
When Counterterrorism Enters the Curriculum: How the Global War on Terror Risks Impairing Good Education

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Abstract

This article outlines and critically discusses the securitisation of the counter-radicalisation efforts in Norwegian schools. More specifically, it explores perceptions offered by educators and youth social workers through interviews with 23 practitioners on the topic of preventing youth extremism. Through the narratives of these practitioners, the paper reveals a belief that education can contribute to counter-radicalisation efforts, by focusing on relational pedagogy, social interaction and the safeguarding of vulnerable youth. Nevertheless, the article outlines a concerning discursive practice, in which young Muslims are frequently framed as vulnerable to being radicalised towards violent extremism. There is, however, evidence of both hegemony and resistance regarding the framing of Islam as a security threat, as many practitioners state that the stigmatising and polarising portrayal of Muslim youth in politics and the media can affect progressive, liberal and inclusive education. Finally, it is suggested that practitioners remain relatively unaware of how the assumption driven radicalisation discourse extends from the Global War on Terror, which is widely criticised for its informal criminalisation of Islam.

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Introduction

The September 11, 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks constitute what Thomas Birkland (2004) calls a “triggering event”, in the way that they brought tremendous attention to the issue of terrorism, essentially placing it at the top of geopolitical agendas. Congruously referred to as the “Global War on Terror” (Mattsson, 2018), this idiom used to describe this doctrine represents an array of security policies that have significantly influenced the way that terrorism is dealt with in politics, media and public life. Perhaps most notably through the

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construction of the “radicalisation discourse”, where terrorism is portrayed as an end-product of individuals who have undergone radicalisation processes (Sedgwick, 2010). The radicalisation discourse is loaded with assumptions, and few have felt its derogatory effects more than Muslims who routinely find themselves being racially profiled or categorised as suspect communities (Kundnani, 2009). Nearly two decades after the 9/11-attacks, this framing remains profound as the securitisation of young Muslims as a social category has become all too real (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2017).

According to Silke (2008), some commentators have argued that we are, in fact, experiencing a new age of terrorism. This view, which is sometimes referred to simply as “new terrorism”, sees terrorists foremost as devoted religious fanatics, who are committed to carrying out more brutal and indiscriminate violence (Laqueur, 2011). Policymakers have largely adopted this view, claiming under the pretext of counterterrorism, that urgency is the new normal, which, needless to say, requires exceptional measures (Ramsay, 2017). In this political climate, the integration, or rather “securitisation”, of public sector services into the War on Terror is commonly occurring across Europe (Lindekilde, 2012a). Schools and universities are at the forefront of the securitisation of public sector services and, while an argument can be made that education should play a role in the formation of democratic attitudes in future generations, extremism-related issues are saturated with ethical, practical and philosophical dilemmas. Critics are, therefore, apprehensive about the chilling effects that the Global War on Terror with its radicalisation discourse can have on educational systems (Sjøen & Jore, 2019).

This article studies the securitisation of counterterrorism measures in Norwegian schools. By drawing on in-depth interviews with 23 practitioners (educators and social workers), the research presented in this article shows how there is an attempt to recontextualise the Global War on Terror’s radicalisation discourse into educational discourse and possibly practice. Through detailed empirical research, the study pursues the question of *how counterterrorism measures can affect inclusive education in Norwegian schools*. Background questions are organised around the participants’ understanding of:

1. The political, religious or ideological movements or groups that they consider to constitute a threat of radicalisation and violent extremism in Norway.
2. The risk factors of radicalisation and violent extremism among students that they are particularly observant of in their professional preventive practice.

The research is influenced by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as authored by Norman Fairclough (2010). A principal objective with CDA is to study how power is carried out, reproduced and legitimised by connecting power, dominance and injustice on a macro level, with language, discourse and communication on the societal micro-level (Van Dijk, 2017). This is fittingly for this research, which aims to show how counterterrorism measures are explicitly and implicitly framing Muslims in politics, media and public life, and how this may impair safe and inclusive educational environments in schools. Hence, we lean on what Lindekilde (2012b) describes as the need to understand the negative experiences of security policies, as this should be the most worrisome from a societal or policymaking position.

The present study finds that the framing of Muslims as vulnerable to radicalisation can be found in educational discourse and possibly practice, as expressed by the practitioners. Yet, there is evidence of both hegemony and resistance among these practitioners, who also state that the negative framing of immigrants and Muslims under the pretext of security can affect progressive, liberal and inclusive education. Foreseeable, as the radicalisation discourse blurs the lines between political agendas: here, national security concerns and immigration policies (Sedgwick, 2010). This blurring of lines places practitioners in the space of uncertainty, as the radicalisation discourse allegedly caters to safeguarding principles for first-line workers, while the stigmatising effects of extremism-related issues are more inclined to cause polarisation and disintegration. Thus, in the words of Heath-Kelly and Strausz (2019, p. 1), there really is nothing radically different between the criticised Global War on Terror and what appears to be a greater accepted responsibility, at least by practitioners (Sjøen & Jore, 2019, p. 8), for preventing youth from being radicalised towards violent extremism.

The counterterrorist classroom

Historical analysis reveals that education, in its broadest sense, holds a long tradition as a promoter of peace and political stability (Sargent, 1996). This also applies in Norway, where the creation of public schools in the late 19th century was, in part, a political attempt to restrain young people from adhering to monistic or extremist doctrines (Solerød, 2005). The modern merger of counterterrorism and education, however, developed from increasing concerns about homegrown terrorism. Following the events of the 9/11 attacks and the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) bombings, a new policy field involving counter-radicalisation programmes² started to emerge in Europe (Lindekilde, 2012a). Driven by an innate fear of the threat from “within”, European counterterrorism measures were reconfigured towards visible and overt counter-radicalisation efforts, as schools and universities were given an ever-greater responsibility to provide national security from threats of homegrown terrorists (Dresser, 2018).

