SPOTLIGHT

SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

RAN
Practitioners

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EDITORIAL

The main role of schools and universities is to prepare young people for adulthood and to become active citizens and positive members of society. In so doing, their role is to ensure that young people are equipped with the skills, tools and knowledge necessary to access opportunities and succeed in life. One of the main challenges in this work is to safeguard young people of negative and harmful influences, such as those that seek to radicalise and recruit them to violent extremist causes — particularly given progressively younger school children are being targeted by violent extremist organisations and becoming ensnared in extremist ideologies.

Teachers and other educational professionals, both in school and outside, play a critical role in protecting young people from such radicalising influences and preventing them from turning to extremism. To do this, it is important to build their resilience to these influences while strengthening democratic citizenship among them. This can often involve facilitating discussions with young people on controversial topics in a productive and meaningful manner, developing their critical thinking skills and guiding them in making the right decisions, helping them to understand democratic and social values, and helping them to form their own identity.

Pre-schools, home-schools, supplementary schools and denominational schools (both offline and online) represent an expression of freedom of choice, religion and diversity in European society. Meanwhile, there are concerns that some of these schools encourage the self-segregation of children from the rest of the society and/ or offer a problematic curriculum to pupils. There is therefore a very real need for Member States and education professionals alike to consider ways in which to safeguard children in these educational settings from radical influences.

In this Spotlight, RAN Working Group leads, practitioners and experts from outside of the network, share their insights on radicalisation challenge in education settings. This Spotlight includes content on the state of play for P/CVE in schools today, the role of teachers and current pedagogical approaches, and the challenge posed by problematic informal and non-formal education in schools. Many of these topics have been addressed by RAN Practitioners through Working Group meetings and other activities in 2022. This Spotlight publication captures the highlights from some of these activities and points practitioners to where they can read and find out more.

As always, we want to hear from you. If you would like to contribute to future editions of Spotlight, or if you have ideas for an article, interview or feature, please get in touch with the RAN Practitioners communications team at **ran@radaradvies.nl**

RAN Practitioners Staff

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RADICALISATION: A CHALLENGE TO SCHOOLS AND PRACTITIONERS

**Jean-Philippe
FONS**

One could contend that, after 18 months of an unprecedented crisis, never has the well-being of young people (young teenagers and young adults, in particular) been more at the heart of our collective concern. The COVID crisis and the various periods of complete or partial lockdown that Europe has been through have undoubtedly had consequences on the ability of young people to maintain social relations. Some, unfortunately, have fallen prey to isolation-related psychological ailments while others have been the victims of complex networks involving conspiracy narratives like QAnon-inspired radical groups (as illustrated in Beatrice De Graaf's recent publication).

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ARTICLE
**RADICALISATION: A CHALLENGE TO SCHOOLS
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OCT 2022
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As a new school year begins in European countries, all eyes will be turned towards the schools' response to these issues; professionals and practitioners will be asked to take these perspectives into account as they help redefine the outlines of a "normal" school environment.

In many countries, initial teacher training contains some form of training around P/CVE and how to address occurrences of violent extremism in the context of the classroom. With the psychological consequences of the lock-downs yet to be evaluated, practitioners will have to be accompanied as they measure the impact of youth isolation and desocialisation.

Recent RAN Youth & Education (Y&E) working group events have taken these perspectives into account. Alongside conspiracy myths over the 18 month-span of the COVID crisis came anti-democratic narratives fueled by radical groups and spread online. Practitioners widely suggested to reinforce, within school curricula, citizenship education and media literacy. In our complex social environments, critical thinking skills are essential. Practitioners recognise that media literacy "provides a framework to access, analyse, evaluate, create, and participate with messages in a variety of forms – from print to video to the internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of how to recognise mis- and disinformation, and the role of media in society, as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy".

All around EU countries and education systems, citizenship education and media literacy curricula have paved the way for a vast array of initiatives and projects; workshops, plays, videos and exhibitions have been designed by teachers, youth workers and pupils/students to reinforce democratic values. For pupils/students to give meaning to shared democratic values, collective projects must be developed around the pupils themselves. Including all forms of art in the process (literature, music, drama, painting and design, etc.) has proved effective and meaningful. An upcoming RAN Y&E meeting in late 2022 will address the roles of art in the prevention of radicalisation.

The challenges that schools and practitioners have to overcome are countless. We try here to identify some of them so as to give perspective to the reader.

– Social networks, online platforms and metaverses. A metaverse is a universe blending the virtual and the real. The soaring development of metaverses, as with other online spaces, such as gaming platforms, chat rooms and social media channels, has an impact on the narratives and the processes of enrollment and radicalisation. Digital media literacy curricula should rapidly be adapted to better equip pupils/students;

– Alternative youth engagement programmes. Vulnerable young people, particularly those not in schools, can sometimes be difficult to reach and engage. A range of viable programs involving engagement, empowerment and individual responsibility are valid alternatives to violent extremism paradigms, particularly if young people are looking for meaning, sense and a direction to their lives;

– Creating safe spaces. Pupils/students need to engage in bias-free debates and discussions in the context of safe spaces, whether held in schools or outside (in a social center, for example). Teachers, educators, social workers, mediators, police officers can help create these environments. Ultimately, those safe spaces help pupils/students to share a "common sense of belonging" to an entity that goes way beyond their individual selves.

Jean-Philippe Fons is the co-chair of the RAN Working Group on Youth and Education, and an Inspector at the French Department for Education.

RAN PAPER
Designing secondary level interventions
for at-risk youths

A manual, published by RAN Practitioners in April 2022, entitled 'Manual for Designing Secondary Level Interventions for At-Risk Youths in an Open Setting', provides all practitioners working with young people, with insights on how to prevent young people from becoming further radicalised and prevent them from engaging in criminal or violent activities. You can read the manual in full **here.**

European Commission

Manual for Designing Secondary Level Interventions for At-Risk Youths in an Open Setting

