Education for Preventing Violent Extremism (EPVE)

Working Group Paper

Education for Preventing Violent Extremism (EPVE)[1]

This working paper was developed by the Working Group for "Education for Preventing Violent Extremism" (EPVE)* under the umbrella of the Education for Shared Societies (E4SS) initiative. It presents key recommendations, challenges, actionable solutions, and practical examples for policymakers to implement appropriate educational approaches to preventing violent extremism (PVE) in the formal education setting. It also seeks to integrate informal education, and suggests ways in which the formal education sector and informal education overlap with respect to EPVE.

It should be noted that as part of the E4SS initiative, two other Working Groups were formed that tackled issues related to education in emergency situations (e.g. refugee camps and displacement), and education as it relates to digital resilience. In this respect, the present policy paper has a "light touch" on these issues, although it should be stressed that EPVE should be part and parcel of these subjects in their contributions to building Shared Societies.

This paper is premised on the idea that access to quality education for all students, regardless of gender, culture, faith, nationality or ethnicity, is the starting point for PVE. However, access to quality education alone is not sufficient for PVE—school systems that do not provide quality education can also be counter-productive to violent extremism. Examples include school systems that may encourage classroom discrimination or provide

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Appropriate quality education can tackle underlying factors of violent extremism

unequal access to education based on ethnicity or religion lines, which could further polarize societies and fuel violent extremism.

At the same time, education can be a positive tool to build resilience against violent extremism, especially if the quality education incorporates appropriate pedagogies and teaching approaches that build global competencies in students that are not only good for PVE, but are also supportive of traits of global citizens and qualities employers are looking for in the job market. Appropriate quality education has the potential to tackle underlying factors of violent extremism, including feelings of exclusion, discrimination, lack of recognition of equal rights, prejudices towards diversity. In addition, quality education can also shape attitudes and behaviours that are either more susceptible towards violence, or more resilient against it. In this regard, EPVE requires the promotion and nurturing from an early age of a combination of values that are at the core of this initiative —building Shared Societies.

Education and the education sector can contribute to PVE efforts by:

- Mitigating feelings of isolation or exclusion by establishing positive connections between students' own worlds and the worlds of others, building respect for diversity and providing young people with the skills to cooperate based on shared interests and commonalities and/or to negotiate or mediate differences;

- Inculcating critical thinking skills that enable students to challenge ideologies that foster feelings of division and difference, including prejudice, hate speech and violent extremist messages. By incorporating concepts of acceptance, multi-culturalism, diversity, and civic responsibility, into as much of the existing curriculum, it is possible to make these concepts pervasive and normal, rather than an effort to add them as additions to the regular learning agenda;

- Providing alternatives to violence and violent extremism by cultivating attitudes and values that encourage students to participate as active citizens in their communities, their nations, regionally and globally to address challenges in a non-violent manner;

- Facilitating intercultural exchanges and encouraging students to feel anchored in their own beliefs and practices. Educational institutions can be a safe space where students feel confident to share and debate their beliefs with others;

- Equipping students with the skills, knowledge and resources necessary to develop a sense of civic responsibility and to positively engage with institutions and organizations and are empowered to make decisions related to their lives and communities;

- Raising awareness among educators and school communities about violent extremism, and, where appropriate, equipping them with relevant tools for responding to violent extremism, such as being able to properly identify those who may be most vulnerable or susceptible to violent extremist ideologies;

- Structuring education systems and classrooms appropriately to prevent situations in which educational institutions inadvertently reinforces differences or stigmatizes students.

EPVE is a multi-stakeholder approach and involves engagement with different fields of practices, including development, human rights, peacebuilding, and counterterrorism. EPVE can contribute to and help support the implementation of a number of regional and international frameworks and existing programs that have emerged from these different areas. For example, EPVE supports UNESCO's work, which includes providing assistance to states in shaping their PVE policies and recently released a guide on PVE through education.[2] UNESCO is also working with UNODC on an Education for Justice (E4J) initiative to prevent crime and promote a culture of lawfulness through education activities designed for primary, second, and tertiary levels, which includes a module series on terrorism and violent extremism.[3] Within the development sector, EPVE supports Goal 4 on providing quality education and Goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, including equal access to justice and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.[4]

Within the UN counterterrorism architecture, the Secretary General's Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE), identifies the education sector as a key stakeholder in PVE strategies and action plans and Security Council Resolutions such as UNSCR 2250 (2015) closely link security solutions to youth and education. Additionally, The Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) recognized education as playing a vital role in CVE through its framework document the *Abu Dhabi Memorandum on Good Practices for Education and Countering Violent Extremism* and subsequent *Abu Dhabi Plan of Action*[6] on the subject. Moreover, the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) supported the adoption of

the *Manifesto for Education: Empowering Educators and Schools*, endorsed by EU education ministries in 2015[7].

