Schools and the development of national identity in young children:

A justification for comparison

Traditional nation-states that base their membership on stories of ancestry and blood have boundaries that are usually less porous than those of constitutional democracies that base membership on the acceptance of certain institutions ad practices. And because there is no single and easy test of identity, constitutional democracies that embrace people from many different cultural groups need practices that reproduce their national identities… the common school has been the most important instrument for doing this.
- Walter Feinberg, Common Schools/ Uncommon Identities

I. *Introduction and brief overview of my dissertation*

Citizenship education has historically been, in some shape or form, an overarching goal of public schooling in every society. In multicultural societies, however, this becomes even more of an imperative. Unlike ethnically homogenous societies where a shared genealogical lineage provides a common national anchor, multicultural societies typically rely on what Michael Ignatieff terms "civic nationalism" where national identity is based on the commitment to a set of common institutions and political rights.[1] As such, school systems in these societies become even more important, bearing the mantle of bring together children from different backgrounds by developing this commitment.

Amid the current unprecedented global transmigration, the nationalization process of individuals has come into sharp focus, and subsequently, so has this role of the school. Many countries are becoming increasingly multicultural and are wrestling with the tension between ethnic autonomy and national cohesion. By comparing two multicultural societies, Singapore and the United States, my dissertation seeks to understand how schools have been tasked to bring together children from different backgrounds through a commitment to a shared national identity, and the ways in which children in two countries develop an attachment to the nation. In

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[1] Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys Into the New Nationalism* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1993).

this paper, I justify why a comparative study is important in light of my research focus, and make the argument that understanding how two distinct societies engage schools in the process of national identity development will contribute to a broader understanding of how multicultural nations respond similarly or differently to the critical challenges of a rapidly evolving global demography.

The theoretical framework for my dissertation draws on scholarship in three fields: i) the "new" sociology of childhood in childhood studies, ii) the discursive nature of national identity development in political science, and iii) the nationalizing function of schools in education. First, the fairly recent sociological perspective for studying children considers children as active participants in a variety of social scenarios. These theories contend that children should not be seen as passive receptors of adult instruction but as active agents who effectively negotiate with and evaluate their social world.

Second, this validation of children's individual agency in their identity formation aligns tightly with emerging research in political science that argues for the discursive nature of national identity formation. This paradigm contends that national identity is a narrative we construct to make sense of who we are and therefore not completely stable or immutable; it is a fluid construction generated and expressed differently by different individuals in various contexts.

Third, we know that schools have always been charged with- among other things- producing good citizens. What is more controversial, however, is what citizenship and national identity represent in a multicultural society, and the obligations of the public school in this regard. Recent scholarship has highlighted the debate about whether it is possible- or even

desirable- for schools to advance a single common national identity in the face of a society that is becoming increasingly multicultural.

For the purposes of this paper, the last two paradigms are particularly important. As a consequence of the contextual nature of identity construction, I argue for the need to situate my study in two different countries in order to investigate the extent to which culture plays a special and specific role in identity construction. This becomes even more pertinent when we consider that school systems themselves are a reflection and product of the culture and context of each nation. Notions of citizenship and identity necessarily vary across countries, and if schools are tasked with promulgating these ideas through citizenship education, it is vital that we take into account the unique historical, cultural, political and social traditions of each society, and how these traditions may produce similar or differential patterns of national identifications. This is underlined in a number of comparative studies on citizenship, civics, and education for democracy.[2]

II.　*Some definitions*

First, it is important that we clarify the terms, "national identity", "nationalism", "patriotism", "citizenship education" and "civic education". This not only has implications for a general understanding of how each of these terms relate to individual citizens, but more importantly for this paper, it is important for how we view the role of the schools in the process of promoting national identity.

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[2] JudithTorney-Purta, John Schwille, and Jo-Ann Amadeo, *Civic Education across Countries: Twenty-four National Case Studies from the IEA Civic Education Project* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: IEA Secretariat, 1999).

National Identity, nationalism and patriotism

In his seminal work, *National Identity*, Anthony Smith explicitly lists the fundamental features of national identity as: possessing a historic territory, or homeland; the existence of common myths and historical memories; a common mass public culture; common legal rights and duties for all members; and a common economy with territorial mobility for members.[3] In other words, national identity is a way of relating to the nation; it is a feeling of inextricably- and on different dimensions- being a part of this larger entity. National identity, then, is primarily a *sense of attachment*. As Eley and Suny remind us, national identity/identification is a matter of "sensibility":

> …something transmitted from the past and secured as a collective belonging, something reproduced in myriad imperceptible ways, grounded in everydayness and mundane experience… A common memory of belonging, borne by habits, customs, dialects, song, dance, pastimes, shared geography, superstition, and so on, but also fears, anxieties, antipathies, hurts, resentments, is the indistinct but indispensable condition of possibility.[4]

With regards to nationalism and patriotism on the other hand, in her article on the child's position in discourse about the nation in Norway, Marianne Gullestad notes, "While national identity refers to a sense of belonging to a national community, nationalism refers to ideologies maintaining and defending the existence of a nation, above all its right to self-determination."[5] Although this paper does not seek to raise a debate about nationalism and its incarnations, for the

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[3] Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 14.

[4] Geoff Eley and Ronal Grigor Suny, eds., *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 22.

[5] Marianne Gullestad, "A Passion for Boundaries: Reflections on Connections Between the Everyday Lives of Children and Discourses on the Nation in Contemporary Norway," *Childhood* 4, no. 1 (1997): 23.

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sake of clarity, I wish to offer a brief clarification about the relationship between patriotism and nationalism. Writers have often not been particularly clear in their use of these terms and an explanation is necessary in light of concerns that an education for nationalism/patriotism may potentially promote xenophobia or chauvinism.

