

RDF project 2015-2016

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Opening the Can of Worms: How Can We Best Promote Fundamental British Values in Teaching and Learning?

Abstract

The issue of British Values has been a contentious one (Jerome and Clemitshaw 2012; Kenny & Ghale 2015) and with the introduction of the Common Inspection Framework (2015) Personal development, behaviour and Welfare judgement, there has been an expectation that teachers in the education and training sector will promote Fundamental British Values (FBV) within the classroom. This action research study investigates how trainee teachers and experienced teachers in an FE college engage with the policy of FBV, how they translate in the classroom and further questions *'How can we best promote FBV in teaching and learning.'* Analysis of the baseline assessment demonstrated that teachers' recognised attributes from FBV however, were not actively signposting them as FBV within their classroom. Key findings indicates that teachers agreed with the notion of the values, but expressed tension with the term Fundamental British Values. As FBV are located with the Prevent strategy trainee teachers were concerned that open dialogue may lead to conversations that they don't feel professionally confident in managing. This may indicate a concern from the FE community regarding the discourse between the expectations of the regulatory body and the lack of foregrounding of British Values that is occurring. This case study research demonstrates an intervention of a bridge between teaching practice and government expectations.

Fundamental British Values are defined as "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs" (ETF, 2016: 1). In September 2015, the Government published the statutory framework for Further Education inspection guidance highlighting an expectation that 'The promotion of fundamental British values is at the heart of the provider's work' (HM Government, 2015a: 40). In the document, it is considered that providers will actively promote FBV and are recognised as part of the effectiveness of leadership and management for outstanding and good grade descriptors. The need to ensure all staff recognise the expectation to 'actively promote' (HM Government, 2015a: 40) FBV was therefore paramount for quality purposes.

We are two teachers working as part of the quality team in Higher education in Further Education (HE in FE) as well as in Further Education (FE) delivering a variety of initial teacher education (ITE) courses for the Education and Skills Sector. Additionally, one of us also works as a cross curricula learning coach supporting new FE, as well as established, practitioners. As practitioners ourselves, we not only had a duty to actively promote FBV in our own practice but also, through our roles as initial teacher educator and learning coach, we had to ensure that the staff and student teachers were actively promoting them too. However, we were uncomfortable about how to actively promote them as well as being very concerned that staff and student teachers were unsure as to what FBV actually were (we had heard on one staff development day how they were fish and chips, The Queen and Tea!) If we felt uncomfortable and they felt unclear, how were

we to actively promote them? This research demonstrates an FE institution in the South West of England journey to actively promote FBV in teaching and learning.

National Identity

Jerome and Clemitshaw (2012) recognise that it is not unusual in education to have a national narrative taught. Yet the the promotion of FBV has caused a tension in education. Key issues have been namely: linking the Prevent agenda and radicalisation to the role and responsibilities of the teacher as part of in the securitisation agenda.

The rise of FBV can be drawn back to a number of international and national events. Notably, September 11th 2001, with the attack on the World Trade Center. David Blunkett, who was at that time the Home Secretary, likened the attacks to a 'rejection of the values of democracy' (Blunkett, 2015). Furthermore, with the terrorist bombing in central London by British Citizens in July 2007, Gordon Brown (2006) made a reference to homegrown terrorism and concerns with local communities. This caused a new quandary for politics: equality and diversity, and counter terrorism. However, one point was clear, 'There is room to celebrate multiple and different identities....(but) none of these identities should take precedence over the core democratic values that define what it means to be British' (Green Paper, 2007: 57). There followed an assertive rise in Britishness usurping all other forms of identity. A vehicle to expedite this rise was through education. In 2007, the Secretary of State for Education (as cited in Jerome and Clemitshaw, 2012) stated the national curriculum could be used to explicitly teach about the role of British Values. For example, the citizenship programme, revised in 2007, introduced an 'Identities and Diversity: Living Together in the UK' (QCA, 2007: 29).

Whilst the Labour party has attempted to link Britishness with a national identity, the debate about Britishness, nationalism and the 'us' vs 'them' mentality took a step change with Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (HM Government, 2015b). The legislation stipulated that authorities (of which FE colleges are named) had to pay 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (HM Government, 2015b). The 'Prevent' guidance (HM Government, 2015c) outlines the duties that needed to be met and made an explicit link to promoting fundamental British Values with the legal duties of the Act. It was now a legal duty for teachers to promote FBV.

