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Religious Diversity: Models of Inclusion for Schools in England

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Religious Diversity: Models of Inclusion for Schools in England

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Abstract

This paper discusses two educational and religious incidents featured in the British press in recent few years. The first refers to a pupil who took her school to court claiming she had been excluded from school for wearing the *jilbab* (full length coat-like garment). The second incident relates to the issue raised by Michael Reiss as to whether when questions of Creationism and intelligent design are raised by pupils in science lessons, it would be appropriate for the science teacher to discuss them with those pupils rather than dismiss Creationism.

In Britain, Asian and white British youth often live 'parallel lives' and this has serious implications for the cohesion of British society. Siddiqui (2007) raised the issue of the segregation of communities and made a strong case for inclusion that begins with the academic but has implications for the communal and social domains. This paper suggests that there is a possibility for a peaceful coexistence of different epistemologies supported by incidental reference as well as by structured comparison. The school is a place where a pupil should have a sense of belonging, where they can 'tap their faith performatively' both to develop their own learning and to contribute to the learning of others.

Résumé

Ce document traite de deux incidents éducatifs et religieux apparus dans la presse britannique au cours des dernières années. Le premier fait référence à une élève qui a traduit son école en justice affirmant qu'elle a été excluée de l'école pour avoir porté le *jilbab* (tenue toute en longueur pareille à un manteau). Le second incident mentionne un problème soulevé par Michael Reiss quant à savoir, lorsque les élèves en cours de sciences soulèvent des questions sur le Créationnisme et la conception intellectuelle, s'il ne serait pas approprié pour le professeur de sciences d'en discuter avec ces élèves plutôt que de renier le Créationnisme.

En Grande Bretagne, les jeunes Asiatiques et Anglais souvent mènent des "vies parallèles" et ceci a de sérieuses implications pour la cohésion de la société anglaise. Siddiqui (2007) a soulevé la question de ségrégation des communautés et a fortement plaidé la cause pour l'inclusion qui commence dans le milieu universitaire, mais a des implications dans les domaines communautaires et sociaux. Cet article suggère qu'il existe la possibilité d'aboutir à la pacifique coexistence de différentes épistémologies soutenues autant par des références fortuites que par des comparaisons structurées. L'école est un lieu où un élève doit ressentir un sentiment d'appartenance, un endroit dans lequel ils doivent pouvoir "pratiquer leur foi ouvertement", et pour développer leur propre apprentissage, et pour contribuer à l'apprentissage des autres.

I begin this paper with two educational and religious incidents that have featured in the British press over the last few years. The wearing of the *hijab* by Muslim pupils is common in many English public schools both primary and secondary. However, in 2005, Shabina Begum, a pupil from Denbigh High School, Luton, took her school to court claiming she had been excluded from school for wearing the *jilbab* (full length coat-like garment), an item of clothing she was told contravened the school's uniform policy. The case eventually reached the House

of Lords. Here it was acknowledged that the girl's right to manifest her religion had been 'interfered' with. It was also recognised that the school had taken immense pains to devise a uniform policy that was inclusive and respectful of Muslim beliefs and was eventually ruled that the school was best placed to consider whether or not the wearing of the *jilbab* should be permitted on the basis of the repercussions that this action might have on other pupils in the community (*R (Begum) v Headteacher* 2006).

The second incident also has a religious element but the controversy was of a different nature. Learning about creation stories, most notably the Six Day Creation, has long been part of religious education syllabuses in England, but in September 2008 Professor Michael Reiss, director of education at the August Science Body, the Royal Society, caused a furore in the science world by arguing in a public address that should questions of Creationism and intelligent design be raised by pupils in science lessons, then it would be appropriate for the science teacher to discuss them with those pupils rather than dismiss. He argued that the science teacher should treat these positions 'not as a misconception but as a worldview', and explain how they differ from scientific theory. Scientific colleagues accused him of backing the teaching of Creationism in science and of having brought the Royal Society into disrepute. The outcry eventually led to Reiss' resignation (Smith and Henderson 2008).