Despite increased attention to the subject by multiple stakeholders, much work is still needed to determine what is working and what is not working in the overlap between education and PVE. Moreover, senior policymakers and world leaders need to be made aware of how EPVE approaches, strategies, and policies can be implemented in a practical way, while avoiding instrumentalization of the education sector and adhering to "do no harm" principles. This paper seeks to outline several of these strategies through five key recommendations, along with challenges and potential solutions to overcome those challenges.

A guiding principle in the implementation of these the recommendations is that they should not be considered universal, but rather guidelines that should be tailored to fit local needs and contexts. In other words, while the recommendations in this paper are broad, implementation will manifest differently across countries and contexts. Care should be taken to ensure that EPVE is implemented in a way that is appropriate for the communities it is influencing, and that policies and programmes follow relevant international standards, such as those related to human rights and education. Recognizing the sensitivity around the language of "preventing violent extremism," the approaches described in this paper may not be (and sometimes should not be) labelled as "PVE," but can utilize less controversial language, such as reinforcing values of Shared Societies.

» Recommendation 1

Incorporate, where appropriate, EPVE approaches into policy, legislation, funding mechanisms, and institutional structures.

Challenges: Actors within the education and development sectors do not always view PVE as their responsibility or priority and are concerned about instrumentalizing, securitizing, or stigmatizing the education system for national security or intelligence purposes. At the same time, it is often a challenge to convince counterterrorism policymakers and practitioners to invest in long-term solutions to prevent violent extremism, as they usually prefer short-term, kinetic and military responses. While these approaches may achieve measurable results in the short-term, the underlying factors contributing that an enabling environment for radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism are often missed.

Given this complexity, there is often a lack of sufficient funding for educational approaches to PVE from any appropriate ministry or agency. In addition, while there is a small body of research supporting EPVE approaches, long-term and longitudinal studies evaluating the effectiveness of approaches on attitudes and behavior are lacking, making it even more difficult to justify to national and international donors that funding these activities has the intended effect on building resilient communities and reducing violent extremism.

Solutions: It is important at the outset that all sectors involved define their own roles and limits to educational approaches to preventing violent extremism. Senior change-makers, such as those involved in WLA-CdM, can advocate for EPVE approaches to be integrated across the education sector. This includes supporting appropriate legislative bodies to make necessary changes, encouraging, where appropriate, the changing of curriculum requirements at the national level, and

Bodies developing PVE strategies should include a diversity of actors from the education sector

supporting and advising ministries of education interested in implementing EPVE. At the same time, those bodies developing PVE strategies at the national level (typically ministries of interior, foreign affairs and justice) should include and incorporate a diversity of actors from the education sector in the development process.

In addition, there is a pressing need to collect data, as well as present sufficient data to policymakers to emphasize the importance of, and potential positive impact of, EPVE approaches both inside and outside the classroom. This means that the organizations working on EPVE need to prioritize the collection of appropriate data and research to support their case to policymakers.

EPVE in the classroom could involve investments in reforms to textbooks and national curriculum and appropriate training and resources to be provided to teachers and teacher-trainers. Funding for these activities could come from the educational ministries, but also from the development or counter-terrorism sector that may be interested in supporting longer-term goals of preventing violent extremism.

Practical Examples:

- Evaluate current education policies to see if and how EPVE can fit into existing structures;

- Establish working groups between the education sector, development and security institutions to discuss EPVE;

- Establish regular channels of communication between EPVE actors, including within the education sector;

- Mapping existing initiatives on EPVE and collecting good practices;

- Write policy papers on the importance of getting the education sector involved in EPVE approaches where needed;

- Draft new education policies to include EPVE approaches in the national level curriculum;

- Fund research and evaluation of EPVE programs to investigate the effects of EPVE in the long term;

- Present research and evaluation of EPVE programs to skeptical policymakers in the education, development and/or counter-terrorism sectors;

- Fund programs to evaluate and revise teaching materials with an EPVE lens at the national level.