Radicalisation Awareness Network

RAN

Practitioners
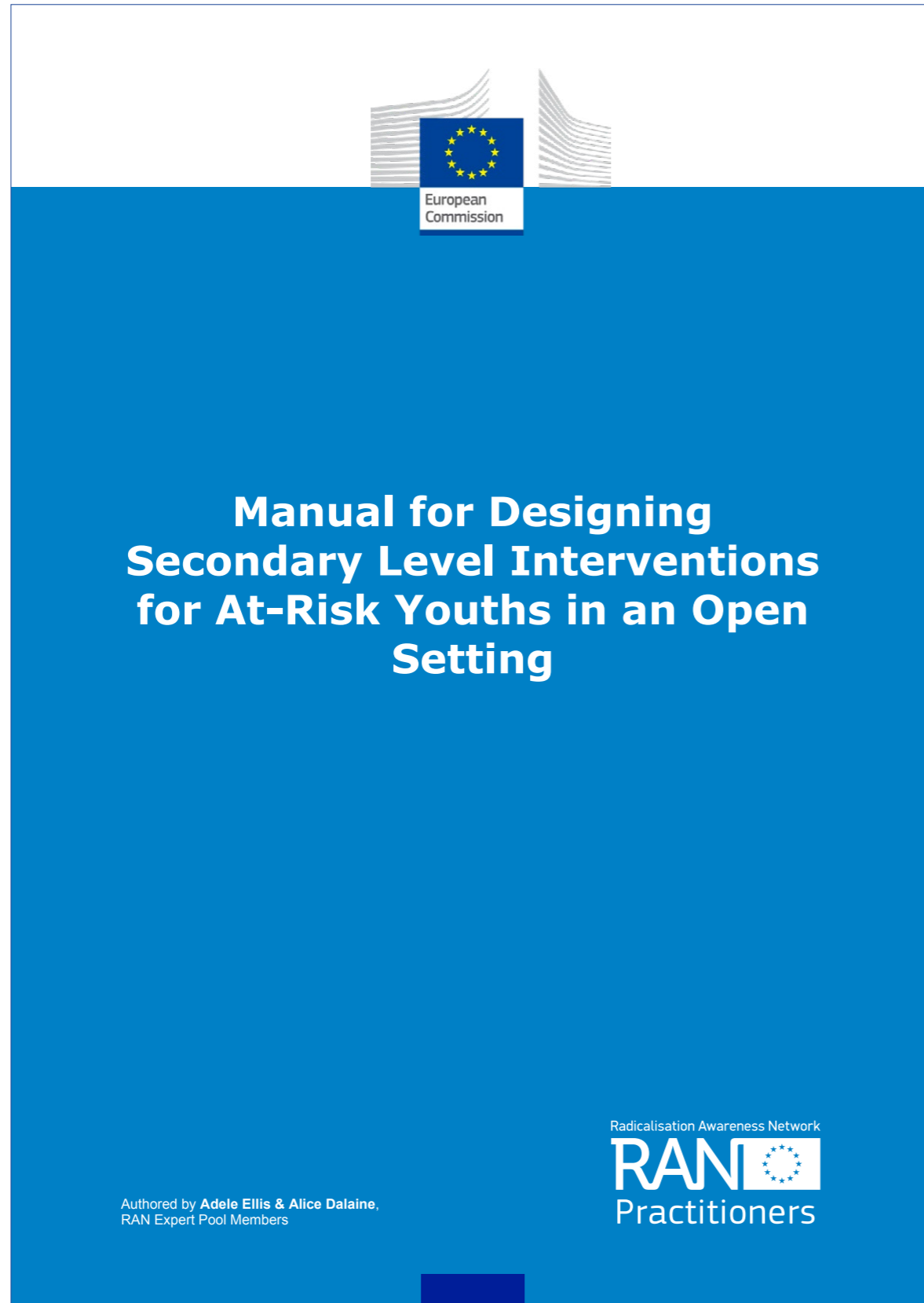
Authored by **Adele Ellis & Alice Dalaine**,
RAN Expert Pool Members

- Awareness-raising workshops for young people dealing with issues such as: identity and living together, as well as issues like hate speech, inclusion and diversity of beliefs, and learning about digital technology and social media.

At this level, it would be helpful for youth workers to have knowledge of the process and signs of radicalisation to deal with specialised issues and challenges about adolescent identity development. These elements are discussed later in this chapter, with explanations about the process of radicalisation, and about young people's vulnerability to these mechanisms.

Tertiary prevention

Tertiary prevention or 'Indicated prevention' targets young people already engaged in an extremist group or with extremist ideals and who want to leave (or who are regarded as being open to the idea of receiving support for dropping out).[8]

It is recommended to provide tertiary prevention work only to experts and youth workers who are specifically trained for this. In these instances, it is also necessary to build multi-agency coordination especially when security services are concerned as well.

In addition, field experiences highlight the role of liaison/relational work to maintain a sufficient level of trust between young people and professionals.

Figure 2: A simplified prevention pyramid

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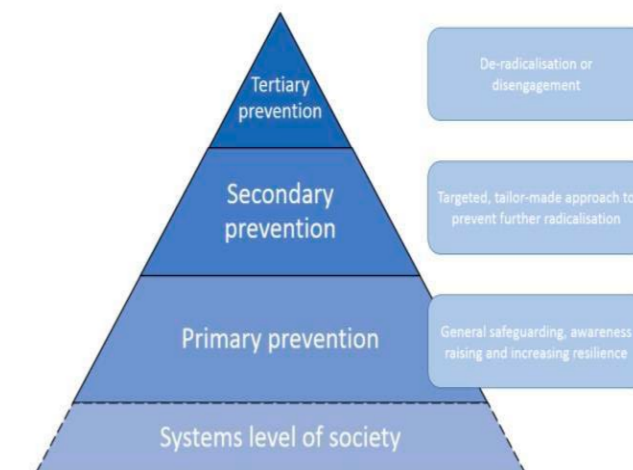
[8] RAN Ex post paper, 2017, The role of youth work in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism

SPOTLIGHT
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

ARTICLE
P/CVE THROUGH THE NATIONAL CORE CURRICULA IN FINLAND

OCT 2022
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

ARTICLE

P/CVE THROUGH THE NATIONAL CORE CURRICULA IN FINLAND

Satu HONKALA

Violent extremism, as its associated hate speech and conspiracy narratives, are a threat to democracy. They limit the multi-voiced, democratic discussion in Finland. The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) therefore works in early prevention, as set out in the Finnish National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism 2019—2023, which defines the goals and actions for the education sector in P/CVE.

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**P/CVE THROUGH THE NATIONAL CORE CURRICULA
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The causes of violent extremism and radicalisation are explained through three N's: Needs, Narratives and Networks. Each of these N's are, at least partly, present in school. EDUFI therefore provides for children's needs, teaches science-based content and helps to find healthy networks. The Finnish core curricula is human rights based and early prevention elements like participation, non-discrimination and student well-being have been integrated into it. These elements are part of the school ethos and are also included in the subjects, teaching and transversal competences.

