

ELT Materials as Sites of Values Education: A Preliminary Observation of Secondary School Materials

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Abstract The chapter raises and explores issues on English language teaching (ELT) materials as sites of values education in the Singapore secondary schools. It specifically examines secondary textbooks as a potential repository of cultural values. Using discourse analytical tools including White's (The language of attitude, arguability and interpersonal positioning. From The Appraisal Homepage. Web site: <http://www.grammatics.com/appraisal/index.html>, 2002) appraisal framework and a close reading of the selected texts, the authors demonstrate how certain values may be surfaced from the resources available for teaching in the secondary schools. The chapter concludes that the potential values offered by the textbooks may be tapped by teachers who need to exercise due care when critically engaging them in the classroom so that these values are realized in their proper contexts.

Keywords Cultural values • Singapore • ELT • Textbooks

1 Introduction

Two basic questions are addressed in this chapter on values education in English language teaching (ELT) in Singapore: *What kinds of cultural values surface in secondary school English textbooks in Singapore? How are they realized in the classroom if they are realized at all?* The first examines secondary textbooks as a potential repository or source of cultural values while the second investigates whether these values are actually discussed or even tapped in the English language classrooms of Singapore. Before we address these questions, we wish to provide the reader some theoretical grounding and a brief review of relevant literature on values education in ELT. The studies we mention below inform the discussion throughout the chapter.

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Like many other forms of teaching, language teaching is fundamentally moral in nature. Johnston and Buzzelli (2007, p. 95) explain morality as the involvement of “crucial yet difficult and ambiguous beliefs and decisions about what is right and good for learners and others.” If we adopt this general description of the term morality, it is not difficult to envisage the moral elements embedded in various processes in the English language learning journey – from the conceptualisation of the curriculum, the development of materials, the teaching approaches and methodologies used in class, and the assessment stages.

Investigation into the moral element in language teaching, with a focus on the teacher is an area that has received some attention in the field of ELT. Johnston and Buzzelli (2007) highlight the seminal work of Edge (1996) and Johnston et al. (1998) that enquire into the moral dimension of language teaching. In particular, Edge (1996) points out what he terms as three types of ‘cross cultural paradox’ that involve tensions between considerations of education culture and teaching English as a second language culture, for example. Johnston et al. (1998) adopt similar conceptual frameworks of such cultural tensions but investigate these issues in the smaller scale contexts of English language classrooms of three ESL teachers at a university-based intensive English language programme. Essentially, the study addressed morality issues construed implicitly in these areas: classroom rules and regulations, the curricular substructure, and expressive morality. Subsequently, Johnston and Buzzelli (2007) describe the general direction on studies into morality in language teaching as focusing on these areas: the moral dimensions of classroom interaction; values and politics; professional ethics; and the role of religious beliefs in language teaching.

Johnston and Buzzelli (2007) basically describe the state of investigation into the moral dimensions of language teaching as in its infancy stage, with a clear awareness of the difficulties in the probing of such issues in the language classroom. Four problems surface in such investigations: the absence of a good conceptual definition of ‘morality,’ the intersection between the societal and individual, that morality is embedded within individuals and not necessarily displayed for inspection, and lastly, that cultural and linguistic barriers hinder research in the area. Furthermore, the focus on morality and the language teacher has also meant that other equally important sites construed by the moral dimension have been left not investigated:

[A] crucial arena in which moral values and issues are played out is that of curriculum and course books; the moral dimensions of published materials, and the moral consequences of choices about which vocabulary, what form of pronunciation, what grammar, and what pragmatics competencies to teach is an area that is ripe for enquiry (Johnston and Buzzelli 2007, p. 103).

In the context of Southeast Asia, we cite the work of Dat (2003), which discusses the need to localise ELT materials for the language classroom. He highlights the incongruence between mainstream cultural assumptions and that of the local culture that renders language instruction ineffective. He cites various researches’ arguments for a need for course content to be motivated by cross-cultural considerations so that there is “more room for learners to express values important to them” (p. 170). Dat

explains localisation from three perspectives: conceptualising local learners' culture by linking language study to their present receptivity besides their future use; helping learners to express their identity by providing them with the tools to reflect on themselves using their personal knowledge and experiences; and thirdly, addressing learners' right to decide what they need or do not need in such a way that materials inspire their interest and affective involvement.

