Preventing violent extremism

Stahl, Garth; Baak, Mel; Schulz, Sam; Adams, Ben; Peterson, Andrew

DOI:
10.1002/berj.3720

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):
Stahl, G, Baak, M, Schulz, S, Adams, B & Peterson, A 2021, 'Preventing violent extremism: resourcing, stakeholder strategies and fostering belonging and connection in Australian schools', *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 47, no. 5, pp. 1177-1193. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3720

Preventing Violent Extremism: Resourcing, stakeholder strategies and fostering belonging and connection in Australian Schools

Abstract

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) continues to be a topic of national and international concern and media interest. In the field of CVE, educational institutions have an important role to play, but precisely how educators and policy makers should best respond to extremism within schools remains unclear. This article draws on interviews with multiple stakeholders implementing a small-scale nationally funded grant in Australian schools to guard against behaviours leading to violent extremism through developing Restorative Justice (RJ) practices. In foregrounding their accounts, we draw attention to the complexity of negotiating the CVE space by resisting dominant narratives that could be considered "exaggerations" regarding both the manifestations of and motivations behind violent or extreme student behaviour. To conclude, we highlight how – in important ways – the money and resourcing allocated for CVE in local settings simply recycles what are already established to be best practices for fostering belonging and connection in schools, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

Keywords: vulnerability; young people; risk; policy; Countering Violent Extremism (CVE); Restorative Justice (RJ)

Introduction

Governments around the globe have trialled various approaches to integrating Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs into schools (Davies, 2009; Marshall, 2014; Sieckelinck, Kaulingfreks & De Winter, 2015). In Australia, both federal and state governments have provided funding to support many such projects, including as the *Building Community Resilience Youth Mentoring Program*, *Countering Violent Extremism, Building Community Resilience* and *Living Safe Together* (c.f. Barker, 2015; Prime Minister and Attorney General, 2014; Roose & Harris, 2015). Indeed, in the Australian context, Harris-Hogan and Barrell (2018) note a recent policy development has been the emergence of "a national program to conduct tailored CVE interventions" (p. 15). Noting the lack of existing empirical research that focuses on how CVE programs in Australian schools are implemented, in this article we draw on data from a research study exploring a small, grant-funded state-level trial program that provided Restorative Justice (RJ) training in four schools as the centrepiece of its CVE efforts. While the research study was initially expected to involve a critical exploration of how educators and policy actors combat ideologically based extremism and the effects of this phenomenon – the reality of the research ended up being markedly different.

While we do not dismiss the very real security threats present in our society and the important role education plays in combatting the threat of terrorism (Gearon, 2015; Ghosh, Chan, Manuel, & Dilimulati, 2017; Lundie, 2019), our study of CVE was conducted in a state with minimal reported incidents but sizeable funded programs nonetheless in operation. Such a situation raises significant questions regarding the relationship between 'perceived threats' of violent extremism – driven by politics and media reportage – and how stakeholders work with the funding to best address the needs of vulnerable young people who are positioned within, and consequently constructed by, discourses of deviance, securitisation and risk. This paper does not focus on the policitised way in which this funding and policy making operates at the level of the program development – but rather focuses on how the program is implemented at the school level.

Our article draws on interviews with multiple stakeholders (n = 13) capturing the ways in which they negotiate the CVE space by largely resisting dominant narratives that could be considered "exaggerations" regarding both the degree and nature of risks associated with violent extremism. Reflecting on how participants discussed their implementation of the funded

program, we consider how the money and resourcing allocated for CVE often recycles well documented best practices for increasing belonging and connection in schools. The RJ techniques implemented at these schools addressed issues resulting from socio-economic disadvantage and other forms of marginalisation or social isolation rather than specifically focusing on, and specifically countering, violent extremism. In this way, while the funding and program were constructed as *countering* violent extremism (CVE), due to the absence of any extremism to counter, it really became a program of *preventing* violent extremism (PVE) and susceptibility to extremist ideologies before they happened.

We are interested in the premise that young people's needs are now being routinely addressed through (and framed as part of) mediatized and securitised "crisis narratives" which not only drive progressive policy interventions from government but, also, influence how stakeholders "on the ground" work to gain the necessary resources. Not only did the research find that the participating schools had very few or no reported instances of ideologically driven extremist behaviour in the first place, the schools were enthusiastic adopters and adapters of the intervention. All participants reported positive effects within their institutions and communities and the usefulness of RJ in negotiating the complex human interactions that schools have always managed. Given the low number of incidents in this particular state, it remains important to critically examine how the "risk" of violent extremism is constructed, along with the implications of this (Durodie, 2015; Awan, 2012). From the perspective of risk management, we recognize there may be a need to be ready and prepared in case of extremist violence, but this stands in juxtaposition with significant strains on resourcing for an Australian education sector which often has to fight strenuously for every dollar. Therefore, while not discounting the importance of attention paid to terrorism and radicalization since 9/11, we offer empirical data which suggests that one consequence of a focus on CVE in terms of resourcing (e.g. grants) is that it draws attention away from more significant underlying issues – such as poverty and marginalization – which contribute significantly to the school experiences of some vulnerable young people. This sets up a key point of contention, regarding whether poverty itself – or ideologies associated with various "crisis narratives" – should be seen as the primary driving force behind efforts to engage with CVE in schools.

