FUNDAMENTAL BRITISH VALUES VERSUS A CRITICAL RADICAL TEACHER EDUCATION COURSE: WHO WINS?

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In 2012, the UK's new Coalition Government presented a revised version of Teaching Standards, now called Teacher Standards, which has sent shock waves through the academic community involved in teacher education. The document includes a glossary defining terms such as 'parents' and 'pupils'. The very first item in this list, however, is 'Fundamental British values' (henceforth FBv), which, it declares, is taken from the definition of extremism as articulated in the new Prevent Strategy (2011), part of the Government's wider counter-terrorism strategy. This definition exists because in part two of the standards, under personal and professional conduct, students and teachers are instructed not to undermine FBv.

Given the on-going Islamaphobic and generally racist discourse evident in much of the UK's press, which, together with the discourse of the Prevent strategy, positions blame for marginalisation as lying within those 'with factors and characteristics associated with being susceptible to radicalisation' (Prevent Strategy 2011, 110, my italics), there is an implication that extremism is embodied. For those dedicated to teaching student teachers about education and social justice, reference to extremism and counter-terrorism within a document detailing teacher standards is therefore highly problematic. Without considerable effort on the part of teacher educators to critically engage with such terminology, students may inadvertently understand education as assimilation, assuming some pupils to be in deficit for not adequately embodying Britishness.

This paper explores what one cohort of Primary student teachers in the North-East of England, where many schools are predominantly white, make of such standards. Students were asked to write what they understood by the requirement not to undermine FBv in the very early days of the PGCE course. The question was repeated twice thereafter during and following a critical radical module on education equality, which included a critical historical analysis of the term FBv, and an introduction to critical whiteness. The first responses were analysed to reveal themes, which were then explored in the subsequent FBv workshop. Further responses will be analysed in more detail using a critical discourse analysis approach, founded on critical whiteness, to reveal tendencies towards or explicit acknowledgement (and possible rejection) of assimilationism. This will then be compared with written evidence from the students' practice journals to reveal whether and how such knowledge or ignorance influences students' actual practice. The findings will support the practice of those committed to a radical critical teacher education within the current education climate.