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Teachers' constructions of mutual respect and tolerance through the lens of Religious Education: fundamental British values – propaganda or longstanding aims of RE?

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ABSTRACT

This study stems from our interest in policy requirement from the Department for Education in England that instructs all teachers to promote a set of fundamental British values, including mutual respect and tolerance for people of different faiths and beliefs. Working from a social constructionist epistemological standpoint, the first author collected data to explore how seven Religious Education (RE) practitioners who work in three contrasting secondary schools in England construct mutual respect and tolerance. Data analysis used critical discursive psychology, a form of discourse analysis, to facilitate nuanced and critical insights. Analysis reveals that the teachers are not critical of mutual respect and tolerance in terms of their status as FBV. Instead, they re-located tolerance and mutual respect as part of the RE curriculum area and emphasised how these values cohered with their own personal values. Overall, teachers construct tolerance as a minimalistic form of acceptance, with mutual respect positioned as a preferable concept. This has implications firstly for teachers' comfort with disagreement, secondly for children and young people's responses to diversity and thirdly for limiting the educational potential of RE as a vehicle for exploring different faiths and beliefs.

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

This study focuses on mutual respect and tolerance, two of a set of fundamental British values (FBV), which all teachers in England are instructed to promote, as set out in the Teachers' Standards and subsequent policy guidance. This research addresses a gap by critically exploring the meaning of two of the concepts within the statement of FBV in detail, building on and extending prior research which has tended to focus on either the nationalistic or securitising elements of the requirement. We focused on how RE teachers construct mutual respect and tolerance because we were interested in how practitioners, who may see the promotion of these values as coherent with the aims of RE, interpret and navigate their inclusion within educational policies which originate in counter-terrorism. The study shows how, by avoiding a reliance on formulaic definitions or narrow understandings of mutual respect and tolerance,

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educational policy makers and practitioners might be better able to support young people to engage with the complexity of encounters with diverse faiths and beliefs in contemporary society. The findings from the research also encourage RE practitioners to consider how they might re-claim mutual respect and tolerance as part of the longstanding aims of RE, rather than seeing their promotion as an obligatory political requirement.

Introduction

Our focus on mutual respect and tolerance originates in their inclusion in a statement of FBV, which has been present in part two of the Department for Education's (Department 2011, 14) Teachers' Standards since 2011. This statement requires teachers in England to 'not undermin[e] fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance, of those with different faiths and beliefs'. This study investigates why and how such legislation has entered the educational sphere and asks whether the educational space of RE has been colonised by a political agenda or whether there is scope for a re-claiming of mutual respect and tolerance by RE practitioners as part of the longstanding aims of the subject. From our position as former RE teachers (first author secondary RE, second author primary RE), both now teacher educators, we are interested in the way educational policy impacts on classroom practice. Non-statutory, guidelines from the Department for Education (2014a, 5) require schools to 'actively promote' FBV as part of their obligation, as set out in section 78 of the *Education Act 2002*, to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. However, FBV did not originate in education policy but in a UK counter-terrorism policy entitled Prevent (Government 2011, 34). Revell and Bryan (2018) chart how a number of significant events including the London terrorist attacks of 7/7 led to a rejection of state multiculturalism by then Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the subsequent arrival of FBV from Prevent into education policies (Busher et al. 2017).

Interest in FBV has been extensive, with a wide range of studies conducted in educational settings, some identifying concerns about the promotion of FBV. Vincent (2018, 2019a, 2019b) large-scale case study research into the promotion of FBV identifies how schools commonly take a visible approach to representing Britain, alongside re-locating and re-packaging FBV as school values. This is of interest to us as we sought to tease out how RE teachers were conceptualising FBV. Critical approaches to the promotion of FBV are, however, in the minority. Busher et al.'s (2017) survey of 225 school and college staff finds that Prevent might contribute to the stigmatisation of Muslim pupils, and several smaller-scale studies have found that whilst FBV themselves might not conflict with Islam, Muslim teachers feel the requirement to promote them is nevertheless rooted in suspicion of the Muslim community (Farrell and Lander 2019; Panjwani 2016). The origins of FBV in Prevent have also resulted in concerns that conversations in classrooms may be chilled because students fear being reported (Faure-Walker 2019) and questions about whether there is a continued ascription of Muslims as a suspect community, which adversely affects society and education (Elton-Chalcraft and Bryan 2024). At

the same time, other research has highlighted how the Prevent duty has worked to revitalise recognition of the importance of discussion about issues linked to extremism and conflicts in classrooms (Busher et al. 2020). These concerns also extend to higher education, where Ramsay (2017) highlights the tensions around free speech, safe spaces and the role and purpose of higher education itself.

In addition, we were keen to build on examinations of what it means to label a set of values as British (Jerome and Clemitshaw 2012; Lockley-Scott 2019; Sant and Hanley 2018). For example, Buckley (2020, 27) points to the incompatibility of the requirement to promote FBV with a History curriculum which does not recognise Britain's colonialist past and evidence of the nation's historic 'marked *in*tolerance for local languages and traditions'. Whilst generating extremely important insights, this body of research has tended to focus on either the enactment of the FBV policy, or on the contested nature of the Britishness of the values, rather than probing interpretations of the values themselves. We seek to provide empirical evidence to address this gap by investigating some RE teachers' perspectives specifically regarding the values of tolerance and mutual respect.

