

## Rebirth of Civics and Citizenship Education in Malaysia

**Vishalache Balakrishnan**  
University of Malaya

### Abstrak

*Pendidikan Sivik dan Kewarganegaraan (PSK) sudah wujud dalam sistem pendidikan Malaysia sejak 1972. Selepas kemerdekaan sivik dan kewarganegaraan memainkan peranan yang penting dalam proses perpaduan dan pembangunan negara. Pada masa itu, Pendidikan Sivik bertumpu pada struktur dan jenis kerajaan. Tetapi kini, mata pelajaran ini menumpu pada keadaan semasa masyarakat serta keperluan masa depannya. Selepas beberapa dekad, mata pelajaran PSK diajar merentasi kurikulum dalam mata pelajaran seperti Kajian Tempatan, Pendidikan Moral dan Sejarah. Kini mata pelajaran Pendidikan Sivik dan Kewarganegaraan diberi keutamaan untuk membantu mengekalkan integriti kaum dan identiti negara. Fokus utama mata pelajaran ini ialah hubungan individu dengan masyarakat di sekelilingnya.*

### Introduction

Citizenship education is not just a matter of learning the basic facts about the institutions and procedures of political life (Kymlicka, 1999). It also involves acquiring a wide range of dispositions, virtues and loyalties closely linked to the practice of democratic citizenship. The increasingly complex nature of our society, the greater cultural diversity and the apparent loss of value consensus are some reasons for introducing students to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and values. Citizenship education is focused on action and may be included as the external factor that activates values and dispositions.

Recent research on what teachers perceive to be "good citizenship" found that an overwhelming number regarded a "good citizen" as one who can tolerate others, has social concern for others and has a marked disposition towards moral behavior and community involvement (Davies, 2000).

Over the years, Civics Education in Malaysia was given less importance due to constraints and pressure from other subjects. In recent years, much has been said about the need to revive the subject. After much consideration, the subject

Civics and Citizenship Education will be introduced in stages in all primary and secondary schools in Malaysia from 2005 onwards.

Civics refers to the relationship of an individual with the society around him or her. Citizenship refers to the relationship of that individual with his or her country. Thus the educator who is the Civics teacher aims at generating responsible citizens through Civics and Citizenship Education.

### **Status of Civics Education Before the Rebirth**

In Malaysia, Civics Education used to focus on the structure and type of government (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2004). Patriotism was the focus without much emphasis on self and family patriotism. Students used to memorize symbolic events, anthems and facts of national importance without having a bridge with their inner self, family and society. Civics Education became just another subject which did not provide the knowledge, skills and values as tools for students to develop patriotism.

Based on current challenges faced by the younger generation, the curriculum for Civics and Citizenship Education needs to emphasize issues of solidarity, patriotism and understanding of the cultural diversity in Malaysia. Students need to understand the existence of cultural diversity, learn to live and respect these diversities and acquire the knowledge, skills and values to respect the differences. Patriotism needs to be inculcated from a very tender age. Without bridging what is happening in the classroom with real-life situations outside, patriotism will not be accepted as gaining knowledge to be a good citizen. The paradigm shift in Civics and Citizenship Education should provide students with the tools to think, feel and act as responsible citizens and great leaders of tomorrow.

### **Status of Current Civics and Citizenship Education**

When Civics and Citizenship Education is introduced in early 2005 to all students of Standard Four and Form One in Malaysian government schools, teachers would still expect the structure to be similar to the one they used to study which only focused on the structure and type of government. Only as teachers directly involve themselves with execution of the subject will they realize the difference. The present Civics and Citizenship Education structure focuses on three main components of knowledge, skills and values (Figure 1).

With the rebirth of Civics and Citizenship Education in Malaysia, focus of the subject is on three main components to enable students not only to gain

knowledge of civics and citizenship but also to have the skills and act the same way. The knowledge component focuses on education about civics and citizenship. This knowledge is inclusive of knowledge about one's own strengths and weaknesses, knowledge of family and society and knowledge of the political system operating in Malaysia.

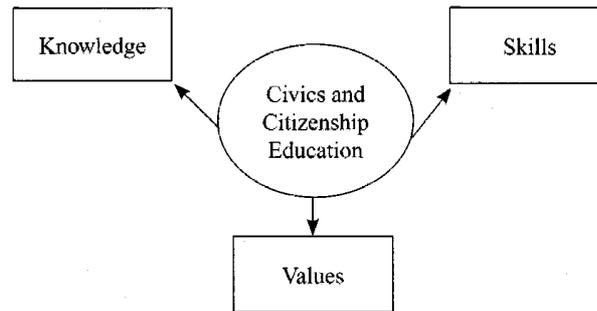


Figure 1. Three aspects of Civics and Citizenship Education

The skills and values focus on education for citizenship and education through citizenship. Education for citizenship is the development of skills and values as a means to encourage active citizens. In education through citizenship the emphasis is on learning by doing through experiences in and out of school. The three components go hand in hand to enable effectiveness of the subject. Civics and Citizenship Education is not to be confined to civics lessons in the classroom alone. It should take the form of an integral part of all instructions and activities the students engage in during their school hours as well as during co-curricular activities and outside the school hours where students will have the opportunity to engage in community services.