EPVE in the classroom could involve investments in reforms to textbooks and national curriculum and appropriate training and resources to be provided to teachers and teacher-trainers

» Recommendation 2

Promote education that emphasizes open-mindedness, inclusiveness, and respect and understanding of different religions, cultures, ethnicities and other identities.

Challenges: On one hand, each nation seeks to reinforce their own values and culture as unique and different than others through their education system. This means that education can become highly politicized, and dependent on the values and culture of the society at the time. This is also important in creating a sense of national identity and inclusion within a society—and the lack of a strong national identity or feeling excluded from the national identity can be something that violent extremist groups prey upon for recruitment purposes. On the other hand, there are also benefits to supporting curriculum that emphasizes global citizenship—breaking down national boundaries and supporting inclusive approaches to all nationalities, ethnicities, religions, cultures and genders. This is where the tension lies—between being a citizen at the local, national and global levels.

In terms of the content taught in schools and present in textbooks, this recommendation is also difficult to carry out. Countries have different understandings of diversity based on their own context. Diversity can be physical or cultural—in one country, religious differences may be core to individual identities, whereas in another country, ethnic heritage may be more important. Sometimes it is the omission of diverse perspectives that contributes to someone feeling excluded – for example, when the curriculum omits major historical events that are highly relevant to a portion of students (even those in the minority). Thus, the representation of diversity in textbooks and lesson plans will manifest differently as it applies to each context.

Moreover, private or non-formal educational institutions, such as religious institutions, may not be integrated into the national education system. In these circumstances, different policy requirements may be needed to advocate for certain pedagogies relevant for EPVE, or to bring private educational institutions into the conversation.

In addition, lessons to equip young people with intercultural understanding are sometimes perceived to be taking up classroom time at the expense of other core skills, such as reading and writing. Subjects where EPVE approaches are easily integrated, such as history or social studies, are also not always prioritized by teachers and parents, and math and science may be seen as more important in a students' educational process.

Solutions: Encourage, where appropriate, national curriculum reforms and educational programs that reinforce concepts of global citizenship that emphasize diversity, connect students' worlds to the worlds of others, build on shared interests and commonalities, and negotiate or mediate differences. Diversity here means respect towards and acceptance of other values, cultures and religions. Each context and country may have issues and tensions that are divisive in their communities, and textbooks and content of curricula should take care not to divide societies further through examples given or conspicuously omitted in the classroom. Education can also be a space to discuss contentious issues, which if unresolved, can contribute to underlying factors leading to radicalization to violent extremism such as marginalization/discrimination, racism, personal frustrations and personal or community failures. Appropriate education can enhance students' coping strategies, encourage personal development, provide job orientation, include civic education and encourage young people to take action. All of these approaches can be integrated into national and local curriculum in ways that are appropriate to the ages and development of the child.

Where private institutions do not follow national curriculum, or when local authorities have more control over the curriculum development than national governments, national ministries of education should take care to raise awareness of EPVE approaches, their benefits, and options of steps that can be taken to implement EPVE in the classroom. Generating buy-in and enthusiasm from private stakeholders is important to ensuring these approaches reach educational institutions of all varieties.

Finally, when subjects pertaining to EPVE are not highly valued by teachers and parents, a case needs to be made for how the skills and values attributed to EPVE approaches are vital components of education that shapes a student into a productive and valuable member of the national society and as a global citizen.

Case Study: Preventing Violent Extremism through Education (PVE-E) Workshops

Hedayah, UNESCO and UNESCO International Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa have been supporting several workshops for PVE-E to train teachers and teacher tutors in East Africa. The initiative started with a regional workshop for teachers and educators in Sub Saharan Africa in February 2017. This was followed by a national-level workshop for Uganda in January 2018, and a national-level workshop for South Sudan in October 2018. The core pedagogies that teachers are trained on at these workshops are: 1) facilitating safe spaces for dialogue, 2) social and emotional learning (SEL) for PVE, and 3) digital and media literacy.

The initiative was modified and brought to South and South East Asia through a series of workshops hosted by Hedayah, UNDP and the Commonwealth Secretariat CVE Unit. A regional workshop was hosted in Malaysia in September 2018, and there is planned national-level follow-up in at least 3 countries.

