**Arabic schools and the promotion of Fundamental British Values: A community’s ambitions for consensual diversity**

**Abstract**

This article explores the positioning of a sample of Arabic complementary language schools in the context of the UK government’s discourse and promotion of so-called Fundamental British Values. While there is considerable social and political debate about radicalisation in Arab communities, teachers in the sample are deeply committed to a form of consensual diversity, both in their schools and their communities. They are also supportive of so-called British values, which they frame as universal values. In their promotion of these values as universal there may be the potential for diasporic disconnect: the schools are striving for integration which may at times result in assimilationist positioning in the context of government pressure. However, their discourse is embedded in the highly charged political context in which Arabic schools operate and in which they position themselves as stakeholders in Arab communities. On the basis of the qualitative evidence reported here some of the government’s ways of challenging radicalisation seems unwarranted in relation to Arabic complementary language schools.

*Keywords:* Arab communities; FBV; diversity; complementary education

1. **Introduction[[1]](#footnote-1)**

In the context of heightened political tensions around immigration and attempts to challenge radicalisation it is necessary to discuss the UK government’s promotion of so-called Fundamental British Values (FBV), as well as the sites about which value disagreement occurs and in which value disagreement is assumed to exist. We have throughout this article referred to ‘so called’ FBV in order to indicate our awareness of the tensions in this area generally and in particular over whether these values are indeed British and whether there is potential for failing to distinguish appropriately between sociocultural and civic identity. The FBV are: democracy; the rule of law; individual liberty; mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith. Since 2014 schools have a duty to promote FBV (Department for Education, 2014), which has raised concerns about a national turn in citizenship education (Starkey 2018). The focus of our work is on teachers’ and students’ perceptions of values-based education in a sample of Arabic complementary (or, heritage) schools, that is, part-time educational institutions which focus, in our case, on the language and culture of UK-based Arab communities. By Arab community we mean a group of people who speak Arabic as their own, their parents’ or ancestors’ language, and who are of ethnic and cultural Arab heritage. We argue that there are several challenging issues related to how Arabic heritage schools are perceived. Government policy is contradictory in that it asserts the need for autonomy for schools while at the same time demanding compliance via a rhetoric of locally enacted commitment to particular behaviours associated with FBV (e.g. Vincent, 2018a; b). We argue that reality - in the form of perceptions of values held by participants in our sample of Arabic schools - is, contrary to the government’s fear of radicalisation, characterised by desire for, and enactment of consensual diversity in which sociocultural identities and shared civic identity are achieved through integration (see also Gholami, 2017). At a time when it is becoming common for society to be represented as fractured (e.g., Goodhart, 2017; Snyder, 2017) we suggest that there is an urgent need to identify the differences in perspectives relevant to values education that are held by the government on the one hand, and ethnically and linguistically-based communities on the other. The principles that underlie those perspectives need to be considered and exemplified. Through such critique it may be possible to strengthen a commitment to democratic substance and process. Building on the work of Gholami (2017) on diasporic education we characterise the divisions we are witnessing as a form of diasporic disconnect, which operates in two specific ways. The UK government in its articulations of mistrust and fear of radicalisation is potentially disconnected from diasporic communities who seek consensual diversity and potentially integration; diasporic communities themselves are at risk of disconnecting from the positives of ‘diasporicity’ (Gholami, 2017) if they are too strongly committed to assimilationist thinking with regard to values. Gholami outlines diasporicity in heritage schools as being characterised by ‘their settlement within “host” countries; their difference from host and home country; their concrete transnational collaborations—and the fact that their mode of practice, however mundane or un-self-conscious, challenges the ‘closure’ of absolutist national and ethnic/denominational ideologies’ (2017, p. 576). Gholami argues that heritage schools should be considered sites of ‘diasporic education’:

Taking its cue from the often pragmatic, rhizomatic, and decidedly ‘un-radical’ ways

in which diasporic communities deal with local, national, and global currents on a daily basis, it argues that such diasporic modes of agency are a progressively common feature of the contemporary world and transform it positively through their own impetus. (2017, p. 575).

