



Creativity and Leisure: Singapore in Transformation

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The relationship of creativity and leisure is articulated for cultural transformation. Creativity is the ability to rework on experiences and realities. Leisure is about doing something of one's interest during one's free time for inner peace and for connecting to the world. Creativity is a component of culture; and leisure is the basis of culture. Culture is flourished when creativity is experienced in leisure, and when leisure engages the time of the minds in imagination. A review and analysis of the dynamics of leisure and creativity in cultural transformation is performed with reference to Singapore's recent development.

Keywords: Creativity, Leisure, Singapore, Time, Emotion.

This paper reflects upon Singapore's transformation (changes in life with defining events) from the theories of creativity and perspectives of leisure. Singapore is a South East Asian country situated at the southern tip of the Malaysia Peninsula, about 140 kilometers north of the equator. Singapore is a modernized city. It is a nation with a large pool of talent and ample reliable work force. It is an island-country which aspires to attain the image of a cultural hub. With diligence and passionate leadership, Singapore housed 3.77 million residents (5.08 total populations) in a piece of land that is 712.4 km square. According to the statistics 2010, the literacy rate among Singapore residents aged 15 years and above was 95.9%. Near ninety-two percents among resident non students aged 25–39 years were with secondary and higher qualification. The mean year of schooling among resident non-students aged 25 years and above was 9.9. Life expectancy at birth for 2009 was 81.4 years (females = 83.7 years and males = 79 years). The average household size was 3.5 persons, house ownership rate 87.2%, and resident households living in four room flats was 74.4%. Singapore enjoyed low crime rate (650 per 100,000 population), tourist industries with 2010 visitor arrivals (11, 638,700, excluding Malaysian arrivals by land) and relatively high hotel occupancy rate 85.6% (Singapore Statistics, 2010).

After its independence in 1965, Singapore has transformed to a fast-paced city-state, and a modernized cosmopolitan. Transformation refers to the action of changing in form, shape, or appearance. Leggett (2007) notes that each transfor-

mation will have its defining event (e.g., in 1997 Singapore renamed Ministry of Labor to Ministry of Manpower). Singapore has transformed to a high achieving nation and an efficient society. Singapore plays active roles as a world financial hub, a regional educational hub, and a friendly home for the international talented people of the South East, East and South Asian regions. It has survived well from several recent financial crises. The country has been aware of adopting continuous innovations in socio-economic, technological and educational aspects of life. Some of defining events that shaped Singapore's educational transformation. In 1997, Singapore's education introduced the Thinking School and Learning Nation (TSLN) framework. Apart from being high achievers in academics, children and students shall develop creative and critical thinking skills and become good problem solvers. In year 2003, Singapore engaged in developing creative industries as a strategic mean to "rescue" the country's economy. Schools introduced innovation and enterprise (I & E) framework as an elaboration of the TSLN. The I & E projects enhanced practical and innovative skills. Schools have promoted holistic curricula that highlight wellness and healthy minds. The past years, Singapore have worked through measures and developed integrated resorts for recreation and tourism.

What is Creativity?

Human beings are reactive to feedback from other people, pro-active to engage in social relationships and interactions, and creative in generating forethoughts and actions (Bandura, 1986). We are efficacious in altering information we receive to fit our cognitive structures (assimilation) or altering our cognitive structures to fit the information (accommodation) (Piaget, 1985). We are capable of recalling (memorization) and reworking (imagination) on our experiences and realities (Vygotsky, 2004). We create symbols, representations, and expressions to represent our experiences, and realities. Our creative imagination contributes to and enriches cultural artifacts and activities. Creativity is a human ability to generate images, ideas, and products. Knowledge (expertise or domain relevant processes), interest (motivation or positive emotions), and thought-action repertoires (creativity relevant processes) are components (processes) of creativity (Amabile, 1983; Fredrickson, 1998). Forms of creativity vary according to our experience, expertise, and capability to use resources and to go beyond challenges: Creativity for self-transformation in informal learning (mini-c), creativity for formal learning (little c), creativity for domain-relevant innovation and invention (professional c), and creativity for breakthroughs (Big-C). Every person is able to engage in creativity that leads to self-transformation and in everyday creativity. Professionals with specialized expertise are able to engage in domain-relevant creativity. Eminent scientists are those who experience breakthrough creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). Creative cognition involves generation of pre-inventive structures, and exploration of ways to refine, modify, and combine these structures with reference

to the material, social, and any given constraints (Finke, Ward & Smith, 1992). *Time* to engage is a pre-requisite of creativity. We rework on images that come to us and refine them according to given constraints. *Space* is another prerequisite of creativity for us to broaden our thought-action repertoires and for us to build resources that can support and realize our creativeness. Creative imagination works on the presents and projects the future (Vygotsky, 2004).

