Chapter 2
Promoting Attitude Change Toward Country: A Theoretical Framework and Blended Learning Approach

Abstract Many countries around the world desire their students to have a positive attitude toward their own nations. Although the task of fostering a positive student attitude toward country is an important one, it may not be easy to achieve. The goal of this chapter is to provide a brief review of the scholarly literature on citizenship education, followed by a theoretical discussion on promoting attitude change particularly via the theory of persuasion, as well as a discussion of a blended learning approach that incorporates the use of persuasive messages, Socratic questions, asynchronous online discussion forums, and personal reflections. This paper concludes with a brief description of a research project of two grade five classes in Singapore that attempted to promote positive student attitude toward their country. The results of our study suggested that the blended learning approach was able to instil a positive student attitude to their country. Finally, we discuss several important lessons learned that could inform the design of future instructional strategies in implementing blended learning for the purpose of citizenship education.

Keywords Citizenship education · Attitude change · Blended learning · Affective domain · Asynchronous online discussion · Reflection · Socratic questions · Persuasion

2.1 Introduction

The development of citizenship of young people is typically considered one of the most important aims of formal schooling in many countries throughout the world. In the literature the concept of citizenship education appears to embrace a wide variety of domains (Schuitema et al. 2008), which may include the following:

1. Students' geographical knowledge of their own country and other countries (e.g., Barrett 1996; Barrett and Farroni 1996; Bourchier et al. 2002; Jahoda 1964; Moss and Blades 1994)
2. Students' political and civic knowledge (e.g., Kerr et al. 2002, 2003; Torney-Purta et al. 2001)

3. Students' attitudes toward government policy, laws, as well as civic concepts such as rights and social justice (e.g., Cleaver et al. 2005)
4. Students' knowledge of national emblems (e.g., Jahoda 1963; Barrett 2005)
5. Students' national stereotypes (e.g., Barrett and Short 1992; Barrett et al. 2003; Jahoda 1964; Penny et al. 2001), and
6. Students' national identity, as well as a sense of belonging, commitment or allegiance to one's country (Dixon 2002; Kerr et al. 2002, 2003; Torney-Purta et al. 2001).

Singapore is no exception to the notion of citizenship education. Ever since Singapore attained self-government in 1959, citizenship education in Singapore has appeared in many forms. There have been, perhaps, seven major forms of citizenship education in Singapore throughout the years. Citizenship education was originally taught as Ethics between 1959 and 1966; it was later replaced by Civics in 1967; Education for Living in 1973; Being and Becoming and Good Citizens in the late 1970s; Religious Knowledge and Confucian Ethics in 1982; Civics and Moral Education in 1992; and, National Education in 1997 (Sim and Print 2005) (Table 2.1).

Probably some of the most extensive changes to citizenship education have been related to National Education (Han 2000). The aims and objectives of National Education are encapsulated in the following six messages (Ministry of Education 2007): (a) Singapore is our homeland; this is where we belong, (b) We must preserve racial and religious harmony, (c) We must uphold meritocracy and incorruptibility, (d) No one owes Singapore a living, (e) We must ourselves defend Singapore, and (f) We have confidence in our future.

Underlying the launch of the National Education program was the concern over Singapore's young citizens' ignorance of the nation's history, of how the nation came into being, which might lead to these people taking peace and prosperity for granted (Chia 2012). As the then Prime Minister Goh stated, "One important part of education for citizenship is learning about Singapore—our history, our geography, the constraints we faced, how we overcame them, survived and prospered, what we must do to continue to survive. This is national education" (Goh 1996). Thus, the formal and informal curriculum initiatives for the implementation of National Education focus on instilling the facts of the Singapore story, particularly in school subjects such as civic and moral education, social studies, and

Table 2.1 Summary of blended learning parameters

Parameter	Description
Learning goal	To promote positive attitude toward country
Type of content	Affective learning—receiving, responding, valuing
Type of pedagogical approach	Dialogic
Specific instructional activity	Socratic questions, self-reflection, online peer discussion and face-to-face class discussion facilitated by the teacher
Technological tools and resources	Online asynchronous forum, country pledge, persuasive messages, *Singapore My Home* website
Overall blended learning model	See Fig. 2.3

history (Chia 2012). The teaching of the Singapore story tends to be didactic in its approach, and excessive as evidenced in the repetition of topics on Singapore's independence and racial riots (Chia 2012).

Although teaching of facts about Singapore's history is important, a more challenging and crucial task is instilling a positive attitude among her young citizenry toward the nation. The didactic approach of presenting Singapore's past tends to focus on the students' cognitive domain (e.g., how the nation became independent), but fall short on dealing with students' attitude toward the country. With the recent newspaper report on "1,200 Singaporeans give up their citizenship yearly" (Chua 2012), the task of fostering a positive student attitude toward their country has taken an increased importance and relevance.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. We present a brief review of the literature on attitude change, with an emphasis on persuasive theory. This is followed by a discussion of our blended learning approach that incorporates the use of persuasive messages, Socratic questions, asynchronous online discussion forums, and personal reflections. We then describe the citizenship education project, followed by the findings, and a discussion of several important lessons learned related to the use of blended learning for the purpose of citizenship education.

