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Jubilee Centre for Character Education, Birmingham, UK

Inclusive Character Education

The role of worldview (study) in character
education programs in a pluralistic society

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Background

- Based on a pilot study conducted in a public primary/elementary school in Singapore
- Sought to **understand teachers' conceptions of and beliefs about the character education curriculum**

Background

- Personal experiences – Numerous encounters with poorly behaved students in public places
- Increasing number of media reports of juvenile crime

was printed from channelnewsasia.com

6 youths arrested for handphone scams

10 April 2012 4:25 PM

Title : Boy in China sells kidney to buy iPhone

NGAI
scams i

Since February 2012, police have r
strangers claiming that their phone

The culprits usually targeted own
own mobile phones to the victir

Using the victims' mobile pho
contact their friends through

The mobile phones would
something was amiss why

police conducted exten

... of victims' mobile phones to purchase game credits
... from victims who had
... had run out of

Posted on 03 May 2012

Hong Kah Sec students brazenly smoke in uniform



Why the spate of recent teen suicides in S'pore?

In just four weeks, there have been at least three reported cases of teen suicides in Singapore.
Lim Yu Han and Crystal Aki Mizoguchi, both 18, and Darryle Tan Guo Wei, 16, all fell to their deaths.
- Bright Hua Cheng Institution student who was pulled out
- waterloo relationship problems and difficulties
- was depressed after bad 'X'-Level
- "The student's chances of getting



girl killed in amk: accused 'can't remember pulling out the knife'

ST PHOTO

'CAN'T REMEMBER PULLING

23-Year-Old Woman Battling Suicidal Thoughts After Job Termination

The STOMPer wrote:

... been suspended from
... there are no major
... for been suicide compared to previous
... nowadays are more internet-savvy
... have become
... their



... happy times. (facebook photo)

Youth Crime

This story was printed from channelnewsasia.com



Title : 8 teenage boys arrested for alleged robberies

By :

Date : 04 April 2012 1025 hrs (SST)

URL : <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1193066/1/.html>

SINGAPORE: Eight teenage boys have been arrested for allegedly committing a spate of robberies at Hougang and Pasir Ris.

The boys, aged 13 to 15, were rounded up in a 10-hour operation on Tuesday.

The police said they had received several reports of youth robbery in the two housing estates from March 10 to April 2.

Victims reported that the suspects would assault them before robbing them of their mobile phones, cash and other valuables.

Values, character education to take centre stage: Heng Swee Keat

Published on
Sep 22, 2011



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By Sandra Davie

In the past decade, Singapore's education system has opened up more pathways and become more flexible to enable every student to go as far as he can.

Now, going forward, values and character education will take centre stage, said Minister for Education Heng Swee Keat in his first major policy address to school heads at his ministry's annual workplan seminar.



Now, going forward, values and character education will take centre stage, said Minister for Education Heng Swee Keat in his first major policy address to school heads at his ministry's annual workplan seminar. — PHOTO: BH

CE in Singapore

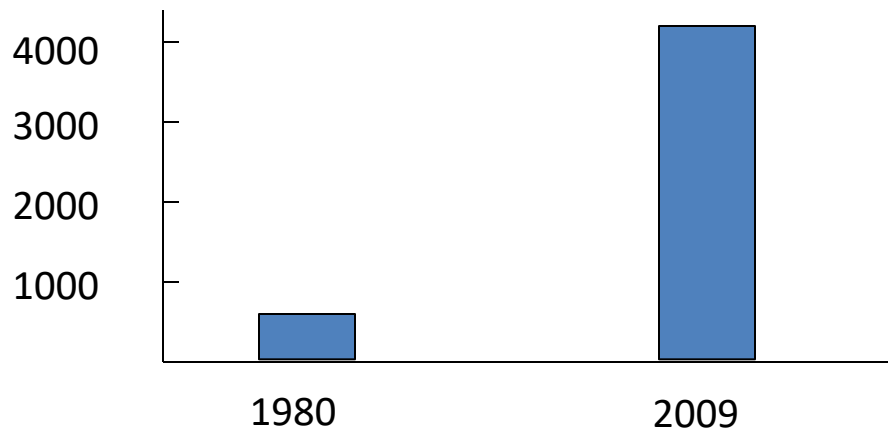
- Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) Framework
 - evident that the Singapore government perceives an urgent need to foreground CE in public education (Heng, 2011; 2012; Goh, 2011)
 - heightened concern about youth crime; seen as a growing problem since 1994 (Choi & Lo, 2002; Singapore Police Force, 2010)
 - may be attributed to tensions in the interactions between new immigrants and born citizens resentful of the influx of foreigners (Goh, 2011)

