

# Spiritual Development as an Educational Goal

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** To inform current international debates about educating for wholeness and purpose, this article gives a critical analysis of spiritual development as a goal of state-funded schooling in England and Wales.

**Design/Approach/Methods:** The analysis follows a history of ideas approach. Relevant texts are examined to understand how notions of “spiritual” and “development” were first combined and introduced into mass education, and how they have changed over time.

**Findings:** The concept of spiritual development blends scientific conceptions of human development with a holistic, but ambiguous formative principle. This expedient, even paradoxical ideal, has resulted in confusion among practitioners and allowed for some considerable shift in policy.

**Originality/Value:** Spiritual development in the English context provides a paradigmatic case by which to explore the integration of formative goals in the curriculum. While in some respects the English tradition of spiritual development represents something of its time and its unique cultural context, its underlying assumptions resonate with renewed international interest for educating for meaning and purpose.

## Keywords

Cultural, curriculum, development, moral, social, spiritual

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## Introduction

The promotion of pupils' spiritual development is a statutory duty of all maintained (public) schools in England and Wales.<sup>1</sup> Currently reinterpreted as a means of delivering the "fundamental British values" agenda, spiritual development remains important to school leaders and practitioners because it is routinely included in inspections as a criterion of a school's overall effectiveness. Spiritual development was first explicitly mandated in the legislation for universal secondary education in 1944. As an educational ideal, however, it has a much older provenance. This can be traced through the Victorian period—when mass publicly funded elementary education was first introduced in England—to the very beginnings of the Western educational tradition in ancient Greece. The cultivation and orientation of minds toward goodness, truth, and beauty is an archetypal supposition of Western intellectual thought, perhaps best exemplified by Plato's enduring analogy of the cave (c.375 BCE/1991, pp. 193–196). According to this metaphor, stages of enlightenment are reached as the intellect ascends from false knowledge to the knowledge of the good and just. The relationship between the development of autonomous reason, personal growth, and civic responsibility has since become a fundamental assumption of Western pedagogy, of modern psychological theory, and the creation of the now worldwide, European model of basic schooling. Spiritual development in the English educational tradition, which is rooted in these same basic assumptions, therefore gives a unique, but internationally relevant, case in point by which to explore how one ideal of formative education has manifested in theory, policy, and practice in a specific context. Intended to add a moral, holistic, and personal dimension to schooling otherwise shaped by literacy and numeracy education (historically referred to as the "three Rs"<sup>2</sup>), the story of spiritual development in the English education system is an insightful example of how goals for holistic education may provide opportunities for pupils' formative development that "go beyond well-being," but on account of broad and open definitions, may also lose meaning, or even subvert their original aims according to changing policy priorities.

## Spiritual development in English education policy

The promotion of pupils' spiritual development was first explicitly stated at the beginning of the 1944 Education Act. Local governments were tasked to ensure schools "contributed to the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development" of their respective communities (Education Act 1944, s2.7[UK]). This has been reaffirmed in all subsequent legislation and guidance, notably the 1988 Education Reform Act, which added to this list, "cultural" development (Education Act 1988, s1.2[UK])—terminology that was reused again in the next major legislation (Education Act 2002, s78.1[UK]). Spiritual development is therefore rarely separated from these other concepts and is often referred to in schools as spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development (SMSC). SMSC is not a discrete subject, but an overall cross-curricular aim that schools must promote throughout all

their activities. It can therefore be understood as what Bernstein considered an “integrated” aspect of the curriculum in the sense that it is supposed to link the various contents of an otherwise “collection”-type curriculum to a basal concept (1975).

It should be noted from the outset that spiritual development as an integrated purpose of schooling is not to be equated with religion in a strict sense here. Spiritual development as an educational goal has been readily distinguished from religion by educationists and religionists alike. For example, Rowan Williams—former Archbishop of Canterbury (Leader of the Established Church, the state religion)—in defining Christian spirituality, stated that it is categorically *not* what is meant by “spiritual values” in the education system (Williams, 1999). Spiritual development as an educational goal has therefore received criticism from some educationists on account that it has little conceptual clarity when removed from a religious context (Carr, 1995). However, despite being a secular concept in the contemporary English educational system, spiritual development can be understood, like much of the European educational tradition, as a legacy of Christianity—a vestigial ghost in the educational machine of what is now one of the most secularized countries in Europe.