For details about the teacher training curricula, a summary of the PVE-E workshop in Uganda can be found on Hedayah's website.

Case Study: Generation Global

The Generation Global program by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change prepares students to navigate differences in a peaceful way through building skills and experience. The program provides training for teachers to facilitate dialogue in the classroom and to create "safe spaces" for dialogue on a range of issues that are concerns for young people. The program also offers the opportunity for classrooms to connect to others across the globe through facilitated video conferencing and in moderated blogging. A 2017 independent evaluation of the program by Exeter University concluded that "this approach to teaching dialogue can increase students' open-mindedness and their ability to handle complexity. In other words, it can help our young people grow up to be well-rounded adults, protected against falling prey to extreme world-views."

For more about the Generation Global program, see the website.

Encourage curriculum reforms that reinforce concepts of global citizenship and build on shared interests and commonalities

Practical Examples:

- Include requirements and facilitate trainings for teachers to implement teaching pedagogies that encourage open-mindedness, critical thinking, and self-reflection;

- Evaluate teachers based on the pedagogies listed above;

- Encourage teachers to include discussions around contentious issues to enhance students coping skills;

- Provide training for teachers on how to facilitate classroom dialogue;

- Evaluate teachers on their facilitation methods;

- Prioritize changes to textbooks and curriculum that emphasize diversity, for example:

  o Recognize responsibility for past negative government influences in history textbooks (e.g. slave trade or colonization), and point out consequences on current affairs;

  o Avoid underlying misogyny in textbook language, as this is sometimes the method utilized by VE groups;

  o Include diverse voices in curriculum—for example authors contributing to literature from a migrant background;

  o Include field trips and excursions where students experience different culture, food, religion, or art.

» Recommendation 3

Put students' needs at the center of any intervention for preventing violent extremism, and avoid securitizing youth and students.

Challenges: Students can be susceptible to many influences—both positive and negative—and EPVE approaches should avoid the underlying assumption that all students are susceptible to radicalization leading to violent extremism. Approaching education through the lens of PVE can potentially create bias amongst teachers towards their students, or raise their concerns of radicalization where there may not yet be a concern.

Early warning mechanisms where teachers detect potentially radicalized students can be harmful if not implemented appropriately. This can lead to stigmatization of students, and possibly further alienation that could exacerbate the radicalization process or lead to other adverse outcomes, such as withdrawal from school. Teachers identifying potential warning signs should take care that their actions do not contribute to the radicalization process, but instead are focussed on protecting the student and the community from harm.

Educational practices that separate students from different cultural backgrounds can be harmful if they perpetrate segregation between communities or enhance feelings of mistrust. For example, separation due to language competency for extended periods of time could be problematic if language is also linked to ethnic, cultural or religious disputes.

Solutions: A do-no-harm approach should be at the core of any strategy to leverage educational institutions to prevent violent extremism. This can be done by contextualizing violent extremism at a local level, and situating violent extremism as one subject to address within the needs of the community or school. EPVE approaches can help build resilience against violent extremism, among other vulnerabilities leading to deviant behavior. This may include combating gang culture or gun culture in the community, preventing students' from being involved in organized crime or drug trafficking, or drawing specific attention to domestic abuse, gender-based violence or sexual violence in the community.

EPVE approaches also support building stronger, more effective national and global citizens with

skills and competencies that can be harnessed for positive change. These include competencies of civic responsibility and civic engagement. Involving students in their own educational processes, and encouraging peer-to-peer learning opportunities can also support building more resilient students and constructive classrooms. This may mean providing opportunities for students to think creatively on how they can take action and contribute to positive change in their communities in a constructive and non-violent way, or for addressing differences and disagreements through a lens of complexity rather than conflict.

For those schools where violent extremism is a significant problem, early warning mechanisms for teachers should be accompanied by sufficient training for teachers to detect potential warning signs, as well as appropriate solutions—both within and outside the school structure—for the teacher to follow if he/she identifies any of these signs. Emphasizing the student-focused approach, the early warning mechanisms should provide clear guidance for the teacher on how to first intervene within the school system (e.g. referring to a school counselor, taking to the parents) before securitizing the situation and reporting to local authorities.

