



Belonging in England today: Schools, race, class and policy

Journal of Sociology
2022, Vol. 58(3) 324–341
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DOI: 10.1177/14407833211050695
journals.sagepub.com/home/jos

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Abstract

Drawing on theorized notions of belonging and understandings of citizenship which stress the everyday and affective, I consider aspects of the relationship between educational institutions and belonging through a discussion of two recent research projects. One explores the educational strategies of Black middle-class parents, and the second teachers' responses to the recent requirement that they promote government-identified national values (the 'fundamental British values') in the classroom. I argue that both projects shed light on the differentiated experience of belonging and non-belonging in England today. I conclude by arguing for an understanding of the school as a shared public institution. This understanding highlights the potential of developing in all members of a school community, including parents, a sense of both belonging to the institution and being perceived by others as belonging, as well as a recognition of the legitimacy of claims to belong from 'other' students and families. Fostering such mutual recognition can be seen as a 'quiet', but potentially powerful, politics.

Keywords

belonging, class, race, schools

In this article, I am drawing on recent research projects with which I have been involved to identify how people's senses of belonging – to their fellow citizens, and to the nation – are shaped by what Favell calls the 'dirty work of boundary maintenance' by others (cited in Yuval-Davis, 2007: 563). 'Belonging' may be affected by social inequalities along many dimensions including race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, social class and (dis)ability and their intersections. Here, I am focusing on race, religion and social class.

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Drawing on two recent research projects – one exploring the educational strategies of Black middle-class parents, and the other how teachers promoted and engaged with government-defined ‘British values’, I discuss whether both projects indicate that full membership of the nation is offered only to those who assimilate into (an imagined) White British culture. Turning to a consideration of school-based developments, I briefly discuss initiatives directed towards increasing student belonging by enhancing social relationships between students, staff and parents. I conclude by emphasising the importance of understanding the school as a shared public institution. This understanding highlights the potential of developing in all members of a school community, including students’ families, a sense of both belonging and of being perceived by others as belonging, as well as a recognition of the ‘other’s’ legitimate interest and investment in the shared resource. Fostering such mutual recognition can be seen as a ‘quiet’, but potentially powerful, politics (Askins, 2016: 471).

This article is intended as a contribution towards the larger debate exploring the tensions around what holds people together, and what develops a sense of communality and belonging, in a context of heightened public anxiety over security, migration and integration. The urgency of these questions of cohesion, national borders, and the behaviour of ‘others’ has been further intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic, including recent instances of ‘vaccine nationalism’.

Belonging

‘Belonging’ is often addressed in terms of national belonging, as it is understood as a ‘thicker concept than citizenship’ (Crowley, 1999: 2; cited in Antonsich, 2010: 650), but the two are often discussed in tandem. In this article, I discuss aspects of belonging on multiple levels, with particular reference to the belonging of settled groups of racial and religious minorities. Additionally, as discussions of belonging often focus on individual and group racial/ethnic/religious difference, I want also to briefly consider the role played by social class. Here, I am picking up on Bridget Anderson’s work. She argues that states portray themselves as a ‘community of value, composed of people who share common ideals and (exemplary) patterns of behaviour expressed through ethnicity, religion, culture, or language – that is, its members have shared values’ (Anderson, 2013: 2). Outside of, or on the borders of these spaces inhabited by ‘good citizens’, are the non-citizen, the migrant, who does not have a claim on national identity, and also the ‘failed citizen’. The latter are the undeserving poor, who ‘fail to live up to liberal ideas’, who are ‘feckless’ and ill-disciplined ‘making the wrong choices’ and ending up on welfare benefits (Anderson, 2013: 4). Anderson comments that ‘the non-citizen and the Failed Citizen are both categories of the undeserving poor: one global, the other national’ (2013: 5) and that both are considered threats to social cohesion. ‘Those at risk of failure or of not-belonging seek to disassociate themselves, one from another’ as those who are not ‘firmly established in the community of value must endlessly prove themselves, marking the borders’ (Anderson, 2013: 6). I offer an illustration of this point, from the second research project mentioned here: teachers’ promotion of the

'fundamental British values'.¹ A teacher, in an urban secondary school with a multi-racial population in a highly deprived area, made the following observation about 14 year-old students' reactions to a Religious Education lesson on the morality of equality of wealth:

