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## Meaningful encounters? Religion and social cohesion in the English primary school

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### Abstract

*Recent debates about state-funded faith schools in England have focused on the way in which they either promote or discourage social cohesion between different cultural, ethnic and religious groups. While one argument suggests that children must experience interfaith and intercultural encounters in order to understand each other, another insists that values of tolerance and acceptance can instead be taught as part of the curriculum. Despite this, much research to date has tended to focus on macro-processes such as selection procedures and residential segregation at the expense of micro-processes within school space itself. This article seeks to address this conspicuous lack of empirical research, by drawing on qualitative fieldwork in a state-funded Community primary school and Roman Catholic primary school located in multi-faith districts of an urban area in the North of England. It will examine a number of ways in which the two schools tried to encourage positive and meaningful encounters between children of different religious backgrounds, as well as the extent to which such attempts were successful. The article will focus particularly on the role of bodies and emotions in making sense of these processes.*

**Key words:** children, emotions, encounters, religion, schools, social cohesion

## Introduction

One of the key charges against state-funded faith schools is that they contribute to ethnic and religious segregation. Following the riots in the North of England in 2001, where there was violence between White and Asian gangs in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley, the government-funded report into factors leading to the urban unrest identified that faith schools were indeed contributing to the 'problem' of racial division (Ouseley 2001). Some studies have shown that there does exist a moderate amount of ethnic and religious segregation in many British cities, both residentially and educationally (e.g. Burgess, Wilson and Lupton 2005) and it is often suggested that schooling children separately militates against learning to co-operate and interact with others from different backgrounds (e.g. Kymlicka 1999).

Complex factors such as the need for cultural, religious and social support to combat racism and constrained choice due to economic disadvantage are often given as reasons for segregation of minority ethnic and religious groups (Phillips 2006; Robinson 2005). However, geographical processes such as 'White flight' are also understood to exacerbate such segregation, where White parents move their children away from schools with large proportions of pupils learning English as an additional language, due to the perception that such schools maintain poor standards. This then results in the segregation of White families and Dench, Gavron and Young (2006) highlight how Roman Catholic schools in Tower Hamlets, an area of East London, could be described as 'White citadels' due to the fact they select by religion and so very rarely admit Muslims.

In contrast to the picture painted above, another argument suggests that faith schools actually work to improve community relations by helping to maintain cultural identities and including minorities in the democratic system (see Parker-Jenkins, Hartas and Irving 2005). Faith schools are said to reduce educational inequalities between ethnic groups, reflecting the fact that many religious minorities, such as Muslims, generally do worse than their white counterparts in mainstream schools (Gillborn and Mirza 2000). Moreover, incorrect assumptions are often made about faith school intakes. For example, Ofsted data show that on average, Catholic schools actually have a higher proportion of pupils from ethnic

minorities than Community schools, although this consists of more Black pupils and fewer Asian pupils and so represents lower religious diversity (Catholic Education Service 2006). These data contrast with the above construction of Catholic schools as 'White citadels', when this is not always the case.

Many of the above debates have focused on the macro-scale of the community, namely residential segregation and school selection procedures, often ignoring the micro-scale of the educational institutions themselves. This article will aim to widen that focus to include everyday primary school spaces and the processes that take place within them, in order to examine how this might make a useful contribution to understanding community relations in the context of education. Over the last few years, Geographers have begun to take much more of an interest in everyday school spaces (e.g. Fielding 2000; Gallagher 2005; Hemming 2007; Holloway, Valentine and Bingham 2000; Holt 2004) but to date, religious identity and social cohesion have not featured in this body of literature.

In this article, I will begin by exploring some of the theoretical work on social cohesion and encounters in the social sciences to explain my rationale for focusing on institutional-level micro-processes. Next, I will briefly outline the research study from which the data in this article originate, before moving on to discuss some of the processes that helped to facilitate social cohesion between children of different religious backgrounds in two case-study schools. In the final part of the article, I will explore some of the effects of these techniques on children's everyday school lives and consider the extent to which they were successful for promoting social cohesion in school. As part of the discussion, I will consider similarities and differences between the two school models, as well as some of the consequences of the success or failure of such processes for social inclusion.

### **Social cohesion and encounters**

Recent work in social policy has attempted to embrace the idea of 'social cohesion' or 'community cohesion' in order to address some of the problems facing many urban communities in Britain today, such as ethnic and religious segregation, crime and social

unrest (see Robinson 2005). The previous Labour Government's social cohesion agenda was based around five basic elements, outlined by Forrest and Kearns (2001). These included 'common values and a civic culture'; 'social order and social control'; 'social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities'; 'social networks and social capital' and 'place attachment and identity' (Forrest and Kearns 2001: 2129). This definition encompasses aspects such as social interaction between groups, respect for difference, absence of conflict and civility towards others. Social capital was also a key concept in this agenda and refers to the significance of relationships and networks between individual and groups for facilitating action (Coleman 1990; Putnam 2000).

