

# Citizenship, PSE and The French Dressing Approach to Curriculum Planning

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Personal and social education continues to be a controversial element of the curriculum. Some teachers apparently despise it, others see it as essential to a broad and balanced curriculum. At the present time, it is possible to find schools just beginning to introduce it, whilst others appear to have tried it, found it wanting and have abandoned it. Why is this?

Even amongst committed staff there is widespread acknowledgement that PSE has problems which include low status (in the eyes of pupils and many staff) poor resources, staffing problems and often a lack of coherence (HMI 1989). This state of affairs can be traced in part to the lack of clarity concerning whether PSE is a subject or a curriculum slot. Nor does it have a single, overarching rationale. There is evidence that schools operate at least two different models of PSE and that these models are sometimes in conflict. There is the personal model and the social model, each important but fulfilling distinctly different tasks.

## The Personal Model

The personal or pastoral model, is concerned with the development of the individual as a whole person. It recognises that personal growth and academic progress depend on many factors to do with the self. PSE can provide much needed time for form tutors to work with their form members on a range of activities, including tutoring, personal guidance and counselling. Time is also needed to encourage strong links between home and school, to report to parents and to prepare records of achievement. All these activities have a coherent rationale which is characterised by a non-judgemental approach and is concerned with empowerment through the development of personal confidence and understanding rather than the acquisition of a core of socially useful knowledge. These activities relate to the whole child and rely on the strength of the relationship between the tutor and individual members of the form (Marland 1989).

## The Social Model

The other model of PSE is the social model. This has developed over the years in response to growing pressures to develop the entitlement curriculum. The rationale for the social model is based upon the need to encourage empowerment through the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes relating to society and the role of the individual within it.

Unfortunately, in the upper secondary years, where concern for the entitlement curriculum was felt most strongly, there was no widespread acceptance of the need for a broad social curriculum which included social studies as well as history and geography. The result has been that additional elements such as citizenship and economic awareness have become located in the PSE slot and in many instances they lie uneasily alongside elements of the personal/pastoral curriculum. As a result, certain tensions have arisen. To teach the social curriculum requires from the teacher a commitment and an expertise of quite a different nature from that required to

implement the personal/pastoral curriculum. And, unlike the personal model, it is not inappropriate to treat the core social curriculum exactly in the manner of other subjects, accrediting pupils' work and assessing progress in terms of gains in knowledge, understanding and skills. Many PSE teachers have been reluctant to go down this road.

It is interesting to note that each of the cross-curricular themes contains elements of both the personal and the social model (although I would argue that, in each case, one model tends to be dominant. The two cross-curricular themes most akin to the personal model are health education (including personal relationships and sex education) and careers education and guidance. These are best dealt with in a supportive, non-judgemental environment and do much to enrich the personal curriculum. The other three cross-curricular themes fall more in to the social model - these are environmental awareness, economic and industrial understanding and citizenship.

These themes are characterised by a substantial body of specialist knowledge drawing on a number of distinct social science disciplines. To fulfil the requirements of Curriculum Guidance & Education for Citizenship will take commitment and considerable expertise on the part of the teacher. To implement the guidelines will require staff to become familiar with a number of curriculum areas which until now have been regarded as controversial and difficult. There is a decided deficit of experience in the areas of moral, political and legal education - all areas now recommended as central to citizenship. For example, teaching about The Citizen and the Law (one of the recommended areas in CG8) requires knowledge of criminal and civil law which takes a certain amount of time to accumulate. At least as important, teachers need to develop specific teaching skills, relating to the use of group work, handling discussions, encouraging critical thinking, using role plays and so on.

We would not expect a non-specialist to be able to offer a science course and yet the assumption is often made that the science teacher, as form tutor, will automatically be able to handle moral, political or cultural issues with ease. But the evidence is that, faced with such demands, some tutors have felt so ill-equipped that they have, in effect, refused to address these issues. This has certainly contributed to the poor coverage of legal and political issues in the core curriculum (Davies 1991 and HMI 1989). Do we as a profession attach so little importance to citizenship that we are prepared to leave it so much to chance?

## **The 'French Dressing' Problem**

The difficulties facing many PSE courses, is that they have tried a kind of french dressing approach, attempting to mix two elements which stubbornly refuse to combine and which insist on separating out again. Whilst most teachers of social subjects accept the role of form tutor, the reverse is decidedly not the case. Issues such as abortion, the family, race, gender, politics, and law can be dynamite if not handled well and can place teachers in extremely difficult positions professionally. There are tightropes to walk here and no one should walk a tightrope lightly, so to speak.

## A Possible Solution

Some schools have recognised this problem and have adopted a solution based on delivering a social curriculum (as distinct from merely history and geography) separately from the personal/pastoral curriculum. Although the time constraints are considerable, the benefits of this approach are several. Firstly, it eliminates a serious confusion in the minds of pupils (and indeed some staff) over what is on offer. Pupils are notorious for not taking PSE lessons seriously and this, I believe, is very much bound up with the fact that the core social curriculum cannot be given the weight it deserves within this structure. Secondly, it allows the core social curriculum to be taught by experienced and specialist staff, committed to the social studies, and able and willing to develop the new areas of expertise required under the recent NCC guidelines. Thirdly, assessment and accreditation can be offered as for the other social science subjects, which should underline for pupils the importance placed on these areas by the school. At key stage 4, modular courses including, inter alia, RE, citizenship, environmental education and economic awareness, can provide academic rigour and a broad and balanced introduction to many important issues facing today's young citizens. Similar structures have also been developed for key stage 3. Time, of course, is the problem. If schools adopt this option it does have the effect of expanding the compulsory core by at least one period per week. I hope, in arguing this, I will not be construed as denying the importance of the personal dimension within the social curriculum (or indeed, vice versa). That would be a nonsense. I am very much in favour of seeing the development of personal and social skills more thoroughly integrated across the whole curriculum (see, for example, Rodin 1992). Indeed, if this were the case, it would further reduce the pressure on many PSE courses to make up this kind of curriculum deficit.

The National Curriculum does not, as some thought it might, pose a threat to the personal and social dimension of the curriculum. It has made it more necessary than ever. It may, however, have brought more sharply into focus the problem of the french dressing model which has bedevilled the development of the entitlement curriculum for so long.

## References

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