

Fundamental British values in education: radicalisation, national identity and Britishness

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BOOK REVIEW

Fundamental British Values in Education: Radicalisation, National Identity and Britishness, authored by Lynn Revell and Hazel Bryan. 2018. Bingley, Emerald Publishing, 137pp., £32.00 (pbk) Available as e-book. ISBN: 978-1-78714-508-5.

What exactly do we mean when we talk about fundamental British values? Further, what defines Britishness and has this remained a static concept over time? How have recent changes to legislation and policy repositioned the way teachers engage with British values and how has it affected their status in the private and public spheres of their lives? This illuminating book sets out to address these questions, providing a historical account of how national identity in Britain has developed over time and an overview of the status that teachers currently hold. As the book focuses on British education, it will be most relevant for professionals working in the UK context, however international readers will undoubtedly be interested in how national identity can develop and how the role of the educator progresses to reflect these changes.

This book is organised into an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. The four chapters are divided equally into two parts; the former sets up the context whilst the latter examines issues of professionalism and pedagogy. The first chapter details how the concept of Britishness has undergone a shift in the manner through which it is defined and presented, on the basis that there has been a change in emphasis on cultural ideas to political narratives. Accepting this premise, the second chapter provides an explanation that this shift is due to an evolution of language.

The third chapter sets out the requirement found in legislation, detailing the role that teachers have in promoting British values. Without wishing to reveal too much about the argument presented in the fourth chapter, the authors establish that the requirement for teachers to promote the British values outside the school has blurred the boundaries between the private and public spheres, raising questions of identity and practice. Through the requirement to promote British values, teachers have become both cultural and political workers, which the authors argue risks undermining the relationship between the teacher and learner. The conclusion successfully links together the authors argument with the limited currently available research.

This book has several strengths, it is concisely written and supplies an interesting overview of how national identity in Britain has progressed over time. The introduction, chapters and conclusion flow logically and the line of argument is clear from beginning to end. Readers of this journal will undoubtedly hold interest in how Religious Education (RE) fits into these chapters and

how it relates to national identity in Britain and the present role that teachers hold. However, there are only three brief references to RE within the book. The first of these details a resource book named *Religious Education and British Values*, created to support RE teachers within their lessons that discusses the merits and issues raised through the notion of fundamental British values (p.14). The second reference relates to the assumption of religious uniformity in the wording of the section that outlines RE in the *1944 Education Act* (p.50).

The final reference to RE is in the conclusion, where the authors acknowledge that they were not able to focus on subject areas such as RE or Citizenship because they could not be addressed in enough detail within the book (p.103). This absence is understandable given that the first part of this book outlines the concept of national identity in Britain and how this relates to the British values, whilst the second half focuses on how all teachers holistically have been affected through legislation and policy.

However, this comes across as a missed opportunity to explore the differences between teachers specialised in various subject areas and how they could deliver content surrounding the British values. This is particularly more striking when we consider that for there may be a greater expectation for teachers working in some disciplines to promote British values more so than others. These subjects could include RE, Citizenship, or Personal, Social, Health, Economic (PSHE) education amongst others, due to the engagement and explicit focus in these subjects on content surrounding the British values such as mutual respect and tolerance of others with and without beliefs and faiths, democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law (Ofsted, p.41).

Another issue is that with this limited research, we are unsure if all teachers are perceiving a blurring of the private and public spheres in their lives, which is acknowledged by the authors within the book (pp.104-105). This does however raise questions whether teachers specialising in various subject areas and with differing age groups perceive this blurring of the private and public spheres of their lives in a similar or equal fashion.

Nevertheless, this book offers an excellent introduction for readers interested in how the concept of national identity in Britain has progressed from reflecting cultural to political themes. Further, it presents a compelling argument for how legislation has affected teachers to promote the British values, in so altering the boundary between the private and public spheres of their lives.

References:

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