



# Character and Citizenship Education in Singapore: A Holistic Framework to Flourish the Learner

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# **Character and Citizenship Education in Singapore:**

## **A Holistic Framework to Flourish the Learner**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents a comprehensive framework for Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) in Singapore, addressing the global challenges of a complex, uncertain world. CCE's evolution reflects Singapore's blend of Eastern and Western influences, responding to issues such as identity, artificial intelligence, and societal fragmentation. The framework emphasizes the integration of purpose, values, virtues and social-emotional competencies to develop well-rounded individuals capable of ethical decision-making and active contribution to society. Intentional implementation, including integration, explicit teaching, and immersive learning, is key to ensuring CCE's impact, supported by school leadership in building a virtue-centred culture, teacher development and empowerment, and community involvement.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today's world is marked by several complex challenges. Over the past 15 years, global peace has declined, as documented in the Global Peace Index 2023 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023). Rising authoritarianism in several regions, coupled with diminishing avenues for diplomacy amid global conflicts point toward democratic backsliding and the erosion of diplomacy, contributing to an increasingly fragmented global order (Carothers & Press, 2022). Simultaneously, globalisation and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced critical issues despite their benefits. AI misuse has raised ethical dilemmas, ranging from deepfakes to data manipulation, with profound economic and societal impacts (International Monetary Fund, 2023). Hyper-globalisation stands to threaten national identities and cultural heritage, as local traditions get overshadowed by dominant global narratives (Kerubo, 2024; Stanford AI100, 2023). Now with an abundance of data and information, translating them into cohesive solutions with meaningful sense-making remains a significant challenge. These realities highlight the urgent need to cultivate a

character-oriented citizenry of the nation and world, equipped with essential components of character and citizenship to navigate the complexities of today and the future.

### **Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) in Singapore**

Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) in Singapore is a cornerstone of the nation's strategy to develop resilient, values-driven individuals essential for its survival and progress as a small, resource-limited nation. Singapore's colonial heritage bequeathed Western systems of governance, education and law, while its societal values remain deeply rooted in Eastern philosophies of its predominantly Asian ancestry. Shaped by this blend of Eastern philosophies and Western influences, CCE addresses the dual imperatives of preserving national identity and fostering openness to global forces.

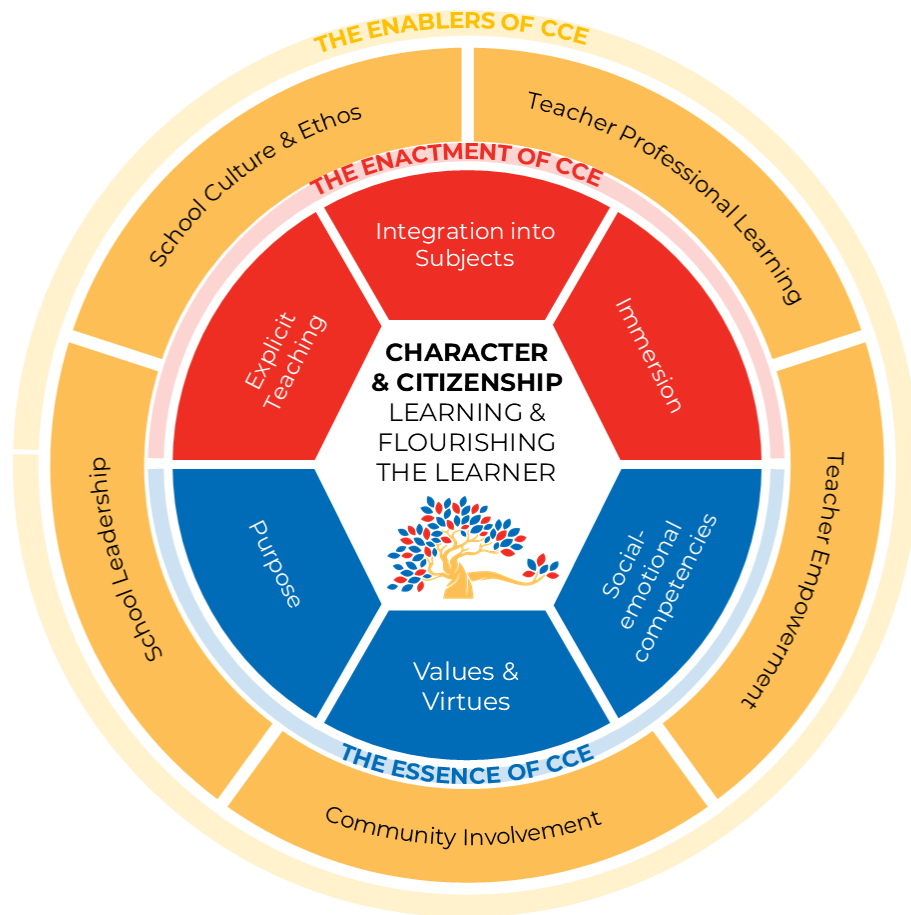
Introduced in 1999, CCE began with a focus on personal and social development, emphasizing values like respect, responsibility, and resilience. Over time, its scope expanded to include citizenship and social-emotional learning, fostering a sense of identity, community, and active citizenship. Key milestones include the 2014 curriculum refinement, which emphasized global and local responsibilities, and the 2021 revision, which integrated CCE across school experiences and enhanced mental health and cyber wellness education.