The task for EDUFI has been to raise awareness about extremism and the possibilities to do early prevention work as part of the national curricula. On top of that we offer training to, and provide support materials for teachers. The aim is that teachers are better aware of the problem, know how to build resilience in the classroom and what to do if they spot signs of radicalisation. Teachers should be able to discuss controversial topics and issues in the class, and also individually with a student who seems to have problems. If something needs to be done, there are school welfare teams in place and there is strong cooperation with the local police. In larger cities, multi-professional 'anchor' teams help young people who have been radicalised.

The overall aim is to ensure schools are safe places for young people to discuss different issues and test their ideas about controversial topics. We emphasise the need for critical thinking, dialogue, participation and democracy skills, and provide materials for teachers on those topics. One important part of early prevention in Finland is taking care of student wellbeing without leaving anyone behind.

EDUFI also cooperates with Finnish researchers. We have a Resilience network that connects those working on P/CVE in universities with teachers and administration staff working on the same issues in schools. In the network we have discussed a lot about what violent extremism is and how it develops. We think that it is very important that schools intervene where there are signs of any violent attitude or idea of "us versus them".
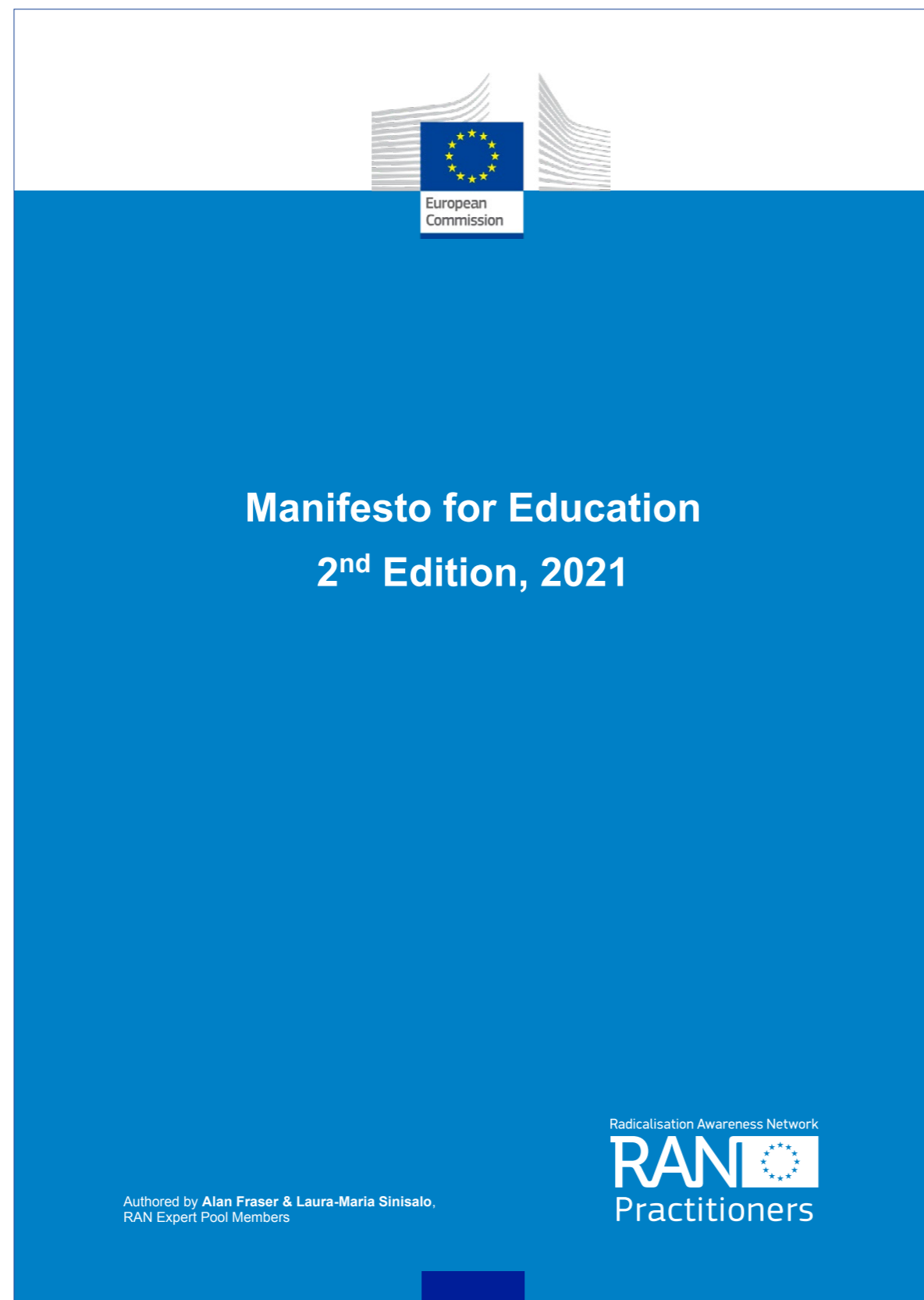
We have also discussed the role of early childhood education and care (ECEC). From the point of view of ECEC, paying attention to children who have been exposed to the effects of violent radicalisation in their own living environment is central. EDUFI has also trained ECEC personnel on P/CVE and provides an awareness raising leaflet.

EDUFI has produced support materials for schools, some of which are available also in English. The first one, 'Constructive Interaction - A guide to reinforcing democratic participation and preventing hate speech and violent radicalisation', promotes the idea of school as a safe place where every member of the school community feels valued and capable of influencing common issues. 'Building resilience – in support of democracy education' introduces schools to REDI – the dimensions of addressing, preventing and countering violent radicalisation and extremism. The REDI-model was produced by Helsinki University researchers Vallinkoski and Koirikivi and is described also in the national action plan. Building resilience also includes the Council of Europe democracy framework and shares some good practices from schools.

In Finland, P/CVE work is considered the responsibility of many different ministries and other stakeholders from within and outside of government. As a result, training and materials for schools and teachers are not provided only by EDUFI but many different actors. A basic online training course is provided by the Helsinki University 'Center for continuing education', while EDUFI and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare provides online training suitable for teachers. EDUFI also cooperates with other Nordic countries – Finnish teachers have participated in training events and projects for all Nordic countries.

Satu Honkala is a Councellor of Education, for education, training and competence, at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI).

