

## Should we choose “Citizenship” or “Global” Education? A Hong Kong Local View

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### Abstract

### Review Article

This essay attempts to address the problem of citizenship education in Hong Kong. As an international financial hub, Hong Kong should educate the next generation to have a more globalised perspective. That is, globalisation is now steering towards the advancement of new science and technology. Hence, the world is now increasingly becoming more interconnected and interdependent. Hong Kong has reunified with China, and thus should have a better understanding of its culture and policies, etc. As such, Hong Kong’s younger generations should receive citizenship education in order to have a better understanding of its related national status. The above two schools of thought has caused heated controversy about citizenship education in Hong Kong. There is a dilemma for deciding whether a global or national priority is more important for citizenship education in Hong Kong. Furthermore, specific topics that best suit Hong Kong’s circumstances must be included in the curriculum.

**Keywords:** globalization, policies, education, curriculum.

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### Citizenship Education: Are Global Priorities Best?

To begin, from a global perspective, what do we mean by citizenship education?

According to Crick [2], it should involve three branches of components:

#### Political Literacy

As a future generation, young people should have a solid understanding of global society. Hence, topics such as international law, human rights, environmental issues, governance, voting, elections, and the significance of mass media, must be taught.

Certainly, the points mentioned above are important for the next generation. Citizens should have the right and responsibility to understand their government. In addition, it is important to have voting rights, a clear understanding of the voting system, and the right to be chosen to serve one’s society. At the same time, as technology advances, mass media such as television, news outlets, and the Internet play an important role in conveying information to the public. These sources provide access to international news and offer a greater understanding of the world in general.

Every individual should care for planet Earth; if we damage the planet, all of us will suffer. For

example, extreme industrialisation will cause air pollution, which is harmful to our health. Increased urbanisation destroys forests and raises global temperatures. Thus, in the coming years, polar ice caps will melt, which will bring flooding to many low-lying areas. Therefore, environmental education is an important topic for citizenship education in Hong Kong—regardless of national or global priorities.

#### Social and Moral Responsibility

There are other aspects that should also concern future generations; for example, students should be taught the difference between right and wrong, fair and unfair, as well as to respect different cultures, religions, and countries.

Every day, we have to make a lot of decisions. Sometimes we are even forced to make moral decisions. For example, if someone is seriously ill, perhaps in a coma, should we leave them in that state or assist in their death?

#### Community Involvement

It is also important for students to understand and be involved in their local community, as well as respect people of different cultures, religions, and countries. Volunteering would be a great way of taking

part in the. Activities could include fundraising for various charities, babysitting, or helping the elderly. Regardless of the activity, they all provide practical experience for students to better understand people less fortunate than themselves. At the same time, it would also be good teaching and learning material for liberal studies.

Ian Lister suggests that “global education” should [2]:

1. Have a global perspective and a recognition of those independent countries;
2. Focus around global issues, such as war and peace, world development, human rights, etc; and Be an activity-based pedagogy.
3. [www.citizenship-global.org.hk](http://www.citizenship-global.org.hk)
4. Strand 2, Lecturer Notes, session 8, p.6; The University of Hong Kong, Faculty of Education, 2004-2005 Education Studies

Lister also believes that: “global education should recognise the need to reconstruct citizenship so that society will be multicultural, diverse, pluralist, and part of an interdependent world”. He also believes that “human rights hold the ideal of universalism, i.e., universal rights for all humanity. These are rights which everyone has and should enjoy, not as a gift from a government or because they belong to a particular social system [2]”.

In this authors opinion, both Cricks’ and Lister’s points of view are similar. They state that the aim of global education should be to create a better and more peaceful society for everyone. However, Lister seems to place more emphasis on an interdependent world. He also provides definitions for ideas such as human rights and global education.

Prior to June 1997, Hong Kong was a British colony and, as such, not a great deal of citizenship education about China was taught, since doing so would have had political ramifications. After the handover, however, the situation changed drastically. With Hong Kong being an international financial centre and now a Special Administrative Region of China, it is hoped that the new generation will gain an enhanced sense of national identity and cultural understanding. Thus, there have been a number of discussions about the shape of citizenship education in Hong Kong and what topics should be included [3].

