Prevent in Schools: A Critical Review

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Abstract

'Prevent' is a term that has increasingly entered our collective consciousness since its inception in 2011 and later revision in 2018. It is a government strategy that is now seen as forming part of the mandatory training for Educational Psychologists (EPs) within local authority (LA) services. Hence, we should all be aware of what it is and how it operates. The following review moves beyond content to offer a critical look at the origins of Prevent and its emerging structures. Further insights are gleaned from the literature in relation to perspectives on radicalisation and extremism and its creation, as well as a search for the underpinning psychology. Finally, a synthesis of the literature leads us to draw out some critical tensions and challenges for constructive consideration by EPs and their partners with particular respect to the position of schools and teachers in both educating and safeguarding children and young people.

Radicalisation and extremism in schools

The issue of radicalisation is not necessarily a new occurrence but is one that frequently pervades both political and social agendas. Whilst the term radicalisation is applicable to a number of different phenomena (e.g. environmental or political radicalism), the term is most commonly applied in a contemporary context to address the issue of extremist violence, or terrorism. Research indicates a worrying rise in the prevalence of radicalised children and young people over the past few decades (Home Office, 2011a; Kundani, 2012; Marret, Feddes, Mann, Doosje, and Griffioen-Young, 2013). There is a view that radicalisation and extremism in young people presents similar risk factors to drugs, gang membership, sexual exploitation, and online bullying (NSPCC, 2018).

Given the adverse negative outcomes that are associated with these risk factors, which can include serious anti-social behaviour and violence (Horgan, 2008), psychopathologies (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Hofstra, Van der Ende, and Verhulst, 2002), lack of productive education (Colman et al., 2009), and in the worst instances, suicide (Padilla, Gelfand, Mirahmadi, Farooq, and Egmond, 2016), researchers and policy makers have been keen to focus on identifying

causal routes and find ways of implementing preventative anti-radicalisation measures.

School-based anti-radicalisation training has been identified as one potentially effective means of preventing the above problems (e.g. Home Office, 2011a). Yet, it is important to note from the outset that there is no universally agreed definition of radicalisation (e.g. Bartlett and Miller, 2012), nor is there incontrovertible evidence that radicalisation results in violent actions. There is a small body of research to suggest that numerous radicalised individuals have remained non-violent (e.g. Francis, 2016).

Nevertheless, the Home Office (2011a) has offered its own interpretation of both radicalisation and extremism. In the first instance, radicalisation is described as "the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups" (p.107). In the second, extremism is defined by the UK government as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values (FBV), including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces" (p.107). Thus, in this context, the terms 'radicalisation' and 'extremism' are interconnected; there is a view that radicalisation may subsequently lead to extremism. The key difference, however, is that whilst radicalisation refers to the process by which individuals are introduced to extreme views and ideological messages (e.g. through social, political, or economic inequality), extremism is the manifestation of these views into action, often with violent ends.

Contextualising radicalisation in the United Kingdom

In light of this, schools are increasingly seen as being a key element in the battle to prevent both radicalisation and extremism, with school-based anti-radicalisation training for teachers, in addition to Educational Psychology Service and other agencies, having been identified as a potentially effective means of preventing the above problems (e.g. Home Office, 2011a). The overarching Counter Terrorism Strategy in the United Kingdom (UK) is known as CONTEST (Home Office, 2011b; Sewell and Hulusi, 2016). This strategy is organised around four predominant outputs:

1. Pursue: to stop terrorist attacks
2. Prevent: to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism
3. Protect: to strengthen protection against a terrorist attack
4. Prepare: to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack

As such, the goals of the CONTEST strategy are vast and require the inclusion of a multitude of agencies to help fulfill its purpose. Since the early part of the 21st century the government has passed several anti-terrorism laws, which

have been revised over a period of time. In light of the recent terrorist attacks in Europe, the government produced an updated Counter Terrorism and Security Act (2015) referred to as the CT and S Act; this was subsequently given additional powers in 2019. Whilst the CT and S Act encompasses numerous aspects of domestic security (e.g. new guidelines for the police) that are not particularly applicable to the role of the education system or the Educational Psychologist (EP), there are, nevertheless, some guidelines in the Act that place a specific obligation on Local Authorities (LAs), all schools (both state funded and private), as well as all early years childcare providers. Indeed, Section 26 of the 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, which is now in effect, requires that schools have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" (p.1). The duties, which are related to the Act, are discussed within the government's 'Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales' (Home Office, 2011), stating:

> "All the terrorist groups who pose a threat to us seek to radicalise and recruit people to their cause. But the percentage of people who are prepared to support violent extremism in this country is very small. It is significantly greater amongst young people... [schools] are subject to the duty to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. Being drawn into terrorism includes not just violent extremism but also non-violent extremism, which can create an atmosphere conducive to terrorism and can popularise views which terrorists exploit" (p.7)

Schools are required to evidence their adherence to this duty, in line with the 'radicalisation risk' of their institution. The Act sets out four key actions that educational settings and the Local Authority are expected to undertake. In their review, Sewell and Hulusi (2016) detail these as the following:

1. Identify children who may be vulnerable to radicalisation
2. Know what to do when they are identified
3. Build resilience to radicalisation through promoting British values and enable them to challenge extremist views
4. Manage concerns via setting-based Safeguarding Policies

Within these broad actions there are three significant areas that schools in particular must focus on. These are summarised in Table 1.

Central to these duties is the expectation that teachers have a clear understanding of what radicalisation and extremism are and how they may be associated with terrorism. The government's definition of both radicalisation and extremism inevitably creates significant challenges for schools. Values and ideologies, which may be regarded by the government as 'legal', could still place individuals on a pathway to illegal, violent extremist views (Francis, 2016). This puts schools and teachers in the uncomfortable position of having to observe and surveil their pupils to fundamentally prevent the proliferation of legally-held

Action	Description
Leadership	Individuals in leadership positions have a responsibility to ensure that their school staff are aware of radicalisation, have the capacity to handle it, are conscious of the significant importance of this duty and can successfully implement it.
Partnership	Schools are required to produce evidence of meaningful co-operation with local Prevent staff, the police service, and other appropriate local agencies.
Capabilities	School staff must understand what radicalisation means and why children and young people may be drawn towards extremism through it. In particular, school staff must be aware of the specific type of extremism that the government is most concerned with and what measures are available to prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism. As part of the Ofsted framework, inspectors now look for evidence to determine whether children and young people have accepted fundamental British values (Ofsted, 2015:33).

Table 1: Key Actions for Schools Arising from Prevent

viewpoints, in addition to referring children, young people, and their families to the government's 'Channel' programme, designed to target potential radicals and violent extremists. Indeed, Jermone and Elwick (2020) suggest that tackling 'controversial' pedagogy is further problematised by the inherent difficulties in teachers distinguishing which issues are distinctly controversial.

Channel is officiated by the Local Authority and the panel includes members of the police service, social services, as well as health and education where appropriate. Referrals to Channel can be made by anyone who deems an individual 'vulnerable' to radicalisation. The police service then designates one of its officers, known as a Channel Police Practitioner (CPP) to assess the validity of the case and its suitability to be raised at the panel. Three elements of vulnerability are assessed by the multi-agency panel, which is chaired by the CCP. These elements are as follows: engagement, intent, and ability. Once the panel has decided whether the individual in question is at a high risk of radicalisation a support plan is produced, in addition to a number of interventions (HM Government, 2015); education skills, careers counselling, constructive pursuits, mentoring support, therapeutic services (predominantly cognitive-behavioural therapy), drugs and alcohol support, and religious support (from approved services and organisations). It is worth pointing out at this juncture that there are several fundamentalist views held by both political and religious organisations in the UK, which appear to starkly contrast with the government's notion of

‘British values’, for example the acceptability of LGBT marriage or the role of women (Francis, 2016). The degree to which these groups might be regarded as being on the same continuum as violent extremists, however, remains open to question.

Sewell and Hulusi (2016) note that the radicalisation of children and young people to extremist positions is a matter of safeguarding and, therefore, is a burgeoning area of research for educational psychologists (EPs). The psychological knowledge and skills that EPs possess are arguably of great benefit in supporting teachers, schools, and other professionals in this domain as well as potentially critically challenging the efficacy of certain anti-radicalisation approaches. Whilst there is seemingly more research available on the ‘factors’ that influence the radicalisation process, there is very little research available on the role of teachers or their attitudes, beliefs, or values in attempting to address this.