RAN MANIFESTO
Manifesto for Education

EDITORIAL
MANIFESTO

OCT 2022
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

In April 2022, RAN Practitioners published a second edition of its 'Manifesto for Education', which called for educators, partners and governments to take action to stem the rise of violent extremism across Europe. This paper reviews progress made to date against the original 2015 Manifesto and identifies areas for further development. You can read the manifesto in full **here.**

European Commission

Manifesto for Education
2nd Edition, 2021

Radicalisation Awareness Network

RAN
Practitioners

Authored by **Alan Fraser & Laura-Maria Sinisalo**,
RAN Expert Pool Members

Acronyms

CVE	Countering violent extremism
ISD	Institute for Strategic Dialogue
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
P/CVE	Preventing and countering violent extremism
PVE	Preventing violent extremism
RAN EDU	Former RAN Education working group
RAN FC&S	RAN Families, Communities and Social Care
RAN H&SC	Former RAN Health and Social Care working group
RAN HEALTH	RAN Mental Health working group
RAN LOCAL	RAN Local Authorities working group
RAN POL	RAN Police and Law Enforcement working group
RAN Y&E	RAN Youth and Education working group
RAN YF&C	Former RAN Youth Families and Communities working group
RAN	Radicalisation Awareness Network
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
YouthCAN	Youth Civil Activism Network

RAN FILM
RAN YOUNG – Empowering a youth voice

SPOTLIGHT
RAN FILM

OCT 2022
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The first of two films about the RAN YOUNG platform travels to Athens to meet with a number of young people engaged in P/CVE. Filmed in the margins of a RAN YOUNG meeting, the film captures the views of RAN YOUNG members on the challenges that young people face today, the key P/CVE challenges of most concern and why young people should be engaged in P/CVE. You can watch the film in full **here.**
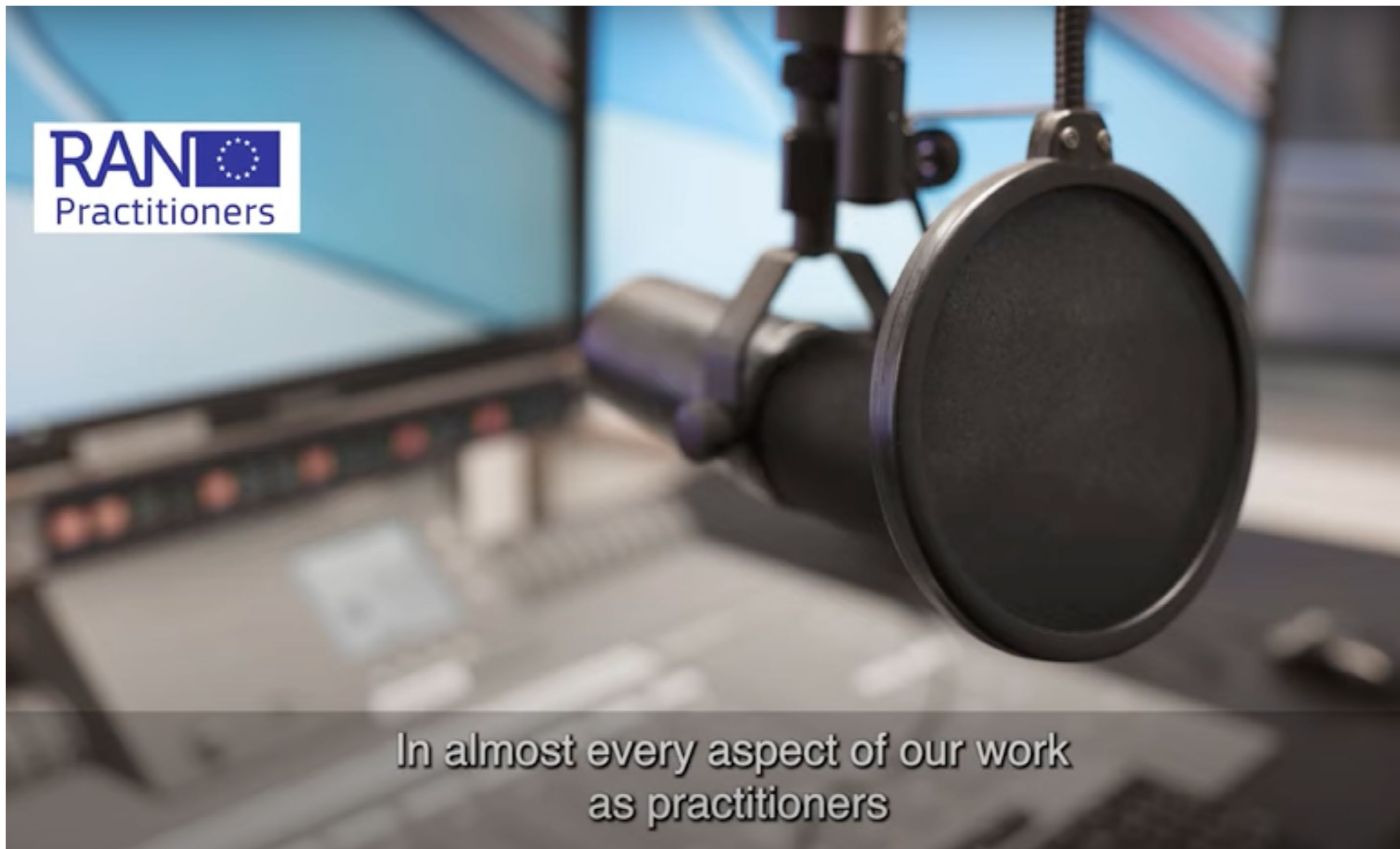
In almost every aspect of our work
as practitioners

SPOTLIGHT
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

FEATURE
**DIVERSION – DIALOGUE IN CITIZENSHIP
EDUCATION**

OCT 2022
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

022—023

**Heleen
COUSIJN**

FEATURE

Diversion –Dialogue in Citizenship Education

The media frequently report stories of students from diverse backgrounds who express extreme opinions. This often occurs following discussions on current societal events, on ethnic, cultural, religious or sexual diversity, or on politics. Society commonly holds teachers responsible for establishing democratic values in students, and for preventing them from having and expressing extremist thoughts.

FEATURE

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However, when students express highly contentious views (e.g. 'You can send those refugees back on a leaky boat', or 'All Muslims are terrorists'), both new and experienced teachers are challenged to respond appropriately: teachers need support and guidelines for such situations.

Teachers often feel too distanced from students' world views to be able to genuinely relate to them. Confronted with complex societal issues and tensions, they may struggle to adequately guide a discussion on these topics in the classroom. How does international conflict, radicalisation and polarisation influence the atmosphere in the classroom? And how does one respond to youngsters who are disconnected from society and do not seem to support democratic values and the rule of law?

