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JEROME, Lee, LIDDLE, Anna and YOUNG, Helen

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Talking Tolerance: Being Deliberative about Fundamental British Values

Lee Jerome,[1] **Anna Liddle,**[2] **Helen Young**[3]

[1]Department of Education, Middlesex University, London, UK (L.Jerome@mdx.ac.uk)

[2]School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK (a.s.liddle@leeds.ac.uk)

[3]School of Law & Social Sciences, London South Bank University, London, UK (youngh@lsbu.ac.uk)

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Abstract

This article reconsiders the literature on civic nationalism and argues that, rather than representing an alternative to ethno-cultural nationalism, it is more accurate to think of the two terms at either end of a continuum. Whilst the fundamental British values (FBVs) are often interpreted through a cultural discourse, which serves to alienate and marginalise minoritised students and staff, this article demonstrates how teaching can avoid this framing and engage students with a civic discourse. Transcripts from secondary students' conversations about religious freedom illustrate that they are capable of balancing rights sensitively, of reaching pragmatic solutions and demonstrating sympathy for others. This demonstrates that the FBVs may create opportunities for developing an ethics of care within a deliberative democratic project.

Keywords: Citizenship education, deliberation, ethics of care, fundamental British values, nationalism, teaching

1. Nationalism, Identity and Values

Michael Ignatieff's book *Blood and Belonging* (1994) brought discussion of the nature and significance of nationalism back into public debate towards the end of the twentieth century. Whilst he was clear that his own identity was global and cosmopolitan, he argued that, because the nation state functioned as the only effective guarantor of security and a rights-based legal system (at least for most people in the world), it was essential to nurture the idea of the nation. His view was borne of a grudging acceptance of necessity, rather than some urge to stir up a celebratory or patriotic nationalism. In order to clarify this position he advocated a distinction between an ethno-cultural form of nationalism and a civic nationalism. Ethno-cultural nationalism represents a form of blood and soil identity, which creates some mythic racial or cultural traits, and seeks to elevate them to superiority and protect them from outside threats (whether that be in the form of

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immigration, international rivalry, miscegenation etc.). Such forms of nationalist sentiment may well serve to bind a people (at least some of them) to their nation, but it will achieve this through the exclusion (and oppression) of those who are deemed not to fit into this mythic race/nation. The Nazi commitment to the Aryan mythology serves as an archetypal example, but Ignatieff was also concerned with more immediate problems, such as the deadly rise of ethno-cultural nationalism dissolving the former Yugoslavia. By contrast, a civic nationalist discourse, at least the kind advocated by Ignatieff, would be more inclusive, and committed to a set of rules and processes for living together. Civic nationalism holds out the promise that a population can be bound together through common interest and can develop some sense of shared nationalist sentiment so that core civic values can be sustained. If the nation state should be supported so that it can sustain a particular civic culture, then Ignatieff is keen to offer a form of nationalism that is democratic, inclusive and compatible with democratic values.

Since Ignatieff wrote that controversial book, much of the West (and beyond) has witnessed a resurgence in support for the far right, with ethno-cultural nationalism combined with anti-immigrant rhetoric, Islamophobia, antisemitism, and attacks on LGBT+ rights, women's rights, and academic freedom. Ignatieff's own institution, the Central European University, has been forced to move from Hungary to Austria after the Orban government introduced restrictions. Faced with popular nationalist sentiment that can be stirred to such exclusivist and negative political ends, many on the centre left have seized on civic nationalism as a positive way to channel such emotional commitments to a positive form of nationalist identity (Xenos, 1996). Importantly, civic nationalism does not demand that national identity sits above other aspects of identity which may bind one to others within and outside of one's society, through bonds of class, language, sex, religion etc. One aspect of the freedom guaranteed by democratic states is the right to prioritise one's various identities, and so attempts to impose national identity as a superior identity within a democracy are contradictory (Sen, 2006, p.38). But Sen argues that this is all a question of balance because the opposite tendency, to be entirely indifferent to national identity, runs the risk that society will simply drift or fall apart, or in the worst cases, tear itself apart. Sen quotes Gandhi's fear that a nation whose population does not perceive itself to share a national identity will be 'vivisected and torn to pieces' (quoted in Sen, 2006, p.169). Tamir (2019) argues that political theorists have evaded the topic by adopting the language of 'community' and 'communitarianism', but this ignores the fact that for many it is the nation that fulfils this function in practice. Liberals often simply assume the political community is already in place, but:

