



# Character Education – Leading cultural change in preschools in Singapore

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## Abstract

This qualitative study reports the practices of five educators, principals, in promoting values based social conventions in Singapore Catholic preschools. The findings to the field by extending the knowledge base of early years educations regarding values based social conventions in their early childhood education and care settings. The educators' transformational leadership is narrated through five themes: credible professional; purposeful collaborator; astute manager; coaching teacher; discerning monitor. The findings contribute to the field by extending the knowledge base of early years educations regarding values based social conventions in their early childhood education and care settings.

## Introduction

Singapore is a culturally diverse island where its citizens and permanent residents comprise Chinese (~74.3%), Malay (~3.3%), Indian (~9.1 %) and Eurasian/others (3.3%). There is also a substantial proportion of non-permanent residents (~29.2%) who are foreigners living, studying or working in Singapore. (1)

Hence it becomes important to uphold a common core value system based on mutual respect which is embraced by all. In Singapore, Character and Values Education forms an integral part of the school curriculum with an imperative to 'inculcate strong values and character in students through education.'(2)

Singapore educators in this study employed a child-centred approach to value-based social conventions, promulgated through the principals who, as lead managers adopt shared language and understanding to design and manage their values education paradigm with staff, children, and their families.

## Research and Design

The ethical guidelines of the university and the Archdiocesan Commission for Catholic preschools Singapore and JCU were followed with approval for ethical conduct of this research obtained prior to the commencement of the study. Focus group methodology was used to gather data. The framework for organizing, analysing and reporting patterns of meaning (i.e. themes) across the focus group was thematic analysis. The data was triangulated into themes, aligned with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase thematic analysis process.(3) All focus groups were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. After the focus group was completed, participants were given copies of the transcript to review and verify.

## Findings and Discussion

As Asian societies are becoming more globalized and more ethnically diverse, traditional values of *filial piety* are being taught with authoritarian processes and strategies, encouraging individuality, decisiveness, responsibility and autonomy (Way et al.,2013).(4) Consequently, teaching values informed social conventions are part of the skill set of quality educators in Catholic early childhood education and care settings in Singapore.

### 1. Credible Profession

Principals, as credible professionals, see their role as leading cultural change in the school where its educators, sharing in the vision initiated by principal as leader, have a responsibility for the education of the child.

### 2. Purposeful Collaborator

Children participate in learning opportunities to grow in the understanding of how to behave in accordance with core values and social conventions.

### 3. Astute Manager

Principal provide varying levels of support, targeted at the child's cognitive level, are provided to promote children's understanding of altruism, the cornerstone of prosocial behaviour.

### 4. Coaching Teacher

As coaching teachers, principals intentionally engage staff and children in learning the baseline social standards.

### 5. Discerning Monitor

Principals are empathetic collaborators, alert to the role parents have in supporting children develop social responsibility.

## Conclusions

Education leadership represents a multidimensional systematic integration of various psychological and counselling theories and leadership models: servant leadership, transformational leadership, and principled centred leadership.(5)

Character in education is reported as being taught in an environment of autonomy where children, in participating across curriculum domains and themes have repeated opportunities to engage with tasks that are values driven.(6)

The values based social conventions are the foundation of the character in education focus. As such they promote a school wide focus in the preschools, fostering in children positive character traits, esteemed in society. (7)

## References:

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