This point is also interesting because the relationship between violent extremism (and thus efforts to counter it) and poverty is, itself, an often contested one (Enders & Hoover, 2012). While many scholars and politicians have suggested that combating poverty can and should

play a role in reducing violent extremism, particularly since 9/11, others assert that the connection is more complex and that no causal connection exists between the two. For example, as Krueger and Maleckova (2003, p. 119) argue:

> Any connection between poverty, education and terrorism is indirect, complicated and probably quite weak. Instead of viewing terrorism as a direct response to low market opportunities or ignorance, we suggest it is more accurately viewed as a response to political conditions and long-standing feelings of indignity and frustration that have little to do with economics.

As Piazza (2011) suggests, while 'it remains a popular thesis among policymakers that poverty causes terrorism, the empirical literature has been inconclusive regarding the link between socioeconomic factors and terrorism' (p. 339). For our purposes, the most salient point is that while poverty may have no consistently direct causal link to terrorism, the schools and policy and program developers in this study operated from the premise that socio-economic disadvantage undoubtedly do lead to the same feelings of isolation, indignity and frustration that often drive extremist behaviours (UNESCO, 2017; Cherney et al. 2018). This raises important questions about how schools and other agencies operate around the blurred and complex relationships between these interconnected factors.

Overview of CVE

As Harris-Hogan et al. (2019) note, 'CVE has coevolved with the debate about radicalisation as a subfield of counterterrorism policy and practice' and 'has become a favoured term used by governments to refer to noncoercive attempts to reduce involvement in terrorism' (p. 732). The increased prominence of CVE can be seen as part of a "risk management" approach to such threats as terrorism, which Beck (1992) argues has become an increasingly significant part of public discourse, as has the process of 'discovering, administering, acknowledging, avoiding or concealing such hazards with respect to specially defined horizons of relevance' (p. 19). We recognize that CVE has become an important aspect of modern governance and is, therefore, becoming increasingly a part of modern schooling, both in Australia and elsewhere.

There is currently tremendous money being spent on the "war against terrorism." For example, UNESCO (2017) reports that between 2001 to 2017 the United States government spent approximately US$1.78 trillion to fight terrorism, while the European Union's spending was estimated to have increased from €5.7 million in 2002 to €93.5 million in 2009 (p. 10). Such figures have significant ethical implications regarding not only how the money is spent directly, but also broader questions of whether such funds are being distributed in the most effective ways regarding resourcing, appropriate strategies and what best practice may look like.

In terms of young people in the CVE space, UNESCO (2017) also highlights how young people globally are at particular risk of recruitment by violent extremist groups and that 'in the face of such threats, there is no single solution' but that 'relevant, inclusive and equitable quality education' has a key role to play (p. 2). It is important to note here that while relevant, inclusive and equitable general educational provision has been identified as important, educational systems and policy actors have also sought to find and enact specific, targeted interventions in order to counter violent extremism. While many of the CVE programs that have been either enacted or proposed concern themselves with intervention and action, they are often critiqued as reactive, as opposed to proactive (Bakker, 2015; Macnair & Frank, 2017; Spalek & Lambert, 2008). In these studies, "resilience" is often conceived of – and promoted as – something that can be incrementally built (e.g. resilience scales, factors, item measures) through strategic action (Grossman et al., 2020). Synced closely with perpetual "crisis narratives," notions of "risk" and "risky behaviours" are often depicted as powerful, pervasive and unpredictable – a silent, subversive enemy lurking in classrooms. Furthermore, some programs within 'the contemporary cohesion agenda' in Australia have not necessarily been intended by their authors to respond specifically to violent extremism, seeking instead to foster wider capacities, such as a critical awareness of difference, tolerance and a sense of belonging (c.f. Roose & Harris, 2015; Abdel-Fattah, 2019).

It is also important to note that 'no agreed international definition of violent extremism' exists and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade describes it as 'a complex phenomenon that differs substantially across and within countries' (2017, p. 1). However, for the purposes of Australian governmental CVE programs and strategy, violent extremism is defined as 'a willingness to use unlawful violence or support the use of violence by others to promote a political, ideological or religious goal' (Council of Australian Governments, 2015, p. 7).

Furthermore, these definitional debates influence how schools address behaviours which may be considered problematic. While various approaches have been trialled in schooling the lines between violent extremism versus other forms of violence or simply "extreme" behaviour of various kinds remain difficult to comprehend. CVE programs that ask educators to watch for and report instances of "radicalisation" among their students have been heavily critiqued (Davies, 2016; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015), raising serious ethical questions of how CVE should be handled in schools. Not least, Harris-Hogan et al. (2019) argue that 'requiring teachers (who may have vastly varying experiences dealing with high-risk behaviour) to understand, recognise and report radicalisation (especially in its early stages) sets unrealistic expectations upon classroom educators' (p. 734). Abdel-Fattah (2019) critiques the *Counter-Terrorism White Paper, Securing Australia: Protecting our Future* (2010) and Building Community Resilience (BCR) which positioned educators as front-line workers in counteracting potentially harmful behaviours (p. 11). O'Donnell (2016) calls for caution concerning the fundamental change in teacher-student relationships from one based on care to one based on a discourse of risk and securitisation. Within the complex environment of a school classroom, teachers – who have multiple responsibilities to consider simultaneously – may misread and misdiagnose certain behaviours. These reflections raise important questions about the intentions behind, and form of, the interventions through which schools and other educational agencies seek to implement to guard against violent extremism.

