IDENTIFYING AN EDUCATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE PREVENT POLICY: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING ABOUT TERRORISM, EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION

For Peer Review

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IDENTIFYING AN EDUCATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE PREVENT POLICY: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING ABOUT TERRORISM, EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION

ABSTRACT: School responses to the Prevent agenda have tended to focus primarily on 'safeguarding' approaches, which essentially perceive some young people as being 'at risk' and potentially as presenting a risk to others. In this article we consider evidence from secondary school students who experienced a curriculum project on terrorism, extremism and radicalisation. We argue that a curriculum response which addresses the acquisition of knowledge can build students' critical capacity for engagement with radicalisation through enhanced political literacy and media literacy. We further argue this represents a genuinely educational response to Prevent, as opposed to a more restrictive securitised approach.

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1. COUNTER TERRORISM AND SCHOOLS

The UK Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) requires schools to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being draw into terrorism" and the subsequent DfE advice adds that schools in England should also "think about what they can do to protect children from the risk of radicalisation" (DfE, 2015: 4). To date, much of the guidance for schools has focussed on safeguarding and child protection, which has led to increased pressure to monitor and intervene with young people who express opinions that could be seen as extremist. This has led to a significant rise in the number of children being referred for a formal risk assessment, involving the police or local authority staff (Farmer, 2016). Against this backdrop of monitoring and referring individuals identified as being 'at risk' (what we refer to as the 'security response'), the DfE advice also urges schools to use citizenship education to:

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> build pupils' resilience to radicalisation by providing a safe environment for debating controversial issues (DfE, 2015: 8).

This curriculum response also sits alongside the promotion of fundamental British values (FBV) as a new element of Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural development (SMSC) (DfE, 2014). According to Ofsted, the school inspectorate, successful SMSC provision is evident where children demonstrate:

> Acceptance and engagement with the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs (Ofsted, 2016: 35).

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We refer to this as the 'educational response' because it speaks more explicitly to teachers' role in implementing a curriculum, based on knowledge, skills, values and learning experiences. Ofsted's inspection of provision has given this a high profile for school leaders, especially in the aftermath of the 'Trojan Horse' affair, where the DfE and Ofsted indicated their willingness to use their powers to scrutinise and intervene in schools where either the security response was inadequate (students were not being monitored), or where the educational response was not evident (FBV were not being promoted) (Arthur, 2015).

2. SECURITY AND RESILIENCE IN THE RISK SOCIETY

There is a burgeoning literature exploring the educational implications of terrorism and counter-terrorism in the post 9/11 era. Some of this work seeks to provide educationalists with a prescription for the kind of educational interventions that might tackle extremism, for example, Davies provides a framework for teachers to tackle religious and political literacy (2014, 2008), UNESCO provides guidance for classroom practice (2016), and Gereluk (2012) explores the role of citizenship education. Some commentators worry that the surveillance and reporting functions tend to dominate, at

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the expense of building the 'educational response' mentioned above (Panjwani, 2016; Sieckelink et al., 2015); and this has emerged as a clear theme in much of the UK-based empirical research to date. This research documents the perpetuation of Islamophobia (e.g. through non-Muslim teachers interpreting guidance largely in relation to Muslims, and many Muslim students and teachers feeling singled out) (Busher et al. 2017; Chadderton, 2012; Coppock and McGovern, 2014; Farrell, 2016; Pal Sian, 2015); a general concern among teachers that they must be seen to act on the guidance (with a subsequent risk of over-reporting) (Farmer, 2016; Kundnani, 2015); and a scepticism in some schools about any form of political dissent, or even political action (Revell and Bryan, 2016). These findings reflect broader concerns expressed by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR, 2016) and the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, that the Prevent programme may be becoming counter-productive (Anderson, 2017; Gayle, 2016).

When thinking through why such a counter-productive policy is being implemented Beck's (1992; 2006) and Giddens' (1999) thesis about the risk society is useful because it positions the specific issue of the risk of terrorism within a broader account of the central role of risk and risk-management in contemporary society (Mythen and Walklate, 2006). According to Beck, the unintended side effects of modernity have created new forms of omnipresent risks. Living in a risk society means that people can no longer simply accept hazards as determined by fate or nature, because they are increasingly seen as the result of humanity's own actions (Giddens, 1999). The production of such risks is also evident in relation to the side-effects of individuals' lifestyle decisions, such as smoking, poor diet and lack of education. And so, social problems are increasingly accounted for in individualised terms, as evidence

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of personal inadequacies, psychological dispositions, weakness or illness (such shifts in social attitudes are evident in social surveys, see for example Taylor-Gooby, 2009).