2 English Language Teaching and Moral Education in Singapore

Singapore's bilingual policy requires every student to learn English as one of the school subjects for 10–20 years of their school career, depending on their educational path chosen. The Ministry of Education provides a comprehensive national English Language Syllabus (2010) that guides educationists in the navigation of English language skills development for both the primary and secondary schools. The evolutionary (Lim 2001) process shaping the design of the syllabus is described by Cheah (2002), and she points out the emphasis on English being taught and learnt for knowledge and technology transfer in the very early days of its design. The general thrust in 'dictating a prescriptive, skills-based grammar approach to language learning' remained a feature of the syllabus until what Cheah observes as the stage of rethinking ELT in the 1980s. The move away from prescriptivism to an expressive model at that stage also saw the change of status of English language from one of the four official languages and its functional role to English being the first language in the national school curriculum. The main aim of English language teaching in the 1991 syllabus aimed to "help pupils develop their linguistic and communicative competence to meet both their personal, educational, vocational, social and cultural spheres" (MOE 1991 in Lin 2003, p. 230–231). Subsequently, the next wave of reshaping the syllabus came in 2001 where

Key principles and approaches first introduced in the 1991 syllabus, such as learner centredness and a focus on process and contextualisation among others, were reintroduced although significantly, the focus on culture has been played down (Cheah 2002, p. 75).

The current English Language Syllabus (2010) is described as building upon the 2001 syllabus and continues to focus on the key features of the EL Syllabus 2001, which are language use, learning outcomes, text types, and grammar (EL syllabus 2010, p. 7). It is notable that throughout the stages of reshaping the English language syllabus, there is no explicit articulation of the place of moral education as there are other platforms that address such initiative (see next paragraph). The emphasis of English language education is clearly on the development of literacy and proficiency. Any connection between the moral element and the English classroom is possibly implicit and incidental, perhaps because language, culture and values are inextricably connected.

A programme that is primarily focused on civic and moral education has long been institutionalized in Singapore. In fact, the city-state is noted to have one of the most tenacious and vigorous governments in terms of pursuing and implementing a compulsory civic and moral education programme in the school system (Chew 1998, p. 505). Since its independence from the British colonial system in 1959, the city-state has come up with various permutations of values education programme in the schools, but Chew (1998) notes that “citizenship training” has remained as the main thrust of these efforts (p. 507). Chew reaffirms Tan’s (1994) earlier observation that moral education in Singapore is conceptualized as a means of nation building—one that is “aimed at forging together, by promoting shared values, the four major racial and cultural communities” and “used for preserving national and cultural identity against the perceived erosion of Asian roots by Western education” (p. 61). The emphasis on social harmony and on developing a moral and cultural ballast rooted in the Asian experience, notes Tan, has been viewed as “instrumental towards a strong economy, including the attraction of foreign investors” (ibid.).

It is clear then that in the Singapore educational system, there is an established platform where teachers and students can discuss values and morality. Gopinathan (1995), notes Chew (1998), classifies civic and moral education, together with history and social studies, as part of the “cultural curriculum” intended to contribute to the “enhancement of social cohesion, political identity and loyalty to the state” (Gopinathan 1995 in Chew 1998, p. 514). Other subjects like English, mathematics, and the sciences are then part of the “non-cultural curriculum” in that they are not designed to directly contribute to the cultural and political agenda of the city-state. The boundary that separates the two curricula, however, becomes blurred when the official rhetoric on National Education launched in 1997 and implemented up to the present is considered. Chew notes that then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong “made a pointed remark that *all* teachers would have to help transmit national values” (p. 156, emphasis supplied). The English language education then is a potential platform where values such as “national cohesion, an instinct for survival and confidence in the future” can be effectively communicated.

3 Method

This chapter examines English language teaching materials used in Singapore secondary school textbooks in order to understand these curricular materials from a moral dimension. Using discourse analytical tools, we investigate selected narrative passages used in textbooks as they represent sites of morality. As Johnston and Buzzelli (2007, p. 102) explain, “... a deeper understanding of the moral dimensions of language necessitates discourse-analytic research in a range of contexts and settings,” including discourse analysis of textbook genres.

Our study adopts White’s (2002) appraisal systems of affect, appreciation, and judgment in order to tease out the values that surface in our textual sites. The systems of affect and judgment would be more informative of moral ideologies and

thus, would be given focus in this analysis. The appraisal framework highlights the importance of evaluative lexis, and is organized in terms of sets of options of evaluative meanings that speakers/writers can typically use in certain contexts and the linguistic realizations of those meanings. The three major systems of attitude, graduation, and engagement signal writer evaluation of a range of entities in relation to the intensity and negotiability of these assessments. The valuation of emotions, people's behavior, and the aesthetic quality of things constitute the expression of attitude. Being multifaceted, the model accounts for the manipulation of the intensity of these valuations (graduation), and the dialogic space afforded for the negotiation of these values (engagement).