Before going into more historical detail about this relationship, for the international reader it is important to briefly state how spiritual development is currently interpreted in government policy and give some practical definition of it. One important aspect of current policy is the fundamental British values agenda (Department for Education [DfE], 2014). Another is how spiritual development is conceptualized and evaluated by the government’s educational inspection service, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Ofsted is charged with evaluating schools, currently giving an overall judgment of effectiveness based on this guidance and other stated criteria.<sup>3</sup> Guidance stipulated by Ofsted is therefore crucial to practice in general (Perryman et al., 2018). For spiritual development, the introduction of Ofsted inspections in 1993 was particularly significant because it was the first time it had to be defined (Brown & Furlong, 1996). As explained in the section “A contemporary twist” later in this article, SMSC has been reinforced as part of a wider policy of promoting the “fundamental British values” of the rule of law, individual liberty, and civic responsibility. The recently revised guidelines for inspections, the *School Inspection Handbook* states that “inspectors will always consider the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of pupils at the school” prior to giving their verdict (Ofsted, 2019, p. 29). This means that schools can be downgraded if they do not provide evidence that they promote the spiritual development of their pupils. According to the recently revised 2019 *School Inspection Handbook*, to promote spiritual development means that a school should provide opportunities for pupils to develop the:

- ability to be reflective about their own beliefs (religious or otherwise) and perspective on life
- interest in, and respect for, different people’s faiths, feelings and values

- sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them
- use of imagination and creativity in their learning
- willingness to reflect on their experiences. (Ofsted, 2019, pp. 59–60)

According to these definitions, spiritual development is supposed to occur when pupils can experience, create, inquire, and enjoy things beneficial to life's meaning and purpose. While this may include learning about religions and worldviews, spiritual development is essentially not something of religious faith, but a universal human faculty which is exercised and advanced through experience and reflection. As such, activities pertaining to spiritual development in schools are assigned to areas of the curriculum by means of audits that indicate where relevant provision in programs of study may occur. Some curriculum subjects—Art, English Literature, and Religious Education, for example—are commonly understood to provide greater opportunities for spiritual development. However, Science and Mathematics may also contribute to spiritual development according to the definitions given. They may stimulate awe at the natural world or wonder at the complexity of the universe through concepts such as infinity or probability, for example.

### **The origins of spiritual development as an educational goal**

The 1944 Education Act expanded universal public education to secondary schooling. It did so on much of the same premises of the 1870 Education Act which had introduced elementary education. The legacy of the 1870 settlement and the cultural assumptions of this dominating period in English history are imperative to understanding spiritual development as an educational goal today. Two fundamental factors that have accompanied education policy since 1870 are contestation about the role of religion in publicly funded schooling and concern about moral formation. These ongoing themes are indicative of unresolved tensions in the general cultural orientation and intellectual background inherited from the Victorian period. They also represent a concrete compromise found when preparing legislation in 1944 that first combined the terms “spiritual,” “moral,” and “development.”

Under the 1870 settlement, the government established new elementary schools in the control of local government and offered increased funds to voluntary religious organizations to run already existing, but patchy, networks of schools. In opposition to supporting this existing provision, some advocated the creation of an entirely secular state-funded education system. The Liberal Government, newly elected in 1868, after intense debate, opted for the “dual system” still in force today—by which the state both gave funds to voluntary religious organizations to run schools and funded the creation of new schools of no specific religious character to be controlled by the state. Nevertheless, although the new government-controlled schools were not affiliated to any given

religious organization, they were to provide a generic Christian ethos and instruction—the absence of which was unworkable for a Victorian consensus.

