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Teaching Fundamental British Values in Primary Schools

Project Summary

Centre for Human Rights in Practice
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Introduction & Background to Project

This project developed out of academic research carried out by Alison Struthers into the practice of Fundamental British Values (FBV) and Human Rights Education (HRE) in English primary schools. In this research, the author explored the problems with the Government's FBV agenda, and argued that because human rights values are rooted in universality, couching FBV in this broader framework would be likely to contribute to societal cohesion to a far greater extent than the potentially discriminatory FBV guidance. This project sought to action these findings by showing how teaching about FBV can be linked effectively to broader human rights values.

The obligation to teach FBV since 2014 has ostensibly been introduced in England as a means of ensuring that learners are exposed to the values necessary to 'participate fully in and contribute positively to life in modern Britain', thus reinforcing the idea that there is a set of values that should be adhered to in order to live successfully as a British citizen. What this overlooks, however, is that the UK is already subject to international obligations concerning teaching about values in schools, with these obligations stemming largely from the international HRE framework.

Whilst the values and outcomes identified within the FBV guidance are ostensibly unobjectionable, there followed a backlash from both the education sector and the broader media. Some took issue at a fundamental level with the inadequacy of the definition of FBV. Others considered the ostensibly incomplete nature of the list to be problematic. The values promoted by the international HRE framework, by contrast, have been unpacked and clarified over a number of decades, yet the FBV guidance fails to reinforce or even to acknowledge the UK's existing international obligations regarding the teaching of human rights values in schools.

More problematically, however, it also arguably directly conflicts with these obligations. The potential for the FBV guidance to exacerbate racial and cultural tensions, and foster discrimination and subversive treatment of minority groups, has been recognised not only by journalists and academic commentators, but also by teachers and teaching unions. Interpreting FBV within the broader context of human rights values, such as universality, equality and dignity, is likely to address the potential for discriminatory treatment of minority groups. The ethical aims of educating about human rights include promoting the idea that the values at their root stem from the notion of a common humanity where the rights of everyone are respected and upheld.

With this in mind, this project sought to put these ideas into action. The project had as its aim: *to show how FBV can be taught effectively through the lens of human rights values.*

And it had the following objectives:

- (a) *To develop and pilot educational resources appropriate for year 5 learners;*
- (b) *To show increased understanding of the human rights values discussed in the sessions: respect, tolerance and justice; and*
- (c) *To disseminate the findings locally and nationally.*

Year 5 primary school learners (aged 9-10) were chosen for this project for the following reasons: (i) Alison Struthers' research was based on HRE and FBV practice in primary schools; (ii) the learners were old enough to have some understanding of the values and formulate ideas around them; and (iii) should there be funding to evaluate the learners' understanding one year on, they would still be in primary school (Year 6) and therefore accessible. The first stage of the project comprised the design and development of educational resources for two workshops: one on Respect and Tolerance and the other on Justice and the

Rule of Law. The second stage involved the piloting of these resources in four Coventry and Warwickshire primary schools. Year 5 classes undertook one each of the above workshops and the success of these was evaluated. Both the resources and workshops emphasised that the values being discussed are important to people living in Britain, but that they are also universal values, found within key human rights instruments and shared with human beings around the world.¹

Workshop 1: Respect and Tolerance²

Respect and Tolerance was the first workshop and comprised six activities around this theme. It also provided a general introduction to British, global and human rights values.

Activity 1: Two Trees

This activity involved hanging two A1 posters of trees. The learners were then asked to write down on a post-it note one value that is important to British people and stick these to the first tree. On another post-it note, they were then asked to write down a value that is important to everyone in the world and to stick these to the second tree.

Most learners wrote down relevant values such as 'kindness', 'fairness', 'equality', 'love', 'peace', 'hope' or 'democracy'. The examples of values provided for the Global Values Tree in many ways resembled the values on the British Values Tree, with answers such as 'peace', 'love' and 'hope' being repeated, but with the addition of 'family', 'safety', and 'compassion'. It was rewarding to see that some learners recognised the purpose of the activity stating the 'the British values are also values all around the world'. A few answers regarding British values represented cultural symbols more than values such as a 'cup of tea' or 'posting a letter'.

Activity 2: Potato People

For this activity, the learners were all given a potato to study carefully. They were told to pay attention to its size, shape and to any distinguishing features. The potatoes were collected and laid out on the floor and the learners were asked to find their potato. This exercise was used to highlight that, like potatoes, we're all the same, but different and that whilst we each have unique characteristics that make us who we are, at a fundamental level we are all human beings, no matter our nationality, colour, religion, beliefs or gender. It also conveyed that because we are all human beings, we all have human rights which are universal and should not be taken away from us, and which are based on values such as fairness, tolerance, respect, non-discrimination, justice, freedom and equality. After having this discussion about human rights values, the two trees from the previous activity were labelled as a British Values Tree and a Global Values Tree.