Together with several teacher-training colleges, Diversion – an organisation which develops creative, innovative and hands-on models and programmes, in the fields of education, youth literacy and youth participation – has developed a methodology to provide guidelines and support for teachers tackling such situations. Diversion draws on over 13 years of experience in discussing socially sensitive topics in the classroom, using the peer education methodology.

This employs young role models who use their own experience and references to engage in open conversations with students, not shying away from (positive) confrontation. Alongside teacher training colleges, we have translated lessons learned through this experience into guidelines for (student) teachers in the methodology, titled 'Dialogue in Citizenship Education'.

In this methodology, we provide clear steps, guidelines and exercises that help teachers guide conversations around conflicting values and polarising topics. A step-by-step approach helps teachers become an equal partner in conversations, facilitate open dialogue (while maintaining necessary boundaries) and round up the conversation and reflect on it. Teachers are often expected to remain neutral in the classroom. The methodology posits that nobody is neutral: assuming

neutrality when discussing these sensitive topics deflates the open atmosphere in the classroom, weakens teachers' credibility and makes them feel uncomfortable and frustrated. How should teachers manage their own morals and values in these conversations? And where do they draw the line regarding the expression of extreme opinions?

You can learn more about Diversion **here.**

"This employs young role models who use their own experience and references to engage in open conversations with students, not shying away from (positive) confrontation."

RAN PAPER
Problematic informal and non-formal
education in schools

EDITORIAL
RAN PAPER

OCT 2022
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in May 2022, entitled 'Developing resilience as an approach to dealing with the influences of problematic informal and non-formal education in schools', provides practitioners with information on how adolescents develop socially, how problematic education can influence them, and how teachers can get support from appropriate cooperation partners. You can read the paper in full **here.**

026—027

European
Commission

Developing resilience as an approach to dealing with the influences of problematic informal and non-formal education in schools

A practical guide for first-line practitioners

Radicalisation Awareness Network
RAN ◯
Practitioners

Authored by **Julia Wöllenstein**, RAN Expert Pool Member and
Elena Silva Duque, RAN External Expert

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE AS AN APPROACH TO DEALING WITH THE INFLUENCES OF
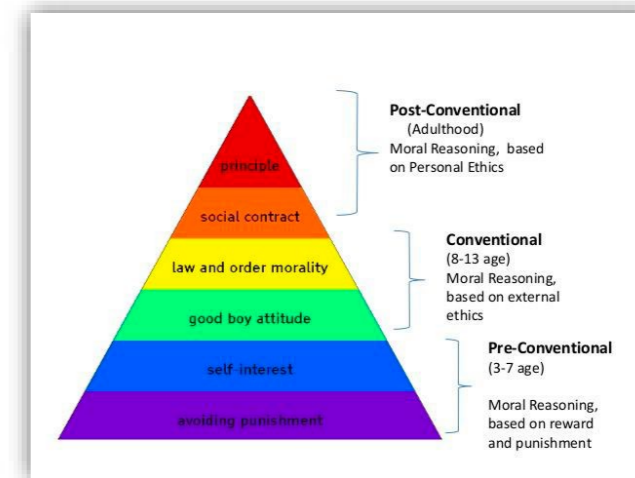PROBLEMATIC INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Figure 1: Lawrence Kohlberg's 6 stages of moral development, © Jennifer Wilber

The stage model offers a clear explanation of how children's understanding of morality forms and changes. It is an important basis for working professionally with children and young people. However, there is justified criticism of this model's western-only conception of morality. This is a criticism that should not be ignored during lessons, especially when working with children and young people from different cultural backgrounds.

In an increasingly multicultural society, moral thinking patterns may progress differently according to different external influences. For instance, the moral development of children may be hindered or prevented if obedience to authority and elders, patriarchal values, and religious commandments have a higher value than democratic principles of freedom and individual rights.[5]

In this context, first-line practitioners need to be aware of the fact that, depending on the family background and cultural upbringing of their pupils, moral development may not follow Kohlberg's model exactly.[6] Being bound to cultural or religious beliefs prevent students from progressing further up the moral development funnel which ultimately calls first-line practitioners to be aware of the children's upbringing when addressing certain topics and holding difficult conversations in the classroom. As such, teachers not only need support when understanding their students' backgrounds, but also need training in becoming moral role models and creating holistic learning settings so that democratic moral values can be experiences by pupils.

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[5] Siegler, Eisenberg, DeLoache, Saffran, (2016). Entwicklungspsychologie im Kindes- und Jugendalter, Springer, 535
[6] Ibid.

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SPOTLIGHT
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

FEATURE
**YMCA DOBRICH' – AN APPROACH TO CITIZENSHIP
EDUCATION**

OCT 2022
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

028–029

FEATURE

**Kita
BONCHEVA**

YMCA DOBRICH
An approach to citizenship education

YMCA Dobrich is an inclusive youth organisation based in the city of Dobrich which aims to tackle a number of threats faced by young people in Bulgaria, including issues such as discrimination, exclusion, radicalisation, extremism and hate. It does this through supporting the overall development of young people, through cultural, education and sport projects, including arts and culture, theatre, music and performing arts.

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FEATURE
YMCA DOBRICH' – AN APPROACH TO CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

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The threats faced by young people in Bulgaria are very similar to their peers in other European Union Member States. These often relate to school violence, online bullying, unemployment, and lack of economic opportunities, drugs and substance abuse. Young people are also increasingly exposed, especially through the Internet and social media, to the incitement of religious, ethnic and racial hatred, the spread of violent right wing extremist and Neo-Nazi ideas, the calls for sharing hate speech and committing hate crimes.

The threats that young people in Bulgaria are facing have been further increased by the COVID pandemic, the current economic crisis, political crisis and the increase of conspiracy narratives and fake news. These risks and developments are the precursors of polarisation within Bulgarian society. Combined with school bullying – Bulgarian schoolchildren are among the top ten most affected in the world - young people In Bulgaria are particularly vulnerable to radicalising influences.

In a survey of pupils, over one-third said that they have become victims of violence or bullying, of physical and verbal aggression at school at least once during the past year. Additionally, young people are directly exposed to online bullying (or cyber-bullying). It is a threat to which young people, as active Internet users, are especially vulnerable. In Bulgaria, the Ministry of Education and Sciences states that online bullying has increased significantly in recent years, often occurring between pupils of the same school.

The threats for radicalisation of young people against "others" are deeply rooted in the Bulgarian history and general characteristics. The country has a large number of Orthodox Christians and a small amount of other religious and ethnic groups. Group-focused enmity, hostility towards 'otherness', such as migrants and refugees, are other factors for the spread of hate and radicalisation among young people.