The FBV policy context has particular implications for teachers of RE because in England, state-funded schools have to teach RE. Whilst the requirement to promote mutual respect and tolerance as part of FBV is levied at all teachers, the explicit mention of 'faiths and beliefs' (Department for Education Department 2011, 14) within the policy points to the significance of this requirement for RE practitioners. The content taught in RE may differ between schools and the extent to which values education can comprise a central and effective aim of the subject has been widely researched (Conroy et al. 2013; Lundie 2018) and more recently re-ignited in debates regarding the proposed shift from the Commission on RE (2018) towards 'Religion and Worldviews'. Nonetheless, RE does require pupils to study different religions, beliefs and values, including those which they may disagree with. Since 2016, pupils in England and Wales have studied two religions for GCSE, a decision made to help prepare pupils for life in contemporary British society and in alignment with the requirement to promote mutual respect and tolerance (Department for Education Department 2014b). This link between FBV and RE has been noted by Farrell (2023, 95), who argues that the requirement to promote FBV in the context of a rejection of state multiculturalism presents a particular dilemma for RE teachers because of the conflict between the 'homogenising shared values discourse of FBV' and the 'demands of pluralistic RE'. RE teachers, whose role entails teaching about worldviews and religions including non-liberal perspectives, must consider how to fulfil policy requirements alongside representing the worldviews they teach in a fair way. Whilst one option is to teach 'liberal versions' of religions, Farrell suggests this results in difficulties for truly upholding the concept of democracy, and a more meagre curriculum. Along similar lines, McDonnell (2021, 2023) research using a life history methodology finds that her participants, who are RE, PSHE and Citizenship teachers, are already deeply committed to values education and find creative ways to 'accommodate FBV within their practice' (2021, 390). McDonnell argues that pluralistic RE might afford opportunities for more critical responses to the FBV policy and advocates for further research with RE teachers, given the space they occupy in relation to FBV.

This research study thus works from the premise that the requirement to promote mutual respect and tolerance is of particular significance to RE teachers and explores how these concepts were constructed by RE practitioners. We begin by reviewing a range of

theoretical constructions of mutual respect and tolerance, which were used to develop a framework to analyse the data which captured RE teachers' constructions of tolerance and mutual respect.

Literature review

The starting point was to review interpretations of the concepts provided by the Department for Education. It is striking that within the Prevent Strategy (Government 2011) and in policies produced by the Department for Education (Department 2011; Department, 2014a), there is a complete absence of guidance about the interpretation of the terms. Moreover, Richardson and Bolloten's (Richardson and Bolloten 2014) close analysis of statements of FBV highlights the shifting positioning of punctuation in statements about FBV which creates ambiguities, a trend which continues in more recently published documents. So sometimes tolerance and mutual respect are constructed as a collective (Department for Education Department 2011, 14), whereas in other documents a comma has been added, implying a separation between mutual respect and tolerance (Department for Education, 2014a, 5). Meanwhile, the most recent Inspection Handbook (Ofsted 2019) includes two different renderings of the statement of FBV in sections 225 and 269, with the shifting of a comma resulting in uncertainty about whether mutual respect and tolerance are intended to be understood as separate or connected values. As Richardson and Bolloten (2014, 10) argue, this is important because 'conceptual and grammatical clarity' is needed when requirements are made of teachers and schools which have implications for their reputations. Of equal concern, research has revealed that teachers do not seize the absence of guidance as an opportunity for critical interpretation. Instead, a range of constructions of tolerance are unacknowledged by teachers (Bamber et al. 2018), and even more alarming, the concept of tolerance is constructed as applying to some (Muslim) pupils and not others (Vincent 2019a). So, next we consider the broader potential constructions of mutual respect and tolerance. In this discussion, we draw from literature which sets out the arguably most well-known and widely used theoretical and philosophical conceptions of mutual respect and tolerance, as well as examining key literature which explores these concepts in the field of education, especially in Religious Education.

Constructions of mutual respect

While we focus first on mutual respect before exploring tolerance it should be acknowledged that the boundary between the two concepts is contested. We would agree with Anker and Afdal's (2018, 49) classic positioning of respect as 'a more active phenomenon than tolerance'. However, Scanlon (2003, 193) observes that whilst tolerance provides a solution to the presence of disagreement in society, such disagreements can helpfully be contained 'within a framework of mutual respect', highlighting some of the interplay between these two concepts. Scanlon refers to a collective recognition of the right of other people to hold alternative viewpoints about how society should be. Heyd (1998, 12) also connects the two, describing tolerance as a 'sub-category of respect' because both consist of a moral attitude towards another person. Consequently, in this project, we acknowledge that there may not be an absolute boundary between mutual respect and tolerance

or that there may be a symbiotic relationship between them. Alongside the analysis here, we have summarised the key characteristics, similarities and differences of the concepts in Figure 1.

