Abstract

This chapter is about primary and secondary school teachers of history and how they negotiate policy in order to teach sensitive and controversial issues. Research findings demonstrate how the context of the school is fundamental in how teachers enact policy in relation to their practice, particularly in light of political changes in society. Self-surveillance was identified as a key strategy, adopted in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. We frame this context around Kitson and McCully's (2005) theoretical continuum which indicates that there is a reluctance by some teachers to engage with the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues due to concerns with policy enactment. Three key policies will be explored: the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), The Teachers' Standards (DfE,2012) and the Prevent Duty (DfE, 2015). Policy was demonstrated to be ambiguous for teachers and recommendations are made relating to policy and the need for clearer guidance for teachers to support them with their practice.

We present research conducted in two phases that used bounded case study (Stake, 1995) as a methodological approach. In Phase One, two focus group interviews were undertaken, in Phase Two, six unstructured individual interviews were held with teachers of Key Stage 1 to 5 (4– 18 years). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data which was informed by reflections on positionality and being a socially conscious researcher (Pillow, 2010).

Key words

Sensitive and controversial, history, teachers and policy

Chapter Title:

Context, Consciousness, and Caution: Teachers of history and the exploration of sensitive and controversial issues in practice.

Introduction

This chapter draws on Sarah's doctoral research which is about teachers of history in England from Key Stages 1- 5 (age 4-18) and their experiences of teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Both of us (Sarah and Verity) have since used the findings from this research to extend combined projects that explore anti racist pedagogy. In this chapter we reflect on three key policies that have informed our ongoing work: The Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012); The National Curriculum (DfE, 2013); and The Prevent Duty Strategy (DfE, 2015). These policies have shaped the current education practice and provided new challenges for teachers when engaging with sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom. This research considered how teachers may be categorised in relation to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues and how they often adopt a protectionist stance due to surveillance and the impact of policy. In this thesis there were four research questions, however for the purpose of this chapter we have decided to focus on research question 2 which was- How does policy impact on the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues?

Literature review

Davies (2017) states that the study of history is essential for living in a democratic society and that sensitive and controversial issues emerge within the teaching of history. They argue that this is essential if children are to be able to make links with the past and the present. Similarly, Cowan and Maitlas (2017, p. 32) argue, discussing sensitive and controversial issues as part of education is a crucial part of any history curriculum. Goldberg *et al., (*2019) note that children are going to meet sensitive and controversial issues before and after they leave school therefore schools have a duty to support them in developing their understanding of such issues. Barton and McCully (2007, p. 13) state that if a democratic society depends on "the ability of citizens to take part in reasoned discussion then…it is our job as educators to develop this ability in our students". This implies that taking part in discussions which are sensitive and or controversial should enable children to be critically reflective, to question claims of neutrality and to be tolerant of uncertainty. In the case of sensitive and controversial issues within history, this would also require the ability to prepare children to question constructions of the past. We will now consider how three policies influence what past is discussed and how the discussion of controversial issues is presented within these.

The National Curriculum for History (DfE, 2013)

The content of the National Curriculum for History (DfE, 2013) creates both challenges and opportunities for teachers when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. The National Curriculum (DfE, 2013 p.64) for history aims for children to be able to 'understand that

different versions of the past may exist', and 'how interpretations of the past have been constructed'. Maddison (2017) suggests that National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) provided opportunities for children to study a range of different topics, this unquestionably created opportunities and challenges for teachers to engage with the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

The Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012)

While the National Curriculum (DfE 2013) presents the breadth of educational content, it is the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) that outline clear expectations all teachers must meet in order to be an effective classroom practitioner. Presented in two parts, there are eight standards in Part One which relate more directly with teaching and accountability. Part Two of the Standards focus on teachers' professional values. An important part of Part Two of the Standards is the requirement to uphold British Values which are characterised as, "not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs" (DfE, 2012, p.2).