Unsurprisingly, the role of educational systems as the first line of defence in counter-radicalisation efforts is a controversial subject (Gearon, 2013). Although it was envisioned, at least by policymakers, that the terms “radicalisation” and “violent extremism” would be less judgemental than “terrorism”, the radicalisation discourse seems to have reinforced existing normative and political connotations of the terrorist label (Kundnani, 2009). Perhaps more concerning, the radicalisation discourse conflates non-violent political expressions with terrorism, which equates different forms of political activism with political violence (Onursal & Kirkpatrick, 2019). Moreover, placing education at the forefront of preventive efforts have revealed a host of challenges (Mitchell, 2016). For instance, education now holds the confounding role of being viewed as both the cause of and cure for terrorism, although this is certainly more the case for universities than it is for schools (Brown & Saeed, 2015). On the one hand, it seems reasonable to argue that perhaps education can and should do more to help

² In this article, “radicalisation discourse” is used in respect of the prevailing belief that radicalisation comprises processes which can lead seemingly non-radical individuals towards violent extremism and terrorism (Sedgwick, 2010). “Counter-radicalisation” efforts, on the other hand, refer to the plethora of terms used to describe policies, programmes and initiatives aimed at preventing radicalisation and violent extremism (Gielen, 2017).

students unlearn, desist or disengage from extremist beliefs or behaviours (Davies, 2008). Yet, political agendas across Europe appear less attentive towards how liberal, progressive and inclusive pedagogy can be used to counterweigh extremist narratives, focusing rather on how educational institutions themselves are so-called “risky” contexts, where students might be exposed to radical and dangerous ideas (Streitwieser, Allen & Duffy-Jaeger, 2019).

Despite a proliferation of literature on counter-radicalisation efforts, the majority stemming from the UK, research on the effectiveness of such approaches in education remains inconclusive (Feddes & Gallucci, 2015; Gielen, 2017; Isabella et al., 2019; Sjøen & Jore, 2019). This comes as little surprise, as there are no rigorous effect evaluations of educational preventive efforts against radicalisation (Sklad & Park, 2017). Much has been written on the need to help students to think critically and to act morally (Davies, 2014; Miller, 2013), and there are indications that educators prefer to carry out counter-radicalisation efforts through civic education and democratic citizenship (Sjøen & Jore, 2019). This seems uncontroversial, as helping students to develop democratic and peaceful skills, competences and attitudes can fulfil key pedagogical functions in education, as well as contribute towards preventive interventions (Sklad & Park, 2017). Yet, as argued by Harris-Hogan, Barrelle and Smith (2019), there are clear limitations in the preventive expectations that are now placed on educators worldwide. Although education, as the common denominator for young people, cannot take a reluctant role in safeguarding students from a range of anti-social issues such as violent extremism, placing educators at forefront these efforts can result in wrongful identification and reporting of students. Such situations may further lead to feelings of discomfort, unsafety and exclusion for both students and educators alike. It seems that a more appropriate approach to preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in education can be achieved by facilitating learning environments and fostering social and democratic competences, which are required for “an individual to thrive in life and contribute actively in a democratic society” (Sklad & Park, 2017, p. 435). Consequently, a case can certainly be made for counter-radicalisation efforts being grounded in the different functions of what Biesta (2009) calls “good education”. The securitisation paradigm that

drives these counter-radicalisation efforts is, nevertheless, more focused on the unrealistic task of having practitioners predict which of the “vulnerable” students will eventually become a terrorist (Panjwani et al., 2018).

From an educational perspective, a vulnerability approach to preventing radicalisation and violent extremism is preferred over the “vilification” of young extremists (Sieckelinck, Kaulingfreks & De Winter, 2015). After all, the vulnerability approach relies on safeguarding the well-being of young lives, which, although a contested subject, is commonly applied in most Western educational systems. Yet, the vulnerability approach has its own set of challenges, and research remains inconclusive as to whether they work as intended (O’Donnell, 2016b). What is more, vulnerability factors as outlined in counter-radicalisation policies can render many types of behaviours or expressions signs of radicalisation (O’Donnell, 2017). This raises the question of support versus control, as the framing of prevention as safeguarding can result in the use of profiling and surveillance strategies (Dresser, 2018; Powell, 2016). An over focus on vulnerability approaches can also impair the agency and autonomy of those who will shape future democracy (Durodié, 2016). Yet, for Ramsay (2017), there is nothing intrinsically incoherent about thinking of particular subjects as both “vulnerable” and a “threat”. What is problematic for education, he claims, is the focus on vulnerability itself, as being vulnerable to new ideas might be said to define the condition of being a student (p. 153).

Existing research in Norway, although at an early stage, indicates that first-line workers such as educators and social workers, accept the professional responsibility to preventing young lives from being radicalised towards extreme violence and terrorism (Lid et al., 2016; Lid & Heierstad, 2019; Sjøen, 2019). The preferred approach among the practitioners in this research is to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism through relational pedagogy, social interaction and the safeguarding of vulnerable youth. Thus, it would appear that the educational narrative expressed in this research aligns somewhat with how the political landscape envision prevention, as seen in national policies and guidelines.

