics. As a fledgling nation, emphasizing patriotism and civic awareness was fitting. Over the years, numerous programs and initiatives, including Education for Living, Good Citizen, Being and Becoming, Religious Knowledge, Civics and Moral Education, Social-Emotional Learning, and National Education, were introduced. These efforts have played a significant role in fostering character and citizenship traits, as well as life skills, among our students. Although the focus has evolved with each review cycle, the primary objectives of Character and

Citizenship Education (CCE) have remained constant. Providing our students with strong values, knowledge, and life skills, nurturing good character in our students and prepare them to be engaged citizens who are deeply connected to Singapore, and actively contributing to the betterment of others' lives. These continue to be crucial and pertinent for educators today. In the spirit of that pursuit, in 2020, the Ministry of Education launched a refreshed Character and Citizenship Education syllabus in 2021 (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). 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 leading rise to the popular phrase – ‘Every teacher, a CCE teacher’. Every educator in Singapore knows that CCE lessons via curriculum lessons provide a powerful opportunity for meaningful discussions and learning of important values and skills. Apart from curriculum lessons, CCE is also taught and ‘caught’ via participation in school life through co-curricular activities (CCAs), Values-in-Action (VIA) service-learning projects, milestone developmental experiences like school-based camps and commemorative events. These are known as Student Development Experiences (SDEs). In SDEs, what often helps students internalize their learning are their personal reflections, sense-making and applying what they have learnt in authentic situations.

To keep pace with the current day and age, marked by rapid technological advancements and global developments which are largely considered to be VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous), the Ministry enhanced the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Core Competencies Framework in September 2023. It did this by placing a ‘greater emphasis on adaptive and inventive thinking, communication and civic literacy’ (MOE, 2023). This can be seen in the enhanced 21<sup>st</sup> Century Core Competencies Framework which can be seen in the figure below.