Problem Statement

- Character and citizenship education has been a major thrust of the Singapore education system even before 1965. E.g. Ethics, Education for Living, Good Citizen, Being and Becoming, and Civics and Moral Education (Sim & Print, 2005)
- Programs sought to equip students with **knowledge, skills and attitudes** that mirror **common values** and **principles** considered important for the **wellbeing of the nation**, but were imparted **within the theme of relationships** that circumscribe the individual: self, family, school, society, and nation (Tan & Chew, 2004)

Problem Statement (Cont'd)

- But statistics on youth crime alarming —from 691 arrested youths in 1980 to 4271 in 2009 (Choi & Lo, 2002; Singapore Police Force, 2010)
- Youth offenders: between the school-going ages of 6 and 19



Effectiveness of prior attempts at CE in schools?

Literature

- Scholars highlight growing concern about individualism, deviancy (litany of alarm, moral decay)
- Role of schools/teachers in developing students' character seen as increasingly more important

Literature

- CE more prominent in an increasingly globalised world (Arthur, 2005) as **boundaries of space and culture rapidly being blurred**
- Emphasis on economic progress has given rise to **individualistic, competitive and consumerist behaviour**; side-lined basic values such as integrity, empathy and care, traditionally deemed important (Arthur, 2010)

Literature

- Given the social impact of an individual's character and behaviour, school CE curriculum mostly intertwined with civics and citizenship education (Cogan, Morris, & Print, 2002)
- Inculcate in students communitarian values for the common good of society (Tan & Chew, 2007; Gopinathan, 1980)

Literature

- Three main overarching approaches to character development:
 - virtues-centred (e.g. Aristotle, Arthur)
 - cognitive/developmental (Kohlberg)
 - whole-school/complexity (Berkowitz & Bier)

Literature

- Vary in **purpose** and in **scope**, and result in different interpretations and practices (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2006)
- Role of teachers as **curriculum gatekeepers** pivotal in effectiveness of curricular programs
 - **perceptions shape decisions and actions** in the classroom

Although research on teachers' beliefs well-established, mostly focused on academic subjects

Literature - Past Research

- Teachers' views about religious education
- Identification of **common** values important for the formation of good character
- Critiques of the moral education or citizenship curriculum
- Impact of the curriculum on students' moral reasoning (e.g. Koh, 2012)

Literature - Past Research

- Growing body of literature/research on worldview (e.g. Johnson, 2011; Gauch, 2009) and their impact on teaching and learning (e.g. Miller, 1993; Valk, 2009)
- **Little evidence of research linking worldview and CE**

Tensions: Individual vs Society

- Dichotomy of the individual and society is at the heart of the matter
- While there is an attempt to inculcate common shared values, this is done in the backdrop of individualism, materialism, consumerism...

Tensions: Individual vs Society

This raises the central question of:

Where does **Moral Authority** reside?
(Who has moral authority?)

Tensions: Individual vs Society

- Does having a common set of values in a community compromise the freedom of the individual to decide what is right or wrong?
- Does the right of the individual to determine which values are personally important to him or her conflict with the sense of community, and compromise harmony?

