

THINK PIECE: Who is Valued and What is of Value?

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The subject of values is complex; this short paper will consider the values held by teachers, and who is valued within teaching. The first area to be examined will be the way in which values are expressed in the mechanisms that drive the assessment of classroom practice in Initial Teacher Education. Inevitably, such an examination cannot avoid engaging with a debate around attainment and achievement, through a consideration of what we value in teachers both as professionals and in the way that they meet the learning needs of the children and young people with whom they come into contact in their daily work. This leads to a second area, focussing on the degree to which these values are instrumental in producing and supporting a differentially weighted schooling system, where some pupils are valued more than others.

In England, the Teachers' Standards are described as the minimum level of practice expected of student and serving teachers when awarding Qualified Teacher Status (DfE, 2011). The Standards are presented in three parts, a Preamble, followed by Part One – Teaching, and Part Two – Personal and Professional Conduct. The Preamble 'summarises the values and behaviour that all teachers must demonstrate...' in a little over four lines. Achieving the highest standards in work and conduct is mentioned, as are subject knowledge and skills. Working with parents in the best interests of pupils is also required. However, the only mention of what might be considered as values comes in the phrase that teachers should act with 'honesty and integrity'.

In Part One – Teaching, the only specific mention of values is in Standard 1, about setting high expectations for pupils, where there is a requirement that a teacher must demonstrate, consistently, ‘the...values...which are expected of pupils’. The remaining seven Standards can be seen to represent a set of exemplars connected to the knowledge and skills of teaching, such as the accurate use of assessment, managing behaviour effectively and fulfilling wider professional responsibilities. It is worth noting here that, currently, the final assessment, undertaken on school placement, of a student teacher before gaining Qualified Teacher Status is based wholly on the Part One standards, where compliance with an attainment led model is privileged.

Part Two of the Standards begins with an expectation that a teacher will demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct, a statement that is followed by a list of attributes that define the behaviour and attitudes for the ‘required standard for conduct’. Values are mentioned only once; teachers should not undermine ‘fundamental British values’, of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs. Whilst these are not seen as relating specifically to initial training and are not graded as part of the award for QTS, the Part Two Standards are seen as the benchmark against which teacher conduct, or misconduct, is appraised.

So, it is clear that teachers in England are expected to demonstrate compliance with a somewhat ephemeral set of ‘Standards’ that lack any real engagement with the precepts of their role, for example those connected to the moral imperative of teaching, or of values such as those described in the Professional Standards for Teachers in Scotland, which include social justice, equality, openness, courage and wisdom (GTCS, 2017).

There would seem to be an alignment here with the frequently stated commitment of the English Government to raise standards, stated in terms of levels of attainment, rather than considering the broader achievements of children and young people, something that is difficult to measure using the metrics currently favoured within that system. It could be suggested that the Teachers Standards are increasingly used to frame this agenda, with a narrowed focus on driving up standards of attainment, through the uncritical use of prescriptive teaching methods driven by the acquisition, retention and testing of knowledge.

Such an agenda seems to be based on how children and young people are valued, rather than on a set of shared values that address the learning needs of all pupils. Increasingly, pupils are seen as being above or below expected standards, or achieving or failing to achieve, arbitrary benchmarks, further disadvantaging and marginalising those who fail to reach these goals.

This leads to the second area of consideration; how this affects children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), a group of pupils who appear to lack value within the English education system, despite legislation and policies that suggest otherwise. The Equality Act (HMSO, 2010), whilst including disability amongst the protected characteristics covered by the Equality Duty, treats disability differently to characteristics such as sexual orientation, race, and age, by allowing unequal treatment where required to ensure that those with SEND can enjoy equitable treatment. An education provider has a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that a pupil with SEND is not discriminated against, for example in providing aids or extra support, and such adjustments are often to be found in schools.

