



# Manifesto for Education

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2021

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**RAN**   
Practitioners

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## 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

## Introduction

The *Manifesto for Education*, published by the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) in 2015,<sup>1</sup> called for educators, partners and governments to take action to stem the rise of violent extremism across Europe.

Over the following 6 years, practitioners were given the opportunity to do this through the RAN Practitioners group. Hundreds of education practitioners attended a series of meetings, identifying the key drivers of violent extremism and suggesting ways to address these drivers.

RAN connects frontline practitioners from across the EU with one another, and with academics and policymakers, to exchange knowledge, first-hand experiences and approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) of all forms.

The aim of this paper is to review progress made to date against the original 2015 *Manifesto for Education* and identify areas for further development. The paper will also explore potential new contributing factors to violent extremism. It is a call to action for practitioners in education and youth work. The new RAN working group will enable the adoption of a more holistic view in its endeavour to tackle extremism. We are at a pivotal moment in the history of such extremism and taking action now will reduce the risk of further such violence.

Much has changed since 2015, and more changes are likely in future as people struggle to deal with the consequences of terror attacks across Europe (including the murder of French teacher Samuel Paty), the Covid-19 pandemic and the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban. These events and the associated societal responses are likely to contribute to a rise in violent extremism. We must be prepared and ready to tackle new challenges in the coming years.

In many ways, we are better prepared for this task now: there is a wider understanding of what does and doesn't work when tackling violent extremism. What we as practitioners must do is become better at putting this understanding into practice. We must stay abreast of changing dynamics and developments and become more agile, to ensure we do not lose ground in any evolving threats.

The paper is proactive rather than reactive in considering what direction developments will take, and proposing issues for consideration. It asks questions which may not yet have answers. It is clear that without committed action and close collaboration from policymakers and practitioners, the risk exists of a perfect storm of conditions that could foster a significant rise in violent extremism. It is also clear that the fight against such extremism has expanded, with many new fronts opening up and old ones being reinforced.

While this paper highlights the importance of greater cooperation between policymakers and practitioners, this should not be interpreted as a diminishing of practitioners' responsibilities. Education and youth work practitioners have a safeguarding duty to prevent young people from becoming radicalised and committing acts of violent extremism. As practitioners, we must not allow barriers to lead to inertia. In the 6 years of RAN work, many examples of best practice have been put forward.

Inaction is perhaps the biggest challenge for practitioners. While some hesitance to engage in countering the causes and conditions of violent extremism and hate may be understandable, there are measures that can mitigate such risks. The murder of Samuel Paty in October 2020<sup>2</sup> sent shockwaves through the community of educators, highlighting the need for this work but also for training and support for practitioners in the field. Ways to mitigate risk will be discussed in this paper, but it is vital that we as practitioners do not allow challenges to deflect us from tackling what has the potential to become the perfect storm. We must understand the conditions and act now to address them before it becomes too late.

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<sup>1</sup> Participants and experts in RAN conference on radicalisation and education (Manchester, 3-4 March 2015), *Manifesto for Education – Empowering educators and schools*.

<sup>2</sup> Makooi, B. (2021). 'The violence shook me profoundly': Teachers, students remember Samuel Paty's murder. France 24. Retrieved from <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20211015-the-violence-shook-me-profoundly-teachers-students-remember-samuel-paty-s-murder>

The impact of Covid-19 on violent extremism is not yet quantifiable; however, we are in a position to make reasoned arguments and identify risk factors and drivers. Two key factors are the increase in polarisation and the distrust towards government and authority, including schools. As practitioners, what can we do on a micro level to help rebuild that trust? If trust in schools is eroded, what will the consequences be? They are at best, likely to be damaging and at worst, catastrophic. Practitioners must be very mindful of this trust issue if they are to safeguard the existing trust between young people and school/youth settings.

One effect of the Covid-19 pandemic has been a rise in young people presenting with mental health issues. What impact will this have on violent extremism? We know there is a stronger correlation between mental health and lone actors than between mental health and organised terrorism. Work is urgently needed to try and quantify this risk, and to develop strategies to counter it.

Trust is a two-way street, and as practitioners, we must also show our trust in young people through programmes that employ the peer-to-peer model.

As practitioners in education, we have the potential to make a difference and protect young people from the dangers of violent extremism, as either perpetrators or victims. There are many challenges, both personal and professional, in this most testing time. Going forward, practitioners must show solidarity in the fight against violent extremism.

## New or developing themes

The new structure of education and youth work within RAN Practitioners, bringing both fields together in the RAN Youth and Education (RAN Y&E) working group, provides an excellent opportunity to transform the way practitioners view radicalisation in young people. Moving from a silo approach to a more holistic one will lead to better outcomes. A review of the past 6 years clearly points to the benefits of this consolidation: joined-up thinking and action will allow the group to be far more effective against the conditions of violent extremism.

This shift is not without its problems and barriers, e.g. the misguided perception that youth workers hold a lower status than teachers. Initial thoughts on countering this were exchanged at a recent online meeting (April 2021), but much work remains to be done to consolidate this concept. This Manifesto is one step forward in that journey.

A clear strategy on how to integrate education and youth work must be developed and shared. Policymakers can support this work by promoting a framework which will boost and advance this collaboration. While individual Member States have their own structures, a flexible framework could be developed to reinforce the relationship between education and youth work.

Before investigating specific themes, it is worth distinguishing the roles of different stakeholders and the difference between formal and informal settings. Formal settings for education and youth work, subject to state inspection and guidelines, are considered the 'default' setting. Similarly, informal settings exist in both education and youth work. In this paper, informal settings are defined as settings without state inspection or guidelines. For example, an informal education setting is a madrasa, and an informal youth work setting is the Scouts.

The following section introduces new or developing themes which the authors seek to address in future.

## Primary school/youth activity

There was an initial reluctance to involve primary school children in this endeavour; however, it has become clear over the years that involvement of the primary phase of education and youth work is critical. We know that children aged nine and sometimes younger are active on social media. We know that they see acts of violent extremism on television. We also know that some children are raised in homes where extremist views are held and shared. How can a child be expected to make sense of such views without age-appropriate support?

Since the original *Manifesto for Education* (2015), significant work has been put into producing age-appropriate resources for the primary school phase. However, is there still a reluctance in the primary school phase to use these resources? If so, how can we overcome this barrier?

## Secondary school/youth activity

Work in the two former RAN groups predominantly explored the secondary school age range. In future, this is still likely to be the phase where work countering radicalisation is principally focused. However, is this the right approach? If more emphasis were placed on the primary school phase, would there be less need for intervention in the secondary school phase and even less in higher education?

## Higher education

Higher education establishments differ greatly from primary and secondary schools – the notion that what works in schools will work in higher education establishments is flawed. Further work is needed to develop workable strategies, building on the ideas developed in Dublin.

## Non-violent extremism

There are numerous groups holding extreme views, outside the mainstream: groups focusing on causes like the environment, animal rights, abortion and race equality may all feature elements of extremism and violence. Recent years, and particularly the last 2 years, have seen greater polarisation and more individuals adopting entrenched positions on a variety of causes/interests. The middle or silent majority, as referenced in the Brandsma model, is shrinking. How can practitioners support young people in expressing strongly felt views in such areas, without this leading to violent extremism?

## Conspiracy theories

This poses an increasing challenge for governments and society: people are showing distrust of authority and related bodies, potentially including schools. Conspiracy theories are spread through disinformation and associated echo chambers, whether online or in person at demonstrations, for instance. The legitimisation of extreme views leads to the belief for some such groups that their actions (including violence) serve the greater good. An example is the 2021 United States Capitol attack: many rioters misguidedly believed they were saving the country from fraud and corruption, including false claims of election irregularities. It is important that practitioners understand how such theories gain traction and how to reduce people's need to believe in conspiracy theories in the first place.

## Polarisation

This was a recurring theme in the work of the two former groups, and it is likely to continue to be an ongoing problem. There is evidence to suggest that the middle ground is shrinking. Do the old models of polarisation still fit? The linear model, with far right at one end and Islamic extremism at the other, is no longer applicable. It is now more splintered, with numerous individual causes creating an explosive cocktail of varying extreme anti-establishment and anti-authority views.

## Training

The training of educators and youth workers is key to the success of any counter-radicalisation undertaking. Training is a recurrent topic in RAN meetings, and is always framed by the dual challenge of time and cost. Perhaps a new approach is needed. One option is an online EU training and support platform for education and youth work which would also link into the dissemination strategy. This option addresses the time/cost challenge.

It's also important to think about who needs to be trained, particularly if we are to harness the power of young people in P/CVE.