Tensions: Individual vs Society

- Does a complexity approach to character education alleviate the quandary of addressing the rights (and responsibilities) of both the individual and the community?

Individual or Community?

- **Binary of individual and community** complex and is at the heart of any education discourse
- The individual and the community are **inescapable features of human existence**
- Necessitates an understanding of the philosophies of life or worldview in which the various approaches to CE are grounded

Worldview

- A lens “through which **the individual views reality**” (Koltko-Rivera, Ganey, Dalton, & Hancock, 2004, p. 1)
- Comprise of **values and beliefs regarding what exists** and address the **fundamental questions of human existence** (such as the meaning and purpose of life) by which individuals organize and make sense of life (MacDonald, 2004)
- Paves one’s perceptions of the world and one’s actions

Categories of Worldview

- Theism (spiritual worldview) and naturalism (scientific worldview) (Nicholi, 2004; Johnson 2011)
- **Theism**
 - affirms creationism and the supernatural
 - philosophy: **reality consists of matter and spirit** (consciousness)
 - awareness of transcendental methodologies to acquire knowledge; acknowledgement of a creator
- **Naturalism**
 - ascribes human existence to chance
 - philosophy: **reality is composed solely of matter;** all phenomena explained by natural or physical causes
 - relies on empirical science as the sole source of knowledge

Theistic Worldview

- Most theistic worldviews are religious; based on monotheistic traditions (e.g. Abrahamic faiths such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as Vedic-Vaishnavite traditions)

Principal characteristics:

- belief in a transcendent God (Jehovah, Christ, Allah, Krishna)
- the relationship of man with God
- the purpose and meaning of life
- the means by which to achieve that goal

(Ochs, 2009; Singh, 2005)

- Acknowledgement of a **grand narrative** or **'Big Vision'**
Ultimate cause underlying phenomena that takes place

Other theistic worldview

Several forms:

e.g. Intelligent design and fine-tuning (Behe, 1996), Eastern pantheism and New Age worldview (Aupers & Houtman, 2006; Sire, 2009)

- Not founded on any traditional religious texts
- Belief in a **supernatural power** in universal state of affairs
- Grounded in reason and eclectic philosophical thought
- Relate everything in existence as part of divinity but reject the acceptance of absolute morality ordained by a personal God

Naturalism

Myriad of non-theistic worldview

e.g. atomism, Marxism, Darwinism, humanism, positivism, and materialism
(come under the banner of naturalism)

- Matter ultimately reducible to tiny, finite, indivisible units -
mechanistic model of life
- Life understood by observation and experimentation based on physical laws, **no moral significance**
- No ideological sanction for human behaviour or for making moral decisions; **good or bad determined by the pleasure derived**
(Sommer, 2006)

Humanism

- Outgrowth of the naturalistic worldview is humanism
- Emphasises individual autonomy and human reasoning, yet **embraces social responsibility**
- **Individual autonomy and personal satisfaction** is paramount, with self-expression and self-fulfilment being the primary goals of life (Sommer, 2006)
- **Values are relative** as they are derived from human experience and vary with the situation

Postmodernism

- Primacy of personal experience + rejection of tradition = **multiplicity of worldview** that straddle both theistic and naturalist paradigms
 - dichotomies of good and bad, right and wrong are relative
 - denies a universal objective truth; **constant evolution of morality** according to the changes and dynamics of the community
 - underpinned by the notions of **pragmatism** and **survival**; encourages discovery of **personal subjective meaning** of essential questions of life