The overall consensus of historians and political scientists alike is that nationalism- as distinguished from national identity- suggests a motivating impulse towards achieving some kind of political legitimacy.[6] While national identity is about attachment as previously established, nationalism is about action. And what of patriotism? I propose that one could perhaps conceive of patriotism as the more affective component of nationalistic impulses. In other words, patriotism is an *aspect* of nationalism, as opposed to its polar opposite as some have argued.[7] There is some agreement on the meaning of patriotism as "a deeply felt affective attachment to the nation" or the "degree of love for and pride in one's nation."[8] In this way, patriotism is seen as a more *emotive* manifestation of national belonging, versus nationalism that is a more *ideological* one. Consequently, viewing the two terms this way, I contend that for schools, it is not as important to differentiate between the two terms; whether it is education for nationalism or education for patriotism, what is vital is that at the end of the day, in a bid to promote a thoughtful but devoted sense of national belonging, educators encourage and maintain an open and evaluative stance towards the nation. This will work against overzealous and potentially chauvinistic conceptions of national loyalty, and consequently facilitate purposeful classroom

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[6] See Smith, *National Identity*; David Archard, "Should We Teach Patriotism?" *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 18, no. 3 (1999): 157-173; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

[7] See Archard, "Should We Teach Patriotism?"; and Daniel Druckman, "Nationalism, Patriotism, and Group Loyalty: A Social Psychological Perspective," *Mershon International Studies Review* 38, no. 1 (1994): 43-68.

[8] Pamela J. Conover, and Stanley Feldman. "Memo to NES Board of Overseers Regarding 'Measuring Patriotism and Nationalism.'" 1987,1.
Rick Kosterman and Seymour Feshbach. "Toward a Measure of Patriotic and Nationalistic Attitudes," *Political Psychology* 10 no. 2 (1989): 257–74.

interrogation, evaluation, and ultimately comprehension of what it truly means to be a member of nation.

<u>Citizenship education vs. civic education</u>

The terms "citizenship education" and "civic education" have typically been used interchangeably to refer to aspects of the school curriculum- whether formal or informal- that prepare young people for their roles as citizens. However, I would like to propose that we consider these terms in a more nuanced manner and to think of them as distinct entities. I am not alone in proposing to draw a distinction between citizenship education and civic education. Referring to French educator and sociologist Emile Durkheim, Mark Holmes contends that the former used citizenship education "to refer to the anticipated moral and attitudinal outcomes rather than to the more objective knowledge and understanding of the democratic process."[9] More recently, Terence MacLaughlin has proposed to look at these terms separately. He sees civic education and citizenship education as a continuum from a minimal to a maximal interpretation.[10] Minimal interpretations are characterized by a narrow definition of citizenship and lead to more formal approaches with regards to education- what he terms civics education. This model is knowledge-based and primarily about the transmission of information about a country's history, geography, politics and systems of government. Maximal interpretations, according to MacLauglin, take a broader definition of citizenship, and this he terms citizenship education. It includes the content and knowledge components of civics education, but also encourages active interrogation and interpretation of this knowledge. The primary aim is not only to inform but also to use that information to enhance students' ability to actively participate in

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[9] Mark Holmes, "Education and Citizenship in an Age of Pluralism," in *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society,* ed. Diane Ravitch and Joseph Viteritti. (New York: Yale University Press, 2001),188.

[10] Terence H. McLaughlin, "Citizenship, Diversity and Education: A Philosophical Perspective," *Journal of Moral Education* 21, no. 3 (1992): 235- 251.

society.

My conceptualization of the two terms builds on McLaughin's insofar as I agree that civic education is just one component of citizenship education, specifically responsible for educating students about formal political processes such as describing the various branches of government, the importance of voting, and the process of legislation, etc. Similarly, I concur that citizenship education is the broader concept that goes beyond merely teaching and acquiring information about a country. However, what I argue is missing from MacLaughlin's model is an affective component, aspects of schooling that serve to develop an *emotional* attachment between the students and the nation. Here I draw on William Damon's work on moral education and citizenship that asserts:

> A positive emotional attachment to a particular community is a necessary condition for sustained civic engagement in that community. For full participatory citizenship in a democratic society, a student needs to develop a love for the particular society, including its historical legacy and cultural traditions.[11]
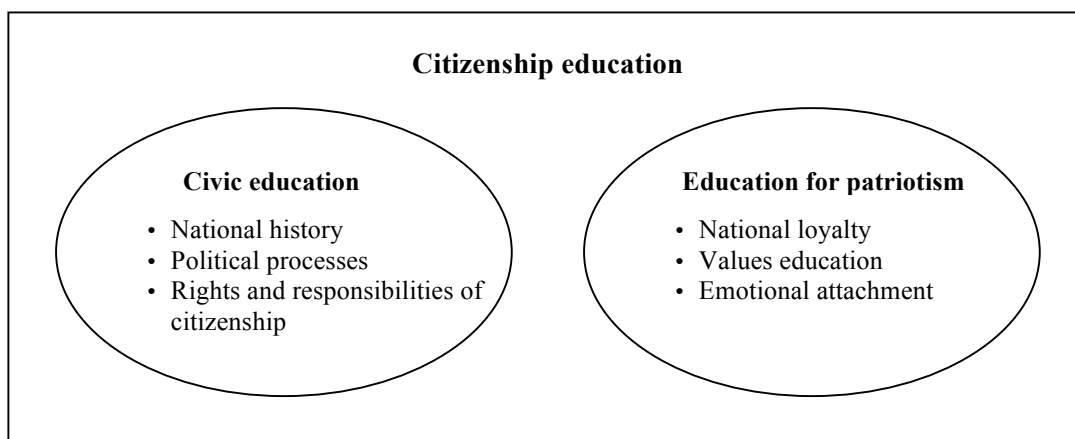
This emotive component is important particularly in light of discussions of national identity. Damon's position stems from his work on moral commitment and character formation which argues that consistent moral action requires commitment, and that commitment is vital to identity.[12] "People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then act as though they are who they say they are. These self-understandings, especially those with strong *emotional* resonance of the teller, are what we refer to as identities," (italics mine)

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[11] William Damon, "To Not Fade Away: Restoring Civil Identity Among the Young," in Ravitch and Vitteriti, *Good Citizens,* 135.