Practical Examples:

- Train teachers and school counsellors to identify "signs of vulnerability" to deviant behavior in the classroom and on how to develop effective EPVE responses;

- Develop an in-school response to vulnerabilities through social and psychological support from teachers, counsellors and parents;

- Establish protocol for reporting serious vulnerabilities of students through appropriate channels, both within and outside the school;

- Where possible, involve students in the discussion around what topics related to EPVE of relevance to them—applying the "do no harm" principle in this regard;

- Re-structure schooling systems to avoid segregating communities (e.g. by ethnicity or religion).

Integrated school systems that still provide options to address students' different learning needs, rather than segregated learning systems, have been shown to be more effective in building tolerant, open societies. For example, in a community where ethnic divisions are coupled with linguistic differences, an integrated schooling system with adequate support to address language inadequacies can support more tolerant communities as well as encourage students' to apply newly acquired linguistic skills faster. Where integrated schooling systems are not possible, solutions can also be made in the informal sector—bringing together divided communities in after school activities.

Case Study: Ethnic Divisions in Sri Lanka

Under the guidance of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation of Sri Lanka, a program was set up to bring together youth and students from different parts of the country in order to expose them to the different religious, ethnic and cultural customs of each group. The students participated in a sort of "camp" where the traditions of the other communities were celebrated and explained, and each student was expected to participate in the activities of the identities different than their own. The initiative helped to foster friendships between students in the hopes to overcome ethnic, religious and cultural divides in the country.

See more about the program.

» Recommendation 4

Work with teachers to change the culture of schools and education systems incorporate interactive learning styles and pedagogies conducive to building resilient students, rather than rote learning styles.

Challenges: Teachers may see EPVE activities in the classroom as an "additional burden" to implement, on top of the national curriculum they have to teach. They may feel the pressure to meet certain local, regional or national standards for their students' scores, and may be punished for their students not achieving these scores. Teachers may not feel that PVE is their priority or responsibility, or that addressing PVE-related issues is too high of a risk.

Teachers may experience rhetoric in the classroom that encourages conflict or hate speech. In some circumstances, teachers may be directly facing narratives of violent extremist and terrorist groups in the classroom. However, teachers may be able to play a role in refuting the ideology and narratives of violent extremism or undermining misinformation of terrorist groups, but they may not feel adequately prepared to address those narratives. This may particularly be the case when faced with teaching on the subject of religion, or when presented with ideological arguments about which they are not familiar.

Teachers may also face other challenges in the classroom, such as large classroom sizes, students of different ethnic, cultural or linguistic backgrounds, or even direct threats of violence or violent extremism in their communities. They may lack basic resources for teaching such as desks, writing utensils, computers, access to internet, or textbooks. They also may face inadequate training, low or inconsistent pay, or lack of respect for their profession from the community. Teachers may also feel a sense of hopelessness or disempowerment, and the sense that they do not have control over what happens both inside and outside the classroom. All of these challenges may be de-motivating for teachers to switch their teaching styles away from rote learning to more interactive approaches, partially because they are looking for "quick fixes" to broader, structural problems.

Solutions: There are four main elements critical to changing the culture of schools to incorporate EPVE:

1) Raising awareness of the need for EPVE in the classroom amongst educators,

2) Revising national curricula and textbooks,

3) Training teachers on interactive pedagogies for EPVE, and

4) Incorporating EPVE measures into educational evaluation frameworks.

Case Study: Schools in Eastleigh, Kenya

Education is seen as a primary way of preventing violent extremism in the context of Kenya. The initiative was taken by teacher Ayub Mohamed, a Kenyan of Somali heritage that noticed radicalization in his community and took the initiative to make a change. After receiving training on PVE approaches in the classroom, Mohamed began discussing the issue of radicalization with his students in Eastleigh Boys School. In particular, he looks at the narratives utilized by Al Shabaab to recruit followers (particularly Islamic narratives) and directly engages with his students on ways to refute these narratives.

Mohamed also founded the Kenyan group called Teachers Against Violent Extremism. He now facilitates the training of other teachers in Eastleigh, and encourages the community to take ownership of their own security through preventing individuals from joining Al Shabaab and refuting their narratives.

