

# An introspective study: elitist views of political socialisation in education



I. Introduction” What are your views of the way Political Socialisation is being conducted now in the education system?” In this essay political socialisation in the education system refers to how students are familiarized with local politics through their educational experience. Education here, defined as one’s individual exposure to the national syllabus and school environment. This essay is a case study. The objective: to deliberate how ex-students from arguably the best junior college in Singapore view political socialization. Having been brought up in an environment of educational elitism, I contend to see how successful the government has been instilling a sense of nationalistic patriotism amongst the smartest students from particular efforts like National Education and Social Studies.

I conducted research by interviewing 3 individuals, who were ex-students of Raffles Junior College. Andrea, Daniel and Nicholas were all previously from the Arts Faculty. Academically bright and among the best in their classes, I carefully chose them for the diverse backgrounds they came from. Andrea-19, holds a Malaysian citizenship but has grown up in Singapore almost all her life.

She wants to change her citizenship but because of “ damn bureaucracy” and government regulations, cannot until she turns 21. Her family comes from the lower end of the economic spectrum, with her father having just passed away and her mother struggling to support the family. A former Humanities scholar, she is now a Khoo-foundation scholar doing undergraduate studies at NUS. An active Buddhist, Andrea intends to be a geography teacher after she graduates.

Daniel on the other hand, just turned 21. Like Andrea, he was a former Humanities scholar. He served as an officer from the prestigious Officer Cadet School (OCS) during his National Service but disrupted his term to take up an MOE teaching scholarship. Daniel was also from the Gifted Programme at Raffles Institution. He comes from a comfortable middle class family.

The thing that stands out most about Daniel is his Christian faith, and he hopes to go into full-time ministry after he completes his scholarship bond. Nicholas- 19, comes from a relatively upper class Christian family. His British father is one of the region heads of an MNC while his Chinese mother is an English teacher in an elite school. Also an ex-RI boy, he was one of the best in history among the Arts classes and a top-scorer in General Paper.

Currently serving NS, Nicholas will be studying law thereafter. II. The Formulating Process It proved a challenge creating my questions because quality answers depended on them. After much thought, I settled with one question and a more 'open-ended' interview. Since the topical scope of my research was so specific I had realised multiple questions had all given way to the same oriented answer.

With a one-question approach, the interview would be both flexible and standardized. Participants also had no idea of what was going to be asked. This was important because it simplified representative data from possible external influences they could have consciously or unconsciously gathered before the interview. All interviews lasted about an hour.

III. The Interviews The most prominent thread that ran common among all 3 interviewees was the attitude of compliance with the way political  
<https://assignbuster.com/an-introspective-study-elitist-views-of-political-socialisation-in-education/>

socialization was being conducted through education. National Education was seen as “ a good initiative”, a necessary expository for students to know “ not just their own lives”. They did not feel teaching social studies in primary school was in any way being “ politically skewed”.

Rather, that it was just “ NE of sorts”, a good foundation “ to know about the political history of Singapore”. “[Y]ou just take in all the history stuff” and after all, it was something “ the government wants to impute in their students”. This attitude of passivity was aptly rationalized by Nicholas “ being a rather pragmatic society” as Nicholas put it. “[W]e don’t want to get involved if it’s not going to benefit ourselves.

We see ourselves as economically stable, economically prosperous, politically and socially stable; we attribute all this to the government and rightly so.” Daniel similarly felt that peace and stability in the country was the most important thing. It was “ good for evangelizing”. Enjoying such wealth is considered a blessing from God. He justified this from a passage from the Holy Bible.” Giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; F2 that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

” -1Timothy 2: 2Criticism of the way political socialization was being conducted in schools was given more in an attitude of constructive criticism than malignant flak. Even expressing opinions of perceived shortcomings was done in a forgiving manner. “ It’s social engineering done for a good purpose” (Nicholas). Andrea was very candid: “ We’re probably all brainwashed without knowing it.

But to me that's alright... So long as we're mostly living happily in our own lives." Over the past few years, multiple revisions have been made to the NE and Social Study syllabus.