This situation requires a lot of P/CVE actions, legislative changes, multi-agency approaches, advocacy and a strong civic sector to

intervene and develop prevention programmes among young people in Bulgaria. YMCA Dobrich has been working to address these challenges.

Citizenship education is the term that best describes the approach taken by YMCA Dobrich to the design and delivery of all of our interventions. Citizenship education develops knowledge, skills and understanding that young people need to play a full part in society as active and responsible citizens. Pupils learn about democracy, politics, human rights, justice, media literacy, the law and much more. They are also taught valuable skills, such as debate, dialogue, discussion and negotiation, giving them the life skills they need to think critically and succeed in life.

Through this citizenship education work, we have been able to develop a series of models and practices which could adopted and adapted by practitioners elsewhere across Europe. These include: A method for integration and inclusion through art and music; A model for citizenship participation, called "I am Europe" ; A youth exchange on inclusion, called "The Different is normal"; Methodologies for using theatre and fashion to fight discrimination", and much more. One of the most powerful early intervention projects is "Music therapy for good children", which is based on the "Schulwerk" music therapy approach of the composer Carl Orff.

Meanwhile, the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) Prevent Network22 project on 'Prevention of Right Wing Extremism' has developed a Compendium of good practices, which includes ten approaches for citizenship education and youth work on the topic of P/CVE.

Given events in Ukraine, our current focus is on media literacy, raising awareness about fake news and the spread of conspiracy theories among young people. Our most recent project, #digitaldemocracy, which is being delivered in Germany and Poland, gets young people from Bulgaria, Germany and Poland to learn how to tackle issues such as fake news, hate speech and other harmful content spread online.

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FEATURE
YMCA DOBRICH' – AN APPROACH TO CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

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Looking ahead, considering the escalating numbers of hate speech cases and violence at schools, YMCA Dobrich is working with partners from other EU Member States to establish a reporting system which can help like-minded organisations to identify, analyse, understand and then respond to such challenges.

Kita Boncheva is the head of Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Dobrich.

"Through this citizenship education work, we have been able to develop a series of models and practices which could adopted and adapted by practitioners elsewhere across Europe. These include: A method for integration and inclusion through art and music; A model for citizenship participation, called "I am Europe" ; A youth exchange on inclusion, called "The Different is normal.""

RAN PAPER
Integrating the online dimension into offline pedagogical practices

EDITORIAL
RAN PAPER

OCT 2022
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in May 2022, entitled 'Integrating the online dimension into offline pedagogical practices', provides educators and youth workers with practical tips on how to include the online dimension in offline pedagogical practices. The paper also provides insights on how to gain in-depth and immersive knowledge of young people's online experience. You can read the paper in full **here.**

034—035

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CONCLUSION PAPER
Integrating the online world in your offline pedagogical practices
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26/05/2022
CONCLUSION PAPER
RAN Youth & Education (Y&E)
8 – 9 March 2022, Online meeting

Integrating the online dimension into offline pedagogical practices

Key outcomes

Older generations are becoming increasingly aware that for young people, the online world (social media and online games) is in fact part of the real world. Offline efforts at preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) should thus certainly take into account this online dimension. After all, it is essential for youth professionals to understand the entirety of young people's experiences if they are to connect with them and build trust. However, youth practitioners still find it challenging to identify this online content and integrate it into their daily practices. Challenges include bridging the gap between young people and professionals; staying up-to-date about trending platforms, content and narratives; and identifying working methods to use in classroom or youth work contexts.

The RAN Youth & Education (Y&E) working group convened a working session on 8 and 9 March 2022 for insights and tips on how to gain in-depth and immersive knowledge of the younger generation's online experience and subsequently integrated it in pedagogical practices. This paper is based on insights from the working session and aims to provide educators and youth workers with practical tips on how to include the online dimension in offline pedagogical practices.

The following key outcomes were identified.

- Since young people are the experts in this area, **let them teach you**. This can be achieved in various ways:
  - give them a subject to research online, and discuss the related sources, platforms and narratives;
  - show them familiar content on your smartphone and let them explain it to you (this may form a foundation for further discussion: begin the conversation on a neutral topic, and gradually move to more controversial content).
- Be **open to reflective conversations** on online content, without interrupting, prescribing or judging: a young person may share something controversial that they do not necessarily support or even really understand.
- The long periods of time young people spend online is not always concerning. Focus on the **quality rather than the quantity**; the internet is also a space for **belonging and personal (talent) development**. Empower pupils by giving them space to share their online passions. In both positive and negative instances, it is important to stay acquainted with their activities.
- Youth workers and teachers should have **freedom in their curriculum or programme** to implement methods to connect to this online dimension.

Setting the scene: Why the urgency?

The RAN Y&E meeting started with a panel discussion on the narratives and platforms of online VRWE networks, in particular the recent threat analysis of the Dutch National Coordinator that reportedseveral hundreds of Dutch teenagers radicalising online towards right-wing accelerationism and striving for a race war and collapse of society, with various examples of manifestations of these networks, including very young children who had seen the Christchurch video, racist gaming communities, and threats on TikTok.

Why are some young people so active online?

Christian Vorre Mogensen from the Centre for Digital Pedagogy shared some insights on why young people are sometimes so attracted to online activity, especially in the gaming community. He stressed that the quantity of time spent online was not concerning; rather, the **quality was more important**. Young people are active on the internet for several reasons: engaging socially, learning and educating themselves, and for entertainment. Essentially, this does not differ from how adults use the internet.

Moreover, for some young people, the internet provides **positive opportunities** not accessible in the real world. For example, someone experiencing difficulty coping with social situations offline may find refuge in an online community where they can feel accepted and included. In fact, the online dimension can thus also be considered **empowering** when viewed positively as a means for young people to develop certain competencies. Despite these possibly positive effects, repeatedly spending a long time online can also verge on escapism.

Considering the topic of gaming specifically, the speaker argued that a gaming addiction does not lead to sadness, but rather that young people might escape online as a **distraction** from their sadness in real life. Also, gaming allows players agency over their actions and control of their online actions, which appeals to those lacking this in real life. We should thus **change the way we view gaming,** moving from the framework of the 'gaming addiction' towards greater focus on their other needs.