In 2023, the establishment of the Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education (SCCCE) reinforced the nation's commitment to advancing professional learning and research in CCE, ensuring that Singaporean students are equipped to navigate evolving challenges as holistic, future-ready individuals.

## **A HOLISTIC FRAMEWORK FOR CHARACTER & CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION**

Drawing on extensive research and global perspectives, SCCCE has developed a comprehensive, macro-level framework for CCE, encompassing key elements designed to guide its development and implementation while allowing for flexibility in contextual adaptation (see Figure 1). This paper explores these key elements through the lens of empirical and field research, examining their relevance to the Singapore context and the broader application of CCE principles.

**Figure 1.** *A framework for the holistic approach to CCE © 2024 Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education*



**A framework for the holistic approach to CCE\***

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\*This framework is developed by team members of SCCCE: Tan Oon Seng, Nicole Liaw, Suzanne Choo, Yu Yue and Ng May Gay; with contributions from Jallene Chua, Melvin Chan, Siah Swee Chuan, Lee Lin Ping, Ong Chin Leng and Tan Fangxi

**The Aim of Character and Citizenship Education (CCE)**

Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) in Singapore aims to cultivate learners who lead meaningful, virtuous lives while contributing positively to society. The concept of flourishing, which underpins CCE, has gained prominence globally, with organisations like the OECD (2023) and UNESCO (2021) emphasizing flourishing as a fundamental purpose of education. UNESCO highlights education as a means of building “common purposes” and enabling ‘individuals and communities to flourish together’ (p.7).

Flourishing is a multifaceted concept, explored through philosophical, psychological, and cultural lenses. Philosophers like Aristotle associate flourishing with *eudaimonia*, the highest good achieved by cultivating virtues and striving for excellence (Aristotle, 1999/350 BCE). Communitarian philosophies, such as Confucianism ties flourishing to societal harmony, suggesting it is deeply embedded in relationships and communal responsibilities (Confucius, 1997/500 BCE). Psychologists define flourishing as a holistic state of individual well-being, integrating positive emotions, relational health, purpose, and fulfillment (Seligman, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001). VanderWeele (2017) bridges these perspectives, outlining five domains of flourishing: life satisfaction, health, purpose, character, and social relationships. However, flourishing research often neglects the collective dimensions central to communitarian cultures in Asian context like Singapore's.

In Singapore, flourishing balances individual and collective aspirations, reflecting its strong communitarian ethos. This ethos is embodied in the “social compact,” emphasizing shared responsibilities and values, as outlined in the Forward Singapore Report (2023). Tan (2012) identified five essential shared values that underpin Singapore's education system and societal ethos: nation before community and society above self, family as the core unit of society, support for individuals within a community, consensus over conflict, and fostering racial and religious harmony. These principles guide Singapore's vision of an inclusive and cohesive society where all individuals can thrive while contributing to a shared identity and collective well-being.

The SCCCE frames flourishing through “character-oriented citizenship,” emphasizing that character development is foundational to both personal growth and civic responsibility. This approach integrates values and virtues with active citizenship, ensuring learners are prepared for personal success and societal contributions.

To support this aim, the SCCCE framework identifies three components:

1. Essence of CCE – Core values and virtues underpinning character and citizenship.
2. Enactment of CCE – Intentional implementation across learning experiences.
3. Enablers of CCE – Ecosystem supports such as school leadership, a positive culture, teacher development, and community engagement.

By embedding character-oriented citizenship, Singapore's CCE equips learners with the resilience, values, and sense of responsibility needed to flourish individually and collectively in an interconnected world.