In order to have an idea of how values are particularly treated in the English language classroom, we interviewed two textbook writers in Singapore. Both interviewees have considerable experience teaching English in secondary schools. The interview provided us insights as to how values are integrated into instructional materials for English language teaching and how these values are and/or may be treated in the Singapore classroom.

For purposes of illustration, we demonstrate our analysis of two texts used as samples of target genres (that is, narrative and news reporting) that students in Singapore secondary schools are expected to learn how to write. Using the analytical concepts of judgment and affect from the appraisal framework, we identify and examine expressions that suggest judgment of human behavior in the texts. We also tease out contradictions, inconsistencies, and complexities in the characterizations and descriptions of people. We then show how these characterizations evoke particular affective engagements that may be tied with interpretations of what is valuable in Singapore society.

The two texts under examination are as follows: (1) an extract from the fantasy novel *The Conch Bearer* written by award-winning Indian-American writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and (2) the news report titled *Runners hit the street to support ex-offenders* published in *The Straits Times*, a widely circulated Singaporean broadsheet. Both are used as sample texts or *Texts in Focus* in Singapore secondary school English language textbooks (Doyle et al. 2011; Sandra-Segeram et al. 2010). We believe these sample texts serve as potential resources for teaching values in the secondary school English language classes.¹

The study is limited to the analysis of the selected texts and the interviews with two textbook writers in Singapore. In a sense, the authors acknowledge that they may have only scratched the surface as far as understanding values education in ELT within the Singapore context is concerned. The authors recognize that classroom observations and learner interviews may potentially offer insights that are not currently covered in this chapter.

4 Analysis of a Text-in-Focus: An Extract from Fiction

Using the appraisal framework, our analysis of the expressions in selected narratives used as sample texts in the instructional materials for secondary schools yielded a wide range of judgments of human behavior. These judgments are either explicit descriptions or implied in the texts. In the extract from *The Conch Bearer* written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a complex valuation of the characters' behaviors becomes manifest upon close analysis. The analysis of the sample text suggesting affect and judgment is summarized in Tables 1 and 2. In the following, we describe the extract of the story used in the textbook while discussing how expressions of affect and judgment in the said extract open up spaces or opportunities for teaching values in the English language classroom.

The narrative extract describes the situation of the young boy, Anand, who had to give up school and work for a tea stall owner, Haru, to help his mother and his ill sister. His father left to work in Dubai but stopped sending money 'unaccountably' after a few months. He also stopped sending letters to the family leaving Anand, his mother and sister without knowledge of what had happened to him. The way the writer Divakaruni describes the behavior of these four characters gives readers an

Table 1 Vocabulary items suggesting affect

Expressions from the Text	Positive/negative	Interpretation
Shivered	Negative	Cold
Solemn gangly 20 year old	Negative	Unhappy
Happy young boy	Positive	Happy
Turned his life upside down	Negative	Sad stage in Anand's life
Black eyes sparkled with merry mischievous intelligence	Positive	Signs of youthfulness
Cautious expression	Negative	Frightened

Table 2 Vocabulary items suggesting judgment

Expressions from the Text	Positive/Negative	Interpretation
Gossips travelled fast here	Negative-normality	Rumour mongering is rife
Haru, frying ...in stale peanut oil	Negative- veracity	Unscrupulous ways of business men
Cautious expression he has learned since he started working for Haru	Negative + capacity	Unfair treatment of employees
If he didn't manage to get them out, Haru would be sure to yell at him...	Negative-propriety	Poor treatment of employees
... had earned him a slap and a curse from Haru	Negative-propriety	Poor treatment of employees
'Dishwashing liquid', shouting so that everyone within the 50 yards could hear him	Negative-propriety	Uncouth ways of employers

idea of the kind of values the characters possess. At first glance, there appears to be a polarized representation of Anand's family and his boss Haru through descriptions of the characters' behaviors and their utterances. On the one hand, the reader finds positive evaluation of Anand (in the text, Anand is described to wish for a magic apple for his ill sister to recover, work very hard for his age, resist the temptation of stealing a pancake despite hunger, cope with the disappointment of not attending school, work really hard so as to keep hope of going to school alive), his father (Anand's father is described as having sent money after a month of working overseas and being an affectionate husband to his wife), and mother (Anand's mother is described to have opened a savings account to save hard earned money, bought gifts for kids, remained persistent in writing letters to her husband overseas, sacrificed roof over her head, took up a job when her husband went missing, had a resolute belief in her husband's fidelity, remained firm in shutting out gossips). On the other hand, there is the somewhat negative evaluation of Haru especially with the apparently hurtful language he uses against Anand. Yet, there is complexity in the characters and the way they act in the extract, and this is a pedagogical opportunity to discuss values in the English language classroom.

