
How Schools Can Reduce Youth Radicalization

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Introduction

Arguably, youth radicalization, extremism and terrorism are among the most divisive issues in the public discourse internationally. We do not wish to create an apocalyptic panic about the rise of such activities. Extremism and terrorism have been a part of history since the rest of time. Yet the very public nature of such events that are proliferated on social and news media makes it accentuated in our public lives, making it seemingly more present and unnerving. This said, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and subsequent attacks that have ranged in scope since then, created an unprecedented rise in the issue on interrelated aspects of terrorism and extremism. The increasing fear and anxiety about terrorism filters commonly into other issues and influences debates such as immigration and refugee policies, the rise of fundamentalist ideologies, typologies of those individuals who may be predisposed to carry out terrorist attacks, and the polarization among diverse populations who may undermine and threaten the stability of democratic societies. The educational response is not unlike these broader political debates and the range of responses to these issues appear to be both sporadic and limited in scope about how to best respond to these complex issues (Gereluk, 2012).

There has been a subtle but perceptible shift in discourse from the actual terrorist acts in terms of the response from societies to looking at the preconditions of what makes individuals become radicalized in the first place. The nature of many of the terrorist attacks over the last decade suggests that the characteristics of individuals are not homogenous, and

commonly are perplexing to individuals. There is no single terrorist profile and looking at age, gender or socio-economic backgrounds will not detect the next terrorist. The stereotypes of immigrants or refugees who move to a new country in order to carry out terrorist activities is actually few and far between. For instance, in many cases the public finds out with the aftermath of a terrorist attack that the individual was not an immigrant or refugee, but rather a person born in the country in which the attack occurred. For example, the attack by Alexandre Bissonette related to the slayings that occurred in a Quebec City mosque in 2016 noted that the student was a French Canadian citizen (Perreux and Andrew-Gee, 2017). Aaron Driver, an Ontario student in Canada, was killed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) during an altercation prior to an imminent terrorist attack in Toronto. Damian Clairmont, who converted to Islam shortly before he travelled to Syria to join a terrorist group in 2012, was born in Nova Scotia into an Acadian family. He was killed in 2014 during fighting between the Jabhat al-Nusra and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) militias. André Poulin, from Timmins, Ontario, loved hockey and was by all accounts an average Canadian until his conversion to Islam and subsequent departure to Syria. In all of these instances, the parents were utterly shocked and traumatized that their children were terrorists, coming from long-standing Canadian families. They did not fit the profile of having recently moved or been indoctrinated by fundamentalist parents. While we are clear that the prototypes of terrorists are as vast and unique as the nature and context of each of the attacks, what we wish to highlight in the previous cases is that they did not fit the common stereotype that is perceived by the general public, these boys were: white Caucasian; raised by Canadian parents¹, and; were not raised by fundamentalist parents. The perplexing question that arises is how did these boys become radicalized in the first place that leads to terrorist actions?

We do not suggest that schools must take the full burden of addressing this broader complex issue about youth radicalization. This said, Trees Pels and Doret de Ruyter (2012) suggest that education has largely been conspicuously absent from the discussions on youth radicalization where schools might offer some attempts to be better responsive and attentive to youth radicalization. While we do not offer the solution, this article wishes to create an educative space to consider what role schools, and specifically teachers, might be able to do to mitigate the rise of youth

1 Given that Canada is an immigrant population other than the Indigenous peoples, everyone is arguably an immigrant. For the purposes of making a distinction, however, I wish to suggest that in these cases the parents were not first or second generation immigrant parents.

radicalization. In the first section, we define and distinguish between the notions of youth radicalization, extremism and terrorism, and focus our attention on the principles of youth radicalization. In the second section, we examine what role educators may play to create a learning environment to reduce polarization, isolation, and marginalization. In so doing, we contend that schools can play a partial role in how the formal curriculum may better inform students about the broader political and social determinants that lead to terrorism and extremism and reduce more fundamentalist and ideological stances.