Whilst the Teaching Standards (Department of Education, 2012) in primary and secondary stipulate not undermining FBV, the Professional Teaching Standards in the education and training sector neither make reference to not undermining or to actively promoting them (ETF, 2014). Instead it encourages a development of professional judgment and to 'Value and promote social and cultural diversity, equality of opportunity and inclusion' (ETF, 2014: 1). Whilst both are supportive to the development of the teacher, one concern is the lack of specific responsibility portrayed in the standards leading to confusion as to the role and responsibility of the teacher. As ITT practitioners, we were confused and yet this had clear implications for teachers so needed to be promoted. Debate regarding teachers being 'instruments of the state' (Lander, 2016: 275) we recognised, however, there was a legal duty to perform, that was not, we believed, being addressed and that could fundamentally impact on the whole institution. So we designed an action research study to improve staff, student teachers, students and ourselves into gaining an understanding and to actively promote FBV.

Methodology

Paradoxically the aim of the study was to empower as well as to conform. To empower practitioners, including ourselves in knowledge and techniques to actively promote FBV as well as to ensure due diligence to the legislation. However, throughout the research our aim is to improve practice and ultimately the student experience. With practitioners being at the centre of the study, the most suited methodology was action research to conduct our research. It also chimes with Stenhouse (1975) view that curriculum developments should involve the practitioner, as well as Carr and Kemmis (1986) who stated practitioners are an integral part of educational design. Rather than following an action research cycle we ensured our research design contained the core action research ideas, as outlined by Thomas (2009), that we were conducting research as practitioners, to develop practice, to be committed to change and involved planning, reflection and re-planning for improvement. Then we followed McNiff et al (2003) suggestion that action research can take the form of a dialogue. Each stage of planning involved discussions between ourselves and the relevant stakeholders such as students or staff.

With practitioners doing research rather than having research done upon them, opens the question regarding the reliability and validity of the outcomes. Action research by its very nature subjective. However, that is the point. We wanted findings about our setting. The aim of the study was not to generalise the findings we required 'useable knowledge' (Viadero, 2003 as cited in Pine, 2009:5). However, we utilised a range of data collection methods rather than just one method to improve the reliability and validity within the research to ensure we did get an accurate reflection of our setting.

Firstly, we wanted to conduct a baseline assessment to act as a measure for the intervention. In the institution, we administered a questionnaire to identify existing knowledge. The questionnaire method was useful as it enabled us to quickly establish prior knowledge of a large sample. However, in the teacher training sessions, we could engage with a poster exercise as the sample was smaller (each group ranged from 13-17 people). Similar to the questionnaire, in that the main british values were each identified, students took turns to identify their current teaching activities they use to promote FBV and record them on an A1 sheet displayed in the teaching room. From both of these activities we were able to identify the current engagement with FBV at the start of the project.

Ethical Considerations

Our aim was to enhance the learning experience rather than hinder it. We endeavoured to follow ethical principles outlined in BERA (2011) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research:

Prior to starting the research approval was sought from management. A statement informing lecturers as to the nature of the study was included on the questionnaire. We delivered copies of the questionnaire to each staff meeting and verbally reinforced that lecturers could volunteer to participate and how the information was to be used. A Verbal statement was read out prior to the interview and the interview transcript was sent to the participant for approval. For the volunteers acting as case studies, a consent form was given to outline the nature of the study and how the data was to be used. We were open about the aims and objectives of the research throughout the project.

On the initial questionnaire, at the start of the interview and with the case studies we stated the right of any participant to withdraw at any stage of the research prior to publication. With the ITE students we were mindful to a dual role conflict. However, we were also mindful that an understanding of British Values was a responsibility of a teacher and recognising how they can be applied would be part of the curriculum. However, the collection of the data was not part of that, so all students had volunteer informed consent for the collect of the data and the right to withdraw that data.

There were no children, young people or vulnerable adults involved in this study. We monitored for any emotional harm and ensured that the questionnaire, the interview and the case study was minimal in terms of time taken to complete to reduce any form of 'bureaucratic burden' (BERA 2011: 6) for participants.

There was no predictable detriment arising from the process. All ITE students still had the opportunity to participate in the activity regardless of if they consented for their data to be used.

All data was confidential and anonymous. We adhered to the Data Protection Act (1998) and kept all data on a password encrypted cloud drive and memory stick.

Findings from Baseline assessment:

The response rate from 130 questionnaire was 25%. From the poster activities there was a 100% response rate. We recognise that the poster activities may have yielded a higher response rate due to the social nature of the activity. Students were able to observe their peers' responses as well as discuss their responses in a pair, in contrast to the questionnaire which was completed individually. Additionally, the activity was part of their ITE however, the reserved the right to keep their responses from the research.