Methodology

Context and Methods

This article draws on the findings of a study entitled *Vulnerability, Resilience and Extremism: Investigating the Restorative Practice Framework in CVE*, which was funded by a local university and explored the impact of a small-scale, state-level grant funding of restorative justice training to counter potential ideologically driven extremist behaviour or violent acts in four schools (Baak, Stahl, Schulz, & Adams, 2020). Implementation of the grant targeted four disadvantaged state schools (two rural or remote, two metropolitan). None of the schools had reported incidents with violent extremism, but were still deemed eligible for the funded intervention due to the identification of these schools as having significant levels of disengagement and rates of "extreme behaviours" (e.g. absenteeism, anti-social behaviours,

etc). The majority of staff in these school were Anglo Australians. The aim of the study was to collect evidence of the efforts made by stakeholders (e.g. policy actors, school leadership teams, teachers), in order to understand how CVE measures function in terms of both policy development and practical implementation "on the ground."

The researchers were a team of three academics who all had expertise researching marginalised populations and extensive expertise working in diverse school settings as well as one research assistant. We sought to understand how young people in schools, who may be vulnerable and susceptible to violent extremism or violent ideologies, are identified – along with the strategies being used to reengage them in their school community. At present, state-level policy actors bid for national funding to enact their vision of what best serves local communities. Often, to deliver the services deemed necessary, requires state funds being used to employ private businesses for work in schools and communities – in this case a private business focused on restorative practice. Therefore, the research involved significant ethical and political sensitivities to navigate stakeholder input from both public and private sectors. To be clear, this research was not an evaluation of this program but, instead, sought to explore the problems and tensions stakeholders experienced with its implementation.

Case Studies

The enquiry employed case study research to examine the above research questions. Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark and Morales (2007) write that: 'Case study research builds an in-depth, contextual understanding of the case, relying on multiple data sources (Yin, 2003) rather than on individual stories as in narrative research' (p. 245). Case studies work within bounded systems (or *cases*) through detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual materials, and documents and reports). By drawing on diverse methods and data sources, the expectation is that a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny can be reached (Merriam, 1998).

Participants and Data Sources

Members of the research team interviewed a variety of stakeholders (n = 13) who worked in the vulnerability, resilience and extremism space in one Australian state. In total, we interviewed four policy actors, five school leaders, two youth workers and one private consultant who was an expert in RJ. There was also a school counsellor and wellbeing coordinator who attended our focus group session, but had not been interviewed independently.

To gain a cross-sectional understanding regarding policy implementation, we spoke with people based at each of the four different school sites that received funding. Conversations were wide-ranging, covering personal biographies, practices, experiences and their agendas for assuring that young people were best provided for.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Each interview ran for about 45 minutes to an hour and was conducted on school grounds or at a department office. A range of factors contributed to the success of the interviews. We created a culture of ownership where participants chose the time and location of their interview, meaning we knew they were comfortable. This allowed for flexibility, where participants had space to discuss what was important to them. Given the diversity of the stakeholders' roles we used a Mind Map where participants were able to look across multiple categories and speak to those areas in which they felt they had the most expertise. Some participants found the Mind Map approach useful, while some did not need the catalyst. To conclude the data collection phase, we invited participants to a focus group which ran for 90 minutes. A professional transcription company was used. We listened to the interview audio files several times and checked them against transcripts to ensure accuracy. Re-listening to the recording and reading the transcripts also facilitated a deeper interpretation of the data.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the university with a letter of support from the Department of Education. All names and schools in the data have been anonymised and – given that participants disclosed details about their professional lives and what they perceived as the difficulties in executing their job within various constraints – each participant was supplied with a copy of their semi-structured interview so they had the opportunity to retract any information they felt was inaccurate or problematic.

Countering Violent Extremism with Restorative Justice in Schools

Within this Australian state, two project officers were appointed from a government department to secure funding for, develop and implement programs targeted towards vulnerable young people who may be at risk of supporting or committing acts of violent extremism. These two project officers – who had diverse backgrounds but no specific expertise in CVE or RJ –

provided a clear contact point for the Department of Education, school or community leaders, and police alike. While they did liaise with law enforcement, the project officers saw their strategic role primarily as a last line of defence for keeping vulnerable young people from becoming part of the criminal justice system. These project officers were not listed on government websites and could only speak to us about certain aspects of their work.

The idea of RJ is one that emerged as a reforming approach to criminal offending, beginning in Canada during the 1970s and gradually attracting international attention until, by the late 1990s, 'the idea of restorative justice had become familiar to criminal justice reformers and scholars all around the world, and it is today considered one of the most fertile fields of criminological thought' (Marshall, 2014, p. 5). There has also been, since then, a 'substantial increase in the range of application of restorative justice principles and procedures, both within the criminal justice system and beyond it' (Marshall, 2014, p. 6). This has included an increased use of RJ inspired approaches in schools and other educational settings. Regarding terminology, we use the phrase RJ throughout this article, although it should be noted that different associated phrases are used by various scholars, such as Restorative Practices (RP) (Mirsky, 2007; Short, Case, & McKenzie, 2018) and Restorative Approaches (RA), which Cremin, Sellman and McCluskey (2012) employ to distinguish the use of restorative principles in more informal settings, involving 'the use of restorative questions with the person who has caused harm and the person who has been harmed' (p. 423). Regardless of the particular terminology used, the core basis of restorative justice practices, approaches and processes – particularly as it is utilised in educational contexts – is succinctly summarised by Garnett et al. (2020) as a 'framework' that 'emphasizes relational connections, school engagement, personal responsibility, and repairing harm. It is preventive *and* responsive … an umbrella of tools that can be used to create a culture of care, to establish positive relationships that prevent conflict and misbehaviour, and to repair relations that have been damaged by conflict and harm' (p. 22). This is precisely the sense in which RJ practices were employed within the program we examine here.