Respect, as a broad concept, is widely discussed in the literature and is often oriented towards respect for other people because of Immanuel Kant's influence on Western philosophy (Dillon 2018). Kant's (1981) 18th century categorical imperative proposes treating someone not as a means to an end, but as an end in themselves, meaning respect is shown to someone because of their inherent value as a person, not because showing respect will lead to benefits for oneself. The Department for Education's Department (2014a, 5, emphasis added) guidelines appear to follow this trend, with the phrase '*those* of different faiths and beliefs' indicating a focus on respect for persons. In the 20th century, Darwall's (1977) division between recognition and appraisal respect has become widely acknowledged as key. Recognition respect refers to giving 'appropriate consideration or recognition' to a feature of the object of respect when determining whether something is ethical, such as something being the law, someone being a judge or the object of respect being an aspect of nature. The feature of the object that is given consideration might even be personhood itself. Hence, Darwall suggests that the Kantian idea of respect for persons is recognition respect. This is because the fact someone is a person is acknowledged and given appropriate consideration in deciding how to act towards them. Recognition respect could thus form the basis for respecting someone whilst totally disagreeing with their views.

Contrastingly, appraisal respect denotes 'esteem or a high regard for someone' (Darwall 1977, 39). Used in the appraisal sense, respect refers to someone's excellence as a person in terms or their characteristics or to showing esteem for them when engaged in activities like sport or music. Unlike respect as recognition, it does not require the bestower of respect to alter their behaviour. Although appraisal respect can be held for persons, it does not rest on personhood alone. This highlights the question of whether the Department for Education (2014a, 5) intends respect to be understood in the Kantian sense, with respect owed primarily because of personhood. If so, schools and teachers could be seen as being asked to promote a form of mutual respect which does not entail any evaluation of the content of people's faiths and beliefs. Alternatively, if the respect implied is appraisal, it suggests an evaluative aspect; respect should be shown because someone's faith and beliefs are recognised and esteemed. This is an important distinction because critiques of FBV argue that the imposition of FBV inculcates a hierarchy of faiths/belief systems with some worthy of more respect than others (Elton-Chalcraft and Bryan 2024).

In the context of RE, Barnes (2015) argues that an emphasis on respect for beliefs, rather than the recognition respect of personhood has been historically dominant but proposes this results in a type of RE that fails to promote respect for others and the beliefs they may hold. Promoting respect for beliefs means that instances where a belief is disagreed with can become misconstrued as disrespect. In response, A. Davies (2015) asks whether Barnes' proposal of RE centred on recognition respect is practically possible because it requires someone to be respected as a person when their beliefs are not respected. Utilising recognition respect here would require enacting Carter's (2013) concept of opacity respect. That is to say, not taking account of any features beyond personhood when determining whether someone should be shown respect. However, Davies asserts that this may be practically challenging in RE: focusing on recognition