Deep down, prevention of radicalization and violent extremism is nothing but general

crime prevention. Whether a person ends up with a substance abuse problem, as a criminal or as a violent extremist, usually happens by chance and depends on “who gets to you first”. The common denominator is vulnerability (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, 2010, p. 8)

According to Lindekilde (2012b), the logic of neoliberal governance, which decentralises governmental tasks on first-line workers, may explain the ease with which such policies are integrated into practice. Yet, practitioners in a previous study described having little direct knowledge of counter-radicalisation policies, and it appears that the “everyday” political rhetoric and media framing of security issues has a significantly greater impact on how they form their understandings (Sjøen & Jore, in press).

Lid and Heierstad (2019) reflect on the Norwegian counter-radicalisation “model” and whether it can be characterised as geopolitically unique, especially in relation to the criticised British Prevent Strategy (Kundnani, 2009). While the Norwegian government, similar to many other European countries, drew on the earlier policy contribution from the UK, counter-radicalisation policies in Norway are argued to compliment counterterrorism strategies, the latter of which should be carried out by the police, security and intelligence services. Thus, it differs somewhat from the British model, which made counter-radicalisation efforts a statutory duty under its Counter Terrorism Act (Home Office, 2015). It has also been stated that Norwegian counter-radicalisation policies build on a general crime prevention framework that is grounded in the ideals and values of a democratic welfare state (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2014, p. 13). This, writes Lid and Heierstad (2019), is a crucial feature in the Norwegian model, as efficient prevention depends on genuine social, institutional and political trust among citizens and institutions. Past studies have shown that the population responded to the Norwegian 2011 terrorist attacks with increased “tolerance, democracy and openness”, which was different from recent responses to terrorist attacks in the Global War on Terror era (Solheim, 2018).

Perhaps there is some distinctiveness about the Norwegian model for preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. On this, Burgess (2009) has demonstrated that there is no European security, only European securities, each characterised by its own “national

cultures, institutional norms, political agendas, local perceptions and global needs” (p. 310). Yet, there seems to be something habitual and worrying about the integration of counter-radicalisation policies across Europe. For one thing, they appear to be driven more by geopolitical agendas than by any understanding or reflection of local needs and resources (Mattsson, 2019). Having examined media substantiation of counterterrorism measures in Norway, Jore (2016) argues that security policies are more influenced by international obligations as counterterrorism has gone from being a minuscule policy field pre the 9/11-attacks, to being described as a societal necessity and responsibility. Moreover, while democratic liberties were considered the main value when assessing counterterrorism measures in the past, such values are considered less important today (p. 111). A problematic consequence of this is shown in how the radicalisation discourse also affects Muslims in Norway, who sometimes turn to self-censoring practices in fear of experiencing social stigmatisation (Winsvold, Mjelde & Loga, 2019). This very much resembles experience from the UK, where the Prevent strategy has caused widespread informal criminalisation, targeting non-violent radicalism as if it were terrorism (Onursal & Kirkpatrick, 2019). Hence, caution should be issued in respect of any naïve assumptions about the “unique” Norwegian model and its impacts, as there is a good reason to suspect that much of the criticism that has emerged elsewhere in the world is also applicable in Norway.

Theoretical and methodological approach

This article studies the securitisation of counterterrorism measures in Norwegian schools. Based on a qualitative study carried out in 2017, the research explores how teachers and youth social workers perceive and approach the issue of preventing students from being radicalised towards extreme violence, as well as the potential risks and implications of securitising these preventive endeavours in education. The research is influenced by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as authored by Fairclough (2010). Situated within a realist tradition, CDA draws from a school of linguistics that emerged in Britain and Australia during the 1970s, which studied

how powerful “groups” control public discourse. According to Van Dijk (2017), CDA emphasises the linguistic-discursive dimensions of social and cultural phenomena, and he sums up the core principles of CDA as the “interdisciplinary approach to study social problems by showing how discursive practices legitimise, reproduce or challenge power abuse in society” (p. 322).

Borrowing from Michael Halliday’s (1925-2018) systemic functional linguistics, Fairclough (1992, 2010) has proposed the analytical approach of studying linguistic-discourse features through a three-dimensional framework. The framework comprises a “textual” level, a “discursive practice” level and a “social practice” level, although Fairclough later preferred the terms “events”, “social practice” and “social structures”. Analysis of the textual level involves studying any form of verbal and non-verbal linguistic features. The textual level is distinguished from the discursive level, which can be viewed as text in context (speech acts), although it cannot be separated from discursive or social practices. Discursive practices, where one produces and consumes texts are, nonetheless, also social practice. Yet, CDA differs from other discourse theories, as it views discourse as only one of many forms of social practice. Fairclough (2013) understands “social practice” as relatively stabilised forms of social activities; seeing discourse as social practice enables one to combine the perspectives of structure and action in research.

Definitional power is central in CDA, which relates to how “radicalisation”, “violent extremism” and “terrorism” are defined by policymakers or other powerful groups. After all, with definitional power also comes the ability to assign solutions to what is considered a problem (Birkland, 2004). CDA is a promising tool when analysing why some solutions (i.e. counter-radicalisation efforts) are accepted by an audience. Yet, it does not aim to simply explain how discourses constitute and are constituted by social practices; CDA also offers a normative critique by showing how phenomena, which may seem natural, are in fact dependent on historical, cultural and political conditions (Fairclough, 2010). This can be achieved by demonstrating how discourses are prone to change by drawing from other discourses, either explicitly through “intertextuality” or implicitly through “interdiscursivity”.

