

Researching School Values

King's College London

Bush House (SE) 2.12

27 June 2025



Presentations maximum 10 minutes

Schedule

10.30 – 11.00– Tea, Coffee and light breakfast served

11.00 – 11.10 – **Welcome** Linda Woodhead, Anna Strhan

11.10 – 11.25 – Charlotte Hobson, Mapping School Values

11.30 – 12.15 – **Panel 1:** Gill Duddy, George Gross and Linda Woodhead

12.15 – 12.30 – Tea and coffee

12.30 – 13.15 – **Panel 2:** Solange Lefebvre, Anna Strhan, Jennifer Harding-Richards

13.15 – 14.15 – Lunch

14.15 – 15.00 – **Panel 3:** Peter Hemming, Glenn Bezalel, David Lundie

15.00 – 15.30 – Tea and Coffee

15.30 – 16.15 – **Panel 4:** Line Nyhagen, Karl Kitching, Asli Kandemir

16.15 – 16.30 – **Closing remarks** Linda Woodhead, Anna Strhan

Abstracts

Charlotte Hobson

Mapping School Values – Although academic interest in values education within schools is growing, we still lack large-scale data mapping the specific values that institutions claim to promote. My doctoral research sought to address this gap by collecting values lists/statements from the websites of English state-funded schools. I employed three samples: one nationally representative of all state-funded schools in England, and two booster samples representative of faith and non-faith state schools respectively. This short presentation will outline the most commonly adopted school values as highlighted by my dataset, exploring what the key trends reveal about schools' approaches to values education and the broader values landscape within contemporary British society.

Panel 1: Chaired by Anna Strhan

Gill Duddy, George Gross, Linda Woodhead

Using data collected direct from school pupils in eight schools (primary and secondary) in different parts of England in late 2024/2025, this panel of co-researchers will present a 'pupil's eye view' on school values. Using 'quantifiable qualitative data', the panel will explore the pupils' perspectives on three themes. First, what do pupils think are the reasons for schools having values? Second, how do pupils perceive values being used in the school environment? Finally, what are the pupils' own values? This project is a preliminary study that provides a pupil-centred perspective on the function and efficacy of school values, and the relation of these to students' own values.

Panel 2: Chaired by Paula Montero

Solange Lefebvre

Education, diversity and religions in Quebec and Ontario - This brief talk explains how public secondary schools in Quebec and Ontario integrate diversity and values into their educational frameworks, based on a comparative analysis of their institutional websites (a method inspired by our collaboration with Linda Woodhead and Charlotte Hobson). Using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analysis of key thematic occurrences (values, diversity, religion, spirituality) with a qualitative examination of school discourse, the study revealed contrasting dynamics between the two provinces. While respect emerges as a shared core value, Quebec places greater emphasis on equal opportunity and the inclusion of students facing academic difficulties, whereas Ontario explicitly promotes inclusion, equity, and diversity, in line with its legislative frameworks. The role of religion also differs, absent from Quebec schools due to the secularization of the educational space, it remains institutionalized in Ontario's public Catholic schools, while spirituality appears in specific contexts in both provinces. The study thus highlights how educational policies and sociocultural contexts shape distinct conceptions of citizenship in Canadian public education.

Anna Strhan

The presentation reflects on two recent ethnographic research projects, 'Non-religious Childhoods: Growing Up Unbelieving in Contemporary Britain' and 'Becoming Citizens of "Post-Secular" Britain', in which the relations between values, religion, and belonging in primary schools in Britain were key threads. While the place of religion in school life varied across the different schools we studied, there were nevertheless distinctive shared values, which could be seen as new 'sacred' values, which were being widely fostered across the different schools. These included ideas of respect, kindness, and therapeutic values. This presentation considers briefly the role of these values in schools, and how pupils were experiencing them, including how they came to navigate tensions in relation to these values. It will then reflect on the role of these values, combined with pupils' experiences in homes and engagements with media and culture, in contributing to changes in broader moral, religious, and existential landscapes.

