ABILITY-DRIVEN EDUCATION IN SINGAPORE: RECENT REFORM INITIATIVES

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Outline of Presentation

- Brief about Singapore and features of education system as cultural context
- Historical perspective on educational developments and reforms
- Current reforms in the context of ability-driven education
- Personal Observations/Reflections
SINGAPORE

- Small country
- Multiracial and multicultural
- Meritocracy
- Some national concerns - how to deal with competition from China, India and SEAsian neighbours; terrorism; globalisation.
Role of Education in Singapore

- Nation-building
- Economic Development
- Social Cohesion

Government Investment in Education
3.8% of GDP in 2003
Education System in Singapore

- National school system
- English as the medium of instruction
- Common Curriculum for all schools
- Primary Education – 6 years (178 pri schs)
- Secondary Education – 4 years (165 sec schs)
- Pre-University Education – 2 years (16JC s & 2 CIs)
BILINGUALISM

- Children learn English and learn their Mother-tongue language in school.

- Results of the policy: Effectively a bilingual society, after four decades of nationhood.
  - The 2000 census showed for the first time that a majority of the Singapore population is now literate in two or more languages (56% in 2000 compared to 45% in 1990).
  - Among Chinese youths (aged 15-24), 88% are literate in Mandarin and 98% in English.

- Refinements to mother-tongue policy (2004)
STREAMING

- Streaming occurs at P4. Streaming has been refined recently to remove EM1 and EM2 distinction. EM 3 remains.

- High stakes examinations
  - PSLE which streamed children into Special/Express/Normal Academic and Normal Technical Streams. More pressure on kids now to enter integrated programmes available in top secondary schools.
  - O level examinations - entry to pre-university, polytechnics and Institute of Technical Education
  - A levels and Poly Diploma - entry to 3 universities.
Three Phases of Educational Developments

- Survival-Driven Education (1959 – 1978)
- Ability-Driven Education (from 1997)
Survival-Driven Education

- **Response to Economic Survival**
  - Mass Education with rapid rate of building of schools
  - Technical Bias in curriculum

- **Response to national cohesion**
  - 4 vernacular schools and hence need to unify standards
  - Schools under a national system with a common curriculum
Ability streaming introduced

- Streaming at P3 into normal, extended and monolingual (revised to P4 and renamed EM1, EM2, EM3; further revised in 2004 to remove EM1 and EM2 distinction)
- Streaming at end of P6 into Special, Express and Normal Streams in secondary schools

Curricular Changes

School Management

- Emphasis on school reform with schools given greater autonomy
Effects of Efficiency-Driven Education

- Reduction of educational wastage
- Uniformity and standardisation
- Narrow emphasis on academic achievement
“Thinking schools to be crucibles of questioning and searching, within and without the classroom ....and Singapore a Learning Nation that goes beyond schools.”

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong
International Conference on Thinking, 2 July 1997
KEY THRUSTS OF TSLN

- Emphasis on Critical and Creative Thinking
- Use of Information Technology in Education
- National Education (Citizenship Education)
- Administrative Excellence
THINKING SCHOOLS

- Fundamental review of curriculum
- Reduction of subject content
- Revision of assessment mode
- Greater emphasis on process instead of outcomes e.g. introduction of project work
Project Work allows students to:

- Apply creative and critical thinking skills
- Foster collaborative learning skills
- Improve communication skills
- Develop self-directed inquiry and life-long learning skills.
Infusion of IT in Schools

IT Master Plan

- Pupil-Computer Ratio  2: 1
- Teacher-Notebook Ratio  2:1
- Whole School Networking
- 30% of curriculum time to be IT-based
National Education

The objective is to develop national cohesion, the instinct for survival and confidence in the future by

• fostering a sense of identity, pride and self-respect as Singaporeans;
• knowing the Singapore story;
• understanding Singapore’s unique challenges, constraints and vulnerabilities;
• instilling core values of our way of life.
TSLN heralds Ability-Driven Education

- Focus on developing the full spectrum of talents and abilities in each child through a mass customized approach to education
- Focus on holistic education with greater emphasis on character rather than imparting just knowledge and content.
KEY PRINCIPLES

Improving Quality
Increasing Diversity
Maintaining Access
The Education Landscape

Primary (PSLE) → Integrated Programme Schools (Offering seamless Secondary and/or Junior College education without GCE 'O' Levels) → GCE 'A' Level or International Baccalaureate Diploma → Recognised Pre-University Qualifications → Junior College / Centralised Institute (GCE 'A' Level) → Politecnic (Diploma) → Institute of Technical Education (ITEC) → University (Degree)

Secondary Schools → Specialised Independent Schools → Secondary Schools (Sec 1 - Sec 4/5) → Privately-Funded Schools (Sec 1 - JC 1) → GCE 'N'/'O' Level → Recognised Pre-University Qualifications → University (Degree)

Arrows show typical routes
CURRICULUM REFORMS

■ Innovations in Pedagogy
  ➢ Strategies for Effective Engagement and Development (SEED) & lower class size
  ➢ Strategies for Active and Independent Learning (SAIL)
  ➢ IT Innovations - Digital Literacy

■ Broadening of CCA framework (from 2004)

■ Changes in assessment - source-based questions; IB and NUS High school Diploma.

■ Revised JC Curriculum - K&I (in 2006)
School Leaders and Teachers are the keys to success of education reforms
TEACHER ED REFORMS

- Review of Teacher & Educational Leadership Programmes
  - Foundation Programmes
  - Diploma in Departmental Management & Leaders in Education Programmes

- Professional Development of Teachers

- New Career Tracks; New Recognition Structure; Work Attachment Scheme; 3000 more teachers by 2010

CONNECT

EduPAC
My Observations & Reflections

• Pace of Reform & Teacher Stress
• Experimentation & failure/School Ranking?
• Elitism & Equity/Ethnicity
Thank You

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