



Presentation and Discussion Around The Teaching and Learning of Britishness and Fundamental British Values

A Presentation by Dr Sadia Habib

With much political and media focus and discussion around the Muslim minority community and their attachment to 'Britishness' and 'Fundamental British Values', the Lewisham Islamic Centre (LIC) considered it important to have a discussion on these issues. Accordingly, on Saturday, 2nd December 2017, the LIC hosted a presentation and discussion on 'The Teaching and Learning of Britishness and Fundamental British Values'.

Councillor Pauline Morrison - the Chair of Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee at the London Borough of Lewisham - opened the event with encouraging words about the importance of engagement. LIC was also privileged to hear from Rev. Canon Charles Pickstone, of the St Laurence Church in Catford, who shared his thoughts on British values too.

The presentation was led by Dr Sadia Habib. Dr Habib has previously taught A level English at a college in north Manchester, and then Key Stages 3, 4 & 5 in southeast London. She was awarded a distinction at Goldsmiths University after completing her MA in Education. She recently completed her doctorate on students' perceptions of Britishness and belonging, as well as on the teaching and learning of Britishness. She is also a co-editor of the very popular Sociological Imagination blog. We were delighted and honoured to have her lead on this important issue.



The presentation was very fruitful and opened up many discussions and questions about the meanings and experiences of 'Britishness' and 'Fundamental British Values'. The young southeast Londoners in Dr Habib's study showed that they each had their own unique perceptions and understanding to what exactly constituted 'Britishness' and 'Fundamental British Values', often shaped by their own social experiences. The young people often expressed local and transnational attachments as more important. Moreover, their experiences of Britishness were often closely connected to social categories such as class, race and ethnicity.

It also became apparent that there is difference between Britishness, and the obscure concept of Fundamental British Values. Often Britishness is more interesting and fun to explore for young people who can link their ideas to their local, national and transnational sense of belonging. When it comes to Fundamental British Values, however, Dr Habib found that trainee teachers struggle to accept these as 'British': future teachers are wary about promoting patriotic agendas about a notion that they perceive as ambiguous and debatable. Trainee teachers expressed concerns about FBV teaching leading to racism, recognising it was important that schools should support anti-racist education in a post-Brexit Britain. The trainee teachers in one of Dr Habib's research projects were keen to explore fundamental human/global values with their students, rather than label these as British.

The Q&A session was particularly enlightening as members from the audience were able to critique the interlinking between the concept of Fundamental British Values and counter terrorism. A major critique of Fundamental British Values is that the guidance does not root from education policy, but from Home Office documents on 'extremism'. Moreover, policies such as PREVENT have had a disproportionate and detrimental impact on the Muslim community.



One audience member pointed out that if schools took ownership of this i.e. British values, then it limits the far right from filling the vacuum. However, as another audience member made clear, while on the face of it, that may well be true, the whole discourse of Fundamental British Values in schools needs to be looked at in the wider context of everything else that surrounds it such as PREVENT, the Casey review and Ofsted's own focus on Muslim schools and Muslims. Therefore it was felt that the void has already been filled by policy makers who are willingly or unwillingly pushing the right wing narrative to the detriment of the Muslim community.

Perhaps what was most profound was the contribution made by an 11-year-old who said that he was at present learning about the transatlantic slave trade and Britain's involvement in this. He believed that this deeply disturbing period in British history formed part of his understanding and learning of British values. Dr Habib too found some trainee teachers were felt uncomfortable about Fundamental British Values teaching for they felt that the requirement had connotations of Empire, colonialism, and slavery.

In her book on learning and teaching about Britishness and Fundamental British Values, Dr Habib concludes that an open and honest debate is needed so that teachers and students have the space to express their concerns and fears about the implications and consequences of Fundamental British Values teaching. Valuing and encouraging culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse young people's contributions to the debates on Britishness should be a priority in any educational policy or practice.

The Lewisham Islamic Centre is truly grateful to Dr Sadia Habib for sharing her first-hand knowledge on the concept and teaching of Britishness and Fundamental British Values, its vagueness and ambiguity, and the impact on minority communities in the UK as well as the general British population. The LIC also thanks Councillor Pauline Morrison and Reverend Charles Pickstone for their continuing support in fostering and maintaining a cohesive and tolerant Borough. Our thanks also go to all who attended and contributed to this event.



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