As a member of staff, I know which kids are on pupil premium, I know which kids are on free school meals² and it was so weird having so many kids who are on that, talk about how bad poor people are! And that was one of the scariest things, the consensus in that room.... Scroungers. Taking off the state, like they don't work hard [...] In a class where 70% of the kids were on free school meals[...] I was playing Devil's advocate and I said 'So do you think nobody in society should get any benefits?' ... [I explained] why am I pro the benefits system. [...] Some of the kids got it but some of them were like 'you should just be able to work hard' [...] If the government is calling people scroungers and skivers, why are you not going to have that rhetoric and language [here]? [...] 'They come into this country and they are on benefits', like, the kids are obsessed with that. (RE teacher, Kenton school)³

Here we can see that claims for full national belonging – often discussed in relation to possession of the majority ethnic identity – are also closely intertwined with the notion that financial independence from the state equals 'respectability' and enables belonging. With that linkage apparently firm in the minds of these teenagers, a need to remove oneself and one's family from the disreputable, the dependent, the lazy is paramount, and castigating these 'others' would seem to achieve this. It is clear that this discourse is closely intertwined with that of migrants 'cheating' the benefits system or somehow unfairly 'jumping the queue'. Here both the non-citizen and the failed citizen are condemned by those in similar situations, with local populations rendered divided and insecure by precarity (Patrick, 2016; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013).

In this article, I want to widen these ideas of non- and failed citizens by arguing also that perceptions of 'not belonging', or at least not fully belonging to the nation, affect those who are assumed to differ from the norm, both in terms of 'respectability', closely linked to the possession and display of particular forms and volumes of cultural and economic capital, and in terms of ethnic and religious heritage, illustrating how narrow the boundaries of national belonging seem to be.

Before I turn to the data, I want to argue two points in this section. The first is that national belonging cannot only be understood in terms of formal citizenship status; although that clearly is important, it does not fully encapsulate people's lived, everyday experiences (Sullivan, 2018). Indeed, recent discussions of citizenship have gone beyond formal status. I have discussed elsewhere (Askins, 2016; Vincent, 2019) an approach to citizenship that stresses affect; that is, it focuses on bodies, feelings and emotions, as discussed in the work of, for example, Sullivan (2018), Fortier (2010, 2017), Jackson (2016), Di Gregorio and Merolli (2016), and Johnson (2010). Affective approaches understand citizenship as going beyond 'a purely rational and administrative exercise of state authority' (Di Gregorio and Merolli, 2016: 934) – a series of rights and responsibilities held by rational subjects – to understand who is positioned as fully belonging and who is not. Emphasising affective dimensions of citizenship concentrates attention

on bodies and feelings, the nature of the emotions that attach themselves to citizenship (Fortier, 2016: 1041); it highlights how ‘citizens are encouraged to feel about others and themselves’ (Johnson, 2010: 496). Emotions are mobilised within the construction of citizenship and thus ‘the interaction of affect with social power relations can influence constructions of citizen identity and entitlements and involve different emotional regimes’ (Johnson, 2010: 496; Patrick, 2016).

Similar conceptions are put forward by Askins (2016) and Sullivan (2018). The latter discusses the development of everyday ‘habits of citizenship’. Drawing on a feminist phenomenological framework, she explains that, ‘habits are a function of the relationship of [the] bodily organism and its environments, including social, political, aesthetic, psychological, economic, as well as physical environments’ (Sullivan, 2018: 165). As an example, she notes – in relation to the US, but her point is applicable elsewhere – that an indicator of white privilege is that White people assume ‘the right to feel psychologically comfortable in any space that [they] choose’ (Sullivan, 2018: 165), something which I suggest particularly applies to affluent sections of the White population. This is an example of how ‘habits of citizenship’ can produce ‘regimes of inclusion and exclusion’ (Di Gregorio and Merolli, 2016: 934). Askins develops a similar argument as she refers to ‘emotional citizenry as a process embedded in the complexities of places, lives, and feelings’, arguing that ‘individual bodies and emotions mutually co-constitute a broader body politic that exceeds any formal political sphere’ (2016: 515). She continues that ‘emotional belonging’ can never be considered ‘outside political and economic spheres, rather it is simultaneously embedded in culture’ (Askins, 2016: 517). This stance allows Askins to argue that ‘belonging is about more than being materially and legally secure, but is also about being recognised’ (2016: 518), a ‘quest for recognition’ (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2012: 627), a point to which I shall return.