Individuals certainly shoulder more of the responsibility for mitigating the risks that confront them (through making healthier lifestyle choices, pursuing education, buying insurance etc), but they continue to look to the state to tackle national and international risks such as flooding, global warming, or terrorism. But, whilst the state must concern itself with mitigating risks, one increasingly important strategy for doing so is to emphasise the responsibilisation of citizens. Citizens interacting with public services are increasingly seen as informed consumers of services rather than merely patients, students or welfare recipients (Clarke, 2005). The prerequisite of informed consumer choice is information and so:

> ‘Western society’s obsession with safety has led to the emergence of an influential cottage industry of risk experts… who have produced a plethora of theoretical work based on universal generalizations of low-probability and high-consequence occurrences’ (Bialostock and Whitman, 2012: 4).

But, as Douglas (1992) has pointed out, risks are always imagined (if realised they become catastrophes) and therefore what possibilities become elevated to the status of ‘risk’ are defined by a process of politicisation.

In relation to terrorism and extremism the new forms terrorism are obviously related to economic and technological developments such as the development of drones, the accessibility of the Internet and mobile technology, the ease of travel etc. In that sense it emerges as an unintended side-effect of modernity, as described by Beck (1992). But accounts of radicalisation also draw attention to the kind of individualised responsibility described by Giddens (1999) – individuals are susceptible to radicalisation partly through their own weakness, lack of resilience, or the negligence of their communities. Kundnani (2014) has discussed how the new profession of security

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experts has focused on the 'low-probability and high consequence' processes of radicalisation, and produced the model of the 'conveyor belt' which in turn leads to new forms of surveillance and monitoring in order to mitigate risk. By focusing on individual risk factors, the state can justify a policy response which focuses on monitoring and intervention aimed at building individual's resistance to extremist narratives, whilst ignoring structural or societal factors such as racism, poverty, underemployment, lack of cohesion etc. As Bialostock and Whitman (2012) note, in this way we can observe how, in addition to the state taking actions to mitigate this risk, individuals are both drawn into self-monitoring and into a shared responsibility for the prevention of crime. The responsibility for dealing with the risk of terrorism is thus distributed between the surveillance state (Kundnani, 2015), suspect community groups (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2016), and individuals (e.g. www.gov.uk/report-terrorism).

Print has argued that by teaching directly about these risks teachers can provide 'a basis upon which an individual may cope with adversity' (2014: 86). But there is also the broader potential for teaching to shed light on the political process through which such risks are identified and come to be seen as significant. There are a great number of risks at any one time, and the process of identifying and prioritising them is a social one, often associated with political manipulation, media amplification or pressure group attention. Living in reflexive modernity may require citizens to understand risk, the mitigation of risk and the social production of risk. On this reading, taking a broader look at 'education' and 'risk' in the context of terrorism opens up the possibility that young people may not only be enabled to think about their own response to risk, but will also be enabled to take a more critical look at the construction of radicalisation and extremism as risks which demand a response.

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3. THE BUILDING RESILIENCE PROJECT

The education literature discussed above intimates that there is a tension between the kinds of intervention work that might be helpful in encouraging an individual to reject extremism (see for example van San et al. 2013) and the appropriate kind of educational intervention that would be suitable for all young people (most of whom are unlikely to be directly involved in extremism). The *Building Resilience* project, with which this article is concerned, developed an educational approach within the formal Citizenship curriculum, which is aimed at all young people, not those singled out for an individual intervention. The Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT) secured Home Office funding in 2015-16 to develop the project and recruited ten citizenship teachers from around the country who attended a central training event and then developed their own school-specific sequence of lessons. These lessons were different in each setting as teachers were encouraged to respond to their local context and the needs and interests of their students. Each teacher was supported by a specialist advisor and Middlesex University was appointed to conduct the evaluation of the project (see Authors, 2016). The detailed evaluation report drew on lesson observations, scrutiny of teaching material, interviews with teachers, focus groups with students and questionnaires for staff and students at the beginning and end of the project.