A curriculum focusing on the social responsibilities of education must include situations relevant to the problems of living together (Dewey, 1926). When students learn this subject, they will realize they are not alone and that whatever they do affects those around them. These include their families, their friends and society. All have a shared responsibility. Through the teaching of civics and citizenship, active learning takes place where students are able to apply what they acquire in the classroom through implementation of citizenship projects. The use of real-life dilemmas and real-life projects provide students with experience and makes learning more meaningful (Vishalache, 2002). Students are able to identify themselves as part of the community and community service is seen as the link between citizenship education in class and the real world outside.

Citizenship comprises five related features (Enslin, 2000). First is the status of the individual of membership of a territorially defined unit in which reciprocal rights and responsibilities are exercised on equal terms with other citizens. Second, citizenship provides identity for an individual, an awareness of self as a member of a collective group, be it the family, the school or the community. Third, a set of values usually linked to commitment to the common good of the community. Fourth, a degree of participation in the life of the democracy of the country and finally, knowledge and understanding of political and legal principles. Enslin believes that all five features of citizenship have important implications for education, especially in the practice of democracy.

### **Why the Need for Rebirth?**

Why is there the sudden need for the rebirth of Civics and Citizenship Education in Malaysia? What is civic culture, and what does it have to do with thinking in our nation? Civics represents the patterning of how we share a common space, common resources, and common opportunities and manage interdependence in that "company of strangers" (Palmer, 1981) which constitutes the public.

In a pluralistic country such as Malaysia, most of us have a common interest in maintaining a public framework within which we can live our lives as individuals and families and as society as a whole. When we are thinking about civic culture, we are usually thinking about our own society. Civics and citizenship is therefore an emerging concept which needs certain clarification.

Civics and citizenship is concerned with three levels: the local community, national citizenship and international citizenship. Second, citizenship education is a combination of approaches which focus on education about citizenship, education for citizenship and education through citizenship. Finally good citizenship is an individual's sense of social and moral responsibility (Arthur & Wright 2001). Thus, our students must be encouraged to develop their understanding of the moral values which should mould and guide their actions within a pluralist and democratic society. Civics and citizenship should provide the opportunity for students to express the behavior appropriate to the context students experience.

Students should be educated to respect authority within the school and outside. They would also learn through this aspect of citizenship a sense of what is wrong and right and have an informed understanding of the choices available to them. The students should also understand the consequences of such choices. Thus, students who are aware of the choices available are able to make informed decisions and accept responsibility for the choices they make.

The very concept of civics and citizenship comes out of the experience of conflict and diversity. Civic and citizenship both derive from the Latin *civitas*, or city. The inhabitants of the cities were historically strangers to one another, strangers resettled at the convenience of kings as the temple-palace cultures or early civilizations developed. To the city came traders and crafts people from faraway places, as well as slaves. This company of strangers had to learn to communicate across the barriers of language and custom. They had to develop a set of understandings on how to accomplish the business of life, within the constraints imposed by the king, priest, and army (Boulding, 1990).

If we make a comparison with our own country, there are plenty of similarities. Our country is made up of people of different origins who decided to stay in one place and lead life. It appears that our forefathers were dedicated to the creation of a government that could be "administered well" (Ravitch & Thernstrom, 1992). They had different cultures, religions, races and creeds. They spoke different languages and led different ways of life. They had to develop a set of common understandings, use a common language and live within the constraints imposed by British rule. Despite all the differences, our forefathers lived a peaceful life because what mattered most was the development of the nation. Even though they had their own cultural agenda, they could cooperate to perform a cultural task or organize a common project which took care of national interest.

So why the need to revive a subject when civic mindedness has long been embedded in the hearts and souls of Malaysians? The difference is quite clear in the sense that those days our forefathers initiated the notion of understanding and getting to know and respect one another's culture, norms and way of life. But now, certain norms have been integrated in all cultures and yet there are some norms which need to be clarified, understood and respected. Students should be provided with the opportunity to practise their own culture and at the same time be able to have adequate knowledge and information about other cultures.