Social studies has been made compulsory for secondary school students, mini-speakers corners have even been set up. Nonetheless, Andrea feels that "the whole thing is just an artifice. She did relief teaching during her A-level break and was exposed first-hand to the way political socialization was being done in schools. "[T]he stuff they speak about (at Speakers Corner) is all rehearsed. They don't just stand up at the spur of the moment and discuss what they think about current issues in Singapore.

.. it's become something that has to be bound 'cos the teachers know that MOE has said "Oh you need to conduct speaker's corner lessons in your school." She pointed out grimly that if anything, it's "the politically correct thing to do to give the impression that you're open to politics". Daniel similarly expressed: "in the teaching of Singapore's history, you note that things are..

. overly objective. There's no critical insight (and) it does not allow the students to see less savoury sights-like the role of the ISA". But at the same time he feels that the government is in transition towards sincerely trying to promote a culture of openness in schools with a "willingness, to listen to the people". Nicholas noted the rigidity of the NE syllabus despite multiple revisions to the NE syllabus as indicative of how "reluctant of releasing too much control, too serious a discussion" the government was to the students. "I think that is a failure of the education system.

.. to have a truly mature political system for a state that's trying to be mature in the Arts, in the economy, in even our social sense, it doesn't make much sense that we still keep our political sphere so restricted." While it was a pertinent point, Nicholas also stressed that he was "not advocating that the political system should be opened up for mass two-party fights". Reason being the Singaporean economy was too small and dependent on foreign investment.

"Like how Daniel articulated, "it has to be for the greater good,... not endangering our cohesiveness in society". IV. An Analysis There is definitely political consciousness on the individual level.

Even despite personal grouses, interviewees were in compliance towards local politics and socialization. Nicholas interestingly attributed this as the government's fault "because it has engendered a feeling of -it's not really their fault- such great trust, that citizens do not see it as a reason to feel politically active. They take the political stability and the political accountability and trust they have in the government for granted". I believe this compliance comes from an individual choice, that ironically though free, had been heavily entrenched and influenced to think of rigid particulars as knowledgeable and acceptable.

Immanuel Kant called "Immaturity (as) the incapacity to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another." <sup>1</sup> If maturity is what the government is leaning towards, I feel that they must be open to the adversities that can possibly come out of cultivating this. When an individual is taught to think critically, there grows this "courage to use one's

intelligence without being guided by another" (Kent). The power of influence and control other people (or in this case, the government) has over him is taken away. Being taught to critically think means being able to criticize the education system, which is in turn, linked to being critical of the government itself.

I think the government is in a rut because encouraging such thought could potentially backlash on them. Maybe this paradigm is a rather extreme, totalitarian one. It's like one of the car-racing game on X-Box, called Burnout 3. The more risks you take while you're racing, the more points you will be rewarded. Similarly, the more risks the government is willing to take in teaching their young to critically think, the more possible "fruits" they could possibly enjoy in acclimatizing their citizens towards a more "knowledge-based, new economy".

I think the government realises the fatality of keeping the system this way, which is why they are slowly (very!) taking steps towards being more politically open in schools. They realise this change is absolutely necessary because their political continuity depends on economic prosperity." [W]e are so capable, we are so efficient, we are so comfortable that we stick with what we have tried and tested and found working and we are reluctant to take risks and try new things." - PM Lee But at the same time, they seem hesitant, I feel, because economic stability depends on political stability and this is something you risk in opening up politically.

For the few from the 'elite students' I interviewed, it is provocative to realise that they do think and are even critical about the Singaporean governing

methodology. Coming from an elite school has if anything distinctive, made them critical but accepting of political governance in Singapore. V. An Afterthought Although I thoroughly enjoyed doing this case-study research essay, it is by no means comprehensive or totally representative. Given the short duration of the assignment, the methodological limitations of this research are obvious.

With various restrictions in availability of resource and interviewees (in terms of time and energy), etc., I could not make as in-depth a study of this phenomenon as I would have liked to. As a result, this essay can sadly only be seen as a fresh, perhaps provocative insight to the effectiveness with which the government has been able to instil a sense of nationalistic patriotism among it's brightest youths.