These Standards (DfE, 2012) both guide and shape teachers' practice. Gove (2011) stated that the revision of the standards (DfE, 2012) was part of an initiative designed to be used as a performance management tool by head teachers. Lander (2016) suggests that radical changes to the teaching profession since 2010 have resulted in a school led system that fosters a neo-liberal ideology which is framed around the marketisation of education. Such a context neglects opportunity to foster a more holistic approach to education and the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Part Two of the Standards (DfE, 2012), with their focus on the teaching of British Values, could be viewed as an opportunity to develop teachers' practice in relation to sensitive and controversial issues. However, this could raise some challenges for teachers. Lander (2016, p. 276) argues that as a consequence of Part Two, teachers have become marginalised and a performativity agenda is in place as British Values are assessed by OFSTED (the English education inspectorate authority). Furthermore, there can be an overlap between history and British Values and Mansfield (2019) suggests that the teaching of these values has fallen to teachers of history. It is particularly contentious because much of the discussion in classrooms relating to British Values has implications for both

teachers and children as teachers are now expected to prevent extremism through their teaching. Many of the skills within the teaching of history consider different constructions of the past and an understanding of different perspectives, this has some overlap with the teaching of British Values curriculum. Lander (2016, p.329) however, suggests that there has been a lack of training in supporting teachers on how best to deliver British Values, which has resulted in "nostalgic imperialist constructions of Britishness". Lander (2016) argues that this potentially leaves teachers vulnerable because their naïve interpretations of Britishness can result in contentious discussions.

The Prevent Strategy (DfE, 2015)

In February 2015 the UK government published a new Counter Terrorism and Security Act (2015) in which teachers had a legal duty to recognise children who would be potentially vulnerable to extremism and to prevent them from being part of terrorist activity. This, combined with the requirements for teachers to teach fundamental British Values (as set out in the Teachers Standards DfE 2012) has, as Smith (2016, p.298) states, "changed the face of education policy". While the full extent of these changes has yet to be realised, the statistics for referral to Channel (the UK government's anti-radicalisation scheme) are noteworthy. Dickens (2015, p.8) reports that 50% all the referrals of children in 2015 came from teachers; a 42% increase from 2012-2013.

Guidance included in the Prevent strategy (DfE, 2015, p. 5) state that:

> "it is not intended to stop debating controversial issues. On the contrary, school should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments".

This guidance, on the one hand, encourages teachers to discuss sensitive and controversial issues. However, on the other hand it implies that sensitive and controversial discussions may lead to comments that could be viewed as alarming. This is supported by Mansfield (2019) who argues that there is a tension for teachers who are expected to promote British Values

while they monitor pupils for pejorative comments which could indicate that children are vulnerable to extremism. Elton-Chalcraft *et al.,* (2016, p.1) argue that as a consequence of this policy, teachers are seen as "state instruments of surveillance".

The National Curriculum (DfE 2013), Teachers Standards (DfE 2012) and Prevent (DfE 2015) are significant policies that were designed to shape teachers practice in relation to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. However, these policies provide little by way of detail as to how the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues should be accomplished. For insights into practice, we must look to the history teacher.

Categorisation of History Teachers

This section will introduce research by Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) who categorised teachers by the way they approached the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. In both cases the link between policy and the context they inhabit is of importance.

Kitson and McCully's (2005) research took place in Northern Ireland, which had experienced recent conflict. Their research focussed on what historical topics teachers had included in their teaching. They also considered why some topics had been excluded from the curriculum and what justification was used in determining these choices. Within the research they identified three categories of teacher: the 'avoider', 'container' and 'risk taker'. The research found that teachers' prior experiences linked directly with these categories. Characteristics of the 'avoider' included the avoidance of teaching topics which could be potentially sensitive or controversial, and a belief that the purpose of teaching history was for children to get better at the subject. The teacher as a 'container' found that although controversial issues were taught, they were contained, to avoid contentious debate. Topics were taught as directed in schemes of work and did not focus on topics relevant to the learners. The teacher as 'risk taker' fully embraced the difficulties and complexities of teaching history. They were able to make links between the past and present and looked to develop opportunities which challenged children's pre-existing ideas.