This allows us to warn that the delicate nature of integration that is heralded by Gholami (2017), and for which we have some evidence from our schools in the form of their reported views on values, is distinct from a kind of assimilation in which the suppression of sociocultural identity occurs (LeMay 2000). We point to the danger that assimilation involves separation from the diasporicity referred to by Gholami (2017) and instead results in disconnection. That disconnect is characterised by an ethnic and linguistic group being positioned as outsiders by the dominant culture while itself striving to tolerate and integrate with - or, ~~negatively, even~~ in spite of risks of disconnection, assimilate with – the values of the dominant culture to achieve acceptance. We suggest that opportunities for an equal partnership involving a range of diverse communities are currently not being utilised.

Some work that helps in that process is work which focuses on perspectives on interculturality and what counts as cultural competence. A key aspect of Deardorff’s (2006) model of intercultural competence is the attitudinal position of tolerating ambiguity. Attitudes about difference that lead to its avoidance or a failure to recognise it are seen as the least interculturally competent. In the context of culture, tolerating ambiguity means building comfort with not knowing. This enables individuals to be more at ease with themselves, to not expect that their beliefs or experiences are being challenged in favour of another’s and to gain confidence in outwardly interacting with those from unknown backgrounds. Taking a slightly different angle, the Intercultural Development Continuum (Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003; Hammer, 2011) also focuses on how individuals deal with difference. For example, in the Denial stage an individual will rely on broad stereotypes and become polarised with an ‘us vs them’ perspective. Becoming more competent leads to Minimization of differences. A dominant culture individual may highlight commonalities due to a lack of understanding, while a minority culture individual emphasises their similarities as a coping mechanism or strategy to function within the culture propagated by dominant culture values. The most competent stage (Adaptation) has been achieved when someone can recognise and apply patterns of similarities and differences within cultures.

The empirical findings below show that Arabic schools may position themselves as assimilating to (dominant) British culture, emphasising similarities in values over cultural differences, which may lead to what we refer to as diasporic disconnect in the wider context of diasporic education as described by Gholami (2017). This occurs in the context of the government’s promotion of FBV which, arguably, evidence a lack of toleration for ambiguity. Against the background of research on identity formation and prejudice reduction (e.g., Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1986;) we argue that schools and communities require opportunities for thinking about, maintaining and developing distinctive identities in specific cultural contexts without, necessarily, promoting segregation or opposition to others.

We have elsewhere explored, in general terms, the nature of complementary education as a lens for understanding citizenship education (see Szczepek Reed, Said & Davies, 2017), and we have also discussed more precisely the teaching and learning of Arabic and the specific values being promoted in the same sample of schools that underpins the current study (Szczepek Reed, Said, Bengsch & Davies, 2019). We wish in this article to present our findings about schools’ perceptions about values and education more broadly in a context of the government’s insistence on the so-called FBV.

1. **Background**

There are 3-5000 supplementary schools in the UK (National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRCSE), 2019), which are organised in a wide variety of ways. The schools in which our project took place focus on the teaching of Arabic heritage language, culture and history. Following Martin, Bhatt, Bhojani and Creese (2004) and Francis, Archer and Mau (2009) we are not in this article concerned with schools that aim to supplement mainstream schooling (in, for example, helping students to cram for formal assessments in subjects already taught in a mainstream school). Rather, we are interested in complementary schools that aim to help young people maintain and enhance heritage in relation to culture and language. Funding of these schools usually comes from parents and carers although others may also contribute including charities, private donors, embassies and local authorities (Issa & Williams, 2009; Martin et al., 2004; Mirza & Reay, 2000). Teachers are often recruited as volunteers, and many lack formal training (Hall, Özerk, Zulfiqar & Tan, 2002; Wang, 2014).

At the time of writing (2019) heritage schools are unlikely to gain official approval. This initially seems surprising. Governments in pursuit of a communitarian agenda have, since at least the mid-1990s (and as part of a longer tradition in support of individualism and the devolution of power to local and regional groups), encouraged initiatives and local action that do not depend on direction from central government. The lack of governmental support for Arabic complementary schools in part arises from the official position that at the same time as proclaiming the need for local enterprising activity, there must be very strong direction from - and control by - central government. That centralised approach may be seen explicitly from governments since 2010 in the context of the Prevent anti-radicalisation strategy (HM Government 2011), the identification and promotion of the so-called FBV as part of Spiritual Moral Social and Cultural (SMSC) in schools (Department for Education 2014), and the immediate curtailment of any educational activities that seem to run counter to those values.

