

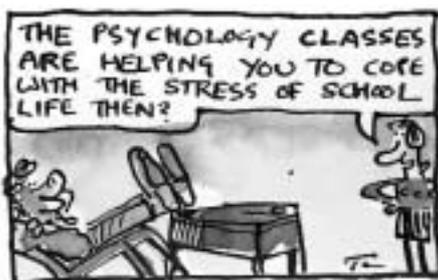
# Citizenship with added psychology

**A**S a student in Year 12 I have only studied psychology for eight months. It became an AS- or A-level option at my school (the Howard of Effingham) relatively recently, and has become the most popular choice available. But I think there is a strong case for psychology for all, not just those attending the sixth form. I appreciate it is hard to slot yet another subject into the busy day, so why not include a psychological element in the PSHE (personal, social and health education) classes currently used for citizenship and sex education? Basic elements of psychology in the fortnightly lessons (compulsory from Year 7) would, I believe, benefit students of all ages. Why do I think this?

Firstly, psychology is an important step towards understanding yourself. All good schools do more than simply teach academic subjects: they prepare a student for life after their education. Part of this preparation comes in the form of PSHE lessons, and surely an integral part of the 'personal education' is understanding the functions and processes of the self. Psychology would provide all students with an insight into possible reasons for their actions as well as the actions of others. I have found that I, along with the other members of my class, have been forced to question ourselves. We have looked back at our childhood and early development,

BY TIMOTHY JONES

as well as studying the influence that those in positions of power have over us. Awareness of biochemical functions can aid everybody in everyday life, as well as complementing biology lessons perfectly. 'Critical issues' that could be included in the PSHE classes include examination of stress management techniques, ways of improving memory, and causes of disorders such as anorexia and bulimia.



Secondly, psychology teaches an acceptance of other cultures. It is commonly accepted that the way to avoid prejudice and discrimination against other cultures is to increase people's understanding of them. In almost all of the topics that I have covered so far as a part of my AS-level course, I have examined how practices and beliefs are different in other parts of the world. This is especially true for many of the studies that I cover, most of which are performed in the West. For example, when Asch's famous conformity experiment was conducted in other countries a wide range of results was discovered, depending on whether the tests were carried out in individualist or collectivist cultures (e.g. Moghaddam *et al.*, 1993). The diagnosis of abnormality changes from society to society, where some symptoms shown by African-Caribbeans are viewed as 'normal' in their own country but in Britain would be seen as signs of schizophrenia (Rack, 1984). Psychology has real potential to increase understanding and reduce prejudice.

Finally, a lot of group discussion takes place in psychology classes. This is

especially valuable at a time when it feels that every second of my other lessons is spent learning how to pass the exam, rather than looking at the subject in a wider context. My class has discussed, amongst other themes, childhood memories, the ethics of research, and the power of minority influence. I have found out facts about other members of my class and shared in their experiences. I have found out that I am not alone in a number of thoughts, but I have also learnt to respect the standpoints of others. Anyone who profits from the group discussions in the ways that I have will come out a better, more rounded person. This is exactly what PSHE lessons are all about.

So that's my argument for including psychology in 'citizenship' lessons, even if it is just a general overview of the subject. When I first read about psychology a few years ago I became hooked, and slowly built up a greater knowledge of it. The science as a whole can only benefit from its inclusion, as there will be a number of students who first find out that the subject especially interests them from the teaching of it in PSHE lessons. It must be a consideration in everyone's mind, as the positive outcomes are endless.

## References

- Moghaddam, F.M., Taylor, D.M. & Wright, S.C. (1993). *Social psychology in cross-cultural perspective*. New York: W.H. Freeman.  
Rack, P. (1984). *Race, culture and mental disorder*. London: Tavistock.

## YOUR STUDIES IN YOUR LIFE

We're publishing a special issue later this year entitled 'Can psychology revolutionise higher education?' – could what you have learnt on your course be used to improve your life of work, rest and play?

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Articles, news, tips, quotes, cartoons and other contributions for the 'Students' page are most welcome.

Send to: Daniela Schulze, c/o the Society's Leicester office. E-mail: [dani@ecosse.net](mailto:dani@ecosse.net).

## THE SOCIETY'S VIEW

Timothy Jones eloquently describes many of the arguments for psychology being part of the National Curriculum. The Psychology Education Board has recently adopted the policy of seeking a place for psychology in the National Curriculum, and the training of psychology graduates as secondary school teachers. It may take quite a long time for this to be put into practice, but it will form an important part of the mission of the Psychology Education Board.

*Professor Peter Morris, Chair,  
Psychology Education Board*