## **The Essence of CCE**

The essence of CCE is anchored in three interconnected components: purpose, values and virtues, and social-emotional competencies (SECs). Purpose represents the 'why,' providing the motivation behind actions, while values and virtues define the 'what,' offering guiding principles and ethical benchmarks for decision-making. SECs reflect the 'how,' providing the practical skills to translate purpose and values into meaningful action.

These components are deeply interconnected, forming the foundation for ethical behaviour and purposeful action. Values shape an individual's sense of purpose by helping them to identify what is worth pursuing in life and those with a strong sense of purpose are more likely to align their actions with their core values (Damon et al., 2003). Values also influence emotional intelligence and social behaviour, guiding interpersonal interactions (Zins et al., 2007). SECs act as 'participatory competencies,' enabling individuals to apply their values and purpose effectively (Elias et al., 2014). For example, demonstrating respect requires social awareness to understand social cues and responsible decision-making to act accordingly.

While values are abstract and emotionally laden, SECs make them visible and actionable (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). In this way, SECs bridge values and virtues, with character often being seen as 'values in action'. Together, purpose, values, and virtues provide the ethical foundation for SECs, ensuring these skills contribute to morally positive and meaningful outcomes.

**Purpose.** The concept of purpose is deeply rooted in both philosophical and psychological foundations. It refers to a stable, long-term intention to achieve meaningful goals for oneself and others (Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003). Drawing from Aristotelian notions of *eudaimonia*, purpose aligns with the pursuit of excellence and fulfillment, where the journey itself imbues life with meaning and direction. Psychologically, purpose is typically defined by three core elements: commitment, goal-directedness, and personal meaningfulness (Bronk, 2013). Commitment involves staying true to values, beliefs, and orientations that provide a coherent sense of self. Goal-directedness refers to pursuing a stable, long-term aim that shapes behavior patterns over time (Damon et al., 2003; Damon, 2008; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Personal meaningfulness reflects how central and significant a goal is in an individual's life, influencing nearly all actions, thoughts, and emotions (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Crumbaugh & Maholic, 1967).

Further research reveals a fourth element, described as the desire to contribute to the well-being of others—*impacting the world beyond-the-self*—has been identified as crucial (Bronk, 2013). Although less commonly emphasized, empirical research indicates that this "beyond-the-self" orientation differentiates individuals on key measures of psychological well-being, such as more integrated personality dispositions,

improved psychological adjustment, greater achievement, and enhanced life satisfaction (Bronk & Finch, 2010; Mariano & Vaillant, 2012). Purpose, particularly when it extends beyond the self, is strongly linked to flourishing and psychological well-being, which is especially significant in a communitarian society like Singapore.

Purpose often emerges during adolescence, typically in conjunction with identity development. The growth of purpose facilitates identity formation, and identity formation, in turn, supports the development of purpose (Bronk, 2011). However, qualitative research with youth exemplars suggests that many young people with a strong sense of purpose trace its development back to their childhood experiences, indicating that purpose can be nurtured from an early age. In Singapore, studies show that students often have a self-focused purpose orientation, centered on achieving academic goals, with fewer students aspiring to broader, beyond-the-self life goals (Heng & Pereira, 2023). Furthermore, the development of purpose in Singaporean adolescents is often left to chance, highlighting the need for a more intentional, purpose-driven approach in schools. CCE provides an opportunity to guide children and youth in developing their sense of purpose over their lifetime, by creating a learning environment that fosters intentionality through authenticity, supportive relationships, and a positive school culture—key enablers that are explored further below.

**Values & Virtues.** While values and virtues are often used interchangeably, they have distinct meanings in scholarly literature. Values are principles or standards of behavior that individuals consider important and desirable, often shaped by cultural, societal, and personal influences (Schwartz, 2012). They are subjective and can vary significantly between individuals and contexts. In contrast, virtues represent universally recognized qualities of moral excellence that guide ethical behavior. Virtues are intrinsic, enduring, and provide a stable foundation for moral character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Kristjánsson, 2013a). Unlike values, virtues are dispositional traits, consistently influencing an individual's actions across various contexts (Snow, 2010).

Despite these distinctions, values and virtues are closely interconnected. The Values-in-Action (VIA) framework (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) implies a hierarchical relationship—values are guiding principles that, when enacted, manifest as character strengths. These strengths are observable, measurable, and serve as tools for practicing values. For example, the value of kindness is enacted through strengths like compassion and generosity. Character strengths, according to the VIA framework, are pathways that enable individuals to live out virtues. For instance, the virtue of courage is realized through strengths like bravery and perseverance, while the virtue of justice is expressed through fairness and leadership. The VIA



framework identifies 24 character strengths contributing to six core virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.