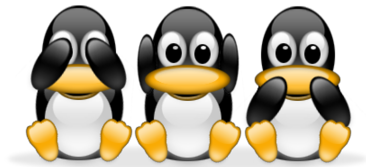


WORLDVIEW

Reality = Matter + Spirit
Life > Atoms + Molecules

Theism vs Naturalism

Reality = Matter
Life = Atoms + Molecules



Big Vision



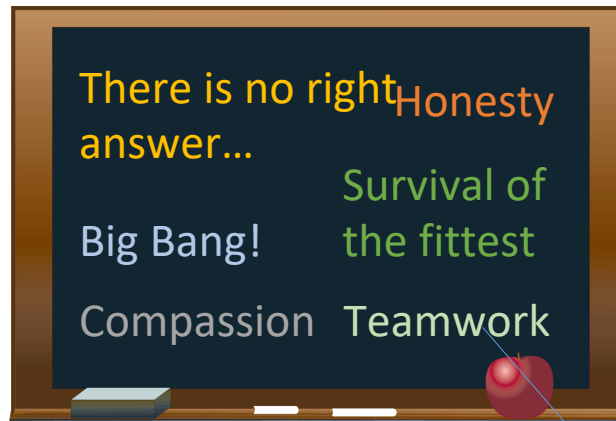
Authority vs Autonomy

What's right for you may not be right for me...

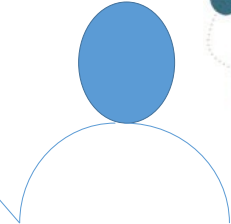
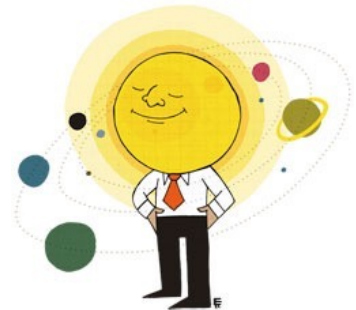
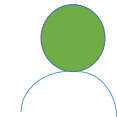
What if I don't care?

Why should I listen to you?

Consciousness
Meaning and Purpose



Character Education



Worldview & Education

- Important for students to understand theistic and naturalistic worldview in order to be grounded in their moral decision making (*Perhaps - the basis for Phronesis; intellectual character development*)
- More equipped to **question, reflect** upon and **develop deeper understanding** of their own and alternative worldview, particularly of the moral convictions grounded in each particular worldview
- **Necessitates an understanding of teachers' worldview** reflected in their curriculum orientation (Miller, 1993)

Curriculum Orientation Positions

- **Orientation**
 - Transmission
 - Transaction
 - Transformation
- **Worldview**
 - Atomism
 - Scientific Method
 - Perennial Philosophy
- **Teaching Methodology**
 - Didactic, behaviourist principles; syllabus
 - Dialogic, constructivist, analysis of learners' needs, learning styles
 - Intuitive and reflexive, interconnectedness, care and compassion, overall development

Objective of the Study

- **To understand the connection between teachers' worldview and their views on CE (especially in a pluralistic society such as Singapore), as the worldview teachers have affect their attitude towards CE and role as character educators and thus have a bearing on student character formation, and that on the effectiveness of a common national CE framework (*subtle impact on their roles as character educators and on classroom practice*)**

The Study Sought to:

- Understand how teachers in a pluralistic setting view CE
- Explore the connection between teachers' views on CE with their worldview
- **NOT** examine the character of individual teachers nor evaluate the CE program in the school