Despite not mentioning RJ explicitly, many of the UNESCO (2017) recommendations regarding CVE do suggest its key tenets as best practices, such as empowering students, using pedagogies to open up safe spaces, and adopting strategies that foster a positive identity and sense of belonging to a student's immediate community. Some authors have also considered the potential for CVE through restorative justice techniques in non-educational contexts, such

as Yamuza and Ravagnani (2018) who discuss 'using restorative justice resources, procedures, methods and institutions to combat radicalization in prison' (p. 619). With this in mind, we now describe some of the factors influencing the implementation of the small-scale grant in schools, largely drawing on the policy actors' perspectives. We then explore how the school leaders and youth workers reported using RJ practices to address various issues of concern regarding student behaviour and community relationships, before turning to look at both disconnects and alignments between the two elements – CVE and RJ – that made up the grant-funded program. Finally, we draw together and discuss some of the implications for policy and resourcing that this data suggests.

Factors Influencing the Implementation of CVE Programs in Schools

Acknowledging there is an ongoing debate regarding what the education sector's appropriate role should be in CVE efforts, in terms of the CVE trial program we studied, our research showed that its implementation was influenced by many aspects of the ongoing media and political discourse. Stakeholders at the state government level responsible for policy development and implementation were clearly aware of the various issues and concerns involved, along with how schools and the wider public could potentially misconstrue their efforts. As Harris-Hogan et al. (2019) have pointed out, debate in CVE is often concerned with how best to balance two competing factors: that on the one hand, violent extremism 'is a low incidence phenomenon in schools, particularly when compared to bullying, gang activity or other forms of youth violence' while, on the other hand, 'even a single event of violent extremism' can have a 'disproportionately large impact … on a society' (p. 732). Indeed, this very consideration was expressed by one participant named Peter – a policy officer from the Department of Education – during our interview: 'The thing for me that I always come back to though, is whilst we've got very low incidences of it, it takes one incident for it to be very high impact for our state.' In a state in which there have been minimal incidences of violent extremism, the CVE program was focussed around preventing the radicalisation of those who might be susceptible to violent extremism. In the absence of specific incidences of violent extremism within the 4 schools, the language and focus within the schools as well as the policy arena focussed instead on what they referred to as 'extreme behaviour', which broadly encompassed violent behaviour which presented a risk to students and/or staff.

Another issue that has been of concern within the CVE field – and perhaps especially so in schools – is the potential for 'unintended stigmatization of vulnerable sections of the community' (Harris-Hogan et al., 2019, p. 734). In the aftermath of 9/11, this stigmatization has largely been experienced by Muslim communities living in Western countries, including Australia (Morsi, 2017). Indeed, this has been a major focus of scholarly literature in the field, which has contained numerous 'critiques of the counter-productive effects of the construction of Muslims as "suspect communities" and the best way to negotiate tensions between CVE and individual rights' (Abdel-Fattah, 2019, p. 4). In our study, Daniel, a senior project officer for youth inclusion in the state public service, acknowledged these sensitivities and the importance of not jumping to conclusions about the risks posed by particular students, especially those from certain demographic groups: 'Oh, this kid said "ISIS". And not all teachers are experts in adolescent development who understand impulsive and risk-taking behaviour". Daniel's point being that young people do "take risks" and may behave impulsively, but this does not necessarily mean that they themselves *are* risks. Apparent in the data was a desire by policy actors to avoid situations in which mere reference to extreme ideological subject-matter, or terror groups, would be taken as evidence that a student may be likely to commit the same kinds of violent extremism themselves. This highlights the complexity of identifying 'risky behaviours' that may lead to VE.

Interestingly – in terms of prevailing mediatized narratives – when asked about ideological extremism, youth worker Luke mentioned one boy of Middle Eastern background and did remark on other Middle Eastern and African students at the metropolitan high school where he worked, but said: '…the vast majority don't display any sort of troublesome behaviour. Definitely mental health, definitely wellbeing over-represented, but not in behaviour that goes against the grain of the school.' Luke further emphasised in the focus group: "I definitely see a lot more of just, yeah, anger, violence, that sort of at-risk behaviour, as opposed to someone that's got an ideology that they're sort of pushing on,' or as he summarised in his individual interview:

> I don't say the word extremism, which isn't a word I ... I mean, it's a pretty strong word, and I don't necessarily see that in the school. What I would see more is not even violent. I mean, it's … Young people displaying behaviours in a classroom that makes them even being in that classroom really hard. And, I'd say what's driving that, for me, would be family dynamics, socio-economic indicators, family dysfunction, mental health, split

> families, drugs and alcohol, that is definitely a driver in what makes some students, their experience at High School, in a classroom, really hard.

In terms of the tension between reactive and proactive interventions in the CVE field, how behaviours are coded and understood is paramount to doing CVE work effectively. For Daniel, his aim is to address "isolation" in schools, rather than deploying the language of "countering violent extremism" directly:

> So, again, there needs to be some discerning about, well, what's just normal risk-taking behaviour and what's something that I should be worried about? And so, for my money, the better investment is teaching people, practitioners, how to look for isolation at levels of concern rather than trying to teach them this whole new thing which is countering violent extremism.

Here, Daniel locates countering violent extremism interventions as being rooted in – and even better focused on – wider concerns, particularly isolation. Indeed, this focus on deciphering the signs of social isolation reflects a broader consensus among many of the policy actors, evaluators and restorative practitioners we spoke to, who all expressed the view that isolation, disconnection from community and related experiences were a significant underlying risk-factor not only for violent extremism but, also, for a wide range of troubling or harmful behaviour, or what they referred to as extreme behaviours.