Feeling or emotions is part of creative processes. We engage in a special task when we feel positive and have interest in it. The feeling of positive is induced when we have sufficient knowledge of the task and ways to manage it. The interest in the task, the joy of doing it, the pride of accomplish it, the contentment of being with it, and the love of playing, exploring, and elaborating it and its functions broaden our imaginative minds and build resources to withstand challenges that may occur (Fredrickson, 1998). Our sense of humor enables us to work through challenges even if they are unavoidable (Frankl, 1984).

What is Leisure?

Leisure refers to free time of a person during which s/he engages him(her)self in activities s/he desires and chooses. The activities in which we engage during leisure are different from jobs or employment (e.g., regular work for incomes), routine tasks in everyday life (e.g., laundry and spring cleaning), and family or social responsibilities (e.g., paying utility bills and reunion dinner). Leisure occurs when we have time and space in doing something we are interested or in engaging in sets of experiences and realities we deem meaningful (Pieper, 1952). Engagement during leisure induces possible emotions, broaden action-thought repertoires, and build resources for problem solving, creativity and resilience (Fredrickson, 1998). In this manner, leisure enhances our interest, competencies, health and well-being. In the state of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) we experience personal and socio-cultural transformations.

Creativity and leisure relates to each other in their contribution to our wellness, health, everyday experiences and cultural activities. We articulate this relationship with reference to the occurrence of leisure in creative imagination (Vygotsky, 2004). Leisure occurs when a person has free time to fantasize and imagine, and/or when s/he feels the presence of freedom to play. Children have the capacity to be creative. Play forms a basis for children’s creativity (Lindqvist, 2001). In play, children are open to new emotional realities, social relationships, and physical environments. Emotional realities become materials for them to fantasize. Leisure provides *space* for a person to source for inspiration and to be in contact with inner peace and intuition. In leisure, a person is able to externalize the embodiment of his(her) imagination in material forms – artistic representations in the forms of drawing, writing, art and craft, composing, and the like. The cultural aspects of creativity are expressed and created in leisure. Leisure occurs when a person

absorbs in doing or in making something. S/he “forgets” about time and space, and that s/he is united with the past, present and future. S/he feels free to go beyond constraints. S/he experiences “flow” of feeling, thought and action. The outcomes of creative imagination and leisure are similar: cultural artifacts. Leisure or *Muße* is the basis of culture (Pieper, 1952) which includes not only free time and inner peace but also mental freedom. “*Kult*” is associated with the act of cultivation. The ethics of creativity is related to being connected to inner peace, enriched experiences, and life appreciation. By engaging in creative leisure, the person likely cultivates inner peace, and connects to the worlds of transformation.

How Does Creativity Develop?

We articulate development of creativity with reference to the dynamics between person-social institutions-culture interactions, and personal space-time complex (see Figure 1). The three systems theory of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1996) states that the person is an open system that interacts with two other open systems, namely the social institutions (field) and culture (domain). Social institutions (as an open system) select variations that are desirable and beneficial. Culture (as an open system) preserves variations that are sustainable over time and generations (Simonton, 1999). Leisure is the basis of culture (Pieper, 1952). Culture, creativity and leisure are inseparable in human development. We use meta-strategies to optimize opportunities, and/or to compensate our incompleteness (Baltes, 1997). Culture is a source of development. We are guided by our parents and significant others to overcome limitations, face challenges, and develop our understanding of the world. Enduring reciprocal interactions in the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) affect our development. Culture preserves sustainable, over-generational skills, knowledge, and wisdom (Simonton, 1999). It is essential for us to search for the creativity behind knowledge of the domain, and create a meaningful worldview of our own (Nishida, 1921/1987).