[12] William Damon and Anne Gregory, "The Youth Charter: Towards the Formation of Adolescent Moral Identity," *Journal of Moral Education* 26 (1997).

writes Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain.[13] As such, citizenship education, if it seeks to

develop national affiliation, civic engagement and participatory citizenship, must involve an

affective component, an *education for patriotism*[14] if you will. I contend that citizenship

education should encompass all aspects of schooling related to cultivating a relationship between

the student and the nation *including* civic education but also areas such as moral education,

service learning, and other informal aspects of school that serve to develop children's sense of

national identity and attachment to the nation. Its intention ought to be to promote in children

both an intellectual as well as emotional bond to their country.

Figure 1: Components of citizenship education

Citizenship education

Civic education

• National history
• Political processes
• Rights and responsibilities of citizenship

Education for patriotism

• National loyalty
• Values education
• Emotional attachment

Underlying these two components of citizenship education is a *manner* of teaching and learning.

It is not enough to say that citizenship education needs to promote both an intellectual

understanding and emotional commitment to the nation; it must be done in a way that steers clear

of indoctrination and whitewashing. In the words of Diane Ravitch,

> The extent to which we abhor or admire patriotism in the schools depends on how it is
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> taught. If we teach it narrowly as jingoistic, uncritical self-praise of the nation, then such

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[13] Dorothy Holland, William Lachiotte Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain. *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3.

[14] See above discussion on *patriotism*.

instruction is wrong. It would be indoctrination rather than education. If, however, we teach civic education and define patriotism as a respectful understanding and appreciation of the principles and practices of democratic self-government, then patriotism should be woven through the daily life and teachings of the public school.[15]

In other words, citizenship education must be conveyed thoughtfully, critically if necessary, allowing for active interpretation and interrogation. Only then can we say to have instilled in our students what Walter Feinberg terms "informed allegiance and a reasoned commitment."[16]

I belabor the discussion on citizenship education[17] and what I see as its two requisite facets- civic education and education for patriotism- as I will suggest in a later part of this paper that the school systems in the United States and Singapore emphasize these two components to different degrees. I demonstrate the extent to which this difference stems from the unique political and social background of each country and how it presents an interesting framework to then investigate the manner in which children from the two countries understand national identity.

III. National identity and citizenship education in multicultural societies: the importance of culture and comparison

One reason why a comparative study is compelling with regards to my research focus is the centrality of culture in the development of identity, national or otherwise. Synthesizing theoretical contributions by Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Bourdieu, Holland and her co-writers refer to

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[15] Joel Westheimer, ed., *Pledging Allegiance: The Politics of Patriotism in America's Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007): 92.

[16] Walter Feinberg, *Common Schools/uncommon Identities: National Unity and Cultural Difference* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998):156.

[17] Subsequent use of the terms *citizenship education, civic education* and *education for patriotism* in this paper will be based on this conceptualization.

the identity-formation process as not static but constantly shifting and evolving; for them, identity is culturally constituted and very much an interaction between the self and the cultural resources at hand: "Identity is a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations."[18] Culture in this case takes many forms- ethnicity, gender, minority status, nationality, etc. A comparative study will allow me to investigate the extent to which children's patterns of national identifications may cut across these different lines; for example, do minority children in each country- whether racial, ethnic or religious- respond differentially to the nationalizing project of the school, i.e. are minority children in the U.S. more likely to be similar to other American children in terms of how they identify with the country, or are they more similar to minority children in Singapore? In other words, is there something about inhabiting the culture of a minority group- across nations- that influences your process of national identity formation compared to children in the majority group?

This argument is bolstered by some empirical evidence from both comparative and non-comparative studies which suggest that national identifications do align along such cultural lines. In their study of national identity formation in middle childhood in Wales, Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford and Davies demonstrate the extent to which national identity formation can sometimes be a gendered process where girls identify with the nation in ways that are distinct from boys.[19] In his comparative study of Turkish, German and British children, Heinz Hengst focuses on the dynamic construction of national identity and the culture of "childhood" in particular. He suggests that while there were differences between the national groups in relation to the importance they assigned to national identity, there was interesting and unexpected evidence of

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[18] Holland et al. *Identity and Agency*, 5.

[19] Jonathan Scourfield, Bella Dicks, Mark Drakeford, and Andrew Davies, *Children, Place and Identity: Nation and locality in middle childhood* (London: Routledge, 2006).

another alignment, where children, in many cases, saw themselves as more similar to other children across nationalities than to adults who shared their nationality.[20]

Feinberg provides even further support for the necessity of examining identity development across cultural contexts:

> Culture is implicated in self-development because the "I" is implicated in the "we." The "I" is always formed in the context of the "we," and it is the "we" that provides the ideas of identity and attachment that constitute the "I." Culture as a system of meaning provides the material through which self-recognition occurs.[21]

Whether the "we" are other minority children, other girls, or other fellow citizens, acknowledging the various potentialities of national identification will allow me a richer understanding of the patterns in which children 1) identify with the nation; and 2) experience the nationalizing project of the school.