Indicators of Youth Radicalization

Youth radicalization is an increasingly common rhetorical device that is used in public media portrayals. Yet, little articulation is provided as to what that means or how youth become radicalized in the first place. More commonly, it is a term that is used in a reactive sense, when a public act of violence or atrocity has been committed, to describe a youth as ‘other’ in light of what is perceived as within mainstream society. To start, I draw upon David Mendel’s (2010) definition of youth radicalization as the “increase in and/or reinforcing of extremism in the thinking sentiments, and/or behavior of individuals and/or groups of individuals” (p. 111). In this way, it is distinguished from extremism, which focuses primarily on the nature of the principles, values, and beliefs that are limited and constrained in options and choices, commonly fixated on a particular ideology or absolute truth. Youth radicalization emphasizes the process by which an individual or group becomes more extremist in nature, while extremism is on the current state of beliefs by an individual or group “who has a particular perspective to the exclusion of other perspectives or that it strays from the accepted norms and behaviors of mainstream society” (Gereluk, 2012: p. 7). In both cases, neither refers to the act of committing an act of violence, nor does it refer to any particular political, social or religious movement. When such acts of violence are committed to destabilize the citizens of society and to create fear, it is terrorism. In this case, terrorism is the actual act against civilians to cause general instability, often to disrupt the political, religious or social discourses that terrorists are trying to upend (Bonar, 2002). Radicalized youth and extremists may or may not commit an act.

There is a futility in declaring definitive principles of what makes youth become radicalized. Trying to pinpoint the motivational bases for reasons why youth become radicalized is as frustrating as trying to decipher why a person commits gun violence in schools. The reasons for why individuals become radicalized are as vast and varied. As noted in the

introduction, they may or may not be educated, single or married, have jobs, be men or women, and come from high or low socio-economic status. Despite those individuals who inevitably commit terrorist attacks, media portrayals inevitably default to highlighting the characteristics that may be deemed as abnormal, half crazed, or come from indoctrinatory families of communities (Vertigans, 2011). It is a caricature that helps to assuage the anxieties that the individual could lurk anywhere, and instead creates an individual who is unlike the rest of us. Yet, this problematizes and obscures the way in which our societies could better support individuals who become radicalized in our own societies.

As such, we draw upon some of the research that examines possible indicators of radicalizing youth, understanding full well that there is a complexity and uniqueness in the formation of youth who become increasingly extremist in nature. Knowing that this is a flawed approach, akin to trying to hit a fly with a baseball bat, we argue that there is some relevance for considering more broadly several factors that may move youth in this direction. Despite the relative amorphous tendencies, we contend that there are some general factors that are worthy of consideration from an educational standpoint.

It would be remiss to suggest that history is not a critical factor in setting the preconditions for the way in which stories are told, positioned, and applied. Historical narratives shape particular norms and values, often feelings of superiority or conversely insecurity that do not promote mutual interdependence. Drawing upon particular events as a catalyst to strengthen the narrative, stories, songs, and folklore position a particular story for targeted purposes; in the case of radicalizing individuals, historical narratives may mobilize support for a particular cause or movement. The historical past helps to create a collective memory positioned in a particular way to either exploit past wrongs and injustices, glorious heroes, or of a particular time and place that was once held in great esteem of a golden age now lost. There is a narrowing of citizenship that prioritizes and highlights particular narrow versions of patriotism, commonly noting the heroes of their cause, solidarity and unity of the collective movement, which affirms their particular ideology to the exclusion of others (Ben-Porath, 2006).