Scholars like Kristjánsson and Arthur (2022) and Shields (2011) have classified virtues into four dimensions: intellectual, moral, civic, and performance virtues, each contributing to the cultivation of ‘good character’ in students. Intellectual virtues, such as open-mindedness and curiosity, guide the pursuit of knowledge. Moral virtues, such as integrity and kindness, enable individuals to act ethically, consistently prioritizing moral over non-moral actions. Civic virtues emphasize contributing to the common good, fostering meaningful societal engagement (Peterson & Civil, 2023). Performance virtues, such as resilience and confidence, underpin effective self-management. The concept of a meta-virtue, practical wisdom or ‘phronesis,’ has also been proposed as a guiding force that integrates and directs the enactment of all virtues through reflective and adaptive judgment (Kristjánsson & Arthur, 2022).

Values and virtues are closely linked to the promotion of student well-being and flourishing. For example, Yang’s (2024) review of children’s perceptions of happiness highlights the alignment between moral goodness and flourishing, echoing Aristotelian notions of virtue-driven well-being. The integration of VIA character strengths into positive education programs has also shown enhanced outcomes for student well-being (Bott et al., 2017; Burke & Minton, 2019; Seligman et al., 2009). In response to this, VanderWeele (2017) critiques many measures of flourishing for neglecting the importance of ‘virtues’ in promoting flourishing, developing a Flourish Index that includes ‘character and virtue’ as key constructs.

In Singapore’s education system, the term ‘values’ is frequently used in policies and programmes. However, closer examination reveals that the educational vision aligns more closely with virtues—developing positive dispositional traits and qualities of moral excellence. The recognition of virtues in Singapore’s education system dates back to the 1979 Moral Education Report, which identified gaps in moral education programs and proposed strategies for improvement. In addition, there has been a broader focus on intrinsic qualities and dispositions essential for holistic development, with a notable shift away from an overemphasis on academic grades. In response to the increased moral confusion in today’s AI-driven and socially fragmented world, both values and virtues have been incorporated into the framework to emphasize the importance of nurturing ethical, resilient individuals capable of navigating contemporary challenges while contributing meaningfully to society.

**Social-Emotional Competencies.** Social-emotional competencies (SECs) encompass a set of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enable individuals to understand and manage their emotions, build and sustain

positive relationships, demonstrate empathy, set and achieve goals, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020; Elias, 1997). Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which students acquire and apply these SECs to guide their thoughts, feelings, and actions in constructive ways (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). SEL has emerged as a global educational trend, reflecting a paradigm shift toward holistic development. A variety of SEL frameworks have emerged worldwide, each with different terminologies (e.g., life skills, non-cognitive skills, soft skills), conceptualizations, and applications (Brush et al., 2021; Berg et al., 2017). Research has shown that SECs have a positive influence on key life outcomes, including academic achievement, mental and physical health, life satisfaction, and civic engagement (Chernyshenko, et al., 2018; Kautz et al., 2014; OECD, 2015; Greenberg et al., 2017).

A widely referenced SEL framework in education is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, which identifies five interrelated sets of competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making. These competencies are integral to children's academic success and positive life outcomes (CASEL, 2020). In Singapore, the CCE curriculum incorporated SECs into the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programme in 2005, aligned with these five core competencies. Tan and Chua (2024) extended this framework by adding self-motivation as an additional intrapersonal competency, particularly relevant to the Singapore context. There has been a growing emphasis on fostering intrinsic and autonomous motivation, as well as self-directed learning, among students. This shift is reflected in the incorporation of Self-Determination Theory (which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as critical factors for intrinsic motivation; Deci & Ryan, 1985) and growth mindset principles (Dweck, 2006) into educational policies and practices. A local study on student motivation, *Motivating the Unmotivated*, found that only 15.6% of secondary school students exhibited "autonomously regulated" motivation, considered optimal for being self-directed, enjoying learning, and recognizing its importance without external rewards or pressures (SingTeach, 2019).

