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CONCLUSION PAPER
RAN event – Education and youthwork: towards an effective collaboration
8-9 April 2021, Online

Education and youth work: towards an effective collaboration

Key outcomes

As described in the RAN policy paper Transforming schools into labs for democracy, schools play a role in binding children to a democratic society. At the same time, however, this is not only the responsibility of the school. Other partners in the neighbourhood also play a role in creating places for practicing democracy. It is helpful if schools and partners in the neighbourhood (including youth workers) work together. If this is done correctly, we can strengthen social capital and counteract processes of radicalisation and polarisation. In practice, however, we see that this collaboration between school and youth work does not always achieve the intended results. The various organisations face the following challenges:

- There is a desire for more opportunities to share experiences, needs and expertise between the two fields. Currently, organisations often work strongly from their own perspective. As a result, the different educational visions do not always correspond. For example, an issue surrounding radicalisation may be tackled from either a repressive approach or a preventive approach. It is desirable to develop a shared vision with the various partners.

- Participants from youth work also pointed out that it is rather difficult to encourage schools to participate in joint activities, because the parties are not always perceived as equal. In some EU Member States, youth work is voluntary and is not always taken seriously by other actors. This also counts for activities related to safeguarding vulnerable youth, as projects on P/CVE or 'risk prevention' might put an undesirable label on schools.

- Youth workers generally speaking have to take the initiative in setting up collaborations. After all, there is a rather strict curriculum in education while this is not the case in youth work. School personnel (teachers, principals, faculty heads) often do not have the time to invest in establishing collaborations.

This paper will explore the main highlights of the RAN Y&E working group meeting, in line with the challenges experienced by youth workers and school personnel regarding establishing collaboration. In order to provide concrete answers to these challenges, this paper will also set out recommendations for practitioners in youth work as well as education. Recommendations follow the six phases of 'the Peaceable Neighbourhood', which the participants applied to their own respective contexts.

Highlights of the discussion

This RAN Y&E meeting was attended by practitioners in youth work as well as education, who were either experienced in collaborating with neighbourhood partners or faced challenges when trying this. This meeting provided positive examples of strong cooperation between partners in neighbourhoods in the form of 'the Peaceable Neighbourhood' and JES vzw (see the section 'Relevant practices' of this paper). There are many similarities in the collaborative structure of both programmes that could be considered key in setting up effective collaborations:

- **Bonding & bridging:** The speakers explained that it is important for young people to feel they are part of society in order to prevent radicalisation and extremism. Both organisations start with 'bonding'. This is the feeling of being part of the school, of the youth centre, and of the neighbourhood. It is also important that practitioners actively reach out to young people in the neighbourhood. School is an important partner in this, but not the only one. When young people feel connected to the different social circles in their environment, it becomes easier to bridge the gap to what they consider to be different people or groups, and thus accept inclusiveness.

- **Collaboration:** The importance of collaboration in P/CVE was broadly recognised. At the same time, this collaboration was said not to happen automatically. It is considered important to investigate how this collaboration should be structured. An important first step is to 'map' the neighbourhood or district and to identify the parties or stakeholders working with young people in this area. It was considered good practice to investigate which platforms already exist and how you can be part of them.

- **A shared vision:** The Peaceable Neighbourhood as well as JES stressed the importance of a shared (pedagogical) vision in order to facilitate collaboration. They both discuss with other actors in the neighbourhood what their vision is and how they can learn from each other. This shared perspective could be strengthened by organising activities in the neighbourhood. For instance, consider a neighbourhood event which the different actors organise together, but also a joint training on 'restorative justice'. It is also useful if the different parties know how they can help each other: *How are we a good neighbour?.*

- **Secure and hold:** Finally, both speakers stressed the importance of thinking about safeguarding a sustainable cooperation upfront: *How to ensure that this is not one-off project, but that we will still be doing this in 5 years? Which knowledge do we need to share knowledge with the partners? With which networks can we organise this?* It is also good to consider the role the local municipality can and wants to play in this.

Recommendations

In order to prevent processes of radicalisation, it is necessary to work on cohesion between the various parties working with children and young people. To make this collaboration visible, we based the RAN meeting on the six phases of development in the Dutch practice called "Peaceable Neighbourhood". These six phases of development are part of a dynamic model, without set conditions to get to the next phase. Participants of this meeting applied this model to their own environment and identified which phase they are in. They formulated a number of practical recommendations for themselves and each other in order to take the next step towards better cooperation with partners in their neighbourhood.

The Peaceable Neighbourhood model, as well as the participants' recommendations based on this model, are presented below.
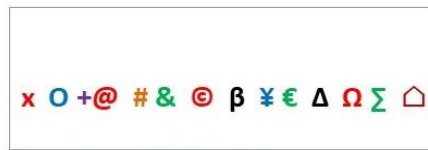
It takes a village to raise a child
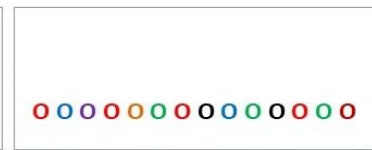

Phase 1 – separate parties in the neighborhood

Phase 2 – parties form a chain

Phase 3 – parties retain their color, but speak the same (pedagogical) language

phase 4 - parties gather around a common (pedagogical) goal

phase 5 - parties are prepared to make a sacrifice for that common goal

phase 6 - parties are willing to admit each other in their own field for the benefit of that common pedagogical goal

Phase 1: Parties in the neighbourhood are separate

- It is often useful to conduct a mapping exercise of who could be involved. It might be easier to start with the key players and then gather more as you develop. Frequently review this phase and keep the local authorities informed as they may be a source of funding.