Following on from this – and my second point – is that the need for a more complete characterisation of belonging is increasingly visible in the literature. In terms of national belonging, authors note the importance of a multi-dimensional and multi-scale definition of belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Healy, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2007, 2011), as many people, perhaps particularly those who have migrated, understand themselves as having ‘multiple belongings’ that may be local, national and/or global (Healy, 2019). Antonsich defines belonging as having two dimensions: ‘belonging as a personal, intimate, feeling of being “at home” in a place (place-belongingness), and belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)’ (2010: 645).

Healy (2019) develops this, clearly signalling an affective approach to citizenship when she argues that ‘belonging’ is required across three dimensions: formal membership (e.g. access to citizenship rights and responsibilities), a sense of belonging (e.g. an affective bond, a sense of intimate connection to a place which grows out of everyday practices, such as friendship relations, Vincent et al., (2018)) and, making the same point as Askins, a perception by others that one belongs, requiring mutual recognition.

Like Anderson, cited earlier, Healy (2020) has developed her conceptual discussion of belonging by focusing on ‘failure to belong’. She defines two states of failing to belong. The first – ‘not belonging’ – occurs when formal membership belonging is intact, but a

sense of belonging fails. Sullivan (2018) develops a similar conception of ‘sub-citizenship’. Healy’s second state of ‘failing to belong’ is ‘unbelonging’, when both formal membership belonging and a sense of belonging disappears (2020: 120). Healy sees race and class as vital determinants here. She comments that not belonging and unbelonging can arise from austerity and precarity, and the demonisation of those dependent on benefits (Healy, 2020: 131), as we can see in the earlier quote from the RE teacher. Furthermore, she points to the Windrush scandal⁴ as an example of unbelonging. For this group of long-established residents, membership belonging was suddenly removed by the state, they became ‘illegalised non-citizens’ (De Noronha, 2020: 10). Those currently being defined as unbelonging in England also include those with no formal immigration status who are currently deemed NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds), and consequently have much reduced eligibility for welfare benefits.

With reference to not belonging, Healy says: ‘this has the effect of rendering the individual as an outsider: they may have formal membership belonging, but the reality positions them as “not part of us” and thus someone who can be discounted’ (2020: 131). Not belonging, she argues, can be felt in relation to a polity or to fellow citizens who are not trusted, and/or can be deployed to draw attention to the gap between formal status and acceptance, and exclusionary treatment by individuals and institutions (Healy, 2020). She references the example of former American football player, Colin Kaepernick’s ‘taking the knee’ when the national anthem played, as a protest against endemic racial injustice.

I will develop this conceptualisation of ‘not belonging’, by drawing on two examples from my research of cases where, although formal membership belonging is not challenged, a sense of belonging and clear recognition by others of belonging are either absent or partial.

The Black middle classes

My first example is from research, conducted with [Nicola Rollock, David Gillborn and Stephen Ball], on the educational strategies of middle-class, Black (Caribbean-origin) parents (see e.g. Rollock et al., 2015). The 62 respondents shared, over 77 semi-structured interviews, a variety of experiences from their own childhood and adulthood, from their children’s and their parents’ lives, when belonging had been denied by others. These examples included overt racism (such as verbal abuse) as well as more subtle incidents where exclusionary and discriminatory assumptions were made, about, for example what a ‘gifted’ student was, that somehow included no children of colour. Indeed, the threat or actuality of low teacher expectations of Black children was a concern for all the participants (see, for a further discussion of the parents’ perceptions of teachers’ low expectations, Gillborn et al., 2012). The perceived requirement to defend their children against such low expectations is the first point that I draw attention to here that indicates a position of non- or precarious belonging by Black children within the education systems. The second indication of non-belonging is the sense on the part of parents that there was no recognised space in which to be both Black *and* middle class.

On the first point, parents' strategies for navigating their children through the education system successfully drew on the capitals available to them, which included relatively privileged levels of economic capital, and forms of social and cultural capital valid and valued in the field of schooling, such as: personal networks of other professionals, including educational professionals; a knowledge of educational jargon; confidence, and a readiness, as one said to 'research' and 'read', although 'because I was a Black woman, single parent, [the educational psychologist] assumed I knew nothing about parenting' (Lorraine, Rollock, et al., 2013: 270).