> How a 'People' and political solidarity are created is often ignored and taken for granted even though it is nationhood that generates the 'We' and collective power. (Kuzio, 2002, p.31)

Whilst Ignatieff's argument that we must engage with the phenomenon of nationalism, has attracted some pragmatic support, the idea that one can divide up nationalisms into these two broad categories has been subject to more sustained critique. Several authors point out that Ignatieff's distinction is actually a continuation of an older thesis developed by Kohn (1944) during the Second World War to defend Western liberal democratic nation states as being more developed compared to Eastern states (Kuzio, 2002; Tamir, 2019; Yack, 1996). But, these critiques do not dismantle the distinctions entirely, instead they argue that it might be better to treat them as two ends on a continuum, and to see every nation as occupying different positions on that continuum at different points in history. Those Western states that might be described as civic nationalist now, generally went through a period of forging a culturally and / or linguistically homogenous population. This involved a dual process of suppression and creation, where ethno-cultural nationalist myths were generated and promoted. Kuzio (2002) argues that these two types of nationalism are always present in different combinations and so the emergence of crises, threats or conflict can re-balance sentiment in the most settled nation from a form of civic universalism towards ethnic particularism. In addition, this more subtle analysis

reveals the obvious truth that the civic institutions, processes and relationships that prevail in each nation state are also situated within a specific territory and history, they therefore have a cultural dimension, which is often associated with an ethno-cultural identity. Yack (1996) argues that Ignatieff's simplistic binary model represents a kind of wishful thinking which allows Ignatieff to ignore the cultural baggage that comes with a belief in certain values and processes, i.e. being a Canadian citizen brings a sense of cultural identity as well as a political affiliation. Tamir (2019) extends this argument to contend that civic nationalism is essentially the illusion that one can have a form of nationalism without emphasising the nation. While constitutionalism, universal rights, and equal membership are valuable guidelines for political action, they offer far too thin a basis for social and political cooperation. This is why nationalism keeps coming back, pushing civic ideals aside, and making its way to centre stage (p. 433).

Whilst the authors cited so far root their arguments in historical analysis, Fozdar and Low (2015) take a different approach through listening to citizens' talk about citizenship and immigration. They argue that, whatever the merits of the distinction between ethno-cultural and civic nationalism, in practice the two are elided in everyday discourse. By analysing a number of focus groups in Australia they argue that suspicion of migrants (especially Muslims) is superficially concealed with the more acceptable language of civic nationalism. So, immigrants are seen as a concern because they may not follow 'our laws' rather than because of their language, religion or ethnicity. They argue this should not be a surprise as both forms of nationalism inevitably construct some 'other' against whom national identity is constructed. For ethno-cultural nationalists, the other is a person with a different ethnicity, language or cultural identity. For the civic nationalist, the other is simply someone who has not sought or achieved membership of the political community. Immigration and citizenship policies serve as mechanisms for 'civic integration' but they also provide a set of criteria for people to use to measure the threat posed by immigrants who might not endorse specific values. Barker (1981) called this 'new racism' as it moved beyond explicitly citing race as a reason for exclusion or suspicion, but it has a similar effect. We can see this in the rise of Islamophobia in the far right in Europe, who target ethnic minorities as illiberal and therefore as a threat to their civic national ideals (Fozdar & Low, 2015, p.529).

On this view, emancipatory ethical and political values (those that would be defended by Ignatieff) can be transformed, under certain conditions, into inherent personal attributes of members of particular national and regional collectivities (Britain, the West) and, thus, in practice, become exclusionary rather than permeable signifiers of boundaries (Yuval-Davis, 2006, pp.212-13). In practice, this turns into Dutch immigration officers 'testing' Muslim's tolerance of gay men as a form of homonationalism or of women's rights as femonationalism (Larin, 2020, p.134). The fear is of 'cultural incompatibility' (Fozdar & Low, 2015, p.539) and it can be seen across the new right, for example in Orban's appeal to Christian and illiberal democracy in Hungary, in Pim Fortuyn's high-profile defence of Dutch socially liberal values against 'socially backward' Islam, and Renaud Camus' fears about the 'great replacement' of indigenous French culture with an immigrant and Islamic culture (Haynes, 2020). Parties on the far right have begun to couch their arguments in terms of the distinctive values that underpin society, rather than a unique ethnic character – even though their motivations remain the same.