Peter, for example, when discussing his responsibilities working 'in the school operations space' within the state Department of Education and how this related to CVE, stressed the importance of 'working with schools around gathering information around some short term strategies and then I guess some longer term interventions and thinking about how we reconnect and reengage that young person with their school in a pro-social sort of way.' Peter also mentioned that both his and Daniel's understanding about the kinds of behaviours that needed addressing had broadened since beginning their work coordinating the state's CVE efforts:

> I think we were looking at probably very specific things around CVE. Once we got into it and started to receive referrals and we started tracking some of the behaviours in schools, what we quickly realized is that it was much broader around not just

> radicalisation but fascinations with violence or a fixation with a particular concern or worry so that broadened our thinking quite a bit I reckon, compared to where it started. Our risk profile and what we're seeing in terms of antisocial behaviours are very different and that would be translating in schools as well where they are thinking, not just about this, we're addressing much broader behaviours than CVE.

This data suggests an acknowledgment both of the need to adopt proactive, 'pro-social' approaches to CVE but, also, that "violent extremism" itself – as commonly understood or defined – is only one part of the potentially harmful, antisocial behaviours that can be addressed through RJ programs employed in CVE.

Indeed Leah, the director of the private organization tasked with delivering RJ training to schools as part of this program, also referred to extreme behaviours as stemming from similar, underlying feelings of isolation including – but not limited to – extremist ideologies or radicalization, saying: '…my theory of change is we then find a way of meeting that innate affect that we have, which is to be connected. So, is it online gaming, is it social media, is it drugs and alcohol, is it radicalization? What is their... They all find an unhealthy way of connecting if they're not... if they don't have the innate need for connection there.' Leah's point is that people have a fundamental need for connection, which individuals will seek to fulfil in whatever ways they can, whether positive or negative. Meeting that need for connection in constructive, pro-social ways was thus an important part of what RJ practitioners were focused on achieving in schools.

Schools embracing RJ practices

While all of those we spoke with in policy coordination, implementation or evaluation positions expressed the view that isolation of various kinds was an important aspect to consider in CVE, we also found that "on the ground" staff in schools felt isolation played a big role in the behavioural issues and challenges they faced and, therefore, community building and pro-social engagement was an important focus of their efforts. In the absence of any violent extremist behaviour in their schools, school staff were focussed more broadly on preventing and responding to extreme behaviour. Staff including school leaders and youth workers at the four schools where RJ was being trialled all spoke about the ways it had been used to help address

problems caused – in part – by isolating factors such as socio-economic disadvantage, substance abuse, poor mental health and disability.

These factors were perhaps most pronounced at the non-metropolitan high school, situated in a regional town more than an hour drive from the capital city. This was also the school where the research team spoke to the greatest number of staff members: the principal, deputy principal and a youth worker. The issues with isolation at this school are exacerbated by the literal remoteness of its location and community, which then contributes to social and psychological forms of isolation and conflict. As Finn, a youth worker at the school, told us: '…there's probably more isolation issues. We have pockets of communities; the only way they get to school is by bus. Their parents don't have licenses, or they don't have vehicles for whatever the reasons may have been. Then those kids are stuck in very small type communities.'

Similarly, the school's principal, Cassie, explained to us that whatever tensions existed and manifested within both the school and broader community – including violence more generally than violent extremism – resulted, in part, from geographic isolation and the effects of poverty. The sparsely populated nature of this rural region contributed to a lack of "community cohesion" whereby students from outlying districts and smaller hamlets failed to feel "communal investment" in the central town and school:

> In terms of the violence, a lot of it, the vast majority was outside of school, but this is the place where they get together. I forget the exact percentages, but it's 90 something, I think it's 92% of our students catch a bus to school. That brings its own issues in terms of how do I get those people who might never come to [town] to see this as their school as well, as opposed to [the town's] school. It's just situated here but it actually belongs to everybody.

Cassie also emphasised that economic disadvantage interacted with a variety of other factors – such as levels of academic achievement, or the ability to participate in sports and other communal activities – to a detrimentally isolating effect. When asked what she thought was the root cause of violent or otherwise extreme behaviour from students, for example, Cassie said:

> I suspect for some of the key players that it is a poverty thing. It doesn't matter what you call these kids, kids know where they fit in the social, educational, academic. You don't need to call it Gumnut Cottage. The kids know that: "If I'm going to Gumnut Cottage, I'm a gumnut. Like, I know, I'm not at the same place as you. My name's never going to be out there on the... As the dux[1] of the school." Kids know that. I think... And it is only my opinion, I don't have anything to back that up... that it is a class, culture, where do I fit in the scheme of life, and not necessarily feeling comfortable about where I fit, not knowing how to change it…

In other words, students had a sense of their classed and raced marginalisation in social relations, and working effectively to counter this deeply internalised social stigmatisation was an issue facing many of the school staff. Similar views were expressed to varying degrees by the other school leadership and youth workers who spoke with us, suggesting a broad spread of issues combining poverty, isolation and the need to strengthen a sense of community and belonging for students.