The learners enjoyed this activity, with 40% naming it as their favourite of the workshop. Examples from the feedback included that the activity "helped me to think how we're all humans (potatoes) but we are all different.", and that "I liked the potato activity because it teaches you that everyone has the same human rights but they have a different personality and distinguishing features." The feedback forms thus demonstrated that the activity conveyed this important message effectively.

Activity 3: Respect & Tolerance

As this workshop focuses on two particular human rights values: respect and tolerance, the learners were asked to write down what they think the word 'respect' means on one post-it note and 'tolerance' on another. Their definitions were then used to begin a short class discussion about the meaning of these values.

Most of the learners worked studiously on writing down a definition for 'respect' and were happy to solicit help from us or

their class teacher if they were struggling. Some of their answers were interesting, if a little concerning: including that “respect is when you give someone what they want” or “to do what people say because they know best”. Others provided impressive definitions: “giving people and animals kindness and care” and “to treat others how you want to be treated and not care if they are different, we’re all humans”. The learners were then asked to define ‘tolerance’ and, overall, they struggled more with this. The feedback forms reflected that even after an explanation of tolerance had been given, the learners still found the word more difficult to define. 56% of the learners demonstrated some understanding of the meaning of ‘respect’ versus 46% for ‘tolerance’.

Activity 4: Sentence Stems

The learners were asked to complete the sentence stems below in pairs:

- We think the word ‘refugee’ means ...
- We think refugees might leave their countries because ...
- We’ve heard people say refugees ...
- The news suggests refugees ...
- I’m not sure if it’s true when people say ... about refugees

Their answers were then used to discuss as a group what they know, or have heard, about refugees.

Some learners demonstrated a clear understanding and awareness of refugees. Regarding the first sentence stem, the answers were somewhat similar, based on the introduction to the activity, and included ‘we think the word refugee means ...’: “a child or adult who has to flee their country because of war or conflict”. The second sentence also demonstrated some awareness of the issue with answers such as, ‘we think refugees might leave their countries because ...’: “they do not feel safe”, “the food lack and the terrorist attacks, war, natural disasters” and “because people are not happy with the way they are treated by their government”. The third sentence stem revealed more about the negative opinions to which learners may have been exposed, by stating ‘we’ve heard people say refugees ...’: “shouldn’t come to our country anymore because it is too full”, “they are annoying because they might take our jobs” and “are being rejected by Donald Trump”. Sentence stem four demonstrated the impact the media can have even on young children by stating that ‘the news suggests refugees ...’: “newspapers like the Sun suggest that they should be held back” and “that there is no space left in the country”. The last sentence stem was a way to encourage the learners to critically question what they are hearing about refugees, by stating ‘I’m not sure if it’s true when people say ... about refugees’: “that they are a nuisance”, “that they are taking our jobs”, and “that they are terrorists”.

Activity 5: Refugee Journeys

The learners were split into groups of 5 and each group was presented with a Journey Card detailing a journey being made by a refugee family. Each card had details of 5 characters: a mother, father, child, border guard and aid worker, and each learner was allocated a role. In character, they discussed the story, including: (1) why the family left home; (2) their journey; (3) their expectations in the destination country. They had to think about the facts, but also about how their character would feel. The learners then presented a ‘still photograph or freeze-frame’ from their journey that involved all of the characters at a border. We asked each character in turn to describe their role in the ‘freeze-frame’ and they had to be able to explain, or clarify, their story. Other groups, who were watching, were briefly asked to contribute/ask questions as well.

During the preparation of their scene, the learners were excited and engaged. We found, however, that their attention tended to drift during the other groups’ presentations, and we felt that they

may have struggled overall with this exercise. It was to our surprise, therefore, that 53% of learners rated this as their favourite activity. Nevertheless, it was difficult to get them to express anything significant when questioning them about their scenes. Indeed, most of the answers from the refugees were along the lines of “I am scared and tired” and the border guards were saying “it is my job”. The groups did not demonstrate any real awareness of their story line, and all the presentations, regardless of their varied journeys, looked more or less the same.

Activity 6: Recap & Summary

The learners were asked to choose a post-it note (not necessarily one of their own) from each of the two original trees and to put them on a third Human Rights Values Tree. This was used to show that many of the values that we think of as British values are actually global values and, more importantly, human rights values. Respect and tolerance are two human rights values that are considered to be important in the UK and around the world. These values should be respected irrespective of borders or nationality and, therefore, they apply equally to refugees.