Kapoor (2013) has suggested that we are witnessing policies of racial neoliberalism in which “while any progressive measures using race for the purposes of anti-racism fade from view, they are increasingly overshadowed by a position which uses race, silently and ambiguously, through policies of policing and securitization.” (p. 1028) The connection between Prevent, FBV and education is explicit and detailed (Department for Education, 2014). There are perceptions that these initiatives are directed principally at Muslims and especially at their approaches to educating young people (Abbas & Awan, 2015; Kyriacou, Szczepek Reed, Said & Davies, 2017; Mythen, Walklate & Peatfield, 2017; Thomas, 2016), with Islamic faith schools being a matter for suspicion (e.g., Wilshaw, 2016; Richardson, 2016). Key figures in the government are referring to concerns about attitudes towards Muslims (e.g., Sabbagh 2019; Walker 2019). While mainstream schools are the most explicit target for promoting Prevent and FBV, Arabic speaking communities and community schools find themselves at the centre of these tensions due to their large Muslim populations. For example, the Casey Review (Casey, 2016) mentions ‘cultural and religious practices (…) that (…) run contrary to British values’ with regard to ‘communities in which there are high concentrations of Muslims’ (pp. 5-6). As the data below show, British society’s focus on Arab communities is keenly felt and a strong factor in influencing educational decision-making in Arabic schools.

The scope for tension between central control and local freedom is clear (Arthur, 2015). One way of reading this contradiction is to suggest that, in practice, community enterprise may only occur if it agrees with the aims of central government. Beyond the possibility of contradiction we are also alert to the unintended consequences of actions to achieve a cohesive multicultural society. We recognise that calls by the government for community enterprise to tackle radicalisation are not necessarily intended to accuse whole communities of anti-democratic behaviour. When Cameron (2011) advocated ‘a lot less of the passive tolerance of recent years and much more active muscular liberalism’, he was at pains to declare that he was not advocating action against Muslims. Indeed the government has suggested there is a need for the teaching and learning of FBV in order to curb the potential radicalization of all in society including British far-Right wing groups. But it has become apparent that ‘the securitization agenda’ (Lander, 2016, p. 274) is harmful to the stated aims of promoting democracy. Acts of Islamophobia are increasing (Marsh, 2018), and across the UK there is recognition that the government may be playing into the hands of those who seek conflict (see Education Scotland, 2018; House of Lords, 2018; Johnson, 2018; McCully & Clarke, 2016). It is also possible that communities that are keen to continue promoting consensual diversity find themselves having to tolerate attacks made against them and are responding with initiatives that may exemplify a form of diasporic disconnect. Some have called for policies that are relevant to schools to focus on education rather than securitization (Jerome & Elwick, 2019).

1. **The nature of values-related education in the context of the promotion of FBV**

The work we report here focuses on perceptions of values related to education by teachers and students in Arabic heritage schools. Values are ‘the principles and fundamental convictions which act as general guides to behaviour, the standards by which particular actions are judged as good or desirable’ (Halstead & Taylor, 2000, p. 169). Very broadly, the ways in which values are perceived and enacted in educational settings may reveal both ‘traditional’ approaches in which existing norms are emphasised (Cairns, Gardner & Lawton, 2013) and ‘constructivist’ tendencies in which there is an emphasis on ‘children’s active construction of moral meaning and development of a personal commitment to principles of fairness and concern for the welfare of others through processes of social interaction and moral discourse’ (Solomon, Watson & Battistich, 2001, p. 573). This may link to the realization of the Spiritual Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) elements in teaching and may not be necessarily associated with thinking and practice opposed to democratic pluralism. We cannot, of course, know for certain what prompted the government’s initiatives, and it may be that ideas and actions are well-intentioned. But FBV are clearly regarded by some (see House of Lords, 2018) as ‘traditional’ in their emphasis of existing norms. These values are of course ‘not exclusively British’ (House of Lords 2018, p.18). There are ‘troubling connotations’ (House of Lords 2018, p.19) of fundamentalism and potential for a failure to distinguish between sociocultural and civic identity (House of Lords 2018, p. 17). Naturally there are many theoretical perspectives about the expression and formation of values in education. Jones (2009), for example, discusses values in relation to postmodern perspectives. But the broad distinction between traditional and constructivist approaches allows us to consider the extent and nature of the direction that is applied in the present context. Our understanding of the so-called FBV is that a ‘traditional’ conception of values is being promoted by the government. We recognize the possibility that this may also be undertaken by schools, as proposed recently by Moncrieffe and Moncrieffe (2019).

