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Powerful knowledge: Revealing the Citizenship teacher's professional knowledge base

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As part of a team of academics, teachers and mentors the Teachers and Citizenship Knowledge project (TACK) is working to determine how teachers develop citizenship knowledge and practice in their classrooms.



Teachers and Citizenship Knowledge (TACK) builds on existing well-established collaborations between the Citizenship (PGCE) programme at IOE (including partner schools and mentors) and citizenship specialist academics. It has been funded by the Centre for Teacher Training Research at the IOE and it addresses the theoretical issue of conceptualizing powerful knowledge for Citizenship and the practical issue of developing resources to support this for student teachers. It is a timely response to the expectations of the Core Content Framework and DfE promoting a 'knowledge-rich curriculum' requiring 'well-trained and supported teachers'. This project addresses the core question of the nature of a knowledge-rich Citizenship curriculum.

There is currently no single definitive account of the key concepts essential for understanding Citizenship, but schools in England must promote democracy, freedom, the rule of law and tolerance (the 'fundamental British values'), which can be contextualized in international frameworks such as human rights. Since these are all core Citizenship concepts, we are at the forefront of responding to major contemporary concerns, such as resilience to extremism; combatting conspiracy theories and misinformation; understanding and acting on climate change; making sense of the rise of global protest movements including Black Lives Matter (BLM), Rhodes Must Fall, Extinction Rebellion.

The research questions

1. What do student and experienced teachers, teacher educators, policy makers and experts consider to be the **essential knowledge** associated with Citizenship?
2. How can student and experienced teachers access and develop **knowledge organisers** that help to make sense of core concepts in Citizenship?
3. What lessons can be learnt and disseminated from experiences of **operationalizing** the use of knowledge organisers in materials and schemes of work?

We [citizenship educators] are at the forefront of responding to major contemporary concerns.

Methodology

The research employs a variation of the dialogic framework for action research proposed by Daly et al. (2020). By drawing together teachers, student teachers and academics who are already in the established

networks of the IOE PGCE and ACT, we are holding a series of honest, critical and unsettling collegial conversations to focus on subject knowledge. One of the challenges in ITE is that much of the established teachers' knowledge might be described as 'tacit knowledge' – it is often so ingrained in their everyday practices that they are unaware of it, and often find it difficult to explain (Toom, 2012). But it can be brought to surface through reflection, and this is sometimes easier through conversations, especially where participants do not share the same tacit knowledge and therefore do not take the same things for granted. By bringing together teachers and others with different professional interests in the same field of knowledge, we are

aiming for 'generative conversations' which surface and explain knowledge that might otherwise remain submerged in practice.

Practically, we have planned a series of six 'masterclasses' to reflect on important contemporary topics in Citizenship education, including climate change; human rights; extremism and radicalization; conspiracy theories and media literacy; race and racism; conflict and peace. Each masterclass includes:

- A teacher-led case study with a focus on their account of key knowledge.
- Introduction or response by subject expert sharing views on the core knowledge to understand the topic.
- PGCE students and mentors.
- A conversation focusing on the various conceptions of knowledge, facilitated by the research team.

These have generated professional conversations which have not been reflected in the literature to date. Such conversations are unlikely to happen in individual schools with few specialists. With this knowledge content we will write up our findings to disseminate to teachers and academics including briefing packs for student teachers and case studies in Teaching Citizenship. We intend to continue this work after our initial funding to involve as many contributors as possible from the Citizenship community and as such we are running a new masterclass on Justice at the 2022 ACT National Conference. We look forward to sharing this knowledge and practice widely and thank all the participants to date.

The FBVs Masterclass

Our first masterclass was focused on the Fundamental British Values (FBVs) and included contributions from:

- Kirsty White, who shared three lessons from her school's schemes of work. She explained her lessons plans, demonstrated the resources and talked participants through her experiences teaching these lessons.
- Alex Elwick, who shared his insights from researching Prevent and the FBVs in a number of research projects over the past 5 years (e.g. Elwick & Jerome, 2019; Taylor et al., 2021). He highlighted some of the data on how teachers perceive the FBVs and how they approach them in their teaching.
- Lee Jerome, who shared some of his thoughts about the FBVs, focusing on what knowledge is useful to understand them as contested political concepts rather than values. Some of these insights were taken from ACT's *Deliberative Classroom* project.