Both of these cases explore the limits of the inclusion of pupils' religion in school. They show that after three decades of discussion about the degree to which the religion of pupils in an increasingly pluralistic society should be accommodated within school routines and practice or provide content for the curriculum, the subject still remains controversial in England and the situation fluid .

By beginning with these two instances I also want to highlight two different forms of inclusion that are involved: the first case relates to the accommodation of *outward manifestations* of the pupil's religious identity, the second to welcoming the expression of *their beliefs and worldviews* as part of the learning process, it relates to religious epistemologies.

WHO I AM: IDENTITY-BASED INCLUSION
Elsewhere (Ipgrave, 2010) I have described two different types of inclusion in English schools, *identity-based* inclusion and *epistemology-based* inclusion, recognising at the same time that there is a close relation between them. The first is concerned with questions of 'who I am' and the second with 'how I understand reality'. The models of inclusion currently adopted in most English schools are identity-based; they are the products of antiracist and multicultural movements

within the English education system, designed to counter discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity and to celebrate cultural diversity within the school. *Identity-based* inclusion can be justified in educational and societal terms as follows: it is important for pupils to participate fully in school and learning if they are to achieve well and go on to play a full part as confident and valuable members of society; if they perceive a conflict between their school and their religious identities they might feel alienated, their self-esteem could suffer, and they may underachieve or disengage from learning altogether. This is a standard argument for multicultural education in general and for the recognition and inclusion of elements of Islamic culture in particular because of concerns about the underachievement of young people of Pakistani, and Bangladeshi heritage. The link between school recognition of pupils' cultural identity and academic performance was expressed in terms of 'belonging' by Babar Mirza, director of Education of the Muslim Nida Trust:

> 'If a child feels as if they don't belong, then it will affect their performance. It doesn't have to be Muslim kids, it could be your average Joe Blogg. They switch off.' (Butt 2008)

It is an argument used by the Muslim Council of Britain in its guidance manual for schools, *Towards Greater Understanding: Meeting the Needs of Muslim Pupils in State Schools:*

> Muslim pupils' faith and cultural heritage should be affirmed and developed positively within schools to contribute to promoting the value and importance of education and to overcoming barriers to learning and achievement (MCB 2007 p14)

Arguments for the inclusion of pupils' religion in school life are frequently couched in terms of achievement, but it is undoubtedly the case that worries about the segregation of many Muslim communities from the indigenous white population. Related concerns about the radicalisation of British Muslim youth, and a corresponding rise in Islamophobia among other sectors of the population have added urgency to the education for citizenship agenda. One strand of this agenda is the promotion of respect for the variety of community cultures and their inclusion within schools so that minority groups might be encouraged to feel part of the wider society. It is a way of challenging racism on one side and extremism on another. One of the arguments used in the Begum case was that the *jilbab* was associated with extremist views. To give added enforcement to the requirements to educate for citizenship, the Education and Inspection Act 2006 (c.40) placed a duty on school governing bodies to promote 'community cohesion' within their schools and on school inspectors to report on their

progress in doing so. For reasons of achievement and community cohesion, then, concern about Muslim children and young people in particular has prompted and still leads debates on the inclusion of pupils' religion in school.

Within an identity-based approach to inclusion I have identified two stances: *permissive* inclusion and *affirmative* inclusion (Ipgrave, 2010). *Permissive* inclusion allows pupils to manifest their religious identity within schools, or at least does not set up barriers to that manifestation[21]. There is a link here to Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights which states that everyone has a right in public and private, to manifest his (or her) religion or belief, and which was indeed the legal basis for Begum's case against her school. However, school policies on religious practices have generally not been shaped by reference to law, they have often been arrived at through consultation with parents and community representatives some of whom may serve on school governing bodies (Haw 1998 p66). This was certainly the process followed by Denbigh High School as reported in the Begum case:

> In 1993 the school appointed a working party to re-examine its dress code. The governors consulted parents, students, staff and the Imams of the three local mosques. There was no objection to the shalwar kameeze, and no suggestion that it failed to satisfy Islamic requirements. The governors approved a garment specifically designed to ensure that it satisfied the requirement of modest dress for Muslim girls. (*Begum v Headteacher* 2006, 7)

The kind of concessions made in relation to Muslim students include providing opportunities and spaces for: Muslim prayer, allowing students to attend the local mosque for Friday prayer, making arrangements that enable pupils to observe the Ramadan fast, allowing students to have time off school for religious festivals such as Diwali or Eid, adapting the school uniform policy so Muslim girls are able to wear trousers or *shalwar kameez* and *hijab*. Though recent reports from Muslim bodies have drawn attention to instances of ignorance or lack of sensitivity to Muslim students' needs [22], allowances for religious observance have long been standard practice in many English schools with Muslim pupils and, in the foreword to their guidance for schools, members of the Muslim Council of Britain recognised that 'many of our schools have a cherished tradition of fostering an inclusive ethos which values and addresses the differences and needs of the communities they serve' (MCB 2007 p7).

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[21] Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights states that everyone has a right in public and private, to manifest his (or her) religion or belief, only subject to limitations as prescribed by law and in the interests of public safety, public order, health or morals, or for protection of rights and freedom of others. Evans (2001)
[22] A recent article in the Guardian records previous reports from the Muslim Council of Britain and the Islamic Human Rights Commission (Butt 2008)

More research on the impact of religious accommodation on pupil achievement is needed; however, a local study among high achieving Pakistani-heritage boys in schools in the north of England (Choudry 2004) indicates that allowing the practice and manifestation of their religion in school can have the desired positive effect on achievement. The boys identified the freedom they were given to express their Muslim identity in school in a positive way through prayer arrangements and links with the local mosque (the fact that they were 'given the opportunity to be Muslims') as a key factor in their academic success. Positive recognition of their religious identity provided the context in which they could apply Islamic self-discipline and a high view of the pursuit of knowledge to their school education (Richardson & Wood p40). Similarly study of schools in Lambeth (South London) that had been successful in raising the achievement levels of their African heritage pupils identified as one important reason for this success, the fact that 'the strong faith backgrounds of families is recognized and supported' (Demie and McLean, 2007 p430).

An *affirmative* stance moves beyond the *permissive* by adopting a proactive approach to the incorporation of some aspects of pupils' home cultures in school events and the curriculum. All schools are required to include recognition of the nation's and local community's cultural diversity in their life and curriculum. Reports and guidance on the achievement of minority ethnic students, (DfES, 2003; Ofsted, 2004), have consistently stressed the importance to motivation and achievement of students seeing their own cultures and histories reflected in the curriculum. A direct link is made between a culturally responsive curriculum and achievement in the influential 2003 report from the Department for Education and Skills, *Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic Pupils*;

> Both the content of the curriculum and the skill with which it is delivered are key to engaging children and young people in learning. This can be particularly important for children and young people from minority ethnic groups who may not see their culture, history and values reflected in their school experience. Teachers need the confidence, competence and materials to use the existing flexibility within the curriculum to make subjects more relevant to pupils' own experience and to reflect their cultural heritage. (DfES 2003, 2.15)

A website, *Respect for All* was set up to provide resources to support teachers in this task. The celebration of religious diversity forms a significant part of this general cultural celebration influenced as it was by the coming together of the multicultural movement in schools and the Religious Studies movement in universities. A multi faith religious education in which pupils of different faiths

(and none) learn about each other's traditions in class developed, supported by a statutory requirement (in the 1988 Education Reform Act) to take into account 'the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' alongside Christianity (ERA Ch.1, 8). Other curriculum subjects are used to promote awareness of diversity and to recognise and value the culture (including the religious culture) of their pupils. An audit of education of Bangladeshi students, for example, investigated how each subject addressed cultural diversity and Bangladeshi heritage. In one school with a high proportion of Bangladeshi pupils RE and PSHE[23] provided opportunities to discuss family and community life, issues of racism and stereotyping; in mathematics there was work on Islamic patterns and on the contributions of Muslim scholars to the discipline; the geography curriculum included a study unit on Bangladesh, History included a study of the movement of Bangladeshi families into the local area, and in English a study of language change provided opportunities for pupils to read and speak in Bengali and Sylheti (Ofsted, 2004). In religious education older students can take Islamic studies as a component of public examination courses.