In the Singapore context, integrating SECs with ethical foundations such as purpose, values, and virtues, as discussed earlier, is crucial. Many Western SEL programs tend to emphasize psychological constructs over moral paradigms, focusing on competencies without anchoring them within a broader moral framework (Kristjánsson, 2013b; Elias et al., 2014). Furthermore, some frameworks exhibit a neoliberal bias, prioritizing individual success over collective well-being (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009). Given Singapore's communitarian ethos, it is vital that SECs are ethically grounded and contribute to the collective good rather than merely serving individual interests (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

Thus far, the essence of CCE has focused on the core components of character and citizenship essential for individual flourishing. However, flourishing cannot be fully understood or achieved in isolation; it must also be examined from a systemic and community perspective, with attention to the conditions that enable both individual and collective flourishing. For instance, VanderWeele and Hinton (2014) emphasize the importance of a systems-level approach in education for flourishing, arguing that flourishing requires not only individual character development but also supportive systems, policies, programs, and communities. The Human Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000; 2011) underscores the need to create enabling conditions, such as equitable access to education, healthcare, and opportunities for participation, that allow both individuals and communities to thrive. Applying this to the context of CCE, it is essential to explore how CCE is implemented in schools and how key agents within the educational ecosystem set the necessary conditions to support effective CCE and foster flourishing.

### **The Enactment of CCE**

The enactment of CCE in Singapore is shaped by foundational principles in curriculum design, pedagogy, and best practices in character education. Historically, educational systems have balanced both explicit and implicit curricula to foster student development. In character education, the explicit curriculum involves planned and structured instruction aimed at helping students understand and internalise ethical principles and social-emotional competencies. This curriculum provides opportunities for focused discussions and activities that encourage students to practice and reflect on values (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). In contrast, the implicit curriculum refers to informal learning that occurs through school culture, peer interactions, and the modeling of behaviors by teachers and peers (Lickona, 1996).

The literature suggests that the explicit curriculum does not necessarily require a separate, standalone subject exclusively dedicated to character and civic education. What is essential is the intentional and systematic delivery of values education, whether through a dedicated subject or integrated across various disciplines. As Berkowitz & Bier (2005) and Arthur (2003) emphasize, explicit character education can be embedded within academic subjects, ensuring that values are consistently integrated into students' learning experiences. Explicit curricula enhance clarity and consistency by articulating and reinforcing values throughout the school experience (Lickona, 1996). Research demonstrates that such structured approaches to character education improve academic performance, moral reasoning, empathy, and civic engagement (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Durlak et al., 2011). Moreover, embedding values education across subjects promotes both cognitive and emotional development, contributing to a more holistic educational experience.

Character education frameworks, such as the “taught, caught, sought” model, have drawn on the principles of explicit and implicit curricula to guide how character education is structured and experienced by students in a holistic manner. The explicit curriculum corresponds to the “taught” dimension, which involves the deliberate and systematic teaching of values, virtues, and SECs through lessons and structured dialogue, ensuring students grasp foundational moral concepts (Lickona, 1996; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). The implicit curriculum aligns with the “caught” and “sought” dimensions. The "caught" dimension emphasises the implicit influence of the school environment, where values and virtues are absorbed through the culture, norms, and behaviours modeled by educators and peers (Arthur et al., 2017). The "sought" dimension highlights student agency, encouraging personal exploration and internalization of values and virtues, thus fostering self-driven moral growth and lifelong reflection. Character education programs that integrate these dimensions have been shown to foster deeper character development, addressing the cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of moral learning (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004).

Singapore’s approach to CCE draws on these scientific principles by offering a holistic framework that includes a standalone subject dedicated to CCE (explicit teaching), embedding CCE across all academic subjects (integration into subjects), and providing immersive opportunities for internalization, personal exploration, and reflection through real-life contexts involving peers, teachers, and others (immersion). This comprehensive approach ensures that CCE is consistently reinforced both explicitly and implicitly.

**Explicit Teaching.** Singapore has chosen to implement CCE as a distinct, standalone subject, reflecting its commitment to ensuring that CCE receives dedicated focus and resources. By making CCE a core part of the curriculum, Singapore aims to provide students with a structured environment where character and citizenship development are prioritized and systematically integrated into their educational experience. This approach mirrors practices in countries like Ireland, France, Indonesia, and Vietnam, where character and/or citizenship education is delivered through a dedicated curriculum, in contrast to Western countries where standalone subjects of this nature are less common.

The Singapore CCE curriculum revolves around three key themes: Identity, Relationships, and Choices. This approach explicitly links core values to social-emotional competencies, fostering students’ ability to internalize and embody these values in their daily lives. The curriculum’s focused design allows educators to utilize a range of pedagogical and assessment strategies that actively engage students, ensuring the intentional and systematic development of both character and citizenship.