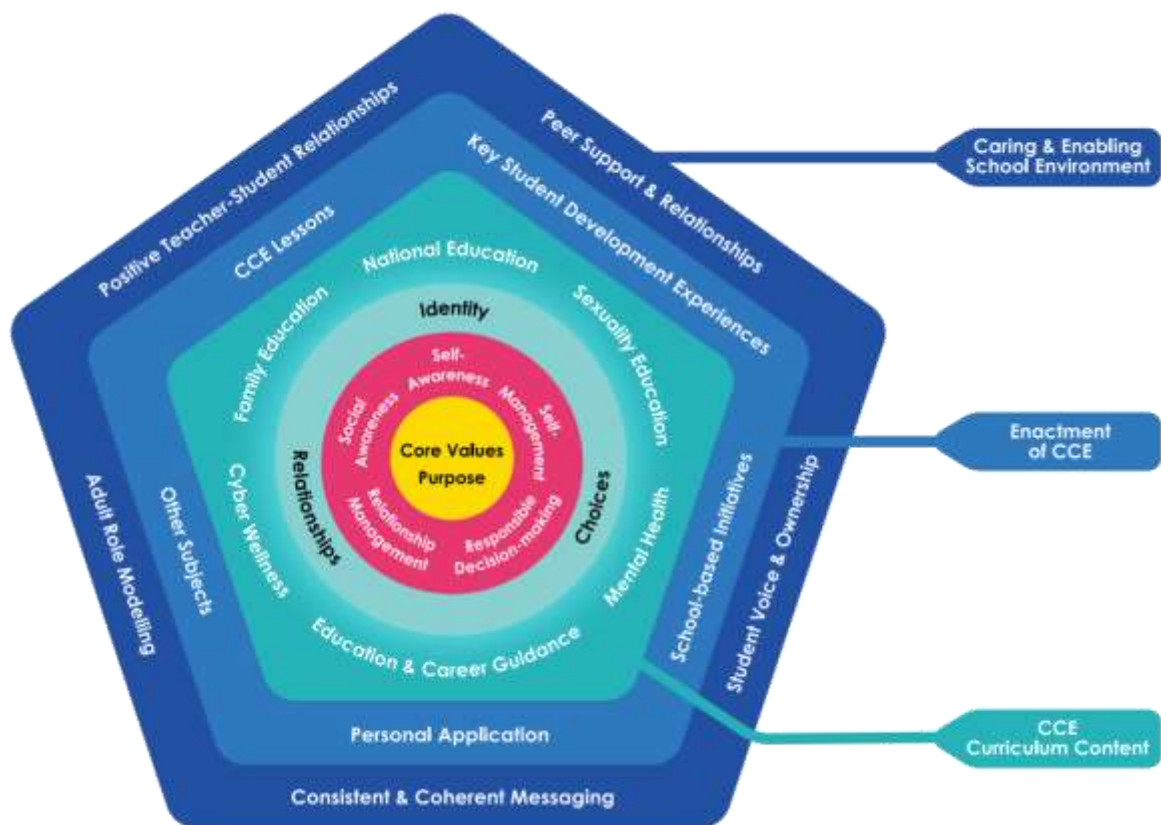


**Figure 2**

In order to enact these competencies, MOE established three key guiding principles in the CCE 2021 syllabus. Firstly, it focuses on student-centricity. This places students at the heart of all efforts in CCE and seeks to understand their needs and interests when designing learning experiences, focusing on student engagement, choice and voice. The second is the intentionality of the curriculum and SDEs that are carried out. By doing so, we do not leave learning of values, social-emotional (SE) competencies and citizenship dispositions to chance. Finally, it is the coherence of CCE across the total curriculum and the school environment. This includes students' social interactions and daily challenges.

To take a look at how this is all put into place in the CCE 2021 syllabus, it is important to look at the CCE 2021 Curriculum Frame in the figure below. We can see that the three big ideas – Identity, Relationships and Choices are crucial in bringing out the Enhanced 21<sup>st</sup> Century Core Competencies.





**Figure 3**

The values, purpose, socio-emotional competencies and three big ideas of Identity, Relationships and Choice are woven across content areas of National Education (NE), Sexuality Education (SEd), Mental Health (MH), Education and Career Guidance (ECG), Cyber Wellness (CW), and Family Education (FE), in ways that are age-appropriate and meaningful for students in Singapore. The next section will look at some examples of how new educational formats are carried out via innovative teaching methods in Singapore schools.

## **CHAPTER 2: NEW EDUCATIONAL FORMATS AND INNOVATIVE TEACHING METHODS**

Blended learning, an educational approach that combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods, is gaining traction in the realm of Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) as well as all other aspects of teaching and learning in Singapore. This method allows students to benefit from the best of both worlds: the flexibility and accessibility of online learning and the personal interaction and immediate feedback of face-to-face instruction. One notable example is Bukit View Secondary School, which employs a blended learning model for CCE topics such as empathy and respect. Students are first introduced to these concepts through online modules, which include videos and interactive quizzes designed to engage and educate. The online component allows students to learn at their own pace, ensuring they fully understand the material before moving on. Following the completion of these modules, students then participate in in-person discussions, where they can delve deeper into the topics,



ask questions, and engage in meaningful conversations with their peers and teachers. This combination of online and in-person learning not only reinforces the students' understanding but also encourages the application of these values in real-life situations.

The flipped classroom model is another innovative teaching method being adopted in CCE. In this approach, traditional learning structures are reversed. Students are first exposed to new content outside of the classroom, typically through video lectures or reading assignments. Class time is then devoted to exercises, projects, and discussions that deepen their understanding of the material. Crescent Girls' School has successfully implemented the flipped classroom model for CCE. For example, students are assigned to watch videos on ethical dilemmas at home. These videos present various scenarios and prompt students to think critically about the choices and consequences involved. When students come to class, they engage in debates and discussions about these dilemmas, allowing them to express their opinions, consider different perspectives, and develop their critical thinking skills. This method not only encourages active learning but also helps students to become more independent thinkers and problem-solvers.

The integration of digital platforms in education has revolutionized the way students access and engage with learning materials. The Singapore Student Learning Space (SLS) is a prime example of how technology can enhance CCE. SLS is an online learning portal that provides students with access to a wide range of CCE resources, including videos, articles, interactive activities, and assignments. Students can use SLS to explore CCE topics at their own pace, complete assignments, and participate in interactive activities that reinforce their learning. The platform also allows teachers to track student progress, provide feedback, and tailor their teaching to meet the individual needs of their students. By utilizing digital platforms like SLS, schools can provide a more personalized and engaging learning experience for their students, ensuring that they not only understand the material but also develop the skills and values needed to become responsible and active citizens.

River Valley High School has effectively implemented the flipped classroom model for CCE, leading to notable improvements in student engagement and understanding of complex moral issues. By having students watch videos and complete readings on ethical dilemmas at home, the school has been able to free up class time for more interactive and meaningful activities, such as debates, discussions, and group projects. This approach has not only increased student participation but also allowed for a deeper exploration of CCE topics, helping students to develop critical thinking skills and a more nuanced understanding of moral and ethical issues. Another example is Ngee Ann Secondary School which has utilized a blended learning

approach for a project on environmental stewardship. In this project, students were tasked with researching environmental issues, participating in virtual field trips, and developing community projects to address these issues. The online component of the project allowed students to access a wealth of information and resources, conduct research at their own pace, and participate in virtual experiences that would not have been possible in a traditional classroom setting. The in-person component, on the other hand, provided opportunities for students to collaborate, discuss their findings, and work on their community projects. This blended learning approach not only enhanced students' understanding of environmental issues but also empowered them to take action and make a positive impact in their communities.