Religion is often included in school life outside religious education lessons. School Gospel choirs were found to have a motivating influence on students in the Lambeth schools (Demie and McLean, 2007 p421). Recognitionofdifferent religious festivals is incorporated into the school calendar and observed, in primary schools in particular, through celebrations, parties, plays and activity days. In addition, English schools are required by law to set aside some time each school day for an act of collective worship, commonly known as an 'assembly'. Many secondary schools do not achieve this, but a research review commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills into *Diversity and Citizenship in the Curriculum* found that assemblies were often used to deliver and reinforce positive diversity messages and incorporated elements from a variety of different religious and cultural traditions (Maylor and Read 2007, p71). The table below shows a fairly typical example of a multicultural, multi-faith assembly programme where the overriding desire to include all is very evident and results in some strange combinations of themes.

Week beginning	Monday	Thursday
25th September	Ramadan	Gandhi

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[23] In English schools pupils are required to have classes covering Personal Social and Health Education.

2nd October	100 Black Britons	Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur
16th October	World Food Day	Festivals: Diwali; 'Id ul Fitr
30th October	All Saints Day	Crowning of Haile Selassie
20th November	Universal Children's Day	Evolution Day – publication of Origin of Species
27th November	Freddie Mercury (Farookh Bulsara)	St Andrew's Day – UK saints and flags

There are some problems with identity-based models of inclusion, however. One difficulty is that the school ends up defining the religious culture of the students both within the *permissive* stance where school authorities decide what shall or shall not be permitted (*hijab* is permitted but not *jilbab*), and in the *affirmative* stance where schools select which aspects of a religion they are willingto promote. In attempts to represent a full range of diversity, schools sometimes end up offering to their pupils the kind of eclectic mix of cultural references found in the table above.

A 2007 review of education for diversity in England raised another issue: namely, the importance of getting a balance between recognition of distinct community identities and the promotion of a collective identity that includes all in the national narrative (Maylor and Read, 2007). It found that few students had experienced lessons where they talked about British people as a whole or about things that people in Britain share. As one student said 'we don't learn about different people in Britain, we just learn about different cultures' (p7). In a position paper on education in the UK the Association of Muslim Social Scientists raised the question of the distortion of the curriculum by an approach to education 'based on the educational equivalent of proportional representation for the various cultural groups';

> We feel that a better strategy is to promote in schools the best education in each given field. If in some areas the material happens to derive from one particular cultural, ethnic, racial or religious group, so be it. (AMSS 2004 2.2.6 p14)

These arguments are part of the current questioning of the principles and practices of the uncritical multiculturalism that has for decades dominated educational discourse and practice in relation to the cultural diversity of society. Stephen May's book *'Critical Multiculturalism: Rethinking Multicultural and Antiracist Education'* fed the debate among educationalists (May 1999), and

Trevor Philips, Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, popularised the issue in April 2004 when he argued that the term 'multiculturalism' belonged to a bygone era and should be scrapped in favour of the promotion of community cohesion and a sense of Britishness (BBC, 2004).

The to-and-fro movement of the Begum case as it journeyed from High Court to Court of Appeals to the House of Lords illustrates the difficulties of a *permissive* stance towards religious practices. How are school managers and teachers to know which requests are reasonable and truly linked to religious obligation and which are personal preference or cultural practice, and is this a valid distinction to make? The school was commended during the hearing of the case for its respect for the 'cultural and religious diversity' of its pupils and yet the arguments against the wearing of the *jilbab* included fears that it might lead to a fragmentation of the school's population of Muslim girls into smaller dress code groups and that the wearing of the *jilbab* would act counter to the common school identity that had been developed through the wearing of a common school uniform (*R (Begum) v Headteacher* 2006). The whole issue of which identities and which expressions of identity are supported in school is problematic. The judgement in the Begum case recognised the contextual complexities and variety of local and personal factors that needed to be taken into consideration, hence the conclusion that ultimately the decision should be made at school level and that the case should not set a general precedent for the wearing or banning of the *jilbab* in English schools.