In this paper we review the data from the student focus groups (ten focus groups in eight of the schools) to focus on what the students learned through these diverse sequences of lessons. Each of the focus groups took place in schools, after the researchers had observed a lesson. In schools where the focus groups were scheduled within lesson time, the teachers had invited students to participate in advance, in order to clear permissions for them to miss another class. In other schools, where the focus groups took place in break time, students in the observed class were all invited to

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participate and made their own decision. This means the smallest groups had four participants and the largest ten. The groups ran for between 20-45 minutes and each followed a flexible structure based on the following themes: questions to elicit students' own accounts of how they perceived these lessons (e.g. what are you learning and why?); questions focused on students' emergent understanding and feelings about terrorism (prompts included why people become terrorist, how it affects you personally, how you feel); questions to elicit students' views about the Prevent agenda (e.g. how can people be prevented from being involved in terrorism, what should schools do about it, and what should government do?).

Each focus group was recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions were then analysed separately by each researcher, blocks of text were annotated to identify key ideas, and then possible themes or clusters of ideas were identified. These annotated transcriptions were then reviewed together and a number of themes were identified as a means to summarise the main issues arising.

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4. MEDIA LITERACY

Media literacy is often discussed as a skill, or set of skills. A recent literature review in the UK, for example, focuses on young people's ability to differentiate true from fake stories, or their awareness of bias (Picton and Tervainen, 2017). Teaching might typically focus on analysing text to think about an author's motivation, the strategies they have used to persuade the reader, or arguments they have used to inform a conclusion (Holmes-Henderson, 2014). Lin et al. (2012) list ten competencies for 'new media literacy' including analysis and evaluation, which imply users might have awareness of how the media message is part of a broader social process, with associated values and purposes. In relating these skills to citizenship, Mihailidis and Thevenin (2013: 1618) have argued this critical competency extends to 'an ecological agency,

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where their [citizens'] critical consumption of content also helps define and orient a sense of place and cultural connection to the world.' This expresses the challenge and value of media literacy, even though empirical studies often demonstrate how difficult this is to achieve in reality, for example Buckingham's study of young people's engagement with the television news notes that many young people miss the interpretive framing of news completely, and simply pick out facts and issues that seem of most interest, rather than engaging in any sustained 'critical viewing' (Buckingham, 2000: 211-223).

McQueeney's case study of teaching about terrorism in the media in the USA demonstrates how important it is to consider where one's perceptions of this phenomenon come from, and how common prejudices inform one's construction of risk and subsequent ideas about what action might be required to mitigate those risks. In the course of the research it became apparent that students had strong views on the role played by both traditional media and also newer forms of social media in terms of informing their opinions. Students were aware of entirely false stories, those commonly referred to as 'fake news', and the ease with which such stories can now rapidly spread (see Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). However, students were more concerned that the media they are exposed to is often one-sided and therefore, potentially, biased. Whether this is due to the 'echo chamber' of the sources to which they have day-to-day access, or whether this represented a more widespread problem, was not explicitly resolved. Students identified that at times there were multiple honest representations of situations and issues, which were not always equally weighted. This was particularly keenly felt by those students who had discussed, in class, other terrorist causes (other than Islamist terrorism), such as the activities undertaken by animal welfare / rights groups, who noted that:

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> The media only really talks about Muslim terrorists, they brush over other forms of terrorism (School 6, focus group 1).

Students particularly identified a trend in the mainstream media to focus on negative or 'dark' stories:

> If you go on and something's happened, like an attack has been done by a group then it's number 1 trending and I click on it for the information to find out about it, and you kind of learn, but it's quite dark if you get me, what they're exposing people to (School, Group 2).

> The news and the media presenting things in a negative way, that's made me nervous but I know that's just how they want to… like their opinion of it (School 3).

These students' observations resonate with studies, such as Powell's (2011) analysis of media coverage in the US (post 9/11), which has described a climate of fear around Islam and international terrorism.