Another key concept in CDA is “recontextualisation”, understood as the extrication (or “colonisation”) of some parts of a text or discourse from of one domain to another (Fairclough, 2013). In this work, counterterrorism and education are understood as two different domains, each with its own discursive and social practices; this study is concerned with the recontextualisation of the radicalisation discourse into educational discourse and potential practice, and furthermore, whether the radicalisation discourse with its “apparent” solutions is accepted or rejected by the participants.

The primary data in this research is based on in-depth interviews carried out with 23 experienced practitioners during 2017. Sixteen of the research participants were educators working in lower and upper secondary schools, and the remaining seven participants were youth social workers. Practitioners were selected through non-probability sampling, with requests to participate in interviews being sent to small, medium and large schools in urban and rural places across Norway. Municipalities that had been encouraged by the Norwegian Government to introduce local action plans on the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism were prioritised in the sampling process (Office of the Prime Minister, 2014). These practitioners were selected based on them representing diverse social and pedagogical backgrounds in both lower and upper secondary schools. All the participants described incidents of personal concern of students radicalising in their professional practice, yet actual encounters with youth extremism varied across the sample. However, the sampling process in which request letters were sent to school leaders and administrators may have attracted research participants who hold strong opinions, or who are more than averagely confident about the subject at hand. Participation bias may therefore be present in this study, and this is further compounded by the small number of practitioners who were interviewed. However, the purpose of this exploratory research is to theorise about a crucial social issue, which at a later stage could be the subject of more precise investigation.

The interviews were loosely structured around an interview guide, but the participants were allowed to explore other related subjects. Findings presented in this article revolve around the main themes, namely the participants’ view on 1) what political, religious or

ideological movements or groups they considered to constitute a threat of radicalisation and violent extremism in Norway, and 2) what risk factors for radicalisation among students they have particularly observed in a preventive lens. Excerpts from these interviews are marked with “interviewee” followed by a number in the article, and an overview of the research participants is appended at the end of the text. Placed within realist philosophy, this research will also attempt to explain what causes the participants’ perceptions, by analysing policies, political rhetoric and media framing of these issues.

The participants were provided with information sheets and consent forms in respect of the research project, which adheres to the established ethics standards set by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). All interviews were transcribed verbatim before being analysed on a textual and a discursive level, which, although constituting different analytical levels (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), are integrated together in the article’s discussion. This article comprises three main sections. First, the empirical data exploring the two aforementioned themes are presented. Thereafter follows a section that brings attention to the hegemonic power of the radicalisation discourse, before educational resistance to the radicalisation discourse is discussed.

Safety for whom, security from what?

This study reveals a clear educational narrative on the need to prevent students from radicalising towards any form of extremism, with Islamic and right-wing extremist ideologies receiving the most attention from the participants. Previous research into this issue in Norway suggests that there are two different but educational approaches to prevention (Sjøen & Mattsson, in press). The first is a “narrow” form of prevention which sees practitioners as contributors to the alleviation of root causes of radicalisation, including feelings of personal adversity, deprivation, social exclusion, marginalisation and psychopathology. For these practitioners, counter-radicalisation efforts form part of a larger safeguarding duty aimed at protecting vulnerable students. The second and “wider” approach is aspired to by practitioners

who see the role of schools as being more indirect arenas for prevention. They describe the vulnerability approach as verging on pedagogical control and, thus, state that the role of schools should rather be to help youth become independent subjects, participating citizens and fellow human beings. Religion is by most accounts not considered a root cause of radicalisation among most of the participants (Sjøen & Mattsson, in press), but, as will be featured in this article, when participants describe the risk factors of radicalisation they observed, increased religious and cultural markers or expressions among students are most frequently mentioned.

Participants were asked whether they considered any type of political, religious or ideological movements or groups constituted the greatest risk of attracting young lives into extremist milieus, and furthermore, what groups they perceived to pose the greatest threat of extreme violence in Norway. Broadly speaking, this question yielded two responses with the majority of participants (20 of 23) viewing a combination of Islamist extremism and right-wing extremism as the largest threats, while a smaller segment (3 of 23) focused exclusively on Islamist extremism as shown in these excerpts:

It [terrorism] has become associated with Islam in recent years. I would like to say “obviously”, as the attacks in London, Paris, and now even Sweden shows what can happen when vulnerable people are hijacked by fundamentalist religious ideas (Interviewee 17)

Radicalisation and violent extremism are a problem that is of little relevance to us in our school. We are a small school with very few non-Western immigrants or Muslim students (Interviewee 13)

I believe that it [terrorism] is largely caused by extreme Islamic practice. However, I also believe that Muslims are the largest victims of this religious terrorism (Interviewee 6)

Islamist ideology has been at the core of societal, political and media attention on terrorism since the 9/11 attacks, and one may certainly anticipate that many draw on the role of Islamic

extremism when discussing these issues. The majority of participants, however, acknowledged a substantial threat from right-wing extremism and midway through the interview, one educator even remarked on his own bias.

I have been talking almost exclusively about Islamic terrorism throughout the interview, and I just realised that we [the school] were recently informed that the police had carried out a risk assessment and found that a local right-wing nationalist group constitutes the largest threat of extreme violence in this region (Interviewee 11)

Apparently, a right-wing group had established itself in the area of this participant's school; in its recruitment tactics, this extremist organisation specifically targeted young people. When asked why he would describe himself as being biased, he explained that he had not been accustomed to thinking of right-wing extremism in relation to terrorism prior to our interview, as it did not seem natural for him to associate these two issues together.

