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Values education in England and Wales: official policies and pupil responses

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Introduction

The values formation of young people is considered within England and Wales to be a legitimate concern of the public education system. Just as intellectual development is seen as being a legitimate aim of state maintained education, so too are moral development and social development.

This paper illustrates the legislative impetus behind values education. It will be argued that such education must be anchored within the experiences and perceptions of the pupils who are supposed to benefit from such initiatives. The contribution empirical research can make in understanding the experiences and perceptions of young people, with specific reference to values education, is demonstrated by drawing reference to a large-scale empirical study.

Legal background to values formation in the curriculum

While educational legislation in England and Wales has never explicitly concerned itself with 'values education' there appears to have been a clear implicit concern for the nurture of values within various aspects of legislation. This point can be seen most clearly by charting the legal concern for 'moral development' within the school curriculum. Values education, in the context of the current paper, will be seen as being largely concerned with moral development within the curriculum.

The legal interest in the development of pupil values was introduced in the 1944 Education Act, and made explicit within the 1988 Education Reform Act. This legislation stated that the purpose of education is to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils. Commentary of this legislation identifies two main issues: first, that the moral and cultural values of pupils were seen as being a legitimate educational aim; second, that there was no specific requirement that schools needed to promote these varying aspects of development. Simply acknowledging the scope of education did not require schools to alter their practice with regard to fostering values.

This situation remained unchanged until the passage of the 1992 Education (Schools) Act. It was this legislation which required that the spiritual, moral, cultural and social development of pupils should be covered by the statutory inspection framework. Therefore, since 1992 OfSTED [The Office for Standards in Education] inspectors have evaluated the performance of schools in achieving spiritual and moral development. The 1996 Education Act consolidated earlier legislation and clarified the situation.

The 1996 Education Act states that 'Each pupil should receive a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school, and prepares pupils for ... adult life'. This legislation imposed a clear requirement that schools should promote the spiritual and moral development of pupils.

Moral development

There is no suggestion in the legislation that moral development is the sole responsibility of religious education, rather, it remains the responsibility of the whole curriculum. Furthermore, because religious education in England and Wales is a secular pedagogical subject, rather than a confessional theological subject, an absolute moral framework is not available in the religious education curriculum (Fearn, 2002). Religious education is 'neutral' within this context and plays only a part of the moral development within school.

While it is not possible to explain exactly what moral development involves in the school context it remains the case that *understanding* pupils' values is the key element in *promoting* pupils' values. Consequently the remainder of this paper will concern the empirical investigation of pupil values in England and Wales.

Understanding pupil values

The investigation of pupil values in England and Wales is a legitimate focus of practical theology. The key enterprise in practical theology concerned with the investigation of pupil values has been undertaken by University of Wales, Bangor.

The Values Debate

The practical theology team at University of Wales, Bangor initiated a large scale survey designed to establish a benchmark of young people's values. The project was devised and developed through the 1990s and has resulted in numerous publications exploring atheism (Kay & Francis, 1995), support for religious education (Francis & Lewis, 1996; Lewis & Francis, 1996), religion and attitude toward environmental issues (Francis, 1997a), the impact of television viewing on values (Francis, 1997b), the relationship between religiosity and attitude toward substance use (Francis, 1997c; 2002; Francis & Mullen, 1997), the relationship between marital disruption and values (Francis & Evans, 1997), the relationship between bible reading and purpose in life (Francis, 2000), the benefits of growing up in a rural environment (Francis, 2003), values (Francis 2001a), the social significance of religious affiliation (Francis, 2001b), and a profile of Anglicans in Wales (Francis, 2003). The research initiative culminated in the publication of *The Values Debate* (Francis, 2001c). The purpose of the current illustration is to bring this research initiative to a new audience through the medium of Polish.

This research initiative was based on the premise that it is necessary to understand thoroughly the values of young people,

in order to establish a common frame of reference with young people, which would allow meaningful dialogue and education. In order to generate such an understanding, it was decided to gather a statistically robust database which would illustrate the values of young people.

The survey explored fifteen key values-areas, namely: personal well-being; worries; counselling; school; work; religious beliefs; church and society; the supernatural; politics; social concerns; sexual morality; substance use; right and wrong; leisure activities; and, local area. In addition to gathering information about these areas, the survey also investigated background variables such as age, sex, parental separation or divorce, church attendance, and television viewing. The resulting analyses have presented not only an overview of pupil values but also have presented the interrelations between these background variables and the values areas in focus.

