

Learning To Live Together

'Fundamental British Values', 2016

Introductory remarks at a conference for headteachers

Two new kids on the block

When I ask Mummy, she says ask Daddy. When I ask Daddy, he says ask Mummy. I don't know where to go. I'll ask Teddy. He never says no.

These introductory remarks at today's conference start – they have just started – with a poem about the human condition by John Agard. The poem is a succinct reminder that learning to live with others – their yesses and noes, their evasions and dodges, their pacts and disagreements, their bestowing and withholding of support and opposition – starts when you are still an infant.

And so does the temptation, amid the changes and chances throughout the rest of our lives, to turn to dear comfortable, comforting Teddy, who never says no, never says you can't or you mustn't, never says Thou Shalt Not, and never truly has the answer.

The tasks and temptations associated with learning to live together stretch from cradle to coffin in time, and in space stretch from cradles, kitchens and customs in the home to classrooms, corridors and curricula in education systems, and to courts and councils in national and local government, and – on occasion – to conflicts, crises and catastrophes all over the world.

LTLT – learning to live together – is seen by UNESCO as one of the four pillars of education throughout history and throughout the world.

UNESCO's other three pillars of lifelong and worldwide learning, by the way, are learning to be, learning to know and learning to do.

To be, to know, to do and to live together, it's not a bad summary of the professional life of everyone at this conference here today.

And of everyone's personal life, too.

LTLT is not new. There are, though, two new kids on the block as we gather here today to think about our professional work. Well, newish kids. Their names are FBV, fundamental British values, and Prevent, the duty of schools to protect children from being drawn towards NVE, nonviolent extremism.

FBV and Prevent are troublesome, worrisome, alarming, ornery, unpredictable, mixed-up kids with whom, just at the moment in the education system of England, you and I are having to learn to live.

Three standpoints, three speeches

To help us get a preliminary purchase on FBV and Prevent in schools, here are three speeches. As a collection, they aim to articulate the range of views that probably exist at this conference, and that certainly exist in society and the education system more generally.

The speeches will be addressed to two people who are not here today in person but whose influence has affected this conference in its planning, organisation and *raison d'être*, Mr Michael Gove MP and Ms Nicky Morgan MP. These two are accompanied, similarly in spirit not in person, by a contingent of their spads – specialist advisers – and by the education correspondents of their favourite newspapers, and by senior members of Ofsted.

We can entirely reasonably assume, particularly in the light of various articles and speeches by Mr Cameron over the last three weeks, that Mr Gove and Ms Morgan have the full support of the prime minister.

We can be less confident that they will faithfully report back to him next Monday morning, if not earlier, the gist of what they hear here today.

After the speeches, and for the rest of today, we shall be discussing points arising.

First speech: Thank you so much

Thank you so much for all you have done and are doing to return the English education system to one of its most important historic responsibilities, namely to make children and young people proud to be British, and to be loyal to the state where they live and will spend their lives.

There's a similar responsibility in every democratic country, of course, not just in the UK and not just in England. Children need to know their place in the world and to cherish it and be committed to it. My colleagues and I are so grateful to you for reminding us of this crucial fact and for reinforcing it. For too long this country has been drifting and coasting – it has been wallowing in a morass and mess of multiculturalism, relativism and political correctness, all three of these going or gone bonkers.

Thank you for getting a grip.

Patriotism has seldom if ever been more important than it is now, in this increasingly troubled and hazardous multicultural society of ours and in this globalising world. Too many people don't know where they are and where their true loyalties should lie, and

in consequence too many people in this once great country have lost their bearings and are fearful – legitimately fearful, this is not a 'phobia' – of disorder and violence.

You made a great start in summer 2010, even though encumbered by being in coalition, by showing that you yourselves consider the Equality Act, the brainchild of a female member of the previous administration, to be a lot of silly nonsense, and by signalling that you would have no objection if schools throughout England were to ignore its silly features as robustly and resolutely as you intended to ignore them yourselves.

It's not yet practical politics to actually repeal the Equality Act, but at least you have indicated to us through Ofsted, and through your own example, that most of its components can and should be ignored.

Thank you for the lead you have given on this, and thank you – again -- for stressing the importance of fundamental British values instead.

Second speech: you are nasty

N-A-S-T-Y – you guys are noisome, arrogant, sloppy, treacherous and yobbish.