Most participants in this research, however, are quite vocal regarding the threat of right-wing extremism, as they are regarding Islamist extremism in Norway. This should come as little surprise, given Norway's historical experience with right-wing extremism (Bjørge, 1997) and, the 2011 right-wing terrorist attacks in Oslo and Utøya (Solheim, 2018). The participants' awareness of both right-wing and Islamist extremism seems warranted; yet, according to Crawford, Ebner and Hasan (2018), there is a symbiosis between these two phenomena, which magnifies the attention on extremism in general. In particular, there are concerns that increased focus on extremism-related issues may cause societal polarisation, stigmatisation and fear. Specifically, in relation to youth, some participants consider divisive rhetoric, especially anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments, to have become more mainstream in politics, the media and public domains, and that this could affect educational inclusion and tolerance.

A female Muslim student I know who was wearing a hijab had been harassed by an older woman on the bus. The woman had loudly declared to the girl and the rest of the passenger that come next election, the politicians would throw her "kind" out of this country (Interviewee 8)

It is becoming increasingly difficult for immigrant students to repeatedly have to read negative stories about immigrants in the media and from politicians. Even the question of wearing a hijab has now become a question of terrorism. I have to say, I am not particularly thrilled about the way that some politicians talk about other human beings these days (Interviewee 12)

According to practitioners, polarising and stigmatising experiences like these may affect their ability to provide safe and inclusive environments (Sjøen, 2019). Safe environments here are interpreted as educational arenas, where students can discuss contested issues in a constructive way. In a preventive lens, divisive rhetoric can perhaps even push non-radical students towards extremism. Available research in Norway suggests that Muslim youths who have been exposed to harassment are more prone to holding the view that there is a “war” between Islam and the West, while also showing the strongest support in defending the use of violence to achieve political change (Pedersen, Vestel & Bakken, 2018; Vestel & Bakken, 2016).

As previously suggested, the interview data reveal an educational narrative on the need to prevent students from being radicalised into any form of extremism. Yet, when delving into the more practical sides of prevention, some participants, probably unconsciously, draw a link between Islam and the threat of terrorism, as cultural and religious markers including growing beards or wearing traditional Islamic clothing, are viewed as vulnerability factors.

When students change their apparel and behaviours in this [religious] way, you have to be watchful of what is going on. For example, many of the foreign fighters who travelled from Norway were not deeply religious to begin with. They were perhaps struggling with personal or social problems. All of a sudden, they are dedicated Muslims with a clear purpose in their lives. These are situations where school and society have to be watchful (Interviewee 9)

After reading the book *Two Sisters* by [Åsne] Seierstad [a book depicting how two Norwegian-Somali sisters ventured from seemingly ordinary adolescent trajectories to becoming devoted Muslims heading to Syria to aid the Islamic State in 2013], I

realised that teachers should be much more observant of vulnerable youth who change the way they act and dress. This case shows what can happen when parents, teachers or society are not on proper alert (Interviewee 10)

Linking religious expression and vulnerability to radicalisation towards violent extremism in such a way brings to mind what O'Donnell (2017) calls identity prejudice. Although identity prejudice is not necessarily at play because practitioners hold such social stereotypes individually, it is rather because prejudice underpins the entire radicalisation discourse (p. 180). There were, rightly, some participants who had experience with students exhibiting extreme religious views in class or on social media, and one female educator talked about an encounter with a male Muslim student who did not want to participate during her teaching.

After this situation [a male Muslim student, supported by his father, refused to participate in physical education with a female teacher], we became particularly concerned with Muslim boys who displayed certain oppositional behaviours. For instance, openly expressing anti-female or anti-gay sentiments in class or on social media has become a big “red sign” for us. While these signs are not necessarily linked to radicalisation, they are, nevertheless, issues which we have to deal with in school (Interviewee 3)

Naturally, a situation like this may warrant pedagogical actions, such as counselling, parental conversation or perhaps a referral to other relevant actors. However, there are some practitioners who describe a practice of monitoring students, almost entirely based on the latter showing (increased) cultural or religious expressions. While monitoring and profiling strategies are often placed at the centre of counter-radicalisation efforts, they are not without their own problems. For instance, they seem to place education in the space of “pre-crime” preventive strategies where the focus is to stop crimes (terrorism) yet to be committed (Dresser, 2018; O'Donnell, 2017). Yet, the transition from childhood to adulthood is, after all, supposed to be a period of personal exploration and experimentation where feelings of opposition and protest behaviours can be commonplace (Erikson, 1968). For some young individuals, these transitions will involve increased resistance and adventure-seeking;

categorising them as potential terrorists can have a detrimental effect on the development of their identities, worldviews and agencies. Moreover, while profiling strategies are often applied in counter-radicalisation efforts, they have arguably proved to be ineffective approaches to counterterrorism (Horgan, 2014).

To summarise, the interview data shows a clear educational narrative to prevent young lives from being radicalised towards violent extremism. Although, in this context, there are a small number of practitioners who focus exclusively on Islamic extremism, the majority are quite vocal regarding the threat of right-wing extremism in Norway. Despite the fact that the majority believe they have a duty to prevent students from being radicalised towards any form of extremism, students who exhibit increased religiosity are often seen as more vulnerable to such radicalisation. This is troublesome, considering that the framing of students based on their religious or cultural expressions is a stigmatising and exclusionary practice. Related to this, there is also widespread concern among the participants regarding the negative experiences that immigrant students have to endure in this Global War on Terror “era”. According to participants, increasing polarisation is on the rise in Norway, which may affect their ability to provide safe and inclusive educational environments. Accordingly, it seems that these practitioners struggle to navigate between the educational discourse of inclusion and the dominant logic of the radicalisation discourse, with its negative framing of Islam as a threat to national security.