Putnam (2000) makes the distinction between bonding social capital among members of the same social group and bridging social capital between members of different groups in a community. Although bonding and bridging social capital can both be understood as positive forces for society, if creating bonds does not leave enough energy for building bridges, this may create problems for relationships with other communities. This is clearly a significant issue for ethnic and religious harmony in urban settlements. For Flint (2007), the question for faith schooling is whether or not such a system works to bond social capital within faith groups, at the expense of bridging social capital between different faith communities. Despite the large amount of interest in the idea of social capital from both academics and policy-makers, the concept is so widely encompassing and poorly defined that it has been denounced in some quarters as useless as an analytical concept (Middleton, Murie and Groves 2005).

Recent work in social and cultural geography has focused instead on the small events and occurrences that may lead to the development of social cohesion in everyday contexts. The idea of 'encounter' has been employed by geographers as a way of thinking through how citizens can learn to live with cultural difference by showing civility to others. For example, Laurier and Philo (2006) focus on the low-level interactions involved in sharing seats and holding doors for facilitating civil engagement, whereas Thrift (2005) argues that everyday acts of kindness and friendliness in the city can be fostered to create a successful affective force to combat and heal urban conflict and decay. However, Valentine (2008a) draws on empirical research to point out that while civil encounters may well be positive and polite in

the public arena, this does not necessarily mean that individuals will not express prejudice in their own homes. In other words, affective micro-encounters are still a reflection of wider power relations and they cannot be disconnected from the politics of 'race', ethnicity, gender, class and other social divisions (see also Tolia-Kelly 2006).

Many of the arguments about ethnic and religious segregation seem to assume that merely encouraging people to mix in the same urban context will automatically result in cultural integration, through the kind of momentary encounters championed by Thrift (2005) and Laurier and Philo (2006). However, for Amin (2002), it is the type of encounter between cultural groups that matters. The ethnic composition of a neighbourhood may tell us little about what actually occurs there. For example, Asian Muslims and White Brits living in the same street may never talk to each other. Rather, Amin (2002) argues that it is the meaningful interactions in everyday life that are important and can make a difference. The same logic can be applied to children and schooling. Merely placing children of different ethnic and religious backgrounds in the same institutional context will not necessarily result in a cohesive school community. Rather, it will depend on the kind of embodied encounters occurring within schools and whether or not they could be described as positive and meaningful.

The enormous diversity in the community school and the faith-based school sectors is such that it is impossible to say whether all community schools or all faith schools will be good or bad at facilitating meaningful encounters and promoting social cohesion (Cush 2005; Jackson 2003). Although some commentators continue to argue that preparation for a multicultural society requires real interfaith and intra-faith encounters within schools (e.g. Nipkow 1999), there are also those who believe that good teaching can be just as effective in fighting prejudice (e.g. Short 2002). Amin (2002) suggests that schools can be appropriate contexts for meaningful interactions, whether through everyday school life and events, or links between different schools, while Flint (2007) argues that effective values and citizenship education can also make a contribution. Since 2007, all state-maintained schools in England, regardless of their secular or religious character, have been required to demonstrate how they are promoting social cohesion to the school inspectorate. Despite this, recent work has indicated that some faith schools have failed to make this issue a

priority and engage with community cohesion initiatives such as interfaith partnerships (Berkeley and Vij 2008). What is required, therefore, is an examination of the micro-spaces within schools, in order to focus on the types of encounters that they facilitate and the educational contexts in which these occur.

### **The study**

This article draws on data from a research project on the role and significance of religion and spirituality in English primary schools. The study involved a qualitative case-study comparison between a Community primary school and a Voluntary Aided Roman Catholic primary school,<sup>1</sup> both located in multi-faith districts of an urban area in the North of England and both with fewer than 350 pupils on roll. In each of the case-study schools, the research involved a mixed-method approach, including participant observation, adult and child interviews and child-centred creative methods. All of these methods were analysed thematically for effective integration of the different data sets (see Mason 2002). Most of the research was focused on Key Stage Two (7–11-year-olds), although the paired interviews and child-centred methods involved only 9–11-year-olds.

The participant observation was carried out in the context of my role as a classroom assistant and included the classrooms, playgrounds, dinner halls and around the schools in general. Both parents and teachers were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews and this included three teacher interviews and ten parent interviews in each school. Children were given the opportunity to talk to me in pairs, in order to reduce the adult–child power differentials and facilitate more open and relaxed conversations (see Mayall 2000). They consisted of eleven pairs and one group of three in the Community school, and ten pairs and one group of three in the Catholic school. The child and parent interviewees were chosen to reflect the religious make-up of the focus classes in each school. In the case of the Community school, this included approximately 20 per cent non-White Muslim or Sikh, 40 per cent Black or Mixed Race Christian and 20 per cent White Christian (non-Catholic) or Agnostic/No Religion and 60 per cent White Catholic. In the Roman Catholic school, it included approximately 5 per cent non-White Muslim, 15 per cent Black or Mixed Race

Christian (mostly Catholic), 20 per cent White Christian (non-Catholic) or Agnostic and 60 per cent White Catholic children.