**Integration into Subjects.** In addition to standalone lessons, CCE concepts are seamlessly integrated into various academic subjects, further enriching students' character and citizenship development. Research supports the effectiveness of this integration in cultivating specific character and civic skills, particularly within language and humanities subjects such as English, Language Arts, Social Studies, and History. For example, exploring ethical themes and civic issues in literature could enhance empathy and critical thinking (Applebee, 1996; Noddings, 2005), while embedding civic and democratic values, such as deliberative democracy practices, into Social Studies and History lessons could foster civic literacy and engagement (Hahn, 1998; Parker, 2003). CCE can also be effectively integrated into non-humanities subjects. Socio-scientific issues like climate change, for instance, promote moral reasoning and ethical understanding (Zeidler et al., 2005), while debates surrounding scientific controversies encourage civic understanding and ethical decision-making (Reiss, 2006).

In Singapore, citizenship and civic literacy are embedded in the Social Studies and History curricula, with a focus on governance, national identity, and global interconnectedness. Social Studies cultivates civic literacy by addressing topics like diversity, active citizenship, and Singapore's role in the global community, encouraging students to become informed and responsible citizens. History complements this by examining Singapore's milestones, nation-building challenges, and historical lessons, helping students develop a sense of identity and a critical understanding of their civic responsibilities. Both subjects employ inquiry-based learning, case studies, and debates to connect theoretical knowledge to real-world applications, equipping students with the skills and values necessary for active civic participation. Furthermore, contemporary issues such as war, climate change, and artificial intelligence offer rich interdisciplinary contexts for moral reflection. Discussions on war, for example, underscore the importance of peace, diplomacy, and conflict resolution, while fostering values like justice, empathy, and respect for humanity. Similarly, topics such as climate change and AI extend beyond scientific understanding, prompting students to engage in ethical contemplation and reflect on their principles and actions.

**Immersion.** Immersion in CCE emphasises the transformative power of experiential learning through interactions with peers, teachers, and real-world contexts. By intentionally designing experiences that engage both the heart and mind, immersive learning creates opportunities for students to internalize values and virtues in meaningful ways (Makransky & Petersen, 2021). These experiences range from everyday interactions to structured activities like service learning, where students apply character and citizenship principles in authentic settings. Teachers play a crucial role by modeling values in their behavior, offering students relatable, real-life examples to emulate. Immersion fosters experiential empathy, enabling

students to see the world through diverse perspectives, thereby deepening their understanding of their own values and beliefs.

In Singapore, students are immersed in a variety of student experiences containing intentional, real-world contexts. For instance, the Values in Action (VIA) programme engages students in community service projects, encouraging them to contribute meaningfully to society. These activities are supported by structured reflections that help students deepen their understanding of their roles as active citizens. Additionally, school-wide events like National Education activities foster a sense of national identity and civic responsibility. Celebrations such as Racial Harmony Day and Total Defence Day provide experiential learning opportunities that highlight Singapore's multiculturalism and shared history, reinforcing the values of unity and resilience.

### **The Enablers of CCE**

As previously mentioned, effective CCE requires a systemic, community-oriented approach. Its successful enactment is shaped by key agents within the educational ecosystem, who play a vital role in students' experiences with CCE. The enablers of CCE focus on the critical levers within this ecosystem that drive its success, drawing on ecological systems theory and well-established principles of effective character education. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) emphasizes how individuals are influenced by interconnected social ecosystems, highlighting the need for a holistic framework for development. Similarly, Berkowitz et al. (2017) identify six key principles essential for effective character education. These include prioritizing character education as a central element of a school's mission, fostering positive and collaborative relationships among all school stakeholders, and empowering these stakeholders by creating meaningful opportunities for involvement and input. They emphasise the importance of educators, staff, and leaders consistently modeling the values and virtues they seek to instill in students. Together, these principles emphasize the need for a cohesive, intentional school-wide commitment to embedding character and citizenship development throughout the educational experience. This framework identifies five key enablers that support this purpose.

**School Leadership.** School leadership is crucial in shaping student learning and school effectiveness. Research shows leadership is second only to classroom instruction in school-related factors influencing student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004). In Singapore, where leadership is key to educational transformation, school leaders are vital for the success of complex initiatives like CCE (Ng, 2017). Leaders must navigate the dual demands of the "centralised decentralisation" characteristic of Singapore's education

system, interpreting national CCE policies and curricula within the broader societal context while tailoring them to their school's unique environment (Ng, 2008). This includes aligning national priorities with the school's mission and addressing tensions, such as balancing academic achievement with character building, through clear articulation and collective decision-making (Boon & Wong, 2019).