2. The Role of Policy

Cannadine (2013) reminds us that most nation states, and therefore national identities, have actually been quite fluid over time. One might think this is less so for island states where borders are stable due to geography, but in the case of the UK, there are certainly shifting identities being negotiated between the various claims presented by England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the UK, Britain, and the British Isles. For this reason, Anderson's (2006) account of nations as 'imagined communities' has proved influential where the nation is seen as a 'cultural artefact' (Anderson, 2006, p.4) that comes into being for a variety of reasons and invokes a variety of emotional and ideological

connections. But as cultural artefacts, they are generated and sustained through cultural processes, and these frame the role of policy, most obviously immigration and citizenship policy, but also education, where government perceives the opportunity to promote a positive vision of national identity. In Britain, this task of narrating a national identity was intimately bound up with the empire, for example, the Colonial Office created and circulated lantern-slide lectures and illustrated textbooks which represented the British to their empire, and the peoples of the empire to the British. Such resources were promoted through school geography with the express intent that thinking geographically should become synonymous with thinking imperially (Ryan, 1997, p.187). Such artefacts led Tomlinson (2019) to conclude that textbooks in Britain were 'largely places of myth-making and evasions of the truth' so far as the empire was concerned (p. 3).

In more recent times this was evident during New Labour governments, as Gordon Brown and Tony Blair sought to harness some set of British values to their particular form of progressive politics. This included reforming the citizenship and history curriculum to ensure children were taught about their shared values and the national narrative that accounts for them (Jerome & Clemitshaw, 2012). It also included the development of community cohesion programmes, citizenship ceremonies for immigrants (see McGhee, 2008), and numerous reports such as Lord Goldsmith's *Citizenship: Our Common Bond*, and the Commission on Integration and Cohesion's report, *Our Shared Future* (WiredGov online, 2008). Such developments accompanied a fear, akin to that expressed above by Sen, that policy might be promoting a form of multiculturalism through which the nation was 'sleepwalking to segregation' (Phillips quoted in McGhee, 2008, p.87). These developments laid the groundwork for the identification of a list of fundamental British values (FBVs), which emerged under the subsequent Conservative / Liberal Democrat government, and which have been incorporated into the requirements for qualifying to teach (DfE, 2011); guidance on Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural (SMSC) education (DfE, 2014); and the Prevent Duty (DfE, 2015), where 'vocal opposition' to the FBVs is taken as an indication of extremism (see Jerome et al., 2019; Revell and Bryan, 2018). All teachers in England are required to uphold the government's defined list of British values, all children must be taught them, and explicit rejection of them can result in referrals to police and/or local government.

The FBVs are democracy, the rule of law, liberty and mutual respect and toleration (DfE, 2014). This list is remarkably similar to other lists of 'national values' drawn up by various countries in the West. But the literature on different forms of nationalisms (discussed above) alerts us to pay attention to the specific context in which those values are being defined and implemented. Tolerance, for example, is a common principle to all liberal democracies, but looks rather different in France with its commitment to laicité, or England with its established Church and public Equality Duty. Similarly, the elision of the FBV policy with anti-terrorism/extremism policy generates another set of contextual assumptions that shape their implementation (House of Commons, 2015). On this view, the FBV policy can be seen within civic nationalist discourse, because even though they are universal liberal values they are framed as British. In addition, the defence of these values is also bound up with defending the nation against extremist threats (from those who do not support the FBVs). Significantly, the FBVs are also promoted as a set of values to bind us together.

3. Towards Critical Implementation of the FBVs

Given the potential for slippage between a civic and an ethno-cultural nationalist framing of the FBVs, it is significant that there is evidence that many schools are choosing to emphasise the teaching of British cultural identity, symbols and artefacts, rather than focusing on teaching about the core values that underpin British democratic politics. Recent studies demonstrate that many teachers are promoting Britishness, rather than the FBVs, with the result that Muslim and other minoritised teachers and students often feel marginalised and under pressure, from the very policy that ostensibly seeks to promote a common bond (see

the edited collection in Busher & Jerome, 2020). Practice in some schools therefore shifts the FBV policy along the scale towards ethno-cultural nationalism. But this is not inevitable, and in some schools the policy is implemented in a way that reinterprets the FBVs through the existing school ethos, or teachers adopt a more overtly critical approach to teaching them as principles of democratic citizenship (Vincent, 2019).