Magill (2016) builds on the earlier work by Kitson and McCully (2005). She presents a model which examines the relationship between history taught in school and the recovery of historical memory in Spain. Magill (2016) identifies the same categories of teachers as Kitson and McCully (2005) - avoiders, containers, risk takers - and adds a fourth category of 'activists'.

Magill (2016, p.260) argues that "history as an uncontested body of knowledge was a major tool for legitimizing the state, under Franco, the goal of education was not the liberation of the individual but the subordination of the individual". Therefore, Magill (2016) argues that the teaching of history needs to link past and present if children are going to develop their historical understanding and awareness of contemporary society. She questions to what extent children can really understand the present if they do not critically question the past. This is supported by McCully (2012, p.151) who argues that "history teachers must not collude with social amnesia by avoiding sensitive aspects of the past" or present the past as truth rather than considering different interpretations of it.

Returning to the categories that Magill (2016) identified; avoider, container, risk taker and activists, the avoider category has been adapted from the earlier work of Kitson and McCully's (2005) research to include 'natural avoiders' and 'reluctant avoiders'. Magill (2016) found that both types of avoider tended selected topics that would not be considered to be sensitive and controversial. By contrast, reluctant avoiders embraced the complexity of teaching but were constrained by a number of factors such as peer pressure, fear of reprisal and lack of support from their schools. The natural avoiders rejected the complexity and difficulties of teaching sensitive and controversial issues within history. The 'containers' did not purposefully avoid teaching topics but did not seek out opportunities to teach sensitive and controversial issues. The risk takers in Magill's (2016) research tended to create opportunities to tackle the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom. While they fully embraced the complexity and difficulties of teaching sensitive and controversial history, they actively encouraged the use of critical thinking skills with children in the classroom. The fourth category of 'activists', were similar to the risk takers in that they sought out opportunities within the curriculum to teach controversial issues. However, the activist sought to take a standpoint in the classroom which enabled them to share with children their own strongly held views. These four categories of teacher can be seen to be the product of a profession under surveillance.

Surveillance

Caluya (2010) and Page (2016) claim that surveillance has become embedded in all aspects of society and as a consequence of this, surveillance is situated within the context of power. Caluya (2010) uses the term 'pedagopticon' to describe how teachers' awareness of their

pedagogical decision making may be viewed by others. Caluya (2010) argues that there has been a 'rhizomatic growth' of surveillance in its many forms. This metaphor recognises both the potential for the positive and negative aspects of surveillance- in this case surveillance as a multi directional web of connections to protect individuals, or a pervasive weed rooted in covert behaviour. The implication of the latter is that teachers can be even more accountable for what happens in the classroom. For Foucault (1977), the panopticon became the central metaphor for surveillance in modern society, a potential gaze that creates self-discipline amongst citizens, workers and the institutionalised. Page (2016) argues that there is a move towards a post-panopticon which can help understand surveillance within the context of schools and classrooms.

Page (2016) reasons that surveillance within the context of education is not new and has taken various forms which they categorise as vertical, horizontal and self. Vertical surveillance could refer to surveillance in the form of school inspections, and strategies of senior leaders within schools - such as watching back CCTV, undertaking teaching observations and learning walks. Page (2016) also suggests that vertical surveillance may include the actions of students who use mobile phones to record teachers. Horizontal surveillance concerns other teachers in terms of peer observation in classrooms but also more routine forms of surveillance such as informal staffrooms conversations. Horizontal surveillance also includes parental surveillance, which operates directly or through parental networks and collective action (Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg, and Cucchiara 2014). Self-surveillance is enacted through reflective practice and self-monitoring. Page (2016) argues that teachers are consciously aware of how their practice may be viewed by various stakeholders.

Page (2010) argues, the notion of self- surveillance is perhaps the form and practice that most defines the surveillance of teachers as distinct from the context of Foucault's (1977) panopticon. Foucault (1991) argues that the gaze moves 'inside' and discipline becomes internalised to produce 'docile bodies'. Self -surveillance activities that teachers engage with, Page (2016) argues, is a form of surveillance that "panopticism cannot account for in contemporary surveillance". In this context, teachers are the active agents and willing participants within the surveyed space.