Jennifer Harding-Richards

The Curriculum for Wales (2022) offers a values-rich, purpose-driven framework that affords all schools the autonomy to design their own bespoke curricula that aligns with the national vision of developing ambitious, capable, and ethically informed citizens. Within this framework, Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE), formerly Religious Education, retains its unique and complex position. While it remains a statutory subject, early research (NCfREW 2024) demonstrates that its implementation varies widely, and its broader educational purpose remains contested. My doctoral research, currently in its early stages, investigates the evolving role of RVE, with particular emphasis on the often overlooked and misunderstood values and ethics components. Initial findings reveal significant uncertainty among teachers and schools regarding what constitutes effective RVE and how it can meaningfully align with the curriculum's four purposes. My study aims to map emerging practices, identify inconsistencies, and explore how RVE can support learners to navigate the complex moral and philosophical landscape of contemporary Wales. By engaging with practitioners, policymakers, and learners, my research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of RVE's potential as a transformative subject. It aims to support evidence-informed curriculum design, enhance teacher confidence, and influence national dialogue around the integration of values and ethics in education. Ultimately, my study ambitiously aspires to position RVE not as a marginal subject, but as a vital contributor to the holistic development of learners in a complex, rapidly changing society.

Panel 3: Chaired by Linda Woodhead

Peter Hemming

Therapeutic values in schools: beyond neoliberalism and individualising effects - Therapeutic values, such as confidence, self-esteem, resilience, wellbeing and emotional literacy have become increasingly prominent over the last few decades in schools across the UK nations and elsewhere in the world. These trends are set to continue in the context of a purported acute mental health crisis, particularly affecting the young, and exacerbated by the ongoing after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent cost of living pressures (Adams 2024, Porter 2023, Williams & Davies 2024). This also forms the backdrop of growing interest from the UK Labour Government, which is currently progressing through Parliament a flagship 'Children's

Wellbeing and Schools Bill'. Generally referred to as 'therapeutic education' in the academic literature (Ecclestone & Hayes 2009), critical analyses of these trends have tended to focus on the ways in which such values may promote certain modes of neoliberal citizenship, which require pupils to take individual responsibility for wider structural processes and inequalities (e.g. Brunila 2012, Gagen 2015, Mills 2022). This paper briefly reflects on findings from two Leverhulme Trust funded projects: 'Mapping Mindfulness in the UK' and 'Becoming Citizens of 'Post-Secular' Britain: Religion in Primary School Life' to go beyond these dominant readings of therapeutic values and explore the wider meanings and modes of citizenship promoted through different forms of therapeutic education. In doing so, the paper begins to map out a future research agenda for investigating the evolving nature of therapeutic values in schools, as well as competing constructions of 'wellbeing' across educational contexts.

Glenn Bezalel

From the so-called cultural wars to global military conflicts, issues of controversy can strain school community cohesion. Barack Obama (Goldberg 2020) has warned that "[w]e are entering into an epistemological crisis" for "[i]f we do not have the capacity to distinguish what's true from what's false, then by definition the marketplace of ideas doesn't work. And by definition our democracy doesn't work." Meanwhile, the Khan Review in the UK (2024) has noted the particular vulnerability of young people who are susceptible to "dangerous conspiracy theories and disinformation, alongside unregulated and societal-changing technology". However, despite the desire of many pupils to learn about such topics of consequence, many teachers feel ill-equipped and unsupported, and so prefer to avoid teaching about contentious subjects in the classroom.

This presentation argues that school values have a vital role to play in teaching and learning about issues of controversy in the spirit of what Paul Ricœur has called a 'genuine discourse' (Kearney 2004). By proudly adopting school values as lived values rather than as mere slogans, school leaders and teachers can provide a healthy and safe framework for thinking and debating the difficult topics that are shaping our world as per Arendtian 'agonistic pluralism' (1998). This holistic approach puts forward the importance of promoting epistemic tools alongside pastoral care, underpinned by the school ethos, to offer a more nuanced and humane educational response to the most contentious issues facing young people today.