2.2 Review of Literature on Attitude Change

A recent review of the citizenship education literature by Geboers et al. (2013) revealed that past research studies tended to focus mainly on the political aspects of citizenship education such as student attitudes towards freedom of expression, immigrant rights, personal rights, and public rights. So far, none of the past studies reviewed by Geboers et al. (2013) examined the impact of citizenship education on student attitude toward their country.

Although the task of fostering a positive student attitude toward country is an important one, it is not easy to achieve. Thus, the main question that guides our research project is: "how could one promote a positive student attitude toward country?" To answer this question, it is first important to understand the meaning of the word attitude.

Despite the many previous studies on attitudes, there is no universally agreed upon definition (Olson and Zanna 1993). Various scholars have defined attitudes in terms of evaluation, affect, or cognition (Eagly and Chaiken 1992; Kruglanski 1989). Despite these various definitions, most attitude theorists agree that evaluation constitutes a predominant aspect of attitudes (Olson and Zanna 1993). Thus, attitudes may be described as the evaluative judgments, with some degree of favour or disfavour, about a given entity, object or event (Crano and Prislin 2006; Eagly and Chaiken 1992; Gawronski and Bodenhausen 2006). As Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) wrote, "an attitude represents a person's general feeling of favorableness or unfavorableness toward some stimulus object" (p. 216). In other words, attitudes can be conceptualized as perception or affect that indicate whether a person likes or dislikes something (Havelka 2003; Simpson et al. 1994). So for
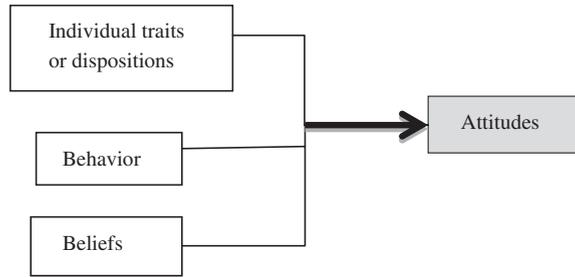
example, students' attitudes toward Singapore may be conceptualized as students liking or disliking Singapore.

A review of the literature suggests several factors that could influence or affect attitudes. These factors include individual traits or dispositions (e.g., genetic, dispositions toward cognition), behaviour, and beliefs (Flaste 1991; Kohnstamm et al. 1989; Perry 1973; Schachter et al. 1977; Tesser 1993) (see Fig. 2.1). We described each of these factors in the following paragraphs.

2.2.1 Disposition Toward Cognition

Attitudes may be affected by certain individual traits such as a person's dispositions (Sinatra et al. 2012). Dispositions are "relatively stable psychological mechanisms and strategies that tend to generate characteristics behavioral tendencies and tactics" (Stanovich 1999, p. 157). One of these dispositions is what Cacioppo et al. (1996) referred to as people's tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavors which could be represented in terms of a single factor called *need for cognition.* Scholars (e.g., Cacioppo and Petty 1982, 1984; Cacioppo et al. 1983, 1986) have found that individuals low in need for cognition, as well as those high in need for cognition must make sense of their world but they tend to derive meaning, adopt position, or solve problems in different ways. Individuals who are high in need for cognition tend to approach ideas or suggestions open-mindedly, and tend to engage in critical thinking, while those with low degrees of need tend to be close-minded, and less willing to engage in critical thought or discourse (Sinatra et al. 2012). Previous research has suggested that students with a high need for cognition tend to be more accepting of belief change (Sinatra et al. 2003).

2.2.2 Genetic

Besides individual dispositions, a person's genetic or heritability could also influence his or her attitudes (Olson and Zanna 1993). Perry (1973), for example, studied the heritability of attitudes toward alcohol, cigarettes, and coffee, and found that attitudes toward drinking alcohol had a genetic component (51 %) but attitudes toward drinking

coffee and smoking cigarettes did not. In a stimulating paper, Tesser (1993) described several examples and studies that argue strongly for the genetic basis of attitudes. For instance, Tesser (1993) suggested that genetic differences in sensory structures such as taste and hearing could affect attitudes toward food and loud music, and that genetically derived color blindness eliminates any preference or favour between undetectable color differences. In another study, Schacter et al. (1977) had argued for individual differences in body chemistry and their attitudes toward cigarettes, while the relationship between genetic differences in body chemistry and the desire for alcohol is frequently discussed (Flaste 1991). Tesser (1993) also suggested that the genetic differences in activity level could easily have an effect on attitudes toward different free-time activities and career options (e.g., Kohnstamm et al. 1989).

Contrary to commonly held views, it is important to note that heritability is not a fixed entity determined solely by certain biological substrates but is also dependent on the social or environment context within the population under study (Cropanzano and James 1990). Tesser (1993, pp. 131–132) described heritability as "a ratio of the phenotypic variance controlled by genetic variance to the total phenotypic variance which is controlled by genetic variance and environmental variance, for a particular population". In other words, heritability is determined both by nurture as it is by nature (Tesser 1993). Thus, if heritability of attitudes can be influenced as much as by nurture as it is by the operation of genes within individuals, then it stands to reason that a teacher can influence or alter students' attitudes by ways of changing beliefs, particularly via the principles of effective persuasion (see section on persuasion).