In addition to these more conventional methods, the study also included a set of creative child-centred methods, which were aimed at facilitating participation in the data-generation process and encouraging meaningful responses from children (Punch 2002; Veale 2005). Although the research project included drawing, story and photography, the particular method that is drawn upon in this article involved a vignette drama activity. A number of researchers have used vignettes with children and young people in order to access values and beliefs (e.g. Barter and Reynold 2000; Smart, Neale and Wade 1999), but more recently, Frankel (2007) has used this technique in the context of drama discussion groups to explore children's moral decision making processes. The vignette drama activity in this research was quite similar to Frankel's (2007) approach and involved groups of between four and six children. Each group was asked to act out a particular scenario that could have occurred in an everyday school context, followed by a discussion about the rights and wrongs of the characters' actions in the drama and their feelings and decision-making processes. The first vignette involved a Muslim girl who was being teased in the dinner queue because she was wearing a hijab, the second was concerned with a group of boys from one particular cultural group who would not let others join in their games on the playground, and the third entailed a girl who was trying to pray or reflect during assembly but was being distracted by two boys in the row behind. The whole-class discussions following the drama performances were then recorded and transcribed in a similar format to a focus group.

There were a number of ethical issues relevant to the research project, particularly regarding the needs of child participants and also the sensitive nature of the topics under investigation (Alderson and Morrow 2004; Nesbitt 2000; Valentine 1999). Accordingly, children were fully involved in the consent process (alongside parents), through child-friendly information leaflets, questions and discussion, and the ongoing opportunity to opt in or out of different parts of the research. All pupils in the class participated in the drama activity as part of the school curriculum, but comments from those who did not wish their work to be analysed were omitted from the transcripts. In the separate paired interviews, child participants were invited to choose their own pseudonyms to protect their identities

and interviews took place in private locations in order to protect confidentiality. The usual ethical procedures were used in the case of adult interviewees.

Finally, there were a number of power issues related to mixing different qualitative methods, particularly regarding the more authoritative role required to co-ordinate the drama activity. These were through careful planning of the timings of research activities so that my changing role did not undermine the effectiveness of the methods (see also Hemming 2008). The combination of methods was, however, useful for making sense of the complex nature of the encounters taking place in the study schools, particularly the distinction between rhetoric and practice.

### **Encouraging positive encounters**

In the two case-study schools, I was able to investigate the type of encounters taking place between children of different ethnic and religious backgrounds as part of everyday school life. In this part of the article, I will explore some of the processes operating in the schools to encourage positive encounters and the development of social cohesion. These processes were not just limited to ethnic and religious identities but did nevertheless encompass them. They were also working alongside other socially cohesive techniques concerned with building a sense of community and togetherness in the schools (see Hemming forthcoming).

The institution has historically sought to ‘restrain, control, treat, “design” and “produce” particular and supposedly improved versions of human minds and bodies’ (Philo and Parr 2000: 513). Consequently, as Watson and Ashton (1995: 14) point out, schools ‘convey values everyday, knowingly or unknowingly, both at the more explicit level of what is taught, and the less openly acknowledged level of how the school is administered’. Both study schools therefore sought to teach children how to demonstrate ‘civilised’ bodies, through their internalisation of acceptable ways of using their bodies to interact and get along with each other (see Elias 1978 [1939]). Such processes can be understood through Foucault’s (1977) concept of disciplinary power, where technologies of surveillance, employed through everyday practices such as routines, drills, timetables and the organisation of school space, act as mechanisms for the regulation of children’s bodies (see



Gallagher 2005; Hemming 2007 for other examples of disciplinary regimes in primary schools).

One of the main techniques used to achieve the cultivation of socially cohesive bodies involved the teaching of 'emotion work'. The significance of emotions for making sense of children's lives, and social processes in general, has recently been recognised in Geography (e.g. Anderson and Smith 2001; Davidson and Milligan 2004; Valentine 2008b). The term 'emotion work' was coined by Hochschild (1983) who argued that individuals actively shape their own private emotions into socially acceptable ones. This is in order to comply with implicit 'feeling rules' within particular social and cultural contexts. Emotions are therefore managed to maintain a suitable outward appearance through two types of acting—'surface acting' and 'deep acting'. 'Surface acting' is when particular socially acceptable feelings are displayed through deception, even though they may not be genuinely felt, and 'deep acting' is when emotions are internally induced or suppressed as a result of social interactions with others, again to comply with 'feeling rules'. Hochschild (1983) argued that within institutions, part of the work of emotional 'acting' is replaced by institutional mechanisms to arrange 'proper' ways to feel. Both of my study schools employed institutional mechanisms through the teaching of 'emotion work' as part of Personal, Social, Health & Citizenship Education (PSHCE), and values education in school.

