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Preventing radicalisation: a systematic review of literature considering the lived experiences of the UK's Prevent strategy in educational settings

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ABSTRACT

This article surveys relevant literature on experiences of the Prevent Strategy in the UK in order to explore the role of schools in preventing radicalisation. The first section explores the concept of radicalisation and how this is positioned within UK policy and legislation followed by a review and critical appraisal of seven relevant articles. The following section synthesises themes from this literature in relation to pedagogical inefficacies in relation to academic freedom and flawed fundamental British values, and the problematic focus of the Prevent strategy in terms of surveillance and securitisation, and having a focus on individual vulnerability and ends with a positive example of Prevent funding. The article closes with implications for school staff.

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Introduction: the concept of 'radicalisation'

The concept of radicalisation is at the forefront of discourse relating to safety and security in modern society. Although not a new term, it is predominantly used in relation to the subsequent acts of terrorism perceived to result from radicalisation. In particular, recent high-profile and widespread acts of terrorism by extremist groups such as the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) have put the process of radicalisation to extreme Jihadi views firmly in the media spotlight.

The definition of radicalisation is much contested, and there is no unanimous agreement in policy or legislation. According to Sieckelinck, Kaulingfreks, and De Winter (2015), radicalisation is usually understood in the literature as 'a process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo' (p. 330). Kundnani (2014) discusses how the concept has transformed over time in the direction of practical prevention of violent extremism, and the Home Office define radicalisation as 'the process by which people come to support, and in

some cases participate, in terrorism' (2011, p. 36). However, research by van San, Sieckelinck, and de Winter (2013), in which former extremists and young jihadis suggested violence against non-believers is only ever justified in specific conflict situations, indicates that violence is not an essential and inevitable component of radicalisation, and therefore links to threats to security are inherently flawed. Furthermore, Sedgwick (2010) suggests that the concept of radicalisation often emphasises a process undergone by an individual and neglects the wider context.

School staff are now finding themselves increasingly responsible for the outcomes of pupils, both in terms of their academic progress and their engagement with radical views and ideologies. Policy changes in light of recent acts of terrorism have attempted to reduce the threat to society posed by extremist groups by identifying children and young people at risk of radicalisation (AROR) and employing primary prevention strategies, where actions are taken to avoid radicalisation before it occurs, to intervene at the earliest possible opportunity. Sieckelinck et al. (2015) note that exploring perspectives that subvert societal norms is often a developmental stage in the transition to adulthood, highlighting the dangerous implications of viewing young people with radical views as suspicious or even 'guilty before charges' (p. 331). Therefore, the securitisation of educational settings inevitably limits freedom of expression. It is no longer considered safe to express views of an extreme nature, meaning that crucial political and moral debate which can genuinely shift radicalised perspectives cannot take place (Saeed & Johnson, 2016).

Policy and legislation

A primary prevention toolkit entitled 'Learning Together to be Safe' was developed by the previous Labour government's Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2009), with strategies for schools to use to reduce the likelihood of children and young people becoming radicalised and joining extremist organisations. The DCSF toolkit took an ecosystemic approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) to radicalisation, focusing on risk and protective factors within the ecosystems surrounding young people AROR. Although the implementation of this toolkit was not fully evaluated, it focused on building resiliency against radicalisation within systems (as well as individuals) through narrowing attainment gaps between groups of pupils, encouraging active citizenship and pupil voice, increasing staff confidence to encourage safe debate of controversial issues, anti-bullying approaches and developing links between families and schools (DCSF, 2009).

The current Home Office Counter-Terrorism Strategy, CONTEST, has a strand which is directly concerned with preventing people becoming or supporting terrorists (Home Office, 2011), and states that educational institutions must function to prevent individuals from becoming radicalised. The Prevent duty is to identify, report and intervene at a safeguarding level with all pupils who express 'extreme political, social or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the

status quo' (Sieckelinck et al., 2015, p. 330), suggesting that it is intended to be a response to all forms of radicalisation. The Department for Education (DfE, 2015) gave guidance on the implementation of Prevent in educational institutions, requiring them to:

- identify children AROR;
- know what to do when they are identified;
- build resilience to radicalisation through the promotion of fundamental British values (FBVs);
- manage concerns through safeguarding routes.