## RAN Youth and Education working group

Initial meetings have been held and some problems identified. As stated previously, a clear strategy and input from policymakers is needed to reap the rewards that such collaboration can bring.

### Competing priorities

This is always the elephant in the room in this area. Schools and youth work have competing priorities, particularly after Covid-19. Should schools prioritise academic learning over personal development (which reduces the risk of radicalisation)? Should youth workers prioritise increasing gang or drug activity over work to reduce radicalisation?

Perhaps the answer is that these are not competing but rather complementary priorities. Children are more likely to be academically successful if they benefit from good personal development. Likewise, many of the strategies used to combat gang and drug activity also help to reduce radicalisation. Perhaps a more holistic approach is needed to help break out of the radicalisation silo. This calls for a change in the mindset of policymakers and practitioners. The shift towards a more holistic approach is a key theme of this Manifesto.

### Online activity

This is likely to be an ongoing theme, as online activity continues to evolve and adapt. The impact of Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns has been discussed in a recent RAN meeting, but will remain an area of concern.

### Gaming

There is growing concern over radicalisation occurring through gaming or in the context of gaming, i.e. gaming(-adjacent) platforms. This phenomenon is particular to gamers or users in digital environments: modified existing games content is used to ascertain whether a person frequently shares racist/hate views. Gaming platforms also offer a place to chat and exchange views. Although the right wing is particularly active here, there is also an Islamist extremist presence.

### The peer-to-peer influence

This is an area in need of further development. Studies have shown the impact of the peer-to-peer influence on various areas, and radicalisation is certainly one of them. An important caveat here is that this gives ownership to young people and empowers them to feel they are contributing rather than just being a passive voice.

These themes will be developed further in the next section.

## In depth: new or developing themes

### Primary schools and youth activity

Even though the 2015 *Manifesto for Education* noted that primary schools are an under-investigated area in education, most P/CVE work still focuses on secondary schools and students. Most good practice examples are derived from secondary schools and projects tailored to teenagers. Participants in the RAN Education (RAN EDU) and now RAN Y&E meetings who hail from schools also tend to be educators from schools with older students.

As primary education starts at different ages across Europe, a definition taken from the RAN meetings will serve to define the target group here: primary school students aged between 5 and 12. So in this paper, primary school students are considered to be in the pre-teen years.<sup>3</sup>

Primary schools have been researched less, with fewer activities in the field of P/CVE than in higher levels of education. One of the given reasons is that teachers and school leaders are unsure whether children at such a young age are psychologically developed enough to understand or cope with such complex and sensitive issues as identity, polarisation, sexuality, values and beliefs.<sup>4</sup> Teachers might not be equipped to discuss such sensitive topics with young students, but are also likely to be concerned about parents' reactions.

However, if schools are to fulfil the role set out in the Paris Agreement in 2015, i.e. to make students active, responsible and open-minded members of society, then the earlier they start to work on these skills, the better. School should play a crucial role in increasing students' resilience, and therefore teachers should not shy away from P/CVE, but rather do it age appropriately. Some argue that it is crucial to start P/CVE in primary schools, because it is easier to explore the subject at a younger age, than later, when students may have already formed opinions and might be less open to discussion.<sup>5</sup> As with other subjects, if one builds a foundation in the early years, it is easier to revisit and consolidate, even at a time when teachers and school play a less important role in students' lives.

Students are exposed to ideas, controversies, fake news and memes ever earlier, as mobile use and internet exposure starts at a very young age. Primary schools also have students from radicalised families, or who have returned from Daesh-held territories or who have come to Europe as refugees/migrants, with or without families.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is no longer possible to argue that these topics do not touch the life of primary school students.

It is vital that critical thinking skills are developed in an appropriate way in primary schools. To do so, additional space specifically dedicated to these topics needs to be created in the curriculum.

What primary schools need are long-term, curricula-driven programmes with a proven impact, that tie preventing violent extremism (PVE) to schoolwork in an age-appropriate manner. This is an area where schools and youth work could do more work together. Youth workers might be more comfortable informally discussing sensitive topics with young people, and are also more aware of the social media trends that appeal to students. These kinds of connections should be investigated in more detail. Teachers also need training on how to deal with these topics, and how to turn their classrooms into laboratories of democracy. These actions will address many of the (perceived or real) barriers in primary education.

**Table 1: Relevant stakeholders and their roles at primary school level.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At primary school level, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• School leaders</li> </ul>	<p>At primary school level, the roles of stakeholders are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively engage in PVE topics with students and practice skills such as discussion, listening to others, respecting differences and peaceful conflict resolution.</li> <li>• Communicate PVE work openly to parents and stress its significance. Provide teacher training as well as time to debrief. Implement a school plan to tackle these issues before polarisation/radicalisation/extremism becomes a problem. Build networks with other stakeholders in the community.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> Clay, *The role of primary education in preventing radicalisation: A realistic and optimistic perspective.*

<sup>4</sup> Clay, *The role of primary education, in preventing radicalisation: A realistic and optimistic perspective.*

<sup>5</sup> Nordbruch & Sieckelink, *Transforming schools into labs for democracy. A companion to preventing violent radicalisation through education.*

<sup>6</sup> Peresin, *Building resilience among young children raised in extremist environments – specifically child returnees.*

- Youth workers
- Policy makers

- In countries where youth work includes primary school students, build partnerships and communication lines with schools in the area to serve children better.
- Include primary schools more in P/CVE work at all levels. Make recommendations and policies that allocate time and resources for P/CVE work at primary school level.

## Secondary school and youth activity

Secondary school has traditionally been the focus of preventive work, chiefly because students at this age are developing identities, beliefs, values and opinions, but are also more open to the outside world. Whereas primary school students are still heavily influenced by home and school, secondary school students are widening their circles and are more influenced by outside input.

Secondary school students typically spend a great deal of time online, on social media or playing games. These are also places where recruitment is increasingly prevalent, as speakers at the 2021 RAN High-Level Conference stressed.<sup>7</sup> Remote learning, the pandemic and lockdowns all contributed to making online spaces the most common place for socialising. Without critical thinking and digital awareness skills, students must navigate all kinds of online material alone. This age group also likes to provoke and test boundaries, and this should be facilitated in a safe environment: both education sector and youth work should provide such safe spaces.

However, often secondary school students have set identities, beliefs, values and opinions, and getting them to see the counter-narrative might be challenging. It might also be more difficult for them to learn to handle conflict peacefully or feel that they've been heard if this was not experienced in their earlier years. So, while the focus on secondary school remains crucial, the same focus should be placed on primary school. If students have learnt since the start of their formal schooling to respect diversity, handle conflicts peacefully and trust that their voices are heard in matters that concern them, continuing this work in secondary school will be easier.

Secondary school students are also influenced by spaces other than formal school. Spaces that facilitate hobbies, religious schools and other forms of informal learning should cooperate with formal education and youth work. Cooperation is needed because the informal nature of such places allows better relationships to be fostered between young people and adults; for example, a football coach might be closer to a young person than a school teacher would. However, practitioners should exercise caution when working with the informal sector: some of these players can be harmful and actually pose a threat to P/CVE work. But when there is a shared vision and common goals, schools should acknowledge the skills and know-how of informal education spaces and embrace this cooperation.

**Table 2: Relevant stakeholders and their roles at secondary school level.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At secondary school level, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> </ul>	<p>At secondary school level, stakeholders' roles are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively engage in PVE topics with students and practice skills such as discussion, listening to others, respecting differences and peaceful conflict resolution. Familiarisation with the online environment, polarisation and radicalisation.</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> Scheele, Korn, Zuiderveld, & de Deus Prereira, *RAN HLC 2021: 10 years of RAN – Learning from the past, preparing for the future.*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School leaders</li> <li>• Youth workers</li> <li>• Policy makers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide teacher training as well as time to debrief. Implement a school plan to tackle these issues before polarisation/radicalisation/extremism becomes a problem. Build networks with other stakeholders in the community, especially with youth work and youth organisations.</li> <li>• Partner with other schools in the area and share knowledge with teachers and school leaders. Ask for training on radicalisation, polarisation and the online environment.</li> <li>• Make recommendations and policies that allocate time and resources for P/CVE work at secondary school level; promote collaboration between schools (both formal and informal) and youth work.</li> </ul>
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## Higher education

Primary and secondary schools can, to a certain degree, screen harmful influences, as schools also play the role of protecting underage students. Higher education institutions face a more complicated challenge: they cannot physically contain students; moreover, academic freedom and free speech are fundamental in higher education. How can these spaces cope with extremist groups seeking to recruit and radicalise students?