School leaders also shape the school culture and ethos, another key enabler further elaborated below. Effective CCE requires a whole-school commitment, permeating all aspects of a student's life (Arthur et al., 2021; Berkowitz, 2021). While teachers directly impart CCE principles to students, school leaders create the conditions for success by fostering a positive school climate. This includes building trusting relationships, cultivating a supportive environment, and promoting a shared sense of identity and belonging within the school community (Teng & Zhang, 2019). As culture builders, leaders empower and amplify the collective efforts of all stakeholders, ensuring the coherence and sustainability of CCE implementation (Dabdoub et al., 2024).

Given CCE's broad scope, school leaders must embrace distributed leadership, engaging the school community in shared decision-making. By empowering others with autonomy, voice and the necessary skills, leaders foster ownership and commitment, allowing them to focus on integrating efforts for greater impact (Leithwood et al., 2020; Elbot & Fulton, 2007). This approach enhances implementation and ensures leadership is shared and adaptive to the complex needs of CCE (Tan, 2024).

At the core of effective leadership is the leader's character and purpose. The Singapore Ministry of Education's Leader Growth Model emphasizes ethical leadership grounded in values and vision. Lickona (as cited in Berkowitz, 2021) states, "the single most powerful tool you have to influence a child's character... is your character." School leaders must not only believe in the intrinsic value of CCE but also exemplify the values they wish to instill. Through continuous self-reflection and growth, leaders inspire their schools to embrace CCE as a cornerstone of education.

**School Culture & Ethos.** School culture, often described as "the way we do things around here" (Bennett, 2017), includes the relationships, behaviours, and values that shape daily interactions and learning. A positive school ethos, grounded in supportive relationships and safety, creates an environment that promotes social-emotional learning and ethical behaviour (Parekh, 2022). As key agents of socialisation, schools shape values and model ethical conduct, reinforcing these principles through policies, practices, and everyday interactions (Gökçe, 2021). School culture and ethos significantly impact both academic and social-emotional outcomes for students (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Parekh, 2022).

CCE is not just about regulating behaviour; it's about fostering internal changes in how individuals understand themselves and their values (Berkowitz, 2021). This internalisation occurs through socialisation within a community, highlighting the importance of shaping school culture and ethos alongside CCE policies. A school's culture and ethos reflect its collective beliefs, values and norms, telling the story of how the community lives and learns together (Glover & Coleman, 2005). Positive school culture requires intentional effort, defined, established, and sustained by everyone in the school, supported by leadership that reinforces shared values. When embraced by all, it fosters a strong sense of identity and purpose (Peterson & Deal, 2009).

For schools prioritising CCE, a culture of relationships, competence, and autonomy is key to helping individuals recognise, desire, and act on ethical values. Positive relationships, based on care and trust, are fundamental to well-being and influence one's development (Berkowitz, 2021). Schools must cultivate meaningful relationships not only between students and teachers but also across the adult community. This broadens students' concern for others, helping them internalise shared values and a commitment to the common good (Strike, 2008).

To sustain this commitment, schools must nurture a culture of learning that equips students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need while emphasising collaboration. In such an environment, all members of the community—students and adults—are dedicated to lifelong growth, contributing to one another's growth, ensuring that the entire community flourishes together (Strike, 2008).

For CCE to succeed, it must empower individuals, particularly students, by valuing their voices and granting them autonomy to make decisions, shape the culture, and exercise leadership (Berkowitz, 2021; Noddings, 2008). This autonomy is vital not only for students but also for adults in the school. Teachers, school leaders, and staff shape students' experiences both directly and indirectly. Therefore, schools must foster caring and trusting relationships among adults, support their professional growth, and encourage shared leadership at all levels, ensuring everyone contributes to CCE's success.

**Teacher Professional Learning.** In Singapore, the role of a "CCE teacher" is central to educators' expectations. Every teacher is not only a subject expert but also a mentor and role model, shaping students' character and citizenship through CCE principles embedded in daily interactions and learning. Teachers are the driving force behind educational transformation, and their effectiveness is key to CCE's success. Research consistently shows that teacher quality profoundly impacts student outcomes. The variation in



teacher effectiveness leads to significant differences in student performance, including their social-emotional development and ethical behavior (Aaronson et al., 2007; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006; Nye et al., 2004; Rockoff, 2004). For effective CCE implementation, teachers' competencies in social-emotional learning (SEL) and values education are critical, as these shape how they model and foster positive behaviours. A systematic review of teachers' roles in values education underscores that teacher competencies are essential for CCE's success (Mohamad et al., 2020).