Drawing upon the past, contemporary rhetoric builds momentum to valorize or condemn the past. "Across discursive and nationalist terror groups there is therefore a tendency both to integrate ideas and behavior from the past into contemporary rhetoric and strategies" (Vertigans, 2001: p. 31). Individuals who move toward radicalized positions may take two different views of considering the past. In one way, there may

be a view to position the past of what once was – a nostalgic depiction of what the group once had. Arguably, the rise of the far Right in the United States calls forth a call back to a “Golden Age,” where the superiority of the white Anglo-Saxon settler, and colonizer, had positional authority and racial supremacy over others (Johnson & Frombgen, 2009). The Far Right Christian movements harken back to this racial supremacy and Christian assimilation is commonly used to spur increasing polarization and radical extremism for the shifting political and religious diversity across America. The desperation to return to such a past may help validate the nature of individuals to take more radicalized stances.

Conversely, radicalized groups may draw upon the injustices of the past to justify the means for more extremist positions. Calling upon inappropriate use of military or state force against a particular group may become a catalyst for the injustices of the past. Bloody Sunday, a peaceful protest on January 22, 1905 at the Tsar’s winter palace regarding the plight of the common Russian people, is often attributed to the catalyst and eventual fall of the Romanov Dynasty and the subsequent Bolshevik Revolution. The massacre of approximately 500 individuals who peacefully demanded reforms from the increasing corrupt nature of the dynasty was met with the Imperial forces drawing fire on the demonstrators. In this case, the inappropriate act of violence became a catalyst for strikes and riots across the country, and for growing sympathy and support for the socialist revolutionary Bolsheviks. In this way, such an event adds legitimacy and urgency to the collective memory and agency of a radicalized group that feels historically persecuted. Without the mechanism to redress such injustices in the current day, in the recognition and formal apologies of such atrocities, with substantive attempts to create any form of reconciliation and understanding between groups, then there is more inclination for radicalized groups to create momentum that something drastic ought to occur if the balance of power is to be shifted.

Social media has shifted the lens for recruiting and attracting radicalized youth towards extremist views. Vertigans (2011) starts from the premise that social media in and of itself does not create a radicalized person; rather, individuals who already hold dispositions toward more radicalized ideas may search out events, behaviors, to help validate their particular dispositions. However, the way in which the media is used to describe a particular terrorist event has unintentionally helped to radicalize individuals and groups. The process of describing the event, how it was done, and the fear and anxiety amongst the citizenry helps to further legitimize the nature of those events for groups who wish to commit violent acts. In this way there is some parallel to the use of historical events.

Similar to the historical events which give legitimacy, it also raises the reputational status of the extremist groups in that the values and behaviors have been propagated broadly in popular media and that the act of violence created the intended result. Ironically, the news-worthiness of combatting terrorism, further legitimizes those groups that turn to terrorist actions given the viral nature of terrorist activities and events. For the individual who may yearn of having a place or an identity, there is the potential to create a romanticized excitement at the prospect of gaining notoriety, particularly if that individual has felt isolated, marginalized, or on the peripheries of communities.

At an individual level, the potential to create a convert requires to some extent a particular narrowing of one's affiliations and identity to the one group to the exclusion of others. It creates a sense of affiliation of belonging, a purpose, particularly if those individuals have been isolated or pushed to the peripheries of society. It creates a form of legitimacy for their frustrations or worldviews that are exclusive to the group. Capitalizing on an individual's disenfranchisement is critical to becoming radicalized. One's own dissatisfaction, frustration, isolation, inequalities, discrimination or racism, and relative deprivation, is commonly a catalyst for individual who become more radicalized (Toolis, 1995, Richardson, 2007; Sageman, 2008). Youths who are the most susceptible to radical messaging are those who perceive themselves to be politically, economically or socially marginalized, resulting in a pervasive sense of purposelessness and lack of hope for the future. It is not solely poor socio-economic status that results in susceptibility, but rather a sense of relative deprivation, coupled with feelings of political and/or social exclusion that makes youth susceptible to the radicalization process. This process entails drawing upon the affective emotions and for the group to create a more compelling affiliation to them than to any alternative affiliations that may include family, friends, schools, communities and other forms of affiliation or belonging. As such, one's existing social relations, bonds, and ties, are all but substantively severed in favor of this one particular group to the exclusion of any others. This process creates a new form of socialization where secrecy and trust creates a heightened sense of self, of being an insider, and concomitantly attempts to sever any alternative groups that may provide an alternative worldview. The attempt then is to instill increased apathy and disillusionment with the outside world, with an unbreakable pact with those within the extremist group. In so doing, it lessens one's own individual identity to a more collective solidarity and unity, which in some cases can sacrifice the self to a greater cause espoused by the group. "Secrecy and trust, the intersection between group charisma and stigmatization and