Two key recommendations with concrete suggestions emerged from a meeting in Dublin in 2018. The first relates to student welfare. Some higher education students turn to the student welfare system for support because they find the required shift to independence in higher education challenging. Therefore, student welfare workers need training on how to identify radicalisation signs. The other key recommendation is to add a fifth 'P' to CVE work that has traditionally relied on the following four 'Ps': protect the public; prepare to mitigate the damage caused by an attack; pursue the perpetrators; and prevent people from being lured into violent extremism. The fifth 'P' is an 'additional, positive "P" [that] stands for promoting a positive and constructive range of activities to boost the public domain and the promotion of fundamental values'.<sup>8</sup> This fifth element is suitable for all P/CVE activities and would also benefit the education sector at lower levels.

Higher education is also dealing with a new element resulting from the lockdowns due to Covid-19. Most higher education institutions have been teaching remotely since spring 2020, with enormous impact on students. Many have dropped out, unable to keep up with their studies in such an independent context. Others are still shakily hanging on, and some are coping quite well. But there is no real data yet on how many higher education students are at risk of marginalisation and/or radicalisation because of Covid-19. Isolation is taking a toll on these young people: polarisation is increasing and this provides a breeding ground for radicalisation. Higher education is a topic that needs to be kept high on the agenda in the coming years.

**Table 3: Relevant stakeholders and their roles at higher education level.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At higher education level, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• Higher education leaders</li> </ul>	<p>At higher education level, the roles of stakeholders are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively engage in PVE topics with students and practice skills such as discussion, listening to others, respecting differences and peaceful conflict resolution. Familiarisation with the online environment, polarisation and radicalisation.</li> <li>• Promote a positive and constructive range of activities to boost the public domain and the promotion of fundamental values.</li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> Lenos & Krasenberg, *Making a difference: The dissemination and implementation of RAN EDU lessons for PVE-E*.

- Youth workers
- Policymakers
- In some EU Member States, youth workers also work with young adults. Cooperation is needed with health services/counsellors, as is reaching out to students at risk of marginalisation, polarisation and radicalisation.
- Ensure that student health services have resources to cater for post-pandemic needs of higher education students.

## Non-violent extremism

Words like radicalisation and extremism have taken on powerful emotive connotations over the past 20 years. The word extremism is often misused to describe a point of view which runs contrary to that of a given author, but is it really extremism?

Is non-violent extremism something we as practitioners should be concerned about? Or is it just another means to bring about change in a liberal democracy?

The primary concern over non-violent extremism is that it may lead to violent extremism. The ‘conveyor belt’ theory of radicalisation<sup>9</sup> suggests that non-violent hate rhetoric might trigger some individuals to commit acts of violence. This is exemplified by Omar Bakri and Brenton Tarrant: both belonged to or supported non-violent organisations, but at some point, decided to change their methodology to one of violence.

How should education and youth work practitioners deal with non-violent extremism? As society becomes polarised and the liberal democratic consensus weakens, should we be concerned? We should not be shying away from difficult questions or disregarding extreme ideologies. Teachers, coaches, youth organisation leaders and youth workers should be able to discuss these issues with young people, allow their voices to be heard, and show them different perspectives and counter-narratives, in a safe space. In the process, stigmatisation should be avoided and students expressing extremist views should not be shamed or embarrassed. Discussions must be approached sensitively, without pushing young people to outgroups that isolate them from school, youth activities, hobbies and peers.

The subject of non-violent extremism is fraught with moral, ethical and democratic dilemmas. There is no certainty that the ‘conveyor belt’ theory holds and leads to violent extremism universally. Would Bakri and Tarrant have gone on to commit atrocities had they not supported non-violent groups? Are non-violent groups just stopping points on a violent extremist’s journey? Do they incite violent behaviour or play a more passive role? The balance of probability would suggest that some people are likely to resort to more violent tactics.

The subject of non-violent extremism is clearly one to watch, as many questions on this topic remain unanswered.

**Table 4: Relevant stakeholders and their roles regarding non-violent extremism.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At all levels of education, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• School leaders</li> </ul>	<p>At all levels of education, the roles of stakeholders are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be prepared for difficult and controversial discussions with your students. Ask for support from your school leader and other stakeholders in the community. Be proactive and begin a dialogue with parents about the issues.</li> <li>• Organise support for teachers holding difficult discussions with students; partner with other stakeholders in the community to address issues in support of teachers. Ensure your school is a safe place for holding controversial discussions, through training and support.</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> Powell, Counter-productive counter-terrorism. How is the dysfunctional discourse of Prevent failing to restrain radicalisation?.

- Youth workers
- Policymakers
- Engage with young people; provide them with safe spaces to discuss difficult issues; partner with schools and other stakeholders in the community. Proactively communicate with schools, if there is concern about any of the students.
- Be aware of the trends in your country and across the EU. Provide spaces where different stakeholders can easily partner and work towards a common goal. Support sustainability in partnerships.

## Conspiracy theories

Conspiracy theories have existed for many years. However, technological advances and the proliferation of social media has greatly amplified their reach and mainstream appeal. As our society shows a greater propensity for polarisation, what has the role of conspiracy theories been? They have certainly played a part in the recruitment of far-right extremists, but has this led to violent extremism? When not leading to violent extremism, conspiracy theories facilitate the spread of hate, further polarise society and increase the risk of violence.

When considering conspiracy theories and their role in encouraging violent extremism, it is worth revisiting recent attacks, particularly those in New Zealand and the United States. Conspiracy theories are referenced in these attacks, and in the New Zealand attack, Brenton Tarrant produced a ‘manifesto’ referencing the great replacement theory<sup>10</sup> and linking it to the white genocide theory.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it seems there may be a link between conspiracy theories and violent extremism, particularly with the far right.

So, what does this mean for us as teachers and youth workers? How should we, as professionals, tackle this issue? Francesco Farinelli proposes some measures in the RAN paper *Conspiracy theories and right-wing extremism – Insights and recommendations for P/CVE*.<sup>12</sup> The paper focuses on young people as the key to halting the use of conspiracy theories as a recruitment tool for extremists. So again, teachers and youth workers have a vital role in countering the narrative, but where to start?

Cassam<sup>13</sup> argues that a simple rebuttal may do more harm than good for those entrenched in the conspiracy with unshakeable belief. Instead, a more nuanced approach may be needed.

*‘A more promising and worthwhile target of rebuttal efforts is people with a weaker commitment to Conspiracy Theories, or the presumable large number of those who are curious about such theories, maybe even receptive to them, without yet being true believers.’*

Cassam

To achieve this, practitioners must first gauge an individual's depth of feeling about the theory; before attempting a rebuttal, an understanding of these aspects is essential. In a way, this is akin to the triage system used in medicine. In countering conspiracy theories, practitioners must bear in mind that research shows ‘certain existential needs drive people to endorse conspiracy theories as a way to achieve a stable, confident, and accurate understanding of the world’.

Should classroom teachers be expected to debunk conspiracy theories? Is it a realistic expectation that they will have the necessary skills and time to do so? And if this is not the teachers’ role, then whose is it?

The principle that prevention is better than cure is universally applicable across health and social care, so what role could teachers/youth workers play here?

<sup>10</sup> Ebner & Davey, *‘The great replacement’: The violent consequences of mainstreamed extremism*.

<sup>11</sup> Gardell, Lone wolf race warriors and white genocide.

<sup>12</sup> Farinelli, Francesco. (2021). Conspiracy theories and right-wing extremism – Insights and recommendations for P/CVE. Radiclaisation Awareness Network [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2021-04/ran\\_conspiracy\\_theories\\_and\\_right-wing\\_2021\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2021-04/ran_conspiracy_theories_and_right-wing_2021_en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Cassam, Q. (2019). *Conspiracy theories*. John Wiley & Sons.

The key lies in the fostering and development of critical thinking skills. Again, the question is how to achieve this in an already crowded curriculum, with youth work also having similar conflicting needs. This is where policymakers need to step up to the mark and highlight the importance and essential nature of critical thinking skills. The importance of these skills lies not just in countering conspiracy theories; for example, we know that young people with these skills are more resilient as regards their health. Too often in education, due to competing demands, key skills such as critical thinking are overlooked or superficially addresses in inadequate time frames.

If research shows the undisputed benefits of critical thinking, why are policymakers not doing more to ensure that related national programmes run from primary school through secondary school? Other key questions for policymakers are how to create the capacity for schools to deliver and what youth work can do to encourage young people to develop these skills.