IV. The context of citizenship education in the United States and Singapore

Schools are often products of a country's sociopolitical context and are frequently shaped to fulfill or respond to specific societal needs. In a review of the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Archive (INCA) and other literature on citizenship education across 16 countries, David Kerr identified five main contextual factors that influence the definition of and approaches to citizenship education: historical tradition, geographical position, socio-political structure, economic system, and global trends.[22] For Singapore and the United States, it came down to one year: 1965. The year was a watershed for the two countries;

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[20] Heinz Hengst, "Negotiating `us' and `Them': Children's Constructions of Collective Identity," *Childhood* 4, no. 1 (1997): 43-62.

[21] Feinberg, *Common Schools/ Uncommon Identities*, 64.

[22] David Kerr, "Citizenship Education: An International Perspective," in *Education for Citizenship,* ed. Denis Lawton, Jo Cairns, Roy Gardner (London: Continuum, 2005): 4.

although separated by fourteen time zones and two oceans, that year, they both individually experienced events that would profoundly change not only the social and political fabric of the nation, but also redefine the role of their school systems.

Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965

Sometimes known as The Law That Changed the Face of America, the 1965 Immigration Bill passed by President Lyndon B. Johnson had far more sweeping consequences than was ever envisioned. "This bill that we will sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions," Johnson said at the signing ceremony, symbolically held at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. "It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives or add importantly to either our wealth or our power."[23] Initially conceived as a small immigration bill aimed to merely reunite families, Johnson mistakenly believed that the law would have little practical consequences. In reality, this law opened the floodgates to millions of new immigrants. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 represented a marked shift in policy. It eradicated the national origins system replacing it with selection criteria focusing on family reunification and desired occupational skills. For the first time in United States history, immigrants were allowed to enter the country without regard to national or racial origin. As a result, not only has the annual volume of immigration since increased steadily to the current level of a million more arrivals a year, but as has been noted, the major increases in immigration rates are from Asia and Latin America.[24]

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[23] Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965. Volume II, entry 546 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1966): 1037-1040.

[24] J. S. Passel and B. Edmonston. *Immigration and race in the United States: The 20th and 21st centuries* (PRIP-UI-22) (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 1992).

Rudolph Vecoli questions the extent to which this wave of immigration would redefine American national identity and notes how the definition of an American identity has been stretched again and again to accommodate new peoples.[25] And how has this been possible? It lies largely with the institution of the American public school. For many of the nation's schools, the altering immigration patterns resulting from that dramatic change in immigration policy has meant not only an increase in the size of their student bodies, but also represent an enduring shift in the demographic composition of their school communities.[26] As a result, till today, schools continue to tackle the challenge of teaching an increasingly diverse student body and dealing with the accompanying issues of how to educate them in a way that will help them grow into active participatory citizens in a democracy governed by a core set of shared values. Although not referring to immigration in particular, it is important to quote at length here a passage from the Introduction of Susan Fuhrmann and Marvin Lazerson's impressive collection of essays on the American public school. It highlights the traditional role undertaken by schools in not only national identity formation in general, but more specifically, identity formation in a historically multicultural nation. It provides compelling support for my argument in this section that it is impossible to divorce the institution of schooling from that of the nation from whence it originates:

> The United States, as one of the first nations consciously "created," has sustained an enduring obsession with issues of national identity… The history of citizenship in the United States has been closely intertwined with the history of education. Americans have looked to schools to foster individuals' identifications with the nation. They have

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[25] Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Significance of Immigration in the Formation of an American Identity," *The History Teacher* 30, no. 1 (1992): 9-27.

[26] A. Reynaldo Contreas, "The Impact of Immigration Policy on Education Reform: Implications for the New Millennium," *Education and Urban Society* 34, no. 2 (2002): 134-155.

expected schools to prepare future citizens, nurturing in children loyalty and common values and forging from them a strong national character. Thus, as key aspects of citizenship have been defined and redefined, expectations of schools have changed as well… The changing population of schools- what groups were included in schools and how they were treated there- has closely tracked the relative status of groups within the nation. Political values dominant at various periods in the country's history have strongly influenced what children learn about their country and their own role in its future. Educators, by embracing the expectations that one of school's primary responsibilities is the preparation of future citizens, have ensured that schools have both reflected and helped shape the ongoing debates about the boundaries and meanings of citizenship.[27]

Singapore's Independence: 1965

In August 1965, barely two months before President Johnson had signed the bill that would forever change the face of the American population, across the world in a small island just off the equator in Southeast Asia, Singapore was experiencing an even more profound upheaval of her sociopolitical structure. She suddenly and against her will, had become an independent state. Singapore was a state born, "despite itself, in crisis and trauma,"[28] unexpectedly an independent city-state with a national infrastructure but a state without a nation and without national identity. Granted limited self-government by the British in 1959, Singapore was led by a party, the People's Action Party (PAP) whose longstanding objective was federal union with Singapore's northern neighbor, Malaysia. In 1963, she was duly admitted into the Malayan Federation, but was unceremoniously expelled two years later due to political acrimony and racial strife. It was now given full independence and the Singaporean government suddenly

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[27] Susan Fuhrmann and Marvin Lazerson, ed., *The Public Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005),1-2.
[28] Andy Green, *Education, Globalization and the Nation State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 144.

found itself leading a country of multiple nationalities[29], languages and creeds amidst an anxiety of whether it would be able to survive politically as an independent state on its own. It was under these unfortunate circumstances that the Singapore state set about constructing itself a nation, and nation building became a matter of political survival. Education was central to this task.

The education system in Singapore was to have two major tasks in the immediate wake of independence: politically, it was to construct a unified nation from the ethnically divided populace; economically, it was to provide a stock base of basic education, skills and attitudes required for industrialization.[30] This is characteristic of the developmental state where education serves the process of economic development, state formation and nation building[31] and is commonly found in Asia. Subsequently, the PAP initiated a centralized school system in 1973 through policies of integrated schools, bilingualism and meritocracy.[32] Since then, the Singapore school system has become highly centralized, tightly controlled, and designed to "be responsive to perceived social and national needs."[33]

In a developmental states such as Singapore, education as an instrument is fundamental and powerful because it straddles both the cultural-symbolic and civic-instrumental dimensions of nation building.[34] For the purposes of my research, I highlight the role of the Singapore school

[29] Singapore's population has traditionally been- and continues to be- made up of three major ethnic groups: the indigenous Malays, and Chinese (the ethnic majority presently) and Indians whose forefathers migrated from China and India throughout the early 20th century during Singapore's growth into a regional trading epicenter.