This activity was short and simply concluded the idea of Human Rights Values applying to everyone.

Post-Workshop Reflection: Respect and Tolerance

The objective of the Respect and Tolerance workshop was to show that respect and tolerance, explicitly included within the FBV guidance, are not only considered to be important values in the UK, but are also important elements of the broader human rights framework. Based on the learners’ understanding at the beginning and end of the sessions, the workshop appeared to achieve this objective. 80% of the learners demonstrated through their feedback that they had learned about respect and tolerance through the workshop activities. Much of the feedback indicated that they were thinking deeply about these values as examples of universal values that we share with people around the world. By showing the learners how British values are linked to broader human rights values, the workshop demonstrated how FBV can be taught in a more inclusive manner, thus countering any concern that the government-produced FBV guidance could be interpreted in a nationalistic, subversive or discriminatory way.

What Went Well?

The feedback from the learners at the end of the workshop showed that they had enjoyed the session and its activities. 92% answered ‘yes’ to the opening question on the feedback form querying ‘Did you enjoy today’s session?’ Feedback from our student observer identified that the learners were engaged and interested throughout most of the workshop activities.

The end of workshop feedback also suggested that the learning outcomes for the session were, for the most part, met. Learners showed an improved understanding of the values of respect and tolerance and much of the feedback showed that they were thinking deeply about the applicability of these values universally, as opposed to simply within the context of the UK.

The workshop lasted for two hours, with one school requesting a short break in the middle and another school breaking for a mid-morning assembly. Throughout most of the activities, we were able to stick to the original timing schedule laid out in the workshop plan.

What Would We Have Done Differently?

Problems with conceptual understanding of the workshop content tended to arise in discussions around values. In

particular, the opening activities around British values and global values, and the meaning of respect and tolerance, often betrayed the learners' lack of understanding of the nature of a value. Often this lack of understanding could be overcome by linking the discussion to existing values with which they were familiar, such as school values or religious values. For future workshops, some thought needs to be given to the presentation of tolerance, in particular, as highlighted in the previous section.

Much of the vocabulary was also new to the learners and they often struggled to understand the more complex words. Whilst we provided a glossary that gave definitions for the most difficult words, the learners appeared often to have either not read, or not understood, these definitions. Some did ask for clarifications. As the sessions progressed, we started providing definitions at the beginning of the activity of those words or terms that were repeatedly queried. The post-workshop feedback suggested that many of the learners had a better grasp of the meaning of the word 'refugee' and were able to provide some context for this term.

The freeze-frame Refugee Journey activity dealt with some complex material. During planning, we had deliberated whether some of the detail would be too complex or upsetting for year 5 learners. We toned down some of the more distressing aspects of the political refugees, though some did still involve, for example, loss of family members. Some of the learners responded positively in the feedback that they had benefited from learning about the challenges faced by refugees fleeing their countries. Others indicated that they had been saddened by some of the details. We felt it was important for the cards to reflect the harsh realities experienced by refugees, as this was a key aim of the workshop: to show that refugees are human beings who face considerable challenges and that they deserve to be treated with respect and tolerance.

In future sessions, we consider that it might be more worthwhile to have the learners acting out a short role-play of the refugee journey, as opposed to a freeze-frame activity. The freeze-frame did not really provide them with the opportunity to think deeply about the nature of their journeys from start to finish, and a number of them indicated in the feedback that they were keen to do more acting. Having a clearer and more detailed visual map of their route, together with better structured (bullet points) Journey Cards covering easier-to-understand information, would assist their interpretation of the family's journey.

In planning, we also discussed the possibility of negative or discriminatory responses to the Refugee Sentence Stem activity. We were concerned about learners repeating opinions that they had heard at home or in the media and presenting these ideas as their own. We were, however, keen to understand what the learners already knew about refugees, and the opinions to which they had been exposed. We felt that sentence stems would enable them to present these views objectively, and would in turn enable us to discuss or counter any hostile or discriminatory statements that arose. The discussion could then be brought back to the theme of the workshop, respect and tolerance, and how these universal values must be applied to *all* people, including refugees.

For the majority of this workshop, the learners were active participants in the activities, and were thus occupied and engaged. During the Refugee Journey, however, the concentration of other class members tended to wane when they were not presenting. We suggest, therefore, that getting the other groups involved through giving them Journey Cards to complete with as much detail as possible may be a more efficient way of holding the attention of other groups when not presenting.