Parliament has included religious minorities since the Victorian era (when the first public atheist was admitted after a lengthy struggle), but the second chamber, the House of Lords, automatically includes Bishops of the Established Church—who have had a considerable influence on education legislation. However, in the national debate about the 1870 Act, it was nonconformist Christians (denominations other than the Established Church) who called for schools to be arranged on an “undenominational” principle, that is, the Established Church would not instigate education based on the creedal formularies of the Church of England. Government-controlled schools were therefore to be broad and inclusive of all denominations in their curriculum, including provision of religious education and collective worship (Cruickshank, 1964). Subsequently, this broad commitment has been reasserted by the Established Church, and it is in this context that spiritual development as an educational goal may be understood as an astute compromise with the aim of finding a common formative goal among diverse stakeholders. Its inclusion as an aim of the education system captures a general principle, held across different worldviews, about the purpose of education going beyond the instilling of knowledge and skills.

In 1944, the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, was appointed to write the preamble to the 1944 Education Act which used the phrase “spiritual development” for the first time in statute. We are fortunate the late Jack Priestley, a former Principal of Westhill College, Birmingham, once interviewed Canon J. Hall, the assistant to Temple. According to Priestley’s account, Hall explained that the term “spiritual” was used because it was “much broader” than religion, and “if we had used the word ‘religious’ they [Members of Parliament] would all have started arguing about it” (Hall in Priestley, 1997, p. 29). This testimony illustrates how the mandate for spiritual development as an educational goal reflects a certain political compromise, but one that attempted to capture a shared, common, and broad purpose for all educational activities in the holistic formation of the human person. It is necessary to explore some of the philosophical assumptions of this historic articulation. Appreciating the intellectual background that enabled spiritual development to appeal to a broad consensus, and for such a long time, is important. While it seems likely the term was pragmatically chosen on account of its vagueness, it would only be possible to make an expedient combination of these ideas if they were, in some sense at least, a plausible proposition.

Basil Yeaxlee’s (1925) two-volume *Spiritual Values in Adult Education* is the first attempt at a comprehensive articulation of the idea of spiritual development in the era of mass education in Britain. Given the subtitle *A study of a neglected aspect* at the time of writing, the significance of Yeaxlee’s contribution has also been, since with the exception of Yeaxlee’s later successor, Jack Priestley, overlooked by scholars even though it has had a long-lasting influence on policy.<sup>4</sup>

Yeaxlee's ideas informed a pivotal discussion about the purpose of schooling that took place at an international conference in Jerusalem in 1928. Archbishop Temple, who later led the drafting of the 1944 Act's preamble, was present and was much impressed by the ecumenical vision of education decided at the council (Priestley, 1991). The concluding document emphasized that education must promote "spiritual development" and "all that fosters the development of personality and fits it for the service of mankind" (International Missionary Council [IMC], 1928, p. 227). As Priestley observes, it is of note that elsewhere in these proceedings there are dedicated papers about Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. These demonstrate that, although a subject for conjecture and debate, the notion of the "spiritual" was at that time also considered to span across cultures and religions—an assumption later to be enshrined in law in the 1988 Act.

Yeaxlee was Principal at Westhill College, Birmingham, from 1930 to 1935, before going on to become Reader in Educational Psychology at the University of Oxford until 1949. Throughout his career, and subsequently in his retirement, he lobbied ceaselessly for spiritual values to be included in the school curriculum, petitioning R. A. Butler and Archbishop Temple prior to the drafting of the 1944 Act (Chorley, 1984). Both Yeaxlee and Westhill represent examples of an influential tradition in nonconformist (i.e., liberal protestant Christian) educational thought and practice, crucial to understanding the concept of spiritual development in the English education system. Westhill College was founded by nonconformist industrialists with the aim of improving the lives of ordinary people by training specialist teachers to work in schools and voluntary organizations. *Spiritual Values in Adult Education* documents how various similar institutions and movements among the working classes voluntarily supported the "general principles" of spiritual development for lifelong education, rather than narrower instrumental purposes of training for work.