Anand's father appeared to be a good family man in the early descriptions of him by the storyteller. Yet, the storyteller later reveals that after a few months in Dubai, the father stopped sending money 'unaccountably.' That there was also no word from him casts doubt on his character—his fidelity and concern for his family. The extract does not provide information about what had happened to the father, and this may be an opportunity for the teacher to encourage the students to read the entire book by Divakaruni to find out more about Anand's fate and that of his father. On the other hand, the lack of information may also pose an opportunity for the students to think about how to make sense of the sudden and abrupt absence of Anand's father. Should they rely on speculations and rumors about what could possibly have gone wrong, despite lack of information? Or should they adopt the position of Anand's mother who maintained her belief in the fidelity of her husband in spite of a suggestion from a lady neighbor ("Sometimes, men go to a new country and come across another woman, a younger, prettier one. It's tempting for them to start a new life with her, to cut off ties—").

In the extract, Anand's mother is cast as a faithful and caring wife and mother, but she also comes off as someone dependent on her husband or the man of the family. Her dismissal of Anand's yearning to make his ill sister Meera better through magic easily reveals her being grounded in what is real ("Those things happen only storybooks, son. Don't you know that by now?"), yet it also suggests a certain pessimism on her part. Her matter-of-fact response to Anand's secret wish ("that someone would give him a magic apple like the one he had read about") points to a sense of jadedness that to dash a young boy's sense of wonder becomes rather easy.

Anand is described in the extract as a hardworking and honest boy; one who admirably adjusts to disappointment of not attending school and keeps the hope of going to school alive. Yet, his aspirations are caught up in his family's state of poverty and the seemingly helpless situation he is in. Despite his aspiration to change ("I want to change my life"), he seems unable to rise above the current state of

affairs. He is constrained by disabling circumstances: his youth and lack of capital (economic, social and cultural), the implied unequal social arrangements that make women in the families dependent on men, and the harsh child labor environment he has to endure to help his family make both ends meet.

Haru, the tea stall owner, is described as having a “blistering tongue and ever ready fist,” but his business actually provides an opportunity for Anand to work and help his family. His character comes off as frugal and practical for opting to use ash to scrub aluminum pots. He is revealed to be hardworking as well for he has been in the business for 50 years.

Expressions that suggest judgment of character provide teachers avenues to talk about values, especially empathy with the characters’ situation. Potentially, the extract from writer Divakaruni’s novel invites a certain affective engagement from the local readers—a sense of pity towards the main character Anand. This affect when tied with certain interpretations of poverty in places like the one depicted in the story (especially an interpretation that poverty so constrains the individual that an attempt to change his or her situation would be impossible without resorting to something magical) creates an emotional appeal that makes it possible for a Singaporean student to think of himself or herself in a much better position. The text lends itself to discussion of the values of empathy and a better appreciation of education and perhaps, a student’s lot in life.

It should be noted that there is no explicit discussion of values in the textbook. What we find is the extract with marginal annotations from the textbook writers. Based on our description and discussion above, the extract even without explicit prompts on values education offers possibilities for the teacher to guide students to adhere to certain values. The annotations that appear on the margins of the extract include questions and statements that guide the students to engage in independent close reading. They ask the reader to identify features of the narrative, infer the feelings of the characters, and derive meanings of specific terms based on the context, among others. Some of these questions can potentially serve as opportunities for values education as they enable student-readers to make judgments on the characters’ behavior in the extract (see examples of questions below). These questions, however, remain evocative and do not direct or impose on the reader a certain way of looking at the characters:

1. How do you predict that Anand will respond to Haru? (p. 267)
2. Do you think it was right of Anand not to eat the pakora? Does his action cause you to admire him more or less? (p. 269)
3. What do we learn here about Anand’s character? How does Anand’s mother (a supporting character) help us learn this about him? (p. 271)

The post-reading activities that are suggested after the presentation of the extract are also a potential resource for teaching values. They include questions that enable the students to further explore the narrative features (“What is the main problem [conflict] which Anand faces in this story? Is it internal or external?”), infer about the main character (“Copy the table below onto a piece of paper. Write down inferences about Anand in the first column. In the second column, write down the con-

textual information from the text which helps you make that inference.”), examine linguistic features that make the story come to life (“Fill in a sensory chart...based on the details found in the first three paragraphs of the story.”), generate the theme of the story, and imagine a story based on specific details of the extract (“Reread the story for important details and write a short story, which makes Anand’s father the main character instead. Imagine why he has gone missing [you may give him the name Vignesh].”). These activities directly encourage students to review previous lessons on making inferences and writing narratives. It enables them to synthesize previous insights in order to carry out the suggested tasks. Allowing the students to deepen their understanding of the extract from Divakaruni’s *The Conch Bearer* through the post-reading activities potentially reinforces their appreciation of judgment on the characters’ behaviors.