The Bangor initiative was shaped by an appreciation and understanding of the wider research literature concerning the values of young people in England and Wales. Phenomena which had been shown to be of core concern to young people were included in the investigation. In focusing attention on those areas which had emerged during previous research, the Bangor initiative has built on previous studies. While the methodology of the Bangor project has been broadly similar to that employed by previous studies, the Bangor project differs in one important respect. The Project Director (L.J. Francis) decided that the dataset employed in the values survey should be built on the responses of no fewer than 30,000 young people. Assembling a dataset of this size was an ambitious undertaking and represented a high level of commitment to understanding the values of young people. Such a large dataset generated findings in which educators and pastoral workers can have confidence. The remainder of this paper is dedicated to introducing illustrative material from *The Values Debate* in order that the contribution of practical theology within the field of values education can be understood.

Describing the survey: Methodology

The questionnaire comprised a series of well focused Likert (1932) type items. Each item allowed respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a 5-point response scale. Pupils were asked to report whether they 'agree strongly', 'agree', whether they are 'not certain' whether they 'disagree', or 'disagree strongly'.

Data were provided by pupils from 163 schools from across England and Wales. Participating schools were asked to follow a standard procedure. The questionnaires were to be administered to normal class groups, to all year nine and year ten pupils in the school. Pupils were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. It was made clear to the pupils that nobody in their school would read their responses.

Sexual morality: a case study

Regarding sexual morality, the questionnaire included six items. These items are: it is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside marriage; it is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age (16 years); homosexuality is wrong; contraception is wrong; abortion is wrong; and, divorce is wrong. Pupils were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of these statements.

Overview

Table 1 shows the level of agreement with each of these statements. For the purpose of table 1, the categories 'agree strongly' and 'agree' have been combined to form a single category (yes) and the responses 'disagree strongly' and 'disagree' have been combined to form a single category (no).

Table 1: Sexual morality: values profile

Item	Yes	?	No
It is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside marriage	14	15	71
It is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age	24	22	55
Homosexuality is wrong	37	24	39
Contraception is wrong	5	21	73
Abortion is wrong	36	30	34
Divorce is wrong	19	26	56

Table 1 demonstrates that the majority of young people (71%) did not agree with the assertion that it is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside marriage, leaving only a small minority of pupils (14%) who took the more traditional view that sexual intercourse outside marriage is wrong. Fifteen percent of young people stated that they were unsure with regard to their agreement or disagreement with this item.

With regard to their perception of sexual intercourse under the legal age, the young people in the survey were more conservative than they had been with reference to the previous statement. While 24% of the participants agreed that it is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age, and 22% remained uncertain with regard to this item, this still left a majority of the respondents (55%) who did not agree that it is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age.

The proportions of young people who agreed that homosexuality is wrong (37%) and those who did not think that homosexuality is wrong (39%) were roughly similar. Twenty-four percent of young people were uncertain in this regard.

Only 5% of the participants agreed with the assertion that contraception is wrong. Twenty-one percent were uncertain in this regard, while 73% felt that contraception was not wrong.

There was less certainty among the participants with regard to the view that abortion is wrong. While 36% of the participants agreed with this view, 34% disagreed, and as many as 30% were uncertain.

Only 19% of the participants agreed that divorce is wrong, while 56% of the participants did not agree with this view. Twenty-six percent of the participants remained uncertain with regard to the view that divorce is wrong.

The influence of age

Table 2: The influence of age on sexual morality

Item	year 9 %	year 10 %	χ^2	P<
It is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside marriage	15	12	62.1	0
It is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age	26	21	134.7	.001
Homosexuality is wrong	37	38	1.8	NS
Contraception is wrong	6	4	71.9	.001
Abortion is wrong	38	33	87.1	.001
Divorce is wrong	20	18	34.1	.001

While the data have been gathered among only a narrow age range (13-15 years) of pupils, significant differences do emerge between the two age groups included in the survey. Table 2 shows that pupils in year ten were generally more permissive than those in year nine. Year ten pupils were significantly less likely than year nine pupils to agree that divorce, abortion, or contraception are wrong. Furthermore, they were less likely to agree that it is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside marriage, and they were less likely to agree that it is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age. Attitudes toward homosexuality were unrelated to age.

The influence of sex

Table 3: The influence of sex on sexual morality

Item	male %	female %	χ^2	P<
It is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside marriage	14	14	5.2	NS
It is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age	19	29	472.7	.001
Homosexuality is wrong	53	21	3535.9	.001
Contraception is wrong	7	3	269.1	.001
Abortion is wrong	32	39	180.8	.001
Divorce is wrong	23	15	283.3	.001

Table 3 shows that there were five significant differences in sexual morality which were related to the sex of the respondent. First, the most marked difference between males and females emerged with regard to their response to homosexuality. Many more males than females took the view that homosexuality is wrong. Second, a further clear difference emerged in response to the assertion that it is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age. This view was endorsed by significantly more females than males. Third, females were significantly more likely than males to agree with the view that abortion is wrong. Fourth, females demonstrated a more permissive view toward divorce than males. Fifth, males were significantly more likely than females to agree with the assertion that contraception is wrong.

