

TEFL 7: Intercultural language education for increased European identity and cohesion

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Title:

Teaching “Social Studies in English”:
A case study of Education for Democratic Citizenship from Austria

Abstract

Democratic citizenship education has been increasingly promoted worldwide in an attempt to provide the kind of education that is capable of safeguarding and sustaining peace, plurality and democracy. Many voices have highlighted the importance of foreign language teaching in promoting citizenship education and intercultural understanding. The present study investigates an innovative course designed by a group of English teachers to teach about democracy and human rights. The study investigates the implication of such initiatives on education for democratic citizenship and how the English medium may or may not have an influence on the process and what kind of learning and assessment occurs when citizenship education is taught through a foreign language. The study primarily deals with the teachers’ approach and understanding of democracy and good citizenry, and highlights some of the challenges and tensions facing education for democracy in increasingly diverse contexts, such as dealing with controversial issues. The study is using a qualitative methodology utilizing discourse analysis to approach a variety of data that is being collected through interviews and classroom observation and materials. Initial findings revealed that the content of the course was a source of motivation and an eye-opening experience for both students and teachers. Data also revealed that teachers’ own democratic dispositions and beliefs highly influenced their pedagogical approaches in the classroom and the way they approached the topics and assessed the students. Moreover, the use of English in such a course, although for pragmatic reasons, may have facilitated the discussion of controversial issues in a language that is not the mother tongue, which might have made emotional distance more possible.

Keywords: citizenship education, FLT, teacher education, and democracy

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