Another problem with identity-based inclusion, *affirmative* and *permissive* stances, is that a limited understanding of faith as little more than a marker of group identity, can lead to an oversimplified view of religions as bounded homogeneous cultural groupings with insufficient attention given to their internal diversity, to the permeability of faith boundaries or to the individual, developmental journey of faith of each child. In her 1998 study of Muslim girls, Kaye Haw argued that the accommodation of particular practices and customs can lead to a reification of cultural stereotypes that do not allow for complexity and change (Haw 1998, p67). We have seen how school policies on accommodation are often reached through negotiation with parents and communities, but the Islam that these adults espouse and particular practices they value may not be in keeping with the young people's own understanding of their faith, especially as they advance through their teenage years. Recent research with young Muslims traces a move away by many from the cultural practices of parents or from what they regard as their parents' compromises with British culture (Haw, 2009, Haw 2010). The move may be towards more western cultural expressions or towards a stricter, 'purified' Islam. Shabina Begum's

decision to wear the *jilbab,* although it had not previously been the practice in her family, is an example of the latter. The South Asian female students in Tahir Abbas's research are beginning to identify strongly with their religion but seeking to discover a 'proper' and a 'beautiful' Islam rather than the apparently outmoded religious and cultural practices of their parents (Abbas 2004 p138-9, p103). As they incorporate accommodations of pupils' religion into their structures and practices it is important for schools not to make assumptions on their students' behalf.

HOW I VIEW REALITY: EPISTEMOLOGY-BASED INCLUSION

Having established a tradition of inclusion and responsiveness towards pupils' religion, English schools should not lose heart because of the continuing difficulties entailed. The English education system claims to focus on the 'whole child' and requires teachers and managers to organise the school and the curriculum around the diverse needs and also the knowledge bases, aptitudes and aspirations of the pupils, it cannot, therefore, ignore the power of religion in the lives of so many. A 2006 report from the Department for education and Skills (DfES, 2006) based on research with a sample of 15,450 school students, revealed that, 55% of Indians (Hindu, Sikh and Muslim), 71% of Black Africans (predominantly Christian but also Muslim) and 85% of Pakistani and Bangladeshis (almost all Muslim) held religion to be *very important* to their way of life, and a significant additional number in these and other ethnic groups assigned to it a 'fairly important role'.

As different generations of these groups and religious students from the indigenous population move through the education system care has to be taken not to pathologise the young people's religion as though it were a form of learning difficulty for which special provision needs to be made, but instead to free up the potential their religion offers to enable them to flourish as human beings, and also to recognise ways in which the faith that is so important to these young people can contribute to the rest of the community. The concern in short is to recognise the religion to be what Habermas describes as 'source of energy that the person who has faith taps performatively and this nurtures his or her entire life', (Habermas 2006, p8).

This energy and its direct relationship with motivation and learning can be recognised in the words of the African heritage teenager who declared 'God is central to my life and purpose' (Demie and McLean 2007, p423), of the Bangladeshi heritage girl who acknowledged that 'without Allah's help and guidance I would not have achieved so much' (Abbas 2004, p102), of the Pakistani heritage girl who found that 'believing in religion gives you faith, you

look up to something, you wake up with a different reason'[24], the 10 year old who found his wisdom in prayer, 'when you pray you get more wise'[25] and the 18 year old who found in her faith the sense of selfhood and calm needed to help her through her vital end of school examinations;