In our analysis, we drew attention to the degree of emotional labour our respondents put into marshalling the forms of capital available to them and strategically deploying these resources in order to be recognised as respectable and 'readable' by the White majority. The parents emphasised the importance of attending to dress, accent, the presentation of young children, in order to fend off racist stereotypes of themselves and their children as uninterested in education, loud and prone to aggression, a limiting view, as Femi says below, of 'all you can ever be':

I won't let my daughter go to school unless everything is ironed, her shoes are polished. I know nobody else in the school does it ... [but] there's no way she's looking scruffy because I will not let people make that judgement about her. [The interviewer asks, 'what judgement?'] That if you're Black, you're working class, you're scruffy, you don't care and that's all you ever can be [...]. There is a real pressure there to make sure that everything in [her lunchbox] is healthy and just right... It's not just that it's got to be right and appropriate, it's got to be seen to be appropriate. (Femi, Vincent et al., 2012: 269)

Another participant, Miles, concentrates on the perceptions of the White majority here when he denounces the value of Patois, a colloquial form of speech in Jamaica and elsewhere in the region: 'Yeah [speaking properly means] not speaking in Patois. Speaking clearly, and being able to be understood really [...], no street talk or anything along those lines, just as I'm speaking now' (Rollock et al., 2011: 1086).⁵

In analysing the strategies used by parents, we drew attention to the importance of considering the different ways in which race and class intersect, arguing that for this group of participants, race changes the way in which class is understood and lived. Their class status allows them access to a range of resources which they deploy to 'perform a unique classed form of racial resistance' (Rollock et al., 2015: 152), although always aware of the possibility of discrimination. Such resistance is another form of what Patrick (2016) terms 'defensive citizenship engagement'. Her study with welfare claimants found that respondents sought to avoid stigma by engaging in a process of disassociation from 'other' claimants who 'deserved' a label of scrounger. Our participants did not in general criticise other Black individuals or groups, but, like Patrick's welfare claimants, had little choice but to strategise to claim entitlement. Thus, they sought to support their children's successful navigation of the education system by defending them against racist assumptions and generalisations about Black families as disreputable and uneducated, in a bid to claim recognition of their families' worth.

The second point also relates to the intersection of class and race. Despite the plentiful forms of capital commonly associated with the middle classes, a dimension of non-belonging emerged when we asked participants about their class identity. All our respondents had professional/managerial jobs, and the vast majority had first or postgraduate degrees as their highest educational qualifications. This sense of being 'economically embedded', and the relative security that it brings, is important for place-based belonging, but it is, as Antonsich notes, not sufficient (2010: 648). We noted and considered why a majority of our respondents – whom we termed 'middle-class ambivalent' (Rollock et al., 2013) – did not feel comfortable with an identity as middle class. Ray discusses his reluctance to be positioned in this way:

All sociological codifications I have seen have placed me in that category [middle class] despite my discomfort and wriggling [...] I have multiple identities: I am middle class by profession, working class by birth and attitude, and African Caribbean by culture, history and social experience. (Ray, head of public sector department, Rollock et al., 2015: 29)

Ray's sense of belonging as described here is an example of the multi-dimensional and multi-scalar conceptions of belonging mentioned earlier. We commented in our analysis that place, class, race, generation and emotional attachment come together in a complex formation for the respondents in our project (Rollock et al., 2015). As Koefoed and Simonsen (2012: 626) observe: 'social and cultural identity inevitably involves the construction of symbolic boundaries'. Many participants felt that there was not a clear space and identity in which to be Black *and* middle class, and that their race meant that they did not feel they belonged, or were perceived as belonging (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019) to 'the middle class', a space which they saw as inhabited by the White middle classes, to the exclusion of other racialised groups. Additionally, for some participants, this was a space of entitlement, exclusion, pretentiousness and privilege, all of which they wished to reject (Rollock et al., 2015).