[30] Leslie Sharpe and S. Gopinathan, "After Effectiveness: New Directions in the Singapore System?" *Journal of Education Policy* 17, no. 2 (2002): 151-166.

[31] Green, *Education, Globalization and the Nation State;* Aaron Koh, "Towards a Critical Pedagogy: Creating "thinking schools" in Singapore," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002).

[32] For details, see M. Hussin, "Singapore's Quest for a National Identity: The Triumphs and Trials of Government Policies" in *Imagining Singapore*, ed. K. C. Ban, A. Pakir and C. K. Tong (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992); and S. Gopinathan, Educational Development in a Strong State: The Singapore Experience. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Newcastle, Australia.

[33] Jasmine Boon-Yee Sim and Murray Print, "Citizenship Education and Social Studies in Singapore: A National Agenda," *International Journal of Citizenship and Teacher Education* 1, no.1 (2005): 60.

[34] M. Hill and K. F. Hong, *The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore* (New York: Routledge: 1995).

system in developing in a diverse population the attitudes and motivations necessary for collective commitment to the common goal of national development. In this regard, education has been harnessed to transform a generation into sharing a common destiny. According to Sim and Print, it is from this perspective that the relationship between education, nation building and citizenship should be understood in Singapore.[35]

Another common challenge

What the brief contextual history of Singapore and the U.S. has shown is how 1965 marked a turning point in the political and educational histories of both countries. As nations, newly independent or otherwise, they were confronted with a populace that would only grow more diverse in the years to come, and shaping a common national identity became of utmost concern. Tasking schools with the responsibility to bring together a multicultural population of students was- and continues to be- a constant challenge that the two countries share.

Over the last decade or so, on top of the omnipresent concern about how to build a shared identity in a multicultural student population, there has been a great deal of public debate in both countries about the disengagement of young people from civic participation and the lack of cultural mooring and national identity. In the United States, this is related to falling voting rates and a perceived lack of knowledge about civic processes, while in Singapore, the anxiety is over globalization and how it has allegedly destabilized local culture, values and identity. Accordingly, this has implications on what schools should- or should not be- teaching, and what they can do to ameliorate this apparent lack of civic and national commitment.

Robert Putnam's famous argument about Americans increasingly 'bowling alone'[36]

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[35] Sim and Print, "Citizenship Education and Social Studies."

[36] Robert Putnam, "Community-Based Social Capital and Educational Performance", in Ravitch and Vitteriti, *Good Citizens*.

reflects wide concern about the state of America's civic culture, especially in reference to young people. In recent years, a chorus of critics and educators has expressed alarm over the retreat of young people from politics and public affairs in the U.S. and the consequent disconnect from a sense of shared dedication to the nation. As William Galston from the University of Maryland pointed out in the *Annual Review of Political Science*[37]:

> [While] anxiety about the civic engagement of young adults is nothing new … there are also disturbing trends over time. If we compare generations rather than cohorts—that is, if we compare today's young adults not with today's older adults but with the young adults of the past—we find evidence of diminished civic attachment.

In 2000, only 26 percent of freshmen voiced the belief that keeping up with politics is important, compared with 58 percent in 1966. Only 14 percent say they regularly discuss politics—down from 30 percent.[38] Similarly, a Pew Research Centre poll of voters in their late teens and twenties found that fewer than half were thinking 'a great deal' about the elections in 2000, compared to two thirds in 1992. Four in ten believed that it does not matter who is president, twice as many as in 1992.[39] Specifically with regards to the decline of civil and national identity in American youth, Damon alludes to a recent Department of Education assessment which showed that only 9 percent of U.S. high school students were able to cite two reasons why it is important for citizens to participate in a democracy, and only 6 percent could identify two reasons why having a constitution benefits a country.[40]

Although these data are not related specifically to national identity per se, I argue that in the U.S., involvement in the civic processes of a constitutional democracy is a large aspect of

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[37] William Galston, "Political Knowledge, Political Engagement and Civic Education," *American Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 217–234.
[38] Ibid.
[39] National Alliance for Civic Education, available at: www.puaf.umd.edu/NACE
[40] "35% of High School Seniors Fail National Civics Test," New York Times, November 21, 1999.

national identity.[41] More importantly, I highlight this public anxiety because it explains to a large degree the increasing pressures on schools to cultivate "good" citizenship and to work harder in order to ensure social and national cohesion. Just as it has been even since the founding of America, the public school is being called on to be the panacea of all social ills, be it exponential immigration or declining test scores in Civics and Government. Says Mark Holmes in his critique on the public school and its ability to provide moral education in a pluralist society, "If the school is to contribute to the reconstruction of social order, to a better and stronger sense of citizenship, then both the content of good citizenship and the mechanisms by which it can be promoted must be established…"[42]

This public concern over young people's commitment to their nation is not America's alone. In Singapore, a similar unease has been apparent. Current government rhetoric in the media is directed at "Generation M", a term used by former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong to describe the younger generation of Singapore as the generation of the millennium. This generation was born into post-Independence Singapore and during a time when Singapore had already experienced economic wealth and political stability. As such, they are perceived to be either ignorant of or flippant about the history of Singapore. Generation M is seen as disconnected from Singapore's nation-building endeavor that is built around an ideology of survival, discipline and diligence.[43] They have been singled out for displaying amnesia of