minorities of the best and worst are integral to group cohesion, recruitment and retention processes” (Vertigans, 2011: p. 110). Finally, as part of their greater affiliation to one extremist view propagated by a group, there is often a corollary weakening of moral obligations that reduce the inhibitions of an individual to think about, and potentially carry out, acts of violence. Ensuring that the valor of the collective memory and agency takes precedence over the individual wellbeing of citizens is paramount to the extremist position that is inculcated by the group on the particular individual.

Radicalization and mobilization to violence are distinct but often intertwined processes. Mobilization is the process by which a radicalized individual moves from extremist intent, to preparing for an act of terror, travel to join a terrorist entity and/or facilitating the terrorist activity of someone else (CSIS, 2018). While terrorist attacks may be difficult to anticipate, indicators are often present. Analysis conducted by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) found that the speed of mobilization to violence takes an average of twelve (12) months, but that youth mobilize to violence more quickly than adults and that they tend to mobilize in groups. Young adults and minors generally have fewer obstacles to overcome in their process of mobilization and by mobilizing in groups. They can overcome any existing obstacles quickly by pooling resources and expertise allowing them to engage in terrorist activities. For example, “a person may give money to another member of the group and share items such as luggage or cell phones” (CSIS, 2018). Of note, however, are the findings that many extremist mobilizers demonstrate behaviours that they are mobilizing to those around them. In other words, youth mobilizers will demonstrate observable ‘leakage’, which puts bystanders (friends, family, educators) in a position to identify their impending mobilization to violence (CSIS, 2018). According to the research conducted by CSIS, however, it is often more difficult to spot indicators of mobilization to violence in groups than by individuals alone.

The nature of radicalizing youth, and subsequent possible mobilization, is thus a progression of increasing extremist views that narrows one’s own outlook on the world that is aligned with the extremist views, and gives legitimacy and potentially valour to the individual who may yearn for creating such an identity and persona. There is a valorization of playing a role in the greater cause, built upon the historical legacy, rhetoric, and broader public discourse on extremism and terrorism that may fuel greater polarization toward a view of one absolute truth to the neglect of any others. Self-radicalization does not exist. While radicalization is an individualized process, it is influenced both by factors (such as peer pressure,

grievances, international events) and through association with people supporting and/or promoting a violent extremist ideology. These associations or relationships can occur in person (face to face) but they often take place online. The consumption of extremist media and/or messaging promotes violent ideological norms through which a person becomes convinced that violence is a legitimate means to advance their ideological causes or beliefs.

In reviewing these imprecise indicators, what is most prevalent is the relative normalcy that leads an individual to become radicalized. There is a particular historical perspective that is positioned in a particular way to promote the particular norms and values that are to be perpetuated and amplified. The individual identifies with the group and with the values that resonate with the individual, whether it be disillusionment, frustration, disenfranchisement, or isolation at the one end of the spectrum to that of heroism, valorization, heightened recognition, or martyrdom on the other. The move toward extremist views and acts of terror may remove the suffering of the one event and highlight the suffering and plight of the people for whom have historically or presently commonly feel atrocities over a longer period. In this way those who move to more radicalized groups may see that their views are not to their own benefit but serving the greater need of those who have suffered, and thus create a moral distinction between that of a criminal to one who is sacrificing oneself to the benefit of others (Richardson, 2007). The nature of youth who becomes radicalized is not half crazed, or a villain, or evil. The weight of their values and arguments have been shaped and constructed within the broader historical, political and social discourses. For instance, Jihadi groups utilize these discourses effectively to put forward narratives that are enticing to youth who may not be well educated in the nuance of Islamic history, other religious history, or theology writ large. These discourses feed their disillusionment and fuel their desires to belong to a group and participate in what they see as a noble cause.