Counterterrorism as a hegemonic discourse of education

In analysis concerning how the radicalisation discourse, with its framing of Muslim youth as vulnerable “at risk” students, there is an attempt to recontextualise this political security paradigm into educational discourse and possible practice. Naturally, this research provides no insights into how the participants’ perceptions may have changed over time, but their mention of the growing political and media framing of terrorism sees a strong call for urgency, regarding societal preparedness manifesting itself throughout the Norwegian political system.

While the first national policy on the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism stated that “Norway is one of the safest countries in the world”, where the threat level is considered to be low (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, 2010, p. 5), only four years later, counter-radicalisation efforts were being described as a societal necessity to ensure that “fundamental values such as democracy, human rights and security” are maintained (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2014, p. 5). The revised policy of 2014 makes frequent use of “presupposition” (Fairclough, 2010), with the threat of terrorism being described as more complex due to the ongoing “changes in [Norway’s] potential enemies”. Yet, despite the complex nature that is terrorism, counter-radicalisation efforts remain a “responsibility that rests with many sectors of society” (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2014, pp. 7, 9). Value assumptions (Fairclough, 1992) can be readily found throughout these counter-radicalisation policies as the aforementioned virtuous of democracy is argued to counterweigh extremist narratives.

Al-Qaeda-inspired extremism and right-wing extremists “who are hostile to Islam” (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2014, p. 10) are singled out as the two dominant threats of terrorism in Norway, a claim which certainly mirrors Crawford et al’s., (2018) argument of the symbiotic relationship between Islamic and right-wing extremism. However, the ideological presupposition (Fairclough, 1992) that Islam is the “trigger” for a particularly dangerous kind of right-wing extremism in Norway exemplifies the performative power of the radicalisation discourse, which can convince an audience to believe that something is true. Similar language choices are used in the recontextualisation process, to construct manifest intertextuality between the perceived threat of Islam and the need for broad societal preparedness against (Islamic) terrorism. Coherence here, according to Fairclough (1992), would then depend upon the assumptions that the audience brings to the process of interpretation, and violent right-wing extremism is, thereby, portrayed as something that may not even exist in Norway without the presence of extremist Islamic groups.

It is further argued that “Polarisation among Norwegian extremist threat perpetrators will probably increase [...] recruitment to and radicalisation of various groups” (Norwegian

Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2014, p. 10), a claim that is also found in the Norwegian Police Secret Service (PST) annual threat assessment released in 2014 (p. 1). Polarisation as a concept is not defined or specified in Norwegian counter-radicalisation policies or threat assessments, assuming that its meaning is already imbedded among the audience. For instance, when there is reference to the risk of “increased polarisation between different groups” (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2014, p. 9), it likely alludes to the increasing (culturally) diverse Norwegian society, which links the domains of immigration and national security together. This view was repeated immediately after the right-wing terrorist attack at a Mosque in Oslo on August 10, 2019, where the Norwegian Prime Minister, Erna Solberg, argued that a key reason for the rise of right-wing extremism was due to the large waves of refugees who arrived in Norway in 2015 (TV2, 2019). The assumption here is that increasing immigration triggers societal polarisation, which in turns heightens the threat of terrorism. Thus, it contradicts the dominant view expressed by the research participants who believe that the political climate in Norway is a major, if not the most important, contributor to increasing polarisation in society. Furthermore, this political assumption overlooks the fact that Norway has had an extensive contemporary history of right-wing violence (Bjørge, 1997).

Part of analysing counterterrorism measures involves highlighting the implied securitised role of the radicalisation discourse. Tracking the derogatory connotations of the radicalisation discourse as caused by the multicultural society and Islam in particular is, after all, not shown only in policies and threat assessment but also in more general guidelines. An illustrative example of this comes to the surface when reviewing what the Norwegian Government suggests as appropriate literature on counter-radicalisation efforts for first-line workers. This proposed list of reading material includes six publications on “radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism”, eight on “communication techniques”, two on “crime prevention” and twenty-five on “migration, religion, multiculturalism, racism and globalisation” (The Norwegian Government, 2019). Thus, several genres of literature are included in the implicit understanding of radicalisation, which demonstrates interdiscursivity

tendencies that relates the causes of terrorism to a multicultural society and Islam in particular.

Policies, political rhetoric and security statements seems to play a role in shaping the dominant assumption of the radicalisation discourse, where terrorism is foremost a threat caused by Muslims. Islamic terrorism received, after all, the most attention in the interviews and, it was frequently suggested that Muslim students are more at risk of radicalisation towards violent extremism than non-Muslim students are. The preceding narratives may constrain inclusive educational practice as it is clear that they carry substantial negative connotations. Notwithstanding the fact that the political agenda continuously refers to the societal responsibility for providing security from threats of (Islamic) terrorism, counter-radicalisation policies are arguably not well known among practitioners (Sjøen & Jore, in press).

An important question remains regarding how the dominant counter-radicalisation discourse is recontextualised into educational discourse and possibly practice. Previous research indicates that political agendas are often transferred to an audience through the media, which tends to adopt official positions or “powerful” discourses (Birkland, 2004; Larsen, 2018; Solheim, 2018). This seems certainly to be the case here, as is also shown when the Norwegian Police Secret Service’s (PST) annual risk assessment changed the threat of Islamic terrorist acts in Norway from “possible” in 2016 to “likely” in 2017 (PST³, 2016, 2017). This change in risk assessment sparked massive attention on extremism-related issues, and the notion of “exceptionalism” (Fairclough, 1992), which was demonstrated through sensationalist language in the media, seems to have influence practitioners in their concern about vulnerable Muslim youths turning to violent extremism and terrorism.