The traditional and constructivist have different means and ends in mind, but each may be aligned with a version of a democratic society. The question of what constitutes a diverse democracy is not immediately clear and certainly not agreed by all. In the absence of both a complete, universalizing moral theory and practical guides about what to do in particular cases we must continue to wrestle with both principles and what to do in relation to them.

In light of the highly charged rhetoric about who is likely to be a challenge to democratic society, there is a need to undertake an analysis of empirical data to discuss the nature of key stakeholders’ understandings and perceptions about values in education in particular community settings. We suggest that the government’s stance is ‘traditional’ and norm-based; that it is presented in a contradictory manner that is actually about control but is presented as if it emphasises autonomy; and that there is evidence within our sample of Arabic complementary schools of a desire and action for consensual, democratic diversity. The findings presented here are not representative of all Arabic schools, and our sample contains students from a wide range of national backgrounds. However, they do provide a strong qualitative indication that any fear of radicalisation (as clearly evidenced in Prevent and government guidelines for schools) is unwarranted in relation to the Arabic complementary schools which we visited.

1. **Methods**

The study is part of a wider project on Arabic language education and values in complementary language schools (see also Szczepek Reed et al., 2017; Szczepek Reed et al., 2019), which considers teaching and learning practices for Arabic as well as the link between educational practices and FBV. The data were obtained from three Arabic complementary schools, one in London, one in the North of England and one in the North West of England. Interview citations below are marked L (London), NE (North of England) and NWE (North West of England). None of the schools receive government funding but are funded via a range of community avenues (parents, affiliated cultural centres, donations). Lessons were offered on Saturdays only. The student cohorts were mixed with regard to religious background (Sunni, Shi’a) as well as gender. They were ethnically Yemeni, Egyptian, Moroccan, Libyan and Lebanese between the ages of 11-15. All students were second or third generation Arabic heritage speakers (all born in the UK to parents who were either themselves born in the UK or migrated previously). All students were bilingual Arabic and English speakers, with English as their more proficient language. None of the students, headteachers or teachers were recent arrivals to the UK but had all been settled in the country for a long period.

Ten schools listed on the webpage of the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRCSE, 2019) were approached at the start of the project. Three schools agreed to take part. The remaining seven, while positive about the study itself, were concerned about the socio-political climate in general, and in some cases specifically about the possibility that misunderstandings could lead to pupils being referred to Prevent. The final sample of three schools exemplifies Arabic schools who are strategically motivated to engage with an external non-Arab audience. The sample is not representative of either complementary schools in general or Arabic schools in particular, but it allowed for an exploratory engagement with the data and provides a basis for future research and engagement with Arabic heritage schools.

In the participating schools, discussions were held with headteachers before data collection began to explain the project and the school’s involvement. Parents gave consent to classroom video recordings and student focus groups, and teachers consented to additional interviews. As a result, ten semi-structured interviews and three focus groups were conducted: three interviews with headteachers (one per school), six interviews with Arabic teachers (three at L, two at NWE, one at NE), and one interview with a religious studies teacher (NWE); three student focus groups (one per school, with 7 (L), 8 (NEW) and 3 (NE) participants respectively), and three video recordings of Arabic lessons (one per school, 1 hour each). Interview duration varied from 25 to 60 minutes. The research design and data collection were aligned with the school context, aiming to include both participant (emic) perspectives as well as researchers’ (etic) observations. Two researchers, one of whom is fluent in Arabic and has experience of working as an Arabic teacher in complementary schools, visited the schools to gather data, allowing a day of engagement with each school (Zhu & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013). Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Education at the University of York, where all authors were affiliated at the time of data collection.