This article draws on a curriculum project in England which explicitly set out to promote teaching about the FBVs in the context of critical citizenship education, in order to avoid the tendency towards *promoting* 'Britishness'. Such an approach seeks to promote understanding of the FBVs as political concepts and to enable students to engage with them critically, both theoretically and in relation to everyday politics (Vincent, 2019). *The Deliberative Classroom* thus positions the FBV teaching towards the civic nationalist end of the continuum and away from the ethno-cultural pole. It includes a set of resources which aim to explore one or more of the FBVs. The resources promote deliberative discussion rather than competitive debates because deliberation is better suited to opening up discussion of complex issues through exploratory talk. But deliberative tasks also encourage students to seek a consensus, or at least to find a way forward that can meet the approval of as many classmates as possible. Again, this contrasts with competitive debates, where a simple majority will win the day.

Deliberation is also pragmatic, in that the resolution to a deliberative dialogue only results in a compromise that works for the people who achieved it, at the time it was achieved. Decisions are open to further deliberation, and one might well expect that with different evidence, different participants, and a changing context a similar process may well recommend a different solution. To this extent deliberation models the form of democratic vision espoused by Dewey (1916), who promoted a commitment to pragmatic processes of living together. Noddings and Brooks echo this aspect of Dewey's position by arguing:

> Conversation is imperative in a participatory democracy and it should be an essential part of every school day. A participatory democracy is not simply an arrangement of governing procedures; it is a mode of associated living that requires both critical thinking and moral commitment to its continual analysis and improvement. (Noddings & Brooks, 2017, p.152)

By encouraging participants to attend to the views of others, and to understand the reasons they have for having those views, deliberation encourages empathy and mutual understanding. This also reflects some of the core ideas at the heart of Nodding's 'ethics of care', as she applies it to education, where 'sympathy' means being receptive and attentive to the other (Noddings, 2002). In order to develop such sympathy, one needs to first care about the other, and then develop the capacity to care for them. And through the development of these reciprocal relations of regard for others and care, we develop deeper connections, which are often called social capital (Smith, 2020). In relating this approach to the teaching of controversial issues in schools, Noddings argues that:

> The care approach, as a relational ethic, recognizes the centrality of relations and works through these relations to make life better for all those involved. (Noddings & Brooks, 2017, p.16)

This seems to chime with aspects of deliberative democracy, and certainly the deliberative classroom as we have interpreted it. In this project the solution to an ethical or political challenge is to be sought through an inclusive process of discussion, and should represent an inclusive answer to the problem.

In the rest of this article, we consider the extent to which this approach enables students to engage with the FBVs as civic ideals in the specific context of Britain without moving towards the ethno-cultural pole of nationalism.

4. Methodology

The data reported in this article was collected as part of a larger project: *The Deliberative Classroom and the Development of Secondary Students' Conceptual*

Understanding of Democracy (Jerome et al., 2020). In this article we have chosen to focus on one school, that we have given the pseudonym Avon School. This school was different to the other three where data collection took place in that the data came from volunteers in the debating society, rather than from lessons. Furthermore, the age-range in this school was broader, covering 12-18 years old whereas the other schools were in year group classes of 12–13-year-olds. Due to the particular richness of this data in relation to the subject of the article, we felt that it warranted a more thorough exploration.

Avon School is an 11-18 Church of England academy in the north of England with a mixed intake, including a sizeable Muslim minority. The group was made up of 14 students aged 12-18 and three of the four tables in the room consented to having recorders on the table to capture small group discussions. The plenary at the end of the session was also recorded. The activity we used required students to engage in a deliberative discussion of a draft resolution about religious freedom in their school. They discussed this initially in small groups where they were encouraged to critically examine the text and make changes and prepare to table any amendments they wished to make. Next, each group presented their ideas to the rest of the class and engaged in discussion on amendments. This session took place during a lunch time meeting of the debating society and was facilitated by two researchers with the assistance of the teacher who runs the club.