The participants were thus able to discuss the FBVs from three distinct disciplinary perspectives – Kirsty from a practical teaching perspective, Alex from an academic social science

research perspective, and Lee from a political philosophy perspective. Hugh Starkey facilitated the session and invited speakers to reflect in greater detail if they glossed over points and the student teachers provided prompt questions to push participants further and to discuss how their ideas might translate into practice for novice teachers.

First insights – the nature of professional knowledge

We are still analysing the data and thinking about how best to present it, but one thing that stood out very clearly was how

Kirsty's lessons drew on several distinctive forms of professional knowledge. This is a useful first step towards articulating what the knowledge base for Citizenship teachers might be.

(i) Critical policy knowledge

Shulman (1986) acknowledged that teachers' essential knowledge included a wider knowledge of educational contexts, including key issues from the community that affected them. Here we see the importance of a more expansive understanding of this dimension as the teacher is drawing on a wider political interpretation of the Prevent policy in order to frame their own teaching approach. Vincent (2019) demonstrated how a more politically naïve interpretation of the policy can lead teachers to de-politicise the FBVs, for example, reducing the rule of law to following school rules; or translating democracy into school council elections. This narrow form of compliance appears to faithfully implement policy, but it

actually avoids any serious *educational engagement* with the concepts, and at worst is reduced to a rather superficial (but potentially alienating) performance of compliance.

By contrast, in Kirsty's lessons we saw how she opened up the possibility of teaching about the FBVs in a way which engages with them as complex ideas to be understood and used, rather than values simply to be 'promoted'. The 'FBVs' as a whole are framed as broad human rights principles; 'democracy' is problematised, exploring examples where democratic movements are attacked, and where democracies may adopt rather ambivalent attitudes; 'the rule of law' is deconstructed to consider the changing nature of legislation, the institutions and processes in the justice system, and the contested nature of punishment. To engage with the Prevent policy and the guidance on FBVs in this spirit is to open up the possibilities for teaching which are being unconsciously closed down by other colleagues (Vincent, 2019).

(ii) Pedagogic knowledge

Another feature that is evident from reviewing these lessons is the extent to which the teacher consistently finds ways to open

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the classroom to discussion. From the outset, as students are introduced to the FBVs, they are engaged in a critical discussion of values and then encouraged to discuss the FBVs, what they might mean in reality, and what might happen if they were not adopted. The students are not simply given information, they are engaged in expansive discussions as they are introduced to the new content. Similarly, the complexities of the situation in Syria are taught through a role-playing discussion. This means that students have to engage with the information in order to play their roles, but also that they are immediately engaging with the fact that there are multiple perceptions of the conflict and what should be done about it. In the third lesson substantive information about anti-terrorist legislation, the justice system, sentencing procedures, and the nature of punishment is embedded in a set of simulations, requiring students to devise a position, defend it and (potentially) revise it in the light of the conversation. Talk emerges as central to the experience of these Citizenship classrooms, and the teacher's commitment to talk leads her to adopt these pedagogic strategies (persuasion, role play, problem solving) in her lessons.

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(iii) Conceptual knowledge

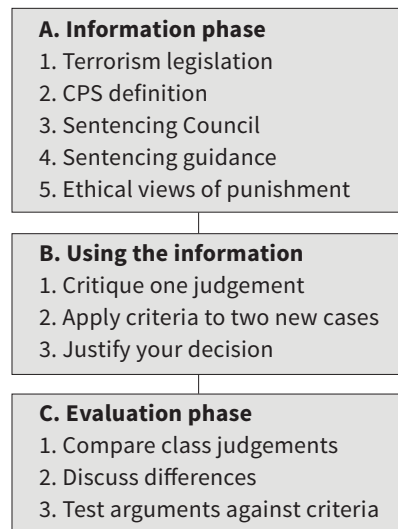
One observation was that these lessons were multi-layered, in that several key concepts were being considered simultaneously. As an example, Kirsty's first lesson introduced year 7 students to the FBVs in the context of a broader range of values, and considered the relevance and significance of such values for individuals and society as a whole. The FBVs were also related to human rights principles, which the students had studied earlier. And students were introduced to the relationship between Cabinet and parliament to consider how and why government might legislate to promote certain values. These layers or dimensions to the lesson are not just different information, they also represent different types of knowledge.