Assumptions

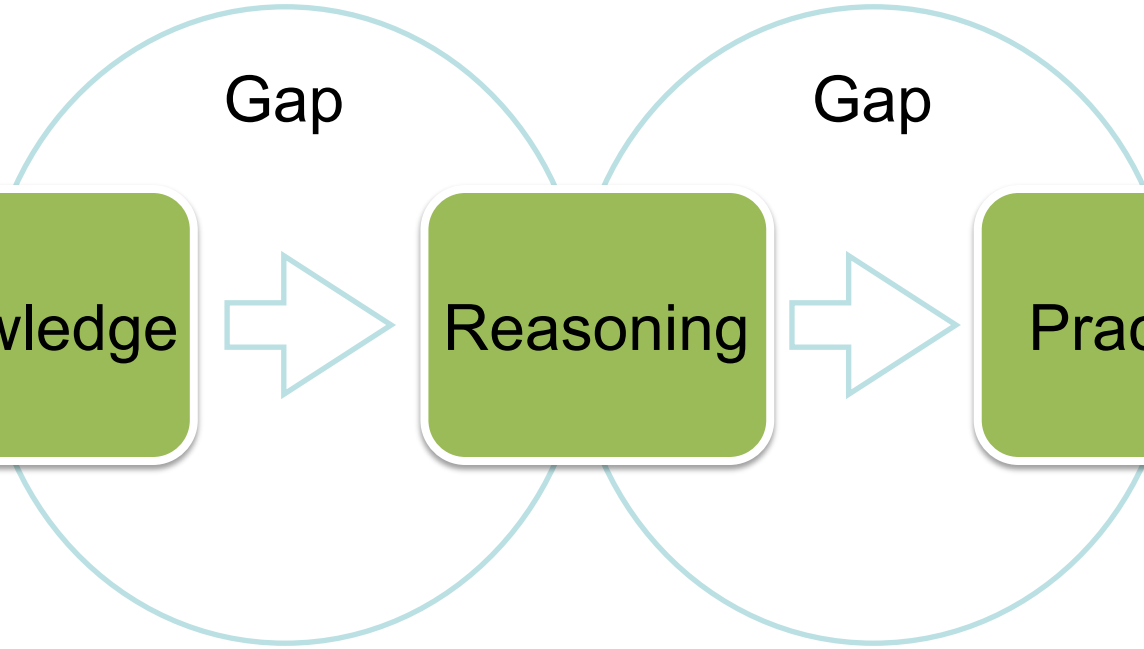
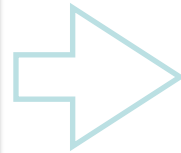
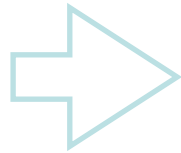
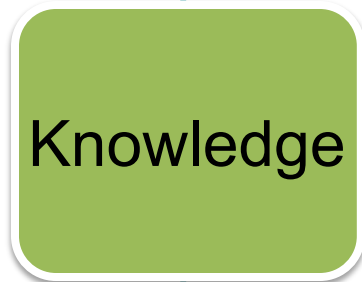
- Worldview plays a foundational, albeit invisible, role in teachers' views on CE and their identity as character educators
- Teachers' attitudes towards CE impact student character formation
- An understanding of the role of worldview in character formation can lead to a panacea to the moral malaise in society

Worldview



Gap

Gap



Understanding Belief Systems

- Level 1 - Knowledge Construct
 - assimilation and accommodation of information
- Level 2 - Social and Cultural Constructs
 - personal and cultural paradigms; religious / philosophical views
- Level 3 - Worldview / Metaphysical Perspective
 - nature of reality; fundamental assumptions of phenomenal and transcendental reality; includes most fundamental religious or spiritual beliefs

Understanding Belief Systems

- Level 1 - Knowledge Construct
 - knowing about good character; knowledge base
- Level 2 - Social and Cultural Constructs
 - identity as part of group; personal goals of life; personal ambition; political, cultural views; understanding of duty, roles, responsibility
- Level 3 - Worldview / Metaphysical Perspective
 - understanding life and matter; existentialism; origin of the universe; origin of life

Research Questions

- What are Singapore teachers' views on CE?
- What do these views suggest about their underlying worldview?