Training is clearly key for practitioners to effectively deliver critical thinking. Teachers and youth workers need to have a greater understanding of conspiracy theories if they are expected to play a role in countering such theories. Ill-judged rebuttals can do more harm than good. To be effective, practitioners will need significant investment in training, which again, is a policy issue.

Families and parents also have a role to play. Often skills like critical thinking are not valued as highly as those considered more academic. Parents need to understand the importance and relevance of these skills for their children, in order for them to have currency. Is a campaign required to promote critical thinking with parents? An education campaign is needed at national level to ensure parents understand why critical thinking is essential for the development of their children. These skills have never been needed as much as they are today, and are likely to be needed even more as the complexities of our modern world increase.

What is the role of schools, fundamentally? Is it to provide a purely academic and technical education, or to equip children to become good citizens, thereby also reducing the risk of violent extremism? Beyond academic or technical qualifications, schools should help young people acquire the skills necessary for them to contribute to society.

Alongside critical thinking, Farinelli argues the importance of digital literacy for those challenging conspiracy theories. In the rapidly changing digital world, how do practitioners keep up? What do they need to know? Your average 40-year-old teacher may be familiar with Facebook and Twitter, but young people are not using these platforms; they consume social media differently from the older generation. While training may be appropriate for the present, fast-moving digital developments will render much of this knowledge redundant very quickly. So how can we keep practitioners updated? One of the positive impacts of the pandemic is that many more of us are digitally literate. We should build on this advance, through a new digital platform which allows teachers and youth workers to stay abreast with developments. Accessibility and ease of use are key. For instance, a busy classroom teacher or youth worker will not have time to read a 20-page document. Much work has been done in this field, but to engage with frontline staff, we need to take the existing content and make it more user friendly.

Conspiracy theories are inherently seductive: they lure people in by conveniently providing answers and justifications to questions that people may be pondering. The power of conspiracy theories, particularly on young minds, should not be underestimated.

Stakeholders need to join forces to find practical and effective ways to prevent the spread of conspiracy theories and acknowledge the damage they can do to individuals and society, including leading to violent extremism.

**Table 5: Relevant stakeholders and their roles regarding conspiracy theories.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At all school levels, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• School leaders</li> <li>• Youth workers</li> <li>• Policymakers</li> </ul>	<p>At all school levels, the roles of stakeholders are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be prepared to discuss challenging topics and theories raised by students. Participate in training on critical thinking and include it in classroom activities.</li> <li>• Organise training for teachers on conspiracy theories and critical thinking.</li> <li>• Be prepared to discuss theories when young people bring them up. Participate in training on critical thinking. Listen to and discuss with practitioners the most effective way to prevent the spread of conspiracy theories. Provide advice and propose common ways of working together for all Member States.</li> </ul>

## Polarisation

A proper discussion of polarisation would take up an entire research paper, especially with current global issues such as Covid-19 and the rise of the Taliban adding more fuel to polarised perspectives. RAN EDU has contributed to the topic of polarisation widely, not only within the working group but also through the *RAN Polarisation Management Manual*. This current Manifesto briefly summarises events since the 2015 *Manifesto for Education*; the related literature will be linked in the further reading section.

What emerges clearly from the research published over recent years is that teachers need more information and training on polarisation and depolarisation. It's vital they have an understanding of Bart Brandsma's theory on the polarisation process, the different roles involved and how to manage it. Without this knowledge, teachers or school leaders might actually increase the risk of polarisation rather than aid depolarisation.<sup>14</sup>

The highly informative *RAN Polarisation Management Manual*<sup>15</sup> sets out the theoretical background for the polarisation process, but also gives practical guidance for different sectors, including education and youth work. The following four rules should be followed in all sectors.

### Guidelines for working with polarisation

1. Do not harm, understand the dynamics of polarisation. This specifically calls for training on polarisation for both educators and youth workers, who must be aware of the roles people adopt in polarised situations (joiners, the middle ground, bridge builders, scapegoats), but also the game changers that have an impact on the situation.
2. Don't be belatedly surprised; instead, be prepared. One should not wait until a situation arises, but prepare for it beforehand. Training and having procedures and policies in place is crucial for preparation.
3. Polarisation management needs multi-agency cooperation. Just as the issues leading to polarisation are not only school or youth-work based, they cannot be solved solely by schools or youth organisations. This multi-agency cooperation needs time and advance preparation.
4. Vulnerable practitioners with backgrounds pertinent to a given situation must be protected. Such colleagues with experience of polarising situations are not best placed to deal with particular situations where they might be confronted, questioned or accused of being biased.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See <https://insidepolarisation.nl/en/> online.

<sup>15</sup> Lenos, Haanstrá, Keltjens, & van de Donk, *RAN Polarisation Management Manual*.

<sup>16</sup> Lenos, Haanstrá, Keltjens, & van de Donk, *RAN Polarisation Management Manual*; Nordbruch & Sieckelink, *Transforming schools into labs for democracy. A companion to preventing violent radicalisation through education*.

The recent global Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated polarisation in many Member States, and the conversation surrounding it is part of schools and youth work. The same principles apply to depolarising these questions, but new perspectives are also introduced that could defuse the situation. Here, the key lies in the fact that the educator or youth worker knows the student(s) and can select the best solution to address the polarised comment/situation. The main goal is the same, to react so as to keep the student(s) engaged in the discussion and not push them away. The different defusing methods are the cool-down, the counter narrative, relativism and arguments. For these methods to be used effectively, they should be tried and tested beforehand, which once again highlights the importance of advance preparation.

Teenagers are known to test boundaries and be provocative as a regular part of their development. It is therefore important to provide them with the space to do so, without always expecting that this will lead to a polarised situation. It is the job of educators and youth workers to create these kinds of places: ‘Being provocative, testing boundaries and being obstinate is normal and even necessary for adolescents. Creating safe spaces in which youngsters can test their opinions, have open discussions and learn about other sub-cultures is therefore of great importance. In combination with educational programmes, safe spaces will provide young people with the greatest boost to their ability to think critically, which is ultimately the best defence against polarisation and extremism.’<sup>17</sup>

Creating a safe space for controversial conversations and being able to manage them so no-one is harmed is a balancing act that educators and youth workers need to be able to do, because ‘children and young people who are taught to handle conflict in a peaceful way, who have been supported and guided in their identity development, and who feel their voices are heard on key issues for them, will less likely be seduced by socially harmful propaganda’.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 6: Relevant stakeholders and their roles regarding polarisation.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At all levels of education, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• School leaders</li> <li>• Youth workers</li> <li>• Policymakers</li> </ul>	<p>At all levels of education, the roles of stakeholders are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request training on polarisation and be aware of the undercurrents in class. Take action before things get too heated.</li> <li>• Be prepared; organise training for your staff and request training for yourself. Take action before things get too heated. Include parents in the process. Protect your staff members, especially those who are too close to polarised issues to deal with them effectively. Offer support and debriefing for all staff. Partner with different stakeholders in the community.</li> <li>• Request training on polarisation and be aware of the undercurrents in encounters with young people. Take action before things get too heated.</li> <li>• Provide a good example, take care not to polarise situations unintentionally.</li> </ul>

## Training

Training of teachers, school leaders, and to a certain degree, youth workers is a topic featuring strongly in every RAN EDU and RAN Y&E meeting. Training of educators is crucial; at the same time, however, there is a shared understanding that teachers are already overloaded with work, and that without proper resources, time and money, the training will not have an impact. Something must be done to resolve the training dilemma, because lack of knowledge and skills is one of the most common reasons for teachers not incorporating PVE issues into their teaching. Having empowered and resilient teachers is beneficial for all parties, school leaders and students.

<sup>17</sup> Lenos, Haanstrá, Keltjens, & van de Donk, *RAN Polarisation Management Manual*.

<sup>18</sup> Nordbruch & Sieckelink, *Transforming schools into labs for democracy. A companion to preventing violent radicalisation through education*.

This training that teachers should receive is focused not only on radicalisation-related issues, but also on the educators' own self-reflection. The *RAN EDU's Guide on training programmes 'Effective and confident teachers and other school staff'*<sup>19</sup> lists the following training needs:

- awareness and understanding of the risk of radicalisation and recruitment,
- making schools safe and democratic microcosms of societies,
- making schools physically safe,
- learning about media literacy, fake news and conspiracies,
- training on polarisation and depolarisation to create peace and stability,
- training on how to deal with cultures, religion, ideology and identity.

Later RAN EDU meetings and ex post papers have also highlighted the need for training on how to discuss controversial issues with students, including media literacy, fake news and conspiracies.