Having outlined the policies related to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues and how teachers can be categorised in relation to teaching these issues, we will now turn to the insights provided by teachers of 4-18 year olds in exploring …. ADD THE AIMS / RQ HERE .

Methodology

Due to the aims and objectives of this research project, the interpretivist paradigm was chosen as the central epistemological position. Mack (2010) states, interpretivism emphasises the ability of the individual to construct meaning of their research. This construction is attributed to the fact that social reality is viewed from multiple perspectives and is interpreted differently by individuals and social groups (Mack, 2010). Case study was adopted as a methodology as it assumes an in-depth understanding and deep immersion with the subject (Stake (1995), Flyvberg (2006), and Yin (2014)). Thomas (2016) describes interpretivist research and a case study approach as natural partners, as they each seek for rich, intensive understanding of the phenomena being researched. Stake (1995) suggests that a case study provides the opportunity to study the particularity and complexity of an issue.

The participants in the research project were selected through purposeful sampling. Emails and information were sent out to teachers who were either known through our informal history networks or were contacts or colleagues of teachers.

The data collected involved using two methods; focus groups and individual interviews. Focus group discussions are a particularly rich source of data collection. Aurini *et al.,* (2016) define the focus group as a method of understanding and describing an issue from the perspectives of the participants; they are an opportunity for multiple participants to interact with others through dialogue. Unstructured individual interviews were used which sought to understand the subjective feelings, thoughts and experiences of the participants individually—this method allowed for data collection while seeking to understand individual perspectives which were contextualised within their experiences Aurini *et al.,* (2014). Below is a grid which outlines contextual information about the participants who were part of this study, using alternative names for participants in order to anonymise those takin part.

Name	Teaching Experience	School Context	Age Phase	Focus Group	Individual interviews
Sammy	10 years plus	large inner-city academy	Secondary	1	No
Rebecca	Less than 5 years	large semi-urban academy	Primary	1	Yes
Charlie	Less than 5 Years	large urban academy	Primary	1	Yes
Mike	Less than 5 Years	large urban academy	Secondary	1	Yes
Nate	Less than 5 years	large urban academy	Primary	1	Yes
Emma	Less than 5 years	independent urban school	Secondary	2	No
Kate	More than 5 years	independent urban school	Primary	2	No
Jim	Less than 5 years	large academy	Primary	2	Yes
Robert	More than 10 years	large inner-city school	Secondary	No	Yes

Thematic analysis was adopted and drew on the work of Clarke and Braun (2017, p. 297) who suggest that this approach can provide an "accessible and systematic approach" to generate themes from qualitative data. This allows for the generation of a critical framework which can "interrogate patterns within personal and social meanings … and to ask questions about the implications of this (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p. 297).

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that there are five key stages to thematic analysis:

- Become familiar with the data
- Generate initial codes
- Search for themes and potential themes
- Review themes and check for examples that do not fit
- Refine themes, generate propositions and look for complexities common with a thematic approach.

This five-step guidance provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) gave a robust guide that was used to support thematic analysis of both the focus group interviews and the individual interviews in Phase One and Two respectively.

Thomas (2009) states that ethics is about the conduct of a researcher's work. So an attentive and reflexive approach was adopted as the research unfolded and was guided by the BERA ethical guidelines (2014). The principles of being a socially conscious researcher (Pillow, 2010) who acknowledged the importance of listening to and representing the voices of the participants, committing to ethical principles through all decision making, and recognising social justice with education was adopted. Data was anonymised and presented within themes.

Findings and discussion.

The policies highlighted in this chapter have been: The Teachers Standards (DfE 2012), the National Curriculum for history (DfE, 2013) and the Prevent Strategy (DfE 2015) as these policies shaped the context for this research which influences the categorisation of teachers when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Themes that arose from the data were:

- Exploring and Defining the Terms 'Sensitive' and 'Controversial'
- Reflections from Classroom Practice;
- History as an Opportunity to Discuss Controversial and Sensitive Issues;
- Disclosure Dilemma;
- Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues.
- Influential Factors that Impact on Teachers' Decision Making in the Classroom

- Constructions of Childhood;
- The Influence of Parents;
- Unexpected Discussion;
- The Significance of the School Context.

