

<b>Institution:</b> Newman University Birmingham		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> English		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Nurturing Healthy Diversity in Church of England Primary Schools		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2016-19		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Stephen Pihlaja	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Reader in Stylistics	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> Jan 2014-Present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> March 2015 – December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>‘Nurturing Healthy Diversity’ used empirical research into inter-religious dialogue and research in Church of England (CofE) schools in Birmingham to engage local schools in discussion about Religious Education (RE). The project resulted in impact on how involved schools approached RE, wider discussions in the Diocese through the publication of a booklet on diversity in church schools, and the development of an evaluation tool to help CofE schools address religious diversity for the SIAMs (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools). The tool was used in one school, St Michael’s Bartley Green, resulting in changes to the school curriculum.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>This project is underpinned by Stephen Pihlaja’s ongoing research on inter-religious dialogue and Muslim citizenship in the UK. This work has looked specifically at how people of different faith and no faith understand one another and recognise shared values when they interact and the different strategies that are used in inter-religious dialogue to find both highlight differences and find common ground (see publications). The research then moved to looking at inter-religious dialogue in community settings in Birmingham. Between October 2018 and January 2019, Newman colleagues Dan Whisker (Sociology), Stephen Pihlaja, and Lisa Vickerage Goddard (Education) conducted a series of focus groups and one-to-one interviews with school leaders, teachers, governors, parents, and clerics. These interviews were conducted in four Church of England schools of the Birmingham diocese, chosen for their range of social and demographic characteristics.</p> <p>In collaboration with the Birmingham Diocesan board for Education and supported by a grant from the St Peter’s Sallley Trust (£2,238), the team published a booklet for the Grove Education series as a practical resource for school leaders in building diverse communities.</p> <p>In each school, the research discovered common ways of talking about community, where interviewees presented narratives around social diversity which simultaneously identified social tensions and presented the functional community of values as the mechanism of their resolution. In each case, though the poles of difference were themselves different (along lines of social class and religious pluralism), the resolving mechanism was presented, emically, as the effect of the shared values of all faiths: as the work of the divine through diverse human cultures.</p> <p>The team analysed talk about community building on two levels: the level of socio-linguistic construction of a space of shared values and the level of social practice, where shared values were embedded in individual identities through collective community action, especially worship and religious education. The team found that embedding these shared values was crucial for the</p>		

successful day-to-day management of school life. The team also found that the accounts of these processes often revealed anxiety about incommensurable worldviews amongst participants, about the stability of the community being constructed and about the implications of this instability for the school and community.

Finally, the team identified successful examples of this community-building work and sought to understand their efficacy in relation to the specific social, cultural, and economic circumstances of each school. The most successful examples responded to the specific forms of diversity in the school and its adjacent community. Grove books are intended to serve as guides to practice for members of the Anglican community, and the book stemming from this research presented the four schools as models for schools to plan their response to the challenges of different types of social and religious diversity in the school and surrounding community. As of January 2021, the book has sold 537 copies — mostly to schools and churches. The project also served as a pilot study for Dr Pihlaja's successful AHRC ECR leadership fellowship proposal entitled 'Language and Religion in the Superdiverse City' (£155,024 FEC).

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

#### Publications:

Pihlaja, Stephen. (2018) *Religious Talk Online: the evangelical discourse of Muslims, Christians, and atheists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 9781316661963

Thompson, Naomi & Stephen Pihlaja (2018) Temporary liberties and uncertain futures: young female Muslim perceptions of life in England. *Journal of Youth Studies* 21/10: 1326-1343. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2018.146802

Pihlaja, Stephen & Naomi Thompson. (2017) "I love the Queen": Positioning in young British Muslim discourse. *Discourse, Context, & Media* 20: 52-58. DOI: 10.1016/j.dcm.2017.08.002