Gaining skills is just one part of the required teacher training; teachers must also engage in self-reflection and investigation of their own attitudes and values. 'Effective training sessions do not shy away from uncomfortable observations: namely, that prevention is not limited to strengthening students, but also includes challenging attitudes and possible biases of teachers, as well as existing institutional barriers to participation and representation. Training sessions can only be effective if teachers are invited to self-reflect on their professional, personal and political identities and attitudes, in a safe environment.'<sup>20</sup> This kind of training will have a real impact, as participants will get a sense of how students feel when doing activities requiring self-reflection and potentially shifting their perspective.

A single training workshop is not enough to build capacity and empower educators; rather, this calls for continuity and possibly a chance to informally share with others post-training, on an ongoing basis. An example of good practice in teacher training is the 'Teaching and managing controversial issues' in Utøya, Norway. In this case, after the initial teacher training, national coordinators assisted teachers and school leaders in each Nordic country, and the trained teachers also met on a regular basis at national level, to discuss what did or didn't work. Another Nordic example is the Dembra project, which employed a similar approach: the group that went to Norway for the initial training met again later to discuss how it panned out at school level, a process that allowed all participants to share their learning experiences.

This kind of informal sharing of ideas and lessons learnt is also the added value of RAN EDU and the new RAN Y&E. Hearing about ongoing work in other European countries and how practitioners have solved or tackled the same issues is always inspiring and empowering.

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*'All countries in Europe face the same issues. Talking to other teachers and [seeing] their commitment makes me feel a lot less alone.'*<sup>21</sup>

*RAN EDU meeting participant, Helsinki, 2017*

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The bottlenecks for training are money and time, both of which are scarce in the education sector. Individual schools would find it challenging to allocate resources to training, and therefore, it is important that policies are drawn up and recommendations made on this issue. Schools need to pair up with institutions that are

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<sup>19</sup> Lenos, Keltjens, & Participants of the Helsinki meeting, *RAN EDU's Guide on training programmes 'Effective and confident teachers and other school staff'*.

<sup>20</sup> Nordbruch & Sieckelink, *Transforming schools into labs for democracy. A companion to preventing violent radicalisation through education*.

<sup>21</sup> Lenos, Keltjens, & Participants of the Helsinki meeting, *RAN EDU's Guide on training programmes 'Effective and confident teachers and other school staff'*.

centres of excellence in the thematic area, so that the training is of a quality that really builds capacity and empowers teachers to work in PVE.

While this section on training has focused mainly on teachers, school leaders need training as well. They will need to learn how to prepare their schools, staff and students for possible polarisation and radicalisation. School leaders should have plans ready for prevention and countering work before any situations develop, just as they would plan for emergency situations of fire, accidents, attacks, etc. A plan that works for P/CVE has specific requirements and this is why school leaders must be trained.

**Table 7: Relevant stakeholders and their roles regarding necessary training.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At all education levels, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• School leaders</li> <li>• Youth workers</li> <li>• Policymakers</li> </ul>	<p>At all education levels, the roles of stakeholders are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand enough training. Be open to questioning your own attitudes, values and preconceptions.</li> <li>• Provide training for your staff and yourself. Avoid theory-based one-off training sessions, but prioritise continuous training where teachers and school leaders must also self-reflect.</li> <li>• Demand enough resources for training, for both formal school practitioners and informal education practitioners such as youth workers. Build a resource model that supports continuous training rather than one-off models.</li> </ul>

## RAN Youth and Education collaboration

RAN Youth and Education joined forces relatively recently. As there are many overlapping themes that both sectors work on, this combination makes sense, at least on a practical level. However, this collaboration is not always easy, and there can be reluctance on both sides. But there is one overarching aim: 'If this is done correctly, we can strengthen social capital and counteract processes of radicalisation and polarisation.'<sup>22</sup>

The collaboration seems like it should be useful: schools need partners, and youth workers are natural partners, as they share the same target group. But this collaboration has its share of problems. Youth workers feel that they are typically the ones initiating the collaboration, and even then, school leaders and teachers might turn down the offer, citing time constraints and the importance of focusing on curricula. Schools and youth workers do not work with young people from the same perspective, which may lead to a lack of enough common ground to allow collaboration. The final reason presented is that the partners do not consider each other to be on an equal footing. In many Member States, youth work is voluntary, whereas school is not: schools might consider the youth work sector to be less than equal, which does not inspire fruitful collaboration.

There are, however, examples where this collaboration has worked well. Taking inspiration from these success stories, certain general rules for collaboration can be derived.

### Building effective collaboration with the Peaceable Neighbourhood model

1. Bonding and bridging. Young people's lives are not compartmentalised according to sectors. The collaboration needs to bring together all relevant sectors of the community, so that young people can feel that they belong and are included in all parts of the community. This is the starting point for work in P/CVE.

<sup>22</sup> De Vries & Broeders, *Education and youth work: towards an effective collaboration*.

2. Collaboration. The starting point here is to investigate what kind of platforms already exist, and to link them up, carefully mapping the whole community so no valuable stakeholder is excluded. In education and youth work, partners working towards an effective collaboration should have this mapping process explained and detailed, so it is useful for practitioners starting from scratch.
3. A shared vision. Collaboration needs equal partners and a vision that all partners can agree on. While each partner may reach the same goal using different means, collaboration is possible only if everyone agrees on a joint goal.
4. Secure and hold. As noted with other P/CVE issues, the aim is not to achieve a one-off collaboration that will only work briefly. From the very beginning, it is important to plan and nurture the collaboration, so that it becomes a pattern or norm, allowing its benefits to be revealed. Very often, this point is neglected. The collaboration needs to be proactively and regularly reinforced, so it still functions as usual when the people in the partner organisations change.

Starting the collaboration is the first step in most Member States. The discussion is focused chiefly on this aspect and on finding common features in the collaboration that work. The next step is to put the collaboration plans in action, and see whether it proves fruitful or whether new bottlenecks arise.

One question not being investigated at all at the moment is the current collaboration work by RAN Y&E, which is focused on prevention. What happens when prevention is no longer what is needed, as in cases where students and young people have already been radicalised? What kind of collaboration is useful then, and does it involve more (or different) partners, compared to the prevention work?

### Case study: Cranford Community College

Cranford Community College is a state secondary school in West London, catering for 11-to-19-year-olds. It is graded 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, the national school inspectorate. The majority of the 1 500 students at the school are first- or second-generation immigrants, hailing from over 60 countries.

The school was built in the mid 1970s, and was designated a community school, meaning it had a role in supporting the community. It received funding for its community activity, but over the years that funding started to decline, and alongside it, the level of community activity.

The current headteacher, however, has a passion for local community-based action, believing that for a child to be successful, excellent academic results alone are not enough. Children spend more time in their community; therefore, it is important that their community is successful. The school is surrounded by social housing and overcrowding is a major problem, with higher-than-average unemployment and a great deal of low-paid employment. The proximity of Heathrow airport means that in a large number of families, one or both parents do shift work.

Just over 10 years ago, the school felt the need to do more to protect the community, which was vulnerable to many problems including violent extremism. It appointed someone with responsibility for developing community partnerships. Over the past 10 years, the school has developed partnerships with over 100 organisations, including the United States Embassy, the Metropolitan Police and local community groups.

These partnerships help address another barrier to success for young people. Most of the students have a deficit in social and cultural capital, and the partnerships have made a difference in this sense.

The links and partnerships the school has developed enable it to channel the energies and time of young vulnerable people into positive activities and to cultivate a volunteering culture.

*'When I arrived in the country at 13, I was a bit scared, with low confidence. I was encouraged to participate in something called the Big Local and started to participate in activities and then volunteering.'*

*Through this, my English and confidence grew, and I am now in my final year at Cranford, looking to study Medicine at University.*<sup>23</sup>

The school has also shown leadership in the community, most recently setting up a foodbank during the early months of Covid-19 and establishing a vaccination centre, actions aimed at supporting a vulnerable community.

The school is an example of how youth workers and schools can work together to ensure better outcomes for young people and reduce the risk and conditions of radicalisation.

**Table 8: Relevant stakeholders and their role regarding partnership and cooperation with other experts.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At all education levels, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• School leaders</li> <li>• Youth workers</li> <li>• Policymakers</li> </ul>	<p>At all levels of education, the roles of stakeholders are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively partner with youth workers and youth organisations by opening the school to other stakeholders and respecting their field of expertise.</li> <li>• Proactively partner with youth workers and youth organisations and other community stakeholders. Provide resources (time) for teachers to cooperate with youth workers. Make sustainable partnerships and dedicate time to finding a common vision.</li> <li>• Proactively partner with schools, teachers and other community stakeholders. Find a common vision with partners and aim for sustainable partnerships.</li> <li>• Support flexible policies that allow easy partnerships between different departments at city and state level. Promote sustainability with long-term funding.</li> </ul>

## Competing priorities

Prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism is not the only important issue that the youth and education sector must deal with. Formal schools are of course preoccupied with the curricula they follow and the skills students are required to learn as part of their education. Youth workers have their own agenda, depending on the kind of work they do with young people. But the basic mandate for each sector is not the only thing detracting priority from prevention work.