The session generated three recordings from small group discussions and a recording of the plenary discussion in the second phase. Each of these was transcribed, and two researchers applied an initial coding system to the transcriptions, which included coding individual utterances as well as longer chains of conversation. Full details of the analysis of the total data set are reported in Jerome et al. (2020) but for this article we were interested in the extent to which the students were able to explore the concepts, what issues were touched on in those exploratory discussions, and whether they slipped into relating them to ethno-cultural identity.

5. Discussion of data

Our analysis of this data demonstrates that the students were able to open up the issues to exploratory discussion with a degree of sympathy, as described by Noddings. Students adopted a pragmatic approach to the situated problem they were asked to consider, and were attentive to the various perspectives represented in the room. Contrary to the evidence from Fozdar & Low (2015, discussed above) they did not make the connection to ethno-cultural norms, and focused more on the civic end of the continuum, looking for the best way to work through the challenges in their own school context. We present the data in three sections below: first in relation to the students' discussion about offence, which brings to the fore questions of balancing different rights and interests; second to illustrate their commitment to a situated pragmatism; and third to discuss how the participants demonstrate respect for others.

a. Offence

The draft resolution the students were debating included a number of clauses designed to stimulate discussion and encourage students to think about the different dimensions of religious freedom and toleration. The final statement to consider stated that the meeting,

> Recommends that no-one should be allowed to offend others because of their religious beliefs, and that the definition of offence should be determined by the person who perceived the offence, not the person who spoke or acted in an offensive manner (Association for Citizenship Teaching, 2020).

This section illustrates how students responded to this stimulus and we were struck by the similarity between the points they raised and the introduction to Winston's (2012) book *A Right to Offend,* where he constructs a classic liberal defence of free speech as the right to offend. The students engage with the same arguments but resolve the tensions in a different way.

First, some of the students considered whether it matters that someone might be offended by what

someone else said, which opens up the discussion about whether there is a right not to be offended that sits in tension with one's right to free speech.

Speaker 1: You can't implement it

Speaker 3: Because it conflicts with freedom of speech

[They talk over each other, disagreeing]

Speaker 4: No he's kinda right because

Speaker 1: If you can't disagree with someone you can't move forwards

Speaker 3: Obviously everyone knows that it is subjective what you are going to find offensive…

Speaker 1: If I am eating Halal meat and some guy comes up and says "oh I don't agree with this you are offending me that you are eating this," who's in the right and who's in the wrong…?

Speaker 2: What do you mean? That's disagreement though innit? It's not…

Speaker 1: Yeah, that's what I'm saying

Speaker 2: That's a stupid thing to be offended over

Speaker 3: Stupid or not it's still something to be offended over. But there's the freedom to be offended over it

This group of Muslim boys touch on several aspects of the classic liberal debate laid out by Winston (2012). In the final contribution, the use of the phrase 'the freedom to be offended' summarises Winston's interpretation succinctly, and the boys also link this to the inherent subjectivity of how one would reasonably use such criteria to restrict the freedom of speech.

In another small group the students explore an alternative approach and start to consider things from the perspective of the person who caused offence.

Speaker 3: I think it depends on the intention behind what they said. If they said it to be offensive then

Speaker 1: But what if they said it to be funny? Because that's not like

Speaker 3: But even then

Speaker 2: They shouldn't be joking about things like that

This of course begs the question of how one could reasonably determine the intentions behind an act, which leads to the double problem that one has the subjective interpretations of the offender and the offended and no obvious way to resolve the situation.

Speaker 3: There should be like an objective test, not subjective

Speaker 1: I also think that it is quite big, no one should be allowed to offend but what happens if you do? What happens to you? Like do you just get told off?

Speaker 3: And as well sometimes people get offended for no reason. That is joking

[Lots of talking over each other]

Speaker 1: Especially if they genuinely didn't mean it. Instead of not being allowed to they should be educated… Sometimes it is not malice, but just ignorance [others agree] so I think it is more important that they are just taught about the issues

In this extract they start to consider how one might adjudicate in challenging situations but also move on to

consider what the consequences should be. This reflects a recognition that offence might not be something that should be punished, even though it is undesirable, and it reflects an emerging idea that most people probably would not want to cause offence to others, and so educating them about the way one's comments might be heard and interpreted is probably the best response.