Resistance in schools: Prevention as good education

It is noted that there is an attempt to integrate the radicalisation discourse into the educational

³ The Police Secret Service in Norway have devised a set of standardised terms to indicate estimated probability of a terrorist attack ranging from “very unlikely”, “unlikely”, “possible”, “likely” to “very likely” (PST, 2017).

discourse. Yet, as expressed by the participants, there are also signs that the framing of Islam and multicultural society as potential threats to national security is met with resistance from these practitioners. This is unsurprising, as neither security nor educational discourses are uniform; rather, they can be heterogeneous and even contradictory (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The radicalisation discourse, as envisioned by policymakers, tend to appeal for cultural integration (Lindekilde, 2012b; Sedgwick, 2010), while, in practice, it more likely represents a divisive and polarising ideology (Kundnani, 2009). This contradictory practice concerning the radicalisation discourse connects with a wider geopolitical security paradigm that is manifesting itself around the world; yet, the boundaries between what these discourses actually represents is not well known among practitioners. A past study in Norway found that counter-radicalisation efforts tend to circumvent ethical dilemmas by appealing to safeguarding principles that are common in both education and social work (Sjøen & Jore, in press). Thus, the radicalisation discourse is often viewed as “natural” and “ordinary” by practitioners, who, for the most part, are unaware that it represents an oppressive discursive order. This contradiction is not uncommon within a preventive lens (Sjøen & Jore, 2019, p. 9), and Mattsson (2018) describes this as putting practitioners in a space of conflict where

[...] what it all boils down to is that we have two discourses operating at the same professionals, in the same field and at the same time – but without any clear signs of interdiscursivity and with a considerable amount of confusion (p. 124)

Resistance among practitioners can be both conscious and unconscious, and resistance against the radicalisation discourse as expressed by participants is presumably more inclined towards the latter form, which becomes evident when they speak about the framing of immigrants and Muslims. It is the author’s contention that this ties into how extremism-related issues evokes feelings of uncertainty. As Burgess (2009) notes, a culture of fear is quite characteristic for European approaches to security in the Global War on Terror era, and fear and uncertainty are, obviously, ill-suited when attempting to create inclusive and supportive educational environments for young lives. Furthermore, if practitioners merely comply with the politically

envisioned radicalisation discourse, the risk is that they might overlook the rich philosophical history that “radicalism”, “resistance” and “emancipation” holds in the field of education (Biesta, 2015). For, what is deemed radical or extreme in one context is perfectly accepted in another, and how do practitioners distinguish between so-called “positive” and “negative” forms of radicalisation? The distinction is perhaps simple in political ideology; yet, as suggested by Sukarieh and Tannock (2016), it does not hold up well in educational practice.

Although there are diverging scholarly views as to whether schools are the correct medium by which terrorism should be prevented in the first place, the professional narratives presented in this article presuppose that “good education” (Biesta, 2009), in its fullest and broadest sense, is what O’Donnell calls “anti-extremist” (2016a). This pertains to how educational counter-radicalisation efforts could be based in learning environments that have a great value also beyond preventing radicalisation and violent extremism (Sklad & Park, 2017). Lending on this belief, educational activities aimed at preventing students from becoming involved in violent extremism or terrorism should be grounded in genuinely good education. Hence, the narratives that are expressed by these practitioners align well with the current state of research on counter-radicalisation efforts, which stresses the importance of progressive, liberal and inclusive education (Davies, 2018; Kyriacou et al., 2017; Mitchell, 2016; Panjwani et al., 2018). However, the recontextualisation of the radicalisation discourse into educational discourse and possibly practice, which certainly does not make explicit the ideological assumptions that underpin this security paradigm, may have a chilling effect on schools and universities across continents (Sjøen & Jore, 2019). Educational prevention efforts appear to be based on a multitude of assumptions and there is little awareness of the limits of these efforts in schools. While this does not exclude educational systems in the task of preventing young lives from radicalisation, it highlights the need for educators to be given adequate training and resources in order for these efforts to not compromise the ideals and objectives of education (Harris-Hogan et al., 2019).

As argued by Biesta (2015) and O’Donnell (2017), who both draw on Hannah Arendt’s seminal work, there is something ethically worrisome in politicising education in a

way that holds youth responsible for the existing problems of the world. Thus, there should be strong caution against the utilisation of education as a cog in the Global War on Terror machinery. While the prevention of youth being radicalised towards violent extremism is certainly within the duties of democratic educational systems, the way in which schools carry out any preventive measures is central to its effectiveness. There is little evidence that access to education itself prevents radicalisation and violent extremism (Krueger & Malečková, 2003), and there is even the question of whether the current application of counter-radicalisation efforts are counterproductive (Sjøen & Jore, 2019, p. 11). It seems that more attention should be shifted towards how schools can approach counter-radicalisation through good education, to avoid the risk of the prevention efforts impairing the education.

Conclusion

This article has explored the securitisation of the radicalisation discourse in educators and social workers practice in Norwegian secondary schools. Viewed through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a number of revealing and concerning conclusions have provided insight for in this article. The practitioners who have informed the research report having a clear responsibility to prevent young lives from being radicalised towards any form of violent extremism. There is, however, evidence for both hegemony and resistance towards the recontextualisation of the radicalisation discourse, as participants describe the stigmatising and polarising portrayal of Muslim youth in politics and the media as being at odds with liberal, progressive and inclusive education. Examples of the former, the hegemonic power of the radicalisation discourse, are shown through how students who exhibit increased religiosity are seen by many practitioners as being more vulnerable to radicalisation towards violent extremism. This is troublesome, considering how the framing of students based on religious or cultural markers and expressions is a stigmatising, exclusionary and perhaps even counterproductive approach to preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. Examples of resistance are, paradoxically, illustrated through how the participants problematize the

politically envisioned link of Islam as a societal threat, which they claim creates a divide between Muslims and non-Muslims. This resistance to the radicalisation discourse is, as with the acceptance of the same discourse, probably also unconscious, as most participants seem to concur that school should spearhead the societal efforts against predominantly Islamic radicalisation, while they are simultaneously sceptical of the negative political framing of immigrants and Muslims.