Yeaxlee argues that to avoid the horrific perils of World War I, which he witnessed firsthand, true, and lasting peace could not be created without education that focused on the formation of spiritual values. For Yeaxlee, this goal was compatible with, and supported by, the most up-to-date scientific insights of psychology and biology. In this regard, of particular influence to Yeaxlee was the thought of Henri Bergson (1859–1941), with whom he concurred that every human being was a dynamic force of personality. This did not mean the spiritual was immaterial, or not real. On the contrary, Yeaxlee's conception maintained, following the long tradition in liberal theology, that it was the innate and natural property of the human person. Spiritual values developed according to the propensity of each individual to stand back from the universe and reflect and establish his or her own relationship to the world and others. Personality, therefore, while having a biological basis, was not a "given," but is emerging. It contains "something infinite and universal, realizing itself in the concrete human life of the individual, the transcendent becoming immanent" (Yeaxlee, 1925, p. 24). Here lies the most important divergence of spiritual development as an educational goal compared with an historic, more strictly religious meaning. It does not rest upon a dualist

metaphysics of a “spirit/soul” and “body” but on a philosophical resolution of this tension, compatible with a material account of mind. Although continual, dynamic, and transcendent, spiritual development is a natural psychological process.

### **Pedagogies of spiritual development and their basic assumptions**

The implementation of school inspections by Ofsted in the 1990s prompted debate and consultation about the nature of spiritual development which until then had been undefined (National Curriculum Council [NCC], 1993). As a result, academic interest in spiritual development in England increased, leading to several small-scale research projects, the creation of a small but viable research community, and the founding of the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*. By this time, Yeaxlee's philosophy had already been forgotten. However, Yeaxlee's basic assumptions anticipated subsequent pedagogies of spiritual development in two principal respects. The first of these is the psychological connotations of “development.” “Development,” as opposed to the “spiritual,” evokes the scientific disciplines of “human development” or “developmental psychology.” This connotation is important not only because it blends a materialist view of the human with a term borrowed from religion, but because a material view of the person claims universality in the sense that general psychological theories apply to all people. This dominant principle relates to a second, that of individualism. On all accounts of spiritual development from Yeaxlee onward, spiritual development is stressed as personal, following a course determined by an individual, on account of their “inner” inclinations theorized in one way or another. Along with this view are the corollaries that spiritual development, as a free and spontaneous phenomenon, is something to which children are somewhat privileged, but that is somewhat universal in character. These beliefs represent, as well as some of the central tenets of liberal Protestantism, a romanticism that has had a long influence on English education, culture, and literature since the European Enlightenment. Childhood has a spiritual and moral quality which is lost in adulthood. It follows that children cannot fully develop spiritually by means of instruction by adults alone, but only in their capacity to be free agents. As the Oxford scholar Copley (2000) explains in his treatment of spiritual development, the poets Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Blake established the cultural background, and cultural capital, for spiritual experience to become a goal of education.

Influential pedagogical models of spiritual development elaborate on these basic principles. Inspired by the Oxford biologist Sir Alistair Hardy, Hay and Nye (1998) see salient personal experiences as prerequisite to spiritual development. To cultivate it, therefore, children's awareness needs to be stimulated through suitable activities, such as reflection, meditation, and “stilling”—the experience of interiority. As part of this process, students are encouraged to “keep an open mind,” aided, for example, by contemplating optical illusions in the manner that the philosopher Karl Popper also challenged his students to think about alternative perspectives of

reality (Hay, 2000, pp. 74–75). As children’s introspective awareness is often ignored and dulled by a culture that does not value it, it is the task of the educator, therefore, to reconnect children with their deeper selves. According to Nye (1996), the same cultural biases led mainstream developmental psychologists to overlook spiritual development in their research, despite there being a theoretical precedent for it in the work of pioneering psychologists Piaget and Vygotsky.

