

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION THROUGH THE INCORPORATION OF ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY INTO THE CURRICULUM: THE RESULTS FROM AN INITIAL CASE STUDY

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Abstract

In today's social and political climate, the need to find effective methods for dealing with issues associated with multiculturalism, diversity and community cohesion is essential, particularly within the realm of education in plural societies, and the Citizenship curriculum in schools provides an ideal starting point. An interdisciplinary approach is suggested as the way forward in this paper through the compulsory incorporation of social psychology into the Citizenship curriculum in schools, with evidence to support this from an initial case study carried out in the U.K.

Teaching secondary school pupils about the notions of conformism and in-groups and out-groups, including the impact on the human psyche, as well as the real social issues which face many marginalised and divided communities, may help to break down barriers to peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, fostering tolerance is a mutual process, for just as majority populations have to learn how to live alongside various ethnic minorities, so too must these ethnic minorities integrate and work alongside the wider population where they live. Just as importantly, in divided communities where reconciliation is being sought, reducing tensions and dealing with the socio-psychological impact of past events is crucial. The education system should be the starting point for addressing the complexities of this range of issues in order to prepare young people to be good citizens and to be able to positively contribute towards the society in which they live.

This paper will examine the aforementioned issues and suggest ways in which the Citizenship curriculum can be adapted to meet the various needs in question, whilst drawing on a pluralist approach. It will examine how and argue why particular elements of social psychology should be incorporated into the secondary school curriculum on a compulsory basis. The initial findings from the research carried out to date will also be discussed. These findings, which are from a case study involving a Welsh Valleys (rural) school in the U.K, appear to be positive so far, suggesting that introducing this type of interdisciplinary approach within schools may be beneficial as, for example, an addition or alternative to intercultural contact.

The new curriculum which has been designed and utilised in the case study takes an inter-disciplinary approach that involves incorporating social psychology into the Citizenship curriculum through a set of eight to ten lessons depending on individual schools' time frames. One important aspect of the curriculum is to develop the pupils' critical thinking skills as they learn about various sociological and psychological theories and experiments. This is famously explained by Wright Mills (1959 p.7) as facilitating "the capacity to shift from one perspective to another- from the political to the psychological" (Wright Mills 1959 p.7).

Keywords: Education, citizenship, multiculturalism, ethno-cultural empathy, toleration