Workshop 2: Justice and the Rule of Law

Justice and the Rule of Law was the second workshop and comprised six activities around this theme, including a recap of the Human Rights Values Tree.

Activity 1: Human Rights Values Tree Recap

This activity involved providing a recap on the bringing together of the two trees from the last session: the British Values Tree and the Global Values Tree. The learners were reminded that people in the UK share important values with people around the world, and many of these are human rights values.

This activity was short, but demonstrated that the learners had taken lessons away from the previous workshop. They were able to define respect and tolerance and recall information about Human Rights values.

Activity 2: A Long, Long Crime Ago and Definition of the Court System in England

In this activity, the learners watched two short clips from the CBBC series, A Long, Long Crime Ago. The clips were then used to discuss the role of the prosecution, defence, witnesses, defendant, jury and judge in a court. A brief introduction to the court system in England followed.

The learners enjoyed watching the videos and, when it came to the introduction to the court system, they remained attentive and engaged. The quiz that followed and the feedback forms suggested that they learnt something about the different courts in the English judicial system from this explanation. For example, one said: "I learned that there is actually more than one court like the high court".

Activity 3: Defining Justice

The learners were asked to discuss in pairs what they think the word 'justice' means as a value and to write this on a post-it note. These definitions were used to facilitate a discussion around the concept of justice. At the end of the discussion, a definition of 'justice' was provided based on the notion of 'fairness'.

Despite some learners defining 'justice' in terms of "people should get what they deserve" and that it is about "getting revenge on someone", many associated the word with "fairness" and "doing the right thing". 30% of the learners said justice was about fairness, and 26% said it was an important concept. Despite the learners being easily distracted, the feedback revealed that 28% said the workshop taught them about justice, thus demonstrating some success with this activity.

Activity 4: Rule of Law Quiz

The learners were introduced to the idea of the rule of law: that all people and institutions have to obey the law and there will be consequences if they don't. However, the law has to be fair and fairly carried out. Electronic voting buttons were used to carry out a short quiz about the court system.

The learners performed surprisingly well on the quiz, achieving an average of 67% of correct questions on a four-option multiple choice based quiz. This is impressive considering the complexity of questions such as 'How many people sit on a jury in England?' and 'Who does the prosecution represent (work for)?' This demonstrated that they were attentive to the previous activities. The purpose of this activity, to teach the learners about the court system and the rule of law, was achieved, as many of them recalled facts from the quiz on their feedback forms: "It is 11 jury members in Scotland and 12 Jury members in England" and "that the judge doesn't decide if they are innocent or not". 51% also named aspects of the court system when asked in the feedback what they had learned through the workshop.

Some aspects were more difficult to understand, for example, the idea of 'beyond reasonable doubt' as the standard of proof. One learner referred to this in their feedback form as "you need to know

that you are certain before you arrest someone” and there were similar definitions from other learners. However, this remains a complex concept even for first year university law students.

Activity 5: ‘The Case of the Stolen Car’

This activity involved a role-play concerning the theft of a car. There were 29 roles that were allocated to the learners in advance of the session. Certain roles required more participation than others, and some roles could be duplicated to account for different class sizes. The activity took the form of a criminal court trial, where the prosecution and defence councils questioned and cross-examined witnesses. The jury were tasked with ultimately deciding whether the accused was innocent or guilty. After the verdict, there was a discussion of the outcome of the case and the issues of justice raised.

The learners were enthusiastic about the role-play. Some struggled more than others (e.g. presenting their evidence) but it was generally enjoyed by most, with 81% naming this as their favourite activity. Despite the length of the activity, its format and the evidence forms that everyone was given to complete allowed the learners to remain fairly focused throughout. They seemed to enjoy discussing between themselves whether the defendant was guilty or innocent based on the clues they had gathered. The content of this activity was quite challenging as the learners had to engage with complex concepts, such as cross-examining, and had to note down important clues from a wealth of information, but they generally remained on task and engaged.

Activity 6: Recap and Summary

This was a recap on the workshop content: emphasising that justice is not only a British value but also an important human rights value. This was then linked to the discussion from the previous workshop on respect and tolerance. It was communicated that these values should all be understood as important not just here in Britain, but around the world as well.

The conclusion was usually brief due to the length of the court activity and the fact that the learners were less attentive after such a long time focusing.