Findings from Baseline Assessment

We collated the data using a constant comparative method. Some frequently cited examples were: ground rules and student voice for democracy, turn taking and feeling safe in the learning environment for rule of law, respecting opinions and debating for individual liberty and celebrating festivals and challenging ignorance for tolerance. We questioned whether the method of stating the FBV had swayed the responses, for example, by stating 'democracy' did this act as a aide memoire? However, returning to our research objective, to promote FBV, we considered it as an aid. We independently reviewed the data and from this generated key themes and then discussed our independent findings together. What we both noticed was there was more knowledge about FBV than we had originally recognised. However, we discussed that if practitioners knew about FBV, why were we not seeing them actively promoted in their classrooms? Informally discussing this with our ITE cohorts, suggested feeling uncomfortable with 'actively' promoting.

Following the baseline assessment, we used Brookfield's (2005) reflective lenses as a framework to get a diverse range of actions from scholarship, students, self and peers. We interviewed a department manager from another institution to gain a perspective from another setting, arranged a trip to the Houses of Parliament for trainee teachers, participated

in the 'Teacher's Institute', a continued professional development course for teachers at the Houses of Parliament, engaged in a community of inquiry with trainee teachers to explore the concept of FBV, we met with library staff to explore how we could jointly support each other to promote FBV, we promoted resources at a teaching and learning fair, we created a VLE resource bank promoted both through ITE and through the learning coach role, to enable practitioners with go to resources for promoting FBV in their classrooms. We have illustrated a selection of these activities:



Above: Trip to the Houses of Parliament

In April we arrange a trip to the Houses of Parliament. After a guided tour we engaged in workshop activities to explore democracy and the rule of law. Following the trip, one student said she had never been interested in politics until the visit. Another student has now arranged for her students to visit at a later date. From the trip we collected a variety of resources that we promoted with ways to engage students in democracy at 'Quality Street', an internal teaching and learning fair at the college.

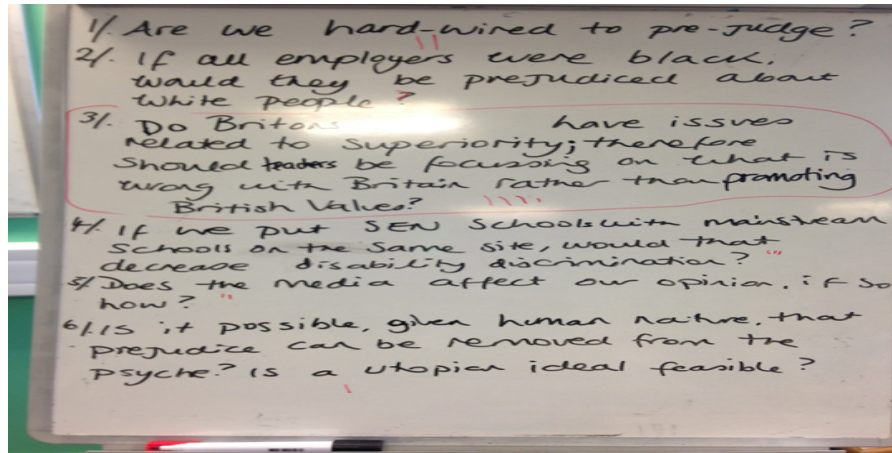
Moodle Site

We created a virtual learning environment as a repository for resources to support practitioners.



Community of Inquiry

In one of the ITE session, we conducted a community of Inquiry to generate authentic conversations related to FBV. Students watched a 10 minute comedy sketch based around racism in the UK. Each student then generated a question related to the stimulus. Shared the question in pairs, selected one to share. The group then voted on the question they would like to discuss together.



The resulting conversation led to a critical incident. The term 'muslim terrorists' was used generically for terrorism a number of times. This was a useful exercise as we were then able to unpack the term and decouple the phrase. However, as experienced ITE practitioners, we felt, at times, uncomfortable as to what was going to be said and how we were going to respond. It felt like the can of worms was being opened and we might not be able to close it again. Whilst nothing inappropriate was said, at the back of our mind was this link to the Prevent agenda and how we had a duty of care to adhere to reporting concerns. The question at this point was if we were feeling uncomfortable actively promoting FBV as experienced practitioners, how were our inexperienced colleagues going to feel? Was this the reason why FBV were not being explored in the classrooms as this may lead to conversations that they don't feel professionally confident in managing? This may indicate a concern from the FE community regarding the discourse between the expectations of the regulatory body and the lack of foregrounding of British Values that is occurring: opening up cans that they do not know how to manage.