The parents in the project were aware that their children's identities were being differently shaped by race and class, and some suggested that their children would be able to more confidently claim a secure identity as middle class. The adults had worked to foster a sense of confidence and entitlement in their children, but some voiced fears that their children underestimated the pervasiveness and insidiousness of racism. Robert commented that his children have been 'shielded and protected' by their relatively affluent lifestyle. Dawn also noted that her daughter and younger relations 'seem to have bought into whole multiculturalism idea', and Jean that the younger generation is one 'that is sleepwalking into thinking that everything has gone, done, dusted. Whereas I think a lot of the racist stuff that goes on is actually very subtle' (Vincent et al., 2013: 942)

Thus, the Black middle-class participants in the research deployed their economic, social and cultural capitals, which were of a form and volume associated with the middle classes, to help their children navigate the education system in a racially unequal society. Despite this, their identification in class terms is far from straightforward, 'histories, cultural identity, the classed British context and racism all intervene

to complicate, disrupt and render identities and allegiances uncertain' (Rollock et al., 2013: 271), and heavy emotional costs arise from being a racialised minority in a society where racism is deeply embedded (Rollock et al., 2015). All of this gives rise to an ambivalent sense of belonging.

Fundamental British values (FBV)

My second example of formal membership shot through with messages about non-belonging, is when the state itself appears to be questioning the belonging of some groups in the population. I have argued elsewhere (Vincent, 2019, 2020, see also Miah, 2017; Mondon and Winter, 2017) that 'Muslims' have become homogenised in British political discourse and media representations, and frequently positioned as a group holding conservative, if not retrograde and extremist beliefs. Moreover, racial, ethnic and classed aspects of identity that give rise to differential experiences and identities among those who identify as Muslim have become subsumed in the increasingly hyper-visible religious dimension, assumed to explain all their actions and dispositions (Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 2021; Wesselhoeft, 2017). This homogenisation and ascription of religious meaning exemplifies the affective 'tone' of contemporary social and political policy and rhetoric, its exclusionary messages visible in British policy around immigration, citizenship and integration (Vincent, 2019, 2020). Norton's phrase, the 'politics of hesitation', is relevant here: 'The Liberal and democratic states of our time hesitate before Muslims, hesitate to include them, hesitate to extend those rights and privileges of citizenship' (Norton, 2013: 3, cited in Miah, 2017: 101).

I now turn to discuss how schools in England, through both the Prevent Duty and the requirement for teachers to promote FBV, are entangled in counter-extremist measures which have been widely perceived as challenging Muslim belonging (my argument is developed in more detail in Vincent, 2019).

Briefly, Prevent is the core UK government anti-extremist policy, set up to identify, monitor and intervene with those understood to be receiving and generating messages defined as extremist. The 2015 Prevent Duty explicitly brought schools into this matrix by enshrining a legal responsibility of public organisations to have 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 part 5, chapter 1, s.26). As a result, teachers have compulsory training in order to fulfil their duty to identify and report any colleagues or pupils displaying signs of being 'at risk' of 'being drawn into terrorism including support for extremist ideas that are part of terrorist ideology'; 'extremism' is defined as 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values' (Home Office, 2015: 6). Later versions of Prevent have invoked far-right radicalisation as well as Islamist extremism. Thus, from April 2019 to March 2020, the majority of cases understood to require intervention were far-right radicalisation (43%), followed by Islamist radicalisation (30%) (Home Office, 2020). However, early versions of Prevent and the surrounding publicity very much focused attention on Muslims, highlighting them as suspect (Pilkington and Acik, 2020; see also Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 2021; Vincent, 2019). Similarly, Busher and Jerome (2020) highlight continued teacher concern around a persistent, disproportionate focus on Muslim students in school,

albeit many of their respondents largely understood the Prevent Duty as neutralised, through its re-articulation as ‘safeguarding’ (Lockley-Scott, 2019).

Prevent is a policy of surveillance, while the promotion of FBV can be understood as a ‘softer’ policy designed to win student commitment. The requirement for teachers to promote government-defined ‘fundamental British values’ of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance, was introduced in 2014. An often-quoted speech by then Prime Minister, David Cameron (Cameron, 2014) argued for a more ‘muscular’ liberalism which asserted itself against the illiberal values of ‘others’. The *Daily Mail*, an influential right-wing newspaper, headlined an article on the speech with “‘Be more British”, Cameron tells UK Muslims’ (Walters, 2014), thus setting up a clear dichotomy between ‘Muslims’ and ‘the British’. Here Cameron was invoking the right to ‘grant’ belonging to others (Antonsich, 2010), despite their already-existing citizen status. I have argued previously (Vincent, 2020) that ‘muscular liberalism’ risks illiberalism, by only offering respect and national belonging to minority ethnic groups if they behave in accordance with its demands (Miah, 2017: 75). It defines some people as strangers who have ‘already come too close and been recognised as a body out of place’, *made* strange (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2012: 625).

