

The importance of education in society

[Education](#), [Importance of Education](#)



This article will first highlight the importance of education in society before deducing the purpose of education in society. The focus of this article will then be narrowed down, focusing on the primary purpose of Singapore education system. This article surveys the implementation of the policies in Singapore education, indicating the strengths of these policies. At the same time, areas of internal contradictions and where questionable assumptions may have been made are also indicated. Implications on teachers and students of these adopted policies are also explored. Challenges that lie ahead in the future are also identified and solutions for the perceived ineffectiveness in these policies made are also presented at the end of this article.

Key Words: Purpose of Education, Implications, Challenges, Solutions

Introduction

Education has an immense impact on human society. It serves as a platform to impart knowledge and skills to make mankind a rational animal. Without education, humans would not be rational to be able to differentiate between the rights and wrongs. Thus, it is evident that the “ purpose of education is to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed and reasonable decisions.” (Howe, 2000, para. 1) It is through education, a nation is then being able to achieve growth and development.

In a recent “ Global Competitiveness 2010” report, Singapore’s economy is ranked first in Asia and third in the world (“ World Economic Forum”, 2010, para. 1). What factors constitute to a small nation for achieving such a remarkable result?

Being a small nation with limited resources, Singapore can only count on its precious asset - human resources, to aid the country in its economical growth. Hence, the government has started investing heavily in its people by placing great emphasis on the education ever since it gained independence in 1965. According to the figures of Singapore Budget 2010, an amount of \$9. 664 million has been allocated to Ministry of Education (“ Singapore Budget 2010”

, 2010, para. 2). This amount is doubled the sum allocated to Ministry of Health of \$4. 181 million. It simply shows how much the Singapore government is counting on its people to contribute back to the nation after they have stepped into the working society. As stated in the mission of the Singapore education service:

“ The mission of the Education service is to mould the future of the nation. The service will provide our children with a balanced and well-rounded education, develop them to their full potential, and nurture them into good citizens, conscious of their responsibilities to family, society and country” (“ Ministry of Education”, 2010, para. 2).

From the above mission statement, we can tell that the role of education is to “ mould the future” of Singapore by providing students with “ a balanced and well-rounded education” so that they can reach their “ full potential” to become great assets for the country.

There are many different ways an individual or an organization can do to become an asset for the country. In a recent fraud case in Singapore, a

trusted “ executive secretary of a director of one of the “ Big Four” accounting firms”, Siew Siu Yin was found guilty of forging her boss’s signature and helping herself to \$642, 000 of his money (Singh, 2010, p. B6). If each individual is educated academically but not holistically, he or she would be earning money through the incorrect way.

This explains why education in Singapore is geared not only to the teaching of academic subjects, but also towards a holistic education, creating well-rounded future Singaporeans to compete and survive in the modern world. This goes to show that the ultimate purpose of Singapore education is to achieve national survival and economic prosperity – in a socially and morally upright way.

Adoption of Realism as Educational Philosophy & Meritocracy as Key Policy

In order for a country to boost its economy, it is ideal for workers to be talented and well-educated in order to maximize economic growth. “ The emphasis on intellectual capital has prompted many countries to see the role of schools primarily as preparing students to be knowledge workers who will enhance the country’s economic competitiveness.” (Tan & Wong, 2008, p. 8)

In Singapore, the educational philosophy of Realism which has been adopted since the independence of Singapore in 1960s “ has been credited with promoting a down-to-earth form of education that prepares students for a knowledge-based economy.” (Tan, 2006, p. 25) As such, schools in Singapore are seen as academic institutions entrusted with the function of

equipping students with the requisite skills and knowledge for the world of work and life based on a subject-matter curriculum.

Also, it is very common to see most enterprises or organizations recruiting employees based on their academic qualification as the basic requirement. For example, “ Skillsforce Management Consultancy Pte Ltd” is looking for an Accounts Manager. One of its stated recruitment requirements is the academic qualification of a “ minimum [d]egree in [a]ccountancy” (“ Skillsforce Management Consultancy Pte Ltd”, 2010, para. 4), followed by other soft skills which they are looking for in employees. This shows that even if one is equipped with other qualities or soft skills but without meeting the minimum academic qualification, he or she would not be able to qualify for the interview.

In other words, academic qualification still plays a major part in getting one a good job with good pay in Singapore’s society. Of course, there are people like Steven Paul Jobs (Co-founder of Apple), a college drop-out, who need not possess high academic qualification in order to be successful (“ Encyclopedia of World Biography”, 2010, para. 3). However, such exceptional case belongs to the minority group.

Furthermore, due to the fact that Singapore is a small nation, lacking of natural resources, “ meritocracy is the best means to maximize the different capacities of a population” in a fair way (“ The Education System in Singapore - Meritocracy”, n. d., para. 4). This explains why Singapore adopts the ideology of Meritocracy in education.

As Meritocracy in education aims to bring the best in everyone by streaming students based on their ability in academics through examinations, students work hard to get what they want so that they can be the best among all. Generally, the more they do, the better off they are. This results in intense competition and hostile competition amongst the students.

Implications for Teachers and Students

As a result, because of how Meritocracy works, Singapore became a result-oriented society. Producing students with good grades tend to be the top priority for many teachers. We often heard teachers telling students to work hard to ace in their academic studies as it will guarantee one with bright future with good job and good pay. Quoting from a famous philosopher, Aristotle once said that “ The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet”; students who wish to excel in life will work extremely hard academically. As such, many students and educators “ see education merely as a stepping stone to extrinsic rewards in life, overlooking its role in students’ moral and intellectual development.