For more about Mohamed, see the NPR article

Raising awareness of EPVE approaches should emphasize that how a student learns is just as important as what a student learns. Research has shown that certain teaching methods, such as those that incorporate social and emotional learning strategies, have a positive effect on school performance (including standardized tests)[8] as well as can contribute to PVE.[9] There are also studies that have shown that alternative techniques applied in a school setting, such as mindfulness, can help reduce school violence, assist students in overcoming trauma, and increase students' abilities to manage anger and stress.[10]

EPVE approaches could also examine national curricula, to include textbooks, to ensure that it at very least does not exacerbate community grievances or conflict, but at best teaches global competencies in students. Recommendations could then be made on how to improve or reform these curricula. Additional supplementary resources, including practical suggestions of EPVE-related activities, may also be needed to ensure that appropriate EPVE activities are integrated and implemented in the classroom. It may also be useful to create networks of educators, both within and outside a country, that are working on implementing EPVE approaches to share resources and knowledge.

Case Study: RESPIRA, Colombia

RESPIRA is a training program for teachers and students that promotes mindfulness practice in Colombia. The program has been conducted with the education sector with respect to the core objectives of Colombia's law regarding School Violence and the Promotion of Peaceful Relations in 30 schools from 2014-2016 in Tumaco, Tambo and Patia, Cali, Medellin and Bogota. An evaluation of the program has demonstrated significant impacts of teachers and students, including a higher level of attention, a reduction of anxiety symptoms, better emotion (and anger) regulation, a reduction in aggressiveness, and an increase in active listening. The program has also been conducted in the community, and is currently being implemented in South Sudan to address gender-based violence.

See more about the program

Teachers who incorporate EPVE approaches should be appropriately trained. Some effective teaching approaches for EPVE include those that encourage open-mindedness, discourage black-and-white thinking, teach respect for diversity and inclusiveness, build independent identities for individuals as well as respectful approaches to other identities and the capacity to navigate differences productively, encourage classrooms to be safe spaces for dialogue, and cultivate skills of critical thinking and critical assessment of materials. Examples of existing teaching approaches may be in alignment with, for example, "Rights Respecting Schools" programs encouraged by UNICEF, or through implementing Global Citizenship Education (GCED). Pedagogies that incorporate games and activities that are student-led are often the most effective. These pedagogies involve a shift in approach to the classroom—from the teacher as a "dictator" with all the answers, to the teacher as a "facilitator" that guides students towards finding out answers on their own. Teachers are often not taught facilitation methods or social and emotional learning techniques in their basic training, but ongoing teacher education can help to support the lack of skills.

In addition to training on skills related to EPVE, teachers may also be trained on knowledge of how to combat ideologies related to violent extremism that may manifest in the classroom. This may include methods to counter a range of potentially violent language, including hate speech and terrorist propaganda. Teachers may also be encouraged to leverage local connections to experts, such as religious leaders, who can address difficult topics with their students as guest lecturers or on field trips outside the school.

From the national policy level, it is also important to integrate EPVE measures into the evaluation of teachers themselves, as well as in the evaluation of students. If teachers are expected to cultivate competencies in their students, there needs to be some level of accountability (and rewards) for leveraging methodologies that build those competencies. At the same time, teachers should be rewarded for integrating more interactive styles into their classroom learning. Thus, any effective policy on EPVE at the national level needs to include a relevant and regular feedback system from schools to the policy level, and set measurable goals for how changes to the curricula to support EPVE have been achieved.

Practical Examples:

- Encourage teaching styles that are interactive and activity-based;

- Revise national curricula and textbooks to include active learning styles;

- Provide practical resources for teachers (including activities) that incorporate EPVE styles;

- Create networks of teachers, nationally and internationally, that are working on EPVE to enable peer-to-peer capacity-building and sharing of knowledge and techniques;

- Include requirements for teachers on utilizing social and emotional learning techniques;

- Provide training for teachers on social and emotional learning;

- Evaluate teachers based on social and emotional learning techniques;

- Provide training and resources for teachers (when contextually relevant) to counter the messages and ideologies of violent extremist groups (to include countering hate speech).

Teachers should learn methods to counter a range of violent language, including hate speech and terrorist propaganda

» Recommendation 5

Connect to and involve the broader community, particularly civil society, in EPVE, where contextually relevant and possible.

Challenges: The broader community may not be invested in efforts to prevent violent extremism, or may promote values that are counterproductive to building resilient students. For example, there may not be community support for girls' education, or even negative criticism of the existence of a girls' school; or hateful narratives against immigration or refugee populations may prevail in a particular setting.