The DfE guidance stipulates that the duty to challenge extremist views does not implicate restrictions on debate of controversial issues, and that institutions have a duty to 'provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments' (DfE, 2015, p. 5). This document, like the DCSF guidance (2009), mentions engaging with families, but focuses on identification of children and young people AROR. Building resiliency against radicalisation is briefly covered in terms of encouraging discussion of controversial perspectives and promoting FBVs through personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship. This guidance focuses heavily on assessing risk of children 'being drawn into terrorism' (p. 5), in line with the problematic securitisation of educational settings (Sieckelinck et al., 2015). This literature review is conducted with the intention of finding out if people's lived experiences within qualitative research reflect an ecosystemic approach as indicated in the DCSF 2009 guidance, or the focus on surveillance and identification indicated in the current guidance (DfE, 2015).

Search strategy

Dickson, Cherry, and Boland's (2013) approach to systematic review was followed, using the search terms 'radicalisation OR deradicalisation' AND 'education OR school OR Prevent'. The systematic review process allows for identification, synthesis and appraisal of primary research in relation to a particular research question. UK-based studies dated between 2013 and 2016 with qualitative methodologies to illuminate the lived experiences of Prevent were selected, leading to the identification of seven papers.

Summary of study characteristics

The seven studies cover a broad spectrum of participants in terms of age and setting: two involve school staff (school leaders and teachers of Muslim heritage), four involve students (secondary-aged students and Muslim university students) and one involves professionals from non-educational backgrounds who attended the

Workshop for Raising Awareness of Prevent (WRAP). The sample sizes range from 30 to 60, and the studies include a range of school settings: comprehensive, community, grammar, academy and church, as well as university and a training centre.

Six studies aim to explore individual perceptions of issues relating to radicalisation and Prevent. Two aim to explore the perceptions of school staff regarding the new standards resulting from Prevent, and four focus on student perceptions of the efficacy of a provocative theatre piece, the securitisation of universities and discourses around terrorism. One analyses the materials and delivery of the WRAP, but perceptions are not actively sought. Four utilise thematic analysis, two thematic narrative analysis and the thesis uses Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), meaning that all seven studies offer rich, qualitative data that can illuminate lived experiences of policy in practice across a range of age groups and settings.

Critical appraisal

Overall, the evidence base appears sufficiently robust for the purpose of this review. There are limitations in the justification of the research design, and some lack transparency regarding details of the interview techniques employed or the researcher's role in the research process. However, most of the papers present a clear picture of how themes were elicited from interview data, and a clear statement of findings ensues. All authors highlight the valuable contribution of their research in the current social and political climate, despite only four making explicit suggestions for future action or research. A synthesis of key themes elicited in relation to the lived experiences of Prevent suggests implications for educational settings, policy focus and practice.

Synthesis of themes

Relevant findings from studies selected for this review suggest Prevent currently presents some significant inefficacies in terms of addressing risks of radicalisation in educational settings, which can be broadly characterised as pedagogical issues and the problematic focus of the agenda. In contrast, some of the findings suggest that aspects of the agenda have proved useful and effective in intervening with issues pertaining to radicalisation.

Pedagogical inefficacies

Academic freedom

The most common theme across the studies examined is that the duty creates a culture of fear and suspicion with regards to those communities or ideologies which have become associated with radicalised views, and a contingent sense of cautiousness around engaging in discussion or debate of such controversial issues with or about these communities or ideologies. This caution can be seen as

risk-avoidance, where it is viewed as overly risky to confront or challenge radical perspectives in or out of the classroom in case offence is caused or professionalism questioned. This inevitably hinders the important dialogue which could otherwise take place in educational settings to help shape and develop students' beliefs and values.