The interview and focus group questions mentioned values in general and British values more specifically, but not FBV. Due to the wider aims of the project, the questions were designed with a view to understanding the schools’ educational practices for Arabic language teaching and learning as well as the specific values being promoted as part of their Arabic language teaching (Szczepek Reed et al., 2019). However, the interviews provided ample additional insights into teachers’ and students’ perceptions of values in the school and community context as participants related the values debate to their role in society. The current study focuses on this aspect of the interview and focus group data. Classroom observation data have not been included here.

The anonymised and transcribed data were entered into the qualitative data analysis tool NVivo. The data were analysed both separately and combined. To strengthen dependability of the results, this was done by individuals as well as small groups within the research team (Aronson, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The coding was then further refined to develop a focus principally on values and the contexts in which they were discussed. In all stages of research, the project was subjectively evaluated from all interacting individuals (Hong, 1998).

The themes that emerged related to a sense of limited influence of schools on the development of children’s values; a stated wish to assimilate to British society and its values, and a belief that fundamentally all people and groups share the same values; an awareness of the highly charged political context, including divisions among Arab cultures; and an overarching, strong commitment to an intercultural approach to consensual diversity in education and community engagement. The following section discusses respondents’ views and perspectives with regard to these themes. As analysts of the data we consider the claims and commitments that were reported by participants as socially constructed in the context of current debates, as well as interactionally performed in each interview situation.

1. **Findings and discussion**

Our overarching finding is that the complementary schools in our data set are committed to passing on values they see as universal, and that they consider this to be a core aspect of the education they provide. Importantly, all schools in the sample see themselves as aligned with ‘British’ values but consider them to be universal values, which are shared across their school community (see Panjwani, 2016 and Vincent 2018b for similar findings).

* 1. ***The role of schools***

Our respondents saw the main role of their schools to be one of equipping students for a multicultural society through teaching Arabic language and culture (Szczepek Reed et al., 2019). Fundamentally, this means supporting the values underpinning a diverse and inclusive society through language learning:

*You can communicate with people in the language of Arabic, so you can make friends, and you can get on better with people in society*. (Student focus group, NE, 26/03/2017)

*Learning more than one language is- you find that kids (…) have a wider perspective and outlook on life (…) They will find similarities, more tolerance and you know- So learning about any language and cultures, it only enhances what we call inclusive ( ) society. The only way we can do that is if we understand each other basically.* (Headteacher, NE, 26/03/2017)

However, schools also noted that debates about values should be guided by realistic expectations of schools’ capacity to influence students’ perceptions of values. While we accept that schools are of course a major force in the development of social norms, even a cursory glance at the literature of educational change suggests that their influence is not without limits. This establishment of limits was presented to us by our respondents in two ways. Firstly, there was a very practical acceptance of the limits of the power of heritage schools.

*We cannot be the parents. We only have four hours. Within these four hours, what we give the child is a different approach, and they can make that judgment themselves.* (Headteacher, NWE, 11/02/2017)

*We have to be very specific (…) because in the school we cannot teach everything.* (Arabic Teacher 1, NWE, 11/02/2017)

Building on Bernstein’s (1970) classic statement, schools - and perhaps especially those that are weakly funded and part time supplementary - can compensate for society only a little, if at all (Gorard, 2010). Secondly, limitations or restrictions were referred to by our respondents in that there was clear commitment to rules of acceptable thinking and behaviour.

*We have discipline messages as well. They know what kind of behaviours and languages or anything like that you know things we do not tolerate (…).* *So, there is a limit to how much freedom they have basically.* (Headteacher, NE, 26/03/2017)

*If a child says something that is unacceptable, and we think that he heard it either on the telly (…) or from family we try to explain that's not accurate, and that's not a reflection of your culture or your religion.* (Headteacher, NWE, 11/02/2017).

As the last comment indicates, characterisations of what is acceptable were typically presented within a cultural context and were either made against children’s ethnic background (for example, practices that are common in other countries may not be common in the UK), or against differing interpretations of religion and its values, with the school supporting the inclusive values of the host society on each occasion.