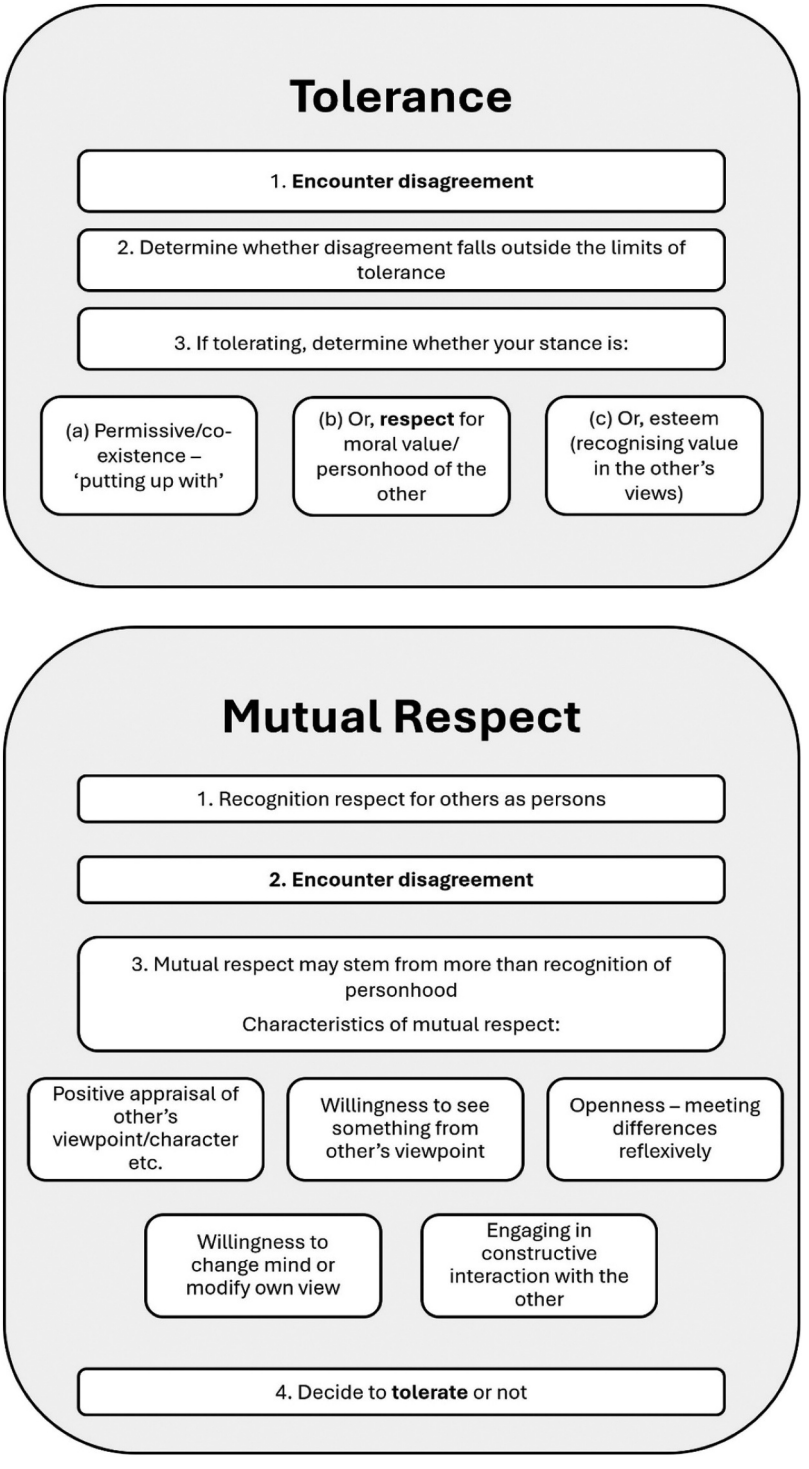

Figure 1. Figure to show the key characteristics, similarities and differences between tolerance and mutual respect.

respect is extremely difficult when dealing with exclusivist religious perspectives such as someone believing all other religions are false.

Homing in on the mutual element of respect, philosopher Rawls (1971, 337) identifies a duty of mutual respect as one of the principles needed for justice as fairness at an individual level. He suggests that this entails showing someone respect because they are a 'moral being', with a sense of justice and conception of the good. More precisely, Rawls identifies how mutual respect might be shown by being willing to see something from someone else's viewpoint and supporting actions with reasons. It can also be demonstrated by people's willingness to do 'small favours and courtesies' (338) for others because this shows awareness of others' feelings. Like Rawls, Gutmann and Thompson (1990, 65) also identify mutual respect as a helpful principle for individuals to hold in resolving moral disagreements. They suggest that it is similar to tolerance in representing a means of agreeing to disagree, but goes further in requiring 'a favourable attitude toward, and constructive interaction' with the person with whom one disagrees.

Mutual respect also entails a reciprocal aspect (Somerville 2009), with Gutmann and Thomson's (1990) theoretical analysis suggesting reciprocity must be underpinned by democratic citizens acting in accordance with the beliefs they espouse: a form of moral integrity. When engaging with viewpoints that are disagreed with, they suggest stating the reasons the stance is disagreed with, in line Rawls' (1971) thinking above. People must also be open to the possibility of modifying their own view or even accepting the position of the other party (Gutmann and Thompson 1990). Anker and Afdal's (2018) empirical research in Norwegian primary schools supports this as they identify how pupils perceive the mutual aspect as the correct mode of respect. This relational respect involves a reciprocal component, being listened to, met with openness and engaging with differences reflexively. Anker and Afdal (2018, 57) suggest that this conception of respect can be seen as overlapping with 'tolerance as openness', a concept which we return to below, highlighting a possible link between some constructions of respect and tolerance.

Constructions of tolerance

Basing his ideas on King's (1976) discussion, Forst (2013, 17–23) identifies how tolerance comprises three elements: objection, acceptance and rejection.

The first component, objection, requires that we feel dislike, disapproval or disgust for something. Mendus (1989) and Cohen (2004) suggest this component is essential because tolerance occurs in situations where diversity exists. Regarding the Department for Education (Department 2011) requirement, tolerance thus becomes significant because diversity of faiths and beliefs creates the possibility of someone objecting to another person's beliefs. Several scholars have argued that the objection component is the defining characteristic of tolerance because indifference towards the other does not lead to an attitude of tolerance (Leiter 2010; Vogt 1997). However, the question of whether the objection must constitute moral disapproval is contested, with Nicholson (2012) advocating for this, whilst Warnock (1990) argues we can talk of tolerance in relation to things which are disliked.

The second component of tolerance, acceptance, is the need for there to be genuine potential for the bestower of tolerance to accept the belief or object of tolerance (Forst 2013). Simply put, the acceptance component provides our reason for abstaining from

intervening with the object of toleration (Carter 2013). King (1976, 52) though notes that the acceptance component 'comes in varying degrees'. This is significant because complete acceptance of the object of tolerance would mean tolerance was no longer necessary. The level of acceptance therefore spans from non-interference at the one end, to some form of association with the object of tolerance at the other, the nature of the acceptance component is returned to below.

The third component of tolerance, rejection, is the need to identify on what grounds the issue would be deemed intolerable and hence rejected or the 'limits of toleration' (Forst 2013, 23). This is not straightforward, with Horton (1994) asking whether something that is morally wrong should be tolerated. Pragmatic reasons such as uncertainty about whether the action is indeed morally wrong and the potential cultural relativity of morality provide some grounds for why something might be tolerated. However, Horton (1994) suggests that more significant is the need for tolerance to exist concomitantly with freedom and autonomy: preventing something which is disapproved of might limit someone else's freedom to choose. Similarly, in his paradox of tolerance, Popper (2012 [1945]) asks whether people who are intolerant should be tolerated. Tolerating them without limit runs the risk of the destruction of the tolerance and tolerance itself. Consequently, Popper advocates caution and for society to retain the right to be intolerant of intolerance.