Educational Studies — Strand 2, Lecturer Notes, session 8, p.5 Exact 3 & 4

As Hong Kong is now part of China, a strong sense of national identity should be encouraged. It is important that students are taught about the 50-year rule and Hong Kong’s unique status as a special administrative region. Currently, schools raise the national flags of both Hong Kong and China and sing the Chinese national anthem—all of which help to establish a national identity and sense of belonging.

Following China’s open-door policy in 1979, more Hong Kong people have been able to visit their hometowns. Furthermore, the trade relationship between China and Hong Kong has grown stronger. This has allowed more ordinary and young people to visit China, and subsequently learn more about their own country. In particular, the origin of Chinese culture and the development of its civilisation. At the same time, the new generation should also have an in-depth understanding of Hong Kong’s history. By studying history, we can spot patterns and parallels with today, and hopefully learn from our past mistakes. In addition, history can also help students understand their own culture and civilisation. In other words, history can give them a strong sense of belonging. Concerning wars between China and other nations, it may help build a strong sense of national commitment and identity [2]. However, too much nationalistic sentiment is dangerous. For example, World War II was started by the militaristic actions of Germany, Japan, and Italy. Most people in those countries at the time had a strong sense of national identity and pride. Another example are the thousands of Chinese demonstrators who took to the streets to denounce Japan’s actions. Japan had claimed sovereignty over a few outlying islands and it was causing serious problems for Chinese and Japanese relations.

While correct to fight for justice, too extreme a protest could lead to a military dictatorship and then nationalism.

Ultimately, war might occur between countries, which should naturally be avoided. In brief, we should educate the next generation to love their country, understand its culture, and be committed to it. However, nationalism should be guarded against, since it is harmful to society. After discussing both global and national priorities, we are at somewhat of a dilemma to determine which one, in general, would best fit Hong Kong’s unique situation. Nevertheless, some important topics can be chosen for our students as part of citizenship education in Hong Kong.

First, fundamental human rights and relevant international laws should be taught, so that students can understand the basics such as freedom of speech and publication, and know what to do should they get arrested. Dissemination of knowledge regarding international human rights laws can help prevent abuse of government power and, in extreme cases, dictatorships from forming.

From a national point of view, students should learn about the history and culture of their own country. In doing so they will hopefully establish a strong sense of national identity and be committed to the good of the nation. Knowing the history of one’s country—in this case, China and Hong Kong—is critical to good citizenship education, since it acts as a bridge linking

the past with the present. It is worth remembering, however, that too extreme of a national identity can lead to nationalism, which is not good.

To protect against unfair trade practices, consumer rights should also be taught. After all, buying goods and services is a daily occurrence. If you buy an electronic product and it breaks within a few days of purchase, you are in your rights to request a replacement. In addition, a free warranty period of 1–2 years should be standard. New consumer rules should be fought for to improve consumer protection.

It is also important to teach students basic politics. For example, teachers should encourage students over 18 to vote. In Hong Kong, they have the right to vote in the legislative council and district board elections, which impacts on social, political, and public issues. For those under 18, it is still important for them to learn about the process, and perhaps mock elections could be held to simulate the experience.

Students should also be taught about the structure of government, since it is ultimately the government which serves the citizens. This type of information will help them know which bureau or department to go to when requiring a particular service. For example, one should focus on the Education and Manpower Bureau and its sub-departments when looking at education and its policy.

One should also teach students about social and moral issues, such as helping the disadvantaged, the poor, and those in need, etc., all these play a significant role in our citizenship education.

Last but not least, the environment is arguably the most important topic that should be taught to students, since it is crucial they learn about conservation. Not only will animals and plants go extinct, but humans will die out as well if the delicate balance of the ecosystem is destroyed. Teaching the basics, such as the importance of recycling, will help reduce waste and save valuable natural resources in the process. Moreover, if students are taught to use less electricity, it will cause less air pollution and result in less of a drain on fuel. All of the above can help preserve our natural world and its resources, thereby creating a better and brighter future.

In summary, pre-handover, there was not much citizenship education in Hong Kong. While public affairs were part of the teaching syllabus, the history of Hong Kong was not really taught; neither was civic education. In general, Hong Kong people did not have a very strong sense of national identity. After 1997, however, with Hong Kong becoming part of China, citizenship education grew in prominence. As there is a democratic movement around the world, citizenship education raises the concern of people all over the

world, especially in Hong Kong. Moreover, as Hong Kong became an increasingly important financial centre, locals needed to have a better perspective on the world. As such, there has been a great deal of discussion regarding the most suitable areas for education.