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[41] For support, see:
Leonie Huddy, Nadia Khatib, "American Patriotism, National Identity, and Political Involvement," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2007): 63–77.
Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh, "Is Patriotism good for democracy? A Study of High School Seniors' Patriotic Commitments," *Phi Delta Kapan* 87, no. 8 (2006): 600-607.
[42] Holmes, "Education and Citizenship," 194.
[43] Beng Huat Chua, *Communitarian, Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Singapore's history, [44] for professing to prefer a Caucasian identity rather than their own ethnicity, [45] and more recently, young Singaporeans have expressed their angst and uncertainty over what constitutes a Singaporean national identity. [46]

In 1996, former Prime Minister Goh officially and publicly drew attention to this issue by highlighting the "serious gap in knowledge" among the young generation of Singaporeans who knew little the country's history. [47] His claim was based on a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education that asked students about Singapore's post-war history. The survey revealed that students had little knowledge of significant post-war historical figures and events. For example, they were generally ignorant about the country's state of Emergency from 1948 to 1960. Some thought the Emergency had to do with water shortage even though in actuality, the Emergency was declared by the colonial government to fight communist subversion and insurgency in the Malayan peninsula and Singapore. Students also had little knowledge about the cause of the Hock Lee Bus riots in the 1950s. Many students guessed that they were caused by a rise in bus fares and poor working conditions, when in fact they were Communist-instigated.

The government perceived this as a critical issue, potentially jeopardizing the nation as young people appeared to take Singapore's existing peace and prosperity for granted. More importantly, he emphasized the notion that it is only with a knowledge of a shared past can there be a common bond of nationhood. In the absence of that knowledge, the very tenets of meritocracy and multiracialism upon which the country was built would be threatened. It was in the context of this threat that schools were subsequently summoned into the limelight. Just as it

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[44] "Serious Gap in the Education of Singaporeans: We Are Ignorant of our Own Country," The Straits Times, 18 July, 1996.

[45] E. Lau, "Being Chinese is Fine, But Caucasian is Better," The Straits Times, 18 December, 1999.

[46] L. Teo, "I Want to be Proud of Singapore… But What About?" The Straits Times, 20 February, 2001.

[47] Chok Tong Goh, *Teachers Day Rally Speech* by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Harbour Pavilion, World Trade Centre, on Sunday, 8 September 1996. Retrieved December 1, 2007 from Ministry of Education, Singapore website: http://www.moe.gov.sg/corporate/contactonline/pre-2005/rally/speech.html

is in the U.S., the responsibility for ameliorating this perceived threat fell upon the institution of education:

> National Education must be a vital component of our education process. We will revise the contents of Social Studies, Civics and Moral Education, and History, to emphasise nation-building. But National Education goes beyond book knowledge. It is an exercise to develop instincts that become part of the psyche of every child. It must engender a shared sense of nationhood, an understanding of how our past is relevant to our present and future. It must appeal to both heart and mind.[48]

As Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry have observed, education policy or any form of educational change is invariably informed by a significant history or prior events that justify and legitimize a policy or curriculum change.[49] What I hope to have done in this section is to show that citizenship education in Singapore and the U.S. did not grow out of a vacuum. They are products of a specific context, and must be understood as policy responses to a specific social and political need.

V. *Citizenship education in the U.S. and Singapore*

In this section, I present a brief description and discussion of citizenship education as it is implemented in the U.S. and Singapore. This survey highlights the points at which the two systems are similar, but more importantly, their points of departure. I suggest that the interesting ways in which citizenship education in the two countries is differentially conducted present a rich context for my research.

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[48] Hsien Loong, Lee, *Launch of National Education* by Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the TCS Theatre, World Trade Centre, on Saturday, 17 May, 1997. Retrieved December 2, 2007 from Ministry of Education, Singapore website: http://www.moe.gov.sg/speeches/1997/170597.htm

[49] Aaron Koh, "Imagining the Singapore "Nation" and "Identity": The Role of the Media and National Education" *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 25 no. 1 (2005): 75-91.

Prime Minister Goh's speech quoted above was the catalyst for the implementation of National Education (NE) in Singapore. NE was conceived as a state-wide curriculum initiative designed specifically to "develop national cohesion, cultivate the instinct for survival as a nation and instill in our students, confidence in our nation's future. It also emphasises cultivating a sense of belonging and emotional rootedness to Singapore."[50] NE was officially launched in May 1997 by then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, whose speech at the ceremony echoed the rhetoric of anxiety and lack voiced by Prime Minister Goh the previous year:

> This ignorance will hinder our effort to develop a shared sense of nationhood. We will not acquire the right instincts to bond together as one nation, or maintain the will to survive and prosper in an uncertain world. For Singapore to thrive beyond the founder generation, we must systematically transmit these instincts and attitudes to succeeding cohorts. Through National Education, we must make these instincts and attitudes part of the cultural DNA which makes us Singaporeans.[51]

At its inception, the structure and pedagogy of NE was a novel one for Singapore- instead of implementing it as a subject in and of itself, NE is infused across the formal curriculum in subjects such as Social Studies, Civics and Moral Education, History, Geography and the General Paper. For the purposes of this paper, I will not delve into the particular details of this citizenship education package except to highlight the six NE messages that are to be infused through the subjects mentioned above:

1) *Singapore is our homeland; this is where we belong. Singapore's heritage and way of life must be preserved.*

2) *Racial and religious harmony must be preserved. Despite the many races, religions,*

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[50] Official National Education website. Retrieved October 10 , 2007 from Ministry of Education, Singapore website: http://www.ne.edu.sg/

[51] Lee, *Launch of National Education.*

languages and cultures, Singaporeans must pursue one destiny.