As this chapter emphasis policy context the data will be presented under each policy and how this influenced teachers' practice.

National Curriculum (DfE, 2013)

During the focus group interviews the participants provided four specific examples of content that had the potential to be sensitive and controversial: The Bus Boycott and The Slave Trade in Bristol (Charlie), World War 1 (Nate,) and Guy Fawkes (Sammy). In the case of Charlie, the events that he cited had a particularly strong local connection. This illustrates that controversial and sensitive issues can be identified for teaching to local, and time specific contexts. It is worth noting that none of these events or individuals are explicitly mentioned within the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) at the key stage that the teachers were working at (Key Stages 2, 3 and 4)). This suggests that the curriculum has flexibility within its content and that individual teachers do select content that have the opportunity to engage with sensitive and controversial issues that are relevant to the context they are being taught in.

Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012)

The Teachers Standards (DfE 2012) were seen to pose some challenges for teachers especially during the UK's Brexit vote in 2016 (a vote to leave the European Union). Both Nate and Charlie - who were Year 6 teachers (10 – 11 year olds) - found this a difficult time as they were unsure how, or if, they should respond to children's comments and questions about politics. Nate commented that 'I just didn't think I could answer' and Charlie stated that he could not 'form an opinion towards them [children] or anything'.

Magill (2016) identified how some teachers in her research were identified as 'activist'. These teachers explicitly selected sources, avoided different perspectives and promoted their own view point, this could be seen as exploiting children's vulnerability and is not the

position that Charlie and Nate took. However, what Charlie and Nate acknowledged was teachers' powerful position of influence with the point of which vulnerability and exploitation occurs being unclear. While the Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012) may be clear, Charlie and Nate's experience shows that the application of them is more difficult in practice. This predicament also raises questions about self- surveillance and protectionism which will be considered later in this chapter.

In terms of teaching British Values, Lander (2016, p.329) suggests that there has been a lack of training in supporting teachers and this potentially leaves teachers vulnerable. Lander (2016) argues that naïve interpretations of Britishness may cause contentious discussions both inside and outside of the classroom. While Charlie and Nate did not refer explicitly to a lack of training, Charlie's experiences of teaching British Values provided an interesting insight into how he approached it; protecting his position by using a purchased ready-made resource available online through a popular educational website.

Charlie used the phrase 'I don't have to worry…[they] packaged it up very objectively' when using such resources. This implied that he had shifted his personal responsibility and therefore presented a protected, container position. This was in contrast to his previous comments with regard to the Brexit referendum where Charlie presented avoidance tactics. Through the purchased resource he felt he had ensured that he did not express his personal beliefs and so he was upholding the Teaching Standards (DfE 2012). Nate was reflexive of his choices and did question the use of this ready-made resource. He recognised 'a naïve interpretation of Britishness', Lander (2016. p. 67) with regard to the delivery of British Values. This supports the idea that a naïve perspective of British Values can be presented in the classroom and indicates that some teachers are aware of it.

The Prevent Duty (2015)

Robert discussed how he perceived how his role of teacher had changed in light of training in the Prevent strategy (DfE 2015). He recalled how he had not had training of this kind in his previous teaching career and that he was not happy about it. One reason for his concerns stems from the underlying ethics of the policy and this training. He commented:

'We're almost being like East German informant type people '

‘And whereas if we saw a vulnerable kid we’d look out for them and like talk to them, like talk to their parents. Now it’s shop them to the police’

Robert’s comments indicate that he views the reporting of vulnerable children as being like an ‘informant’. His position seems to echo Elton-Chalcraft’s (2016) concerns when she uses the term to describe teachers as “state instruments of surveillance”. These comments demonstrate how Prevent (DfE 2015) has impacted on his practice. Robert uses state control as a metaphor for current legislation which implies that he is uncomfortable being in the role of the surveyor of children’s comments. Being so openly opposed to official policy could be viewed through an activist lens and while Robert does not fit Magill’s (2016) category of activist, he does indicate that he is aware of surveillance in his school.