PSHCE is a non-statutory part of the primary school curriculum, but had a presence in both schools. The suggested curriculum guidance for schools includes learning about emotions and how to manage them (emotional literacy), understanding other people's experiences and points of view, and learning about different religious and ethnic identities, values and customs (see QCA schemes of work website<sup>2</sup>; Department for Education and Skills 2005; McCarthy 2000). PSHCE lessons in the study schools often took the form of 'Circle Time', which is designed to act as a 'safe space' where children sit in a circle and discuss their thoughts and feelings as a whole class. Circle time provided opportunities to address issues relating to friendships, co-operation, conflict resolution, self-esteem and promoting kindness and empathy (see Mosley 1996). It was therefore an ideal opportunity for both schools to take emotions seriously and teach 'surface acting' and 'deep acting', through ways in which children could manage their feelings. These messages worked alongside those

given in other contexts such as in whole-school assemblies and focused on issues such as avoiding retaliation or showing kindness to children they did not get on with. The same themes were reinforced in teacher responses to incidents, where for example, children were asked to stand in a corner and calm down when they had become involved in angry disputes. In one of the interviews, Lisa and Zoe talked about some of the emotional literacy activities they had experienced in circle time.

INTERVIEWER:

*Do you ever talk about how you feel in circle time?*

ZOE (White Christian girl, Community school):

*Yeah.*

LISA (White agnostic girl, Community school):

*Yeah, we speak about how we feel at lunch and dinnertimes and stuff.*

ZOE:

*And we also pass the egg around and say like, that we're happy or sad.*

The schools were also concerned with teaching children values of kindness, respect and empathy towards others. There is a whole body of literature on values education in schools, all advocating the teaching of these particular values, albeit using different approaches (e.g. Ling and Stephenson 1998; McLaughlin and Halstead 2000; Watson and Ashton 1995). Similarly, Warnock (1996) argues that despite the existence of moral disagreements between different groups in Britain, there is still a clear consensus for teaching civilized behaviour in the classroom and in social situations. Values education was present in both schools, despite the fact that pupils came from a range of different home backgrounds with potentially different values promoted there.

A number of studies have considered how particular values are communicated through aspects of school life such as ethos, collective worship, religious symbolism and adult behaviours (e.g. Colson 2004; Johnson 2001; Johnson and Castelli 2000). Key elements in the two study schools were the weekly 'ethos statements' that encouraged children to demonstrate particular values, the school rules that rewarded and punished various behaviours, and everyday teacher responses to personal and social incidents. The staff in

both schools talked regularly in both the classroom and the assembly hall about the need for children to be kind and treat others with respect. They visibly enforced school rules to ensure that children were co-operating with each other and did not become involved in fights or disputes. Children were also encouraged to take part in this process as ‘playground friends’ at break and lunchtime. These individuals, usually from the older year groups in school, would walk around the playground in yellow bibs, ensuring that all of the other children were co-operating nicely with each other, and assisting any who did not know how to use the equipment properly.

CLASS TEACHER (Catholic, Catholic school):

*I think we try to instil in them different various things by the ethos statements that we use, and try to instil in them, like, a caring nature and how they be aware of how they treat other people, and that's how . . . It's linked in with our school rules as well, 'cos it's not just, you know, do as I asked first time, it's, you know, listen to each other, take turns with each other, be kind to one another and they're, like, really important principles within our school that help them to develop in lots of ways.*

Both of the above techniques—teaching emotions management and values of respect and kindness—were linked to the desire and necessity in each school to create an environment where bullying and racism were deemed socially unacceptable. Tackling bullying has recently been a priority for English schools, and the last Labour Government approached the issue by promoting social and emotional learning and investigating children and young people’s views and experiences of bullying (Teachernet bullying website<sup>3</sup>; Oliver and Candappa 2003). Both schools had won recognition for their multicultural and antiracist work through various awards or prizes. Anti-racist and anti-bullying messages were an everyday presence in school assemblies and the classroom, as well as on display boards around the school corridors. During the research period, the Community school held an ‘antibullying day’, and a separate racist incident was dealt with in a very serious manner by the head teacher. Children also reflected on the unacceptability of such behaviour when they talked about the school’s reaction and their own reaction to individuals who had displayed such racist or bullying behaviour, as Jack illustrates below.

INTERVIEWER:

*So what happens when people are racist?*

JACK (Mixed-race Catholic boy, Catholic school):

*People won't be friends with them any more.*

INTERVIEWER:

*Yeah and what do the teachers do?*

ADAM (White Catholic boy, Catholic school):

*Well . . .*

JACK:

*You get sent to Mrs Y. and your mum or dad gets phoned.*

ADAM:

*Yeah.*

The above quote also points to the role that children played in contributing to these processes. Although most of the practices discussed so far were very much adult-led, there were examples in the interviews of children resolving their own disputes, or comforting others who had experienced bullying or unkindness. Parents were also generally aware of the school's efforts in promoting social cohesion through these methods. Many of the parent interviewees, such as Shabina (see below), specifically mentioned these as aspects of school that they most liked or were most impressed by. However, as the quote below illustrates, there were still incidents of racism and bullying occurring in the schools and this will be explored further in the next section.