The person and the environment change constantly, and so is the relationship between the person and the environment (Vygotsky, 2004). Our development is influenced by the historical events occurring around us, by the timing of biological and social transitions related to culturally defined age and role expectation and opportunities, by family members’ role transition, and by our own choices and acts (see Elder’s life course principles in Bronfenbrenner, 1999, pp. 20–22, see also Wong, 2001). In our immediate environment such as home or day care, we engage in enduring forms of reciprocal interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) or reciprocal activities (Vygotsky, 2004). Self transformation and collective transformation come with transition in roles and expectations: Broadening and flourishing family responsibilities of each person to the nation and developing of a person’s roles and virtues within his(her) family (see also Bronfenbrenner’s views).

In developing creativity in leisure, we relate ourselves to culture in several

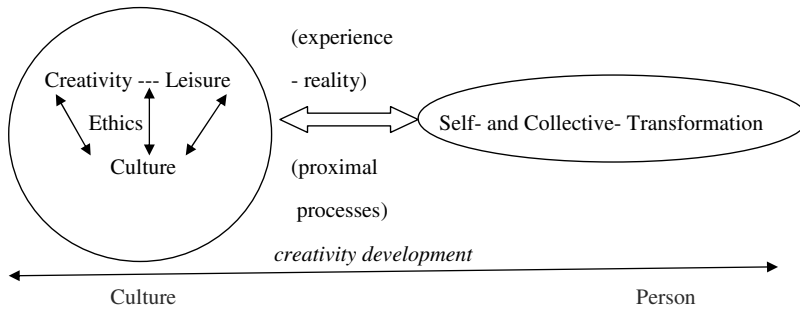


Figure 1 A Person-Cultural Model of Creativity Development in Leisure Transforming Singapore.

manners. Culture is a source of creativity as it preserves variations passing down over-generations. “Every historical situation is laden with a task.” Nishida Kitaro speaks about “from the made to the making.” The iterative processes – from the made to the making, and from the making to the made – synchronize Vygotsky’s four ways of creative imagination in mental, emotional, and social transformations: from experience to imagination, from imagination to reality, from emotional reality to imagination, and from imagination to material form. Culture is also the product of creativity. In leisure, the cultivation of the spirit of goodness for humane and for all happenings (see the essence of *Kult* - the cultivation of spirit, Pieper, 1952).

Nishida Kitaro also highlights “Grasping the creativity behind creation.” The force behind creation is intuition. Intuition and thought differ in the degree but not in quality. There are some essential elements for self and collective transformation. A person attains the state of calmness after engaging in a task in which s/he interests and for which s/he regards as meaningful. Ethics safeguard the processes of transformation so that they are relevant to our experiences, realities, and so that they are beneficial to our health and well-being. In self-transformation, we become aware of the creativity behind the creation of knowledge. Likewise in collective transformation, we gain awareness of the creative force and intuition that generate great knowledge and wisdom.

Transforming Singapore

To elaborate our model of creativity development in leisure (Fig. 1), we refer to Singapore’s aspiration to transform to a creative city and its challenges ahead. Singapore has established herself as a diligent state with strong commitment and dedication in making life better for every citizen. In less than half a century, Singapore has led the world in its air and port services, and attained the status of a competitive city with sound financial and educational foundations. Successes in

socio-economy and education have granted residents in Singapore a considerable attention from the world. Going ahead, Singapore looks into means to warrant development in arts and culture, a balance between wealth and health, diligence and creativity, order and freedom, work and play, and peace and harmony (see Leo & Lee, 2004).

From Interplay between Imagination and Reality

To sustain development of the country, nurturing creativity has been a component of Singapore's education and communities. To elaborate interplay between creativity and culture, I refer to development of arts and culture programs for the past decades. Since middle of eighties, creative art programs were introduced to adolescents as part of the secondary school curricula. Developing artistic talents has gained attention when Singapore education launched the nationwide three initiatives in 1997: Developing critical, creative and problem solving competencies, developing information technological and communication skills, and cultivating civic values. The schools of performing arts at the university level were established. Festivals, films, radio and television channels that allow artists to show their talents through original music composition and script writings (Yu, 2010). Artistic talents from the neighboring countries were and will be recruited. Creative industries have in the past decade contributed to the growth of Singapore's economy. Beyond creative industries, Singapore is in search for sustainable creative culture for innovation and growth.