5 Analysis of a Text-in-Focus: News Report from *The Straits Times*

Values such as unity, solidarity, empathy, law-abidingness, gratitude, and endurance are evident in the news report *Runners hit the street to support ex-offenders* used as a sample text in a secondary 2 English textbook. As in the case of the sample extract from a work of fiction, the news report is used to illustrate the features of the target genre. In the following analysis, we do not just focus on the descriptions in the text that suggest a particular judgment and affect; we also take into consideration the textbook writers’ comments on the organizational structure and language features of the *Text in Focus* as well as the visual/ pictorial representations used to complement or accentuate the text.

The sample text *Runners hit the street to support ex-offenders* reports on the *Yellow Ribbon Prison Run* participated by about 7600 people in support of the *message of acceptance and reintegration of former offenders*. Easily, the report implies the significance to the Singaporean society of such values as unity, solidarity, law-abidingness, gratitude, and endurance. These values are highly significant in that they are consistent with the government’s vision of Singapore as a *Renaissance City* or a distinctive global city that is both a “vibrant magnet for international talent” and the “best home for an inclusive and cohesive population” (Renaissance City Plan III 2008, p. 17).

The sample text’s lead or opening paragraph, shown below, underscores the value of solidarity by foregrounding the participation of hundreds of people in spite of the morning rain. The author specifically used the expression *braved yesterday morning’s rain* to suggest this.

About 7,600 people braved yesterday’s morning rain to take part in the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run, in support of the message of acceptance and reintegration of former offenders.

The lead is then followed by a recounting of a case of a former offender who participated in the event, the gravity of his past offenses and how he has reintegrated himself back into mainstream society. This particular recounting illustrates how an offender *puts his life back together* and provides justification for the *Yellow Ribbon Prison Run*. A direct speech from the former offender is also included, and this contains the former offender's explanation for his participation in the run. In his utterance, he communicates his sense of gratitude to those who helped him while he was in prison. As the report unfolds, more details are given about the run: when it was first mounted, what types of run were available to participants, the specific outcomes of the run, highlights of the event and the involvement of government officials and specific individuals who are non-offenders.

These details are important in that they establish the sustainability of the initiative ("The run, into its second year..."), its viability or practicability ("The event raised about \$110,000 through registration fees and donations...which finances rehabilitation, reintegration and family support programmes for former offenders") as well as its credibility ("Law Minister and Second Minister for Home Affairs...flagged off the run"). The sustainability, viability and credibility of the initiative are important values themselves as they rationalize the conduct of the activity.

Marginal comments from the textbook authors describe the organizational structure and language features of the sample text. These comments are placed in colored boxes located on the left and right margins of the text in focus. The comments, though meant to primarily describe the linguistic and organizational features of the text, are themselves indicative of values that student-readers ought to develop when writing a news report. These values, though not necessarily related to the values suggested in the sample text, are significant in that they highlight specific sample text values and direct the student-readers attention on these other values. For instance, the authors' commentary on the body paragraph below foregrounds the necessity of including details to add *credibility* to the report:

The body paragraphs provide details about the event. Quotes from the people involved are included to add interest and credibility to the report.

Beyond that, however, the comment brings the student-readers attention to specific direct quotes, explanations, and reported speeches in the sample text that as mentioned earlier communicate specific values. Surely, the comments on the organizational structure and language features of the sample text are meant to suggest how students may be able to write a specific genre and adhere to certain principles or conventions of writing, but they are not supposed to be necessarily taken as neutral or detached from the text in focus. Their configuration with the sample text in the course material develops a meaning potential that, when tapped in the classroom environment or teaching-learning situation, serves as a resource for values education.

In terms of graphics, there are three stretches of expressions that are color highlighted in the sample text—a visual strategy that is meant to draw the attention of the reader to a specific linguistic or organizational feature of the text. The highlighted stretches of expressions include the lead (cited earlier), a body paragraph,

and the concluding paragraph. Interestingly, these highlighted parts of the text—the lead, a body paragraph, and the concluding paragraph—foreground values that are consistent with the Singapore’s notion of an inclusive and cohesive society. As discussed earlier, the lead uses expressions that suggest solidarity and a sense of community that is considered important in maintaining harmony in a culturally diverse society like Singapore.