David Lundie

Last Thoughts on British Values

"And your feet can only walk down two kinds of roads

Your eyes can only look through two kinds of windows

Your nose can only smell two kinds of hallways

You can touch and twist

And turn two kinds of doorknobs

You can either go to the church of your choice

Or you can go to Brooklyn State Hospital

You'll find God in the church of your choice

You'll find Woody Guthrie in Brooklyn State Hospital

And though it's only my opinion

I may be right or wrong

You'll find them both

In the Grand Canyon

At sundown" Bob Dylan – Last Thoughts on Woodie Guthrie

This paper employs Sarah Pink's (2015) sensory ethnography approach to understanding the embodiment of values, drawing on data from three projects (Bamber et al. 2019; Lundie et al. 2023; Palenski & Lundie forthcoming) over a decade, each of which employed ethnography to understand school values. What do Fundamental British Values look, smell, feel like? Where are they located? How do they move? With whose voices do they speak?

The 2021 reauthoring of the Ofsted inspection handbook was the first to articulate the spatio-temporal locations evidencing British Values, e.g. during assemblies, at the start and finish of the school day. This paper foregrounds changes to school environments which took place during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular emphasis on the control and care of bodies in and beyond the school space and their normative subscript.

Panel 4: Chaired by Gill Duddy

Line Nyhagen

In 2020 the Norwegian government launched an ambitious educational reform (LK20) which highlighted the teaching and promotion of key societal values in primary and secondary schools. The six key 'Core Curriculum' values to be taught and promoted are human dignity; identity and cultural diversity; critical thinking and ethical awareness; the joy of creating, engagement and the urge to explore; respect for nature and environmental awareness; and democracy and participation. The government notes that the six LK20 values are based on Christian and humanist heritage and traditions whilst also representing universal values, expressed in human rights and different religions and worldviews.

Teacher education plays a key role in interpreting, imparting and delivering the values emphasized by the LK20 reform. Recognising that values are not neutral and that different values may conflict with each other and hence require negotiation, the "Negotiating Values in Norwegian Teacher Education" (NeVa) research project examines how values are taught and negotiated in university teacher education across four educational disciplines and in teacher education training in schools, in Norway and the UK. Theoretically, the project draws on the different but interrelated concepts of negotiation (Nussbaum 2016), reflexivity (Ryan 2015; Garnett & Vanderlinden 2011; Gorski & Dalton 2019) and recognition (Fraser & Honneth 2003; Honneth 2007). NeVa is a 4-year project funded by the Research Council of Norway (2025-2028). This presentation aims to share key aspects of the NeVa project.

Karl Kitching

This short presentation will discuss findings both explicit school values and the hidden curriculum (Jackson 1968) of values that circulate in secondary school spaces in England. Drawing on ethnographic observations from the recent Leverhulme Trust-funded study 'Free' Expression at School? The Making of Youth Engagements with Race and Faith, the presentation will consider explicitly stated school values in terms of how they are positioned as a school's unique selling point in an ever-evolving school quasi-market, how they are mobilised to produce good behaviour and affiliation to the school, and how alignment with fundamental British values seems more important to be explicit about in some school contexts than others. Other values that are explicit but not stated as 'values' in schools include those driven by external pressure, including inspection and examination performance, a focus on citizenship as volunteering, charity, and individual responsibility, the surveillance and safeguarding of pupils thought to be at risk of radicalisation, and the (in)admissibility of different political issues in the classroom. The presentation will focus on inequalities of race, class and religion which derive from these dynamics. It will be framed within a Critical Secular perspective (Kitching and Gholami 2023), which analyses the role of sovereign (state) assemblages in seeking to regulate, rather than eliminate multiple inequalities as part of efforts "to shore up power in the never-ending quest to define national and civilisational identities" (Sheedy 2022, p.11).