In terms of understanding how the radicalisation discourse shapes educational discourse and possibly practice, CDA provides an important framework for analysing linguistic-discursive dimensions of social and cultural phenomena. The exceptional security politics that drive the omnipresent radicalisation discourse appeal discursively to practitioners, and possibly also their practice, as they draw on an educational language of caring for and safeguarding “vulnerable” youth. Thus, the political apparatus circumvents any critical discussion of how the radicalisation discourse can cause polarisation and societal disintegration. On self-reflection by the participants, this professional narrative is clearly informed by political rhetoric and the substantial media attention on these issues, and it is the author’s contention that this framing of radicalisation under the banner of “safeguarding” sanitises ethical dilemmas surrounding the radicalisation discourse, which Heath-Kelly and Strausz (2019) convincingly argue is in actuality an extension of the “us versus them” dichotomy that has characterised the Global War on Terror efforts.

These findings should be of concern, and, while this research does not offer any comprehensive evaluations of educational counter-radicalisation efforts, it does provide insight into how the selected practitioners understand and approach radicalisation and violent extremism in Norwegian schools. This is important knowledge because what the practitioner knows, does, and cares about, are among the most important factors governing educational practice (Biesta, 2015). These findings may not be generalisable to other contexts, as they are based on a limited range of empirical examples, which are surely open to a range of interpretations. The sampled practitioners who were interviewed in this research may also differ systematically from the target populations of educators and social workers in Norway.

Furthermore, the “cherry-picking” of documents and political statements that were analysed for this purpose is prone to personal bias (Fairclough, 1992). However, these findings form part of an emerging trend in the literature, showing a widespread criticism of the securitisation of counter-radicalisation efforts under the banner of preventing terrorism, which seem to impair progressive, liberal and inclusive education. A key focus in future research should be on understanding how counter-radicalisation efforts are experienced by students, particularly immigrant and Muslim youth as well as those within their immediate circles.

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Interviewees	Gender	Age	Profession	School type	Region
Interviewee 1	Male	46	Educator	Lower secondary	Western region
Interviewee 2	Male	56	Educator	Lower secondary	Western region
Interviewee 3	Female	52	Educator	Upper secondary	Southern region
Interviewee 4	Female	41	Educator	Upper secondary	Southern region
Interviewee 5	Female	59	Social worker	Municipality	Western region
Interviewee 6	Female	41	Educator	Upper secondary	Midlands
Interviewee 7	Male	47	Educator	Lower secondary	Eastern region
Interviewee 8	Male	41	Social worker	Municipality	Western region
Interviewee 9	Male	36	Social worker	Municipality	Northern region
Interviewee 10	Female	49	Social worker	Municipality	Southern region
Interviewee 11	Male	43	Educator	Lower secondary	Western region
Interviewee 12	Male	59	Educator	Upper secondary	Eastern region
Interviewee 13	Female	43	Educator	Upper secondary	Eastern region
Interviewee 14	Female	58	Social worker	Municipality	Eastern region
Interviewee 15	Male	42	Educator	Upper secondary	Western region
Interviewee 16	Male	48	Educator	Upper secondary	Western region
Interviewee 17	Male	54	Social worker	Municipality	Midlands
Interviewee 18	Female	49	Educator	Lower secondary	Midlands
Interviewee 19	Female	59	Educator	Upper secondary	Western region
Interviewee 20	Male	52	Educator	Lower secondary	Northern region
Interviewee 21	Female	59	Educator	Lower secondary	Northern region
Interviewee 22	Female	48	Educator	Upper secondary	Midlands
Interviewee 23	Male	63	Social worker	Municipality	Eastern region

Table 1: Overview of research participants

About the JD Journal for Deradicalization

The JD Journal for Deradicalization is the world's only peer reviewed periodical for the theory and practice of deradicalization with a wide international audience. Named an [“essential journal of our times”](#) (Cheryl LaGuardia, Harvard University) the JD's editorial board of expert advisors includes some of the most renowned scholars in the field of deradicalization studies, such as Prof. Dr. John G. Horgan (Georgia State University); Prof. Dr. Tore Bjørgo (Norwegian Police University College); Prof. Dr. Mark Dechesne (Leiden University); Prof. Dr. Cynthia Miller-Idriss (American University Washington); Prof. Dr. Julie Chernov Hwang (Goucher College); Prof. Dr. Marco Lombardi, (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore Milano); Dr. Paul Jackson (University of Northampton); Professor Michael Freedon, (University of Nottingham); Professor Hamed El-Sa'id (Manchester Metropolitan University); Prof. Sadeq Rahimi (University of Saskatchewan, Harvard Medical School), Dr. Omar Ashour (University of Exeter), Prof. Neil Ferguson (Liverpool Hope University), Prof. Sarah Marsden (Lancaster University), Dr. Kurt Braddock (Pennsylvania State University), Dr. Michael J. Williams (Georgia State University), and Dr. Aaron Y. Zelin (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), Prof. Dr. Adrian Cherney (University of Queensland).

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