For example, Julia – senior school assistant principal at the non-metropolitan school – saw RJ as an effective way to 'get that sense of community back.' At one of the metropolitan high schools, youth worker Luke spoke about a survey that had suggested 'feeling of connection with the school' had slipped in recent years and emphasized the need to 'build that connection. And, often I think restorative justice is a great way to … because it's based on relationships.' Bernie, the deputy principal of another metropolitan high school, emphasized the benefits of his school having a relatively small student population, saying 'that works well for us because it means that we're a small enough community that you get to know the kids, and the kids get to know you.' Meanwhile at the only primary school included within the program, Jen and Max – principal and deputy – both emphasized their school's 'socio-economically' diverse cohort, with Jen specifying: '…so we have some real pockets of poverty and disadvantage, and we have some working class, and we have some richer, more middle-class. But largely it's low socioeconomic community.' Given this context, Jen used the RJ framework 'to explicitly talk to each other, talk to staff, talk to families, talk to children, about, "Which box am I in? Which box are you in?"'[2] Here, Jen is highlighting the importance of "the compass of shame" conceptual framework[3], which 'had a massive impact [not just] on people actually understanding their own motivations, but the motivations of others.' According to Jen, a RJ framework was helping their primary school build a more inclusive culture within a community

whose students and families came from a range of socio-economic positions, the disparate experiences of which could otherwise make communal understanding and cohesion more difficult to achieve. Clearly, these aims were far removed from a more specific focus on CVE which was the focus of the grant.

CVE and RJ "in conversation"

Our study set out to speak with multiple stakeholders implementing a small-scale grant to develop RJ practices in order to guard against behaviours leading to violent extremism. What was notable from our data, though, was that both the policy actors seeking to implement and evaluate a CVE program using RJ in schools, along with educational and youth support staff working "on the ground" with RJ, all aligned in their concern regarding similar issues of isolation caused by a variety of socio-economic, mental health and other community factors. Across the data was a reiteration of how important community building and "belonging" is in addressing these problems. However, while some actors broadened their initial focus on CVE to wider concerns with isolation and a lack of belonging, for most school staff, these latter issues were largely unconnected with specific instances of "violent extremism" in a political or ideological sense and, indeed, most school staff were unaware of the connection between this RJ trial program and broader concerns regarding CVE. This distinction between the two sides of the project was addressed directly in our focus group, which brought several of the policy actors together in conversation with school leadership and youth workers. In addressing the school staff present at the focus group, Daniel, a policy actor, said:

> …we sort of had to be careful when we spoke … about the money was funded through a CVE initiative, very much in a building resilience capacity to the things that make young people isolated, which we, you know... It's a long sort of rope from restorative to CVE. But how did you feel? What are your thoughts on that, knowing that this is coming from that; at one facet of this is national security. It's a bit of a disconnect, isn't it?

In response to Daniel, Cassie, a principal at one of the remote schools, replied affirmatively, 'I don't consider national security' while Hannah, who was the health and well-being coordinator from Cassie's school, reiterated her focus on the importance of RJ as a community prevention tool rather than something associated with CVE:

> …and the community having faith that we can come to some resolutions on small things, and it's that conversation that the kids have as well, and that we can understand why we're acting certain ways. And I do have empathy, and shame response and all of that. So, I look at it probably as more of a preventative tool in that area. Like, I hadn't even really considered the link [to CVE].

These responses reflect a recurrent finding of our data, which is that even when asked directly about their thoughts on the presence and role of ideologically based violent extremism in schools, staff reported very low or non-existent experience of it and frequently referred back to other issues evidenced in what they referred to as "extreme behaviour" and which they linked to causes such as poverty, mental health and social isolation.

In short, all of the participants from schools focussed overwhelmingly on a range of broad, underlying social issues, rather than any kind of specifically ideological, violent extremism. This was perhaps summarised most eloquently by school principal Cassie. When asked specifically about her thoughts on the role of CVE, defined ideologically in terms of things like Islamic or far-right extremism as motivating factors for extreme behaviours, Cassie replied: 'Here it would most likely be poverty … I think. And all that is associated with that, because poverty, for me... Again, I haven't done the training... is not only the money, it's the poverty in education and life experiences and things like that. For me, it's poverty of lots of different things.'

Discussion and Conclusion

Certainly education – as Ghosh, Chan, Manuel and Dilimulati (2017) assert – should be incorporated into policies which seek to prevent extremism and address the psychological and emotional dimension. In terms of *educating* against extremism, Davies (2016) suggests there exist a variety of factors such as 'experiences of trauma or fear, extreme poverty, experience of humiliation, being alienated or isolated, frustration at lack of influence, concern about masculinity, a psychological need for cognitive closure, undue respect for authority, wanting love and a sense of purpose, and wanting to feel unique and important' which can all be potential triggers for a person engaging in violent extremism (p. 7). Our research project

initially expected to involve a study of the experience of various stakeholders, in both government and education, regarding the implementation of a CVE trial program. While CVE was the predominant focus for the two senior policy makers who were interviewed, particularly as a result of the funding source for the program, it became clear over time that school staff – who were embracing RJ techniques – had little consideration that their institutions were targeted due to the possibility that students in their cohorts may be susceptible to ideologically and politically driven violent extremism. This highlights an interesting tension around not only the dominant narratives and language of combating violent extremism, but how money earmarked for CVE is secured and used. The common thread between these two sides of the project – specifically the policy actors who had secured the funding and the educators working in schools – emerged as one of 'isolation' among young people, caused by various kinds of social-economic disadvantage and other challenges or, as Cassie put it, 'poverty of lots of different things.' Indeed, those working on implementing CVE policy were themselves attuned to the fact that narrowly defined "violent extremism" was not the only harmful outcome that RJ based programs like this could help to address and counter. However, what is not clear from this research is whether RJ really would work to *counter* violent extremism.