3) *Meritocracy and incorruptibility must be upheld. This means equal opportunities for all, according to ability and effort.*

4) *No one owes Singapore a living. It must find its own way to survive and prosper.*

5) *Singaporeans themselves must defend Singapore. No one else is responsible for the country's security and well-being.*

6) *Singaporeans must have confidence in our future. United, determined and well-prepared, Singaporeans shall build a bright future for themselves.*

Two points I would like to draw your attention to is i) the pervasive and systematic nature of this policy initiative, and ii) its emotive and affective quality. First, NE was designed to infuse throughout much of the formal curriculum, and is presented systematically with themes for each educational level, specific pedagogical objectives, outcome measures to be evaluated, and an informal component that schools can implement outside of regular school hours. This is possible only because of the tightly centralized characteristic of Singapore's education system. Like much of other facets of Singapore's social structure such as transportation and housing, education in general, and NE in particular, is "top-down in approach, state initiated and driven by the goal of effective nation-building."[52] Consequently, with the exception of a few commentators, NE was received without much furor or fanfare by policy-makers, educators and the general public writ large. I argue that another reason why NE was fairly uncontroversial is because the whole endeavor of nation building has been inextricably enmeshed with the fabric of Singapore society that another policy intervention in this direction was unlikely to raise nary an eyebrow.

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[52] Sim and Print, ""Citizenship Education and Social Studies," 65.

Another characteristic of NE worth mentioning is the deeply emotional nature of its rhetoric and objectives. Returning to my proposed model of citizenship education mentioned earlier, NE reflects an intensely *patriotic* notion of citizenship, one that places a great degree of emphasis on national loyalty, values and emotional attachment. A brief analysis of policy documents relating to NE's design and implementation, speeches about NE, and the official NE website reveal language steeped heavily in emotion. Terms such as "core values", "will to prevail", "instinct for survival", "emotional attachment" are used liberally. There is little in NE documents that refer to the actual processes of citizenship such as voting or civic and political participation. As noted by Christine Han, "much of the thrust of NE is of an affective nature. The approach taken is very much one of socializing children into *a* particular set of values and views." (italics mine)(p. 65)[53]

Interestingly, the picture is very different across the world in the U.S. Not only is the country staunchly decentralized and traditionally wary of any centralizing influence of the federal government, its rhetoric relating to citizenship education has always been careful to steer clear of patriotic language. Educational discussions about citizenship and nationhood in the U.S. more often than not constellate around the teaching of history and social studies. These two subjects have long been the battleground between advocates of a national "historical vocabulary" vs. those who reject any effort to promote just *one* vision/ version of what it means to be American. As Gary Nash and his associates write in their recounting of the "history wars," *History on Trial*,[54] the issue is two competing visions of national identity. On the one hand, there are those who maintain that the subject of history should promote loyalty and pride in national

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[53] Christine Han, "National Educaiton and 'Active Citizenship': Implications for Citizenship and Citizenship Education in Singapore" *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 20, no. 1 (2000): 63-72.
[54] Gary Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York, Knopf, 2001).

achievements. Here, social injustices committed are taught as minor aberrations in America's larger quest for freedom and opportunity. On the other hand, opponents to this view argue that students should also be taught the dark side of the nation's history and the prominent role of conflict that characterized her nation building efforts. Proponents of this position advocate for the equal representation of marginalized groups and their struggles in history curriculum.

It is not within the scope of this paper to argue the validity of each argument. Suffice to say that unlike the fairly uncontroversial manner in which NE was implemented in Singapore, citizenship education in the U.S. is much more open to interrogation. In the larger scheme of things, this debate is *the* America debate, "how should the United States of America be redefined as we approach the next century? It is a debate about what it means to be an American… and the vision of the nation to be passed on to the next generation, both formally by means of the school curricula and informally via popular culture."[55] It is a debate about national identity.

In contrast to the language parlayed in Singaporean educational discourse, however, discussions about national identity in the U.S. and the role of schools in its formation is rather free of emotive rhetoric, at least in public discourse. It is instead inextricably tied to the notions of rights, responsibilities and the upholding of certain hallowed ideals such as justice, democracy and equality. A brief look at Social Studies standards reveals an emphasis on the processes of governance and civic duty and practices.[56] Unlike the NE website hosted by the Singaporean Ministry of Education, there is no evocative language that mentions loyalty, attachment or patriotism. Returning to my model of citizenship education, it would therefore seem that the American perspective rests more strongly on the side of a civic- rather than patriotic- education.

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[55] Catherine Cornbleth and Dexter Waugh, "The Great Speckled Bird: Education Policy-in-the-Making" *Educational Researcher* 22, no.7 (1993): 31.
[56] Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. Retrieved November 3, 2007 from National Council of Social Studies website: http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/

McLaughlin and Palmira Jucevicine suggest, in their study on national identity and education in Lithuania, that this is a feature of public education in a pluralistic liberal democratic societies.[57] This form of education cannot assume the truth of, or promote, any particular comprehensive, or all-embracing vision of the good life. Instead it is focused largely on developing the values of basic 'social morality' and democratic 'civic virtue'. Involved here is the notion of an "education adequate to serve the life of a free and equal citizen in any modern democracy."[58] (p. 14) which includes the notions of both education for a significant form of personal autonomy and for democratic citizenship.[59]

Furthermore, there seems to be an anxiety in American discourse in general about the idea of *patriotism*. It is often associated with the subordination of individuals' interests to those of the nation, and with notions of jingoism and chauvinism. Recent controversy surrounding attempts to implement a specifically patriotic form of citizenship education in the U.S. is worth highlighting at this point. In 2002, the federal government announced a new set of history and civic education initiatives aimed squarely at cementing national identity and pride. These initiatives, President Gorge W. Bush declared, would "improve student's knowledge of America history, increase their civic involvement, and deepen their love for our great country." To engender a sense of patriotism in young Americans, we must, President Bush emphasized, teach them that "America is a force of good in the world, bringing hope and freedom to other people."[60]

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[57] David Bridges (ed.) *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship: Philosophy in a Changing World* (New York, Routledge, 1997), 25.