Young people can be exposed to extremist content online very easily because of the nature of digital platforms like TikTok, Discord or Telegram, where the user-friendliness and low barriers in terms of moderation make it easy to creatively distribute certain messages. Keeping pace with online extremist communities is challenging, as they use their own language and subliminal references. It is important for practitioners to be able to identify such symbols and narratives, because the behaviour these young people exhibit and consume online might reflect offline in intolerant language and actions. Being unaware of such online conventions or expressions might lead to unpleasant surprises if practitioners are not able to interpret their meaning and significance. It is therefore vital to be well-informed and prepared, in order to respond appropriately.

Speakers explained that there is a need for digital P/CVE work. The young people consuming and sharing problematic online content need some kind of help or guidance. However, secretly integrating in such networks as a practitioner is a delicate operation and can compromise trust. Therefore, most P/CVE actors investigating these online networks are police or intelligence services. This digital prevent work is rather investigative, while there is a need for help and care, which should be done by practitioners. Preventive digital youth work, for example, is very beneficial, but is not feasible for every practitioner. There is a lack of digital preventive work, so currently it is up to the individual practitioner to also do digital prevent work. Therefore, it is essential to support practitioners with inspiration and methods on how to encourage young people to share their online experiences, in order to be able to interpret online

SPOTLIGHT
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

ARTICLE
**A PEDAGOGY OF DE-POLARISATION FOR
EDUCATION, FROM COLD TO HOT TOPICS**

OCT 2022
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

ARTICLE

A PEDAGOGY OF DE-POLARISATION FOR EDUCATION, FROM COLD TO HOT TOPICS

Bjorn WANSINK

Young people across Europe are suffering from multiple crises. They are confronted with a war in the Ukraine, a climate crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Next to these there is an increasing social crisis. In well-functioning democracies crises are solved by dialogue between different stakeholders, but there is suggestion that the trust that some parts of society have in authorities is eroding. Teachers are experiencing how societal polarisation is becoming prominent in the classroom and often is fuelled by social media used for spreading misinformation and fake news.

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Public schools (i.e. not private) are one a few places where youngsters from different social and cultural backgrounds still meet. Therefore, schools can function as a lab for democracy and citizenship. By having discussions about difficult topics students can learn how to solve problems peacefully together. In addition, students should become aware that it is fine to disagree in a democracy. At the same time, too much polarisation between groups of people can be dangerous for the stability of a democracy. This means that students should learn how to deal with conflict constructively. To help teachers in doing so, this article proposes a pedagogy of de-polarisation for education.

Conflict and polarisation
To start, it is important to note that conflict and polarisation are related but not the same. Conflict means a serious disagreement or clash. Because people are different, they can have different perspectives and subsequently different emotions about specific topics. This ultimately means that conflicts will always be there. Conflicts are not necessarily bad and are inherently part of democracy. If students can engage in a constructive dialogue about conflicts they also can provide an opportunity for learning about different viewpoints and arguments. Unfortunately, most people are not very good in conflict and find it difficult to speak out or to listen to each other. Conflict can lead to polarisation in society when groups are mobilised in "us and them" thinking. Polarisation becomes problematic when students start to think in more extreme and simplistic frames about each other.

Identity
Students can become more extreme in their beliefs when their (group) identities are threatened. In general, people like to have a positive image of their own (group) identity and when this identity is threatened, they can become more extreme in their beliefs and less open for other perspectives. Other reasons why youngsters can get more extreme in their beliefs are the experience of injustice, or lack of certainty or safety about their primary life conditions. In such cases youngsters

tend to create narratives that provide safety, and it becomes less relevant if their narratives are based on scientific facts. In schools, students should be stimulated to discuss topics from multiple perspectives, but students can also be encouraged to be critical of simplistic or polarising narratives. Finally, discussing controversial topics from multiple perspectives does not mean relativism as within democracies there are moral boundaries and claims should be underpinned with arguments.

A model of teaching hot and cold topics
Research and previous RAN Practitioners meetings show that discussing controversial issues can be difficult for teachers. Constraining factors can be insufficient teaching time, a packed curriculum, or perceived lack of topic knowledge. Teachers can also be worried how to respond to students' extremist ideologies and intense emotional reactions. However, teachers should not directly be over-worried about the emotions of students. The question is how to deal with these? Therefore, this article proposes a pedagogy of de-polarisation for education, which is depicted in Figure1.

The depicted figure of a pedagogy of de-polarisation consists of two axes. The vertical axe stands for increasing emotions. When students will be more threatened in their identity it is likely that their emotions will increase. In general, this means that a discussion in the classroom can become more intense and difficult. The oblique line in the figure shows that in such case polarisation in the class between students might increase (i.e., the red part of the line). The horizontal axe stands for the discussed topic and starts with cold topics and then these topics increasingly become hotter. Figure 1 shows that cold topics do not trigger an identity threat as the students' identities are not at stake. The oblique line in Figure 1 is white at the bottom indicating that it is unlikely that cold topics will cause polarisation in the classroom.

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A pedagogy of de-polarisation means that teachers first practice discussions with students using cold topics, such as sports and extra-curricular activities. There are multiple benefits to start with cold topics. First, because students do not strongly identify with the topic, they likely will be more open for discussion and less emotionally involved. Second, teachers more comfortably can establish classroom rules about how to disagree about a topic (see Figure 2). Third, teachers can first practice their questions in a less heated discussion. When discussing a cold topic teachers can start with making an inventory of the different perspectives in the classroom. It is important to encourage students to reflect on their discussions. This can be done by asking questions about their sources, or why they have a specific moral view. Fourthly, during a discussion about a cold topic it is easier for teachers to create a safe classroom environment. Figure 2. Some examples of ground rules for discussion.

1. Acknowledge that opinions are often not right or wrong, but merely different.
2. Do not interrupt the speaker.
3. Support your views with evidence and examples.
4. It is okay to criticise what was said, but not the person expressing the opinion.
5. Listen and speak with the same respect you would like to be shown to you.