What communities of ethnic minorities everywhere, in whichever part of our country, all have in common, whatever their phase of historical development, is that they have been included to varying degrees in participating in the national development processes. We have major ethnic groups such as Malay, Chinese, Indian, Iban, Kadazandusun and many more. Nevertheless, each ethnic group is given the privilege and freedom to practise their own native culture. In fact during festive days, cultural shows are performed and shared with the others.

In addition to ethnic diversity, we also have religious diversity in our country. The spiritual and moral development of children has received unparalleled attention among teachers, lecturers, curriculum designers and theorists in the 1990s throughout the English-speaking world (Thatcher, 1999). The spiritual area cannot be ignored in any investigation of civics and citizenship. Through religion, certain norms and traditions are formed. For example religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Sikhism are practised in our country. Each of these religious traditions provides role models for men and women. The religious traditions can be learnt, understood and respected by students of various religions through Civics and Citizenship Education.

### **Issues Arising from the Rebirth**

Malaysia being a pluralistic country has a vast diversity of traditions, norms and cultures. From the legal perspective, Islam is the official religion but citizens who embrace other religions have the freedom to practise their religion freely. The culture of the Malays and other ethnic groups make up the national culture. Students who undergo the Civics and Citizenship Education should be given the exposure to explore and understand the different cultures of the pluralistic society in our country. Citizenship, both the subject and the practice, should be a bridge between the vocational aims of education and education for its own sake (Crick, 2000). Thus not all of life is made up of one aspect alone. Life has to be productive, there should be leisure and culture, both of which active citizens can defend and enhance.

Policy makers and educators should be equipped with proper citizenship tools to enable them to draw up and implement feasible civics and citizenship programs. They should have the knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens. They need to encourage the skills of enquiry and communication together with the skills of participation and responsible action. Teaching should ensure that knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens are acquired and applied when developing skills of enquiry and communication, participation and responsible action. Teaching is not a neutral activity and teachers help to mould some of the values and virtues their students learn in school. Thus the knowledge of citizenship is effectively acquired through the skills of citizenship.

The curriculum represents all the planned experiences which a school offers its students, but ultimately it is concerned with helping to develop human beings as members of a society (Arthur & Wright, 2001). In the actual sense, the curriculum is about "who we ought to become" and this cannot be done in

isolation. In fact, in most of the subjects concerned, national curriculum is based on relationships which provide opportunities for cooperation, participation and shared responsibility within a community, which on its own is educative. It is the curriculum which communicates, through explicit and implicit messages, the common notion of civics and citizenship, which we hope to achieve through the rebirth of Civics and Citizenship Education.

"Community involvement" is seen as positive involvement in and service to the life and concerns of both the school community and the communities beyond it (Arthur & Wright, 2001). Positive involvement is to focus on non-partisan groups, such as voluntary bodies, working with public authorities, publicizing, fund raising or in negotiating with others to achieve a desired and desirable end. This end should benefit and improve the community in some way.

The community as a whole should perceive the subject as one which is going much further than the Civics Education they once knew. Their mental frame should accept that the rebirth of Civics and Citizenship Education includes development of children's social responsibility as individuals and towards their family, community involvement, development of effective relationships, knowledge and understanding of society, participation in the affairs of society, respect for others and contribution to the building of the common good, including building citizenship values such as independence and self-esteem.

Another important aspect in this rebirth would be political literacy. This refers to an understanding of the institutions of representative government and the different methods through which opinion can most effectively and healthily be expressed (Arthur & Wright, 2001). However, in the Malaysian context, political literacy is not restricted just to an understanding of political knowledge but also extended to include knowledge of and preparation for public life in a wider sense. Students should be united and loyal through national symbols such as the National Flag, National Anthem and National Language. They should respect one another's culture and religion. They should be aware of the prominent landmarks in our country. They should develop good qualities and a sense of responsibility. All these learnt through Civics and Citizenship Education will equip the students with tools to up live as responsible citizens of their beloved country.

### **Conclusion**

Civics and Citizenship Education is a core subject in the Malaysian education system. However, to make the subject a continuous success, all parties such as policy makers, parents, teachers and students need to play their roles. Policy

makers need to be tactful to the diversified cultures and norms in the country when constructing and reviewing policies for this subject. Teachers have to be prepared to accept new paradigms, educate using the latest technology and understand the philosophy behind the rebirth of the subject. As for parents, they need to collaborate with teachers in schools and support the activities, especially the social service component which requires 10 hours outside the normal classroom teaching per annum. Students have to be proactive, creative and critical when studying this subject. With such a collaborative strategy, Civics and Citizenship Education should produce young people who not only know their responsibility to the country but are also able to withstand challenges and rapid changes.

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