The research documented another tension: that between public versus private service provision where, in this instance, the state has recruited very expensive private providers – specifically a private training business focused on restorative practice – to implement their policy approach in each of the four schools. This is important not only because policy actors tasked with CVE prevention are implementing strategies which ignore existing critical pedagogical approaches to building community cohesion from the ground up, but because this raises significant questions concerning how money is allocated in the already under-funded state sector. Furthermore, an argument could be made that the impulse to look to the private sector undermines the work and commitment of educators and teacher education providers.

Given this, we suggest our case study here might help to bolster calls for a broader deployment of funding and resources to support RJ based methods in schools (or similar "community building" practices) beyond a specific policy remit concerning CVE. Certainly, a RJ approach is preferable to one in which teachers are expected to act as surveillance officers, or to speak of young people in "criminalised" terms, which can be common in the CVE literature. Deploying resources – both money and expertise – broadly in regard to RJ would also guard

against positioning certain cohorts of students as "problems" and as "risks" and undermining their capacity to engage in socially equitable pedagogies.

Indeed, it has already been noted that any effort to address the underlying "causes" of violent extremism are likely to have broader impact regardless, as Harris-Hogan et al. (2019) argue: 'One problem with root cause theories (such as a lack of education, poverty, etc.) is that the more deep rooted a cause, the more it works to produce a wide variety of anti-social outcomes … and programmes which focus on addressing these "root causes" are far more likely to impact other anti-social/problem areas than violent extremism' (p. 735).

This does not mean that addressing these "root causes" of social problems has no impact on CVE, however, as several other studies have suggested. As Grossman and Tahiri (2015) note, regarding the findings of a qualitative study into government and community perspectives on radicalization and violent extremism in Australia: 'participants emphasised social exclusion, discrimination, racism and marginalisation as major elements in making people more susceptible to radical or extremist persuasion, especially for young people' (p. 16). They emphasise the strengthening of local communities and most, if not all of the factors mentioned here, align with the concerns identified by participants in our study, particularly the importance of fostering a sense of community belonging in young people.

A through line in our analysis has been the ongoing tension between the poverty experienced by many students, families and school communities, and mediatized education policy (Fairclough, 2000; Lingard & Rawolle, 2004) that can often be more concerned with public perception than the "on the ground" effect: that is, more concerned with putting 'a positive "spin" on' particular policies, or with 'trying to "sell" the policy' (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 19). We remain suspicious – as were the stakeholders interviewed in this study – of a rhetoric which narrows how we understand inequality and its consequences. Both ends of this equation – material poverty and mediatized policy implementation – significantly contribute to how discourses concerning vulnerable young people are structured. Amid the continued and increasing attention to "risk," "safety" and "vulnerability" in public and media discourse, it is imperative that further exploration is undertaken to examine how funding aligns with CVE to both open up and close down space for action.

The tensions experienced by the participants discussed in this article are arguably present in the international CVE/PVE field (c.f. Lundie, 2019). As discourses of "risk" shore up so many aspects of our everyday lives, our concern is how young people's needs are now being routinely addressed through (and framed as part of) mediatized "crisis narratives" which appear to drive government policy interventions. In education, scholars like Sukarieh and Tannock (2015) suggest the need for caution regarding how anti-radicalisation agendas can divert attention from efforts to analyse the structural root causes of social problems. Our study demonstrates that these very same root causes are at the forefront of what "on the ground" educators – school leaders and youth workers alike – see as the primary challenges to be overcome in developing cohesive, functional school communities that provide vulnerable young people with the best chances to engage, flourish and find their way. We do not suggest that CVE is an unnecessary goal, only that the rationale behind resourcing as well as its deployment requires scrutiny.

Acknowledgements

Ethical Guidelines

Formal permission was granted from Department of Education and the university. We took care to anonymise the location of the participants.

Endnotes

1. In Australian schools, dux is a title often given to the highest-ranking student in academic, arts or sporting achievement.

2. Jen is discussing here the ‘emotional boxes’ that are a part of the language of RJ.

3. The compass of shame is a concept developed by Nathanson (1992) and associated with RJ practices, which illustrates the various ways that human beings react when they feel shame, encompassing four “poles” of withdrawal, attacking self, avoidance, and attacking others.

References

Abdel-Fattah, R. (2019). Countering violent extremism, governmentality and Australian Muslim youth as 'becoming terrorist'. *Journal of Sociology*, 00(0), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783319842666.

Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2017). *Development Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/development-approaches-to-countering-violent-extremism

Awan, I. (2012). "I Am a Muslim Not an Extremist": How the Prevent Strategy Has Constructed a "Suspect" Community. *Politics and Policy, 40*(6), 1158-1185. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2012.00397.x

Baak, M., Stahl, G., Schulz, S., & Adams, B. (2020). 'We have to be really careful': policy intermediaries preventing violent extremism in an era of risk. *Journal of Education Policy,* https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2020.1859620

Bakker, E. (2015). EU Counter-radicalization Policies: A Comprehensive and Consistent Approach? *Intelligence and National Security*, 30(2-3), 281-305. https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2014.988442

Barker, C. (2015). *Australian government measures to counter violent extremism: A quick guide.* Research Paper Series 2014–15, Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of Australia.

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: SAGE.

Cherney, A., R. Sweid, M. Grossman, A. Derbas, K. Dunn, C. Jones, J. Hartley & G. Barton (2018). "Local service provision to counter violent extremism: perspectives, capabilities and challenges arising from an Australian service mapping project." *Behavioral Science of Terrorism and Political Aggression*. 10(3): 187-206. https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2017.1350735

Council of Australian Governments. (2015). *Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Strengthening Our Resilience*. Commonwealth of Australia.

