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

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# Reflecting Beyond Our Bubbles

By William Stephens

This issue spotlights a community of practice developed in the Netherlands, bringing together practitioners, policymakers, and scientists. The community of practice has created a valuable opportunity for deep reflection and exchange. One of the highlights has been the opportunity to learn from the experience of different settings outside our usual bubbles of exchange.

## IN THIS ISSUE

### REFLECTING BEYOND OUR BUBBLES

This issue spotlights the development of a community of practice around questions of extremism and education in the Netherlands.

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## Why a Community of Practice?

When we spoke with practitioners and policymakers from across the Netherlands, it became clear that people were missing a space to reflect deeply on their work. For example, practitioners wanted to understand how and when they should set boundaries on a conversation on an extreme topic and how to respond to provocative statements that seem to elicit an emotional reaction. There was a clear appetite for access to spaces that are not about the imparting of information or technique, but that can assist educators in reflecting on how to approach the deep ethical and pedagogical judgements they need to make regarding how to respond to situations that may arise.

A community of practice is an informal arrangement of different actors with a shared interest in common questions. They have proven valuable in various settings, leading to meaningful changes in practice and addressing challenging problems (de Carvalho-Filho, Tio, & Steinert, 2020). The notion of community calls for a specific environment and attitude where everyone involved has shared respect for their expertise and the insight that each participant brings. While some participants possess expertise in the field of extremism, the aim was not a hierarchical transfer of knowledge but rather an environment in which the community understands the varied expertise of all participants as complimentary.

This environment allows for exchange and learning without any one person's agenda directing the discussion. In principle and practice, this arrangement reflects the position EDURAD takes. Practitioners are sources of expertise and insight, equal partners in the generation of knowledge around pedagogical responses to extremism.

## What does the Community of Practice do?

The community of practice has brought together youth workers and policymakers from municipalities and national organisations. Four basic principles have guided the conversations:

1. This space is for all of us, and everyone's voice is equal
2. What matters is the experience we bring, not the positions we hold
3. The space should be helpful
4. Everyone should feel free to contribute

The first session focussed on mapping the issues that were important to the participants themselves. This step was crucial to ensure the space belonged to the participants as much as the organisers. The structure has been simple yet effective, with short pieces of input to stimulate conversation, followed by discussions within small breakout groups.

The kinds of questions explored so far include:

1. What are approaches already being used to deal with extreme ideals and conspiracy thinking?
2. What are the most significant opportunities and challenges facing youth workers in this area?
3. What does a pedagogical response to extremism look like?

4. What are the things we can learn from one another regarding these issues?
5. Do you notice that you react differently to specific issues? What role do these emotions play in your practice?
6. How can youth workers and municipalities work together on creating a pedagogical climate for addressing issues around extremism?

Recently, the Dutch community of practice started joint sessions with EDURAD partners in Ireland, creating an opportunity to explore how these issues play out in different social and national contexts.

Given the restrictions created by the pandemic, these sessions have all been online. While this has reduced the opportunity for informal side conversations, it has made it possible to easily connect across borders and boundaries.

### **What has the impact been?**

Participants are enthusiastic about the community of practice. They shared how valuable it has been to connect with people outside of their typical bubble of reflection. The chance to understand how the same questions are addressed in rural parts of the Netherlands, the bigger cities, and Ireland has been widely appreciated. Participants have spoken about the value of being together as policymakers and practitioners in this setting of exchange. It has allowed a more profound understanding to develop between them of how these issues are being seen and addressed.

The conversations themselves have given rise to rich insights about the nature and challenges of responding educationally to extremism. During the discussions, participants have grappled with difficult topics and have not been afraid to question their own and other ideas. One of the critical benefits of collective reflection is that voicing our thoughts forces us to confront and reconsider our ideas (Jay & Johnson, 2002).

### **What comes next?**

The enthusiasm around the community of practice confirmed our findings that such a space is needed. Now the challenge is to go further. Community of practice participants indicated their desire to continue meeting and move from reflection to influence. Questions that have arisen include: how can we use this space to go deeper into responding to different situations? How can we draw on our collective experience to influence policy?

Circumstances permitting, the community of practice would like to come together physically. Meeting face-to-face would allow for a more extended meeting, where issues can be explored more deeply, and the network of relationships can be more deeply forged. However, notably, participants indicated the continued value of online meetings. With those from more remote parts of the country sharing, they would not have been able to join a face-to-face space.

## **References**

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