SHABINA (Asian Muslim mother, Community school):

Yeah I mean they did, there was a time when they had those bands out as well, and they gave them to the children.

INTERVIEWER:

Oh right?

SHABINA:

Stop racism and bullying, yeah. And then, I mean, not all of them we bought them a few years ago, they had different colours for each thing, I mean I bought them. I remember my son telling me that he was learning stop bullying and everything yeah, so he did tell me.

INTERVIEWER:

So do you think that when there has been bullying, the school has dealt with it well?

SHABINA:

Yeah they have, 'cos that was an issue I've had as well. Another child was picking on my son, and I did go in and they did do, they went and told his parents as well and they dealt with it, and in the classroom they separated them. They were saying that they did have some problems with the other child as well, but I mean they dealt with it fine.

Although both of the study schools engaged in the same processes of teaching values of kindness, empathy and respect, emotions management, anti-racism and anti-bullying, there were different motivations in each of the schools. The Catholic school gave religious scripture and the word of God as a reason for teaching these values and skills. Specifically, staff emphasised that it was written in the Bible that people should love others and show kindness and respect. This was all part of their 'Christ-centred' approach to education (see Stock 2005). In contrast, the Community school was following 'Every Child Matters' national guidelines<sup>4</sup> and staff felt that the values and skills they were teaching were generically good moral and humanistic ones and were essential for successful learning to take place.

HEADTEACHER (Catholic, Catholic school):

*Everybody, yes, wants children to achieve well, they want everybody to be kind and caring and they want all current and modern behaviour policies, so the best way forward is to start afresh the next day, and all these sorts of things. But in terms of a Catholic school, it has to come from being Christlike, we are trying to be like Christ and he has a higher authority than any of us.*

CLASS TEACHER (Agnostic, Community school):

*Most of the religions teach the same sort of ideas of respect and caring and sharing, you know, giving part of what you earn to, to the poor, or you know, respecting others, loving others, whether you're Sikh, Muslim, Christian, or whatever. And I think to say that we do this because it says so in the Bible, I think it's more we do this because that's how we want to treat each other and that's what's going to, sort of, solve problems and stop arguments and things.*

In this first section, I have outlined some of the techniques that both of the study schools used to help encourage positive encounters and facilitate social cohesion between children from all backgrounds, including from different ethnic, cultural and religious groups. These included developing 'common values and a civic culture', 'social order and social control' and 'social networks and social capital', to borrow terms from the Forrest and Kearns' (2001) definition of social cohesion. These methods can all be described under the heading of 'emotion work' and included the teaching of both 'surface acting' and 'deep acting'. In the next section, I will explore the extent to which such methods were successful in promoting the kind of social cohesion and meaningful encounters they were aiming for.

### **Encounters in practice**

The techniques that both schools used to encourage positive encounters between all children, of whatever background, showed a certain amount of success. One of the ways this was demonstrated was how children of all backgrounds, cultures and religions would play and work together on an everyday basis. Smith (2005) found in his study on multi-faith primary schools that children would make friends with other pupils of different religions and ethnicities in school, despite the fact that there were sometimes racist tensions between pupils. This was also the case in both of the study schools, where children in the interviews all reported that they had friends from backgrounds other than their own. Some of the parents also pointed out the positive effect that this contact between children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds could have for creating a harmonious and socially cohesive environment in school. These encounters could, therefore, be described as 'meaningful' following Amin's (2002) observations, because children from different religions were developing friendships and social networks outside their own ethnic or religious groups, or bridging social capital in Putnam's (2000) terms.

INTERVIEWER:

*But think about when you're in school, do you have, are you friends with lots of different children, or does it tend to be . . . ?*

ISABELLE (White Catholic girl, Catholic school):

*I'm friends with [boy from a different background], I'm just friends with everybody, even if they're not my religion.*

INTERVIEWER:

*Ok so it doesn't really make any difference what religion they are?*

ISABELLE AND CHLOE (White Catholic girl, Catholic school):

*No.*

Despite this, children did not always follow the behaviours that the schools prescribed. Although bullying and racist incidents were not necessarily common occurrences, they were certainly present in both study schools to a certain extent. The way in which children challenge institutional rules are well documented (e.g. Gordon, Holland and Lahelma 2000; Hemming 2007; Thomson 2005) and some of the pupils in the study schools did not follow all of the rules because they did not perceive them to be fair, or did not wish to follow them. Others described how difficult they found it to manage their emotions, especially when in conflict with others. One boy at the Community school explained how he had experienced racism from another pupil, but it had not stopped after following the school's 'feeling rules' and reporting it to the teachers. In the end, the boy had resorted to hitting the other pupil in order to stop the racist bullying. Another example is shown below, illustrating the potential clash between the school's teaching of 'emotion work' and popular discourses about how males should resolve disputes through aggression (e.g. see Swain 2003).