The highlighted body paragraph is a reported speech of the vice-chairman of the run’s organizing committee. The reported speech is an interesting take on the run as it explicitly tells the symbolic value of the *hilly stretches* incorporated in the run: they are *difficulties former offenders face when they decide to turn over a new leaf and rejoin society*. The expressions suggest that the participants are directed to empathize with the former offenders’ struggle to reintegrate themselves in Singaporean society. Clearly, empathy is another value that serves well in developing social cohesiveness.

Empathy through an expression of moral support is reinforced by the highlighted conclusion, which is a direct speech from one of the participants, described in the earlier paragraph as a 44-year old full time athlete that “ran the 6 km route even though he was observing the Ramadan fast because he felt for the cause.” That the participant “felt for the cause” instantiates a sense of empathy and may potentially persuade readers to acknowledge the necessity of supporting former offenders who have decided to rejoin the mainstream society.

The analysis demonstrates that the three components of a specific item in a lesson of an English language textbook configure to highlight or foreground certain values that, in this case, are consistent with the values upheld in the Singaporean society. This suggests that English language textbooks serve as potential resources for values education.

6 Textually Constructed Values and Their Implicit Realization in the Singapore Classroom

Notwithstanding the two sample texts’ obvious differences, they share certain features that may probably be said of other sample texts in the secondary school English language resource books. They both evoke certain values that may be considered highly regarded in the context of Singapore. Putting premium on education, fairness in the treatment of workers, social harmony, solidarity, and inclusiveness are some of the values considered significant in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society such as Singapore. Moreover, what the analysis of the two sample texts of different genres suggests is that their reading can potentially generate a certain disposition among their intended readers—students and teachers included. It goes without saying that such disposition is made possible in the classroom—the site where negotiation of meanings takes place.

The analysis of the texts suggests at least three points that reaffirm and substantiate earlier studies on morality and values education in ELT. Firstly, ELT necessarily has a moral dimension (Johnston and Buzzelli 2007), and this may be evident in the instructional materials used by both students and teachers. The importance of these values may not necessarily be explicitly stated in the instructional materials, but that they can actually be evoked and potentially discussed in the classroom reinforces the idea that ELT is not value-free.

Secondly, the use of English language textbooks as potential resources for values education channels the three perspectives on localization of materials expressed by Dat (2003). By potentially generating a certain disposition among intended readers—a disposition that is hinged on values that surface and are given attention from reading the texts—the instructional materials help link language study to the present receptivity of the students, enable learners to express their identity through a reflection on the significance of such values, and inspire the learners to develop affective involvement.

Finally, the values that can be generated from ELT materials potentially channel those that are emphasized in the civic and moral education programme espoused by the national school system (Chew 1998; Tan 1994). The relationship between ELT and moral education may be one of complementarity in that the former potentially reinforces or bolsters the latter. How exactly are these values realized in the classroom if they are realized at all? To find out more about how the values textually constructed in the resource materials are realized in the English language classroom in Singapore, we interviewed two textbook developers who have had considerable experience teaching in secondary schools in Singapore. The interview with the two ELT textbook writers was conducted on 10 December 2012 at the Director's Office of the Centre for English Language Communication at the National University of Singapore. In the course of the interview, we note that both interviewees would reaffirm each other's ideas and share very similar opinions on the relationship between English language teaching and values education. We deem it unnecessary to distinguish one from the other in the discussion below.

Both interviewees are careful to point out that English language teachers in secondary schools are "*not* values education teachers" (emphasis added). The statement from the two textbook developers appears not in consonance with the official rhetoric on teachers as "purveyors of values" noted by Chew (1998, p. 516); however, they concede that ELT materials writers and teachers "take a more implicit role" in enabling students to develop certain values. This implicit role is an observation that they share with Johnston et al. (1998) who point to the role of the ESL teacher as a moral agent. In that regard, the moral dimension of ELT via course materials cannot be overemphasized.

While the implicit role of the teacher as a moral agent cannot be denied, the interviewees maintain that in developing materials for English language in secondary schools, textbook writers primarily focus on language skills and language purposes. They add that this approach takes "a meta-cognitive perspective," which emphasizes how the writer's craft is accomplished through her work or writing. This perspective, the interviewees point out, allows students to do text analysis and learn

how the use of certain words or expressions can have impact on the reader. It basically encourages students “to think about their thinking.”