* 1. ***Positioning within British society: we share the same values***

Beyond the above general positions, teachers and students were often keen to emphasise the importance of fitting into British society. At times this commitment seemed part of what they deemed to be their wider community role. The school was seen by some as a means of helping people to settle in and learn the ropes:

*As I said, you know, we have got people coming to this country, and they don't know anything about this country by the rules and the living and everything. So, when they come here we will always, you know, we've got office you know. We give information where to go….* (Arabic Teacher 1, NWE, 11/02/2017)

Integration with British society was stated as an aim:

*We are trying to support [our children] to become good citizens of the United Kingdom.* (Headteacher, NWE, 11/02./017)

*That is my vision is these students they are not only Arab heritage. They are as well British heritage. And my vision that these students will go into the society to be citizens that help the society with their language. They can work for Britain.* (Headteacher, L, 3/12/2016)

*We always you know teach our children from any part of the world if you are living in this country, you need to follow the rules of this country. (…) So it does not matter where you come from. What type of skin you have got, what background you have. We all have to respect each other. We all have to follow the rules of the land. They expecting from you and do not break the rules. That’s the most important thing they have to know. (…)* *I know this land has freedom and everything, so the country is providing everything for people, and we have to know how to use it. Use it, don’t abuse it.* (Arabic Teacher 1, NWE, 11/2/2017).

The schools’ reported activities supported these statements. For example, in spite of receiving no government funding and therefore not being under the official obligation to promote FBV, the NWE school reported inviting Prevent officers to speak to the children, the mayor of the city attending an event in the school and external speakers giving talks on ‘British values’. The most common element of these responses was schools’ commitment to so-called British values. All schools stated strong, explicit commitment to British society and its values and rejected elements of the community who were not similarly committed. Integration in this sense was embraced by respondents from all three schools. Although there are complex issues around whether or not integration and good citizenship – as explicitly referred to in the interview comments above - are the same things, it seems likely that there is a connection. The frequency with which these statements were made and the force with which they were delivered was noticeable. We know from the academic literature that there has always been official pressure to assimilate (Troyna & Hatcher, 1991). It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that such an approach continues, and that an official approach is met by a willingness to conform. In terms of lived experience, surveys have found that minorities report strong affiliation with British identity (Nandi & Platt, 2014). However, Spaulding (1997), along with many others, points out the weaknesses of an approach that goes beyond integration as reflecting a shared project or continuing commitment to diasporicity as described by Gholami (2017), to assimilation in which sociocultural identity is abandoned (see also LeMay 2000). Submergence in a new culture may seem to have certain advantages but may ultimately constitute a narrowly exclusive approach (see also Alba, Reitz & Simon, 2012) and a denial of difference, as identified by Deardorff (2006) and Hammer et al. (2003).

*When it comes to values, everything is- there’s universal values that’s existed from beginning of time till now.* (Headteacher, NE, 26/03/2017)

*We try to say look, we are one nation, human beings, with different religion (…)*

*We … teach them … about tolerance, about supporting the other, about looking after your family, and mercy, love, care you know, a lot of Islamic values. They are the same, they are international values’* (Headteacher, NWE, 11/02/2017)

As the following section shows, our participants were highly aware of difference, the need for socio-ethnic identity and the benefits of Arabic heritage (see also Szczepek Reed et al., 2019). We are referring in the above to potential dangers of assimilation, but we recognize that the expression of commonality is not necessarily assimilationist. A commitment to universal values is perfectly compatible with diverse sociocultural identities, and with the ‘unique mode of agency’ identified by Gholami (2017) which results in ‘more egalitarian, modes of practice, interaction, and citizenship’ in diasporic communities that ‘often place great emphasis on living successful lives within host countries, which entails being integrated and law-abiding citizens’ (p. 574).

***5.3 Values in a highly charged political context: consensual diversity***

As noted above, reluctance or inability to see difference is not always positively regarded in the literature. But we need to exercise caution about how we interpret such statements. Firstly, participants cannot be expected to be always precise and consistent in using terms related to ‘values’. Secondly, our respondents were very aware of the highly charged political context within which their schools are operating. It is possible that the determination to advocate assimilation and declare commonality is driven by a fear of being seen as inappropriately different.