The nature and degree of acceptance can vary, the following four conceptions of tolerance are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Forst 2013). The first termed the 'permission conception' (Forst 2003, 73) denotes a majority giving 'qualified permission' to a minority to adhere to their beliefs. In return, the minority must accept the dominance of the majority. This permission conception fits with Cohen's (2004) identification that tolerance entails a more conscious process of acceptance than merely enduring something. The second possibility is a 'co-existence conception' of tolerance, also known as 'mutual tolerance' (Forst 2003, 74). This denotes a pragmatic solution to difference whereby two groups of equal power recognise tolerance as preferable to the alternatives. However, because this relies on their power status remaining equal, trust is unlikely to develop. It is also noteworthy that the mutual element here does not entail the identification of something of intrinsic worth in the other party, it is simply an acknowledgement that co-existence is a practical solution to difference.

Forst (2003, 74–75) proposes two other conceptions of tolerance, firstly as 'respect' and secondly as 'esteem', denoting a still greater level of 'mutual recognition'. In the former, people may hold conflicting views about what is morally correct but nonetheless respect 'each other as moral-political equals', recognising each other's rights. The esteem conception refers to how the other person is not only regarded as a moral equal but additionally, something of merit is found within their beliefs. This admiration must comprise 'reserved esteem', otherwise one would accept this belief rather than holding one's own position. These latter two conceptions of tolerance go beyond the permissiveness of Forst's first two constructions, allowing the identification of something of genuine value in someone else's beliefs. As these constructions entail a greater level of 'mutuality of recognition', there is a reciprocal component whereby parties treat each other as equals. This reciprocal feature resonates with some of the discussion on mutual respect and highlights how, in some conceptions, tolerance might be constructed as a 'sub-category' of respect (Heyd 1998, 12). Following this

line of thinking, these later two conceptions of tolerance could be understood as reflecting a connection between mutual respect and tolerance, as one possible reading of the Department for Education's (Department 2011, 14; 2014a, 5) statement of the requirement to promote 'mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs'. These broader conceptions of tolerance from Forst (2003) also align with Anker and Afdal's (2018, 49) findings, so whilst teachers might conceptualise tolerance as 'endurance' or non-interference, in line with the first two of Forst's constructions, they may also construct tolerance as 'openness': a more expansive possibility where difference is not seen as threatening but as creating possibilities (54).

These constructions of tolerance and mutual respect are not exhaustive. Others like Gardner (1993, 90) approach the debate from a virtues perspective, distinguishing between a 'deliberative' and 'dispositional' tolerance, with the latter referring to how tolerance might be conceived of as a virtue or character trait of someone, which Gardner suggests might comprise a truer form of tolerance. However, the purpose of this review has been to work from a critical stance, in order to disrupt the supposition that the meaning of the requirement to promote 'mutual respect, and tolerance, of those with different faiths and beliefs' in the Teacher's Standards (Department for Education, Department 2011, 14) is self-evident or inherent within the terms themselves. On the contrary, this review has presented myriad ways in which mutual respect and tolerance might be constructed and illustrated that some constructions of the concepts may overlap. We now turn to report on the findings from the study, in which the first author explored how teachers of RE construct mutual respect and tolerance.

Methodology and methods

This study adopted a multiple nested case study approach to explore how tolerance and mutual respect were constructed and promoted by seven RE teachers in three schools in England. A multiple case study was used because of the opportunity it provided to explore the real-life practice of three purposefully selected RE departments (Creswell 2018). Chong and Graham (2013) observe that a key strength of a nested case study is that it enables the researcher to consider the macro, meso and micro levels, facilitating an in-depth study of the influences on education systems. Consequently, the seven RE teachers in this study are considered as nested within the context of their department, which is nested in the wider school and, at the macro level, shaped by national education policies, such as those highlighted in the literature review relating to the promotion of FBV.

Working within the interpretivist paradigm, we sought to capture the complexity of the world and diverse constructions and interpretations people in different contexts may have of tolerance and mutual respect (L. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2018). Following a request for schools to self-select on the basis of being good exemplars of promoting mutual respect and tolerance, scoping visits and discussions were held with eight Heads of Departments. Ultimately, this resulted in the selection of three schools from different areas in England, with contrasting pupil demographics in terms of religious background, based on Stake's (2006, 23) three criteria. First, the relevance of the case to the phenomenon of study, second, the ability of the case to reveal 'complexity and contexts' and third, the desire to provide 'diversity across contexts' (see Table 1).

Table 1. The key characteristics of the participating schools and teachers.

School & Characteristics	Participants & length of experience
Barehill Church of England (London) • Voluntary Controlled • Mixed with approximately 50% Christian, 35% Muslim and 15% other faiths	• Emily – Head of Department (6 years) • Amara (10 years) • Yasmin (4 years)
Newton High (North West) • Academy Convertor • Predominantly non-religious	• Anna – Head of Department (15 years)
Westridge School (West Midlands) • Community • Predominantly Muslim	• Rahim – in charge of KS3 RE (11 years) • Fahima (2 years) • Sadia (2 years)