Since early 2020, the battle with Covid-19 has been ongoing, and there is no comprehensive understanding of its long-term impact yet, but the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)<sup>24</sup> and other global organisations have already declared that Covid-19 has caused the biggest decline in education in history. Only when schools are again able to return to in-person teaching in classrooms without too many restrictions, will the real impact be seen. Educators might feel that their priority for the coming years is to minimise the learning gaps, and therefore focus more heavily on the academic side of education. The downside of this approach is that other elements and concerns may be considered non-essential.

However, many parents, educators and leaders are worried about the psychological effect that the lockdowns and isolation have had on children and young people. The education sector is seeing a rise in the discourse on the importance of understanding how students feel and is providing them with skills that build their

<sup>23</sup> 17 year old student at Cranford Community College, September 2020.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Education: From disruption to recovery*. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

resilience so they can face challenges in future. This holistic view is gaining ground, and the momentum should be used wisely. The skills required for PVE are the same skills that children and young people need for their future well-being, where they can cope with difficulties, be critical thinkers, discuss controversial topics peacefully, understand different people, cultures and religions and have meaningful and respectful relationships. This would be a good time to highlight the expertise that exists within RAN Y&E and share some of the most relevant material, such as the paper *Transforming schools into labs for democracy*.

**Table 9: Relevant stakeholders and their roles in supporting diverse skills and needs.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At all education levels, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• School leaders</li> <li>• Youth workers</li> <li>• Policymakers</li> </ul>	<p>At all levels of education, the roles of stakeholders are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be mindful that academic skills do not compete with softer skills; instead, they support each other.</li> <li>• Promote a school culture where academic achievements are not the only priority. Make time for teachers to focus on democratic values and students' well-being at school.</li> <li>• Be mindful of all the needs of young people in the area. Sometimes the loudest voices are not the most urgent. Reach out in different ways to the youth.</li> <li>• Support policies and programmes that pursue a holistic view of education and well-being of young people. Speak out in support of student well-being, not just academic achievement.</li> </ul>

## Online activity

There is a significant body of work evaluating and analysing the impact of online activity on violent extremism.

What is likely to be the impact of online activity on violent extremism in the future? What issues still need to be addressed?

Perhaps the biggest issue mentioned throughout this paper is that of the training of practitioners and the delivery of digital skills. The key is to create the capacity and culture, which calls for a national effort. There are pockets of excellence on delivery of digital skills, but too often they rely on the passion and dedication of individuals. To have meaningful impact, there needs to be a digital skills strategy that is supported on a national basis. While most countries cover digital skills in their curricula, there is still an over-emphasis on transactional skills and programming.

One of the biggest dangers of online activity for young people is the absence of a trusted adult in the environment. In a recent RAN Y&E meeting, Dutch police presented their work in gaming, where police officers join gaming forums and engage with young people there. Is this a direction that youth work could also take? Further discussion and research is needed on digital youth work, including how education can play a part.

One thing that has changed is that online activity has been subsumed into many more people's lives, particularly over the past 2 years. Although this had been the case previously with young people, Covid-19 has increased reliance on online activity and it has become more mainstream. Therefore, should we change our perspective, and consider online activity a part of everyday life for society today? Should we stop viewing it as a separate part of life? If we do so, then how will our approach to online activity be defined? The reality is that online activity is part of almost everyone's lives. The degree to which it is part of people's lives varies, and not exclusively by age. For example, some young people do not use social media at all, while some 60-year-olds are avid users. A key consideration is how occupied and active a person is in other contexts. If the answer is not much, then online activity may well fill that void but that may also present a vulnerability.

The importance of the link between online activity and radicalisation is likely to continue to grow, which makes it critically important that all practitioners and policymakers develop clear strategies for dealing with this evolving problem.

**Table 10: Relevant stakeholders and their roles regarding digital skills and the online world.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At all education levels, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers</li> <li>School leaders</li> <li>Youth workers</li> <li>Policymakers</li> </ul>	<p>At all levels of education, the roles of stakeholders are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demand digital skills training. Listen actively to students when they are talking about their online experience. Consult local experts in this field, if you have concerns.</li> <li>Organise digital skills training for your staff; ensure that there are enough teachers who have the appropriate skills. Partner with local online experts for additional skill resources.</li> <li>Engage with young people online; stay abreast of new trends and developments. Demand digital skills training. Partner with local online experts.</li> <li>Support national/EU digital skills strategy development and related sustainable resources.</li> </ul>

## Gaming

The key concern about gaming centres on the socialising aspects of gaming-adjacent spaces. A number of platforms such as Twitch allow right-wing and Islamist extremists to recruit openly. Unlike other online forums, they do little to hide their identity in many gaming (-adjacent) spaces.

This is an area needing urgent attention both in terms of research and of practical strategies for education and youth workers. There is likely to be an enormous knowledge gap with both these groups. Right-wing extremist activity is an area of particular concern. This should be approached cautiously, since there is no evidence to suggest that gamers are more susceptible to radicalisation. What we do know, however, is that extremists are present in this space, and they are spreading hate on numerous platforms.

Does gaming provide an opportunity for P/CVE work? Could this be an additional tool for educators and youth workers? The answer is almost certainly yes, with the caveat that it would have to be at the same high-quality level of production that commercial games use, which will make it expensive. P/CVE resources have been developed to mimic social media, but the design is low quality and as such, the impact will be low.

There are implications for parental knowledge too. Beyond the actual playing of a game, few parents are likely to be aware of the communication and networking aspect of gaming platforms (chat functions, forums, servers, etc.), and many would be shocked and surprised by the nature of the posts and content.

Beyond potentially using or even developing games for P/CVE purposes, practitioners' general knowledge of digital subcultural spaces such as the gaming sphere needs to be improved in a way that accommodates the scarce time and financial resources of first-line practitioners. Additionally, potential ways of intervening within these spaces need to be further explored. For further information on this topic, readers can refer to papers on [gaming-adjacent platforms](#) and [gamification](#), both in the context of P/CVE.

**Table 11: Stakeholder roles regarding games and gaming sites.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At all education levels, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers</li> </ul>	<p>At all levels of education, the roles of stakeholders are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gain a greater understanding of gaming and its impact through training. Potentially employ young people to help address the knowledge gap.</li> </ul>

- School leaders
- Youth workers
- Policy makers
- Organise gaming training for your staff; ensure there are enough teachers who have the appropriate skills. Partner with local online experts for additional skill resources.
- Engage with young people online; stay abreast of new trends and developments. Demand gaming training. Partner with local online experts.
- Support national/EU gaming strategy development through further research.

## Peer-to-peer learning

Many RAN EDU meetings touched on peer-to-peer models of delivery; this is an area which would benefit from further exploration and development.

There is significant research on peer-to-peer learning, showing the benefits to all from such an approach. Peer-to-peer learning has successfully been employed in many high-ranking universities worldwide and is often used in classrooms. Could and should we be applying this to P/CVE programmes? The answer must be a resounding yes. The traditional peer-to-peer model involves young people of the same age. Another model, similar to the peer-to-peer one, may also be worth exploring and may be more appropriate in the field of violent extremism where young people are used to influence a younger age group.

### Case study: Hear our voices

This a youth-led project aiming to challenge terrorism and highlight and respond to the threat from those who promote it. Two separate strands come together in a combined performance.

#### Strand 1

Secondary school children devised three short drama pieces around the following themes.

- Violence, terrorism, hatred and you. The consequences of terrorism to family, friends and our communities.
- What to do if you are worried that a friend or family member is becoming radicalised.
- The consequences to the family of bringing extremism into the home.

The children, aged 11 to 14, devised their plays with the help and support of a team of professional writers and director. The concept and words were all theirs: it was important for the integrity of the project that they had ownership.

#### Strand 2

This involved two half-day or one full-day creative writing workshops. In nine primary schools across Hounslow, Year 5 students worked with a professional writer, looking at British/fundamental values and reviewing what it means to be British. Eight of the nine schools are located in highly multicultural areas. The aim was to write short stories/poems around these themes, and deliver them at the combined performance. Approximately 647 primary school children and 34 primary school teachers and members of the Senior Leadership Team were involved in this strand.