When this discussion came up again in the whole class plenary, it is characterised in these two contributions:

> *Speaker 1: You were talking about something to do with opinions and if you don't know if it is out of malice or not that's also subjective, but it is also what you would say an opinion is because some are signs of oppression because you can't just say "oh it wasn't out of malice" or something like that as some people would agree it is a sign of oppression.*
>
> *Speaker 2: So what I meant was like it's the way you respond to the situation so obviously you can say that someone isn't allowed to say something offensive but the question is when someone does, because it happens, what do you do with that situation? So I think it is you have to look at whether they said it because they wanted to be oppressive or malicious because in that case you should punish them or sanction them for it or if they said it because they genuinely did not know that it was wrong to say then you should educate them about why it's wrong.*

This illustrates Speaker 1's quite sophisticated understanding ~~from speaker 1~~ of how oppression operates though unconsciously held beliefs and prevailing norms, and so one needs to be attentive to the unintended effects of one's acts. Speaker 2 acknowledges this and argues that there must nevertheless be a distinction between types of motivation in order to make the appropriate response. This seems to reflect the kind of distinction seen in law, where intent and premeditation are relevant factors in judgement and sentencing.

The discussion leads another student to observe:

> *Then it comes down to what's more important – your right to say what you want or someone else's right to feel comfortable in their own environment? What's more important there? I think it is more important that people around you feel safe and comfortable and happy rather than you just being able to say whatever you want all the time.*

This comment reflects the classic liberal argument about offence and free speech but resolves it in a way a classic liberal theorist would not. Winston argues that the notion of 'offence' has been used to widen the definition of 'harm' in order to restrict the right to freedom of speech, but these students do not want to put offence so readily to one side, partly because they recognise this is bound up with established patterns of oppression and injustice. To this extent, the discussion mirrors Davies's argument which concludes that schools should provide opportunities for

> Understanding and discussing the nature of offence and when it is legitimate to be offended; this will require analysis of rights and of motives, whether using the right to free speech just for the sake of offending or to try to point out injustice or wrong (Davies, 2008, p.149).

In part the student's answer is motivated by a pragmatic desire to strike a balance that recognises the importance of mutual respect in the context of their school, and in the next section we focus on this situated pragmatic reasoning.

b. Situated Pragmatism

We saw in the first section that students were willing to consider a pragmatic solution to the issues. One of the most obvious ways they pursued this was by considering whether a teacher could reasonably adjudicate between two people who disagreed about whether something had been offensive, and if so, what the intention was behind it and what outcome might be

reasonable. This was not a simplistic deferral to authority, indeed the students discussed this and noted that, although the teacher brought their own subjectivity to the situation, it was not incompatible with a democratic approach to ask a relatively uninvolved third party to resolve the issue. This demonstrates a principle that is eminently understandable in a school context, where teachers have powers of arbitration in disputes between students, but also recognises an aspect of the rule of law, where an independent third party can reasonably be called on to resolve disputes between citizens.

Another clause of the draft resolution the students discussed stated that:

> This meeting recommends that the school should ensure that all students and staff can pursue their own religion, including adapting uniforms and wearing religious symbols to reflect their beliefs; and attending religious meetings at appropriate times.

This was designed to focus the students on how to enact religious freedom in their specific context, and in this example it is important to recall that the students attended a Church of England school.

A group of Muslim boys raised the following points:

> *Speaker 2: …I think people should get to wear what they want according to their religion*
>
> *Speaker 1: To what extent though. You can't just come into school wearing a Jilbab or something*
>
> *Speaker 2: Well obviously it's a Christian school innit*
>
> *Speaker 3: That's not necessarily something to do with their religious beliefs that's something to do with the school ethos. Like [other speaker: yeah] the way the school want to conduct themselves. You could quite easily have gone to another school that doesn't have uniform with the same teaching standard but you chose to come to the school*
>
> *Speaker 1: Yeah you should abide by the rules that you chose*

There are several things happening here relevant to this theme. Fozdar and Low (2015) discuss the assertion that people should follow 'our rules' and 'our ways of doing things' as a way to deny the legitimacy of diversity and as cultural cover for what may be essentially racist assumptions and motivations. In this example, the boys are from a minority religion in the school and are engaging with what this means for them and other Muslim students. But it makes sense to them that they have to fit in with the rules to some extent, because the school does have a religious ethos.