2.2.3 Behavior

It is a commonly accepted notion that attitude can affect behaviour. However, an important and interesting insight provided by social psychology is that an individual's behaviour can also affect his or her attitude, not just the reverse (Olson and Zanna 1993). An example can be found in two studies conducted by Kellerman et al. (1989). In these two studies, opposite sex strangers were induced to exchange mutual unbroken gaze for two minutes. Results showed that these strangers had increased feelings of passionate love for each other. Subjects who were gazing at their partner's eyes, and whose partner was gazing back reported significantly higher feelings of liking than subjects in any other condition. In addition, the behaviour of other people can also influence one's attitude and action (Learning Seed 2007). If many people are doing an action, then the action must be fine or okay, and this could subsequently change an individual's attitude toward the action.

2.2.4 Beliefs

Whereas attitude refers to an individual's favourable or unfavourable evaluation of an object, beliefs refer to the information, concepts or knowledge that an individual has about an object or entity (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Havelka 2003; McLeod

1992). Beliefs can be described as premises or suppositions about something that is felt to be true (Calderhead 1996).

Beliefs can determine a person's attitude (Bodur et al. 2000; Fishbein 1963; Havelka 2003). In fact, some influential scholars argue that beliefs about an object provide the basis for the formation of attitude toward the object; that attitudes are usually measured by assessing a person's beliefs; and that attitudes are determined by the strength of the beliefs toward the attitude objects (Fishbein 1963). Thus, having a certain set of beliefs toward Singapore (e.g., a knowledge that Singapore is a safer and less polluted place to live compared to other cities or countries), an individual then forms a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the country (e.g., liking or disliking Singapore), which can ultimately lead to a particular behavior or action being performed (e.g., staying in Singapore or leaving it).

If beliefs are central to attitude formation and change, then it stands to reason that students' beliefs toward Singapore must first be fostered or changed before a positive attitude toward the country can be expected. How, then, is belief change most likely to occur? Many scholars have argued that persuasive pedagogy has the potential to change students' beliefs and attitudes (Alexander et al. 2002; Gawronski and Bodenhausen 2006; Murphy 2001; Sinatra and Kardash 2004). In the following section, the principles of persuasion will be discussed in greater detail.

2.3 Attitude Change: Persuasion Theory

Perhaps, the single most important and largest topic within the literature on attitude change is persuasion (Olson and Zanna 1993). But what exactly is persuasion? The word *persuasion* inevitably evokes different meanings from different individuals. Some of these meanings could be less positive such as how media convince women that a skinny body is desirable, or how politicians win our vote (Fives and Alexander 2001). However, a more positive view of persuasion has been voiced by Alexander et al. (2000), as well as Petty and Cacioppo (1986).

Specifically, from a psychological perspective, persuasion involves "convincing individuals to look differently or more deeply at some concept or subject" (Alexander et al. 2000, p. 2). In other words, individuals are first presented with compelling messages or arguments, factual evidence, as well as the opportunities to question, and are then encouraged to reflect and make their own conclusions about a certain topic at hand (Fives and Alexander 2001). Persuasion supports learners in their effort to reorganize and restructure their schemata (Fives and Alexander 2001). Persuasion thus rejects the notion of a simple transmission of knowledge from a teacher to students, or the assumption that all students will simply accept whatever information that is presented (Murphy 2001).

Research has shown that carefully crafted persuasive messages or arguments can promote attitude change (Hynd 2003; Sinatra et al. 2012). Persuasive messages include any number of written, video, or oral materials such as newspaper articles, books, billboards, television programs, flyers, speeches, and websites. All these materials can be catalysts for promoting students' attitude change.
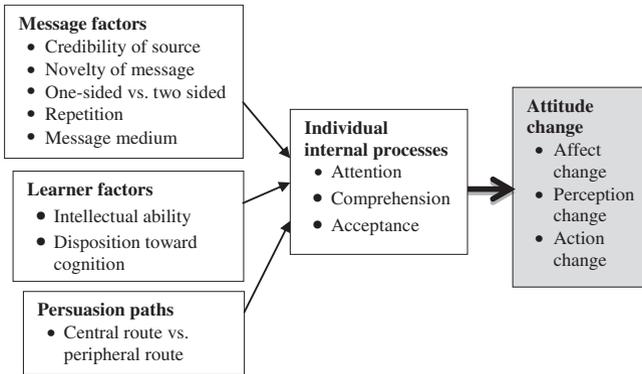
Fig. 2.2   Possible factors affecting persuasion

There are several key factors or conditions that, if present, could help influence the persuasion process of messages. In this paper, we discuss three major factors: message factors, learner factors, and persuasion path factors (see Fig. 2.2).

Message factors include elements or issues such as the credibility of the source, the novelty of the message, whether a message should express only one side of the viewpoint or should it present the opposing view as well, message repetition, and the medium by which the message is conveyed. Learner factors include elements such as the individual's intellectual ability, and disposition toward cognition. Persuasion paths include elements such as the central processing or peripheral processing routes.

2.3.1 Message Factor: Source Credibility

In general, persuasion is generally assumed to increase with credibility (Ajzen 1992). Specifically, the more credible (e.g., trustworthy) the author, the stronger and more persuasive the message is (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). It is also interesting to note that if the issue or topic being considered relates to a subjective preference (i.e., personal choice), individuals tend to prefer the opinion of someone who shares their personal tastes, or way of life (Waites 2002). However, when people make evaluative judgments about facts, such as whether Singapore has a lower crime rate than Iraq, people prefer the opinion of someone with objective credibility (Waites 2002).