- The teacher is drawing on knowledge about human rights as international law, and how this can be used to develop a standard for holding government to account.
- They are also drawing on knowledge on the role of the Cabinet and parliament in relation to legislation, which is relatively straightforward constitutional knowledge, associated primarily with the study of politics and government.
- But the third layer is about understanding what values are and how they function at an individual and collective level, and this draws more on ethics or political philosophy.

This underlines how complicated subject knowledge can be in Citizenship as not only does the teacher need to draw on these different disciplinary sources of knowledge, they also need to be alert to the fact that each discipline might produce a rather different form of knowledge. For example, drawing on ethics to

think about the most desirable shared values in a democracy might help students to spot arguments, make connections and expand their thinking; but this will yield different kinds of outcomes compared to simply learning about the constitutional relationship between parliament and Cabinet. The latter can lead to some indisputably 'correct' answers, whereas a successful outcome in relation to the first task is going to remain open to dispute.

In lesson 3 the students engage with the process of sentencing people who are guilty of extremism and terrorist related offences. They consider the various sources of information a judge must consider and then apply that information to specific cases. We can also see how the teacher plans to build understanding within the lesson by introducing knowledge with clear teacher input (a combination of written resources and teacher explanation) followed up with an activity to employ this information immediately to think about the practical implications. This might be represented as follows:



The final outcome of the lesson is more than the acquisition of the knowledge provided at the outset (A) and is more concerned with the students' ability to understand how the criteria might be applied in practice in order to generate some insight into the process of applying the law fairly. This makes a contribution to understanding how the justice system works in practice, and to understanding what it means to commit to the rule of law.

(iv) Epistemic development

In her book *Educating Against Extremism* Davies (2008) argues that it is important for schools to prepare students for ambiguity. This means acknowledging that a better

understanding of some citizenship issues does not equate to the possession of right or wrong information, rather it refers to a more sophisticated understanding of a situation or phenomenon. If we take terrorism and extremism, as the example relevant to this article, Davies argues that it is vital to encourage students to move away from the idea that there is a single simple truth, and to understand that people have different perspectives, different understandings, and different values, and therefore explain the same situation differently. The educational challenge is to help students move to this more pluralistic view, and to question simplistic one-dimensional explanations.

This is an epistemological matter and involves developing a more sophisticated understanding of how the social world works and how we construct accounts of it. Kuhn (1991) suggests that younger students might start with an 'absolutist' epistemology, in which knowledge is fixed, generally held by experts, and proven by facts. By contrast, a 'multiplist' view of knowledge grasps that people have different points of view, but risks a form of relativism about knowledge in which there is no way to judge between those diverse opinions. Finally, an 'evaluativist' perspective recognises this diversity of opinions but also understands these can be subjected to scrutiny using methods of inquiry and rational evaluation to evaluate which judgements might be more defensible than others (Reznitskaya and Gregory, 2013).

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Learning about extremism and the FBVs requires a similar shift of perspective, away from simplistic accounts of 'how the world works' or even 'how the world is' and towards a more differentiated understanding of how others see the world. It also requires an understanding of how ethical principles or values influence people in the social world, and the difficulties and compromises required to implement them in specific situations. This represents a profound shift from 'promoting' a set of values to understanding what it means to support them, and what they might look like in specific situations, and why some people who genuinely uphold the same values might decide to enact them in different ways.

Conclusion

Lots of the academic work in citizenship education tends to tell teachers what they should do in order to develop young people's capacity for democratic citizenship or evaluates their effectiveness in achieving specific outcomes. This project is more focused on revealing what expert teachers already do, how they frame their teaching and how they conceptualise progression in

learning. These critical conversations have been an excellent way to start to articulate what expert knowledge is already out there in our teaching community. Our next step is to host a collaborative writing day with colleagues to work out the best way to share this. ●



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