A postmodernist variation on this theme which, although different in its philosophical foundations, leads to similar basic assumptions in practice has been advanced by two prominent spiritual educators, Clive and Jane Erricker (Erricker & Erricker, 2000; Erricker et al., 1997). The Errickers’ model of spiritual development is interesting because, rather than suggesting any “grand” spiritual narrative should shape an approach to spiritual development in schooling—as we find in Yeaxlee for example—the individual narratives of children should be given absolute priority. Inspired by interviews with children, Erricker and Erricker argue that as the curriculum, traditionally understood, presupposes there is a distinct body of knowledge, and associated requisite skills that must be acquired, children’s own meaning-making is “marginalized.” Traditional pedagogies fail to give enough credence to the development of the learner as a whole person because their own experiences are, in a sense, trumped by the aggregated and staid narratives of the curriculum. This critique is justified, the Errickers argue, because no curriculum can claim absolute epistemological authority and certainty. It may only present one picture of the world among many. True spiritual development is therefore to be promoted by a narrative pedagogy, one in which the learner is encouraged and supported to develop their own meaning-making in a free and responsible manner, and in purposeful and constructive relationship with educators. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this model of spiritual development has met considerable criticism, mainly on account of its assumption of a strong but untenable anti-realism (Wright, 2001). However, it serves here in the present argument as a good indication of the progressive orientation toward spiritual development held within a small, but influential research community that grew out of successive policy moves reinforcing the mandate of schools to provide for spiritual development in the 1990s.

In the new millennium, spirituality arguably became more “mainstream” within psychology (King et al., 2006). It has often been included as an important personal strength in positive psychology which has had an increased influence on educational discourses in the last two decades. In the influential *Values in Action Scale* for example, the awareness of transcendence is an important dimension of well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2006). Researchers working in similar paradigms claim there are also grounds for considering spirituality as a distinct and significant factor in its own right which correlates positively with good health (Shoshani et al., 2019). There has also been a resurgence of scholarly interest in “character virtue development” which in some sense has reanimated the vision of Yeaxlee for an education that develops the “personality”—not in the sense of the stable traits of personality psychology as it since developed, but of

“character” as a “dynamic relational system” (Lerner & Callina, 2014). Although a field with a confusing array of competing definitions and conceptual frameworks, arguably there is a growing evidence base for the notion of “character” and how it may be supported through educational interventions (Clement & Bollinger, 2016), for which there is some evidence for at least some intercultural norms (Thoma et al., 2019). In recent years, there has also been a surge of interest in related practices and their benefits for mental health, such as mindfulness (Van Dam et al., 2018). While not using the language of the “spiritual,” current mindfulness interventions in childhood and adolescence incorporate some of the principles previously understood as spiritual development. Like spiritual development, mindfulness draws upon a religious precursor—in this case Buddhist meditation—but deliberately removes this terminology from its new application, which is supposed to be secular and scientific in character. Despite similarities of purpose between positive psychology, mindfulness, and SMSC, there has yet to be any formal link between SMSC policy and these movements, although at present educational programs based on these models of spirituality are being trialed in English schools to some acclaim.

### **A contemporary twist**

The new millennium heralded substantial changes in education policy in England. The attacks of September 11, 2001, set in place a chain of events that had far-ranging social and educational consequences (Moulin, 2012). One of these was the increased stigmatization and self-identification of Muslim minorities, who previously were more likely to have been considered in terms of ethnic or national identity rather than religion (Panjwani & Moulin-Stožek, 2017). A dimension of this, exacerbated by terrorist attacks on British soil in 2007, was the implementation of a program to prevent violent extremism by the U.K. government. This developed into a multiagency strategy, known as “prevent” with statutory obligations for local governments, schools, hospitals, universities, as well as the police and security services (HM Government, 2015). The educational impact of this policy has been among its most controversial aspects, not least for the implementation of a “fundamental British values” agenda for all schools (Beck, 2018; Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2017). A perhaps unforeseeable development of this policy was its use of the preexisting statutory requirement for spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development for the same purposes as the prevent strategy (DfE, 2014).

The fundamental British values agenda arose in response to a media furor over several state-funded schools in Birmingham that were supposedly teaching “radical Islam”—known as the “trojan horse affair” (Poole, 2018). These schools were alleged, on account of a leaked (now thought to be faked) letter, to have been part of a conspiracy of extremists to take governance of state-funded schools for their own ideological purposes. The government, in addition to banning

a number of teachers (who were subsequently reinstated on appeal) and ordering Ofsted inspections of the schools, issued revised guidance on SMSC. *Promoting Fundamental British Values as Part of SMSC* (DfE, 2014) emphasizes the promotion of the rule of law, tolerance of those of different faiths, and liberty, alongside other less political goals of SMSC, such as developing “self-esteem and self-confidence” (p. 5).