Whilst beneficial to individual pupils, the reasonable adjustment duty can be seen as both divisive and indicative of a less benign view of the value of pupils with SEND. Those pupils who are provided with additional support or specialist aids are seen as different, requiring 'special help' because of their 'special needs'. If we were to consider the concept of 'inclusive pedagogy' (Florian, 2017), which advocates the extension of teaching and learning to meet the needs of all pupils, rather than overcoming barriers inherent in classroom practice by the provision of additional resources, the inequality of such approaches becomes apparent. In this sense it might be considered that the reasonable adjustment duty is akin to a consideration of the financial value of a pupil.

This is a position that has been argued elsewhere (Runswick-Cole, 2011). The Children and Families Act 2014 (DfE, 2014) requires a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to be placed in a mainstream school, subject to two exemptions. The first of these rests on the wishes of the parent or guardian and the second on the provision of efficient education for others. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the education of pupils with significant levels of SEND compromises efficiency, and this is seen as unwelcome, leading to the disabling of these pupils, allowing them to be excluded from what is likely to

be their local school, a setting likely to be attended by siblings and peers from their potential friendship group.

This sense of exclusion is not confined to a pupil's access to a particular type of schooling, and it is here that the concept of separate but equal needs to be considered. Schooling in England provides many examples where pupils attend schools of a particular character, for example single sex schools or special schools; whilst separate, the schools are considered to be equal in that pupils are not treated less favourably in one setting than another.

This is at least arguable, if not clearly untrue, in the case of special schools. Again, it must be made clear that this does not apply to all aspects of current practice, indeed many would argue that the quality of relationships, the education provided around social and personal care, and the focus on achievement in the widest sense that is a facet of most special schools is evidence of these settings providing an outstanding education. This cannot disguise the fact that this sort of education could be provided within mainstream schools for most, if not all, pupils who are currently in segregated provision, to the benefit of all in creating a more diverse society based on the sort of respect for others contained in the third of the fundamental British values discussed above, and as an indicator of the way that these pupils are valued.

In some significant areas, however, less favourable treatment can be suggested. The first is in transport, where many pupils attending special schools experience journeys that are both much longer and more isolating than their counterparts in mainstream settings. The second area is linked to the first. Special schools tend to have very large catchment areas; this means that children who attend those schools travel for many miles to learn alongside other children with a similarly identified 'condition', leaving them socially excluded on all fronts. The difficulty in engaging with a peer group centred on their home prevents the sort of extended, lifelong, friendships experienced by those who attend their local school, a situation that runs contrary to the idea of the normalisation of the lived experience of those with SEND. Equally, school friendship groups can be impossible to maintain over the significant distances involved in special school attendance.

The notion of less than equal value for those with SEND can be extended to what are called Permanent or Fixed Period Exclusions (FPE) from school. There has been a recent upsurge in the numbers of pupils permanently excluded from school, a significant indicator

of future failure to achieve, and of long term social disadvantage. Recently published figures indicate a 44% increase in these numbers between 2012/2013 and 2015/2016; the number of pupils who experience a FPE shows a similar increase (DfE, 2017). At least in part, this rise can be attributed to schools seeing exclusion as a way of focussing resources on those most likely to succeed academically by removing difficult or challenging pupils. Perhaps the most depressing statistics from the same source are those that show that a pupil with SEND is seven times more likely to be excluded permanently and six times more likely to be subject to a FPE than a pupil without SEND, with almost half of all permanent and FPEs being pupils with identified SEND.

This can be extended to funding. Significant amounts of funding are available to schools, both to support specific children with EHCPs, and generally to support SEND provision within a setting, yet it is clear that parents, teachers, governors and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) often have little understanding of how this money is being spent. This is not new; however, in an economic climate of austerity, and given the often overwhelming focus on the performativity agendas that are discussed exhaustively elsewhere, it is perhaps inevitable that there is an increasing sense of disquiet about the lack of transparency in the way that funding is used. Pragmatic decisions made in increasingly difficult circumstances, about staffing arrangements, Ofsted inspections, national examination results etc., may lead to increasingly compromised decision making, where the needs of the many are more likely to be addressed than those at the margins, as a form of utilitarianism replaces the commitment to social justice and equity that should lie at the heart of the professional values of the teaching profession.

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