The data were generated between June and August 2021, during COVID-19, which presented logistical constraints, and so comprised a document analysis of the key stage three schemes of work and semi-structured interviews, (online or in the open air) with teachers lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. Epistemologically, the interviews were seen as social interactions, not merely information gathering events (Denzin 2001) because participants constructed and re-constructed their conceptions of mutual respect and tolerance. The data were analysed using critical discursive psychology, a form of discourse analysis (Wiggins 2017), employed because it enables participants' words to be analysed in context, avoiding the reductive analysis of features of speech provided by some other forms of discourse analysis. Informed by the steps provided by Wiggins (2017), following transcription using a simplified version of the Jefferson system based on Potter and Wetherell (1987, 188–189) (see Appendix) and close reading of the texts, the first author drew on Edley's (2001, 197–209) use of CDP to identity three core features: interpretive repertoires, referring to how the teachers constructed and talked about mutual respect and tolerance; ideological dilemmas, meaning looking for moments of tension within and between different constructions of the concepts (Billig et al. 1988); and, subject positions, considering how the constructions resulted in teachers constructing particular roles and positions for themselves and others (B. Davies and Ron 2001). Ethical approval was obtained from the authors' institution (reference 19/11) and schools and teachers have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Results and discussion

Tolerance and mutual respect as fundamental British values

Although the starting point for this study was the inclusion of mutual respect and tolerance within the statement of FBV, participants in this research were not especially concerned to promote them because of a statutory duty (Department for Education Department 2011). Instead, in alignment with McDonnell's (2021) findings about teachers' pre-existing commitment to values education, participants in this study constructed an interpretive repertoire of mutual respect and tolerance as values which cohere with the purpose of RE. They positioned themselves in the role of being an RE teacher and hence were positive about the promotion of tolerance and mutual respect. This builds on Vincent's (2018) findings that some schools and teachers re-locate FBV as school or core values: the teachers in this study more specifically re-locate the values as concomitant with the purposes of RE. Five teachers in this study went one step further, constructing mutual respect and tolerance

as values they felt a personal commitment to promoting. This is illustrated in the following extract from Amara at Barehill School (Amara BH).

(1) **Amara BH**: do you want me to be really real?
(2) **Researcher**: yeah yeah
(3) **Amara**: .hh[sigh] as a black woman erm (0.3)
(4) I guess it's a personal thing
(5) to really promote tolerance and mutual respect
(6) erm to teach young people about
(7) to do away with stereotypes and pre-judgement and discrimination

In this extract Amara starts by asking a question, which could be seen as seeking permission to speak openly (line 1). The researcher's response in line 2 points to the co-construction of knowledge which occurred during the interviews, as Amara is encouraged to voice what she is thinking. Wiggins (2017, 158) notes that 'affect displays' such as sighs can function to invoke an emotion, rather than the speaker using words to describe an emotion. In line 3, Amara begins with an audible sigh which alongside the pause at the end of the line, arguably adds gravitas to the statement which follows, or emphasises the personal connection between Amara's identity as a black woman and her promotion of mutual respect and tolerance. In lines 4–5 Amara then constructs the promotion of mutual respect and tolerance as a 'personal' pursuit, with the emphasis on 'really' implying that more superficial promotion of mutual respect and tolerance might also be possible. The three-part list in line 6 and 7 reinforces her personal stance and expands on what her personal investment to promote of mutual respect and tolerance involves.

Interestingly, in embracing the repertoires of tolerance and mutual respect as coherent with the purpose of RE and in alignment with their own personal values, it is also notable that only one teacher in this study was overtly critical of the Britishness of mutual respect and tolerance. Anna at Newton High School constructed them as having 'colonial' overtones and being claimed as 'that's ours'. She also observed that the values are 'very Western'. Unlike in some previous research about Britishness (Jerome and Clemitshaw 2012; Lockley-Scott 2019; Sant and Hanley 2018), this study did not explore the Britishness of the values as its main focus. Although participants were asked what they thought about mutual respect and tolerance being FBV, critiques were in the minority. However, the absence of critiques might arise from the subsummation of FBV into schools and teachers' lives, which Elton-Chalcraft et al. (2017) and Vincent (2018) highlight as common responses to the policy requirement.

In addition, whereas existing research from Panjwani (2016) and Farrell and Lander (2019) found that Muslim teachers were critical of FBV, the three teachers at Westridge School who identified themselves as Muslim, constructed mutual respect and tolerance as FBV and beneficial for their, majority Muslim, pupil demographic. For example, Rahim WR explains:

(1) **Rahim WR**: so yeah so all our pupils
(2) majority are Muslims
(3) so remember now this is where the British values comes in
(4) **Researcher**: ok
(5) **Rahim**: they're living in a Christian country

(6) do you understand
(7) therefore they need to know the rights the beliefs and the practices of people from that country

Rahim starts by mentioning the context of Westridge School as having a majority of Muslim pupils. He then uses this in lines 3 to 7 to construct a contrast with the UK as a Christian country. Rahim's speech in lines 5 to 7 appears to conflate British values as equivalent to Christian values. In line 7, Rahim positions his pupils as outsiders to the Christian (British) country in his phrasing of 'they' (pupils) needing to knowing beliefs and practices 'of people from that country', implying a segregation. Most striking here is that Rahim and his two colleagues at Westridge, who all identify themselves as Muslim, construct FBV as unproblematic.