To develop creativity of Singaporeans and sustainability of a creative and vibrant Singapore's city, some reforms at the policy level shall be introduced. In addition to economy-policy, educators, community leaders, and policymakers shall introduce cultural policies to support flourishing creativity. They shall recognize that creativity or imagination is the ability of our brain to combine elements. "(I)magination, the basis of all creative activity, is an important component of absolutely all aspects of cultural life, enabling artistic, scientific, and technical creation alike." (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 9) They should also be aware of the interplays between imagination and reality. That means, creativity does not come from the vacuum, but from reality or our previous experiences. Our previous experiences provide materials from which our imagination, fantasy, and creative thoughts are constructed. The richer experience we have, the richer materials to which our imagination has access. Broadening the experiences with which we provide children is beneficial as this helps build a relatively strong foundation for children's creativity. Excursions and short trips shall be organized for children to gain a variety of experiences by paying visits to science museum, bird-park, zoo, Chinese Garden, Japanese Garden, and the like. They are exposed to musical concerts, and take part in school concerts and cultural festivals. These experiences are materials from which children's creative imagination can emerge.

Our imagination is based on our experience, especially the final product of imagination corresponds with some complex real phenomenon we experience or observe. Extending further, the product of imagination interacts with real experience such as in fantasy writing – I am in a desert. I must first know what a desert is from social experience of others, and hence my imagination does not operate freely, but is directed by someone else's experience. We read newspaper to find out about events we have not directly witnessed – the events serve as sources of imagination for our fantasy writing. Children shall be made aware of real life events such as the Tsunami, SAS, H1N1, hand-mouth-foot diseases through readings and listening to experiences of other people. Teachers and parents can read related articles from the newspapers or narrates experiences of others they come across from the media. In writing essays about ways to lead a healthy and happy life, children can present their final product of imagination in the context of complex social happening such as during SAS period (e.g., nurses and doctors are infected, food supply chaos, shortage of masks for health protection).

All forms of imagination include emotion. In a dark room, we feel insecure, as we imagine that if we were in danger, help could not reach us, as no one can locate us to extend help in darkness. In a dark room, fear is induced. We imagine that we are alone. No help could reach us in time. We can find the direction to escape from danger. We then feel fearful, insecure, and helpless. In this manner, the functioning of imagination and reality is an emotional one (Vygotsky, 2004). Similarly, living in an island with limited land areas and natural resources, Singaporeans are reminded that they will face shortage of water and food. They have to prepare for rainy days. To survive Singapore residents adopt a diligent, socially responsible, and meritocracy life style. The systems build a strong work force, develop competitive economy, and put social orders in place. The residents feel the urgency to ensure that Singapore withstands odds and survives socio-economic challenges. The mild negative moods situate a person to analyze details, avoid mistakes, and ensure successes. Fear of insufficiency and love for having a descent life select impressions to work hard (diligence compensate insufficiency – Chinese saying), thoughts to prepare for rainy days (preparing for the raining day – *sediakan payong sebelum hujan*), and images of building up a hill gradually (gradually handful things transform to a hill – *sedikit-sedikit lama-lama jadi bukit*). "Emotion possesses the capacity to select impressions, thoughts, and images that resonate with the mood that possesses us a particular moment in time." (Vygotsky, 2004, pp. 17–18).

Singapore city is collective external embodiment of imagination in material forms. The city is with a relatively good mix of green and high rise buildings, preserved cultural heritages (temples, mosques, and churches) and modernized malls, as well as unique statues in the midst of busy business district areas (e.g., Merlion with the head of lion and the tail of fish; the Espane – with the shape of the durian – the king of the tropical fruit). The Merlion and Espane represent

the functionality of emotional realities of Singapore in its legend – the lion (*singa*) city discovered by a prince (*putra*) and its history of a busy port of Malacca Strait. In the creative minds of the inventor, the elements of imagination undergo complex reworking and transformation into products of imagination (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 21). A pedagogy of play can enrich Singapore's children's experience in life. A pedagogy of leisure and creativity can enrich cultures and life of people in Singapore.

Conclusion

Culture is collective wisdom of mankind. Creativity is a human ability that unifies experience and reality and creates new cultural aspects. Culture can serve as resources and cultural experiences as materials from which imagination emerges. In this manner, culture is reference and content of creative imagination. Creativity development is a personal engagement, and social and cultural activity. Leisure relates culture to creativity and creativity to culture when a person uses his(her) free time to connect to the world by doing something s/he is interested and s/he deems as meaningful for him(her)self and others. During leisure, the person experiences freedom of thought and speech, and openness to new experience. S/he plays with his(her) thoughts, materials, and/or people of his(her) choices, and makes something meaningful. Leisure culture and creativity culture thus include the elements of developing personal meanings, cultivating humanness, and establishing connections to the world.

