

Reflections on national chances and problems in promoting values in vocational education in the UK

VET - UK Overview

The UK VET System has evolved considerably over the past few years, especially since the 1980s. Youth policies in UK have taken shape since 1870 through the introduction of compulsory elementary education. Government in UK got involved in Career Guidance as early as 1910 though the Education (Choice of Employment) Act passed during that year. This allowed local authorities to engage one career guidance officer to give advice to young people on getting work. The Education and Training Act of 1948 formally recognized that a national policy was needed for youth that were transiting from compulsory education to the world of work.

With changes in the fabric of British society during the past four decades (1960s to 2000), different governments in UK have attempted to implement changes to education policy and emphasise value in its VE and therefore career prospects of its learners.

The National Curriculum (NC) requires that a number of subjects are included during the teaching and learning at schools that will aim to develop vocational skills or at least engage the youth about the prospects available after compulsory education. From 2015, this compulsory education will be from age five to eighteen. Vocational Education subjects are introduced at Key Stage 3 or 4 depending upon the school and its capacity in terms of staff and their specialism. At post-16 more vocational subjects may be available and students can take these either at the sixth form in schools or colleges of further education.

Values-Based Education: UK Perspective

Values are taught in the UK in both the VET and State sector having been promoted since 1988 under the guise of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSCD). Initially started for Religious Education (RE), SMSCD was later extended to Citizenship, which was introduced as a mandatory subject in 1999. The government however, did not call this Values Education (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Values_education#United_Kingdom) at least until recently, especially during 2014 as many schools came under greater scrutiny, especially faith schools focused on Islam.

The UK has seen a fair amount of ups and downs as far as “values” education is concerned, at least the regulated section that has been drafted and

redrafted by successive governments according to the conditions prevalent at the time.

Values, some argue, might also restrict creativity and may lead to either indoctrination or imposing of values and beliefs held by one group (the proponents) upon another (the receivers), invariably learners in educational establishments. According to David Hicks, all human knowledge is socially constructed, i.e. no area of human endeavour can ever be neutral or value-free since it is always underpinned by the values and beliefs, both conscious and unconscious, of its proponents.

Nonetheless, values or character building are important in society. Some 87% of parents in UK say that children ought to be taught about values and character building (Burns,J.) and that this is the responsibility that lies with the schools and teachers. As Neil Hawkes (2001) pointed out, Values-based education is likely:

- To help the school community think about and reflect upon positive universal values and the practical implications of expressing them in relation to themselves, others, the community and the world.
- To inspire individuals to choose their own positive personal, social, moral and spiritual values and be aware of ways for developing and deepening them as world citizens.

Faraday, Overton and Cooper in their “Effective teaching and learning in vocational education” using Hopkins (2007) Framework of Teaching Skills, Teaching Relationships, Teacher Reflection and Teaching Models discovered that there is a fifth component that adds to the complex teaching and learning. ‘**Teaching context**’ - covers a mixture of aspects and includes the nature of the vocational subject, the setting where teaching and learning takes place, objectives and desired outcomes for a session plus specifications of the qualification, the nature of the learners, their level and how they learn best including their learning styles (Faraday, Overton and Cooper, 2011). It would seem values-based education got even tougher. However, in the UK values-based education, though specifically not called this, has been promoted for the past four decades and within the compulsory subject of Citizenship has taken the form of three strands:

1. Knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens - such as legal and human rights and responsibilities, the work of Parliament and courts and how the economy functions (valuing democracy and freedom)
2. Developing skills of enquiry and communication - for example, researching a topical issue and analysing sources of information (valuing diversity and freedom of speech)

3. Developing skills of participation and responsible action - which includes using their imaginations to consider other people's experiences (valuing diversity and empathy)

As reported by Judith Burns (2013), an overwhelming 95% of parents in UK said it was possible to teach a child values and shape their character in a positive way at school through lessons, team-building exercises or voluntary work. Among parents who agreed schools should do more than deliver exam results, most said schools in UK had become too exam focused, while more than three quarters said it was important to instil good values in the next generation.