Risk takers

Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill’s (2016) research found that the teachers they identified in this category confronted uncomfortable truths and challenged children’s misconceptions and preconceptions. The teachers sought to develop a critical stance in the classroom where children could understand the complexities of the past rather than being presented with a simplistic narrative. From the focus groups, examples of risk taking were provided; these included using images with the intention to shock, expecting children to be upset in order to engage with historical empathy, considering how a particular issue is approached, and the way in which counter narratives were presented to the hegemonic position by the teacher playing the role of devil’s advocate (taking on an alternative position to their own and /or their student’s for the sake of argument and discussion).

Emma used images in her teaching of the Holocaust and the Vietnam war. She deliberately selected emotive images in her teaching in order to provide uncomfortable truths. Kate recognised that teachers have a choice in how they approach the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. This implied that the same issue could be taught in different ways, some more risky than others. Sammy provided an example of choice with regard to the teaching of the British Empire. She felt that the emphasis on celebrating the Empire is an expectation by the UK government. Sammy spoke of how teaching British Empire in this way did not challenge uncomfortable truths but instead provided a simplistic explanation of the

past. Part of her rationale for adopting a riskier approach with multiple perspectives was because of her sense of self and acknowledgment of her political position being 'a bit lefty'. Here her politics were informing her choice of approach.

A further risk-taking strategy can be seen with regard to how Mike used the strategy of devil's advocate in order to counter children's responses. In this instance, Mike commented that his responses to children's comments were reactive rather than being planned or politically informed. With this strategy he was able to provide different perspectives indicating that Mike felt this was a useful way of generating discussion. However, due to the unplanned nature and potential for reactive comments this strategy may have left Mike in a vulnerable position because his comments may not have been supported by evidence.

Containers

Teachers who are considered 'containers' (Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) do not encourage children to fully engage with the issues being taught and they contain the possibility of emotive or upsetting discussions. This indicates a contrast to the previous section where we discussed strategies of risk taking in the form of teacher's position and resources used: this could facilitate unplanned, emotional responses. However, it could be argued that without taking the risk of challenging uncomfortable truths, children are at risk of not being able to understand the past because of the choices that teachers make. We previously problematised Charlie's use of readymade resources to discuss Brexit. Of particular interest were the comments made with regard to the use of a commercial company who mass produce teaching resources. Charlie suggested that the responsibility for the discussion had been shifted to the resource maker and therefore he could resolve himself of any responsibility. His use of the words 'appropriate', 'objectively' and 'easier', were key indicators that Charlie felt this was a more straightforward way of teaching about British Values and this enabled him to be more confident in his teaching. However, Charlie neglected to consider that he had selected this resource due to his trust in these commercially available resources. As a result of this trust, he had considered this resource to be 'objective'. Charlie's lack of questioning of the use of this resource in teaching has the potential to limit learning and may indicate a quick fix to a solution rather than providing an opportunity for children to engage critically with a discussion about British Values. Without questioning the content of resources can potentially place the teacher in a vulnerable

position. Not all participants were comfortable with this approach and Nate recognised that the selection of sources needed careful consideration.

In addition to containment through the choice of resource, Jim reflected on how he contained learning through the negotiation of children's questions. Jim articulated how his teaching about flags raised the possibility to develop a deeper teaching opportunity about colonialism. While Jim's intention had been to teach about flags and their associated country, the children were very curious and appeared to want to know more about the relationship between flags and Great Britain (as many flags have part of Great Britain's flag embedded in their own). This was unplanned, and his comments-initiated containment of the discussion. He used the words 'loose' and 'loosely' to demonstrate the tokenistic discussion that occurred in the classroom around the topic in question. While Jim recognised that this was an opportunity to engage with a deeper discussion, it also indicated two types of containment, planned in the case of Charlie with the use of readymade resources, and unplanned in the case of Jim and flag identification.