[58] Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,1992).

[59] Terence McLaughlin and Palmira Jucevicine, "Education, Democracy and the Formation of National Identity," in Bridges, *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship.*

[60] "President Introduces History and Civic Education Initiatives," remarks of the President on Teaching American History and Civic Education Initiative, 17 September 2002.

What is interesting here is the use of the same emotive language harnessed by government officials in Singapore justifying the need for NE- it is rhetoric designed specifically to stir a sense of national loyalty and emotional commitment. However, unlike the calm reception NE received in Singapore, many educators in America have objected to engaging students in this patriotic pedagogy as initiated by the Bush Administration. They do so on two grounds: i) that this form of patriotism is often monolithic, reflecting an "America-right-or-wrong" stance,[61] what philosopher Martha Nussbaum warns is "perilously close to jingoism,"[62] and ii) that few of these initiatives included teachers or local school administrators in their conception or development. The direction had come top-down, from the federal government and the U.S. Department of Education. Once again, the contrast to Singapore is stark, where the top-down nature of NE's implementation was hardly criticized or questioned.

I acknowledge that in presenting such a distinct dichotomy between the Singaporean and American models of citizenship education, I am painting in broad strokes. Such things can seldom be so plainly defined. In fact, there has been a movement in both countries that suggest a reframing of sorts. A new social studies curriculum in Singapore is showing promising signs of moving away from the more conservative and prescriptive model of citizenship education traditionally practiced in Singapore.[63] There is hope that the greater emphasis on critical thinking skills and inquiry will pave the way for more instruction in civic processes and participatory citizenship. In the U.S. recent discussions about the nature of patriotism have argued for its compatibility with the ideals of democratic citizenship education. Joel Westheimer and contributors to his collection of essays on patriotism in the American public school advocate for

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[61] Joel Westheimer, "Politics and Patriotism in Education" in Westheimer, *Pledging Allegiance.*
[62] Martha Nussbaum, *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism* (Cambridge, MA: Beacon, 2002), 29.
[63] Sim and Print, "Citizenship Education and Social Studies".

a pedagogy of constructive, active and democratic patriotism.[64] This reframed notion of

patriotism involves both an emotional and psychological commitment to the nation, but one that

is still very much anchored in democratic principles and practices. However, I suggest

nonetheless that my distinction between the American civic form of citizenship education and

Singapore's more patriotic perspective is a useful one to employ as I begin to examine the role of

schools in developing national identity in young children.

VI.   Issues to explore in my dissertation

The Singaporean model of citizenship education as represented by the NE initiative is

heavily paternalistic and systematic. It is implemented top-down by the Ministry of Education

and employs emotionally-laden rhetoric to advocate a very particular and prescribed set of values

and knowledge at both the cognitive and affective levels. The American model, like the nation

itself, is inimical to any strictly centralizing force. Citizenship education as embodied by social

studies and history focuses more on methods of inquiry, critical thinking, and the civic principles

and practices related to the functioning of a liberal democratic and participatory culture. Taking

into account these differences in what citizenship represents in each country, how do schools go

about teaching about the nation and elements of nationhood?

More importantly, how do children receive this knowledge and what do they make of it?

It is one thing to describe what each country sees as appropriate citizenship education, it is

another to assume that children in both nations accept and adopt these ideas in ways intended.

Supported by my theoretical frameworks of the new sociology of childhood and the discursive

nature of national identity formation, I argue that it is vital that we listen to what the students

have to say with regards to citizenship education and national identity as it is formed through

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[64] Westheimer, *Pledging Allegiance*.

schooling. Advocating for the voice of the student in designing a schooling for patriotism, Paul Goalen, contends that we cannot take for granted that students are patient, passive vessels waiting to be filled with the carefully constructed messages from teachers and textbooks. As Michael Apple and Linda Christian-Smith remind us, "we cannot assume that what is "in" the text actually is taught. Nor can we assume that what is taught is actually learned."[65]

We also cannot automatically assume that patterns of national identification will fall along national lines. As I have discussed, a comparative study that specifically examines children's process of meaning-making allows me to investigate the extent to which children from different cultural groups- racial, minority, gender, social class- may construct a sense of national belonging that is more aligned with children in the same cultural group in another country compared to their fellow citizens.

There is a paucity of studies that have empirically investigated the development of national identity formation in young children specifically in light of the role of schooling. Understanding how our youngest citizens acquire values and commitments as part of their national identity formation is critical because these years are most foundational to their development- cognitively, emotionally, socially, and civically. Further, a comparative study in this regard is important because national responses to global challenges sometimes vary. Singapore and the U.S. are multicultural countries with two different sets of political philosophies and cultural perspectives, and they hold distinct ideas about the individual's position *vis-à-vis* the larger community and the nation. Consequently, the similarities and differences in children's responses will offer a particularly interesting insight as to whether children's opinions about national identity and the role of school are universal or culture-

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[65] Michael Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith, "The Politics of the Textbook," in *The Politics of the Textbooks*, ed. by Michael Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith (New York: Routledge, 1991), 9.

specific. Also, Singapore's centrally-administered education system differs from the more decentralized model practiced in the U.S. and this difference may have implications for the way in which national identity formation is facilitated in the classroom.

Through a unique multi-disciplinary study across education, childhood studies, and political science, my research will: i) demonstrate how young students make sense of nationalizing projects of which they are often primary objects; ii) provide a description of how two distinct societies engage schools in the process of national identity development, and iii) contribute to a broader understanding of how multicultural nations respond similarly or differently to the critical challenges of a rapidly evolving global demography.

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