Constructions of tolerance and mutual respect

As shown so far, the teachers in this study focused primarily on constructing mutual respect and tolerance as significant values in and of themselves, not linked to their status as FBV. Their constructions of mutual respect and tolerance thus tended to draw on insights from their own personal and professional lives, rather than with reference to policy documents. Overall, four key interpretive repertoires emerged in terms of the constructions of the values: tolerance as accepting but not embracing; tolerance as unsatisfactory; and, mutual respect as predicated on personhood, but as interactional. There were also ideological dilemmas about what the content of interactions that foster mutual respect should comprise. Each of these repertoires is now illustrated in turn.

Tolerance as accepting not embracing

All teachers in this study constructed tolerance using an interpretive repertoire of tolerance as accepting but not embracing something, mirroring the more minimalistic conceptions of tolerance as permission and co-existence from Forst (2003) and Anker and Afdal's (2018) endurance constructions. There were variations, with some teachers suggesting tolerance applied to situations of dislike, whilst other teachers centred on examples of moral disapproval, reflecting the debates about this from Nicholson (2012) and Warnock (1990). The following excerpt shows this repertoire and focuses on tolerance arising from dislike.

(1) **Emily BH**: mutual respect and tolerance of those
(2) with different faiths and beliefs implies (.)
(3) that you don't have to like what the other person's doing
(4) **Researcher**: ah
(5) **Emily**: but you have to accept them for who they are (.)
(6) but then that's just tolerance
(7) that's not mutual respect

Emily, Head of RE in a Church of England school in London, constructs tolerance as entailing dislike for someone's actions (line 3), however despite the dislike, acceptance must be shown towards them (line 5). In this construction of tolerance, Emily suggests it

is acceptance of the person which must be shown through employment of the pronouns 'they' and 'them' (line 5), rather than acceptance of their ideas. The extract ends with Emily identifying a distinction between tolerance and mutual respect in which she uses contrast to position tolerance as the inferior of the two values, as seen by the minimising use of 'just' in line six (Wiggins 2017, 155). Comparisons within discourse serve to emphasise something or highlight distinctions (Wiggins 2017). Here the comparison in lines 6–7, combined with the minimising 'just', emphasises that the aforementioned description of tolerance falls short of what would be required for mutual respect.

Tolerance as unsatisfactory

Other comparisons between tolerance and mutual respect were common in the data, four teachers' (Emily BH, Yasmin BH, Anna NH, Fahima WR) comparisons resulted in a tension or ideological dilemma. Namely, whilst constructing tolerance as a minimalistic form of acceptance with potential utility, these teachers nevertheless also constructed tolerance as negative or problematic. In the following extract, Fahima WR is explicit about her discomfort with tolerance.

(1) **Fahima WR**: tolerance I you know was just something more about (.)
(2) erm it's sort of it sort of has negative (.)
(3) erm what's the word connot- (0.4)
(4) **Researcher**: connotations?
(5) **Fahima**: £connotations£ [spoken whilst smiling] yeah
(6) **Fahima**: £negative connotations£ erm towards it
(7) so it's just like I understand where you're coming from
(8) but I'm just (.) I'm just happy with your ideas
(9) because I have to be

In this extract, Fahima explains how tolerance is different to mutual respect. Fahima describes tolerance as having 'negative connotations' (line 6), a phrase also used by Yasmin BH. On four occasions, Fahima uses the term 'just' (lines 1, 7 and 8) which has a minimising effect and contributes to a construction of tolerance as lacking, or perhaps as being inferior to an alternative, unnamed, option. In lines 7 to 9 Fahima expands on her construction of tolerance as having negative connotations, highlighting how tolerance might arise from a sense of duty or obligation, rather than from genuine desire. This construction of tolerance thus does not draw on the ideas within Forst's (2003) esteem or respect conceptions but aligns with a more minimalistic construction of the concept. Constructing tolerance as negative and unsatisfactory raises a question about whether these RE teachers might alternatively be able to re-claim tolerance as a useful concept for engaging with divisive dilemmas in the RE classroom.

Mutual respect as predicated on personhood and as interactive

Participants' constructions of mutual respect echoed (2018) the pervasive influence of Kant's idea that respect should be shown because of someone's status as a person, also noted in Dillon's (2018) observations. This was summarised by Emily BH as: not

'agree[ing] with them but you accept them as a person' and Sadia BH as 'respect for each other as people'. However, personhood was only the basis of teachers' constructions of mutual respect. Prominent alongside personhood was a repertoire of mutual respect as requiring engagement with another person, cohering with Guttman and Thompson's (Warnock 1990) analysis. The person may have a very different perspective to oneself, as illustrated here:

(1) **Amara BH**: mutual respect is like more personal
(2) so me and you having a discussion (.)
(3) agreeing to disagree
(4) you have your opinion and I have mine
(5) but I still respect you as a person
(6) it's not gonna take my point of view

Here, although mutual respect is constructed as arising between persons (line 5), Amara BH also suggests it is possible for someone to be respected when disagreement occurs (line 3). This highlights once again the underlying feature of personhood, evidencing the widespread influence of this form of recognition respect (Darwall 1977). However, Amara additionally constructs mutual respect as entailing discussion (line 2), in which ideas are exchanged (lines 2–4). This perhaps suggests a type of appraisal respect (Darwall 1977) in which the other person's opinion is evaluated and a decision made about whether it should be respected. In constructing mutual respect as possible in instances of disagreement, in lines 3–6 Amara also builds a construction of mutual respect as reciprocal in that neither party is obliged to change their own point of view: a willingness to see something from another's perspective as observed by Rawls (1971). Although participants shared a construction of mutual respect as involving interacting with another person, there were differences between what participants suggested the content of the interaction should comprise. Whilst Amara BH above emphasises the factual exchange of information between people, Anna NH talked about the importance of the interaction as one in which you are 'challenged to think', whilst Sadia WR focused on mutual respect as occurring when pupils found similarities between themselves in an interaction. These ideological dilemmas about which types of interactions constitute mutual respect show different attitudes between teachers about the role played by disagreement in conceptions of tolerance and mutual respect.