The influence of parental separation or divorce

Participants were invited to indicate whether they had experienced parental separation or divorce. Table 4 explores the differences between those pupils who have experienced parental separation, and those who have not.

Table 4: The influence of parental separation or divorce on sexual morality

Item	Intact %	separation %	χ^2	P<
It is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside marriage	15	11	58.4	.001
It is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age	25	20	68.0	.001
Homosexuality is wrong	38	36	8.1	.01
Contraception is wrong	5	6	1.4	NS
Abortion is wrong	35	39	40.2	.001
Divorce is wrong	20	17	34.8	.001

Table 4 shows the impact of parental separation or divorce on sexual morality. Young people who had experienced parental separation displayed significantly more permissive attitudes toward sexual morality than those young people who had not experienced parental separation. They were less likely to agree

that it is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age or outside marriage. They were less likely to think divorce is wrong, and they were less likely to think homosexuality is wrong. On the other hand, they were more likely to consider abortion to be wrong than young people who had not experienced parental separation. Attitudes toward the acceptability of contraception were not significantly associated with experience of parental separation.

The influence of church attendance

The questionnaire invited participants to categorise their frequency of church attendance on a five point scale ranging from 'nearly every week', through, 'at least once a month', 'sometimes', 'once or twice a year', to 'never'. For the purpose of the current analysis the five categories have been reduced to three. Distinction will be drawn between those who attend church weekly, those who attend church occasionally, and those never who attend church.

Table 5: The influence of church attendance on sexual morality

Item	never %	sometimes %	weekly %	χ^2	P<
It is wrong to have sexual inter- course outside marriage	10	12	28	1034.0	.001
It is wrong to have sexual inter- course under the legal age	18	23	39	836.5	.001
Homosexuality is wrong	40	32	41	198.4	NS
Contraception is wrong	9	4	6	40.8	.001
Abortion is wrong	34	33	47	325.6	.001
Divorce is wrong	17	17	29	393.4	.001

Table 5 shows the impact of church attendance on sexual morality. Young churchgoers tended to hold more conservative attitudes on issues concerning heterosexual morality in comparison with those young people who never attend church. They were more likely to consider that it is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside of marriage and that it is wrong to have

sexual intercourse under the legal age. Young churchgoers were less likely to endorse abortion and divorce. Perceptions of homosexuality followed a different pattern. Occasional churchgoers held the most permissive attitude in this regard when compared with those young people who attend church weekly, and those who do not attend church.

Television influence

Participants were requested to indicate the amount of television that they had watched the previous day. For the purpose of the current analysis, television influence is explored by contrasting the young 'television addict' with the rest of the participants. The 'TV addict' label is given to those young people who indicated that they had watched more than four hours of television the day prior to the completion of the questionnaire.

Table 6: The influence of television viewing on sexual morality

Item	control %	TV addict %	x ²	P<
It is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside marriage	43	39	42.1	.001
It is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age	18	18	1.2	NS
Homosexuality is wrong	51	47	44.2	.001
Contraception is wrong	75	69	107.5	.001
Abortion is wrong	79	73	109.1	.001
Divorce is wrong	74	70	47.4	.001

Table 6 shows the differences between the young television addicts and the remainder of the participants with regard to issues of sexual morality. Young television addicts tended to hold more conservative attitudes toward sexual morality than the other group of participants. They were more likely to think that homosexuality, abortion, contraception, and divorce are wrong. However, the young television addicts were more likely than the other group of participants to present a liberal response concerning sexual intercourse under the legal age.

Conclusion

Any attempt to engage with young people in terms of education in sexual values would benefit from the data presented above. The understanding provided by these analyses allows educators to be aware of the perspectives held by young people of school age. An awareness of pupil perspectives will allow educators to deploy their resources in an appropriate manner.

It may be seen, from the examples above, that attempts to engage in values education concerning sexual morality would benefit from the insight provided by empirical research. It would be a difficult undertaking to demonstrate that effective moral education had taken place, without first understanding the level of moral maturity of the pupils. Research similar to that exemplified above allows educators to understand the level from which pupils are starting, and thus enables them to judge whether true development is actually taking place.

This paper has demonstrated that practical theology has a role in informing values education. Effective research can help to refine curriculum development. Curricular initiatives based on knowledge of the background values of the pupils, and of the various predictors of pupil values can be developed only from research. Curricular initiatives, which are not empirically based, risk being irrelevant to the experiences of the pupils.

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