> It makes you feel you know who you are... Like because I'm in the middle of all my exams ... and it really got to me at one point and it just got on top of me and I really got upset about it but I found myself when I was praying afterwards and I was asking for guidance and I was looking for a way to resolve it, I found that I found it in a sense and it was like – it's hard to explain but I felt kind of reassurance within myself.[26]

These words accord with the findings of Cheron Byfield's study of the effect of black pupils' religion on their educational achievement (in the UK and the US); she uses the term 'religious capital' not in sense of social or cultural capital but to describe how the students' interconnectedness with God has provided them with a sense of direction and enabled them to remain focussed in the face of a variety of pressures (Byfield, 2008). An indication of the positive effect that this religious energy can have on pupil achievement is the consistently high academic performance over the last few years, of students at Islamic schools in Britain, a success that Tahir Alam, education spokesman for the Muslim Council of Britain, attributed to the distinct ethos of the schools that 'use the children's faith and heritage as primary motivators to provide the backdrop for their education and behaviour' (Cassidy, 2006). A question to be asked is whether schools that do not have a designated religious character, are also able to 'tap' this religious source of energy for the benefit of the large number of children from religious families in their care[27]. It would be false to draw too sharp a boundary between outward manifestation and inner faith (they are necessarily interconnected one being the expression of the other). Nevertheless it is helpful for our purposes to make a distinction between the observable phenomena of religion that signal identity categories and are commonly accommodated and celebrated in English schools, and the believer's religious faith understood not as a thing in itself but as that through which understanding of self, the world and everything is experienced. This religious faith includes the experiential and the theological (this is how I know God, this is what I know of

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[24] Quote from participant in European Commission-funded study of religion in the lives and schooling of young people across Europe: Religion in Education: A contribution to dialogue or a factor of conflict in transforming societies of European Countries. For results of the English qualitative survey see Ipgrave and McKenna (2008)

[25] Quote from as yet unpublished research into West African children's concepts of ability

[26] From current research project into the attitudes of 13 to 16 years old students to religious diversity

[27] In 2007 only 1,770 Muslim school children in England attended maintained Muslim schools out of an estimated population of 376,340 Muslim children (DCSF 2007)

God and His activity) and is what Michael Reiss describes as 'a worldview' or 'an entire way of understanding reality' (Reiss, 2010). This distinction enables us to differentiate between the two types of inclusion that are the subject of the article: *identity-based* and *epistemology-based*. The second of the two incidents with which the article began, involved a plea by Reiss that pupils' religious worldview should be acknowledged within the science lesson. The particular topic in relation to which he suggested pupils' religious perspectives might be included is the fraught area of evolutionary biology. Research recently undertaken into English teenagers' perspectives on role of religion in schools (Ipgrave, McKenna 2008) and on attitudes to religious diversity (as yet unpublished) provides some evidence of the way in which the application of the methods of school science to religion leads to a polarisation of views. Some of the young people rejected the idea of God on the basis that there was no proof, no evidence of his existence, that no one had ever seen him. Others rejected some aspects of school science on the basis that it contradicts religious truths or it is very hard to reconcile the two.

> When you get older you either believe in [religion] a lot more or you believe in it a lot less because you get taught about science and evolution and stuff like that so that'll move you away from God created the world. (boy with no religion age 14)
> It's harder to get on with atheists you know because if you know that like life starts from God they bring up some crap like we're from animals (Muslim boy age 15)
> We should learn about CREATION not the BIG BANG!!! (Christian girl age 14)
> If evolution actually did happen then we would have come from monkeys and we would have looked a bit like monkeys, but we actually don't and in Genesis it says that man was made in the image of God so if were meant to be apes or monkeys then why didn't we stay monkeys or apes? (Christian boy age 15)

This dismissal of religion, on the one hand, and distrust of science on the other is exactly the situation Reiss sought to avoid by giving some space for students to express creationist ideas in science lessons. From his 20 years experience teaching school biology he had come to the conclusion that if students are given the impression that their deeply held convictions are wrong then they are not going to learn much science. His position is very similar to that of another science educationalist, Derek Hodson who, in an article on 'critical multiculturalism' in science teaching, reported from his experience as a science teacher how sometimes even some of the brightest students seem resistant to the

assimilation of new ideas (Hodson 1999, p223) when they appear to be in conflict with the forms of knowledge they have assimilated from their cultural (he could also have written 'religious') background. Reiss' solution, in spite of the controversy his words caused, was very modest;