#### Stand 3

The third strand was a combined performance of the plays and stories at the primary school. The three core plays were performed at all nine schools; however, the stories were performed by the children from that primary school. Parents from the performing children's school were invited to attend the performances.

The above exercise is an example of 'near peer' action, using the power of older children's voices to deliver the message. It is also an example of breaking down the taboo of discussing violent extremism with primary school children.

Below is an extract from an email sent by a parent to a primary headteacher.

*When I left the drama production by the secondary school and Year 5 students yesterday, I was in two minds, unsure if I wanted my innocent child exposed to such terror.*

*I remained unsure until this morning, when I heard of the horror that had taken the lives and injured innocent children at last night's concert.*

*I wanted to thank you for identifying the need and addressing this sensitive subject with Year 5 students. The production was a great way of educating both parents and children on ways in which we can tackle this issue together and protect one another.*

As practitioners, we must remember that young people want to be involved: they are a significant part of the solution in CVE and overlooking them means we are missing a crucial tool in our box. Although young people are keen to take this opportunity, practitioners are often afraid to relinquish control. While it may not be the quickest and easiest option, the investment in training delivers a high-quality outcome.

RAN YOUNG provides a voice and networking opportunity for young adults over the age of 18, but those under the age of 18 do not have a dedicated platform. Under 18s are best placed to relate to the challenges faced by young people today, and with support, they are also able to contribute to the solutions.

There are many good examples of peer-to-peer actions amongst young adults, e.g. Facebook's Global Digital Challenge and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) Youth Civil Activism Network (YouthCAN), now in the Young Cities project, which are challenging violent extremism, but are not focused as much on school-aged children.

Another excellent example of peer-to-peer working at a young age is the Peaceable School Model. This is used in primary schools and is an excellent age-appropriate way of training children in the key skills and critical thinking needed to build resilience.

There are many examples where peer-to-peer learning is used in youth work, with young people being trained to run activities like youth clubs. Many practitioners are hesitant for a number of reasons: concern over the possibility that something may go wrong, loss of 'expert' status, and lack of time to invest in crucial training. These barriers can be overcome, with the key being high-quality training and suitable support. Young people in many cases can be very capable allies who can be trusted.

**Table 12: Stakeholder roles regarding peer-to-peer learning.**

Stakeholder	Role
<p>At all education levels, the stakeholders for P/CVE are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• School leaders</li> <li>• Youth workers</li> <li>• Policymakers</li> </ul>	<p>At all levels of education, the roles of stakeholders are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve students more; view older students as a resource and role model for younger ones. Think outside the box to create peer-to-peer models.</li> <li>• Be open to new peer-to-peer models within the school system and provide resources for them. Recognise the importance of such resources, especially for at-risk students. Build partnerships with the community and with the informal education sector.</li> <li>• Use older youth as champions for the younger ones; partner with schools and the informal education sector in the local community. Organise training for peer-to-peer champions.</li> <li>• Promote and resource informal learning models like peer-to-peer learning. Try to become involved by sharing your stories or by highlighting young people who have succeeded 'against the odds'.</li> </ul>

## Dissemination

In many ways, the topic of dissemination brings us back to the question of RAN's purpose. The past 6 years have shown that RAN can produce output and outcomes that can be realistically implemented. The big question is, who is aware of this? Who needs to know about it?

The RAN library is an impressive collection of a wide range of papers on radicalisation. But how many visitors does the library have? What is its purpose? Is it for researchers or practitioners? Who knows about it? The work carried out in the RAN EDU meeting in Dublin needs to be further developed, and a strategy developed for implementation.

We wanted to highlight this issue as a separate concern. We believe that key documents do not reach practitioners in education and youth work, and valuable information is missed by those who need it the most.

RAN documents are disseminated in widely different ways across Europe, if they are disseminated systematically at all. In some countries, a government office or agency is responsible for dissemination (Denmark, the Netherlands and Finland). In others, one person who is a member of the working group uses their own professional network to disseminate the material (Belgium). There are few countries able to identify the dissemination process at all, so one can only wonder how dissemination is achieved in other countries.<sup>25</sup>

Even if the dissemination process were clear in all Member States, there is so much variety in policies, government bodies and school partners, that the material would require not only translation (to the local language) but also an accompanying text at the very least, to link the issue and its relevance to the national and local context. Then the material would have a bigger impact, as it would be more easily applicable in the local context.

In the meeting in Dublin (2019), these dissemination issues were discussed and a dissemination model known as GAMMA+ was proposed, but there has not been any formal follow-up on whether this proposal was adopted in any Member States.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to know if there are any results or new ways to disseminate the material.

Some of the work is still very relevant today. Especially with the Covid-19 pandemic continuing and issues polarising, papers such as *RAN POL and EDU meeting on 'Polarisation management'*,<sup>27</sup> *COVID-19 narratives that polarise*,<sup>28</sup> and a paper that RAN EDU contributed to, the *RAN Polarisation Management Manual*, could be valuable for the education and youth sectors in all Member States.

Another current issue is the situation in Afghanistan and the effect that the Taliban taking over has had on people leaving the country. All Member States will be faced with new influx of refugees and asylum seekers. Teachers and schools should be prepared for new arrivals, and have skills and strategies in place for how to deal with traumatised students. For this, RAN EDU papers such as *Building resilience among young children raised in extremist environments – specifically child returnees*<sup>29</sup> and *Safeguarding troubled refugee children in the classroom*<sup>30</sup> could be very useful, as teachers and schools need to be particularly sensitive to the needs of these new arrivals.

Dissemination formats is another issue needing consideration. While a few videos have been produced on particular topics, short videos featuring the highlights and outcomes of each meeting could be produced and launched on social media, raising awareness of the work of RAN Y&E.

It is clear that this topic of effective dissemination needs to be picked up again within the working group. The valuable work carried out under RAN EDU and now under RAN Y&E should not go to waste, but should be transmitted to practice and policy in all Member States for the sectors of both youth and education. Making dissemination accessible is key to making it effective. The RAN library is an impressive collection, but whom does it serve? Policymakers, academics and researchers will undoubtedly make use of this valuable resource; teachers and youth workers, however, are very unlikely to do so. Perhaps a different approach is needed, to make knowledge and actions easier for these groups to access.

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<sup>25</sup> Lenos & Krasenberg, *Making a difference: The dissemination and implementation of RAN EDU lessons for PVE-E*.

<sup>26</sup> Lenos & Krasenberg, *Making a difference: The dissemination and implementation of RAN EDU lessons for PVE-E*.

<sup>27</sup> Lenos & Keltjens, *RAN POL and EDU meeting on 'Polarisation management'*.

<sup>28</sup> Wansink & Timmer, *COVID-19 narratives that polarise*.

<sup>29</sup> Peresin, *Building resilience among young children raised in extremist environments – specifically child returnees*.

<sup>30</sup> Peresin, *Safeguarding troubled refugee children in the classroom*.

## Recommendations

RAN EDU and now RAN Y&E have taken big steps forward since the original *Manifesto for Education* was published in 2015. Participants attending the different meetings have certainly strengthened their capacity in P/CVE and have taken the lessons learnt to their stakeholders. Ex post papers and the different thematic papers that the working groups have produced have brought the issues to bigger audiences across the EU Member States. Despite these steps forward, there are still issues that need to be addressed in future, and events that have unfolded since then, such as terror attacks and the global pandemic, have created additional challenges.

The whole education sector is facing its biggest challenge in educational history due to the Covid-19 pandemic that closed schools globally. One year into the pandemic, close to half the world's students are still affected by partial or full school closures, and over 100 million further children will fall below the minimum proficiency level in reading as a result of the health crisis. Remote teaching and lockdowns have negatively impacted many students who were unable to keep up with their studies, resulting in a big academic gap between students. Schools are, understandably, concerned about academic skills and are struggling to get students back on track so they will have the skills and knowledge needed to complete their education.

This learning gap, however, should not take priority over all else. RAN Y&E needs to keep P/CVE work front and centre even more than before, because teachers and youth workers must be aware of what students have experienced in the time spent away from school and youth work. The academic gap is therefore not the only concern: student welfare also needs to be considered, as does taking stock of experiences during the pandemic. There must be a shift from competing priorities to complementary priorities.

The issue of training features in all RAN documents. More must be done to turn this into action in the Member States. The training focus for different stakeholders (teachers, school leaders, youth workers, etc.) must be relevant to each person's specific line of work – one size does not fit all. There should be a strong push for proactive rather than reactive action on training. In addition, as the murder of Samuel Paty in France in 2020 highlighted, teachers and youth workers engaging in this crucial work urgently need to be supported.