Avoiders

While some participants used strategies of containment in their research, Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) identified categories of avoider. Within Magill's (2016) research she identified teachers who were 'natural avoiders' and 'reluctant avoiders'. Magill (2016) found that both types of avoider tended not to teach or chose topics that would be considered to be uncontentious. Reluctant avoiders acknowledged the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues. However, they were reluctant in facilitating these because of external factors. By comparison, the natural avoiders rejected the complexity and difficulties of teaching history and provided a simplistic approach. In this research, Rebecca provided an example of this when she commented that she avoided sensitive and controversial issues because she did not want to 'confuse' or 'worry' children in her Year Two class (6-7 year olds). She felt that the children were unable to 'process and understand' at this age.

Rebecca's concerns seem to stem from the fact that she felt her class would not be cognitively able to understand sensitive and controversial issues. Rebecca's rationale for

avoidance was from a protectionist position where she used child development as a factor in her decision making. This indicates that there is a potential relationship between avoider and protectionist.

Emma provided a further example of avoidance when she commented that teachers may use homework to avoid discussions of sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom. She suggested that teachers may shift the responsibility to parents. She gave the example of her son's school where each year children are given homework that involved identifying a country, a flag and a culture. Emma felt strongly that discussion around identity, including culture should take place in school with the teacher and should not be avoided.

Emma and Rebecca's comments provide examples of when teachers may use strategies of avoidance. This resonates with Magill's (2016) category of natural avoiders. During the research no explicit mention of reluctant avoiders was noted within the teaching of history. However, when Nate and Charlie refer to the teaching of British Values in the context of Brexit they imply this reluctance with regard to the sharing of their personal political views.

Activists

Whilst, risk takers, containers and avoiders have been discussed, Magill (2016) identified a further category of teachers as 'activist'. In her research, activists presented a one-sided view that related specifically to their value position. Activists did not seem to be wary of reprisal and seemed to be aware that they could manipulate children's thinking. However, in returning to Part Two of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012), it clearly states that teachers should have 'mutual respect and tolerance' while ensuring 'that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils'. The activist position would seem to oppose these Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012). In interviews, Sammy openly shared her own value position and actively encouraged children to recognise this in the sources she used within her teaching. However, this is in contrast to Magill's (2016) research as Sammy recognised that her own beliefs influenced her teaching but they were not more important than engaging with the teaching of history. In this example Sammy's practice did not oppose the Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012).

Jim explored his recent experience of teaching about current affairs which he described as a sensitive and controversial issue through the teaching of British Values. Jim decided to use 'First News', a weekly newspaper designed for 7-14 year-olds which can support learning in the classroom. He focused on an article and videoclips about Donald Trump (then President of the United States):

> 'I didn't want my own negative views superseding and clouding over what the actual facts are so, to go on 'First News', that to me although it could be seen as having some bias,'

Jim justified the use of an article about Trump as he did not want to disclose his 'negative' views about the President. This suggests that Jim would have found it difficult to share a neutral viewpoint. Jim explicitly selected and used external sources that supported his views. Media coverage in the UK at this time did not present Trump in a positive light. It should be noted that there is a potential tension here. Jim did not provide alternative narratives around Trump to the children which is an essential consideration in the teaching of controversial issues. This example has some of the characteristic noted in Magill's (2016) research which identified the category of activist. Magill (2016) suggests that activists present information that is in line with the teachers' own strong views without concern for giving a balanced discussion. Jim described his school as one which has the support of parents. Activists identified in Magill's (2016) research taught in contexts where parents were likely to hold similar views to the teacher, so there was less fear of reprisal. In Jim's context, this could indicate that the parents may have also shared similar opinions about Trump or that they had trust in the teacher and were likely to support him.

Surveillance

In the literature review we referred to the work of Caluya (2010) and Page (2016) and considered how surveillance is embedded within school practice. Page (2016) provides a

model of surveillance: vertical (referring to Ofsted and SLT), horizontal (referring to peer, parents and children) and interpersonal or self-surveillance (self-monitoring and reflective practice). While Page's (2016) work discusses more general aspects of teachers practice, surveillance has a particular importance within the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

Sammy was happy and confident in sharing her own values with the children that she taught. However, she acknowledged that she needed to restrict this in some ways and 'keep it out'. This suggests that she was conforming to professional expectations and not engaging in anything that may have been considered inappropriate or extreme. Traits that could be considered verging on activism were silenced, resulting in Sammy self - surveying her comments in line with the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012).