INTERVIEWER:

*Ok. So when those things do happen, how does that make you feel, when people are being nasty to you like that?*

JONATHON (Black Christian boy, Community school):

*It makes me feel upset, because they don't really want me to, when I tell they have to let me play so it makes me feel upset.*

INTERVIEWER:

*David?*

DAVID (Mixed-race Christian boy, Community school):

*It makes me feel angry, and when I'm angry, the only way to get me anger out is to do the same to them.*

A similar story was apparent when it came to children's developing values. In the vignette drama activity, children were often quick to state socially acceptable discourses and the 'right' values that the schools were teaching. This included discourses on anti-racism, respect and fairness, for example in the situation where the Muslim girl had been bullied in the dinner queue because of her headscarf (see below). Despite this, children did not always show the same socially acceptable behaviour out on the playground, where fights and disputes did sometimes occur. Similarly, some of the child interviewees told me about incidents of bullying or racism that they or others they knew had experienced. Research on racism in education has often highlighted the difference between what teachers say and what they actually do (e.g. Gillborn 1990; Sewell 1997). In this research, a clear gap was demonstrated between children's discourses and values, on the one hand, and behaviours and actions on the other.

FACILITATOR:

*Right, why was it, so why was it important, why was it important that Gemma wasn't like that to Leena?*

AMY (White Catholic girl):

*It could have hurt her feelings really badly, I mean it might not have been her fault she had to wear a scarf.*

FACILITATOR:

*Ok, anyone else? Why was it a bad thing? Why shouldn't, was it a bad thing for her to do?*

LOUISE (White girl with no religion):

*Because it's not the person's fault that they've got to wear a scarf, and maybe it's, they should just forget about it, and just 'cos they might not look like each other, it doesn't mean they can't be friends.*

FACILITATOR:

*Ok and anybody else?*

VINCENT (Mixed-race Catholic boy):

*Because it's racism and it can really upset your feelings.*

FACILITATOR:

*Ok right. So why was it better, why was it better that they were friends at the end? That's the last question.*

ROSIE (White Catholic girl):



*Because when you're not friends, you're like upsetting people really much, and it's better when you're friends 'cos you can play really nicely and things.*

FACILITATOR:

*Ok.*

HOLLY (White Catholic Girl):

*Because, like, they have to respect each other's religions and they can always be friends, because they go to the same school and everything.*

(Extract from vignette drama activity in the Catholic school)

The quote above also shows the limitations of teaching values of respect in such a contrived way. The comment by Amy and Louise about it not being Leena's fault she wore a headscarf showed that giving the 'right' answers did not necessarily imply a full understanding or respect for another culture. Even the earlier quote with Isabelle and Chloe was significant in that the girls were both White Catholics and had chosen to be interviewed together, despite claiming that they were friends with children from different backgrounds. In these situations, children were demonstrating a certain amount of 'surface acting' rather than 'deep acting'. They were aware that they needed to give the impression of being kind and respectful to others, even if in practice this was not always the case. The diary extract below is another example of the way that behaviours often differed from discourses on these issues.

*Everyone was congratulating the teacher and the children after [the class assembly], and apparently even the youngest children had understood the drama. Unfortunately two members of the class spoilt it at break time by fighting, when the whole assembly had been about not doing such things! I was yet again observing that knowledge/understanding and behaviour gap. (Research diary extract, Catholic School)*

Similarly, two of the child interviewees illustrated the complex nature of prejudice when they brought into the conversation of their own accord prejudiced comments that family members had made about Muslims (see below). Jeffrey and Jonathon had not only learnt to refer to Muslims in a negative way, they had also developed discursive techniques to manage the racist accounts to make them sound more balanced and reasonable. When

asked about 'outsiders' in school however, Jeffrey made a distinction, saying that such individuals were different from other 'outsiders'. Later in the interview, the children talked about how teachers and the school should be harsher on racism, showing clear contradictions on the issue. Valentine (2008a) gives similar examples of the complex nature of prejudice and racism in terms of how individuals maintain seemingly contradictory positions, such as combining personal civility to religious others and support for racist organisations. The finding brings into question research on faith schools that have used shallow questioning or attitude scales to draw conclusions about pupils' lack of prejudices (e.g. Grace 2003; Short 2002; Short and Lenga 2002) and point to a need for more research in this area.