In order to enhance the course, one should add the decision making topic into the course. Teachers and students will need more discussion time in analysing those controversial issues; thereby determining the correctness course of action. At the same time, we should increase the amount of civic education, such as keeping Hong Kong clean and improved disease prevention, etc.

While citizenship education has gained more significance post-1997, it is still hard to determine whether the focus should be national or global—although the above discussion recommends a mixed approach would be best. National citizenship education is definitely good and more emphasis should indeed be placed on it. However, there should be a degree of modification when it comes to Hong Kong. Global issues, such as international human rights laws, election systems, and the environment, to name a few, should be included. A good and well-balanced syllabus with both a national and global focus should be implemented. In doing so, not only will students gain a wider perspective, but the aim of improving the existing education system and encouraging well-rounded development will be achieved.

One of the application in citizenship education is it can provide us reasons during the controversial debate over public issues. In other words, when people have a sense of belonging to a country, they are more likely to participate in national affairs and discussions. This is called ‘political participation’. One particular case of note is the debate surrounding Hong Kong’s outdated retirement scheme. This is a “reflection of the procedures used in handling Hong Kong’s impoverished families”. Similarly, the problem of Hong Kong’s independence highlights that there is a gap between Hong Kong’s Western-influenced liberal capitalism and the Chinese form of social- communism. There is a contradiction between the two systems which cannot be reconciled. Both Hong Kong and China need to review their social systems and implement the necessary changes. For instance, Eastern European communist countries have moved away from dictatorships and have become liberal democracies. Liberal capitalists must implement laws and policies that protect lower-class citizens in order to eliminate inequality, which can be found in Northern Europe, for example. Over the years, socialism and capitalism have both been criticised. One often cited failure of socialism is that many people are selfish, hence it is destined to fail. This is seen as the reason why nearly all communist countries have faded away in the latter part

of the 20th century. However, capitalist nations have been equally condemned for their exploitation of the lower-class. As such, apart from socialism, communism, capitalism, liberalism, etc. is there any better way to govern our society? An interesting case study is Britain's referendum on leaving the European Union (EU). It is widely known that Britain voted *yes* for independence. Possible reasons for this are that while Britain invested heavily in the EU, the rewards in the reality was not as expected. Even after negotiations, Britain failed to reach an agreement with the EU. As a result, in a nationwide public referendum, the British people voted to leave the EU, since they were not sharing in the economic profits of the EU (roughly speaking). Based on this, the need for open government is apparent, however, both sides must respect the outcome of any vote. Moreover, each member of the public should be allowed to participate; and there should be adequate mechanisms to encourage hearing everyone's views. A society should follow the will of the people through a primary communication mechanism and finally a referendum. It is also important to focus more on the process instead of the final result, as ultimately there will always be those who are dissatisfied. In some rare cases, a remedy might be necessary to placate those who have lost. However, there is no need to resort to the extreme of communism.

In many cases, a person may need to make lots of political decisions daily. With reference to Britain leaving the EU, an unequal distribution of resources was one of the main factor in the outcome of the vote. In such situation, the consequences are there will be lots of feasible changes. Only by understanding those factors, can the best possible path (to leave EU) be chosen and a new era can begin (independence of Britain). Hence, the decisions made will lead to some necessary changes such as a new agreement between EU and Britain. Issues such as the new relationship between the EU and Britain, as well as trade agreements, etc. can then be discussed. A well-

balanced equilibrium between the different groups' viewpoints can be established (Department of Mathematics, HKU, 1995–1996, Dr Chu and Dr T. G. Yung's Operational Research lecture notes). A dispute's final settlement is usually reached after the various parties make certain concessions. As a result, the next time's debate is a disagreement where it will hopefully be easier to arrive at a decision.

In conclusion, when peoples debate the pros and cons of a particular controversial issue (this is just like playing "Chinese traditional TaiChi Kofu" or Hegel's philosophy), the final result can lead to some significant changes. These changes can then be sublimated onto another round or level of discussions or eventually a new knowledge will be formed. The underlying reasons can be revealed through in-depth analysis, as in the case of Brexit discovered..

Note: The content of the first half-part of this essay comes from this author's PDGE paper during year 2004 - 2005.

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