In the same report (Burns 2013), Russell Hobby, general secretary of National Association of Head Teachers, said: "Teachers and heads overwhelmingly support teaching values as well. They know that it supports academic achievement and employability."

'Good character is the foundation for improved attainment and human flourishing,' suggests The Jubilee Centre for Character & Values, University of Birmingham, in its "A Framework for Character Education in Schools". In fact, human flourishing is the widely accepted goal of life which requires moral, intellectual and civic virtues. Character education is about the acquisition and strengthening of virtues: the traits that sustain a well-rounded life and a thriving society. According to Dr. Neil Hawkes (2009), a values-based school seeks to promote an educational philosophy based on valuing self and others, through the consideration of a values vocabulary (principles that guide behaviour) as the basis of good educational practice.

This push to promote and embed values in education has increased during 2014 in UK in the wake of the so called Trojan Horse allegations about a group of schools in Birmingham. An anonymous letter claimed hard-line Muslims had been trying to impose their views on the schools, taking over governing bodies and marginalising head teachers. Following investigations by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education in UK), five schools were placed in special measures. In June, the then education secretary Michael Gove, said pupils must be made aware of fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of different beliefs. His views were backed by the Prime Minister (Burns, J. 2014).

While under section 78 of the Education Act 2002, standards for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSCD) already existed, the Department for Education (DfE) published a blueprint and "guidelines" for all schools in England to promote "British Values". The DfE further stated that through their provision of SMSCD, schools should:

- enable students to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence;

- enable students to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the civil and criminal law of England;
- encourage students to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative, and to understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality of the school and to society more widely;
- enable students to acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services in England;
- further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling students to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures;
- encourage respect for other people; and
- encourage respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic processes, including respect for the basis on which the law is made and applied in England.

Examples of actions that a school could take were further listed in order to encourage promotion of British Values. DfE provided a list of of different actions that schools can take, such as:

- include in suitable parts of the curriculum, as appropriate for the age of pupils, material on the strengths, advantages and disadvantages of democracy, and how democracy and the law works in Britain, in contrast to other forms of government in other countries;
- ensure that all pupils within the school have a voice that is listened to, and demonstrate how democracy works by actively promoting democratic processes such as a school council whose members are voted for by the pupils;
- use opportunities such as general or local elections to hold mock elections to promote fundamental British values and provide pupils with the opportunity to learn how to argue and defend points of view;
- use teaching resources from a wide variety of sources to help pupils understand a range of faiths, and

- consider the role of extra-curricular activity, including any run directly by pupils, in promoting fundamental British values.

In his experience of promoting Values Education, Dr, Neil Hawkes (2009) found that when a school seriously develops the moral and spiritual aspects of the curriculum (that is, those that positively contribute to the inner world of thoughts, feelings and emotions of the teacher and the pupil), the school community become more reflective and harmonious. The effect on individual pupils, of developing Values Education, is that pupils take greater personal responsibility for their learning and behaviour.

Although SMSCD has been prevalent in UK for almost forty years, events since the UK governments involvement in wars and its foreign policies have exacerbated the need to focus more on promoting British Values across the education spectrum. 2014 perhaps was a turning point when schools across the country came under greater scrutiny in the wake of Torjan Horse and events at various schools, especially in Birmingham which were infiltrated with hard-line muslim fundamentalists.

References:

Burns, Judith “Schools should build 'character', say parents”, BBC News education reporter, 2 September 2013

Burns, Judith “Respect and tolerance key British Values, says government”, BBC News education reporter, 28 November 2014

Faraday, S., Overton, C., and Cooper, S, “Effective teaching and learning in vocational education”, LSN, 2011

Hawkes, N. Dr. “Being a School of Excellence - Values-based Education,” May 2001

Hawkes, N. Dr. “What is Values-based Education,” 2009

Hicks, D. W. “Teaching for a better world: Learning for Sustainability - The nature of ideology” March 2014

“Promoting Fundamental British Values as part of SMSC” DfE guidelines, November 2014

“A Framework for Character education in Schools”, The Jubilee Centre for Character & Values, University of Birmingham