

Classroom is the wrong place to learn morals

Young people respond to proposals that they should be 'taught' morality at school.

Teachers last week rejected calls for pupils to do community service and 'study' moral issues. Despite their objections, the Government's School Curriculum and Assessment Authority will consider such a proposal in September.

But do children think they can learn morality from a textbook? Young journalists from the Childrens Express press agency discussed how they made moral decisions, where they learnt morality and what they thought of the proposal by the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community.

Nobody worries about morals until you do something wrong. When you feel something's right or wrong, it comes from the bottom of your heart. You just know. said 13-year-old Abeyna Jones, and then they all say: You should know better than that.

Abeyna, from Bexleyheath, south London, discussed the proposals with four youngsters aged between 11 and 16. Erica Rutherford, 14, from Islington, north London, believed moral make-up was determined long before children entered school. You're born with something inside you that basically says: This is right, and this is wrong, she said. It's just up to the parents to reinforce the idea.

Stealing something - that's wrong, said Mehrak Golestan, 12, from Pimlico, west London. Helping an old lady across the street - that's right. People of common sense know that. When you feel something's right or wrong, it comes from the bottom of your heart. You just know.

I don't think morals can be taught in school, said Erica, because what's right for one person may not be right for another. Basically, you're going to go into this classroom and have this person pushing their view into your face.

You can't really teach morals in school because there's hundreds of different religions and beliefs, said Mehrak. Muslims believe women should cover their hair with a shawl, but other countries might not believe that. So if you're teaching morals in school you might offend someone without meaning to.

Georgina Drinkwater, 12, of West Hampstead, north-west London, said her class already had 'personal and social education' lessons. At the moment we're doing this course with the police about drugs. They give you a situation and you have to say what you think is right.

This individual approach is far more appealing to children than the imposition of 'morally correct' views. Allowing young people to think for themselves was seen as the way forward by the panel.

Mehrak said: You can't spend your whole life with people telling you what's right and wrong. You get a right, you get a wrong, and you get a little bit between. You have to decide for yourself. Young kids do know the difference between right and wrong, but they may not know why it's right or wrong, and that's what they should be teaching.

The panel felt the Government needed to look at the reasons behind the rise in juvenile crime and remember what children were up against in the adult world.

Many blamed the media for giving mixed signals. Pete Campbell, 15, of Bow, east London, said: Newspapers say that so-and-so famous is having an affair with such-and-such. Our media is all about watching things that are morally wrong.

All people should be taught is how to respect one another, said one panel member. If we're taught that, then everything else will be OK.

About the team

This roundtable discussion was led by Pete Campbell, with editor Erica Rutherford and reporters Georgina Drinkwater, Mehrak Golestan and Abeyna Jones. It was published in [The Observer](#).

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