Implications

Viability and effectiveness of a centralised CE framework based on shared values and taught by teachers of different backgrounds in a pluralistic society

Methodology

- **Qualitative approach**
 - flexibility and depth to understand the teachers' views on CE and the underlying worldview
 - access to much richer data in order to gain insights into the nuances of the individual teacher's perspectives of CE and their practice
 - allows for examination of and interpretation of data, and making connections of patterns of relationships from the data for each participant and across participants

Data Collection

- Focus of the study on primary school teachers, beginning of a child's education
- **Early years of a child's life crucial** in terms of the formation of values and moral understanding (Brogan & Brogan, 1999)
- One primary school; 5 teachers, various levels of experience
- **Two rounds of data collection:** face-to-face interviews & structured open-ended questions by email

Findings

- **Relationships:** central theme
 - with students and parents
 - with the community and the nation
 - with Transcendence

- **Awareness:** second theme
 - of the power of a teacher's role
 - awareness of “teachable moments”
 - sensitive to the dynamics of each learning situation including that of their own shortcomings
 - of the individuality of each child (background, etc)
(important in order to form meaningful and caring relationships)
 - of challenges in CE

*Findings (Cont'd)

Relationship with nation

- Develop good character for the good of the nation
- Role as character educator: **contributing to Singapore's survival**
- **“Whole purpose of education is to have good citizens”**
- Role of the school: level out conflicting or different messages of character
- Believe in the authority of the leaders in society; felt that it was unhealthy that “there's too much of a questioning culture” where a justification of every decision is needed
- Foregrounded **the teaching of skills** such as managing stress and emotions, “soft social skills”, “skills that are useful for society”
- But one teacher **encouraged her students to be “independent”**, “non-conformist” and “not be dependent on others”

*Findings (Cont'd)

Relationship with Transcendence

- Religion and God considered taboo
- When prodded three of the participants spoke about the **centrality of the role their faith plays** in their views on CE
- “Accountable to God” that she had done her best; “we are not supposed to talk about God and all these things”; **important for world religions to be included** in the CE curriculum, as it exposes students to “multiple perspectives” and helps them “appreciate diversity”
- Reason behind the occurrence in their lives and in the world
- Attributed **trying moments in life as occurrences of chance** or luck or as “challenges to be overcome”

*Findings (Cont'd)

Aware of the power of a teacher's role

- as role models for students
- they are “being observed all the time”
- influence of teachers “**greater than that of parents**”

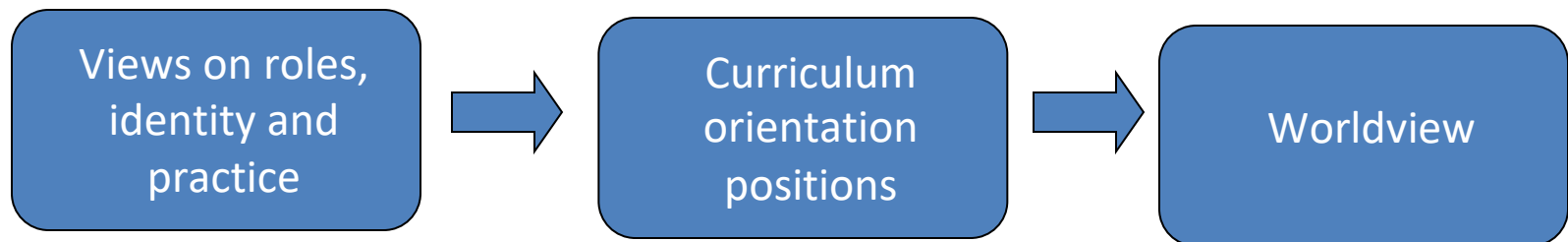
Awareness of individuality of child

- each child uniquely different; explained the differences differently
- “mostly because of luck” or occurrence of chance, “everything happens for a reason”
- “everybody is born smart” and is able to achieve similar results; those who do not perform well “have only themselves to blame”

Analysis

- Primarily guided by Miller's (1993) framework mapping worldview and teacher curriculum orientation positions

Responses /data



Discussion

- Coexistence of a myriad of perspectives and worldview
- Teachers' educational views or beliefs are **eclectic** and even **contradictory** despite their being committed to the same educational practices (Clark & Petersons, 1986)
- Conflicting views on CE simultaneously present in the responses of particular individual participants
 - E.g. freedom and independence, encouraged students not to conform to societal expectations but felt that students “self-centred”; be explicitly taught values
 - acceptance of a transcendent moral authority (theism) but discussed ethical issues from a values-neutral stance (scientific method)