> Although it is unlikely that this will help them resolve any conflict they experience between science and their beliefs, good teaching can help students to manage it - and to learn more science. (Reiss, 2010)

He wanted all his students to find science lessons interesting and intellectually challenging 'without their being a threat' (ibid.), and to teach them not only about the theory of evolution but, by explaining the differences between religious and scientific understanding, about how science is done, how scientific knowledge accumulates, 'the limitations of science and the ways in which scientific knowledge differs from other forms of knowledge' (ibid.). It is a question of epistemologies.

Reiss recommends and practices explicit teaching about different forms of knowledge. In his book *Teaching about Scientific Origins* Reiss describes an exercise with his undergraduate trainee science teachers, in which he encourages them to think about the relationship between religion and science and to represent their thoughts in drawings (Jones and Reiss 2007, p200). They produce a variety of models using circles for the areas of knowledge, some where the two are totally separate, others where they are overlapping or one circle contains the other. These are explicit representations of relationships implicit in an activity I undertook with a class of 10 year old Muslim children (Stern, 2006). They were asked to write down their understanding of how the world began. Among the varied responses there were purely scientific narratives of explosions and clouds of dust, purely religious narratives, 'Allah said 'Be' and the world began', and explanations that combined something of the scientific and religious:

> The world was made from space. The first animals were dinosaurs. After a long time all the dinosaurs died and God made Adam and then He made Hawa.

This collection of beginnings provided rich material for drawing comparisons between different kinds of knowing, for exploring the concept of scientific 'theory' and Islamic distinctions between 'revealed' and 'acquired' knowledge. Rather than a clash of epistemologies there was recognition of the existence of different ways of knowing.

So far the focus has been on science as the most obvious point where there might be epistemological conflict; science and religion are often locked into a debate that is of little benefit to either discipline. Science is not necessarily a problem for the recognition of pupils' religion in class, indeed Reiss interpreted

his position as a defense of science 'the strongest argument for teaching anything about religion in science class … is that it helps students better to understand science' (Jones and Reiss 2007, p200). However, there does appear to be an issue for education in the colonisation of the wider curriculum by particular reason and evidence-based epistemologies to the exclusion of others. This is an issue that has for a long time been the subject of Islamic scholars' critique of English education, most notably the writing of Syed Ali Ashraf, who wrote of the importance in education of recognising 'the presence of something more than ordinary reason as the main source of cognition' (Ashraf, 1994, p216), and it has recently being tackled from a Christian theological perspective, especially as it relates to the teaching of religious education itself (Felderhof et al. 2007). The argument these critics make is that the positivism that has come to dominate higher education has spilled over into the classroom promoting a secular view of religion as a sociological phenomenon that bears little relation to the religious understanding of those for whom faith is important.

Ataullah Siddiqui's 2007 survey of Islam in Higher Education articulates the issue clearly for this sector (Siddiqui, 2007). Siddiqui finds that a clash of epistemologies has contributed to a separation between empirically-based, objective studies of Islamic traditions in the established universities and a more religious, faith-focused approach to Islamic Studies for Muslim students in Islamic centres. What he says is applicable to school as well as university contexts:

> In a pluralist society, like England, it is imperative that we recognise the 'otherness' of the other. This means recognising others' self definition and the way they approach various subjects and disciplines. Plurality should exist not only at social and communal levels but also at an intellectual and academic level. The understanding of a faith-based approach may pose some challenges to secularised worldviews, but to ignore and marginalise it on the assumption of an intellectual superiority that the 'other' considers unconvincing and unfounded, does not solve and problems – worse, it can breed resentment.' (Siddiqui 2007, p36).