Church of England schools interpret the religious dimension to the ethos in different ways, but in other discussions it is evident that religion is quite an important aspect of life at Avon School. In two groups they discuss the school visits to the local cathedral, where students are expected to participate in acts of worship.

> *Speaker 2: Personally, I think that if you are going to the cathedral it doesn't matter whatever faith you are so long as you go there you don't have to take part in the prayers or the hymns you should just sit there and be respectful*
>
> *Speaker 4: Yeah, it shouldn't be a sign of disrespect if they don't go up for a blessing or communion [others: yeah] if they just want to sit there they're not doing anything wrong. At least like they've come.*
>
> *Speaker 2: As long as they aren't like, you know, how some people make a big scene or whatever [others: yeah] and not really respecting it [speaker 3: yeah]*

Here the conversation does come close to some of the exclusivist concerns noted by Fozdar and Low (2015) and there is some connection to discourses around 'model minorities' (Bradbury, 2013) or the 'good immigrant' (Shukla, 2016). These students have an expectation that students from a religious minority

should conform to 'how we do things here' and not speak out or rock the boat. This connects with arguments that promote immigrant / minority assimilation to the dominant culture, and therefore assumes that the culture is somehow a fixed phenomenon, often reflecting a fixed national identity. However, whilst this is one possible interpretation, it is also important to acknowledge that these students are situating this conversation within their own school context, and that institutional culture is undeniably Christian. One might argue about how a Christian school should engage with the faith of non-Christian students, but the whole point of such schools is that they offer parents and young people an option where Christian values become part of the shared life of the institution. To that extent, the question of how non-Christians manage those Christian dimensions to school life is a real issue of negotiation and belonging.

This could lead to a host of alternative arguments and approaches but one Muslim student in another small group offers the following resolution:

> *We sing but we don't actually mean any of it but, we're just singing to be respectful.*

Again, one could offer an interpretation here that the student has succumbed to the institutional pressure to fit in and not rock the boat, but their pragmatic response is also redolent of Vertovec's (2007) account of how people manage to get along in very diverse contexts. He argues that we manage the tensions that arise through diverse cultural, religious and ethical beliefs by establishing a 'veneer of civility' through our everyday interactions. This might manifest itself in what Sandercock (2003, p.89) calls 'the daily habits of perhaps quite banal intercultural interaction' for example small gestures, greetings, acknowledgements, even keeping a respectful distance from others. On this reading, the student may not be succumbing to pressure to deny their own identity, they may be offering a pragmatic solution to maintaining civility. This does not necessarily reflect an act of self-denial or oppression, rather as Gilroy (2004) describes it, it could be seen as an act of 'conviviality' where we move away from a reified sense of identity and embrace mechanisms for identification. Here the student is finding ways to positively identify as a Muslim and a student who belongs to a Christian school, with a mixed group of peers.

c. Sympathy and the Other

One of the principles of deliberative democracy is that participants must try to maintain a measure of open-mindedness. This means being willing to revise one's view of what the best outcome might be, but it also means acknowledging others as legitimate actors, whose views should be listened to seriously, respected, and engaged with. One of the transformative effects of deliberative democracy is generated through this process of serious engagement. And this requires participants to demonstrate the quality of sympathy, as understood by Noddings (2002), i.e. of being attentive to others and receptive to them and their views. This nurtures a commitment to care *about* others and their situation, as the prelude to undertaking actions that show caring *for* them. We can read the statement above in that light, so that 'just singing to be respectful' implies the student cares enough about those who value the Christian rituals of the school to undertake action which allows them to continue uninterrupted. It may well appear problematic if all the examples of sympathy and caring flowed from the minority to the majority, and in this section we demonstrate that such expressions of sympathy were more reciprocal.

