

Newsletter

EDURAD: ADDRESSING VIOLENT RADICALISATION: A MULTI-ACTOR RESPONSE THROUGH EDUCATION



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Educational Responses to Extremism in the Netherlands

By William Stephens

This issue explores the role of education in preventing violent extremism in the Netherlands. Drawing on policy documents as well as the views of teachers and youth workers, we highlight the different ways in which education is seen to contribute to prevention, the kinds of extremism educators are encountering in practice, and the challenges in responding.

IN THIS ISSUE

EDUCATIONAL RESPONSES TO EXTREMISM IN THE NETHERLANDS

A brief overview of policy and professional perspectives on the role of education in addressing extremism.

What is the context in which PVE-E has developed in the Netherlands?

Preventing extremism has been on the policy agenda in the Netherlands for almost two decades now. Initially the focus was largely on policing and security measures. However, the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004 brought the issue of 'home-grown extremists' to the fore. This led to the introduction of a government-wide approach to prevention in 2005, bringing education into the picture. This became increasingly prominent from 2007 onwards, with education forming a key element of each iteration of the national prevention strategy. In the early 2010s there was a very specific focus on addressing 'Jihadism', even while other forms of extremism were acknowledged. In 2016 a new strategy was introduced which broadened the scope, with more specific attention also given to addressing far-right extremism.

What role does education currently play in preventing extremism?

In policy documents education is seen to have three primary roles in preventing extremism. One is identifying or 'flagging' signs of potential radicalisation. Teachers and youth workers, by virtue of being in close contact with young people, are seen to play an important role in identifying issues of concern and reporting them.

While flagging issues of concern is carried out by educators, it is not *educational* as such. A clearer educational role centres on 'building resilience to radicalisation' through developing critical thinking and media literacy skills, and promoting 'democratic awareness'. The idea is that education is able to build skills within young people that enable them to resist extreme ideas.

Finally, education is seen as a key means for addressing the kinds of social tensions that may increase the appeal of extremist ideologies. In particular, this is through providing a safe space to discuss and debate difficult issues. Here the focus is on education being able to influence the social environment by tackling issues such as Islamophobia.

The educators participating in this research attached great importance to education as a means of socialising young people into the democratic order. Education was seen to be able to address this in a unique way, through addressing issues early and broadly. For many educators, their efforts were effective precisely because they were not explicitly seen as preventing extremism, but just part of the general work of tending to the developmental needs of young people.

Alongside the role of developing critical thinking and skills to identify and reject harmful ideologies, a number of educators highlighted the importance of relationships. They emphasised the need to focus on being able to listen without judgement and building a safe and trusting relationship in which young people could express their ideas, however challenging they may be

What issues of extremism did educators identify?

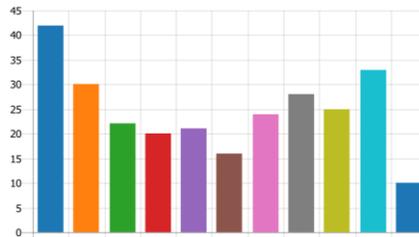
Educators highlight a wide range of forms of intolerance that they encountered in the practice, with racism being the most widespread, followed by religious intolerance and Islamophobia. However, not all these forms of intolerance were regarded as forms of extremism.

Extremism was viewed as being blinded by ideology, having an intolerance for difference, and viewing the “other” as an enemy, and undermining the democratic order. As such, although educators encountered racism, homophobia, and sexism, many did not regard these as issues of extremism as they were not seen as undermining democratic order.

7. Komt u een van onderstaande tegen in uw praktijk?

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Survey result of 47 educators on the forms of intolerance they encounter in practice.

What concerns and challenges did educators raise about addressing extremism?

On the whole, educators expressed that they did not lack support to address questions of extremism, with an array of trainings available. However, a number of educators felt that while they had access to training which provided knowledge and information, they lacked a focus on attitude. That is, they wanted to know how to react in different situations, not just *what* to say, but *how* to say it. A few teachers also felt that as there is already so much on the plate of educators, adding the role of preventing extremism is too much.

Collaboration was raised as another significant issue. Although collaboration between different educators, such as youth workers and teachers, and collaboration with other organisations, was seen as important, it was also felt to be challenging. A number of educators highlighted the importance of being able to understand and appreciate the different roles that each can play in preventing extremism.

What seems to be needed to strengthen pedagogical responses to extremism in the Netherlands?

There seems to be a desire and need to develop a clearer view of what a pedagogical response to extremism can look like. The insights of these educators point to some important starting points which extend efforts beyond critical thinking to highlight the importance of paying close attention to relationships with, and the emotional experience of, young people. Providing educators with a space to reflect on their experience and draw on their expertise to contribute to refining what pedagogical responses to extremism can look like is an important next step.

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