2.3.2 Message Factor: Novelty and Familiarity

Persuasion can occur when a credible source of message presents a belief or idea that differs from the beliefs already held by the learner (Chambliss and Garner 1996; Gawronski and Bodenhausen 2006; Waites 2002). Although most people

seem to have an opinion about most topics, a majority of individuals are open to new ideas or beliefs (Waites 2002). The presentation of a new idea or belief will introduce a momentary tension on the part of the learner that produces a kind of dissonance or incongruity (Waites 2002). If consideration of the new belief or idea implies a different evaluation of a given object, then exposure to the new credible message may lead to belief and attitude change (Gawronski and Bodenhausen 2006). Empirical evidence for this proposition can be found in a research on group decision making (Vinokur and Burnstein 1974). The researchers found that members who suggest novel arguments to support a given decision are found to be more persuasive than those who offer ideas that are well known to the rest of the group. If the new ideas fit in with previously held ideas, then no change to the current belief and attitude toward a given object occurs. The new ideas merely confirm the existing belief, and reinforce the current attitude.

It is also important to note that attitude change can occur when additional consideration of already *familiar* messages is carried out (Gawronski and Bodenhausen 2006). This is perhaps best reflected in research on mere thought (Tesser 1978), or introspection (Wilson et al. 1989). Research in these areas has suggested that merely thinking or introspecting about a given entity may lead to belief and attitude change. If mere thought or introspection of already familiar messages imply a different evaluation of a given object (e.g., something that counters the current view held by the individual), additional consideration could lead to belief, and subsequently attitude change (Gawronski and Bodenhausen 2006). However, if additional consideration of already familiar messages confirm the original belief, no change is likely to occur. In this case, the original belief and attitude is reinforced.

2.3.3 Message Factor: One-Sided Versus Two-Sided Messages

Persuasion can be constructed as one-sided or two-sided (Fives and Alexander 2001). Two-sided message can be further classified as either refutational or nonrefutational (Hynd 1999). Two-sided refutational messages present both sides of an issue (i.e., the argument for an issue as well as its counter-argument); but one side is generally promoted and the other is refuted (Murphy 2001). In two-sided nonrefutational messages, both sides of an issue are merely presented but none is compared or refuted, while a one-sided message presents only one position of a given issue (Hynd 2001).

Generally two-sided refutational messages appear more convincing or persuasive than two-sided non-refutational, or one-sided messages (Murphy 2001). The very act of comparing and contrasting positions influences our evaluative judgment (Learning Seed 2007). Moreover, the acknowledgment and refutation of the opposite position in two-sided refutational messages seem to make the message fairer, strengthen the credibility of such messages, and even disarming (i.e., tending to allay suspicion or hostility; hence winning favor) (Waites 2002). As Murphy (2001) noted, the persuasion process often begins with a discussion of opposing viewpoints.

2.3.4 Message Factor: Message Repetition

Repeated exposure to a message may also lead to more positive evaluations (Zajonc 1968). For example, Arkes et al. (1991) showed that the mere repetition of a message can cause it to be judged more true, and thus greater chance of attitude change as compared to non-repeated control messages, probably because familiarity is used as one basis to judge the validity of a message (Olson and Zanna 1993). Cacioppo and Petty (1989) found that three versus one exposure to auditory messages increased the effectiveness of appeals based on strong arguments but not on weak arguments, presumably due to greater elaboration on the messages by repeated exposure (Olson and Zanna 1993).

2.3.5 Message Factor: Message Medium

Message medium refers to the channel of communication—how the message is delivered or conveyed to an audience. There are basically three primary means of communication: spoken words, written words, videos. Spoken words can convey emotions and feelings of the communicator well, and thus may stimulate a learner's attention, or enhance a learner's understanding of the message. However, try as one might, spoken words are often fleeting and memories fade (Waites 2002).

Written words, on the other hand, are permanent and thus allow a learner to refer to the message repeatedly. This may help stimulate deeper thought on the meaning of the message. However, not all communicators are able to express their messages well in written words (e.g., authors' whose English is not their first language). In addition, a learner may risk misinterpreting a written message due to the lack of tonal cues (Hew and Hara 2007).

What about videos then? Research has suggested that messages that are simple to understand are most persuasive when supported by video presentations, but complex messages are more persuasive when they are written or illustrated, presumably because they force the learner to think through the message (Waites 2002). Thus, as a general rule of thumb, it is perhaps wiser to use more than one medium to convey messages.

2.3.6 Learner Factor: Intellectual Ability and Disposition Toward Cognition

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an in-depth review of all possible learner factors. We shall discuss only two factors that we believe are more relevant to our paper—learners' disposition toward cognition (discussed in an earlier section), and learners' intellectual ability. Intellectual ability refers to an individual's ability to process a given message. Generally, individuals with greater

comprehension skills are more likely to process the content of a message than those with weak comprehension skills (Dole and Sinatra 1998; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). An individual's intellectual ability therefore affects the likelihood that the message will prove persuasive (Murphy 2001). Certainly a teacher could encourage learner comprehension by choosing messages that are easier to understand (e.g., selecting text that is consistent with a learner's language ability).