Revell and Bryan (2016) address the DfE requirements for teachers' 'not undermining fundamental British values (FBVs)' (DfE, 2011, p. 14) and promoting FBVs both inside and outside of schools (DfE, 2014). Their findings suggest a culture of fear and uncertainty has developed about what constitutes teacher professionalism. During the interviews, school leaders expressed concern about teachers communicating their views because 'young children are unable to tell the difference between a teacher stating an opinion and ... expressing their own opinion' on these matters, which is at all times 'inappropriate and unprofessional' (p. 350). However, the majority believed in freedom of expression and the right of teachers to engage in political activities. Overall, the findings with regard to FBVs are contradictory, suggesting confusion with how the standards should be observed. The authors state that school leaders are concerned about teachers undermining FBVs through any kind of radical expression due to fear resulting from the uncertainty around the implications of the standards. Teachers are simply aiming to survive in the face of uncertainty, leading to risk-avoidant behaviour which has a detrimental influence on frank and honest discussion of controversial topics. This goes directly against the DfE's clause regarding the duty of educational settings to 'provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can ... develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments' (DfE, 2015, p. 5).

Furthermore, Revell and Bryan (2016) argue that the current standards move the focus away from pupil outcomes and put greater pressure on teachers' professionalism. Teachers are now subject to performance-related pay (DfE, 2013), meaning the appraisal process has greater implications than ever before, leading to a perpetuation of the fear of confronting matters such as radicalisation in the classroom and further limiting freedom of expression in educational settings.

The negative effects of such restrictions on freedom of expression are highlighted in Quartermaine's thesis (2014). Her FDA suggested that pupils are also influenced by this fear and uncertainty, deliberately avoiding having 'potentially prejudiced conversations' (p. 321). Some pupils explicitly avoided making connections between religion and terrorism, despite the fact that religion was listed as the greatest motivator for terrorism in the survey. Pupils chose to use terms such as 'belief' or 'extremism' (p. 258) as opposed to religion to suggest the motivation to commit a terrorist act is more personal and less broadly associated with religious ideology. Quartermaine also identified self-censorship and silencing of certain discourses around religion and terrorism, stating that some pupils displayed concern over villainising and stereotyping individuals or communities, and pupils were monitored by their peers for their adherence to these social expectations. Quartermaine suggests this was due to the fear of appearing culturally racist

towards Muslims, posing a challenge to frank and honest discussion. However, she also implicates regulations imposed by the school and teachers for pupils not to appear prejudiced in the silencing of these discourses.

Saeed and Johnson (2016) describe how freedom of expression is effected in higher educational institutions, whereby the securitisation of these settings leads to a culture of surveillance that does not support the CTSA stipulation requiring universities to ensure academic freedom. The findings suggest that their Muslim student participants experienced a restriction on their ability to discuss and engage with controversial topics such as radicalisation, with one student describing a reluctance to research sensitive areas. Another student described self-censorship of political activity for fear of being considered a potential terrorist. Furthermore, both Saeed and Johnson (2016) and Brown and Saeed (2015) highlight the impact of such securitisation on university Islamic societies, whereby Muslim students face difficulties both in terms of the fear they experience regarding pursuing or acknowledging membership and the restrictions put upon the activity of these societies which would otherwise act as the ideal spaces to explore, discuss and debate the more radical interpretations of their religion.

Flawed FBVs

Both Revell and Bryan (2016) and Panjwani (2016) identify that participants were critical of the way in which FBVs are defined, utilised and applied. Panjwani links the addition of FBVs to Prevent to the perceived threat of Muslim radicalisation and the 'Trojan Horse affair' (where schools in Birmingham were investigated for promoting radical Islamic ethos: p. 330), and suggests that their creation implies some discordance between values held by 'the West and Islam' (p. 329). He presents findings that suggest teachers of Muslim heritage did not perceive any such incompatibility of values. Panjwani uses Rawls (1993) concept of 'overlapping consensus' (p. 330), whereby people of differing moral, religious or political views reach a consensus on a concept of political justice through agreement on societal objectives such as peace or equality, to explain why participants positioned FBVs in this manner. Panjwani describes the emergence of 'modernist Islam', whereby modern, liberal views such as democracy are positioned as compatible with Islamic practice by Muslims who adopt modernist interpretations of the Quran. Therefore, if it is the traditional anti-modernist interpretations of the Quran that appear in conflict with FBVs, the focus should not be on promoting FBVs as a distinct category but on finding and highlighting the 'overlapping consensus' between traditional Islam and the variety of British moral, religious and political standpoints present in our educational settings and modern, liberal values.