Since the primary emphasis in materials development is placed on the linguistic features of texts (English language syllabus 2010) and their potential impact on readers, textbook writers, according to the interviewees, are cautious in avoiding “explicit discussion of values, lifestyle options, social taboos, potentially divisive topics like religion and race, and sensitive interpersonal issues like cyber-bullying and gambling” in developing textbooks meant for students. These are issues that students taking an English language class may be experiencing, but that English language teachers may not be prepared to discuss. The interviewees emphasize “We take extra care in avoiding cases where teachers are put on the spot.”

Needless to say, the option to discuss values in the English language classroom primarily rests on the teacher as she is in direct contact with the students.² This option is, however, treated with caution and guardedness in the Singapore context. As one of our interviewees says, “As English teachers, we make sure that values education is *not done directly and made not explicit at all.*” Notwithstanding such sentiment, the implicitness of the teacher’s role in values education in the English language classroom echoes the position of language education scholars who underscore the moral dimension of ELT (cf. Johnston and Buzzeli 2007; Johnston et al. 1998).

Even our interviewees concede that English language teachers do have a lot of room to discuss values as the subject lends itself to values education. They admit that values become apparent in the class discussion, and in fact, certain conditions optimize the effectiveness of values education in the English language classroom. These factors include (1) openness of the students to discuss certain issues and (2) a comfort level that is achieved when there is trust between teachers and students. Only when there is openness and trust in the classroom—which may be translated into rapport between and among teachers and students—would values education in the teaching of English flourish.

7 Practical Directions for Language Materials Development

In suggesting practical directions for the development of language materials in Singapore, we encourage language materials developers to read carefully the English Language Syllabus prescribed by the Ministry of Education. Developed by the Curriculum Planning and Development Division of the MOE, the EL Syllabus 2010 offers a detailed account of the guiding principles, areas of language learning and the role of the language teacher in English language education in Singapore’s basic education curriculum. The syllabus, we believe, offers language materials developers much needed guidance in designing culturally sensitive and values-oriented materials for English language modules in primary as well as secondary schools.

The articulation of the underlying philosophy of language learning in the EL Syllabus 2010 already reflects the inevitability of values and moral education in the teaching of English language in basic education. The following are the assumptions and beliefs about language and language learning expressed in the syllabus:

- Language is a means of making meaning and of communication
- Language is a system with its own rules and conventions which can be used to create various discourse forms or types of texts
- Language learning involves cognitive and *affective engagement*, and interaction
- Language use is *guided by our awareness of the purpose, audience, context and culture* in which the communication takes place
- Learning English in a multilingual context is different from learning it in a monolingual or near-native context (EL Syllabus 2010, p. 8, emphasis added).

The recognition that language learning involves “affective engagement” and that language use is “guided by our awareness of the purpose, audience, context and culture in which the communication takes place” already suggests that values and morality are embedded in the teaching and learning of the English language. The idea that English is part of the “non-cultural curriculum” may no longer hold as the cultural contextual factors need to be considered when learners are taught to develop their receptive (listening, reading, viewing) and productive (speaking, writing, representing) skills as well as their knowledge about language (grammar and vocabulary). In fact, one of the principles of English language teaching and learning emphasized in the syllabus is “contextualization” which means, “learning tasks and activities will be designed for pupils to learn the language in authentic and meaningful contexts of use” (p. 11).

We believe that language materials developers need to be cognizant of these underlying beliefs and principles as they necessarily inform the selection of “a variety of print and non-print resources that provides authentic contexts for incorporating the development of information, media and visual literacy skills in the teaching of listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing, and representing” (p. 9). Moreover, these underlying beliefs and principles need to be resurfaced in the rationale of the instructional materials to remind teachers of their mandate and to ensure that there is congruence between what is practiced in the classroom and what is upheld across the curriculum.

On a more practical level, we encourage the use of materials from other cultural contexts such as Divakaruni’s *The Conch Bearer* to expose students to perspectives and values that may be different from theirs. Texts like that of Divakaruni enable students to reaffirm the values that they share with the characters and at the same time allow them to rethink values that they hold important as they begin to empathize with the characters. Materials from other cultural contexts also prepare students “to engage with the wider and more diverse communities outside of Singapore” (English Syllabus 2010, p. 6). Exposure to these materials that reflect different cultural values is undoubtedly important in a world that is increasingly becoming borderless and at the same time experiencing tension between those who benefit and those who suffer from the impact of globalization.