Thus, my argument here is that FBV is a government strategy intended to address the presumed problem: that there are students – those at risk of Islamist (and far-right) radicalisation – who were in need of having liberal democratic values promoted to them (see Vincent, 2019). A blurring of boundaries between ‘Islamist’ and ‘Muslim’ meant that Muslims were homogenised and positioned as particularly likely to ‘need’ such education on how to be British, and on values claimed to be exclusively ‘British’.

School reactions to FBV

How then did schools react to the requirement to promote FBV? In their analysis of FBV, Winter and Mills (2020) argue that the FBV requirement itself proceeds through disavowal and amnesia about Britain’s history of colonial violence and racialised structural inequalities in the contemporary state. They conclude that:

The British values policy is more than a counter-terrorism strategy, it is a psychic defence mechanism that protects and privileges whiteness; denies the normalised state violence and radical exclusions on which liberal values have been built. (Winter and Mills, 2020: 60)

Thus, non-belonging is promulgated. I also concluded however, that the variety of ways in which schools enacted FBV was important (Vincent, 2019; my research was based on interviews with 56 educators and 49 lesson observations). Since the government guidance was short and vague, schools had considerable space in which to ‘translate’ the requirement in ways that they saw fit. As a result, in some settings, the potential impact of the FBV was diluted. Indeed, in the schools in my research, the majority reaction to the requirement to promote FBV was to construct a response based on already-existing practices in their school (e.g. student councils as an example of promoting democracy). This was a rational reaction given the myriad of policies that contemporary English schools are

required to enact simultaneously. I argue that, although perhaps unintentionally, this meant that schools absorbed and minimised the delivery of any strong messages about FBV, thus diluting and domesticating any new, exclusionary displays of nationalism.

Some schools, however, *did* offer particular, and narrow, representations of Britishness in displays which featured traditional and stereotypical references – the Queen, Churchill, Shakespeare, fish and chips, cups of tea, red buses and telephone boxes (Moncrieffe and Moncrieffe, 2019). I have argued that this strategy, used mainly in primary schools, led to particular people, behaviours and practices being defined as ‘British’ and thus, by implication, other people, behaviours and practices are not ‘British’. The ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 2006) of the nation as presented by such displays is pervaded by White British cultural heritage (Vincent, 2019). It should be noted that such images and displays are now less plentiful – although they can still be found – than was the case when the research was carried out in 2017–18, as increasingly schools have absorbed British values into their existing (but not necessarily inclusionary) practices.

A few teachers in my research openly disliked what they saw as the crude nationalism of such a response. At Southern Primary School (urban area, multi-ethnic, predominantly working-class population), for example, ‘Britishness’ was a topic for discussion but in a more nuanced way than British-themed displays would allow. The aim was that 9- to 10-year-olds would gain an understanding that British culture and language developed as a result of a series of invasions and immigrations, that students in the class will have had different journeys to their city, that Britain is made up of different cultures, religions, social groups, and that sometimes these differences may cause conflict. Children were presented with examples of such conflict and asked to consider how such clashes can be addressed.

Southern’s admirable example was a relatively small part of one year’s curriculum in a school which highlighted contemporary social values and issues. I have previously argued that such an approach – engaging in direct discussion around national belonging, the idea of national values, inequalities, diversity, difference and commonality – can increase students’ sense of belonging to their schools, and also to the wider polity. However, the teachers in the research perceived considerable constraints to discussing social and political issues with their pupils (Vincent, 2019). These factors include the marginal status of citizenship education and Religious Education (which both offer a space for such discussions), the way in which the requirements of high-stakes testing dominate schools’ decision-making regarding curriculum time, and teacher anxiety and uncertainty about how to manage discussions of controversial issues (Vincent, 2019; see also Lockley-Scott, 2019; Revell and Elton-Chalcraft, 2016). Recent indicators – for example the Minister for Equalities’ condemnation of school-based discussion of critical race theory, the Black Lives Matter movement, and decolonising the curriculum (Hansard, 2020; see also Trilling, 2020) seem likely to further deter teachers in English schools from openly discussing contemporary social and political issues and inequalities in the classroom.

So, what can schools do?

I now turn to the question of what may be possible for schools and teachers in order to enhance students' sense of security about their belonging to their school, and their place in the nation-state, as well as developing in students a recognition that others' rights should be similarly recognised.