Teacher professional learning is a crucial enabler of CCE. It ensures that teachers have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to integrate character and citizenship into teaching. Matischek-Jauk & Reicher (2021) highlight the importance of embedding SEL approaches in teacher education programs to prepare educators for supporting students' social-emotional and ethical development. Additionally, teachers' own social-emotional learning is vital for their success and well-being. Providing targeted professional development for teachers to develop their own SEL competencies helps them model these behaviours effectively and sustain resilience in the classroom (Soutter, 2023).

**Teacher Empowerment.** Teacher empowerment extends beyond providing pedagogical skills, focusing on giving teachers the agency to take charge of their professional growth and teaching practices (Short, 1994). Scholars have defined teacher empowerment in various ways, including the right to participate in school decision-making, autonomy to make decisions in teaching, and the ability to develop professionally (Bolin, 1989; Lightfoot, 1986; Short, 1994). It is operationalised across dimensions such as decision-making involvement, autonomy, professional development, and self-efficacy (Short, 1994). Teacher empowerment is linked to improved student outcomes, a positive school environment, and increased job satisfaction (OECD, 2021).

Research highlights the significant impact of teacher empowerment on school effectiveness, teaching quality, and student achievement (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Lee & Nie, 2014). Empowered teachers are more likely to engage creatively with their subjects, experiment with innovative teaching methods, and contribute to students' holistic development (Priestley et al., 2015). They also experience greater job satisfaction, productivity, and stronger collegial relationships, all of which contribute to improved learning outcomes (Marks & Louis, 1997; Rice & Schneider, 1994). By fostering teacher agency—the ability to act purposefully in directing professional growth—schools encourage teachers to draw on their unique insights to make teaching more relevant and authentic to students' needs.

For teachers to effectively enact CCE, support structures are essential. Mentorship programs, for example, provide novice teachers with guidance from experienced colleagues, building their confidence and commitment to CCE (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Wellness initiatives that support teachers' emotional well-being also play a vital role, ensuring that teachers remain resilient and engaged with the challenges of teaching character and citizenship (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Collaborative platforms, such as professional learning communities (PLCs), enable teachers to share best practices, discuss challenges, and learn from one another, fostering a culture of innovation within the CCE framework (Vescio et al., 2008).

Empowering teachers to implement CCE is a multifaceted process that requires creating an environment where teachers are reflective practitioners and active participants in shaping the curriculum. By acknowledging and amplifying their agency and autonomy, and providing robust support, schools inspire teachers to drive the evolution of CCE, becoming architects of change in their classrooms and communities. This empowerment ensures that teachers can continuously reflect on and improve their practice, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness of CCE in schools.

**Community Involvement.** Community involvement is crucial for the successful implementation of CCE. The adage "it takes a village to raise a child" highlights the importance of engaging the broader community in shaping students' character and citizenship. A collective vision for CCE is achieved when schools actively collaborate with families, policymakers, and other stakeholders, ensuring that students receive consistent messages about ethical behavior, social responsibility, and citizenship both in and outside the classroom. Community involvement provides students with diverse perspectives, support, and role models, all of which contribute to their holistic development.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In conclusion, the holistic framework for CCE presented in this paper underscores the critical role that education plays in addressing the complex challenges of today's globalized world. By weaving together purpose, values, virtues, and social-emotional competencies, this framework aspires to develop individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also ethically grounded, socially responsible, and equipped to make a meaningful contribution to society. The intentional implementation of CCE—through explicit instruction, integration into various subjects, and immersive learning experiences—ensures that students not only understand but internalize the principles of character and citizenship.

Moreover, the vital support structures of school leadership, teacher professional learning, and community involvement further amplify the success of CCE. School leaders create the environment for CCE to flourish, teachers embody its principles in their interactions with students, and the broader community reinforces these lessons through consistent collaboration and engagement. This interconnected ecosystem enhances the impact of CCE, ensuring that students experience character and citizenship development as a core aspect of their educational journey.

As Singapore navigates its unique position between Eastern and Western influences, the emphasis on a character-oriented approach to citizenship remains crucial. By fostering both individual flourishing and national cohesion, this approach strengthens the collective resilience of the country. The framework, therefore, offers a robust and adaptable model for preparing students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world—empowering them to become ethical leaders, compassionate citizens, and active participants in shaping a flourishing and sustainable future. Through the sustained and intentional integration of CCE, we are not only shaping individuals but also contributing to the long-term well-being of society.

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