A pedagogy of de-polarization for education (Wansink, 2022)
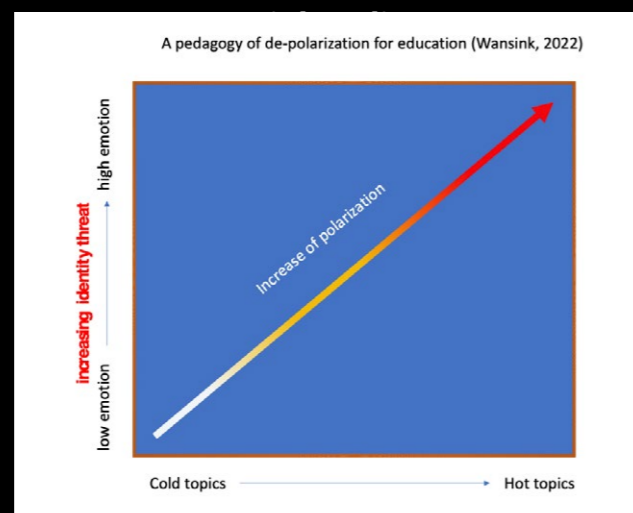
Final remarks
It should be noticed that especially in multicultural classes, students and teachers can disagree about what cold and hot topics are. This means that a teacher has to have knowledge about the backgrounds of his or her students. In general, a good starting point to make a hot topic colder is to search for a similar topic but then situated in another country or in the past. This approach can help in avoiding that students directly identify with the topic causing strong emotions. When teachers feel confident discussing cold topics they can start with discussing hotter topics. Finally, it is important that all students can participate and learn. Not all students feel comfortable contributing to a discussion, especially when having a minority viewpoint in the class. Therefore, teachers also can think of other activities to learn about sensitive topics or for example use art.

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RAN PAPER
Youth isolation – How to get them out of it?

A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in November 2020, entitled 'Youth isolation – How to get them out of it?', provides teachers and social workers with insights and recommendations on how to reach out to isolated and vulnerable young people who cannot be reached in school. You can read the paper in full **here.**

EDITORIAL
RAN PAPER

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CONCLUSIONS PAPER
RAN event – Youth isolation – How to get them out of it?
26-27 November 2020, Online

Youth isolation –
How to get them out of it?

Key outcomes

Youth isolation has been amplified by the restrictions in society due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Youth workers and teachers have encountered many challenges in their attempts to reach out to isolated and vulnerable young people. Some of the most important challenges for youth workers and teachers include:

- **Youth isolation due to COVID-19.** The current social climate caused by COVID-19 creates uncertainty, feelings of alienation and frustration for young people. In some cases, this has led to isolation. The pandemic has highlighted the most vulnerable cases, especially in socially and economically deprived areas across Europe.

- **Social exclusion and threat of radicalisation**. There are serious long-term effects of isolation for those within the hardest-hit communities. Isolation also can lead to segregation, and this may well inhibit the development of important social skills of young people. Long-term Social exclusion for a longer period of time could make young people more susceptible to radicalisation and create a fertile soil for extremist recruitment. Extremist groups play into the above-mentioned feelings and have aimed their recruitment strategies towards these vulnerable youngsters

- **Prevent radicalisation.** Teachers and youth workers have a key role in identifying vulnerable youngsters at risk of radicalisation and consequently to develop multi-agency–based interventions.

- **Using digital means to combat youth isolation**. Young people are more online now than ever before, which creates challenges and opportunities. COVID-19 has made vulnerable young people often ignored by society more invisible in the physical world. However, many youngsters are visible online. By developing local networks that utilise digital platforms, reaching previously hard-to-reach isolated youth has now become a possibility. One challenge for teachers and youth workers is how to create a synergy between the other stakeholders(e.g. social work, local municipalities, community or religious figures, or mental health organisations/professionals) .

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- Both teachers and youth workers must find ways to create safe spaces for isolated young people vulnerable to radicalisation. Training must be offered to stakeholders on recognising early signs, creating a safe space for communication or intervention, and continuing to work proactively with the youngster.

- For youth workers in the most deprived areas, one of the major recommendations is the integration of positive role models for the children in community activities. These role models or "ambassadors" can also be used to reach out to youngsters who do not reach out for help voluntarily.

- Another important recommendation for youth workers is the development of schemes of engagement on social media platforms to reach young people (12 or older) for one-to-one sessions or group communications. This might include building an online community for young people by young people to aid their development into active online role models.

- A necessary step includes the creation of a collaborative roadmap between stakeholders to reach out to isolated youngsters — for example, between the school environment and youth work organisations. The roadmap should include at least the following:

  o Signalling of absences. Routines are key for schools to follow up on student absences. School computerised tracking systems can be useful to keep track of student absences and, consequently, when children have dropped out or are at risk of doing so.

  o Ownership of the case. Decide which person/organisation will own the case and why. Actors involved could be youth workers, police community officers, social services, a sports coach, youth welfare system, a teacher/mentor or other school members.

  o Division of tasks amongst different professionals. For example, planning a home visit to the family. Which professional is best equipped? Decide what matters most. Is it the one with the warmest relations, or the one with the best understanding of the cultural background? Furthermore, with an increase in mental health problems, schools are advised to have available professionals who address emotional-behavioural problems.

  o When these tasks take place (time-bound action plan). Furthermore, it needs to be decided when to create a separation of school (time) and out-of-school time.

  o Consultation structure and sharing information. Mapping the case is crucial to make the right decision and to best safeguard those youngsters at risk. One tool available is to have structural round-table talks.

  o Mitigation of youth isolation. Stakeholders need to be clear on the risks of youth isolation and need to know how to mitigate them. Be aware that this should not put extra burden on teachers.

- Youth centres can organise workshops to parents to help them develop their digital skills to understand what their children are doing online. This also allows them to keep an extra eye on their child in case they are lured into harmful content online.

- In Spain, safe meeting points (community centres) in the physical world to meet with a professional, teacher or youth worker in the evening was quite successful. Elements of success in this approach include:

  o Creating a safe space for dialogue and trust. Whenever youngsters say something offensive, try not judging them so as to keep the connection.

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SPOTLIGHT
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

HIGHLIGHTS
RAN PRACTITIONERS ACTIVITY

OCT 2022
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

044—045

Highlights:
RAN Practitioners activity

Education as a topic will be addressed within a number of RAN Practitioners activities in remaining months of 2022, including Working Group meetings and a thematic event. Stay tuned for further updates in the RAN Practitioners Update and on RAN Practitioners social media channels.

For more information about RAN Practitioners activities please visit the Calendar on the RAN website here.

RAN Youth and Education Working Group meeting

21-22 November 2022

How to include art(istic) values in your PVE approach?

LIBRARY:
DISCOVER MORE

IF you would like to discover more about the topic of prisons, rehabilitation and reintegration you can get in touch with the RAN Staff, take a look at the RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices or read through some of the latest RAN papers. We have included some of these papers in a carefully selected collection of interesting and relevant articles below.

RAN Practitioners (2022)
Hybrid youth and social work

RAN Practitioners (2021)
Working with Community Figures both Inside and Outside Schools

RAN Practitioners (2021)
RAN Activities on Youth Work and Education

Finnish National Agency for Education (2021)
Prevention of violent radicalisation in early childhood

Euroguide (2021)
Practical tools for frontline practitioners

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