2.3.7 Persuasion Paths

There are generally two psychological paths to persuading an individual. The first is the peripheral or superficial route which occurs when a learner is influenced by incidental cues such as the communicator's likeability or credibility or text cues such as the length of the message in order to make decisions about the importance of the message (Murphy 2001; Waites 2002). Ajzen (1992) noted that attitude change produced by the peripheral path is generally of little practical significance. Such attitude change tends to be short lived (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), susceptible to counterpropaganda (McGuire 1964), and have little effect on actual behavior (Ajzen 1992).

The second path is the central or deep route processing which takes place when a learner elaborates on the information presented in the message (Murphy 2001; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Essentially, a learner is assumed to generate arguments of his or her own to either support the advocated position (pro) or oppose it (con) (Ajzen 1992). If the number of pro arguments exceeds the cons, then the learner will change in the advocated direction (Ajzen 1992). The central path of processing deals with the essence of the persuasion process because persuasion requires that the advocated position be accepted only after careful consideration of the message, and after whatever other information the learner can bring to bear (Ajzen 1992).

2.3.8 Summary

In this section, we have briefly discussed how message, learner, and processing path factors may affect persuasion. At the heart of persuasive communication is the process of reasoning, the evaluation of the merits of arguments in favor as well as in opposition to the advocated position (Ajzen 1992). From this viewpoint, we may therefore conclude that in general, the more credible the message, the more novel the argument presented in a message, the use of two-sided refutational messages, the more the message is repeated via various media, the easier the message is to understand, and having students to actually engage in a discussion of the ideas and arguments, the more likely the student is to be persuaded to the perspective presented in the text. In the following section, we describe a research project that utilized a blended learning approach to promote grade five students' positive attitude toward Singapore.
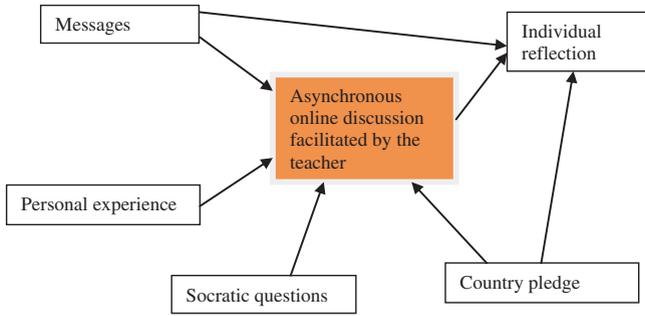
Fig. 2.3   A blended learning model for promoting attitude change

2.4 An Empirical Investigation

The citizenship education project took place at Primary School N, a co-educational elementary school in western Singapore. A majority of the pupils in the school were Chinese Singaporean and came from families of middle to high social economic status. Two grade five classes, each with 30 pupils between the ages of 10 and 11, along with their form teachers took part in the project. Figure 2.3 shows an overview of the blended learning approach that incorporates the use of Socratic questions, messages, asynchronous online discussion forums, and personal reflections.

2.4.1 A Blended Learning Model for Promoting Attitude Change

2.4.1.1 Messages

The messages consisted of cases or narratives (e.g., stories of people concerning what they appreciated about Singapore, why foreigners want relocate to Singapore). To increase the credibility of the messages, all cases or narratives were real-life stories taken from published articles in the mainstream newspapers. We also invited non-citizen students (e.g., foreigners or permanent residents studying in the class) to talk about their views about Singapore. Generally, these students had lived abroad in their own countries before moving to Singapore. They were asked to share what they appreciated about their home countries or cities, as well as what they appreciated about Singapore. They were also asked to compare the pros and cons between living in their home countries and Singapore.

The use of pros and cons is consistent with the notion of two-sided refutational messages which, according to past research, could help make the message fairer, more credible, and even disarming (Waites 2002). As previously mentioned, the process of persuasion often begins with a discussion of opposing viewpoints (Murphy 2001).

The messages used in the research project were primarily conveyed through spoken words and written words. We were not able to find appropriate videos by the time the project commenced. Spoken messages were mainly conveyed by the non-citizen students in the class when they presented their beliefs about Singapore, while written messages were given via mainstream newspaper articles. To encourage learner comprehension, difficult words or phrases were explained by the teacher in class.

2.4.1.2 Individual Reflection

We believe that without meaningful and intentional reflection, students may not fully grasp what is being discussed. According to Boyd and Fales (1983), reflection is a process of creating and clarifying the meaning of experience in terms of self. Hatcher and Bringle (1997) refer reflection to the intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning goals or objectives. In this blended learning approach, reflection helps students to explore and construct personal meaning or belief toward country from reading the persuasive messages, reading the postings in the online discussion, and reciting the country's pledge.

2.4.1.3 Asynchronous Online Discussion

Any educational program or project that aims to foster belief and attitude change among students must first require students to make their pre-existing personal beliefs explicit in order to allow other people to examine, or challenge the adequacy of those beliefs (Kagan 1992). In research project, we used an asynchronous online discussion forum. Asynchronous online discussion refers to "the exchange of messages via computer networks where participants need not be online simultaneously" (Cheung and Hew 2006, p. 2). Every participant in an asynchronous online discussion environment can choose to post and respond to messages at any time or from any geographical location, and can view the messages many times and long after the messages have been posted. By having students to engage in online discussions of the messages, instead of being "talked to" by the teacher, more central processing can be encouraged.