As well as identifying these biases in media representations, there was an appreciation of how this might alter perceptions and opinions:

> The media alter our perception on terrorism and how with all the events that have been happening recently, like in Paris and in Belgium, what we think of terrorism is that it is religious as opposed to political and other things (School 1).

> I don't know because the media is so powerful I think we're all just brainwashed and we're all stuck in that mentality that we should be scared of them [Muslims] (School 3).

> It's strange to think that maybe the way the media represents these people completely changes the opinion of a person (School 6, Group 2).

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Students emphasised the dangers of simply believing everything (or anything) that you read, see or hear (in both the mainstream media and in more transient forms of social media). In particular they cited their (and their peers') youth as a key factor:

> Young people can become convinced easily because they don't know what they're hearing (School 8).

The prevailing sense of these discussions was a feeling that the students were quite vulnerable to distorted media messages, but that this could be tackled, at least partially, through a more critical engagement with information.

Taking Prevent as a starting point enabled teachers to focus on the development of media literacy amongst their students, and through this, the development of their students' own informed opinions. This is a relatively advanced form of media education which 'does not aim to shield young people from the influence of the media... but to enable them to make informed decisions on their own behalf' (Buckingham, 2003: 13). Students frequently referred to this new form of media literacy:

> It made us a bit more aware, like don't believe everything you read (School 6, Group 2).

Another summed up the perceived outcome of the whole series of lessons:

> The whole project is to make the students aware of what protests are like for different people and to understand the full story because when you go home the media don't give you the full story… teachers don't want you to believe that – they want you to get the full story (School 9).

So although students seemed to question the reliability of many sources of information they also seemed to be developing a sense of agency and criticality, rather than resorting to helpless cynicism.

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The students trusted their teachers more than most other sources and explicitly referred to their teachers' roles as being of a non-partisan nature in these lessons and in the development of their own opinions:

> I think just making sure we have the information, not to push opinions on people, but just to show the whole story in a way and then they can realise what is going on and then make a valid opinion for themselves instead of getting an opinion from the media or from school in a certain way. If we show the whole story it's easier to understand and find out what's happening in that situation (School 3).

As well as expanding students' horizons in terms of the different viewpoints or opinions held by others, these lessons also enabled students to see beyond media portrayals to a point where they were developing empathy with others.

> It is good to know about other people's opinion as well, not just the ones you hear about… I want to hear more about their opinion about terrorism (School 6, Group 2).

Students wanted to understand other perspectives to help them make sense of issues. In terms of the specific issue of Islamophobia, often provoked by media portrayals, one student said:

> when you learn about it more you realise that a lot of people do stereotype these people and it's not right, and it makes you think how people feel… what it does to them (School 6, Group 1).

Students were able to use this new level of understanding to make sense of other people's behaviour, which might otherwise seem impenetrable, as one student noted:

> Lessons help you understand why they're doing it… sometimes when you hear things on the news you think 'why are they doing that?' You get an idea… (School 7, Group 1).

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It is easier to describe the imperfections of the media in general terms than it is to apply this insight to how one consumes the media to understand the day to day world. These student responses indicate that the students had started to think about this, identified teachers as a trustworthy source of support, and were beginning to exercise critical judgement in their reading of the media. The extracts considered above illustrate students engaging with the issue of reliability; thinking about how one's selection of sources of information can shape one's perceptions of the issue / event; and appreciating how a range of sources can help develop empathy for a variety of perspectives. These outcomes indicate that media literacy activities can also elicit empathy, help students reflect on their own perceptions and judgements, and begin to clarify their own world view. This reflects the important role of critical media literacy in building an educational response to extremism and terrorism, and more fundamentally, to building a deeper sense of democratic citizenship – one which addresses values, respect for others and a commitment to establishing an informed personal view. However, the focus groups also indicated that this discernment and evaluation requires some kind of knowledge base to draw on as a resource for making judgements and asking questions, and it is to this aspect of our data that we now turn.

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4. POLITICAL LITERACY

The Development of Knowledge and Understanding

In the context of the Building Resilience project the students in the focus groups frequently mentioned the knowledge they encountered during these lessons. The role of knowledge has been contentious in the context of England's 2014 curriculum reforms (Author, 2017) and framing the educational response to Prevent in terms of promoting

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the fundamental British values does not suggest a strong focus on knowledge. Indeed recent research has demonstrated a trend in some schools towards celebrating narrow forms of British cultural identity, rather than engaging critically with FBVs (Moncrieffe and Moncrieffe, 2017). This makes the role of knowledge in our data worthy of further exploration.