Radicalisation – A broader picture

As suggested by its definitions, radicalisation is a highly complex phenomenon, which is perhaps best viewed as a process of change, a transformation that affects the individual at both a personal and political level. The term ‘radicalisation’ is used to signify different meanings that are dependent on the context; the differing terminology, which is deployed by researchers and policy makers alike, creates its own set of challenges, with definitions frequently being misleading, speculative, or incongruous (Kundnani, 2012; Silke, 2001). Recent research suggests that the process of radicalisation is not rapid, but rather one that tends to develop gradually. The change process is slow and one that has been conceptualised, by many researchers, as one that traverses through several distinct ‘stages’ (e.g. Hofmann and Dawson, 2014; Sibler and Bhatt, 2007). Thus, an individual does not become radicalised overnight, although there are thought to be certain precedents that can expedite the process (e.g. an experience of discrimination or marginalisation, or the death of a loved one). For example, Al-Lami (2009) notes that individuals who are driven to drastic acts of violence, such as the shooting of police officers by African American activists in Chicago in the summer of 2016, was triggered by the unlawful shooting of young black African Americans across the United States. When we draw on the social psychological principles of realistic conflict theory (e.g. Sherif, 1954, 1958; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif, 1961), recourses of violence are possibly explicated as acts of vengeance, or as adverse experiences within one’s ecological system.

The suicide attacks of New York in September 2001, Madrid in March 2004, London in July 2005, Manchester 2017, and London Bridge 2019, have led, according to Sedgwick (2010), to a qualitatively different form of ‘new terrorism’ that remained largely absent from the press and the public eye until this time. From a psychological research perspective, radicalisation has been defined and conceptualised through a plethora of ontological stances with definitions rang-

ing from the realist and 'absolute', to those who accept that it can only be appreciated in relativist terms. For example, Klein and Kruglanski (2013) indicated that radicalism could be defined, in simple terms, as a deviation from the ideological norm co-occurring with an externalised, devoted enthusiasm for this 'deviation'. Similarly, Wiktorowicz (2004) stresses the socialisation aspect of radicalisation in deviating from societal norms, with four key stages (cognitive opening, [religious] seeking, frame alignment, socialisation) that intensify the probability of an individual being drawn to a radical group and subsequently being influenced through socialisation to become an active participant. In a similar linear fashion to Klein and Kruglanski (2013), the first three processes of the model must take place before socialisation and the adoption of the group's norm is accepted.

Prevent

'Prevent' is the name given to the government's strategy to prevent terrorism and deter children and young people from becoming radicalised to extremist positions or ideologies (Home Office, 2011b). The government initially defined radicalisation through a 'pyramid' perspective (Audit Commision, 2008), radicalisation is the gradient differentiating the 'active' terrorist from the wider base of passive radical advocates. This is the conceptual model that was used and developed by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), in response to the previous Labour government's Prevent Strategy, which debuted in 2007. The pyramid is built from four layers:

- At the summit of the pyramid are active terrorists (where radicalisation has evolved in violent extremism) who remain comparatively few in number, when compared in relation to a much larger group who may passively sympathise with their beliefs and attitudes.
- The next tier down on the pyramid (Tier 3 – moving towards extremism) pertains to a group of individuals who are not actively involving themselves in any violence, but nevertheless support those who are sitting at the apex of the pyramid and who seek to inspire those on the level below (Tier 2).
- Situated on this lower level, there are a far larger number of individuals that are regarded as 'vulnerable' to these ideologies – this is the group that is most frequently targeted by the Channel service and CPP. One such group is children and young people and those that may be part of the criminal youth justice system.
- At the very base of the pyramid is the category known as the 'wider community', although it is ambiguous from the ACPO tiered model of intervention to address Prevent, just how extensive this group of individuals actually is. 'Community' may function as an innocuous analogue for 'society' as a whole, or a more pointed classification of individuals stratified by denomination (e.g. the 'Muslim community' or 'the far right'). Yet, the model infers an implied and undeviating relationship between one stage

> of radicalisation and the next, leaving a great deal of conjecture regarding how an individual progresses from the base of the pyramid to its apex (Christmann, 2012).

This assumption of a linear relationship has been the subject of criticism by Bartlett, Birdwell and King (2010a) as well as McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) who advocate that the phenomenon of becoming radicalised is far more 'unpredictable and complicated' than the linear trajectory assumed by Prevent. McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) establish 12 different 'mechanisms' that relate to radicalisation, functioning broadly across three different levels: the individual level, the group level, and the mass community level. A conflated account, with a few examples of these 12 mechanisms are as follows: (individual levels) personal victimization (e.g. the role that personal grievance plays in the radicalisation process), political grievance, joining a radical group – the slippery slope (e.g. the slow process of becoming radicalized), joining a radical group – the power of love, extremity shift in like-minded groups, (group levels) extreme cohesion under isolation and threat, competition for the same base of support (e.g. competition for a wider base of support can drive more radical action to gain that support.