Because the discourse that occurs within the forum is not in real time, students thus have more time to reflect and think about new information before contributing to the discussion (Pena-Shaff and Nicolls 2004). This is unlike a face-to-face classroom environment where students are constrained by time to respond (e.g., 30 min for a typical lesson period in Singapore), and where the face-to-face discussion is usually dominated by a few vocal or outspoken students; hence, leaving the shy students as well as those who wish to have more time to think little or no opportunity to participate in the discussion. In addition, since many of the current asynchronous online discussion forums are text-based, students have little choice but to express themselves in writing. The very process of writing in itself encourages students to reflect and make explicit their beliefs and assumptions.

2.4.2 Procedure

There were three main phases of the project: (a) pre-implementation, (b) actual implementation, and (c) post-implementation.

2.4.2.1 Pre-implementation

During the pre-implementation phase, we provided training to the teachers about the use of asynchronous online discussion such as its potential benefits, the challenges of using asynchronous online discussions, possible solutions to overcome these challenges, as well as ways to engage pupils in the discussions. Teachers were also introduced to the use of Socratic questions.

After the completion of the teacher training, a training session for the grade five pupils was carried out. Pupils were taught the definition of discussion. Adopting the work of Bretz (1983) and Henri (1992), we defined discussion as a process of exchanging ideas that involves at least three actions: (a) communication of information, (b) a first response to this information, and (c) a second answer relating to the first. A discussion should not merely involve person A posing a question or comment, and person B responding to the question or comment. Such a process merely leads to a question-and-answer activity, rather than back-and-forth exchange or negotiation of ideas.

Pupils were also introduced to a set of ground rules and guidelines for the online discussion. These include the following: (a) no personal attacks or rude posting, (b) one idea per message posting, and (c) pupils to support opinions with facts or personal experiences. Pupils were introduced to the BlackBoard^{TM} online discussion platform. Essential features of the platform (e.g., creation of discussion threads and messages) were demonstrated. Pupils were also given the opportunity to try out the platform, guided by the teachers and the researchers.

Finally, the pupils completed a 10-item Attitude Toward Country Questionnaire (see Table 2.2). The questionnaire was earlier pilot tested using a sample of 286 grade six pupils from the same school, i.e., Primary School N. The results of factor analyses such as principal component analysis and confirmatory factor analysis showed evidence of construct validity for the 10-item scale, and an overall Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.91 (Hew and Cheung 2011). To decrease the likelihood of pupils giving inaccurate self-reports of their attitudes due to expected social desirable behaviours (i.e., answering the questionnaire items in ways the teacher would think is desirable), the Attitude Toward Country Questionnaire was not graded in any way, and was anonymous (Gano-Phillips 2010).

2.4.2.2 Actual Implementation Phase

The actual implementation phase ran for about four months. During this time, we focused on the theme *Appreciating Singapore*. A teacher presented cases or narratives (e.g., real-life stories of people concerning what they appreciated

Table 2.2 Attitude toward country questionnaire

Item	
Q1	I would be happy to spend my whole life in Singapore
Q2	I enjoy discussing Singapore with people from other countries
Q3	I feel as if Singapore's problems are my own
Q4	I am proud to tell others that I live in Singapore
Q5	I feel accepted as a member of society in Singapore
Q6	I feel emotionally attached to Singapore
Q7	I feel a sense of belonging to Singapore
Q8	I love Singapore
Q9	I care about the fate of Singapore
Q10	I am willing to work hard to help Singapore be successful

about Singapore, why foreigners should relocate to Singapore) in mass lectures. The teacher also shared what he or she appreciated about Singapore. Pupils, after the teacher presentation, proceeded to participate in an online discussion about the things they appreciated or liked about the country. Pupils were told to comment on one another's online postings. Pupils also visited the *Singapore My Home* website and viewed the competition photographs posted on the web page. They then participated in a separated online discussion thread on what the photographs meant to them personally. In addition, pupils re-visited the *Singapore pledge* and commented on what the pledge actually meant to them in another separate discussion thread. One of the primary five classes participated in the asynchronous online discussion outside of class time (e.g., during their recess, at home), while the other participated within class time. The online discussions were facilitated by the form teachers.

2.4.2.3 Post Implementation Phase

At the end of the project, 54 pupils wrote individual reflections on what they had learned from the online discussions, and cases/materials (photographs, narratives of other people). Pupils also wrote whether they had changed their feelings or attitudes toward Singapore and the reason for it. In addition, pupils wrote about the experience of participating in the asynchronous online discussions. Finally, the pupils also answered the Attitude Toward Country Questionnaire.

2.4.3 Results

Table 2.3 shows the statistical results for the pupils' overall mean pre- and post-questionnaire scores. Altogether, 53 pupils completed the pre- and post- Attitude Toward Country Questionnaire. Although we were disheartened to note that there

Table 2.3 Summary of pupils' mean pre- and post- *Affective Commitment to Country* questionnaire scores

Scores	Pre-		Post-	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Questionnaire	3.23	0.60	3.31	0.57

was no significant difference between the pre- and post-attitude scores, the results in Table 2.3 reveal that the pupil's mean scores had improved in terms of their affective commitment to country. The standard deviation had also decreased, indicating that the spread of scores had reduced and that the scores of the pupils varied lesser than before. This suggested that the blended learning approach had narrowed the score differences between pupils.