Conclusion and implications

This study aimed to explore how teachers of RE in three contrasting secondary schools in England construct mutual respect and tolerance. It did so with an understanding that teachers operate in a policy context that requires them to promote these concepts because they are FBV. However, the study did not limit itself to seeing tolerance and mutual respect solely as FBV. Instead, it approached these concepts as potentially significant to RE teachers outwith this requirement.

Critiques of the nationalistic overtones of the requirement to promote FBV were in the minority, as found by Vincent (2018, 2019a, 2019b). However, extending Vincent's finding that schools and teachers reposition FBV as school or core values, the teachers in this research additionally constructed themselves as having a personal commitment to the

promotion of mutual respect and tolerance. It is this which underpins their investment in promoting the concepts in the RE classroom, rather than adherence to the statutory requirement, which echoes findings from McDonnell (2021). Also interesting are the empirical insights about Muslim teachers, who unlike those in Panjwani's (2016) and Farrell and Lander's (Faure-Walker 2019) research, do not perceive FBV as targeting or stigmatising the Muslim community. Instead, the Muslim teachers in this study construct tolerance and mutual respect as FBV which are beneficial for their Muslim pupils, providing a worrying empirical example of how some Muslim teachers may be becoming 'state instruments of surveillance' (Elton-Chalcraft and Bryan 2024; Farrell and Lander 2019, 470).

Most participants tended towards constructions of tolerance as a minimalistic acceptance of something which is disliked or disapproved of. The two forms of tolerance proposed by Forst (2003, 2017) which involve a deeper level of merit-finding within the other's perspective are absent from participants' constructions. Mutual respect is favoured and positioned as the value which they, as RE teachers, should promote. On the one hand, teachers construct mutual respect as arising because of engagement between people (a key tenet of RE) and, in some cases, they highlight how the content of that engagement might be about exploring disagreements. On the other hand, teachers' preference for mutual respect, and dissatisfaction with tolerance, suggests they do not all necessarily see disagreement in RE as beneficial, in the way that Iversen (2019, 324) proposes, namely that RE classrooms might provide 'communities of disagreement'. Within some teachers' constructions of mutual respect is the implication that disagreements are preferably resolved. Tolerance, which is primarily constructed as a form of minimalistic agreement and which can entail disagreements being left unresolved, is constructed as an undesirable outcome in RE.

Teachers' discomfort with tolerance has potentially problematic implications in superdiverse 21st century Britain where the range of 'faiths and beliefs' (Department for Education Department 2011, 14) is growing. RE provides an educational space where pupils can encounter diversity. RE is also a subject where pupils can learn about the option of a blunter, but still peaceful, form of disagreement, namely, tolerance. In RE, we suggest that teachers re-claim the concept of tolerance as one part of the toolkit for young people's encounters with those of different faiths and beliefs to their own. However, if teachers themselves are uncomfortable with tolerance as an endpoint because of an idealistic commitment to mutual respect, how then would they be able and willing to show pupils that minimalistic forms of agreement exist and that these may even be beneficial in the context of certain disagreements? We are keen to engage in further research to explore constructions of mutual respect and tolerance across a wider sample of teachers.

The Department for Education has left the content of the values within FBV open to interpretation, and we suggest that academics, school leaders and subject networks could capitalise on this by supporting teachers to critically reflect on the range of potential constructions of mutual respect and tolerance (seen in Figure 1) and to consider the applicability of different constructions in different situations. When practitioners see the benefit of drawing on the various constructions of tolerance to aid their pupils' encounters with diverse faiths and beliefs, they are enabled to eschew a dichotomic positioning of tolerance and mutual respect in favour of embracing a broader reading of the intricacies of these concepts. Such an acknowledgement would result in the reclaiming of the educational potential of RE, thereby capturing the complexity of contemporary

encounters with diverse faiths and beliefs. This project has helped us see a need to decouple the concepts of tolerance and mutual respect from the FBV agenda and pay closer attention to their role within the broader purpose of RE. Re-claiming a more mature understanding of tolerance and mutual respect, as concepts which RE teachers can draw on in all their complexity, would ultimately ensure young people have the tools to understand differences within and between worldviews, faiths and beliefs and to act in an informed and nuanced way.

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Appendix. Simplified version of the Jefferson transcription system based on Potter and Wetherell (1987, 188–189)

Mark/symbol	Meaning
(.)	Short pause
(0.1)	Timed pause in seconds
(.hh)	Laughter
Word	Emphasised word
.hh	Sigh/exhaled breath
£word£	Spoken whilst smiling
[Speech]	Interrupted speech
word=	Continuous speech, no pause between
***	Word omitted to maintain anonymity
?	Voice rising, indicating question
!	Voice expressing surprise