(Tan & Wong, 2008, p. 8)

Furthermore, exam-based subjects like English, Mathematics and Science are still the main concern for curriculum to equip students with the skills and knowledge they need for the working society. As such, greater emphasis has been placed on these subjects neglecting the part on holistic education which is one of the missions of education.

On top of that, “ because moral education has not been accorded examination status, many teachers [tend] not to take it seriously and [] often use moral education periods as a buffer time to complete the syllabuses of examination subjects.” (Tan, 1994, p. 68) Teachers who do this are setting a bad example to students that Moral education is not important. According to Albert Bandura’s social learning theory, “ most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling.” (Wagner, 1977, para. 1) By doing so, teachers are sending a message to their students that CME is not as important as the academic subjects like English, Maths and Science. Therefore, emphasis on holistic education is again neglected. In fact, the Singapore education should place equal emphasis on holistic education in the curriculum rather than focusing more on academic achievements. In this way, the mission of education is then achieved.

Emphasis on Holistic Education should not be discounted

Hence, bottom-line is that developing the ethical side of a child is the key to creating a socially responsible nation, which in turn allows it to achieve more economic goals. If one is not socially responsible, fraud cases like the one mentioned earlier and corruptions will be occurring very commonly in Singapore. This will create a sense of fear to the foreign investors and prevent them from setting up their businesses in Singapore, resulting in decline in economic growth.

According to a recent research by NUS Career Centre Guide 2010, soft skills are also another element that enterprises and organizations are looking for when recruiting an employee. For instance, DSO National Laboratories

emphasized that “[they] base [their] assessment on the candidate’s technical aptitude for the position of interest, as well as soft skills that are necessary for performing on the job. [They] also look for candidates who share [their] core values of integrity, excellence, teamwork, innovation and customer focus.” (“ The NUS Career Centre Guide 2010”, 2010)

Therefore, it is important for the future generation to experience emotional and psychological well-being including morally and socially responsible. Hence, Singapore education has introduced Character Development with a wide array of activities like CCAs and CIP to help students develop such traits.

For instance, Community Involvement Programme (CIP) aims to “ nurture [the] students to become socially responsible and develops their sense of belonging and commitment to [the] country.” (“ Ministry of Education”, 2010, para. 1) One of the most common forms of fund-raising activities is the “ Flag Day”, where students would be distributed to different locations of Singapore to ask donation from the public in the streets. Through this activity, students learn the amount collected from the public is for the less needy; as such one should not be taking the money collected inside the tin for self-usage.

At the end of the day, all CIP activities performed by each student are clearly documented so as to accord the appropriate CCA points to him or her. CIP activities are logged based on the number of hours that the student performs the activity for.

By construing CIP into something that is on academic basis, CIP would lose all its initial intention on doing voluntary work that is doing on “voluntary basis”, and thus they may not see the value in participation of CIP. Students seem to be more practical nowadays to do CIP for the sake of clocking in their hours so as to build up their testimonials or resume increasing their chances of getting recruited. If there are no CIP hours incurred, will the students volunteer to do CIP on their own accord?

How is CIP able to ingrain the value of empathy deeply into students and how high is the service learning when they randomly ask donations from the public with a tin in hand?

Solutions

Schools should revise their activities to increase the service learning. If time permits, school should allow students to plan what to do for their CIP, instead of pre-planning for them. In my opinion, schools can collaborate with different beneficiaries such as Society for the Physically Disabled that requires volunteers to interact and help the less fortunate directly, through activities like taking them to the library and reading stories to them on a regular basis. After several weeks of service learning, reflections should be done and evaluated to ensure that students have truly benefited from the programme. “The learning experience would not be complete without allowing an opportunity for students to share and reflect on the different experiences they had during the service day.” (Rizzo & Brown, 2006, p. 8) Suggested lesson plans should also be included which can be used to help

the students discuss the day's events and have a more meaningful volunteer experience.

In addition, creating a greater sense of moral values like empathy within students especially the future generation of leaders of Singapore is crucial. One of the problems Singapore is currently facing is the ageing population. If the younger generation of Singaporeans lack of empathy, there would not be graciousness seen on public transports especially on the trains, where youngsters give up their seats to the elderly. If Singapore were to produce a batch of future leaders who are lack of empathy, many demands to meet the ageing population such as building of fuss-free infrastructures for the elderly would not be met. The welfare of the nation would thus be neglected because of the lack of value in empathy.

Conclusion

Efforts from the government have been identified to help gear Singapore education towards a holistic approach. Integrated programmes are introduced to allow the top students in the secondary school to bypass the O level examination with the aim to “ stretch pupils and provide greater breadth in the academic and non-academic curriculum.” (“ Ministry of Education”, 2010, para. 1) However, till today, a minority of only nine schools offer this kind of alternative.

With the educational philosophy Realism and Meritocracy adopted as the foundation of the Singapore education, Singapore education has been successful in achieving its primary purpose of attaining economic prosperity. However, to be able to attain in success in holistic education, more emphasis

should be placed on it. The value of CIP should be further enhanced to ensure that students learn from it.

Holistic Education is important as it plays a part in teaching one to become a morally upright person. A country cannot have people who are knowledgeable but have no moral values. Moral values should be inculcated within each and everyone from young and these values follow us no matter where we go. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that emphasis should not be placed merely on the academic subjects, but also on holistic education. In order to achieve success in holistic education, CIP should be revamped and make known of its value of participation to the students.

Of course, there are other purposes of Singapore education, such as promoting racial harmony. However, the objective of promoting racial harmony in Singapore is to ensure that there would not be any racial riots to cause a decline in productivity for economic growth. It all goes to show that the purpose of education in Singapore is at the interest of the nation - to help achieve economic growth in a morally upright way; if not the Singapore government would not spend such hefty sum on the education sector.

(2186 words)