Post-workshop reflection: Justice and the Rule of Law

The objective of the Justice and the Rule of Law workshop was to show that justice is not only an important value within the UK but is also an important element of the broader human rights framework, and therefore has global relevance. Justice is not explicitly stated in the government-produced FBV guidance, but the idea of ‘fairness’ is implicit throughout. Justice is closely linked to the rule of law (in terms of fair trial, protection through the law etc.) and this is explicitly referred to in the guidance. Based on the learners’ understanding at the beginning and end of the sessions, the workshop appeared to achieve its objective. 89% of the learners demonstrated through their feedback that they had learned about justice and the rule of law through the workshop activities. Not only had they learnt about justice but they also had views on it being ‘good or important’.

What Went Well?

The feedback from the learners showed that they had enjoyed the workshop and its activities. In answer to a question on the feedback form, 96% stated that they had enjoyed the session. The favourite activity for 81% of the learners was the role-play activity on the case of the stolen car. This activity was integral to their understanding of the rule of law and, through it, their understanding of justice as a human rights value.

When asked what they had learned in the session, 51% of the learners said the court ‘the court system’ and almost 28% stated

‘justice’. Throughout the court scene, the counsels, and later the jury, carefully unpicked the evidence to ensure that a just verdict was reached. The remaining learners were equally keen to be involved and voice their opinion on the outcome. It would seem, therefore, that the learners did meet the workshop objectives, improving their understanding of justice and the rule of law.

Justice as a concept did not prove to be too difficult for the learners. It linked in well with the common school value of ‘fairness’ and therefore was quite easily understood. The rule of law however, is a difficult concept and we decided in advance not to ask learners for their definition but rather to explain it through the quiz and the brief court system presentation. This may account for 51% of learners saying they had learnt about the court system but only 4% saying they had learnt about the rule of law. In whatever way this is interpreted it is evident from the quiz and the feedback forms that learning and understanding did take place, as discussed in the workshop section above.

The workshops more or less kept to the allotted two hours. Within the two hours slots, the activities seemed to be appropriately timed and on the whole, we kept to schedule. At a couple of schools, teachers requested in advance that the learners take a break to keep them alert and in another school to attend mid-morning assembly. This was timed at the beginning of the court scene after roles and instructions were given, and seemed to work well.

What would we have done differently?

There were many new terms and words for the learners in this workshop and at times they proved challenging. A glossary was produced to assist learners and the brief description of the court system was useful. Clarifications were provided of difficult words and terms either because they were requested or because it became apparent that this was needed. However, it was more common words that were repeatedly mis-read (e.g. ‘responsible’ for ‘reasonable’). In any future workshop more attention would need to be paid to vocabulary, both at the planning and delivery stage.

There was a huge amount of information in the ‘Case of the Stolen Car’, and the interweaving of facts and precise location details led to some confusion. This was rectified with a representational map being sketched on the board to assist understanding. We decided that in future, a map would be designed and provided as a resource. This would show the area, with the movement of people added as each piece of evidence is released by the witnesses. The use of precise locations, with the complexity of roads numbers and directions, means the workshop would not transfer well to a different area of England and therefore needs to be redesigned with fictitious areas and simplified directions.

The clips, quiz and the brief description of the court system obviously introduced legal aspects and complex terms (see Workshop section above), which were difficult to put to a Year 5 learner. However, their responses in the quiz and on their feedback forms, not to mention their understanding in the ‘Case of the Stolen Car’ activity show that they did gain an understanding of the idea of the rule of law and the English court system. More difficult principles such as ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ as the standard of proof were likely to remain elusive and thought will be given to such terms for future workshops.

Concentration remained at a reasonably high level throughout this workshop, which was especially surprising in relation to the ‘Case of the Stolen Car’, but the evidence collection form kept everyone focussed. Loss of attention was minimal, and mainly only occurred during the counsels enthusiastic lengthy questioning. This is one area that does need attention, maybe limiting the number of questions to be put to the witnesses and defendants.

Recommendations

This pilot project has shown that FBV can be taught effectively through the lens of human rights values. Whilst there exists a comprehensive international HRE framework, the provision of HRE is not currently an obligation within the English primary education system. The teaching of FBV is however, an obligation on all primary schools. With this in mind, we make the following recommendations:

1. Bearing in mind the international HRE obligations to which the UK has signed up, HRE should be compulsory within the National Curriculum for primary schools in England;
2. The easiest way for this to be achieved currently is likely to be the insertion of HRE as a component of the already compulsory obligation to teach FBV in primary schools; and
3. Failing the above two recommendations, the government-produced FBV guidance, which currently makes no reference to HRE or human rights values, can be interpreted through a human rights lens in the ways piloted in this project and described in this report.

1 Such instruments include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2 The authors would like to acknowledge and thank Amnesty International for providing the inspiration for the Potato People and Sentence Stem activities in this workshop.

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