Young (2013), in his attempt to revive this area of curriculum scholarship, has identified 'powerful knowledge' as a central concept, referring to knowledge which enables students to understand the world in more profound ways, through providing them with useful concepts and perspectives for thinking about social phenomena. In relation to terrorism, one may glean knowledge about individual atrocities and human suffering, but accruing more of this type of knowledge does not necessarily mean one comes to understand these acts more deeply. In fact, more knowledge of this type can feel overwhelming, as one of the focus group participants attested:

> Before I didn't know, I knew what was going on the news, but I didn't know how to understand it (School 3).

By contrast, learning about the history of terrorism, the groups who perpetrate such acts and the competing models for understanding them (drawing on politics, economics and psychology) offers young people some conceptual tools through which they can come to new understandings of terrorism. This in turn opens up new possibilities for them to engage more deeply and critically with the phenomenon. To be clear, here the notion of powerful knowledge refers not to some notion of empowerment to act, but rather to the individual's acquisition of transformed ways of understanding the world. Young argues this reflects Vygotsky's distinction between everyday knowledge and scientific concepts – the former arises from reflecting on experience, the latter requires conscious

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teaching in order to acquire the concept, which can then be used to interpret the world in new ways.

This following student extract echoes Young's sense that there is a kind of knowledge which is potentially transformative of one's understanding of the world:

> I think with the whole ISIS thing, it's kind of a topic that we all know about but we're not really knowledgeable, because we don't know the inside and out of it, it's kind of, you see this terrorist group as a terrorist group and you're not really given information to make your own opinion on the whole of it in a way (School 3).

In another school students reflected on their recent encounters with the concept of Islamophobia, and argued it was more useful that the general concept of racism. One student concluded:

> I like giving it a name, you can identify it more (School 6, Group 2).

This illustrates of how the acquisition of a new academic concept can provide students with powerful new ways to understand the world.

Some of the students' views broadly confirmed the government's aspiration that teaching might reduce young people's vulnerability to radicalisation:

> Schools are teaching us what happened in the past and the purpose of this is to prevent them happening in the future. I think our school is good at this, making us more aware of what is happening and we're not going to be as vulnerable as other people who don't know what's happening (School 8).

This reflects a slightly naïve view perhaps, that simply knowing about events in the past helps us to avoid them in the future. Others were more concerned about the alternative – that ignorance could not be defended:

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> Make sure everyone is informed… The more people are shielded, the less they can help… If at a young age they're not taught about it, when they're older, and they finally find out about it… they'll kind of be a bit stupid about it (School 6, Group 1).

The young people almost uniformly agreed that such issues should be tackled in school and many felt that it would have been useful to start tackling these issues even earlier than secondary school. Whilst adults may be cautious about engaging young people with such potentially sensitive issues, there was very little evidence in the focus groups that young people were concerned about tackling this in class.

The teachers' schemes of work covered a diverse range of issues including the far right, media portrayals of extremism and Islam, and diverse political ideologies, as well as more obviously Prevent-related topics such as resisting radicalisation, ISIS and, in one school, a critical review of the Prevent strategy itself. In the focus groups students frequently cited specific knowledge and also expressed interest in the realisation that there were different perspectives on these complex phenomenon – different ideological perspectives; different experiences of the same policy; different explanations of the same event; different examples of violence which are seen as more or less justifiable. The next section considers the outcomes achieved in the project.

Towards Informed Opinions

An exchange between four members of a group in one school around the concept of 'ideology' was particularly interesting:

> I think it's different ways, like in this sense in dictatorship or democracy, it's someone's way of seeing the best possible way a country could be run…
>
> The perfect way of running a country…
>
> Not perfect, I think an ideology is just an idea…

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> Yes, the ideal way of running it… (School 3).

Asked whether this information seemed particularly useful, one of the group added:

> I think it is, because like even now, in the news, we hear about whether we should stay in the EU or not… so knowing from a young age about all the different ways we could live our lives is quite useful... (School 3).