The authors cite a range of examples of this phenomenon from the IRA and other nationalist groups), competition with state power, within group competition – fissioning, (mass levels) jujitsu politics, hate, martyrdom. These mechanisms do not specifically attempt to create an overarching conceptual framework, or an exhaustive list that incorporates all factors involved in radicalisation, but rather the authors seek to identify some of the more subtle psychological processes that may be at play in how individuals become radicalised. Sedgwick (2010) also contests the notion of 'absolute' definitions. Extremist points of view are relative depending on the individual's established juncture of 'normality'; these junctures or starting points therefore vary from person to person, as well as political groups. As Sewell and Hulusi (2016) note, it is perhaps more appropriate to understand radicalism as occurring on an increasing continuum, rather than a fixed set of stages.

Controversial issues in society versus the adherence to didactic approaches

Whilst there is training provided for all LA agencies, as part of the government's Prevent programme, teachers are now expected to play a central role in highlighting children and young people that are at risk of being radicalised (Ofsted, 2015,33). How this is achieved, however, is a contentious issue. Teachers are expected to undergo a training session, which is administered by the ACPO and through online materials. Teachers are expected to report 'changes in their pupils', as the government believes that teachers are 'best placed' to recognise when changes to a young persons' behaviour seems out of character (Educate Against Hate, 2016). Teachers are informed that they should be aware of the following issues:

- Attitudes and opinions: Argumentativeness or aggression, or an unwillingness to listen; refusal to engage, or being abusive to peers who are different from themselves (e.g. race, religion, gender, sexuality); Susceptibility to conspiracy theories and a feeling of persecution.
- Changes in behaviour and peer group: Distancing themselves from friends and their peer groups; recent conversion to a new religion; a significant change in appearance; rejection of activities they used to enjoy.
- Secrecy: Excessive time spent on the Internet or mobile phones; changes in online identity (e.g. having two parallel online profiles).
- Support for extremist ideologies: Expressions of sympathies with extremist groups; expression of sympathy for young people who have supported these groups; accessing material online which may be violent with a social networking element; possessing extremist literature; being in contact with known extremist recruiters; joining or seeking to join extremist organisations.

As is demonstrated from the preceding list, many of the points that are raised (e.g. unwillingness to listen or distancing themselves from peer groups) can be normal developmental processes for children and young people, or indicative of other factors, such as problems in the home environment, bullying, stress, or depression (e.g. Maunder, Harrop, and Tattersall, 2010). Furthermore, if we are to accept, as McCauley and Moskalenko (2008, 2014) suggest, that the first stage of radicalisation occurs through 'personal victimisation', then it is arguable that the marginalisation of an individual plays a large part in this. The government's Channel process, by which schools are expected to report individual children and young people as 'vulnerable' to radicalisation could, arguably, be viewed as a form of marginalisation in and of itself.

Whilst it is certainly arguable that teachers are well placed to identify problems and negative perceptions among children and young people (e.g. challenging stereotypes), teachers have been left feeling confused and fearful of how to best tackle the situation that they have been tasked with (Muslim Council of Britain, 2016). Under the new legislation released by the Home Office (2015) teachers now have a legal obligation to prevent their students from being pulled into terrorist activities. As such, teachers now have a binary responsibility of providing a safe, secure, and nurturing environment for their pupils, whilst also regarding them as potential terrorists. Whilst these tasks are not mutually exclusive, they do pose a significant number of problems. Much of the discourse around Prevent to date has been critical of the policy and possible ramifications, but there has little empirical research to detail the impact of this policy in schools and practice (Jerome, Elwick, and Kazim, 2019; Taylor and Soni, 2017).

Trust remains a highly important part of teacher and student relationships and is considered a central part of healthy social and emotional development for children and young people (e.g. Humphrey, 2013). By increasing the amount

of pressure that is placed on schools and teachers to adhere to this 'duty', the government inevitably runs the risk of creating an atmosphere of distrust and creating attachment 'ruptures' (e.g. Geddes, 2006), not only between teachers and their students, but also with schools and their community of families. It is also conceivable that by placing a great deal of emphasis on the important role of teachers in preventing radicalisation, parents are subsequently absolved of joint responsibility in the education of children and young people. As experts in their own children, parents are arguably best placed to detect the early signs of radicalisation or dissuading them from getting involved in extremist activities.