Of course, issues of injustice, inequality, racism and xenophobia have structural roots that run far beyond individual schools or the education system as a whole. Additionally, when we consider the degree to which the history of schooling is one of being embedded in and perpetuating social and racial inequalities, considering what schools can do to challenge 'institutionalised status sub-ordination' (Fraser, in Pilkington and Acik, 2020: 184) and begin to ameliorate instances of 'non-belonging', may seem hopelessly optimistic. Research in the sociology of education has long documented processes whereby schools are sites where *lack* of belonging is generated, for example, exclusionary practices against some working-class (see e.g. Reay, 2017) and racialised groups (Gillborn, 2008; Gillborn et al., 2017). Parents of children with additional needs have long used the language of 'war' and 'battle' to describe their attempts to access a full education for their children (e.g. Celia et al., 2020; Cole, 2005).

Currently most state institutions in England are required to prioritise results in high-stakes testing with implications for their pedagogy (including grouping strategies and curriculum decisions, Bradbury, 2019; Francis et al., 2019), organisation and teacher–pupil relationships. On the issue of attainment grouping, Francis et al. (2019) note that lower attainment groups tend to be constrained by lower teacher expectations and poor perceptions of their own abilities; and that set allocation is often inflexible and inaccurate, especially with regard to racialised pupils – what the authors refer to as 'allocation bias' (Francis et al., 2019: 157). They conclude that setting has become embedded in the common sense of schooling and 'discourses of "natural" talent, "ability", and meritocracy remain prevalent' (2019: 158). All these factors illustrate spaces and modes of potential exclusion.

However, schools are highly complex institutions that are also central to the social and emotional welfare of many young people (Riley, 2019), and are frequently 'credited as having the power to form ... "connectedness" in society' (Healy, 2020: 121). The work of Kathryn Riley and colleagues, for example, focuses on attempts to disseminate strong messages about belonging to the institution, seeking to generate trust between school staff and students, emphasising pupil agency, opportunities for social and emotional learning, and positive teacher–student relationships (Allen et al., 2020; Riley, 2019; Riley et al., 2020). This work leads us towards a focus on relationships. In terms of pedagogy and the curriculum, some schools in England and elsewhere are taking up particular initiatives and programmes including restorative justice, UNICEF's Rights Respecting schools, and Philosophy for Children, all of which aim to embed respectful adult–child and peer–peer relationships. However, none of these are unproblematic, nor a complete 'solution' to addressing non-belonging (for critical appraisals, see Chetty, 2018; Cremin et al., 2012; Drewery, 2016; Winch, 2020). Such curricular initiatives run the risk of not being fully embedded in school, and/or being seen as the responsibility of one particular staff member; they may have unintended

consequences or they may be repackaged by a school into a more limited, tamer form; they may remain marginal to the stronger influences of performative demands that shape the everyday operation of the school. However, all have the potential to signal the importance of respectful relations and student agency likely to enhance a sense of belonging (Riley, 2019). Thus I argue that there is the potential for schools' to develop educative spaces in which students can consider the recognition claims of different groups, and discuss ways of responding to the clash of such claims between different perspectives, without resorting to defensive othering (Patrick, 2016).

In addition to in-school processes, the relationship between a school and its students' parents requires consideration. The research with welfare claimants referred to earlier cited 'erosion of solidarity' (Pemberton et al., 2016: 34) and a 'sense of insecurity, mistrust and hostility' (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013: 301). I argue that developing bonds, a sense of a shared stake between individuals and local, public institutions, encourages some degree of shared identification (Mason, 2018). Schools – and especially primary schools as sites that parents regularly visit – are a shared resource, a space of mutuality, although not often considered in these terms. In earlier work, with [Sarah Neal and Humera Iqbal], we suggested that schools provide 'public sites of affective and invested social interactions' (Vincent et al., 2018), through the mundane moments of slight, but repeated, social interaction between staff and families, and across different families in the playground and at school events. 'Not only do [primary schools] affectively stretch beyond their institutional boundaries into their surrounding communities and localities, but they are the place of formation of children's identities, of future citizens' (Vincent et al., 2018: 208). Investing in these processes encourages a recognition of the legitimate claim of 'other' parents to be sharing the public resource of the school, developing what Amin refers to as 'the habits of negotiating shared space' (Amin, 2012: 71). This approach emphasises the importance of how we inhabit and live institutions and the key role of inclusive social relationships both within a school, and between a school and students' families (Warren et al., 2009; Vincent, 2017). The development of social relationships between teachers and students, students themselves, and teachers and parents that aim to develop recognition and respect might go some way, albeit a small and partial way, to address the non-belonging described by the two research projects referenced here. As Healy notes, mutual recognition does not require a 'deep shared identity', but rather that each party 'accept the other as a fellow citizen concerned with the pursuit of at least some common ends achieved through living together' (Healy, 2020: 8).