The reception of this guidance has proved controversial among educators who have interpreted it as directed at marginalized groups and representing a cultural supremacist view of Britishness (Winter & Mills, 2018). Eade (2018) observes it takes a superficial view of spiritual development and is potentially counterproductive in terms of encouraging participation of minorities in civic life. Nevertheless, due to the Ofsted requirement to promote fundamental British values, schools have taken up the agenda earnestly to demonstrate compliance. One visible outcome of this is fundamental British values slogans and images posted on school walls and notice boards. These, perhaps inevitably, interpret and represent British values as prevalent cultural tropes of Britishness—such as the picture of fish and chips observed by the author in a Birmingham children’s center supposedly illustrating the stated British value of “table manners” (somewhat incongruous as fish and chips is a street food often eaten with the hands from newspaper!).

The appropriation of the preexisting duty to promote SMSC as part of the British values agenda can be interpreted as an inversion of the ideal of spiritual development when compared to its historical and intellectual origins. As we have seen, spiritual development as an educational ideal grew out of a perceived need for the cultivation of supra-political (or pre-political) moral values in the aftermath of World War I, becoming formalized into legislation as a goal of the education system at the end of World War II. It was originally conceived as vital in the fostering of universal human values necessary for peace common to all religious and cultural traditions. This provenance would seem to contradict the later postulation of the very notion of a distinct set of “British values.” As an island nation once at the center of world trade, it glosses over the long influence of global cultures and the liberal, cosmopolitan principles that developed as a result of this history. The fundamental British values agenda reduces the more expansive concept of spiritual development as elaborated in various pedagogical literature to a narrower, political goal. It departs from the original aim of SMSC to appeal to the deeper principle of common spiritual values that may unite different cultural and religious groups. This twist in the story of spiritual development serves as a good example of how an integrative curriculum principle may shift in its policy aims and pedagogical practice on account of its conceptual openness.

### **Spiritual development as an international goal of schooling?**

The above sections have introduced the international reader to spiritual development in the English education system. Aside from the fundamental British values agenda which has given SMSC a

politicized complexion in recent years, in practice, since its inception little has changed as to how schools may approach spiritual development in England. It is an umbrella term for any activity across the curriculum that may stimulate pupils' reflection, creativity, imagination, wonder, or enlarging of experience or emotion. As such it can be considered as a useful and flexible educational tool, something that can breathe life into the dry content of the curriculum. In an otherwise instrumentalized system where things are often done for the sake of some other outcome, activities that exercise these "spiritual" capacities are of intrinsic worth to learners, even if they may be sometimes recognized in schools for the purposes of the Ofsted inspection alone. It is the value of such a formative "integrating idea" of the curriculum as Bernstein (1975) would have it, that spiritual development may offer to international debates in formative education. As it avoids postulating a discrete "values" agenda separated from "knowledge," it constitutes a formative principle underpinning the curriculum that is not merely an "add-on" or afterthought. However, as it has played out in England, spiritual development may have fallen short of this goal because of the intentional ambiguity necessitated by its all-encompassing remit. Bernstein offers five criteria of evaluating integrated curricula of which two—consensus and coherence—are particularly illuminating in the case of spiritual development. On both counts, spiritual development in England has been problematic. As we have seen, it is a deliberately broad and vague concept, and little work has been undertaken to embed it in all curriculum areas. Rather than articulating clear rationales for spiritual development in different subject areas, educationists have, since the 1990s, repeatedly asked the question "What *is* spirituality?" (Best, 1996, p. 5 original italics).

In terms of the international search for "21st century skills" as interest in formative education renews, the old goals of "the three Rs" inherited from the 19th century and their modern equivalents seem less relevant in an increasingly automated and connected world. In this context, the story of spiritual development is of renewed relevance. Based on the English experience, we may concur, going forward, initiatives for formative education need to balance conceptual breadth and wide-ranging applicability with specificity and clarity. Too much definition may put inclusivity at risk by imposing "top-down" values, too little definition may anyway enable policy "creep" toward another political agenda, as we have seen in the case of fundamental British values.