The adoption of innovative teaching methods such as blended learning, flipped classrooms, and digital platforms in CCE has significantly enhanced the learning experience for students. By combining the strengths of online and in-person learning, schools can provide a more engaging, personalized, and effective education. These new educational formats not only help students to understand and internalize CCE topics but also equip them with the skills and values needed to become responsible and active citizens. Through case studies like those of River Valley High School and Ngee Ann Secondary School, it is clear that these innovative approaches can lead to increased student engagement, deeper understanding of complex issues, and a greater impact on students' lives. As education continues to evolve, it is crucial for schools to embrace these new formats and continue to explore innovative ways to enhance CCE and prepare students for the future. The next chapter will talk about the competency-based framework present in the CCE 2021 curriculum.

### **CHAPTER 3: COMPETENCY BASED FRAMEWORK**

A competency-based framework in the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) classroom in Singapore aims to systematically develop students' values, social-emotional competencies, and citizenship dispositions as earlier mentioned in the introduction chapter. This approach focuses on experiential learning, critical thinking, and the practical application of skills in real-world scenarios, ensuring that students are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of society. The framework emphasizes five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making.

Self-awareness involves understanding one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and values. In the CCE classroom, activities like reflective journaling and personal goal setting are used to cultivate this competency. For instance, students might engage in an exercise where they identify their personal values and reflect on how these values influence their decisions and actions. A practical example is a lesson on empathy, where students are asked to reflect on a

time, they felt misunderstood and then consider how they can apply this understanding to be more empathetic towards others.

Self-management refers to the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. In the CCE framework, students might participate in stress management workshops or time management seminars. For example, during examination periods, teachers might conduct sessions on relaxation techniques and effective study habits, helping students to develop strategies for managing anxiety and maintaining focus.

Social awareness is the ability to understand and empathize with others, particularly those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. CCE lessons often include multicultural education and community service projects. For example, students might engage in a project where they learn about different cultural practices during their Racial Harmony Day lesson and then volunteer at a community centre that serves a diverse population. This helps students to appreciate diversity and develop a sense of responsibility towards others.

Relationship management involves the skills needed to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships. This includes clear communication, active listening, cooperation, and conflict resolution. In the CCE classroom, students might participate in role-playing activities that simulate common conflicts, such as disagreements with friends or family members. By practicing these scenarios, students learn how to navigate interpersonal issues constructively. For instance, a lesson might involve students working in groups to create a project, during which they must practice effective communication and collaboration to succeed. These projects can be decided by the schools to strategically align with its own student development curricular objectives.

Responsible decision-making is the ability to make ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behaviour. This involves evaluating the consequences of various actions and considering the well-being of oneself and others. CCE lessons might include discussions on moral dilemmas and case studies where students must decide the best course of action in complex situations. For example, a teacher might present a scenario where a student is faced with situations that present Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs). Through guided discussions, students explore the potential consequences of each choice and reflect on the importance of courage, adaptability and resilience and that mental health is a work in progress and is a natural process that needs to be cultivated with patience and intentionality.

The competency-based framework is implemented through various pedagogical strategies that encourage active learning and real-world application. For example, in project-based learning,

students might undertake a project on environmental sustainability, where they research local environmental issues, propose solutions, and present their findings to the community. This project not only develops their research and presentation skills but also fosters a sense of civic responsibility and environmental stewardship. This is done in Tampines Secondary School – a pilot school for the eco-stewardship initiative.

In the Values in Education (VIA) curriculum, integrating community service into the curriculum allows students to apply their learning in meaningful ways. For instance, students might volunteer at a local old folk's home, special needs centre, or raise funds for a caregiver welfare centre, applying their understanding of empathy and social awareness to help those in need. In Tampines Secondary School, students have a voice and choice in which organisation they would like to serve after listening to talks from various organisations. In doing so, they are able to exercise their identity and choice – two of the three big ideas in the CCE 2021 syllabus.

A competency-based framework in the CCE classroom equips students with essential skills and values, preparing them to be responsible and active citizens. By focusing on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making, the framework ensures that students not only excel academically but also develop the character and competencies necessary to navigate the complexities of modern society. Through practical examples and real-world applications, this approach fosters a holistic development that aligns with Singapore's vision of nurturing confident, concerned, and contributing citizens. The next chapter looks at modes of alternative education as well as some models present in the Singapore schools.

#### **CHAPTER 4: ALTERNATE EDUCATION IN CCE**

In recent years, alternative education models have gained prominence as effective means of fostering holistic development in students. These models include experiential learning, service learning, and outdoor education, each offering unique benefits that traditional classroom settings might not fully provide. Experiential learning involves learning through direct experience and reflection on those experiences. This hands-on approach helps students apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations, enhancing their understanding and retention of information.