Conclusion

This article's contribution is to develop a fuller consideration of 'belonging', by identifying some examples from recent research of the 'boundary maintenance' signalling the limits of belonging for particular groups, and to consider the potential of schools to counter non-belonging through initiatives and practices that centre social relations, including those that reach outside the school buildings to students' families. I emphasise that belonging operates on multiple levels, involving relationships within local spaces and institutions (such as schools), as well as formal recognition of citizenship belonging.

The affective dimension is key, meaning that citizenship alone may be insufficient for full belonging. To illustrate this, I give the examples of Black middle-class parents. Successful and rooted, they nonetheless felt a lack of social space, of a recognition of their identities as Black *and* middle class. Their awareness of profound inequalities within the education system prompted them to draw on classed resources to mount a defensive engagement, in order to win recognition of themselves and their children by majority White power holders. The second example, drawn from research on the promotion of FBV in schools, illustrates the way in which the state, through the promulgation of policies such as the Prevent Duty and FBV, appears to question the national belonging of children defined as Muslim. I conclude that for non-white British and religious but not Christian identities, full belonging to the nation is precarious. Thus class, race and religion intersect to offer a narrow interpretation of who belongs in Britain.

I recognise, of course, that schools cannot be expected to effectively address deep-rooted, structural inequalities, and that a focus on social relations alone is insufficient for tackling such inequalities. Therefore, the measures proposed here can only ever be a small and fragile set of responses for three reasons: developing full emotional belonging to institutions and to the nation requires political will and economic action (Askins, 2016: 517). Additionally, schools can act to reinforce social inequalities, an effect long established, but intensified by a marketised, performative form of contemporary schooling (Ball, 2018); and, lastly, feeling part of a school does not automatically translate to full national belonging and membership. However, I argue that a sense of belonging to and within a school is not only valuable in its own right, but also that there is a connection between a sense of belonging to a school, a local public institution, and to the wider polity. Schools are public institutions, and the relationships between and across teachers, students and families, the school's rootedness in a locality, can go some way to develop what Husband et al. refer to as a 'substantive civility' (2016: 235; citing Boyd, 2006) – a recognition of the shared rights and equal status of others involved in the school, 'where the daily rights and obligations of a shared citizenry are enacted in practice' (Husband et al., 2016: 235). a process described by Askins as 'a quiet politics' (2016: 471).


Declaration of conflicting interests

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

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The project 'The Educational Strategies of the Black Middle Classes' conducted by Carol Vincent, Nicola Rollock, Stephen Ball and David Gillborn (2009-2011) was funded by the ESRC (ESRC RES-062-23-1880). The project 'Children's and Adults' Friendships across Social Class and Ethnic Difference' conducted by Carol Vincent, Sarah Neal and Humera Iqbal (2013-2015) was funded by the ESRC (ES/K002384/1). The project 'Cohering the Community? School Policy and Practices around Community Cohesion and British Values' was conducted by Carol Vincent (2016-2018) and funded by The Leverhulme Trust (MRF-2015-170).

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Notes

1. The ‘fundamental British values’ (FBV) are defined by the government as: democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance (DfE, 2014). As such, they are examples of values held in many liberal democracies. Schools are inspected by national inspectors, Ofsted, on their promotion of these values.
2. Free school meals (FSM) are available to students whose families receive particular benefits, and schools receive an extra sum of money for each students who claims FSM or has done so in the last six years, known as the pupil premium.
3. All names of schools and research participants are pseudonyms.
4. The Windrush scandal broke when it came to light in 2018 that the government had deported or threatened to deport, Commonwealth citizens who came over (legally) to Britain from the Caribbean in the 1950s and 1960s, but who did not possess the official paperwork to prove their right to remain here, despite having lived and worked in the UK for decades. See: <https://www.jcwi.org.uk/windrush-scandal-explained>
5. It should be noted that other respondents saw Patois as an important part of their identity (Rollock et al., 2015).

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