Furthermore, when discussing SMSC in the international context, in addition to the more obvious culturally determined "fundamental British values," it is crucial to note that spiritual development harbors several cultural assumptions that stem from its origins among progressive, liberal protestant Christian educators in early 20th-century England. The roots of these assumptions tap deep into England's intellectual and cultural history. The use of imagination, creativity, and feeling are the prerequisites to spiritual development currently suggested by Ofsted, but these were also the faculties championed long before by the English romantic poets in opposition to the onslaught of industrialization, for example. A key aspect of this cultural inheritance is the supposed

universal nature of spiritual development. Because it is an innate biological faculty, it applies to those of all faiths and those of none. When discussing spiritual development for the international context, it is worth examining this claim further. On face value, it may seem that the claim for universalizability makes spiritual development internationally applicable as it seeks to transcend different belief systems. However, this claim is potentially exclusionary because of this very same assumption. It homogenizes different values and perspectives of human development into one hegemonic account—overwriting religious and secular divides, for example. Some of its fundamental premises, such as its individualism, focus on experience, and separation from otherwise salient sources of moral authority (such as revealed holy scripture, for example) may be incompatible with established cultural traditions in other national and educational contexts. The difference between collectivist and individualist cultures may be particularly important in this regard.

Despite its universal claims, the assumptions of spiritual development as an educational goal have been quite heavily influenced by specific cultural values. While the growing scientific literature relating to spiritual development may be considered as evidence for its universal importance, by the same token, the implicit assumptions of positive psychology too come with some loaded cultural ideals. Like the early progressive educationists, positive psychologists believe that as there are natural and innate values ready to be drawn out of every child, these values are also present in all cultures. It was for this reason, pioneers of the spiritual education tradition, such as Tolstoy, for example, adapted and appropriated moral fables from all over the world for educational purposes to distill their moral essence (Moulin, 2008). While this approach may now seem naive, some of the fundamental goals of spiritual development will be important in the future. We cannot blame the originators of spiritual development for having a specific cultural background, although we may need to modify some of their claims. Their concerns for peace, cooperation, and personal holistic development are certainly still held among educators internationally. Indeed, as our power to innovate, create, and communicate is increased with technological progress, the axiological purpose of education will only become all the more important globally. Increased technological power makes ethical questions more pressing, and the formation of moral agents more crucial. As the potential for good or bad outcomes is increased, the need for the technical skills of the past will be diminished. Every cultural tradition has rich resources that would aid a process of reflection on “what matters” in education as our planet goes through the forthcoming period of unprecedented, truly global change. Arguably these traditional resources often resonate with one central premise of spiritual development that can be identified here in the English tradition. An enlightened global culture would be one that provides opportunities for the development of learners in every sense that they can develop. To go beyond the knowledge and skills dictated by individual curriculum subjects, to the bigger picture of how each subject taken together may accumulatively inform life’s meaning and purpose in the round. Education should point

beyond the shadows of things, to reuse the analogy from Plato, ultimately to knowledge of what is good. Although developing integrative, formative goals for schooling worldwide along these lines might be lofty, ambiguous, or challenging, this may be a challenge worth taking up afresh. How formative curriculum aims may manifest in theory, practice, and policy in different cultural contexts is an exciting question, no doubt meriting further scholarly collaboration. Evaluating spiritual development in the English tradition has indicated some opportunities in this regard, as well as some warnings.


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### Notes

1. Historically, Northern Ireland and Scotland have distinct education law. In this article, we examine spiritual development in the context of England and Wales. Perhaps confusingly, “fundamental British values” guidance only applies to England.
2. “Reading, ‘riting (writing) and ‘rithmetic (arithmetic)” — a phrase used since the early 19th century to express the basic requirements of schooling.
3. Judgments range from 1 = “outstanding,” 2 = “good,” 3 = “requires improvement,” or 4 = “inadequate.” The two lowest categories trigger punitive measures for schools, including further monitoring, or even requiring a change in the school’s management.
4. The subtitle seemed apt when I borrowed this book from the University of Cambridge Library in 2019. It had never been borrowed. My personal copy, purchased on withdrawal from the University of Oxford Department of Education Library, however, is well used with a broken spine. Unsurprising perhaps as Yeaxlee lectured there for 14 years.

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