JEFFERY (White Christian boy, Community school):

*My dad, my dad said that erm like too, there's some people that come in from other countries, I'm not sayin' it's everybody, but there's some people like what come in from other countries and like try, what like spoil this country, because they're like goin' round, I'm not sayin' it's just other countries 'cos people who already lived here, probably more often they're doin' it, but more people are comin' in from other countries and like startin' fights, but with our people, with the people who are already living here.*

INTERVIEWER:

*Right?*

JEFFERY:

*But the people who already lived here are still doin' it now.*

INTERVIEWER:

*But that, do you think that happens in your school?*

JEFFERY:

*No.*

JONATHON (Black Christian boy, Community school):

*But normally it's new people who come, come like Muslims say that the Muslims, loadsa Muslims who came to this country and like only Christians were in this country, they'll make this country worse because most Muslims don't like Christians, so they'll try . . .*

JEFFERY:

*I know and so they, they end up fightin' and spoiling the country just 'cos of the religions.*

The above example also points to the issue of home and school, and the potential values mismatch between the two (e.g. see Talbot 2000). Such mismatches may occur in multi-faith schools with issues such as sex education, where different religious groups have different views on its appropriateness. In the case of socially cohesive values, teachers and parents in both schools also mentioned the gap between those promoted in school and homes where similar values were not taught.

JANE (White Agnostic mother, Community school):

*If the parent, I mean it's like if a parent lets a child run riot at home, then they're gonna do it here aren't they quite frankly. You know, I consider myself to be a good parent, bringing two children up mainly on my own as well, and I mean at the end of the day, my children are extremely polite, will say please and thank you, and they care about other children's feelings, teachers' and children's feelings, and I just basically wish a lot of the children were like my children.*

These gaps could well be quite significant, given that previous research has shown that high levels of inter-ethnic contact during school years can often decline once young people become adults (e.g. see Back 1996). Here, the limitations of a study focused on the school institution becomes apparent, in terms of its inability to adequately account for linkages between different spaces and the relative importance of each for children's developing values. This again points to the need for more qualitative research on these issues.

School concern with the facilitation of positive encounters between children of different faiths had another consequence alongside creating potential clashes with home values. It meant that other social divisions in school, such as gender and age, were given much less attention. Flint (2006) and Phillips (2006) have both highlighted the way in which ethnic and religious neighbourhood segregation is often overly-problematized in social policy. This is despite the fact that there are many other types of urban segregation, such as socio-economic, that could be viewed just as negatively. Similarly, social cohesion in the two study schools appeared to be defined in terms of ethnicity and religion, rather than other social differences. Gender and age divisions were not raised as a problem or issue worthy of

discussion by any of the adults I spoke to. This was in contrast to racism and bullying, which were often raised by interviewees of their own accord.

The gendered nature of school spaces has been examined by writers such as Thorne (1993), who illustrated the way in which schools regularly use different forms of gendered address, and group and organise children according to gender. Particular spaces, equipment and activities would take on gendered meanings both within the classroom and the playground, through teacher language and child peer cultures. All of these subtle processes worked to exacerbate gendered differences and divisions. These processes were still very much in operation in both of my study schools. It was considered acceptable for a teacher to make jokes about gender or age and group children according to their age group or whether they were girls or boys, in a way that would have been completely unacceptable for ethnicity or religion. Similarly, gender and age divisions were much more obvious in the playground and the dinner hall than ethnic or religious divisions. Despite this, gender and age segregation did not appear to be problematised by teachers or parents.

*The playground looked very different to usual, because the kids were not wearing uniform and I reflected on the importance of gender again for segregation on the playground, as most of the groups of children were single sex, but completely mixed in terms of ethnicity. This continued in PE, when the children were asked to line up in a girls' line and a boys' line, they changed separately, the boys' behaviour was compared to the girls' behaviour and even I commented on the positions in the hockey teams in terms of the balance of girls and boys without thinking. In contrast, religion and ethnicity was never mentioned and appeared to be the invisible difference. I thought about how controversial it would be if teachers had asked the children to queue up in different cultures or religions instead of gender! Later on in the day, the kids were asked to line up depending on their year group, marking age as an acceptable sorting category. (Research diary extract, Community school)*

This finding also points to another way that the social cohesion agenda in schools can contribute to wider processes concerned with the production of future citizens. As mentioned earlier in the article, schools have traditionally taken on this role, and Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2000) have explored their significance for shaping identity and inscribing difference. Through the processes described above, the study schools in my

research were marking ethnic and religious identities in various overt ways, whilst also influencing the construction of other identities such as gender through much more subtle and naturalised means. The inter-subjective conceptualisation of citizenship was therefore a complex affair, influenced through both formal and informal discourses and practices across education space.