Richardson, Peter, Pihlaja, Stephen, Nagashima, Miori, Wada, Masako, Watanabe, Makoto and Kheovichai, Baramee. (2019). Blasphemy and persecution: Positioning in an inter-religious discussion. *Text & Talk*, 40/1: 75-98. DOI: 10.1515/text-2019-2049

Whisker, Dan, Pihlaja, Stephen, and Lisa Vickerage-Goddard. (2020) *Diversity and Success in Church Schools*. Cambridge: Grove Books.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research demonstrated that effective community building around shared values was a central part of the self-identified 'mission' which socially and religiously diverse church schools. To explore how to translate specific instances of good practice from our findings into effective practice in the wider RE sector, the team hosted 'town hall' meetings in the schools where the research took place, with over thirty participants across the four schools. These meetings, in the Autumn of 2019, served to disseminate the findings of the research and to facilitate dialogue and planning for scalable approaches amongst community stakeholders. The project also began conversations begun within the schools about religious diversity among teachers, governors, and parents. The publication of the *Diversity and Success in Church Schools* booklet allowed schools to share their own good practices in a national context (see support letters R1-5).

Feedback from school leaders and governors in these meetings suggested that SIAMS reports on inspections conducted using the new (2019) evaluation framework, derived from the Church of England's 'Vision for Education' (2016) under reports were the most useful and objective metric of successful responses to challenges around social diversity. Consequently, the team began to liaise with other schools to do the following:

- 1) Diagnose effective responses to requirements for 'Diversity' work in extant SIAMS reports
- 2) Draw on the successful case studies identified in the research to provide models for successful community-building projects.
- 3) Connect schools with community groups in existing professional networks and facilitate dialogic planning and initiation of projects to respond to the needs identified in SIAMS reports.

This stage of the been affected by the coronavirus pandemic and the limits on staging public events in primary schools in the autumn of 2020. Despite these challenges, from October to December of 2020, the team worked with the leadership and RE lead of St Michael's Church of England School in Bartley Green, and conducted a close analysis of their previous SIAMS reports and of the demographics and history of the area.

First, this analysis reviewed the school's articulated vision and its theological underpinnings in relation to the social context of the school, helping the school to identify the kinds of outstanding practice which it most needs to, and can most effectively, pursue.

Second, it systematically worked through the grading criteria in the current SIAMS evaluation schedule and explored ways to map the existing outstanding practice in the school onto these, helping to maximise how effectively the SIAMS inspector will be able to recognise the ways in which the school is meeting the aims articulated in its vision.

Finally, it reviewed the previous SIAMS inspection for suggested points of improvement and identified ways for the school to respond to these. This identified points of practical action for the SIAMS lead, the school leadership, and the wider school community to take in maximising the school's effectiveness in living out its Christian mission.

The review of the vision with school leadership impacted how the leadership subsequently addressed religious education and the school ethos more broadly (R4). In partnership with stakeholders, we designed a new curriculum resource for Key Stage (KS) 1/2 by working with LEAF Creative Arts and St Michael's, to introduce the Paper Trails Project in St Michael's, which is a structured curriculum element designed to help children across KS1 and KS2 to connect with elders from the surrounding community, in care homes and supported living, as part of their RE curriculum, through a pen-pal system of writing letters and exchanging experiences and memories of different religious festivals. St Michael's leadership reports that this has changed the school's approach to the community and helped The SIAMS analysis and consequent genesis of the Paper Trails project have shaped the development of St Michael's strategy for nurturing the school's SMSC (Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural development), and has created impact in the development of the school's thinking about Religious Education, their relationship with the community, and how to approach the SIAMS (R5&7).

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- R1 Church of England (Jill Stolberg) support letter
- R2 St Peter's Saltley Trust (Ian Jones) support letter
- R3 St Peter's Church (Graeme Richardson) support letter
- R4 St Peter's School (Evelyn Murphy) support letter
- R5 St Matthew's School (Paulette Osborne) support letter
- R6 St Michael's School (Jane Bruton) support letter
- R7 LEAF Creative Arts (Susie Milne) support letter

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