Both Panjwani and Revell and Bryan (2016) highlight criticisms of FBVs for lacking clarity and being irrelevant, inadequate and inaccurate. Revell and Bryan's participants criticised FBVs for not being specific to Britain and part of a political agenda. Participants in both studies raised the lack of a clear definition of what constitute FBVs, and Revell and Bryan state that school leaders lack a refined

language with which to discuss the implementation of FBVs. Panjwani states that many teachers felt FBVs contributed further to alienating Muslim students by positioning teachers as 'anti-extremist watchdogs' (p. 337), and several mentioned the problematic effects of increased securitisation on engaging students in important discussion, with one claiming schools have been 'deprived of their role of creating critical minds through a fear of criminalisation' (p. 338).

In light of the extensive criticisms of FBVs, it can be assumed that the translation of this aspect of the policy into pedagogical reality is proving limited in its efficacy to intervene with the radicalisation process. Panjwani (2016) suggests that schools need to refine policy regarding FBVs that involves 'a process of public discourse and openness to a possible reassessment of the project' (p. 338). This issue coupled with the threat to academic freedom and critical discussion posed by Prevent's security focus suggests that the duty is not proving efficacious in day-to-day teaching and learning. It is worth noting that although all studies cited under this theme selected larger samples in an effort to produce qualitative findings that have some degree of wider relevance, three of the four studies dealt solely with participants of Muslim heritage. Despite this, Panjwani (2016) hypothesises that the nature of the concerns with FBVs suggests that this may not be an issue perceived by Muslim teachers alone, but a wider issue, and this creates a space for important future research into the enactment of government Prevent policy into real-world educational settings.

The problematic focus of Prevent

Surveillance and securitisation

Saeed and Johnson (2016) expose the tension between human rights and countering radicalisation, and shine a light on how this issue is reflected in universities, sometimes considered 'breeding grounds' for radicalised views (p. 38). Security requirements, which lead to a culture of surveillance in higher educational settings, risk 'alienating the ordinary British Muslim student' (p. 38). The authors cite an article from the Guardian which details how university faculty members vehemently opposed the CTSA's requirement for them to monitor student (particularly Muslim student) behaviour and activity on the basis that it might hinder debate and critical thinking about controversial issues such as radicalisation (*The Guardian*, 2 February 2015). This kind of surveillance would inevitably lead to feelings of fear, distrust and further alienation of all Muslim students, including those AROR whom the CTSA aims to protect, and Saeed and Johnson's findings support this.

Female Muslim students reported feeling alienated and paranoid due to distrust and suspicion from peers and university staff and a top-down approach to security (e.g. stopping and searching Islamic society students watching a visiting speaker or double-booking of lecture rooms to prevent events from taking place). Several students reported instances of anti-Muslim discrimination during their time at university, and said that these were rarely reported to university personnel and

were instead rationalised as a natural response to fears about of Muslim extremism. These feelings of distrust, responsibility, guilt and alienation have only been reinforced by the 2015 CTSA, and with a sense of belonging playing a key role in preventing radicalisation, these findings suggest its counter-productivity in a real-world context. This concern is echoed in Panjwani's (2016) findings, where British teachers of Muslim heritage voiced concerns about the way in which the translation of Prevent into educational practice, through the focus on FBVs, leads to greater alienation of Muslim youth.

These issues are echoed in another of Saeed's studies, where an argument is built that promotion of a moderate version of Islam resulting from attempts to counter radicalisation have removed opportunities for Muslims to engage with political activism or 'critical citizenship' (Brown & Saeed, 2015, p. 1952). Students described being fearful of wearing the hijab, niqab or other religious signifiers, which they viewed as being synonymous with the media portrayal of a radical Muslim. Students are cited as likening Muslim extremists trying to radicalise others to 'British people trying to force liberal Islam on people' and suggesting the term 'traditional Islam' as an alternative to 'radical' (p. 1956). A theme across students was that the commonly accepted concept of radical Islam is actually synonymous with mental illness, or the 'irrationality and violence that anyone is capable of' (p. 1957) and has moved away from the historical concept of radicalism, where student activism was a positive move toward societal change. In this respect, students are reluctant to engage in political activism for fear of being considered radical. Brown and Saeed summarise that the very right to be Muslim is restricted in modern society, and that this is only proliferated by government policy.