In summary, the school techniques for promoting meaningful encounters and social cohesion between children of different backgrounds and religions were obviously working to a certain extent, through the development of common values, social order and social interaction between different groups. There were, however, some difficulties evident when children failed to enact the values and emotional management techniques that they were learning in school or demonstrated 'surface acting' more frequently than 'deep acting'. Problems also arose when values from home did not match those being taught in school. Children were in the process of developing their values and associated behaviours and these were clearly influenced by more than what their teachers told them to do. The focus on ethnicity and religion did tend to divert attention away from some of the other social divisions prevalent in school, such as gender and age. Although these were not considered as problematic in comparison with issues related to ethnicity and religion, they did nevertheless affect the extent to which the school communities could be described as socially cohesive.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Although much of the concern about social cohesion and education has been focused around the macro-scale of school selection and residential segregation, I have argued in this article that an awareness of the micro-encounters within schools is just as important an area for inquiry. Following that approach, I have outlined some of the processes that took place within two case-study schools to promote meaningful encounters and the development of social cohesion between children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. These included teaching children emotions management alongside values of kindness, tolerance and respect for others, in order to create an atmosphere where racism and bullying were not accepted. These techniques took place in a range of school spaces,

including the classroom, playground and assembly hall, and included children's participation as well as teachers'. Central to all of these processes were bodily emotions, aspects of social interaction and civil behaviour that have not been given enough attention to date and need to feature more prominently in future research on social cohesion. In this article, I employed Hochschild's (1983) concept of 'emotion work' to make sense of these embodied aspects, particularly the way in which children were expected to display appropriate emotional responses to their everyday school encounters through 'surface acting' and 'deep acting'. A continued interest in encounters could provide the context for examining the importance of bodies and emotions for building cohesive communities, provided that these are not considered in isolation to wider structures of power and inequality as some of the previous work on geographies of affect has been.

I have also outlined the extent to which such attempts at promoting social cohesion in school were successful and some of the issues that arose as a result. There were many examples of how both schools had been successful in their attempts to facilitate meaningful encounters between children of different religions, not least through the way in which they would all work and play together on a daily basis. Although the schools did work very hard to provide these positive opportunities, it would have been impossible to ensure that they occurred all of the time. Consequently, there were occasions when children chose not to follow the 'feeling rules' of the school, or found it too difficult to manage their emotions in ways that they had been taught. There were also examples of gaps between children's developing values and the behaviours that they demonstrated, or clashes between values they were learning at school and at home. Some of these incidents pointed to the limitations of teaching socially cohesive values, when children can merely repeat rhetoric or demonstrate 'surface acting' without necessarily properly understanding their importance. In the final section of the article, I explored one of the consequences of the schools' focus on encounters between children from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Other social divisions, such as age and gender, were given much less attention, despite being no less salient than in previous research. In our pursuit of inclusion for pupils from all cultures and religions, we should not forget some of the other differences that structure children's everyday school lives and shape their experiences of citizenship.

In terms of the discussion on faith schools and social cohesion that introduced the article, this research has made an important contribution to the debate. Firstly, it adds evidence to the argument that it is impossible to claim that all faith schools are divisive and all community schools are not, since both of the schools were utilising similar strategies to promote meaningful encounters, even though the motivations for doing so were different in each. Both of the schools in this study clearly were promoting social cohesion but then they both had the advantage of multi-faith pupil intakes that facilitated that process. My observations about the limitations of teaching cohesive values to children and the gaps between their knowledge and their behaviour have important implications for schools that do not have religiously diverse intakes, yet claim that they can promote social cohesion through curriculum teaching about knowledge and respect for other faiths. There is an urgent need for more research on such schools without diverse intakes, both religious and secular, which takes a more sophisticated approach to the issues of prejudice and children's developing values.

Finally, the importance of geography was highlighted through the significance of linkages between different spatial scales. Emotional processes at the level of the body, operating and interacting with formal and informal institutional space, helped to determine the success or failure of school techniques to promote social cohesion. All of these had implications for community cohesion at a wider scale, further emphasising the argument I made at the beginning of the article regarding the need for a focus on micro-spaces and their interconnections (see Holt 2004). However, the limitations of research focused on one geographical space were also revealed through the issue of inconsistent home-school values. Further research on this topic that adopts a child or family case-study approach (e.g. Pahl 2007) would perhaps be better placed to explore some of the linkages and interconnections between the spaces of the home, school and religious community, and provide additional insights to the ones developed in this article.

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## Notes

1. State-funded faith schools in the English primary (elementary) sector include those termed 'Voluntary Aided' (15 per cent funding from the religious body and a significant degree of religious governance), 'Voluntary Controlled' (fully state-funded but with a distinctive religious ethos), and 'Foundation' (schools granted more independence from the local education authority since 2006). In total, these schools constitute 36 per cent of state primary education provision in England, the vast majority of which are Roman Catholic or Church of England Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled. All are distinct from private faith schools, which exist outside the state system.
2. See <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100612050234/> (accessed 30 December 2010).
3. See <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes2/ks1-2citizenship/?view1/4get> (accessed 30 December 2010). See also: [www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/) (accessed 30 December 2010).
4. See <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20080906041431/http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/> (accessed 2 February 2009).



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