Discussion (Cont'd)

- Points to a **postmodern phenomenon** of the dialectic tension between moral autonomy and moral authority
- Teachers emphasised the importance of being **role models** while espousing a **values-neutral stance** on moral and ethical dilemmas
(hands-off / ambiguous approach denies students an important source of guidance from adults as they strive to make meaning of the world)
- Tensions when individual values conflict with communitarian values (Carr & Landon, 1998)
 - reluctance to express personal belief in God
 - conflict b/w own worldview and of the state

Discussion (Cont'd)

- Traditional approach of CE espoused in varying degrees (specific virtues and teachers as role models)
- Teachers inconsistent and arbitrary in delivery of CE, **problematic for character formation** (Bergem, 1993)
- Perhaps, national culture where power is centralised and hierarchical affects teachers' pedagogic beliefs and classroom culture (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1998)
- **Exclusion of theism** represents a void or the “**null curriculum**” (Eisner, 2002); raises questions about the completeness of CE programs

Conclusion

- An understanding of worldview diversity essential in character formation and moral decision making (Valk, 2009)
- Behooves policymakers to consider including **a theistic paradigm of CE in schools alongside the current non-theistic approach**
- Exposes students to **alternative views of reality that inform moral decision making and prod reflection of behaviour**; provides for the **education of the whole child** (Morrison, 2009)

Conclusion (Cont'd)

- For true secularism and to foster pluralism (peaceful coexistence of various cultural groups), the **curriculum must not only be neutral among religions**, but also be **impartial between theistic and non-theistic worldview**
- **An inclusive approach** will affirm the value of spiritual and philosophical commitments and **eschew the relativism of moral individualism** (Haynes and Thomas, 2001)

Significance

- Critical implications on the role of teachers in society
- Addresses the fundamental tension between moral autonomy and moral authority in a pluralistic society which gives precedence to shared values
 - reflected in the contradictory and conflicting views teachers have on CE, and in taking a moral stand
 - reflected in the moral decisions made by students as evident in the escalation in youth misdemeanour

Concluding Remarks

Including theistic perspectives in CE affords teachers and students to **draw upon both spiritual and scientific sources to reflect upon the reasons** for their moral decisions or virtues deemed important.

Such an approach would **stimulate an inquiry of the fundamental questions of life** such as ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What is the purpose of my existence?’ and may thus provide students a **sound basis for developing good character**, and thus may provide the panacea to the quandary of moral malaise in society.

“... the primary and singular purpose of human life is to inquire about the nature of the Absolute Truth. What is the nature of reality, what is the nature of our existence, and what is the nature of life? Every branch of knowledge should be utilized in searching the answers to these important questions... In a deeper sense, both scientist and spiritualist or religionist, are engaged in search for the ultimate meaning of life and the universe.”

Dr. T. D. Singh

International Director of the Bhaktivedanta Institute,

Founding Member of the United Religions Initiative (URI)

Singapore Kindness Movement



Launched in January 1997
to over 80 000 secondary
school students

“...inspire graciousness through spontaneous acts of kindness, making life more pleasant for everyone.”

“...encourage all Singaporeans to be more kind and considerate.”

“...enhance public awareness of acts of kindness.”

“...influence and raise the standards of social behaviour in our society.”

Participants Profiles

Participants (Gender)	Teaching Experience	Position	Levels currently taught	Subjects taught
Teacher P (Female)	28 years	Head of Department	Lower Primary	Social studies, English, Math
Teacher Q (Male)	1½ years	Form Teacher	Upper Primary	Math, Science
Teacher R (Female)	10 years	Head of Department	Upper Primary	Mo her Tongue
Teacher S (Female)	6 years	Head of Department	Upper Primary	English, Math, Science
Teacher (Female)	6 years	Form Teacher	Lower Primary	English, Math