Asli Kandemir

British Values from the Perspective of British-Turkish Youth - "Tolerance and Symbolic Borders: British-Turkish Identity, Values, and Community Cohesion" explores the narrated subjectivities of British-Turks, with a special focus on British-Turkish youth. It uncovers how Britishness, British values, and community cohesion are un-made and re-made in the pursuit of racial equality. In 2011, Conservative-led coalition government revised critical policies on community cohesion known as the Prevent Strategy, claiming that the previous government 'failed to confront the extremist ideology'. As part of this strategy, Fundamental British Values (FBVs) of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of faiths and beliefs were promoted and instrumentalised in UK education policy and practice to manage ethno-religiously minoritised youth, particularly Muslims. Although educators responded to the potential bordering effect of FBVs discourse by curating display boards on British Values that uphold British cultural markers, these practices were not sufficient to disassociate values teaching from Prevent. These concerns underlie the need for a bottom-up approach centring the voice of Muslim youth in defining British values before delivery. Therefore, I conducted a case study on a British-Turkish community group, which is ethno-religiously minoritised as Muslims and living in the North-West of England. Following a review of 45 policy related texts on FBVs, published under New Labour and Coalition governments, I interviewed 22 participants consisted of a government official, four third sector representatives, and ten British Turkish parents of seven young British-Turks between the ages of 13 and 18. Through vignette methodology, I co-generated a bottom-up approach centring the voice of British-Turkish youth in defining Britishness, values, and cohesion supported by non-formal education activities within the community. Drawing on my research findings, this book argues that young British-Turks see themselves equally British, thus de-politicise British values, and emphasise value plurality and universality to challenge disciplinary power of FBVs. Indeed, they promote convivial everyday relations through inclusive British values of equality, good character, and friendship complementing FBVs for cohesive society.

Speaker biographies

Glenn Bezalel - Glenn Y. Bezalel is Deputy Head (Academic) at City of London School, where he teaches Religion & Philosophy. With a PhD from the University of Cambridge exploring conspiracy theorising among young people, he has written widely on education in both academic and professional publications. Most recently, he is the author of *Teaching Classroom Controversies*, published by Routledge, which is the essential guide for teachers trying to navigate their way through issues of controversy in the age of 'fake news' and 'alternative facts'. Glenn also serves on the Advisory Board of the Commission into Countering Online Conspiracies in Schools.

Gillian Duddy - Gill Duddy is a PhD researcher at King's College London. Her research focuses on how individuals negotiate the vast array of organisational values with which they are confronted in daily life.

George Gross - George Gross (@drgeorgegross) is a Visiting Research Fellow at King's College London, and founder of the British Coronations Project there. He is a co-convenor at 'The Religious History of Britain, 1500–1800' seminar held at the Institute of Historical Research (IHR) in London. His most recent research involved polling children across the UK at the time of the 2023 Coronation – asking questions about the monarchy, British history and identity. Publications include a co-edited book [Reformation Reputations \(2020\)](#); [The Last Coronation in Scotland 1651](#) in the *Court Historian*; and articles on Coronation perceptions and Anglo-Russian communications between Tsar Ivan IV ('The Terrible') and Elizabeth I. A monograph on British Coronations and the Shaping of National Identity, c.973–present is forthcoming.

Jennifer Harding-Richards - TBC

Peter Hemming - Peter Hemming is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at University of Surrey, specialising in sociology of education, sociology of religion and qualitative methodologies. His specific research interests focus on diversity of religion and belief; religion, community and education (including faith schools); young religious/non-religious lives; and health, wellbeing and emotions (including mindfulness and therapeutic education). Peter has written (or co-written) over 30 academic publications in peer-reviewed journals and scholarly books.