Reflective moment on activities

At this stage, we decided to promote FBV, through 'foregrounding' (Duncan, as cited in Gregson, 2015) as a hybrid term between actively promoting and embedding FBV. We arrange a collection of activities to encourage practitioners to notice and to make explicit opportunities in their classroom to foreground FBV either within the curriculum design (e.g. Referendum or election) or when a naturally occurring opportunity occurs such as current news events. The research was conducted at the time of the referendum on European Union membership (June 2016) and proved timely for foregrounding FBV through debate.

Results

The action research project increased the profile of the the importance of FBV to practitioners. There was an increase in dialogue regarding FBV throughout the college. New and more established practitioners were making reference to the values in

their class observations. One student in ITE conducted their own action research on how to engage their students with learning difficulties with FBV. This research highlighted the risks of vulnerable adults being drawn into terrorism and was cascaded to peers and colleagues via a presentation. A questionnaire will be given to staff in September 2016 to see the impact of the project. The key performance indicator will be the forthcoming OFSTED inspection due for 2016/17 and the judgment made as to whether the college is compliant in their duties.

Discussion

We found Synergy to our research process with the the work of Biesta (2012) and the three domains of purpose to education: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. We saw FBV as being situated in the socialisation domain. That the purpose of education is for developing social, cultural and political practices. To obtain a social identity through adapting to the political policy of adopting FBV in the classroom and transcending to wider community with employability attributes. So the microclimate of a classroom is the macro climate of wider society. Yet, this could be seen as surface socialisation. Yet the climate of a classroom is ripe for discussion and dialogue and, as Biesta (2012) suggests, that to become an emancipated individual it is not an individual process, it requires this plurality and difference. So this gives favour to the promotion of FBV in an educational environment, with the space and time to support development of subjectification, autonomous and independent thinkers.

However, FBV are wrapped within the Prevent agenda and might be one reason that is hampering the conversations in the classroom as extremism in the Prevent Duty as 'Vocal or active opposition to FBV' and as all practitioners have a duty to safeguard their students. This may be why teachers are uncomfortable about opening the can of worms not just about having professional confidence in managing conversations.

Conclusion

Our research project 'How can we best promote fundamental. British values in Teaching and Learning' has given us an opportunity to not only develop our professional practice, knowledge and understanding but to improve the learning programmes and the provision for trainee teachers. For example, it enabled us to reflect on how FBV was already embedded in a further education college. It has led to conversations, how they were already embedded to value the promotion of social and cultural diversity, equality and opportunity as well as opening up a forum for discussing professional values and policy in practice. It highlighted good practice and created a bridge between what was already happening in the classroom, built upon this and created opportunities to further promote positive engagement. This is fundamental for all teachers to have this experience to enable them to understand the responsibilities we all have in our professional role. Furthermore, it had a positive impact. The project had given a platform for discussions surrounding fundamental British Values. It enabled the policy to be foregrounded and highlight the relationship to the Prevent strategy. To open up what was happening already and what could be improved. It gave practitioners a voice to recognise the expectations of the profession but to also challenge and critique dominant discourses. It has given an opportunity to be creative and innovative in selecting and adapting materials to help teachers to support their learners to plan and deliver effective learning programmes

for diverse groups. It has highlighted the importance of continuous professional development for practitioners to encourage confidence in having conversations and debates in a safe and inclusive environment. Moving forward, our recommendations to the further education community:

Recommendations

1. Allow safe space, for teachers as well as students, to explore the concepts involved in FBV with ground rules to manage the sessions as well as a dollop of pragmatism to encourage discussion.
2. Engage in methods (such as community of inquiry) to critically analyse concepts to synergise socialisation and subjectification for staff, students and trainee teachers.
3. Exploit the offerings of the Houses of Parliament Education Services: it is free and a visit to Westminster is by far the most engaging location to witness democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith, in action.
4. Share what you have done. Following Stenhouse (1975) by sharing and investigating our research with yourselves, colleagues, SMT, students and trainee teachers, it raised engagement and discussion in FBV and brought a concept alive. The cascade effect was clear when our student became our teacher when exploring how to teach students with learning difficulties FBV.
5. Adherence to a policy does not mean you have to agree with the rationale or discourse surrounding it. Create space for discussion and dialogue.

3,064 words minus references

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