- **Noisome** – harmful, noxious, objectionable, damaging, insidious, corrosive, toxic, poisonous, twisted, deeply dangerous through and through.
- **Arrogant** – presumptuous, overbearing, so sure you're right, so sure everyone else is wrong, triumphalist in your victory over anyone who disagrees with you, impatient not only with objections but also with questions and queries of all kinds.
- **Sloppy** – slapdash superficial, amateurish, casual, careless. trivial, banal, unthinking, ill-considered, shallow.
- **Treacherous** – you don't care about the real interests of most people in this country, nor about traditions and customs of courtesy, nor the meanings of words or the facts of history, you are unpatriotic, you are disloyal.
- **Yobbish** – beneath a veneer (sometimes) of sickening politeness, you're foul-mouthed louts, hooligans, you trample roughshod over civility, respect and true courtesy, you sneer, snigger, swagger, you're drunkenly indifferent to anyone who gets in your way.

Let me a bit more specific. Your theories about extremism and radicalisation are simplistic in the extreme, unsupported by any evidence, and deeply counter-productive. The use you have made of the Trojan Horse forgery in Birmingham, and continue to make, was and is an example of unprincipled opportunism and hypocrisy. You intimidate, manipulate and micro-manage Ofsted and also, more recently, the children's commissioner.

Your crazy FBV programme, intricately entangled as it is with the Prevent counter-terrorism programme, is fashioning a climate in the education system of worry, uncertainty and fear, and of hatred.

You are not educating against hate, as you claim. You are educating **for** hate.

On the front page of your website, launched a few days ago, you define extremism as 'the holding of extreme ideas'. Do you really think this is a helpful clarification?

Your disdain for the state-funded education system, and for everyone who works in it, is deeply damaging for millions on millions of people. So is your disdain for Muslim people and communities, which is a continuation of your disdain for – amongst others, over the years – Black people and Irish people, and is of a piece with your disdain for people who are disabled, or unemployed, or living with stress.

You are totally ignorant of, and indifferent to, what is truly fundamental and valuable in the evolving history, law and culture of these islands. I recommend and urge that everyone involved in education in this country should have nothing at all to do with your nasty FBV project, your noisome, arrogant, sloppy, treacherous and yobbish FBV project.

Third speech – can we talk?

Can we have a respectful conversation about things that matter?

Democracy in this country is, yes, about trying to secure 51 or more per cent of seats in the House of Commons. You have achieved that.

Achieving a majority entails persuading large numbers of people that you know what you're doing and that you're a safe pair of hands, or anyway safer than the other lot. OK, you have achieved that.

But representative democracy is only one side of democracy's coin. The other side is deliberative democracy – not only voting and deciding but also talking and thinking, having due regard, drawing to mind, attending to a range of points of view, using language with diligence, being respectful of evidence, weighing up unintended consequences, listening and showing one has listened to a range of views and range of *viewpoints*, holding open the possibility that one may be wrong.

It's about having second and third thoughts, not about letting knee-jerk reactions determine what happens, not about shooting from the hip. People who shoot from the hip can all too easily, as you know, shoot themselves in the foot.

Politicians are frequently required, yes, to Do Something. But that doesn't mean it's OK to do any damn thing.

Democracy is not just two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for lunch.

Can we talk?

Can there be greater respect for the professional experience and insights of teachers and subject communities in relation to learning to live together, particularly in the fields of citizenship education, history teaching, religious education, and spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) development? Greater trust and cooperation, both nationally and at local levels, between Muslim and non-Muslim organisations and communities, and greater attention to Islamic values, wisdom, and pedagogy in the field of education?

Recognition that the line between good and evil does not run between PLU and PLT (people like us, people like them) but inside every individual human heart and mind, including yours and – OK – including mine?

Can we talk about how to integrate teaching political values such as FBV with the values that underpin living together in the daily life of schools – values such as kindness, consideration, perseverance, humour, imagination?

Any chance of renewed emphasis on the role of Her Majesty's Inspectorate as a band of critical friends who identify, commend and promote good practice, and who speak truth to power, namely to the government of the day?

Any chance of higher levels of due regard for the values enshrined in equalities legislation?

Can we listen? Can *you* listen? Really listen to what people involved in education say about the fundamental values and principles of living together, and about how to enable the younger generation to live together with each other, and with previous generations, and with the future?

Teachers do know a great deal about living together, and they have a lot to say and share. Oh, if only you could listen to them some time.

This very day, it so happens, there's a conference in a county town near London where there are 80 or so headteachers talking and thinking and listening about learning to live together. Such a pity you're not there to listen to their dreams and nightmares, their knowledge and insight, their cares and concerns, their vision.

Oh, such a pity you're not there to listen. But anyway they are there.

They're talking, and they're listening to the speech between them, around them and within them.

They are there.