Charlotte Hobson - Charlotte Hobson is a Postgraduate Research Assistant affiliated with the NCF project. Her AHRC-funded doctoral research analysed the websites of nationally representative samples of English state-schools to explore if/how religion was portrayed as featuring in school life. Part of this involved examining institutions' self-selected values. She successfully defended her thesis at Lancaster University last month.

Asli Kandemir - Dr Asli Kandemir is an interdisciplinary sociologist (Liverpool Hope University, Vice Chancellor's Scholar, 2016-22), focusing on intersecting inequalities, (education) policy analysis, and youth and community-led nation-building through values teaching. She is currently working at the University of Birmingham on a study examining race inclusion in UK HE and leading her UK Government-funded project titled Values for Cohesion: In the Shadow of Karagöz and Hacivat. Asli is also writing her first monograph on Tolerance and Symbolic Borders to be published by Bristol University Press in 2026. Asli also works on equitable mentoring and volunteers as a certified mentor to academics and professionals. She is a former radio DJ and an avid capoeirista.

Karl Kitching - Karl Kitching is Professor of Public Education and Head of Research at the School of Education, University of Birmingham. His research focuses on questions of race, religion, gender and sexuality in schools and children and young people's lives, and he is forging

a critical secular perspective on inequalities in schools. He was the PI of the Leverhulme-funded study 'Free' Expression at School? The Making of Youth Engagements with Race and Faith. Karl is the author of *Childhood, Religion and School Injustice* (2020) and *The Politics of Compulsive Education: Racism and Learner-Citizenship* (2014).

Solange Lefebvre - Solange Lefebvre is full Professor at the Institute of Religious Studies, University of Montréal and Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. She holds the Research Chair in Management of Cultural and Religious Diversity, co-holds the Quebec-France Chair on the Freedom of Expression, and directs a research interdisciplinary center on religions and spiritualities at the University of Montreal. Her areas of interest include religion in the public sphere; laïcité and secularisation; youth, education and generations. She has published more than 145 articles and chapters, 6 monographs and 13 collective books, edited 17 issues of scientific journals and published a dozen of scientific reports for governmental agencies.

David Lundie - David Lundie is Professor of Education at the University of Glasgow. He is principal investigator on the ESRC project: 'Teaching for Digital Citizenship: Data justice in the classroom and beyond' and the Templeton Religion Trust project: 'Measuring empathy to address culture gaps in character virtue development'. He is deputy editor of the British Journal of Religious Education

Paula Montero - Full Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of São Paulo / Researcher, Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning, São Paulo, Brazil / Co-Investigator, Nonreligion in a Complex Future project, Ottawa, Canada.

Line Nyhagen - Dr Line Nyhagen is Professor of Sociology at Loughborough University, UK, and Adjunct Professor at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL), Bergen, Norway. She researches religion, gender, ethnicity, citizenship and feminism across different countries, with a focus on Christianity and Islam. She also studies social inclusion and citizenship in relation to marginalized groups in higher education contexts.

Anna Strhan - Anna Strhan is Reader in Sociology at the University of York, where she leads the Culture, Values and Practices Research Cluster. She also co-leads the Social Studies of Ethics, Morality and Values Network. She is the author of a number of books, including, most recently, *Growing Up Godless: Non-Religious Childhoods in Contemporary England* (Princeton University Press).

Linda Woodhead - Linda Woodhead is F.D.Maurice Professor, and Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, at King's College London. She researches religion, spirituality, and values in Christian-heritage societies. Her most recent books are *That Was the Church That Was: How the Church of England Lost the English People* (with Andrew Brown, 2016), *Gen Z, Explained* (with Katz, Ogilvie and Shaw 2022) and *Messy Methods in Researching Religion* (ed. with Cadman and Graham, 2025).

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The event is also co-hosted by the [Social Studies of Ethics, Values and Morality Network](#), an open, interdisciplinary, international network which organizes regular online meetings and provides a means to connect with other researchers working in this field.