Materials taken from local newspapers like *The Straits Times* are also good choices for learning language “in authentic and meaningful contexts of use.” Not only do they highlight the values that society puts premium on, but they also enable students to examine more closely why they matter. If the students show more openness to discuss issues arising from the texts and if a certain comfort level on the part of both teacher and students is achieved, the classroom discussion can move on to examine why certain values are adhered to in a particular social context and to discuss why they matter to some people or not to others. The text under analysis may be juxtaposed with alternative texts (print and non-print) that delve on a similar topic or theme but preferably from another time frame or cultural context. It might be useful and productive to select materials that espouse dominant values in society and those that tend to question or challenge such values. The controversy that this potentially invites may be seen as an opportunity to practice students’ English language communication skills as students are encouraged to discuss, debate, take positions, reflect and write about what they think and feel about these values, and reconsider alternative ideas and possibilities. If facilitated well, the discussion may lead to cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity to the perspective of others, values that are necessary in the resolution of disputes and in fostering solidarity within and among communities.

Needless to say, materials should suggest ways for teachers to facilitate discussion of texts that invite affective engagement and that reaffirm or challenge existing values. As language teachers face the inevitable task of getting engaged in values education, it is to their best interest that they come to their classes prepared and equipped to take on the task. A useful and productive way of facilitating discussion of value-laden texts would be to adopt John Dewey’s reflective thinking method. In adopting Dewey’s reflective thinking method, the teacher may encourage students to formulate a problem based on the selected texts under investigation, define and delimit the scope of the problem, analyze the problem based on features of the texts and students prior knowledge, formulate standards through which solutions to the problem may be examined, formulate alternative solutions, discuss the merits of these solutions based on the standards set, and decide on the best solution to the problem. The method offers a systematic approach to dealing with problems of values and at the same time develops students to become critical and reflective participants in group communication situations.

8 Conclusion

One of the implications of this study is that the inextricable link between language, culture, and texts means that one cannot teach texts without impinging on culture and values. To engage with text is to engage with these matters (Fairclough 2003). More important to note here is the use of such an engagement to generate students’ views on pertinent values and to adopt an ‘expressive’ and not prescriptive stance in alignment with the stance adopted in the teaching of the language element.

Notwithstanding the implicit role of the English language materials developers and teachers in values education, it remains clear that the ELT practice in Singapore participates in the students' values formation. English language teachers are, to borrow the term from Johnston et al. (1998), moral agents. As moral agents, they carry the responsibility of using instructional materials to complement or emphasize what is taught in civic and moral education classes.

English language teachers in the Singapore context can exercise their option to discuss value-related topics especially when conditions such as openness and trust are present in the teaching-learning situation. Only with such conditions would it be possible for teachers to examine more closely the meaning potential of texts and perhaps discuss with greater audacity the values that surface from the narratives used as sample texts in the English language resource books. An open and trust-driven classroom would also enable teachers and students to interrogate these values further to ensure their relevance and appropriateness to the society in which they are supposedly practiced.

Even the use of the meta-cognitive approach in the teaching of English in the Singapore secondary school classroom is already an enactment of values education in ELT practice. That students are encouraged "to think about their thinking" suggests the need to develop among our students the values of reflexivity, audience sensitivity, and careful and judicious use of language in various communicative contexts. These are values that students of English arguably need not just to become the articulate and well-rounded individuals that we envision them to be, but also to adjust accordingly to the complexities of human relations and to see through the lens of the intended recipients of their well-crafted messages.

Finally, we would like to point out that while the textbook can serve as a veritable resource for reaffirming certain ideologies or ways of thinking about or viewing Singapore society and the world, the textbook remains just that—a resource. It definitely has meaning potentials—and these potentials when activated may be good for the society or actually dangerous—but it is the teacher working closely with her or his students that has the power to activate them. The teacher then has to be conscious of these meaning potentials and should exercise due care when seeking to critically engage them together with her or his students so that the values are not merely imposed but are realized in their proper contexts.

9 Notes

1. We believe that the textbooks, being shared by both students and teachers, serve as the primary materials for English language teaching in the secondary schools. We note that the teaching resource package (TRP), which provides teachers possibilities for emphasizing certain social values remains optional for the teachers. Teachers may or may not use the TRP for teaching. But the textbooks, being primary resources, compel the teacher to explore texts that may potentially serve as sites for values education.

2. Textbook writers provide English teachers options to discuss values-related topics should the teachers feel adequate to do so. These options can be found in the teaching resource package (TRP) that includes additional worksheets, rubrics, games, and other materials that would supplement actual textbooks. The TRP also includes teacher's guides with sidebar features that dwell on social emotional learning (personal grooming, supporting causes and helping communities), National Education moments (love of country, unique features of Singapore and its multicultural facets) and cyber-wellness (what websites to avoid and how to evaluate websites' credibility) among others. Teachers may or may not use these sidebar features. If a teacher opts to just focus on language skills development, that should be deemed sufficient.

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