- Find people who have the time and endurance to get in contact with the different organisations.

- Stay open to new partners and invest in getting to know them. Invite parties who are not in the network yet and keep presenting the opportunities of the network to potential partners.

Phase 2: Parties form a chain

- Make sure the partners understand how the process of cooperation will work; what the benefits are, why they should participate and what the costs are.

- Schools might be difficult to get involved as partners because of their strict schedules, and could see this extra work as a time consuming burden. Therefore demonstrate, 'sell' and rehearse the argument why participation is in their own interest.

- It is important to connect with the decision-makers of organisations. They might delegate the activity but their support is key.

- Do not expect too much too soon. Allow the network partners time to grow in their own tempo and do not push them too hard.

Phase 3: Parties retain their colour, but speak the same (pedagogical) language

- If the organisations have a similar ethos, it should be easier to have a shared vision. However, it might be good to use a third party in order to avoid bias when developing this vision. This could for example be another association or the municipality.

- Look for a framework or tool that can work for everybody, like the Peaceable Neighbourhood (see relevant practices below) or restorative justice for example. If partners use a similar approach to solve problems, it will be easier to act together when needed.

- Organise moments of reflection and inspiration between the different partners, where they can share and discuss their experiences.

Phase 4: Parties gather around a common (pedagogical) goal

- Not only share the same goal but live it. The managers are advised to keep the process moving. They need to make decisions and cannot always wait for all parties to agree.

- Ask each organisation the question "*What can be our shared mission?"*

- Set ambitious long-term goals, but celebrate small short-term wins.

- Once the common goal is defined, find the strengths and competences of the partner organisations. What can they contribute in order to achieve this goal?

Phase 5: Parties are prepared to make a sacrifice for that common goal

- Partners might see more difficulties than advantages. They expect a drain of time and energy, but working together with others could actually bring them more time and energy. Make clear that the sacrifice pays off in the long term; collaboration allows different partners to act faster instead of letting problems grow.

- Focus on joint activities where everyone may contribute and experience the benefits of collaboration.

- Discuss concretely with the partners what everyone is going to do towards the common goal: *Who organises the training? Who organises the network meetings?* Create commitment by giving everybody ownership and make clear agreements about accountability for different tasks.

Phase 6: Parties are willing to allow each other in their own field for the benefit of that common pedagogical goal

- Even though a well-developed structure exists, it is essential to regularly review the process of collaboration and improve it.

- The success of collaboration often depends on individuals within organisations. Therefore, it is important to share the knowledge within the organisation so the continuity of the collaboration is ensured.

- Also, dare to let each other in on each other's territory when difficult situations occur. How do we act in case of radicalisation? How can we still speak the same pedagogical language from a shared vision?

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Relevant practices

1. The Peaceable Neighbourhood (the Netherlands) is part of the RAN collection of inspiring practices. Children grow up in different domains: home, school, street, organised leisure time etc. In some neighbourhoods, there is a gap between socialising and parenting culture within these different domains. As behaviour is largely dependent on the environment, it is important to have a coherent supportive context for young people to grow up in. The aim of the Peaceable Neighbourhood is to create more educational cohesion between these different domains by working together and sharing experiences. They created a network between different actors in the Neighbourhood

2. JES vzw is a Belgian youth organisation targeting children and young people in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent. JES starts from a positive view of urbanity; children and young people should feel at home in their city. Through several activities and projects, JES supports young people in search for their place in the city and for their own competences. JES gives them a nudge, so they feel empowered and can grow as individuals, as members of a group, and as full residents of the city. JES makes the difference with a constructive view of urban challenges. Together with children, young people and partners, JES tries to build the city of tomorrow.

3. The 180° Turn (180 Grad Wende) is a prevention NGO in Cologne, Germany which is dedicated to social work for young people. Cologne has a well-developed structure with social district coordinators in every neighbourhood, who bring different stakeholders in the district together. 180 Grad Wende is part of this structure and takes part in regular meetings. There is much trust and collaboration. For example, a police officer who is a contact person for Muslim civil society is also in the board of 180 Grad Wende. Police officers also give workshops at schools together with 180 Grad Wende in order to build trust in police and institutions. Different stakeholders, like schools or the police, can turn to the organisation if there is a case of radicalisation.

Follow up

The participants received and completed a form with reflective questions based on the six Peaceable Neighbourhood phases. With this form, participants could orientate which phase they are in, and formulate which steps they could take in their neighbourhood to go to the next phase of collaboration. In a follow-up meeting, participants may eventually share how they have implemented these next steps, and which advantages or challenges they experienced. This form can also serve as a basis for future RAN meetings that focus on collaboration between different educational partners.

There always remains room for further discussion and issues for deeper reflection. The following issues were mentioned in the closing discussion:

- What do you do if a holistic approach does not work? What do you do if the partners are unwilling or unable to work together? What can you do in your role as a youth worker or teacher? How to assert influence and where to plant the first seed?

- The examples mentioned with regard to cooperation are for the most part from a preventive approach. What do you do if this is no longer possible? How do you deal with this in a situation where young people are already radicalised?

Further reading

Haanstra, W. (2018). Engaging with communities, collaboration between local authorities and communities in PVE, Ex Post Paper. Prague, Czech Republic: RAN centre of excellence, 22-23 February

Lenos, S., & Keltjens, M., (2016). The school needs partners, Ex Post Paper. Madrid, Spain: RAN centre of excellence, 1 December

Nordbruch, G., & Sieckelinck, S. (2018). Transforming school into labs for democracy, policy paper. Radicalisation Awareness Network.

Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2020). Collection of inspiring practices – Together against radicalisation.

YouthLink Scotland. Collaboration for Improvement: A guide for youth work and schools.

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