Schools may also be physically separated from the community, remote or isolated. For example, in rural settings, students may need to travel far from their homes to access education—meaning the involvement of parents or other community members in educational activities and may be more challenging.

Discussion of difficult topics in the classroom can also be challenging—teachers may feel they do not know enough, or do not have sufficient resources to open certain topics—and may close down the discussion of those issues that may be grievances in the community (push factors).

The local community itself, particularly the job market, may not feel education is preparing employable students, or students may not feel they are employable after schooling. Notably, in some cases, access to higher education in combination with not sufficient jobs for that education level can lead to more frustrations and grievances that are preyed upon by violent extremist groups.

Solutions: Where relevant and possible, schools should involve parents and the local community in prevention efforts. It is important that skills and knowledge leading to more resilient students are reinforced also at home. Parents can also help to aide teachers in identifying vulnerabilities in their children, and provide suggestions for solutions for the education system.

The community can be leveraged in a number of ways. In cases where teachers may not feel comfortable discussing certain topics, they should be able to bring in verified experts, practitioners, or others (such as survivors and formers) who can speak to their students. In cases where religion is misrepresented and misinterpreted and used as a justification to perpetrate terrorist and violent acts, credible religious leaders and actors can play an influential role in reinforcing ideals of human rights and respect for all. Moreover, students can visit local sites, such as memorials of victims of terrorism, as a way to trigger a conversation around the subject (if contextually relevant).

Extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, culture programs can also be leveraged to incorporate resilience-building measures that are also part of the formal education system. For example, coaches can be taught social and emotional learning strategies that can be applied in the informal setting of teaching a sport, which is naturally more interactive. Culture and arts programs can emphasize diversity and respect for others, while cultivating knowledge about subjects that are supplemental to what is being taught in schools.

Finally, the private sector can be leveraged with respect to ensuring appropriate jobs are available on the market based on skill level; offering vocational training and life skills as part of the formal education process or extracurricular activities; and investing in building students' competencies that match with global citizenship and employability.

Practical Examples:

- Set up meetings between parents and teachers to explain new teaching methods related to EPVE;

- Inform and communicate with parents on EPVE approaches;

- Involve outside experts (invite as guests) in classroom teaching, especially when teachers are not comfortable addressing specific topics;

- Visit a variety of local religious sites to show diversity and encourage questions about other religions;

- Encourage EPVE approaches with religious institutions that may support education;

- Train coaches on social and emotional learning techniques;

- Create clubs that link the private sector to secondary schools where unemployment is a major risk for radicalization and recruitment;

- Involve the private sector in decision-making around cultivating certain skills in students.

Case Study: Student Connectors, Uganda

Organized through Allied Muslim Youth Uganda (AMYU), the Student Connectors is a program to develop capacities of students in playing an effective role as peace agents by providing mechanisms to promote values of tolerance and prevent their participation in acts of terrorism and all forms of extremism.

The students who form this network interact with each other and the broader community through training programs and intergenerational dialogues tailored to instill a culture of peace and non-violence. These communities include CSOs, academia and police involved in sharing best practices in life skills and peace education that is centered to create positive behavioral change and minimize susceptibility to radicalization within and outside universities.

Other activities include the annual national interfaith harmony walk, interfaith youth retreats, and social media campaigns to counter extremist narratives.

For more about the program, see the websites here:

Facebook   Video1   Video2

References

1. The views expressed in this Working Paper are the collective efforts of the Working Group members, but are not necessarily shared or endorsed by all Working Group members or their affiliated organizations. The Working Group was led by Hedayah (Sara Zeiger, Program Manager). The Working Group Members contributing to this paper include the Education for Shared Societies Content Coordinator, Lynn Davies; the Anna Lindh Foundation (the Commonwealth Secretariat (Mark Albon, Anna Sherbum and Patricia Crosby); the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (Ian Jamison and Josephine Malone); the Global Center on Cooperative Security (Rafia Bhulai); Extremely Together Young Leaders (Ilwad Elman, Jonah Obajeun and Mimoun Berrissoun); Kofi Annan Foundation (Maud Roure); and ICAN Peace Network (Sanam Anderlini and Melinda Holmes).

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