Cremin, H., Sellman, E., & McCluskey, G. (2012). Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Restorative Justice: Developing Insights for Education. *British Journal of Education Studies*, 60(4), 421-437. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2012.738290

Creswell, J., Hanson, W. E., Plano Clark, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative Research Designs: Selection and Implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35(2), 326-264. https://doi.org/0.1177/0011000006287390

Davies, L. (2009). Educating against Extremism: Towards a Critical Politicisation of Young People. *International Review of Education*, 55(2-3), 183-203. https://doi.org/ 10.1007/s11159-008-9126-8

Davies, L. (2016). Security, Extremism and Education: Safeguarding or Surveillance? *British Journal of Education Studies*, 64(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2015.1107022

Durodie, B. (2016). Securitising education to prevent terrorism or losing direction? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 64(1), 21-35. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2015.1107023

Enders, W. & Hoover, G. A. (2012). The Nonlinear Relationship between Terrorism and Poverty. *American Economic Review*, 102(3), 267-272. http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/aer.102.3.267

Fairclough, N. (2000). *New Labour, new language?* London: Routledge.

Garnett, B., Moore, M., Kidde, J., Ballysingh, T. A., Kervick, C. T., Bedinger, L., …, Sparks, H. (2020). Needs and readiness assessments for implementing school-wide restorative practices. *Improving Schools*, 23(1), 21-32. https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480219836529

Gearon, L. (2015). Education, Security and Intelligence Studies. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 63(3), 263-411.

Ghosh, R., Chan, W. A., Manuel, A., & Dilimulati, M. (2017). Can education counter violent religious extremism? *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, *23*(2), 117-133.

Grossman, M., Hadfield, K., Jefferies, P., Gerrand, V., & Ungar, M. (2020, January). Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism: Development and Validation of the BRAVE Measure. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1705283

Grossman, M., & Tahiri, H. (2015). Community perceptions of radicalisation and violent extremism: an Australian perspective. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 10(1), 14-24. https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2015.1028773

Harris-Hogan, S. & K. Barrelle (2018). Young Blood: Understanding the Emergence of a New Cohort of Australian Jihadists. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32(7): 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1473858

Harris-Hogan, S., Barrelle, K., & Smith, D. (2019). The role of schools and education in countering violent extremism (CVE): applying lessons from Western countries to Australian CVE policy. *Oxford Review of Education*, 45(6), 731-748. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1612343

Krueger, A. B., & Maleckova, J. (2003). Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection? *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 17(4), 119-144. https://doi.org/10.1257/089533003772034925

Lingard, B., & Rawolle, S. (2004). Mediatizing educational policy: the journalistic field, science policy, and cross-field effects. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(3), 361-380. https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093042000207665

Lundie, D. (2019) Social and civic education in an age of extremisms. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 40(3), 265-268.

Macnair, F., & Frank, R. (2017). Voices Against Extremism: A case study of a community-based CVE counter-narrative campaign. *Journal for Deradicalization*, 10, 147-174. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1686856

Marshall, C. (2014). Restoring What? The practice, promise and perils of Restorative Justice in New Zealand. *Policy Quarterly*, 10(2), 3-11. https://doi.org/10.26686/pq.v10i2.4491

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miah, S. (2017). The Muslim problematic: Muslims, state schools and security. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 26(2), 138-150. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2016.1200996

Mirsky, L. (2007). SaferSanerSchools: Transforming School Cultures with Restorative Practices. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 16(2), 5-12.

Morsi, Y. (2017). *Radical skin, moderate masks: Deradicalising the Muslim and racism in post-racial societies.* London: Rowman and Littlefield.

Nathanson, D. L. (1992). *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self*. W.W. Norton & Company: New York.

O'Donnell, A. (2016). Securitisation, counterterrorism and the silencing of dissent: The educational implications of prevent. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 64(1), 53-76.

Piazza, J. A. (2011). Poverty, minority economic discrimination, and domestic terrorism. *Journal of Peace Research*, 48(3), 339-353. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310397404

Prime Minister and Attorney General. (2014, August 24). Counter-terrorism measures for a safer Australia. Joint press release. Prime Minister and Attorney General. Retrieved February 3, 2017, from http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressrel%2F3357815%22

Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing Education Policy*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Roose, J. M. and A. Harris (2015). "Muslim Citizenship in Everyday Australian Civic Spaces." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 36(4): 468-486. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2015.1049984

Short, R., Case, G., & McKenzie, K. (2018). The long-term impact of a whole school approach of restorative practice: the views of secondary school teachers. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 36(4), 313-324. https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2018.1528625

Sieckelinck, S., Kaulingfreks, F., & De Winter, M. (2015). "Neither villains nor victims": Towards an educational perspective on radicalisation. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 63(3), 329-343. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2015.1076566

Spalek, B., & Lambert, R. (2008). Muslim communities, counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation: A critically reflective approach to engagement. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 36, 257-270. https://doi.org/10.1080/13602000701536117

Sukariek, M., & Tannock, S. (2015). The deradicalisation of education: terror, youth and the assault on learning. *Race & Class*, 57(4), 22-38. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396815621236

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. (2017). *Preventing violent extremism through education: A guide for policy-makers*. Fontenoy: UNESCO.

Yamuza, F.-G., & Ravagnani, L. (2018). Countering Islamic radicalisation in prison through restorative justice based programmes. *ERA Forum*, 18, 611-626. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12027-018-0515-6