In his use of the terminology 'parallel universes', Siddiqui is perhaps being deliberately provocative as the words echo the conclusions of an influential report into community tensions in northern towns (Home Office 2001), that concluded that Asian and white British young people often lived 'parallel lives' and that this had concerning implications for the cohesion of British society. So Siddiqui has raised the issue of the segregation of communities and made a strong case for an inclusion that begins with the academic but has implications for the communal and social.

Muslim students with higher education interviewed for this survey did not argue for a replacement of 'secular' (historical and political) aspects of learning, but that these should be incorporated alongside theological aspects (Siddiqui 2007, p59). Reiss's strategy is to throw into relief one form of knowledge by locating it alongside another, and the educational value of this is convincingly argued, but there is also the possibility of a peaceful coexistence of different epistemologies supported by incidental reference as well as by structured comparison. To give one example from primary education; an independent Islamic primary school I worked with on one research project (Jackson et al. 2009) has a vegetable garden that is used to teach the children about plant growth and where their food comes from, but which is also viewed as an opportunity to learn 'about the patterns of nature Allah has created and how He sustains and provides for us'. Making this kind of connection (though using 'God' rather than 'Allah') would not have been uncommon in English community[28] primary schools fifty years ago, but in a religiously plural and also secular society teachers are rightly concerned not to impose particular religious understandings on their pupils. However, their concern not to make the assumption that all their students have a religious worldview does not require them to act as though none of them has.. A carefully worded and targeted question could invite pupils to contribute religious as well as scientific perspectives to the class's learning and generate the excitement that many children exhibit when talking about their faith without compromising the integrity of the rest of the class or indeed of the teacher.

The use of an example from a 'faith school' here is deliberate, for the experience of these schools in relating their teaching to the religious perspectives of their pupils, means that the better ones among them can be sources of ideas for schools working with students of religious commitment outside the 'faith' sector, always with the proviso that the strategies these latter employ do not include the transmission of religious beliefs from the school to its pupils and do not disadvantage those students who do not share the religious perspectives of their peers. Following the example of Reiss's science lesson, an epistemologically inclusive school recognises the potential for tension between different conceptualisations of the world and makes allowance for different forms of knowledge to sit side by side within the delivery of the curriculum. Students need to engage in the construction and acquisition of the factual and conceptual base of the various school disciplines. In addition, they are invited to bring other conceptualisations of the world into the classroom and share experiential and theological (as also philosophical and ethical) perspectives on the subjects of

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[28] The term 'community' indicates those schools that do not have a designated religious character

their learning. An epistemology-based inclusion *allows* students to manifest their religion not just in what they wear and what they eat but also in what they say and what they think; it is thus *permissive.* It also introduces students to a variety of forms of knowledge within their learning (to Mickiewiczian or Marxian views of history, for example; to theological as well as sociological portrayals of religious traditions), and so is *affirmative,* but it needs to entail more than both these stances. Affirmative methods are limited by teachers' choices and perceptions, and are therefore not fully inclusive. Permissive methods may allow and tolerate but do not necessarily listen and engage. As I have argued elsewhere (Ipgrave, 2010 p19-20), a truly inclusive approach requires a degree of *reflexivity* on the part of those (teachers and students) who do not share the religious views of some other class members. Listening to the voices of religious pupils does not require the unseating of the existing views of the non-religious but it can involve them in considering the implications of a religiously-formed interpretation of reality and ways in which their own understandings might be enhanced by interaction with it. After all, the religious perspectives provide another way of viewing the universally applicable question of what it means to be human, and, as the Archbishop of Canterbury suggested in a conference address to the 2006 National Anglican Schools Conference (Williams 2006), others can still be enriched by the religious 'vision of human dignity and possibility and of our place in the whole of a complex natural order' even if they do not make that particular vision their own. The conversations between pupil and pupil, and teacher and pupil that this reflexivity requires will give a signal to the religious pupil that the school is a place where they belong, where they can 'tap their faith performatively' both to develop their own learning and to contribute to the learning of others.

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