A focus on individual vulnerability

Blackwood, Hopkins, and Reicher (2016) highlight the emphasis on individual vulnerability within the radicalisation process. Brown and Saeed (2015) state that due to the lack of agreement or certainty about the processes involved in radicalisation, the concept is 'frequently reduced to the profiling of traits or attributions of signs of radicalisation in "vulnerable" or "at-risk" populations' (p. 1953). As a result, they argue that Muslim university students are positioned as at-risk due to the alleged inherent radicalism of these institutions, leading to the heavy monitoring and censorship of the activity of these populations. This concern is the central focus of Blackwood et al. (2016), who explore the psychological model of radicalisation that is being disseminated through WRAP, a training programme for frontline professionals (including teachers). The authors criticise the workshop materials for focusing exclusively on individual vulnerability without considering how this could 'contribute to the straining of social relationships that WRAP champions as the basis for diverting individuals from a path to radicalisation' (p. 604). In terms of underlying psychological models of radicalisation, WRAP discussed group influence as a 'form of consolation for psychological needs' (p. 605), but implied that this is mediated by individual factors, sustaining the focus on

individual vulnerabilities and neglecting the principles of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Furthermore, the authors state that WRAP failed to acknowledge that group members are unlikely to accept proposals that do not align with the group's worldview or help them understand their social reality. In this respect, WRAP should be shifting its focus to the social contexts in which individuals live, and the views which are helping them to make sense of these contexts. An individual risk factor such as discrimination is not enough to lead to radicalisation, but a shared experience of discrimination within a social context, or a 'common fate' (p. 606) can lead to social categorisation that can help individuals make sense of their realities. Furthermore, if groups perceive themselves to be 'other' within their community, they may 'retreat and establish alternative "safe spaces" where social recognition and acceptance are more easily accomplished' (p. 608), avoiding interaction in the wider community and reducing the potential for inclusivity.

The unintended effects of WRAP's focus on individual vulnerability may exacerbate the existing scrutiny of the behaviour of Muslims in the UK. In turn, this may intensify the discrimination experienced by these groups, leading to further alienation and intergroup conflict and in some cases, if the narrative fits with an individual's experiences and helps them make sense of their social context, radicalisation. The authors propose therefore that a refocus of such workshops is required, with social identity and group formation at the centre.

Successes of Prevent: funding efficacious interventions

With the majority of the qualitative data indicating that lived experiences of Prevent in educational settings are mostly negative, there were efficacious aspects of the policy, namely the Theatre in Education (TiE) programme, 'Tapestry' (Winston & Strand, 2013). Tapestry was a piece of participatory TiE funded by Prevent, which toured West Midlands' secondary schools in 2009. It was devised by 'The Play House' with the intention of engaging with radicalisation, using humour to defy existing radicalisation discourses. In summary, Tapestry tells the story of Nazia, a British Pakistani Muslim girl, Jason, her white working-class brother-in-law, and Hassan, her friend who is a Nigerian Muslim. Jason and Hassan have been fighting on opposite sides of a violent demonstration, and each reveals to Nazia (and the audience) the events in their lives which have influenced their radical beliefs. Pupils are invited to question and challenge Jason and Hassan on their views and give them suggestions for what they should do next. The piece finishes with Jason and Hassan suggesting that they may now be questioning their membership of the extremist groups, inviting pupils to suggest future paths if they leave these groups but still want to enact change.

As well as presenting quantitative questionnaire data, the authors probe the reasons behind Tapestry's success through pupil interviews, concluding that TiE encourages 'dialogic encounter and civil exchange' (p. 62) through the use of humour and a 'playful aesthetic' (p. 63), making it easier to confront controversial social and political issues such as radicalisation. The authors state that pupils

indicated they most enjoyed the humour of the piece, as well as having the opportunity to engage with religious interpretations in a playful way. They suggested that knowing it was acting made it easier for them to confront the characters, and dramatic techniques such as 'play within a play' and switching between the actor's real identity and their characters helped them question fixed identities.