Remaking Leisure and Creativity Culture

How to remake Singapore to be a creative and sustainable city for leisure and cultural life? How do we connect Singapore to her people and the world with leisure and creativity culture? Singapore's success is evidence of hard work, discipline, and security. Sound economic policies infused into all sectors of life have contributed to the growth of Singapore as a vibrant city in business, finance, banking, air and sea traffics, telecommunication efficiency and the like. Singapore is best featured as a business and financial hub with fast-pace, results-oriented, accuracy and efficiency. The interministerial cooperation ties efforts in advancing education, economy, finance, and wealth of the city together. Singapore's competitiveness has attracted investors and talents of various parts of the world. Will Singapore's successful economic policies shadow and hinder her long-term, deeply rooted, and integrative cultural and creativity development? The questions posed are beyond the scope of our discussion in this paper. They provide some reflective inquiry direction for Singapore to develop for humanness, inner peace, human relations and connections to the world (see also Gwee, 2008). A mechanism shall be

introduced to remake leisure and creativity culture for Singapore's sustainability and peaceful life.

With reference to a person-cultural model of creativity development in leisure (Figure 1) the following recommendations for Singapore's city transformation are presented for consideration:

Beginning from development with close family members and contacts in schools, leisure shall be integrated into everyday life. Leisure (*xiuxian* – rest and do nothing) shall be redefined by moving away from its original connotation – doing nothing, being useless and wasteful, without contribution and zero productivity (Fan, 2011). The ethics of leisure shall build upon Pieper's notion of Musse: "doing something with interest" during "free time" for humane and connection to the world." Within family and among kinship, culture of leisure shall be assimilated into everyday life: Broadening worldviews through leisure engagement and activities, developing diversity in life through engaging in self-chosen, meaningful doing and making, and cultivating love of leisure culture for health.

Physical space for leisure at home, in the housing areas, in schools, and in the communities of Singapore at large shall be inclusive for all at the affordable price and convenient locations. Promoting healthy life styles through enduring and reciprocal interactions among family members and community members shall be enhanced. It is important to develop sound cultural enrichment policies tapping on resources of Singapore's multiethnic residents, and international connections to countries around her. School, community, national, and high educational libraries shall work closely with artists, scientists, and historians to develop resources, and to preserve indigenous and cultural products. To enhance joy of reading for leisure, reading corners for all age groups shall be established. Intergenerational interactions for leisure shall be encouraged to share historical experiences and cultural wisdom.

Cultural policies shall ensure long-term, deeply rooted, and transformational development beyond economic measures. Openness to multiethnic emotions, multi-lingual expressions, and multi-religious artifacts is essential in advancing Singapore to a cultural city. Remaking its community centers and libraries to include multicultural leisure spots is indispensable. Leisure that integrates Singapore's aspiration to sustain racial harmony, international friendship, and civic responsibility shall be recommended and supported. Singapore shall move toward remarking leisure culture for health and sustainable growth. It is important to recognize functionality of culture as the glue of similarity that grounds sociality. The multiethnic backgrounds of Singapore's residents, international talent working groups and globalized organizations and enterprises are sources for Singapore to cultivate the spirit of cooperation, cohesion, and integration. Leisure and creativity culture beyond creative industry initiatives can enhance social sustainability. Festival celebrations are significant leisure and cultural activities that promote openness and creativity. Examples of festival celebrations that invite international

participation is the fifteenth day of the lunar new year, and that engage local artists and school children in performances and parades is the national day. Songs are composed for the national day celebration. Indigenous and local artists are invited to entertain the audience before and after the formal programs. Reflections of Singapore's history, contemporary development, and aspiration are presented with music and dances.