In one mixed small group an extended exchange about how people selectively interpret the bible includes the following reflections:

> *Speaker 3: Yeah like to me, these are the Christians that have put me off Christianity*
>
> *Speaker 4: There are times when I have to question my religion [speaker 3: yeah] it has been because of certain Muslims who like ruin it*

This demonstrates that the students are reflecting on their own religious perspective and therefore the conversation as a whole enables the students to avoid simplifying labels such as 'Christian' or 'Muslim'. This rejection of homogenising interpretations of religions and religious identity is an essential element of the critical religious literacy advocated by Davies (2008).

Research into the teaching of FBVs has also found that students themselves are keen for their schools to provide this kind of educational response to the FBVs and Prevent policy (Jerome & Elwick, 2019).

In addition to the discussion about visits to the cathedral, students also discussed their more routine assemblies, which generally provide the school with an opportunity for a collective act of (Christian) worship.

> *Speaker 2: Not everyone is going to follow that religion, or believe in atheism, it says collective worship but if you don't believe it why would you want to take part in that worship. You might not want to take part in it at all. Should be your choice*
>
> *Speaker 1: You shouldn't be forced to if that worship conflicts with your own religion*
>
> *Speaker 2: Yeah*
>
> *Speaker 3: The way that you adjust to it is to give them the option whether they want to attend the gathering or service at the school give them that option if they want to attend or not. You're giving them that freedom*
>
> *Speaker 2: Those who want to go to the service can go and then have another room where they can do their own reflection or whatever*

In another group the students agreed that most of the moral lessons taught through assemblies were actually equally applicable across their different faiths:

> *Speaker 3: yeah like we're all taught Christian attributes but those attributes that we're taught are a part of many other religions like "love thy neighbour" is present in Islam and present in Hinduism and in umm like*
>
> *Speaker 4: I think they could also maybe do more for people who are questioning god and maybe not then force everyone to and require them to be part of collective worship when they didn't want to be*

One student summed up their group's conclusion on this point by stating:

> *Yes, there should be an act of worship but it could be renamed as a moment of silent reflection and we don't think it should have a mainly overall Christian character because it seems quite narrow.*

In these exchanges the students demonstrate the qualities of sympathy outlined by Noddings and through this process they acknowledge the experiences and perspectives of those with other beliefs and none.

6. Conclusion

In the opening section of this article we argued that the FBVs are open to interpretation between the two poles of civic and ethnic-cultural nationalism. We noted evidence to suggest that in many schools the focus on Britishness tends to promote the second form of nationalism, and that this generates several problems, not the least of which is the marginalisation of people who do not see themselves reflected in that narrow portrayal of Britishness. A second problem is that the teaching that arises from this interpretation may not focus on the FBVs as elements of democracy, and thus fail to connect to critical citizenship education. The *Deliberative Classroom* project was written to promote a teaching approach which moved away from ethno-cultural interpretations and which encouraged a form of talk that was open, exploratory and required close attention and respect for a range of opinions. The research project we undertook was designed to listen in on classroom conversations to determine what kind of discussions arose from using these materials.

One overwhelming impression we have from reading the data from Avon School is that the young people who discussed the issue of religious freedom almost entirely avoided framing their discussion in an ethno-cultural discourse, and actually largely avoided engaging with questions of nationalism at all. To this extent, the discussions reflect a civic debate, rather than a civic-nationalist one. In part this seems to be a consequence of focusing the principled discussion on the school context. This meant that students were able to relate

this immediately to their own experience, and had the opportunity to listen to each other's experiences. This exchange of experience and opinion both uncovered common ground and also highlighted areas of school life that could be improved in order to more fully respect everyone's religious freedom. In considering these solutions, the students exemplify the kind of attitudes and skills promoted by the advocates of deliberative democracy but they did so in a manner which also reflected Nodding's (2002) principles of care about and for others.

A report of a single discussion in a lunch hour between 14 children cannot aspire to prove anything. But it does illustrate that (at least these) young people are able to articulate complex ideas about religious freedom in a way that resists essentialist ideas about identity and difference, and which enables them to find pragmatic solutions to problems rather than resorting to simplistic solutions. Earlier we cited Noddings echoing Dewey's commitment that democracy was best seen as a mode of associated living, and this discussion demonstrates both how the students managed their interactions successfully as a means of association and how they were able to reflect on freedom as one dimension of such a way of life. This lends support, therefore, to the wider calls for a framing of FBVs within the tradition of critical citizenship education.

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The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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