Headteacher: *Our vision for the [NAME] school is to make sure that our children get the right support in terms of their linguistic needs, but it goes beyond that. We are trying to support them to become good citizens of the United Kingdom, taking into account the current challenges that the community faces.*

Interviewer 1: *Yes. So, what do you mean for them to become good citizens of the United Kingdom?*

Headteacher: *First of all, be aware of the political environment in terms of what is the threats and opportunities, ensuring that they are not kind of subject to elements of radicalisation, an insular approach that sometimes unfortunately characterise some for our immigrant communities in this country. So we are quite clear about that at school. We don’t promote any kind of religious teaching that promotes hate. (…)*

*So, you need to explain to people that do not further isolate yourself by attaching yourself to a set of values that actually contradict that and also fuels those anti-immigrant feelings from the whole community.* (Headteacher, NWE, 11/02/2017)

Once again, the above responses show positive commitment to others as well as to British society, as well as that stance being actively promoted against the background of other options. The language respondents use to specify how this commitment is enacted shows that it is viewed as an effort in progress, rather than a completed achievement.

*As you know there are elements within the community who are ultra-right ( ) and they want to promote Qur’anic school alone. And it is hard for us, but I think it is a belief that we need to give our children a balanced approach to their religion and their culture rather than one way of doing things.*

*(…)*

*We do regularly have events in the school here to promote integration (…)* *So that's make sure- make children feel and their parents that they're valued and part of this society.* (Headteacher, NWE, 11/02/2017)

The reference to the need for balance and integration reveals a perspective on these as yet to be fully achieved. What is being aimed for is a commitment to consensual diversity that is accepted by all ‘sides’, a society in which members of the community feel valued, with a reported sense that this is not yet the case. When referring to British values, respondents most commonly mention tolerance and respect (Szczepek Reed et al., 2019); a finding replicated in a recent study of mainstream secondary schools (Vincent, 2018b). Frequently, this is accompanied by references to an immigrant or other outsider position where tolerance and respect need to be shown to the host community in order to be mutually received:

Interviewer 2: *You mentioned British values. Is that something you have a view on or a sense of?*

Headteacher: *The way this term is used... Sometimes it is term to use like anti uh foreign cultures or things. British values for me is something that I respect because it is about, you know, tolerance, about being able to support the other, but also about saying to people, you know, you are here, you got to adapt and understand the issues of this country and how other people feel.* (Headteacher, NWE, 11/02/2017)

The focus on the values tolerance and respect shows that schools’ perception of themselves is not one of an equal partner in a wider group of diverse communities, but one of an outside group required to tolerate those on the inside in order to in turn be tolerated by them. A related issue has been pursued by Healy (2018) under the concept of ‘perceived belonging’, that is, the distinction between a sense of belonging by minority groups themselves on the one hand; and their being perceived as belonging by the dominant group on the other. In this understanding, belonging is a social accomplishment and ‘relational’ (Healy, 2018, p. 7). A third aspect raised by respondents is tolerance and respect for those from other backgrounds:

*So the children here themselves come from different backgrounds. So we’re trying to say look, we are not for, I mean, we are not a Yemeni school, we are not an Iraqi school, we are not a Syrian school, we are Arabic school. We try to bring something in common to them or common set of values.* (Headteacher, NWE, 11/02/2017)

*Interviewer 2: Do you feel that coming here helps you respect other people more or helps you respect each other more?*

*Student 2: Yeah, because you can see other people that speak like yourself. And then you can see how you should respect them and they can respect you.*(Student focus group, NWE, 11/02/2017)

The last comment from a student shows that she considered the shared language as a setting and vehicle for learning ‘respect’ for others, in the context of ethnic diversity in the school itself. All three schools adopted this approach of being committed to a consensual diversity and cited it as an important contribution to values education in the context of their communities and wider society.