Final Remarks

In Singapore, there is little research and studies related to the themes creativity, culture and leisure. It is timely to promote interdisciplinary and intercultural studies on creativity and leisure for health, well-being, peace, and humanness. Schools have integrated community service and service learning programs to promote emotion-learning at home and abroad. Recognizing the importance of emotions in learning is a first step toward creative imagination. Emotional experience and cultural experience shall be promoted hand-in-hand with leisure management within schools and communities. Research on the roles of leisure in promoting creativity, cultural efficacies, and well-being shall be encouraged. Leisure management for quality of life and for cultivating of common good shall be given priority interdisciplinary discourse and intercultural dialogues. The intent of leisure and creativity shall be articulate with reference to understanding of the world and construction of culture. Inquiry into the creativity behind the activities can be a good start. Lev Vygotsky (1929) reminds us that *culture transforms nature to suit the ends of man*. I would like to elaborate this view with reference to cultural development in Singapore. In transforming to a home for every person, Singapore, in her next wave of development, shall focuses on cultural development of every person. My reflective point focuses on cultural development which is in line development of the nature. Located above the equator, Singapore has a tropical climate. As an island city, Singapore is an international port for travellers who wish to visit the island and her neighbouring country. The country has transformed from a developing to a developed society, offering modernized life style. The city uses the English language as the main language of communication and encourages the use of mother tongues (Malay, Mandarin and Tamil) in all official broadcasting and media transmission. *Cultural development has to suit the ends* of the Singapore residents, which are of Chinese, Malay, Indian, and other ethnic backgrounds. The diversity of her population is a natural resources and materials for Singapore to transform to a multilingual, multireligious, and multicultural hub. To succeed this aim, Singapore communities of diversified backgrounds have to empower and to feel the civic and social responsibilities to transform themselves in line with their natural development. According to Vygotsky (1929), transformation to meet its ends occurs when cultural development of behavior consists of *inner changes* (ingrown) in consistent with their natural development of behavior.

Lev Vygotsky (2004) articulates clearly the role of imagination or creativity in development. Imagination is a human ability that enables us to rework experiences and realities. The richer the experience we have, the richer is our imagination. In leisure, we have free time to do what we desire and what we deem as meaningful. As such, leisure provides us time and space for imagination, for engaging in emotional and social realities, and for developing cultural products. In transforming into a leisure city, Singapore authorities and communities shall engage experts of creativity and consult theories of creativity that provide them accurate understanding of the interplay between culture, imagination, and leisure.

Some prospective step is observed on campus of the Nanyang Technological University Singapore toward transformation to a city-university. Situated about 45-minute drive from the Changi international airport, for the past decade, the university has made a conscious and deliberate step to upgrade its infrastructure, develop research and publication culture and enhance student-residential enrichment programs on campus. Technological, multimedia, and physical Infrastructures have been in place to facilitate creativity, innovation, art and performance. The next leap of development is to facilitate cultural development and collective transformation that engage inner changes for quality of life, growth, health, and well-being.

Other prospective steps that can transform Singapore to a healthy city for all are suggested for consideration:

- Internalizing cultural development into social and educational policies. Cultural development is essential for human development and city development
- Recognizing imagination as a human ability; all humans regardless of age, and other background are able to image or be creative. Leisure provides space and time for imagination and cultural creation.
- Imagination includes emotion and experience enhances imagination. Space and cultural heritage that can enhance emotional experiences of all backgrounds have to be recognized.
- Cultural festivals, arts, music, dance, sport and creative activities that promote emotional engagement and imagination shall be encouraged among residents. Schools, higher educational institutions, and community-based organizations shall recognize and celebrate multicultural experiences and traditions for integration, care and positivity in life.
- Creative pedagogies (e.g., play and dance, Lindqvist, 2001; cultural pedagogy of errors, Fang, 2010) that provide support for deep learning and self transformation shall be integrated into school curricula and classroom practices for the young and school age children.
- Removing negative connotations of leisure as unproductive, wasteful, and useless endeavor of less cultivated people. Acknowledging play as a basic for creativity to balance the tradition of doing homework and correcting errors as part of deep learning. Increasing the variety of leisure activities (e.g., building

Lego blocks, field visits, drama, and dance) in addition to the existing activities such as watching television and travelling overseas.

- Integrating creative leisure activities (e.g., Yoga, meditation, chess, and kite flying) to everyday life to enhance well-being, health, and quality of life.
- Having pride of “the nature” of Singapore people, Singapore geography, and Singapore’s multilingual, multireligious, and multicultural communities. Transforming Singaporean cultural behavior in line with the above nature.
- Revitalizing the culture of mother tongues side by side with mastery of the English language and information technology and communication competencies. Making conscious effort to promote multicultural Singaporean identities for peace, harmony and growth.
- Developing cultural policies that support and implement the above ideas.

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