We also share several insights of the blended learning approach based on the pupils' reflections. Overall, more than 90 % of 54 pupils reported positive benefits related to appreciating the country more. For example:

- I feel proud to be a Singaporean.
- I learned that Singapore has a variety of things to enjoy and it is a very peaceful country.
- I feel happy that I am a Singaporean.
- I learned about the Singapore identity and I also learned how to use the discussion forums.
- I felt a great sense of belonging as I learnt that Singapore accepts any religion or race.

A majority of the pupils (80 %) reported that they enjoyed the citizenship project more than the traditional teacher-led didactic lessons. For example:

- It was very interesting and exciting. I hope we have another project like this.
- I found that this project was very interesting.
- I felt that it was meaningful and I learnt a lot.
- I felt happy but it was too short.
- I feel that we should have more time for the project.
- I feel happy. It is more interesting than normal lessons.

Eighty percent of the pupils reported that they found the use of asynchronous online discussion forums useful and beneficial to them. For example:

- The use of online discussion forums helped me make my beliefs and ideas explicit. It also helped me question or challenge the beliefs or ideas of my classmates.
- It [the asynchronous online discussion] was very useful. We can look at the postings over and over again.
- I feel that it is better to discuss online because it gives people like me who are shy to speak up in class, to voice out our beliefs.
- The online discussion enabled my classmates to question my opinions in order to challenge or improve it. I can think more in-depth.

- I felt that it is convenient because we can participate in the discussion at any place we like.
- I can see [clearly] what other pupils are thinking or feeling.
- I am able to express more about how I feel and it is easier for me to type out some things instead of saying it directly. We can see other classmates' beliefs clearly and express our beliefs freely too.

Some pupils, however, reported negative statements regarding the use of online discussions. For example:

- Though I was able to share my feeling and ideas, not everybody in my class responded to it.
- We can only type [and not speak to each other].

2.5 Lessons Learned

We acknowledge that fostering a positive student attitude such as affective commitment to country is not an easy task for educators. Many teachers tend to approach this task through didactic teaching using one-way communication such as lectures aided by PowerPoint slide shows. In our personal communication with teachers, we found that the usefulness of such an approach is questionable. Students tend to "switch off" during these lecture sessions because such teacher lectures sounded preachy. Moreover, many of these didactic sessions focus primarily on factual knowledge such as why one should love or be loyal to one's country. Such presentations tend to address the cognitive domain but fall short on dealing with students' affective domain.

In this citizenship education project, we utilized the use of a blended learning approach that combined the use of Socratic question-mediated asynchronous online peer discussion forum, persuasive cases, reflection, face-to-face classroom discussions, and teacher presentations. We offer the following six major lessons learned.

First, the primary five pupils, on the whole, enjoyed the citizenship education project very much. It was also evident from the pupils' reflections, as well as the increase in mean questionnaire scores that some change of attitude toward the country had occurred. Pupils reported that they learned to appreciate their country more. This suggested that our blended learning approach was able to instill a positive student affective commitment to their country. Of course, we cannot claim actual causal-effect as a result of this blended learning approach due to the absence of a control group. Nevertheless, the positive comments of the pupils were an encouraging sign that at least the blended learning approach was well received.

Second, we found the use of asynchronous online discussion a useful technology to help pupils make explicit their pre-existing beliefs and assumptions about their country. Some of these pre-existing opinions and assumptions about the country may be incorrect. This in turn enabled the pupils to examine, question and challenge these different beliefs, as well as to assimilate new information into

their existing belief systems. This is a very important process of fostering attitude change. We believe that if the pupils' pre-existing beliefs had not been explicitly presented as concrete ideas, questioning and examination of these beliefs would not have taken place. However, we realize that some quiet or shy pupils may hesitate to post their views for fear of being attacked or made fun of by their classmates. To overcome this problem, the teacher may consider using anonymity to encourage the pupils to interact and provide critical feedback.

Third, the use of peer online discussion appears to make citizenship education less teacher-centered. Face-to-face classroom discussions often involve teacher-pupil interaction characterized by the Initiate-Respond-Evaluate (IRE) structure. Usually the teacher initiates a question, followed by the pupils answering the question, and the teacher evaluating the response by giving some feedback. In online discussion, however, the IRE structure is usually minimized or eliminated altogether. Interestingly, although the teachers were supposed to facilitate the online discussion, we found that the discussion on the whole was driven mostly by the pupils themselves. Analyses of the discussion posts, for example, revealed that teachers contributed less than 10 % of the posts. One possible reason for this is that facilitating an online discussion is very time consuming. Not all teachers could dedicate the time and effort required to do it. At this juncture, it is important to note that this citizenship education posed an extra workload for the two teachers. They were not given any reduction in their regular teaching duties to do the project. Overall, this finding, therefore, infers that it might be best to allow students to take charge or facilitate the discussion on commitment to country themselves because by doing so they would have a greater sense of responsibility and ownership over the direction of the discussion as well as the opinions and arguments generated. In addition, no one pupil dominated the online discussion. This was because everyone could post any idea any time.