There is a significant extant base of research that suggests schools are already providing solid safeguarding procedures in schools to recognise and protect those that are vulnerable or at most risk of harm (e.g. Humphrey, Lendrum, Barlow, Wigelsworth, and Squires, 2012), as well as having an inclusive ethos to prevent alienation. Yet, since the implementation of the new anti-radicalisation strategies there have been numerous high-profile cases that have led to children and young people being inappropriately referred to the police as a result of comments that have been made during class discussions (Muslim Council of Britain, 2016). This would seem to infer that the process by which teachers are expected to report children and young people is problematic; this strategy is also being implemented against the back drop of a series of increasing attacks on the Muslim community and potentially endangers young Muslims (Mythen, Walklate, and Khan, 2009). Indeed, an independent reviewer of radicalisation and extremism legislation, David Anderson QC, noted that:

> "If the wrong decisions are taken, the new law risks provoking a backlash in affected communities, hardening perceptions of an illiberal or Islamophobic approach, alienating those whose integration into British society is already fragile, and playing into the hands of those who, by peddling a grievance agenda, seek to drive people further towards extremism and terrorism [...] the prevent strategy has become a significant source of grievance among British Muslims, encouraging mistrust to spread and fester." (BBC, 2015)

Thus, it is clear that the materials, resources, support and training that teachers are receiving on what is certainly a sensitive issue is of critical importance. Yet, in spite of this, teachers have had little to no input into the development of current anti-radicalisation strategies, with very few psychological studies examining their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of this programme. There clearly exists a controversial dichotomy between the open, democratic, criticism of constructs such as 'fundamental British values', and the expectation that teachers should adhere to didactic approaches legally prescribed by Prevent.

Implementation matters

Of cause for concern is the fact that Prevent training is being carried out in schools and colleges by a large number of different organisations, including local police services, as well as a number of private training companies and unregulated non-governmental organisations, rendering the implementation of the Prevent programme varied and inconsistent in both its content and practice (National Union of Teachers, 2016). The study of implementation is, quite simply, "the process by which an intervention is put into practice" (Humphrey, 2013, p86). Focusing on programme or research outcomes may allow insight into 'what' is going on within a preventative intervention, such as Prevent, but cannot tell us the 'how' or the 'why'. Until recent years a large number of government initiatives, training programmes, and preventative programmes have been delivered without reporting implementation information of any kind (Wigelsworth et al., 2016). Understanding implementation is critical for a number of reasons, most significantly because implementation variability can influence programme outcomes (Durlak and DuPre, 2008; Durlak, 2015).

Implementation studies attempt to canvas a wide range of information on how programmes or interventions are delivered, including (but not exclusive to): fidelity; dosage; quality; participant responsiveness; and reach. For further information on the disparate aspects of implementation see Durlak and DuPre (2008). By closely examining the implementation process researchers are better able to explain both the anticipated and unanticipated ramifications of an intervention. Recent implementation research, for example, suggests that the effectiveness of preventative interventions is strongly connected to teachers' intervention compliance (e.g. Pannayiotou, Humphrey, and Hennessey, 2020).

Conclusion

As has been established, the current anti-radicalisation strategies that are in place are not without criticism, described by some as deeply divisive (Busher et al., 2017; Coppock and Mcgovern, 2014). It stands to reason that teacher beliefs, values, perceptions, and attitudes towards this programme will likely impact on the way in which they act on its advice and the training materials they have received. Research suggests that teachers' attitudinal responses to preventative interventions are key to programme success (e.g. Dusenbury et al., 2003; Rogers, 2003) with teaching professionals rejecting interventions that require intensive training by professionals who were not already established as part of their school culture. There is also a burgeoning evidence base in the literature to suggest that teachers deliver programmes and interventions with far higher fidelity when they are satisfied with the level of training they have received (e.g. Domitrovich et al., 2008). It is possible that a collaborative approach between several different parties (e.g. teachers, parents, EPs, health professionals, policy makers) is needed for implementing a strategy aimed at preventing and countering radicalisation, which is currently not expected nor required.

Furthermore, there is a danger that implementation of the government's current anti-radicalisation strategies could worsen relationships between teachers and their students, effectively diminishing the arena for unimpeded discourse in a secure, low-risk setting and suffocating the lawful assertion of political freedom and opinion (Faure-Walker, 2019; National Union of Teachers, 2016). It is, therefore, imperative that research continues to better understand how pupils are affected, and how teachers feel towards the significant role that has been placed upon them. For EPs, this includes both engaging and challenging the controversial issues surrounding Prevent, as well as better understanding how to support teachers, pupils, and their families.

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