This illustrates an increasingly mature form of political literacy, not just the amassing of facts about events or processes, but the ability to develop alternative frameworks for understanding those facts. In this discussion it seemed that students were beginning to grasp the idea that these different opinions were not simply somehow reflective of individual differences, but that these ideological perspectives were actually informed by values, traditions of thought and world-views. It is only when people can grasp this that a pluralist democratic politics makes full sense (Crick, 1962).

This understanding of different perspectives emerged across the schools, not just where students explicitly studied political ideologies.

> Sometimes you only really see it from one side, sometimes you only see the Islamic side of extremism, especially in the media but I think it's showing us that there is more than just this type… obviously you've got animal ones, the far right groups, but really in the media at the moment you never really see anything about those groups, they're sort of forgotten about, it's like reminding us that they are there and anyone can be brought into them (School 7, Group 2).

In this example, the student is clearly reflecting on how they learned about a wider range of extremist activities than just those carried out in the name of Islam. This point emerged repeatedly and serves as a reminder that, for the majority of English students in secondary school, there is an automatic connection between 'terrorism' and 'Islam' as this is almost the only form of terrorism that has been reported routinely throughout

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their lives. Political violence for other causes such as Northern Ireland's Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries, or anti-Apartheid activists in South Africa, or the far right today in Europe, have to be consciously taught to expand young people's understanding of extremism and terrorism as broader phenomenon. These comparisons were developed in several schools and helped to focus on the importance of context and purpose in interpreting and evaluating politically motivated violence. Another student in this group built on this contribution by reinforcing the idea that learning about these differences enabled them to develop a qualitatively different understanding of extremism:

> Before we were learning about this I didn't really know what an extremist group was, I never heard about the neo-Nazis or things like that, but when we started learning about it I started like not only knowing what the groups were and what they did but also two points, like I didn't know you could have a different opinion, I thought they would all just be the same… (School 7, Group 2).

This reinforces the initial point made in this section, that the increased knowledge seems to enable students to develop a more sophisticated and differentiated understanding of the political world, in which there are multiple interpretations and meanings to be considered. We would argue that this understanding is also essential in establishing democratic approaches to dealing with difference. It discourages a single world-view or simple explanations and encourages students to be sceptical of simplified explanations and to search for more nuanced understandings. Not only does this resonate with a pragmatic tradition of democratic thought (Cunningham, 2002; Dewey, 1927), it also provides an educational approach for engaging with the Prevent policy intentions around challenging the 'attraction of the extremist narrative' (see House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2016: 9).

It is important to note that this increasingly open-minded and nuanced sense of the political world in general, and of extremism in particular, does not lead students to

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question their commitment to terrorism being wrong. Our quantitative data, which included pre and post-intervention questionnaires (Authors, 2016), indicated that students were consistently less likely to support political violence than the general population. However, the more sophisticated sense of the issue led some young people to reflect more deeply on the problem of terrorist motivation. As one student put it:

> Obviously a group like ISIS didn't start from nothing, obviously there's something there to help it start and help it build… there's a purpose to it and something has made them do it, it's not like one day they just got up and said, 'oh I want to build this empire, I want to like bomb people…' there's obviously something that's happened that made them do it (School 1).

In the following extract, another student re-phrases the same kind of question, but also acknowledges that a definitive explanation is unlikely:

> I think the main thing that is the most difficult thing to find out about this topic is why the extremist groups… obviously they have their reasons and their beliefs… but why do they take it to an extent where it's mass murders and beheadings and, you know, brainwashing people and I think that's the hardest thing to find out and I don't know if you'll ever get the answer to it (School 7, Group 2).

Students were willing to speculate on a wide range of contributory factors, including political motivations about power and land for ISIS' leadership; a feeling of alienation among minorities in Europe leading to a vulnerability to 'brainwashing' techniques; the search for meaning and the desire to make a difference being taken down a misguided route; and outrage at western bombings of parts of the Middle East. These all seem reasonable accounts, indeed, these have all been suggested by academics and politicians at various times in the public debate about terrorism and extremism, but it seems significant that such explanations were always offered as partial and tentative factors that might be relevant. In other words, most of the students who offered explanations

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did not offer certainty but were able to think about more varied and complex networks of causal factors.

5. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We prefaced our discussion of the student focus group data with a reference to the need to develop a distinctively educational response to Prevent. By listening to the young people themselves, it is possible to begin to identify both what they want, and what they take away from the classroom opportunities already provided for them. As Sieckelinck and his colleagues (2015) suggested, young people have a thirst for knowledge about what is going wrong in the world and how this can be tackled; and this was confirmed by the young people in the focus groups who argued they should have more opportunities to learn about terrorism and extremism. Not only did they feel such learning opportunities were essential, but they also expressed high levels of trust in their teachers, suggesting that schools really are well placed to rise to this challenge. The significance of trust in teachers is also reflected in Thomas et al.'s (2017) research which found that young people are more likely to discuss concerns over radicalisation with their teachers than the police.

According to the students' own accounts of what they valued in these lessons and what they learned from them, there are connections between media literacy and political literacy. There seems to be a reciprocal relationship, whereby increased political literacy provides students with a baseline of knowledge and understanding which enables them to become more critical of the media and social media they encounter. Once they have a clear sense of the range of actions that might be considered as 'extremist' and they understand the range of opinions people might hold about them, they start to recognise the partial nature of individual media stories and explanations and to look for additional sources of information. But this relationship seems to go both

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ways, and the search for additional sources of media coverage, different perspectives, and rival explanations also deepens their political literacy.

Increased knowledge and understanding of the specific issue of terrorism and extremism also operates as a way of building young people's more general understanding of democracy, and the skills they exhibit in finding, interrogating and interpreting sources of information are also fundamental skills for practising democracy. Davies (2008) also combines political and media literacy as essential components of anti-extremist education, and she argues that teachers and students need to adopt an understanding of ambiguity, a sense that knowledge is provisional and always open to revision. This implies there is a role for education in transforming the way students understand terrorism and extremism and the responses to them, the way they ask questions about these phenomena and the kinds of answers they are looking for. There is evidence in some of the student focus groups that these young people are able to understand that there are different world views (informed by values, ideologies and political calculation) and that therefore one's understanding of the situation has to acknowledge these competing perspectives. These findings directly support Bonnell et al's research which found that amongst the key factors in successful teaching methods was the requirement that students be 'actively supported to become aware that views and experiences other than their own exist in the world' (2012: 3-4). This commitment to a provisional and multi-perspective understanding also enables some of the students to develop a nuanced sense of how one might explain these phenomena. They are able to understand that there may be a range of causal factors, without feeling the need to assert one as the 'main' cause, or the 'real' explanation.

This ability to work with fairly flexible causal networks of factors represents a high level of political literacy. In addition, the search for different perspectives and the

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acceptance of partial and provisional explanations suggests the possibility that this developing understanding may itself have some role to play in building young people's criticality towards simplifying extremist narratives (and government-sponsored counter-narratives). Billingham (2016) has argued that this kind of orientation towards citizenship enables students to understand contingency, and thus understand how situations may change over time. The more citizens understand the complexity (and malleability) of the political world, and the risks associated with it, the less likely they are to embrace explanations which ignore or misrepresent that complexity.

In returning to his risk society thesis after 9-11 and the war on terror, Beck made the observation that politicians feel obliged to act, and to be seen to be acting, to mitigate risks, even though such actions may themselves constitute the greater risk:

> In order to protect their populations from the danger of terrorism, states increasingly limit civil rights and liberties, with the result that in the end the open, free society may be abolished, but the terrorist threat is by no means averted (Beck, 2006: 330).

In this context, what Beck calls a narrative of irony, politically literate citizens must be able to not only make individual judgements about how to respond to risk, but also have the ability to judge the nature of such risks in the first place. In an increasingly individualised and responsibilised world defined by risk, the challenges of citizenship are profound. Whilst this project was small, we believe the young people's responses offer grounds for optimism about the contribution of education to helping them to deal with this challenge. By providing them with the knowledge to adopt a critical stance, and the opportunities to engage critically with media representations, the lessons appear to have provided at least some of these young people with the building blocks to be sceptical in the best tradition of the term, to disrupt the unconscious processes that may

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influence their thinking and to use 'powerful knowledge' to help them to think afresh about the challenges of terrorism and extremism and the value of democracy.

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