Fourth, teachers may wish to consider using asynchronous voice or audio discussion. We realized that not all pupils were proficient in reading or writing. Some preferred to speak rather than type. Hence, the use of asynchronous text discussion may not be very suitable for these pupils. In order to overcome this problem, we suggest that teachers consider using tools such as the Wimba Voice Board which allows pupils to speak a question or comment into a microphone and record it as an audio clip in the online discussion. Moreover, pupils have the option of typing out their comments or questions to be appended to the audio clip. The clips, along with the accompanying text if any, are then posted into a threaded organization of other audio clips (Girasoli and Hannafin 2008). The use of the Wimba Voice Board could thus potentially meet the needs of both types of pupils—those who prefer speaking to writing and vice versa.

Fifth, there is a need to enforce the ground rules of pupils replying to other individual's postings within 24 h. One of the main complaints of using asynchronous online discussion was the lack or delay in responses. The delay caused some pupils to feel frustrated especially if their questions went unanswered. So in order to overcome this problem, teachers should establish and enforce the rule of requiring the participants to respond to their peers within 24 h. The choice of a 24-h rule

is not an arbitrary one but based on empirical research (Hewitt and Teplovs 1999). Hewitt and Teplovs (1999), for example, analyzed over 4,000 online messages from seven graduate level distance education courses and found that responses posted to a thread within 24 h had the highest chance (0.26–0.68) of eliciting additional responses compared to responses posted after a day of inactivity (0.18–0.41) and after two days of inactivity (0.12–0.31). In other words, responses posted within 24 h have the highest chance of sustaining the online discussion.

Sixth, we found that pupils participated more (e.g., posted more comments) during asynchronous online discussions in class rather than outside class. Recall that one of the primary five classes participated in the asynchronous online discussion outside class time (e.g., at home), while the other within class time. Although previous research has suggested that participants in an asynchronous online discussion environment can choose to post and respond to messages at any time, we found that this may not necessary apply to the primary school students in our context. One of the main possible reasons for this is that some parents were reluctant to allow their children to access the Internet at home during the day without their supervision for fear that their children might visit undesirable websites. Some pupils were also too busy with tuition in the evenings. Due to these reasons, we suggest that teachers conduct asynchronous online discussions in class, at least for young students such as primary school pupils. In fact, conducting online discussions in class has its own benefits. Students appear to concentrate on the discussion task during online discussions in class as found in this study.

2.6 Conclusion

In this study, we explored the use of a blended learning approach that combined the use of asynchronous online peer discussion forum, persuasive cases, student reflection, face-to-face classroom discussions, and teacher presentations in an attempt to foster primary school students' affective commitment to country. Overall, we found that pupils enjoyed this blended learning approach very much and there was evidence that a change of attitude toward the country had occurred. We also described six major lessons that we learned from this citizenship education project. In particular, we believe that the use of new persuasive messages and additional consideration of already familiar messages are especially important lessons. These messages have to be authentic and real-life rather than fictional. We believe that these messages, together with the use of online peer discussions which enabled pupils to make explicit their pre-existing beliefs about their country so that these beliefs can be questioned and examined, helped the pupils appreciate their country more.

What are some possible future research directions? First, it is important to note that even with well-designed materials the success of belief change may be affected by certain individual traits or dispositions (Sinatra et al. 2012). According to Stanovich (1999, p. 157), dispositions are "relatively stable psychological mechanisms and

strategies that tend to generate characteristics behavioral tendencies and tactics". One of these dispositions is what Cacioppo et al. (1996) referred to as people's tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavors which could be represented in terms of a single factor called *need for cognition.* Scholars (e.g., Cacioppo and Petty 1982, 1984; Cacioppo et al. 1983, 1986) have found that individuals low in need for cognition, as well as those high in need for cognition must make sense of their world but they tend to derive meaning, adopt position, or solve problems in different ways. Individuals who are high in need for cognition tend to approach ideas or suggestions open-mindedly, and tend to engage in critical thinking, while those with low degrees of need tend to be close-minded, and less willing to engage in critical thought or discourse (Sinatra et al. 2012). Previous research has suggested that students with a high need for cognition tend to be more accepting of belief change (Sinatra et al. 2003). Future research should therefore examine the relationship between students' need for cognition and their affective commitment to country.

Second, the results of this study cannot be generalized to other schools. The current study was situated within a local mixed gender Chinese school, using a cohort of 11–12-year-old students. Future research should therefore examine other schools such as single gender primary schools, or secondary schools in Singapore and other countries for comparison purposes.

Overall, we believe that we have contributed to the literature on citizenship education. Perhaps the overall strength of this study lies in the design of a blended learning approach which combined the use of Socratic questions, asynchronous online peer discussion forum, persuasive cases, reflection, face-to-face classroom discussions, and teacher presentations. We intend to further test the effectiveness of this blended learning approach using an experimental research method that utilizes a treatment and control group. Given the importance of citizenship education in today's context, we hope that our blended learning approach will be useful to other researchers and educators who are similarly engaged in efforts to enrich our collective understanding regarding student commitment to their country.

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