Whilst no explicit themes are drawn out, the authors highlight shared views and one-off comments to theorise about Tapestry's success, providing a basis for suggesting that participatory TiE can be instrumental in encouraging critical engagement with radicalisation in schools. This is one area where Prevent and its associated funding have been used in a way that has been efficacious in confronting radical perspectives without alienating certain populations in the process.

Implications for those working in schools

There are some clear implications for practice drawn from the synthesis of qualitative data relating to Prevent. Firstly, education staff must continue to promote the genuine inclusion of all pupils, including those AROR. Clinch (2011) suggests that this necessitates paying careful attention to the 'cultural artefacts' (p. 137) displayed in the setting and whether these promote a sense of belonging and positive identity for all pupils of all heritages. Staff need to carefully avoid alienating or villainising discourses during conversations about or with pupils with radical views, adopting instead an holistic focus that considers the environmental features and social group contexts, and avoids within-pupil attributions that may do more damage than good (Blackwood et al., 2016). Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic model (1989) can help staff to explore how the pupil interacts with their home, school and community contexts, and consider environmental and social influences on a pupil's experience, as well as behavioural, affective and cognitive factors.

School staff should encourage frank and honest discussion around radicalisation and avoid silencing these discourses (Quartermaine, 2014). Enabling schools to foster an ethos of trust and safety around sharing and discussing views will be critical in providing spaces for radical views to be carefully examined and critiqued. More specifically, Clinch (2011) suggests that extremism should be addressed through a 'cross-curricular multi-media curriculum' (p. 136), as assemblies and lectures were considered unhelpful by primary-aged pupils in delivering important messages. Instead, a more holistic approach is required where pupils are not passive receivers of a message but active explorers of their own views and attitudes (Clinch, 2011), and where teachers set-up class discussions, presentations and research tasks where this exploration is necessary. However, the pupils in Clinch's study identified that teachers must be extremely cautious to minimise opportunities for polarising views through conflict. They suggested that strategically composed small groups with clear ground rules and boundaries which allow everyone to have a voice and do not unnecessarily censor free speech but create a sense of tolerance and safety would help with this. Furthermore, Clinch (2011) suggests that schools need to

be encouraged to teach about radicalisation and violent extremism across the curriculum from a range of different perspectives, including far-right and animal rights extremism, helping to avoid the harmful and alienating discourses which can emerge around Islamic extremism.

Staff should consider pedagogical approaches involving humour and playfulness around identity (e.g. role play, hot-seating, story-telling) to approach radicalisation with pupils, and which illuminate areas of 'overlapping consensus' (Panjwani, 2016, p. 330) between more traditional views and modern, liberal values to minimise these tensions. Finally, staff do have a key role in sign-posting families to appropriate interventions (e.g. local support panels: Home Office, 2015) if the pupil is considered to be AROR in light of a holistic formulation, although it is important to keep in mind that expressing radical views does not constitute a threat in itself.

Conclusion

Radicalisation refers to views and not acts. Radicalised views are not acts of terrorism and are not in themselves a threat. The focus on identifying and intervening adopted by the CTSA and Prevent leads to problematic culture of surveillance which inhibits the creation of safe spaces in which to debate radical views. In fact, the lived experiences of Prevent in schools by the participants of these studies suggest it deters important critical discussion through fear and further alienates and villainises groups who may already feel alienated and villainised, threatening their sense of belonging and exacerbating the likelihood of creating intergroup conflict in our society. Instead, a focus on identifying areas of 'overlapping consensus' (Panjwani, 2016, p. 330) between the variety of viewpoints held by pupils in the UK and modern, liberal values could help reduce perceived tensions and create a greater sense of unity within our educational settings. Furthermore, programmes such as Tapestry can genuinely engage pupils with the issue of radicalisation and should be considered a priority for future government funding.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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