Chapter 8

Arabic Language Heritage Schools: The Educational Potential of Celebrating Identity and Diversity

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter we consider the nature and role of Arabic heritage / supplementary schools in the UK in relation to debate security. We do this by establishing an overview of the current political context in the UK and beyond in where there is concern about a possible drift towards the proliferation of / recruitment to terrorist groups. There are significant official efforts being made to reduce that perceived threat. There are, within the UK, thousands of schools that promote and maintain the heritage language and culture of students. We describe and discuss that educational context and use results from empirical research.

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT: CURRENT CONCERNS OVER SECURITY RELEVANT TO EDUCATION AND SCHOOLING IN ENGLAND

Concerns for the education and integration of migrants, combined with the effects on a host society have long been of interest to scholars. The characterization of ‘acceptable’ social and personal identities and norm-related considerations of migrants’ backgrounds often have implications for the host nations’ perceptions of potential threats. Established social stereotypes may influence not only how a host nation views migrants, but also impact on those migrants’ self-portrayal and understanding of their role in their new society. Inflated tensions can lead to what Bonino (2016a) refers to as ‘security syndrome’. The increasing global interconnections brought about by technology are relevant to how identity is constructed not only within, but also across countries. Lives are no longer (if they ever were) tied to a singular place or identity which can be construed as a threat to a nation as a singular entity (Georgiou, 2003) and in this complex scenario a feeling of uneasiness may result for both the host nation and the minority. Globalisation has brought feelings of insecurity to individuals, prompting them to seek reassurance in a collective cultural environment that may reduce this sentiment (Kinnvall, 2004). Debates about citizenship in its various forms and the education related to it are conducted vigorously. Increasingly, these social and cultural phenomena inform perspectives on how both dominant and ‘minority’ groups construct a nation and the role of ethnicities within it (Abell, Condor, & Stevenson, 2006; Skey, 2010). The perceptions about these identities and the reactions to them are significant across generations, thus making vitally important to find ways for children and adolescents to feel included in society, no matter what their background (Francis, Archer, & Mau, 2009; Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011; Noble, 2005, 2007; Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010).

In this chapter, we argue that Arabic heritage schools may serve multifaceted roles in British society, including identity formation, cultural stability, political and moral education and that these things are important in the determination to raise well-adjusted members of society. These schools are part time, community based educational institutions that support culture and language. They meet outside of times normally occupied by mainstream schools, may request a small fee and make use of a mix of trained and inexperienced teachers. They occupy community sites. These schools provide an opportunity for the sort of intergroup contact which has been shown to reduce prejudices and strengthen social cohesion and trust in institutions (Feddes, Noack, & Rutland, 2009; Francis et al., 2009; Macaluso, 2016; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Heritage language schools exist in many parts of the world including for example Canada (Duff and Li 2009) and the USA (Musha Doerra and Lee (2009). We show how these supplementary schools define their role in England and how they use the teaching of the standard language variation to provide an inclusive environment (Blackledge et al., 2008) and we show how these schools relate to developments in citizenship education. Of course, we do not claim that these schools are always...