Outward Bound Singapore (OBS) is a prime example of experiential learning in action. This is a developmental milestone for all students at the Secondary Three level in Singapore. They are grouped with students from various schools – an intentional effort to get students to interact with students from various socio-economic strata as well as life experiences in accomplishing

tasks together to build empathy in one another. At OBS, students also engage in adventure-based learning activities such as rock climbing, kayaking, and high-ropes courses. These activities are designed to challenge students physically and mentally, fostering resilience, teamwork, and leadership. For instance, when students navigate through obstacle courses, they must rely on their peers for support and guidance, promoting teamwork and trust. Moreover, the challenges they face help build resilience, as they learn to overcome difficulties and persevere in the face of adversity. Leadership skills are also developed as students take turns leading their groups and making decisions under pressure.

On top of the milestone OBS programme, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Singapore also runs an extensive Outdoor Education Program for students in other age groups that includes activities such as camping, orienteering, and hiking. These activities are designed to help students develop survival skills, environmental awareness, and teamwork. For instance, during camping trips, students learn how to set up tents, cook meals, and navigate using maps and compasses. These experiences teach them self-reliance and problem-solving skills. Additionally, activities like orienteering and hiking promote environmental awareness as students learn about local ecosystems and the importance of conservation. The benefits of alternative education models are well-documented, with numerous studies highlighting their positive impact on students' development.

Research indicates that students who participate in experiential and service-learning programs exhibit higher levels of civic engagement and enhanced problem-solving skills. A study by the National Institute of Education (NIE) found that students involved in such programs are more likely to participate in community service and take on leadership roles in their communities. This heightened civic engagement is attributed to the hands-on nature of these programs, which allows students to see the direct impact of their actions and fosters a sense of responsibility towards their communities. The findings showed that students displayed better communication skills, were more effective in resolving conflicts, and had higher self-esteem post-participation. These improvements are likely due to the collaborative and challenging nature of outdoor activities, which require students to work together, support each other, and push their personal boundaries.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

CCE can be said to be the bedrock upon which Singapore's education system stands. With the changing landscape of social media and demographics, it is timely to re-think and reset education (Tan, 2023). 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. 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. 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. The Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education (CCCE) that was opened in 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023, will be a good resource that can focus on three main areas: research and development, professional development, and fostering collaboration among schools.



**Figure 4**

CCCE can lead rigorous research initiatives to identify and validate best practices in CCE. By publishing studies and sharing findings, they can provide educators with evidence-based strategies that are proven to be effective in nurturing character and citizenship. CCCE can develop and pilot innovative CCE programs that incorporate contemporary pedagogical approaches, such as experiential learning and digital citizenship education. These programs can then be scaled across schools in Singapore, ensuring a wide reach and impact. By working closely with the Ministry of Education, CCCE can advocate for policies that support comprehensive CCE integration within the national curriculum, ensuring that character and citizenship education remains a priority at all educational levels.

CCCE can organize regular workshops and seminars for educators, focusing on the latest CCE methodologies and classroom management techniques. These sessions can help teachers stay updated with current trends and best practices in CCE. Offering certification programs for educators specializing in CCE can ensure a high standard of teaching across the board. These programs can include modules on developmental psychology, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement. By creating a repository of CCE resources, including lesson plans, multimedia content, and assessment tools, CCCE can equip teachers with the necessary materials to deliver effective and engaging CCE lessons. CCCE can facilitate platforms such as conferences, forums, and online communities where schools can share their successful CCE practices. This collaborative approach allows schools to learn from one another and adopt strategies that have been effective elsewhere. Encouraging schools to partner on CCE projects can promote a sense of unity and shared purpose. For example, schools could collaborate on service-learning projects or environmental initiatives, allowing students from different backgrounds to work together towards common goals. Experienced educators from schools with well-established CCE programs can mentor teachers from other schools. This mentorship can provide guidance, support, and practical advice, helping to elevate the quality of CCE across the education system.

The ASEAN region can enhance its Character and Citizenship education curriculum by adopting various innovative practices. Experiential learning, like adventure-based programs, builds resilience, teamwork, and leadership. Service learning combines community service with academics, fostering empathy and social responsibility. Outdoor education promotes environmental awareness and teamwork through activities such as camping and nature walks. Blended learning offers flexibility by combining online and in-person education. Flipped classrooms enhance critical thinking by having students review materials at home and engage in interactive class activities. Digital platforms provide accessible resources and encourage collaboration. Schools can share best practices through visits, networks, and online communities, fostering continuous improvement and innovation. These approaches collectively prepare students to be well-rounded, responsible, and proactive citizens, enhancing engagement, learning outcomes, and overall development in the ASEAN region.



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