***5.4 Further reflections***

Recent UK governments (2019) have been criticised by high profile groups (including the House of Lords) for promoting FBV that divide rather than build collaboration. ‘Traditional’ perspectives on values inform the characterisation of FBV. Our small scale study shows that in response to government and societal debates around FBV Arab communities in their heritage schools are searching for consensual diversity. Intercultural competence frameworks suggest that both the government’s approach to FBV that leaves little room for ambiguity as well as our Arabic schools’ seemingly assimilationist positioning with regard to values can be signs of less developed interculturality (Deardorff, 2006; Hammer, 2011). Arab communities – certainly those parts of Arab communities that were represented in our sample of schools - are not challenging FBV; instead, under pressure, they may be so keen to tolerate the ways in which the government characterises values that their responses risk weakening the achievement of a cohesive democratic diversity, and in turn of ‘diasporic education’ (Gholami, 2017). We do not make this argument so strongly as to suggest that our respondents actively and simplistically desire assimilation. If that were the case it would be unlikely that they would be engaged with heritage schools. We do, however, suggest that there is clear evidence in our data that awareness of pressure to conform to ‘traditional’ norms is informing responses that suggest the possibility of a desire to demonstrate assimilation. A diasporic disconnect may not be a simple detachment from the mainstream but rather emerges from a willingness to accept the official narrative as to weaken the possibility of a confident cohesiveness.

A society has the right to emphasise its perceived cultural distinctiveness (for example, in order to ensure that there is a common sense of belonging). In a national context it would not be unreasonable to assume that that identity would be developed in connection with the country’s legal framework. A benign reading of the UK government’s position would be that unintended consequences are occurring. Rather, we are inclined to suggest that the official approach is mistakenly aligned with a traditional perspective on values education which is presented in contradictory terms: people are forced to enact autonomous local actions that conform with an imposed narrow national stance. We also suggest that policy is divorced from reality. This can be seen generally in that there is a growing literature about the inadequacies of the Prevent strategy (e.g. Abbas & Awan, 2015); there is a sharp contrast between the stated intent of Prevent and reactions to it (Kyriacou et al., 2017; Spiller, Awan, & Whiting, 2017). More particularly, in our project we were immediately aware of the sense of unjust imbalance that was felt on the part of people who were aspiring to strengthen communities in democratic ways.

The need to recognise the ongoing interplay between diversity and equity may in part be resolved by reference to general principles of universalism. Within a human rights framework it is possible to establish principles that are then directly related to law. But this takes us only so far. We explained above some of the challenges associated with declarations of principle. Practical (and theoretical) developments - or, imperfections - are part of a democratic political process. We need to recognise that politics is about the ‘creative reconciliation of differing interests’ (Crick, 1964) and as such we should expect - and welcome - disagreement. The challenge is to ensure that the commitment to universal human rights is maintained and the relationship between equity and diversity is achieved as a characterisation of social justice and achieved through processes that are inclusively democratic. It is inadequate for government to establish a contradictory policy that is detached from reality. It is also necessary to consider what people and stakeholders in Arab communities would identify as the limits to thinking and action in the context of what seems to us to be a commitment to consensual diversity, which currently may have elements of assimilatory thinking.

1. **Conclusion**

We are witnessing what we have characterised as a search for consensual diversity which may actually be leading to a diasporic disconnect. The UK government has developed particular policies such as Prevent which are generally cast but in effect attack specific ethnic minorities. At the same time, Arab communities in the UK are keen to emphasise consensual diversity but may express that in ways that seem close to aiming for assimilation. The nature of this disconnect may be problematic for the achievement of a harmonious intercultural society. What does this mean for heritage schools? Principally, we suggest that we must find ways of listening to people in communities who, in setting up heritage schools, may in part aspire to and/ or achieve strong identities as a way of making a contribution to the development of an intercultural society (Li 2006; Martin et al. 2004). Young people whose identities are kaleidoscopic (see Ross, 2019) have valuable things to say. Perhaps a broad indication of what could next be done would be to encourage reflection on the framework for inclusion and equity in education offered by UNESCO (2017), which recommends consideration of principles; concepts; policies; and, practices. Of course, these areas are interconnected. More insight and focus is needed on the degree and nature of flexibility in a universalist approach; the nature and meaning of substantive and procedural concepts that will help educators identify what and how things should be learned; the balance between national policies and local interpretation; and the characterisation of professionalism and collaborations amongst educators. In addition, we need an avoidance of fear-driven division and an increased determination to listen to those who are contributing to an intercultural society.

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