Nate undertook a similar strategy of not sharing all political viewpoints by not responding to children's questions that asked him to reveal his political position when discussing Brexit. He too engaged in self-surveillance in front of the children. Teachers in this study also presented their use of devil's advocate as a surveillance strategy (Stradling, 1985). This protection comes in three forms: first, the teacher is able to protect themselves by not disclosing their own views; second, the teacher is able to challenge children's comments without fear of a known position; third, if children or parents have concerns about what has been discussed then the teacher can say that they were playing the role of devil's advocate. This strategy can be used to create a mirage where the teacher can be protected, thus simultaneously acknowledging and deflecting the power of surveillance. Self-surveillance does not happen in a vacuum and, Nate recognised that his practice was shaped by both vertical (the head teacher) and horizontal surveillance (the parents). The lens of surveillance can be used to further explore the experiences of Jim through his teaching of Trump.

Jim decided to use a social media platform to share his teaching about Trump.

> 'I shared on social media …. 'oh, after reading First News, my class has been a hive of political discussion, a buzz with political discussion' something like that. And they [a national newspaper] reshared it, and the editor reshared it and said, 'it's great how young minds get some…[knowledge of current affairs]'
>
> 'it was Saturday and I was feeling relaxed, I didn't have my school head-on…'

The act of sharing seems to raise tension in Jim's thinking. On the one hand, he shared news about how the discussion was political, but in earlier comments, he stated that the child's letter lacked any political focus. Jim first described how the letter written at home was a bit of extra writing and 'not a political…' task, and this seems to be in contrast to the focus of the lesson in which, unquestionably, the content was political; gaining facts about a world leader for non-fiction writing. Jim was aware of how his professional identity changed between home and school. The use of the words 'didn't have my school head-on' indicate that even though Jim was messaging about his work, he did not seem to think of this in a professional context. He refers to feeling 'relaxed', and as a consequence, he makes decisions that he may not have done if he had been at school.

Jim's sharing of information ended up with a journalist writing an article about Jim and the school with the letter written by a child (at home) as a piece of homework appearing in a popular online paper. Jim did not seem to have any regrets about using social media to share class news, and this form of social media is encouraged by his school. However, what is shared and in what context has implications on how teachers' professionalism may be framed, and this raises questions about who decides what is appropriate to be shared on social media. In this instance, the children, the teacher and the parents did not seem to be concerned about the content of the discussion that had taken place in the class or the media coverage that followed. However, there were some concerns about the political nature of Jim's social media messages by the Multi Academy Trust, (MAT)Jim commented:

> '[the problem was management thought we were] looking like we're taking sides in a political] discussion
>
> '[it gave the] school maybe some publicity that we didn't want and almost landed me in quite hot water. Yeah, I think there were conversations about that higher up'

The MAT expressed some apprehensions about the repercussion of Jim's social media messages. One concern was that Jim had not followed the press coverage protocol once the message had reached an online newspaper. A further concern was that senior leaders within

the MAT did not think that the school should be seen to be taking sides in current political debate. In this example, the actions of the MAT could be viewed as a form of vertical surveillance (Page, 2016).

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to highlight tensions within the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom. The research illuminated the pressures that teachers face when teaching sensitive and controversial issues and how they adopt protectionist strategies to ensure that they fulfil their professional responsibilities. The teachers in this research can be categorised in line with Kitson and Mc Cully (2005) and Magill's (2016) research, however these categories are not fixed but fluid and subject to change as a result of policy and school context – shifting from avoider to activist dependent on the topic and context. The polices considered here are ambiguous, leaving teachers walking a precarious tightrope as they navigate tensions in their classroom practice. Through this work we have identified that teachers require: greater support and training in how to teach sensitive and controversial issues, along with how to protect themselves in what can be a vulnerable environment. We have used insights from this research to inform our ongoing exploration of anti-racist pedagogy, another sensitive and controversial issue.

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