

Newsletter # 3 Ireland

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



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Educational Responses to Extremism

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This issue spotlights a comprehensive educational resource called 'Educational Responses to Extremism' that has been developed through workshops with practitioners and policymakers in the Republic of Ireland. It offers an overview of contemporary thinking about extremism and pays particular attention to the role of 'affect' in extremism, in particular 'how ideas feel'. To do so it develops creative new pedagogies. These offer a way of reflectively and critically understanding 'extremism of the centre/middle' that can manifest through a desire for assimilation, purity, hierarchy, and sameness that tends to encourage racism and misogyny, whilst opening up the possibilities of reciprocal exchange. The module encourages working with young people in a spirit of compassion and understanding, inviting a critical approach based on 'unpacking' rather than 'countering' or 'challenging' extremism. This means remaining committed to really listening

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IN THIS ISSUE

WHAT IS NEEDED IN AN
EDUCATIONAL RESPONSE TO
EXTREMISM?

To give space and time to
reflection, listening, dialogue,
awareness and attention.

WHAT IS THE MODULE
'EDUCATIONAL RESPONSES
TO EXTREMISM' ABOUT?

Understanding and
unpacking extremism,
listening and dialogue, and

to the young person. Underpinning it is a firm commitment to pluralism and as such anti-racism. The module provides lots of practical resources to support listening, dialogue, awareness and reflection, as well as exciting creative pedagogical strategies to engage with extremism. These are devised both for work with young people and as a community of practitioners to help deeper reflection and greater awareness of assumptions and biases and the ways people can be silenced or dismissed through a culture of denial or defensiveness.

What is involved an educational response to extremism?

One of the key themes through this project has been to distinguish between educational responses to extremism and those responses that are motivated by other concerns, such as security or policing (O'Donnell, 2020). At the heart of an educational response is fostering relationships that avoid coercive impositions of ideas or positions (in short avoiding extremist responses to extremism) by inviting the young person to 'unpack' their ideas, knowing that they will still be valued as a singular human being making their way in the world. It means exploring and noticing how our ideas, beliefs and values *feel* rather than only focusing on critical thinking skills. For example, when we are committed to a cause, whatever that cause is, we tend to believe that we are committed to justice. Few people would see themselves, no matter how unjust or hateful their causes are to an outsider, that they are actively committed to injustice. What energy does, for example, this feeling of justice involve? What does the body do, what gestures do we make when talking about justice? What happens if we drill down a little further..? What constellation of concepts accompany justice? Is it purity, hierarchy, kindness, or diversity? How do 'sacred values' feel and inspire? This builds on ideas from *The Enquiring Classroom* (2019). Finally, this way of understanding educational responses to extremism speaks to some of the ways in which critical media and informational literacy seek to develop awareness to our embodied and emotional responses to the ideas and headlines that we encounter, in particular those that trigger us with particular intensity.

Where did the ideas come from?

The module emerged from our workshops with practitioners and policymakers who shared their expertise and wisdom, and talked about the ideas, approaches and issues that really mattered to them. Key learning emerging from this underlined the importance of 'ethical relationality', foregrounding listening, reflection, awareness and dialogue, including when having difficult conversations. Part of doing so meant privileging the language of 'unpacking' over 'countering' and 'challenging'. Another insight was the importance of understanding how 'othering' works and its painful impact, not only for young people but also for their families, communities and indeed practitioners in professional spaces. Whilst it's important to look at more familiar kinds of (violent) extremism, we also need to reflect on more honestly is what our participants called an 'extremism of the centre or the middle'. This is a *de facto* assimilationist approach that privileges sameness and dominant forms of identity in a society, viewing inclusion as inclusion *into* those norms and values. This may not, at first glance look the same as some of the other kinds of extremism with which we are more familiar, but it is particularly important in spaces like schools, youth clubs and community centres, which need to be spaces of 'belonging in difference', reciprocal exchange, and solidarity. Persistent 'othering' and, in particular subjection to racism, brings with it its own traumas, violence and alienation.

cultivating imaginative responses.

WHERE DID THE IDEAS COME FROM?

Dialogues with our community of practitioners in Ireland.

WHAT IS AVAILABLE FOR PEOPLE OUTSIDE IRELAND?

A practical module with lots of resources!

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Developing our Community of Practice and our Youth Expert Advisory Group who will help us to review and evaluate the module.

Another idea that emerged was the need for 'two-way inclusion/exchange' or 'reciprocal inclusion/exchange' - the gesture of welcoming others into the mainstream and of welcoming the invitation to be invited into another's world. The problem with belonging as 'one way inclusion' is that people are asked to lose too much of themselves or are asked to commit to one identity rather than being able to hold onto many heritages.

Finally, participants insisted on making a distinction between 'extremism' and 'radicalism'. There was a strong commitment to the latter in cultivating young people's voice and agency in speaking out against injustice and imagining their own future. We have tried to develop some ideas to develop these supportive conditions in Unit 4.

What does the module offer?

The module has four units. Unit 1 is called 'Educational Responses to Extremism' and offers an overview of some contemporary ways of thinking about extremism and about educational responses to extremism. It introduces the concept of 'unpacking'. Unit 2 is called 'The Art of Listening' and it offers practical resources to develop the skills of dialogue, listening, reflection, awareness and having difficult conversations. Unit 3 is called 'Unpacking Extremism and Belonging'. Here we explore ways of 'unpacking' extremism, belonging and inclusion as well as offering some important opportunities to reflect on how 'extremism of the middle' works, and how to create safe spaces for dialogue. Unit 4 is called 'Imagining and Dreaming: Pedagogical Responses to Extremism'. Here we explore more deeply this idea of 'how ideas feel' and how ecologies of ideas work, including in online spaces, sharing ways of telling stories, alongside the motivational force of 'sacred values'. Finally, we open a space for young people to 'imagine a world of the future' and the possibility of new kinds of 'conviviality' (Gilroy, 2006). The themes in the modules center on the art of listening, belonging, awareness, dialogue, and staying with the difficult conversations. They also invite dreaming, imagining and creating with young people the supportive conditions for their voices, participation and ideas. They are meant to both support reflection and capacity building for practitioners and to provide ideas and resources for engaging with young people, families and communities.

What comes next?

We want to make sure that the module connects with practitioners and is of value, and importantly we are putting together a Youth Advisory Expert Group to help us see our own blind-spots, to guide us in terms of what is needed, and what may not be so useful for young people. This module is part of what is called 'participatory action research' so it involves ongoing reflection and review as a collaborative process.

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