Over the years, a number of good practices and programmes have been accumulated in the RAN collection. The issue to consider with these good practices is that long-term programmes are needed, rather than very short one-off pilots. If the funding is short term, and results are sought after just a few months, then the given practice is not very sustainable. Long-term programmes will have deeper impact, but also allow more time for monitoring and evaluations, an element still somewhat lacking from the good practices.

A regional network would address the issues that all EU Member States are facing. However, work is carried out unevenly across different Member States. In future, the network must design a strategy to involve all Member States and their stakeholders. P/CVE issues concern all educators and youth workers across the continent and they should be given the opportunity for capacity building and information exchange in this field.

Apart from ensuring geographic equity, there is also a need to understand the equal importance of P/CVE work across all levels of education. This relates particularly to the primary education sector. If P/CVE work is begun in an age-appropriate way during the primary school years, a foundation will already be in place before outside influences can distance young people from the influence of school and families. Moreover, there are children in primary schools who are being raised in radicalised families or hail from conflict/Daesh-controlled areas. Therefore, long-term programmes built within primary school curricula are needed.

It is clear that a strategy is needed for better dissemination in future. The vast amount of P/CVE-related material needs to find its way to practitioners in all Member States, but at the same time, practitioners must be able to communicate with policymakers. Therefore, forums for such dialogue must be created at national as well as transnational levels.

The issues of non-violent extremism and the online environment, as these relate to violent extremism, must be further investigated. Practitioners need not only more information on these issues but also guidance on

how to deal with them in classrooms and youthwork. They must ensure that non-violent extremism does not become violent, and must also stay abreast of related developments online.

In the fight against violent extremism, education and youth work must engage the support and partnership of a number of key players: teachers/lecturers, school/university leaders, youth workers and national/local government. Supporting players can make the task of the principal players far more effective. Supporting players include health, social work and police agencies as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other third sector organisations. It is vital that action on violent extremism is conducted not in isolation but collaboratively – a key factor for success is the acknowledgement and inclusion of stakeholders in a given scenario.

## Recommendations in brief

1. Keep P/CVE work front and centre in the post-pandemic world; observe carefully to see what has changed and what needs to be addressed.
2. Prioritise the training of teachers, school leaders and youth workers. Staff must be trained before any polarisation or radicalisation issues arise. Training must also be given to the different stakeholders involved: teachers, school leaders, youth workers and young people all have a different angle on the issues.
3. Focus more on long-term programmes that will have meaningful impact for years to come. We must move away from the 'tick box' culture if programmes are to be successful.
4. Look across primary and secondary school curricula to build on previous years' work, so as to consolidate prior learning.
5. Primary school education needs to focus on P/CVE (in an age-appropriate way) as much as secondary school education does.
6. Develop a strategy and framework for greater integration of education and youth work.
7. Create a forum for meaningful dialogue between practitioners and policymakers, and formulate clear outcomes from such meetings.
8. Further develop and update strategies on polarisation, both in the classroom and the community.
9. Move from competing priorities to complementary priorities. Practitioners understand the importance of safeguarding and are more receptive to programmes that address a number of safeguarding issues.
10. Further research and strategies are needed on non-violent extremism and the ways for education and youth work to deal with it effectively.
11. Further develop a communication strategy for dissemination.
12. Develop a strategy for practitioners to deal effectively with the online environment, as it evolves.
13. Further research and strategies are needed on the impact of factors like the pandemic on young people's mental health and the risks of being drawn into violent extremism.

In summary, practitioners are on the right path and in a good position to face the challenges ahead, for both education and youth work. How successful we are is dependent on all key players staying focused and not allowing distractions to halt or reduce their impact on P/CVE.

## Further reading

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## Appendix

### 2015-2021 RAN activity summary

The original *Manifesto for Education* in 2015 was a call to action, to help empower educators and schools to deal with the ever-increasing threat of violent extremism spreading across Europe in the mid 2010s. Various acts of violent extremism had revealed a lack of preparedness for dealing with this upsurge in largely Islamic violent extremism. Education and schools were identified as key players in this battle. It was clear from the start of RAN EDU's work that practitioners had a key role to play, but also that practice and knowledge was dissipated, with pockets of best practice operating at individual school or regional levels and with a few examples of national initiatives.

The Manifesto for Education was discussed at a RAN conference in March 2015, with over 90 practitioners attending from across the EU. The educators identified the key themes listed below. This paper evaluates how effective RAN EDU has been in addressing these key themes.

1. Investing in training.
2. Holding difficult conversations.
3. Offering alternatives.
4. Building educator networks and hotlines.
5. Achieving a greater understanding of online activity.
6. Publishing testimonials of victims or formers.
7. Developing a clear vision on how to deal with radicalisation and extremism in schools.
8. Creating an innovative curriculum to build on critical thinking, democratic values and conflict resolution.
9. Enriching the curriculum with online tools.
10. Utilising extracurricular activity in recognition of a crowded curriculum.
11. Leading by example, e.g. school ethos.
12. Recognising the importance of partnership work.
13. Involving students in prevention initiatives.
14. Building cooperation between schools and law enforcement, parents and families, NGOs and other organisations.
15. Addressing the subject of radicalisation in teacher training (secondary).
16. At government level, the Manifesto for Education called for governments to create the conditions to allow schools to be effective in preventing radicalisation, while recognising that each school has very individual circumstances. It was recommended that governments should view their role as one of facilitator rather than controller.

Over the next 5 years, RAN EDU met around four times a year to discuss themes related to the above key issues. Annual plenaries were a good way to review progress and set the agenda for the coming year, allowing current trends to be acknowledged and addressed.

### RAN Youth, Families and Communities

The RAN Youth, Families and Communities (YF&C) working group did not produce a manifesto but they did have a kick-off meeting in January 2016. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the long-term agenda and decide on concrete deliverables.

The key themes identified at this meeting were:

1. finding and disseminating best practice,
2. the role of social media and the internet in radicalisation,
3. empowerment of marginalised (often migrant) young people,

4. youth culture,
5. the role of gender,
6. training and familiarisation of youth workers,
7. accessibility to families,
8. family dynamics,
9. dialogue skills,
10. reciprocal radicalisation (polarisation),
11. the role of religious communities,
12. establishing and maintaining relations with communities,
13. the relationship between integration and radicalisation.

Like RAN EDU, RAN YF&C was also able to review and update topics for discussion through the annual plenary.

## Topics

Over the 5 years, RAN EDU was able to address all the key themes in their meetings, to varying degrees of depth. The focus of the meetings, particularly in the early years, was Islamic extremism (which reflected the times). As concerns grew for travellers to Syria, refugees and then returnees, the meetings' topics reflected those concerns.

The focus of most meetings was on secondary education, with one meeting on higher education and a part-meeting to discuss primary education.

Joint meetings were held with other RAN groups, including RAN Police and Law Enforcement (RAN POL) and RAN Health and Social Care (RAN H&SC), although interestingly, never RAN YF&C, which is perhaps where the greatest overlap lay.

The key themes identified by RAN YF&C were also addressed during this period. Joint meetings were held with RAN POL and RAN Local Authorities (RAN LOCAL).

Some themes were addressed through papers produced by RAN EDU, such as school ethos in Transforming Schools into labs for Democracy. Others may need further development.

In conclusion, during the 5-year period, the key themes were addressed, but the impact of the outcome of the meetings is beyond the scope of this paper.

## Meetings

Meetings generally spanned 2 days, with participants arriving in the morning and departing the following evening. This structure provided an important opportunity for practitioners to network and reflect. The significance and impact of this opportunity should not be underestimated; current online meetings have highlighted the importance of such opportunities. Before the meeting, participants received an ex ante paper, and after the meeting, an ex post paper that summarised the discussions and provided an outcome.

The meeting structure was as follows. Day 1 was focused on setting the scene and looking at best practice on the given topic. Day 2 focused on producing the outcome from the meeting. Again, this seems to have worked well with all meetings, providing some excellent outcomes which could be used by practitioners.

Both groups have discussed dissemination and identified it as a key area if the work undertaken is to have any impact. At the RAN EDU meeting in Dublin, a dissemination strategy was developed. The question is, what happens next?

There appears to be a disconnect between practitioners and policymakers, which limits the impact of the work. RAN EDU were explicit in what they felt was needed from policymakers in their first meeting; however,

there is little evidence to indicate this has been met. A number of cross-group high-level meetings were held; however, their impact and outcomes are uncertain.

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