If the nature of the individual who becomes more radicalized is not simply a case of someone with severe mental health issues or evil as is often caricatured by popular media, and is relatively mundane and normal indicators that may move a person to become more extreme, then there may be a corollary educative response to consider the ways that may reduce those initial inclinations to become radicalized in the first place. Let us turn to the corollary educational response to youth radicalization.

An Educational Response to Youth Radicalization

Similar to the previous section, we want to be explicit that we do not think that schools have the sole responsibility to address this complex issue. Further, it might seem imprudent to address youth radicalization at all given the very few youth who may become increasingly extremism and radicalized, which begs the question of whether this is an educational question at all. We start from the premise that the pedagogical task is beneficial not only to those who may be susceptible to radicalization, but would bolster general polarization that is prevalent. A purposeful educational task to create more opportunities for more robust historical and political analysis, political deliberation, and political tolerance seems more than warranted for all students. Thus, the intended aim is to build capacity for students to better negotiate the rhetoric and public discourse that narrows and polarizes particular ideologies.

If the aim of radicalized groups is to create an absolute truth among its members – a historical and contemporary narrative that rises to their cause, to the exclusion of all other possible alternative ways forward – then arguably the primary task is to interrupt one particular ideology and worldview. Yet historically, educational institutions and historical curricula have been quite poor at this (Loewen, 2010). It requires thus a move away from a particular dominant ideology, which often positions the wars and events as winners and losers, providing a simply descriptive narrative of key dates, leaders, and heroes. In many cases, the work of developing a democratic conception, and an historical understanding of one's society, may skew and obfuscate the complexities, nuances, and tensions among individuals and groups. For instance, an approach that suggests that the “mark of true citizens: courage, loyalty, responsibility, gratitude to forebears, and a self-sacrificing devotion to the common good” (Kersten, 2011: para 2), may move us toward belligerent forms of citizenship, and only heighten the polarization and isolation felt by some (Ben-Porath, 2006). In creating a narrow, commonly simplified historical narrative, it potentially causes problems for multiple students. For those disenfranchised, the historical narrative may further silence or oppress their perspective. And similarly, it may create a lack of awareness or understanding from those who do not see a particular historical time period as problematic. For instance, the portrayal of Afghanistan under current regimes may highlight the current oppressions of women and children, with increasing religious indoctrinations. However, without a better understanding of the historical epochs, which has been a strategic place for its location to South Asia, one may have a one dimension and misconstrued

understanding of the rise of radicalized groups in Afghanistan. For instance, the tribes and sub-tribes fought for territory in the early eighteenth century. The colonization of Europe in the 1800s had yet another element of territorial strife, with Britain increasing its world dominance and forcible entry into Afghanistan creating an artificial and unnatural boundary line – the Durand line – dividing the people of Afghanistan until 1919. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia also affected the nature of the reforms and Afghan people, which raised hopes of removing the British imperialism that it felt. The ideals of the socialist attempt at world revolution would affect the Afghan tribes and their way of life. Lands were confiscated, and legal courts were replaced with their Indigenous customs and laws, and changes to the familial unit with women entering education. The growing radical movements bolstered by the Stalinist and socialist movement thereafter forced further drastic reforms on the nation. The American government visibly nervous of this shift in power by the Russians, created a deliberately armed, financed coalition against the Afghan Socialist Revolution in 1978. Billions of dollars were spent by the American government so that they could defeat the positionality of Russia in Afghanistan. The fall of Kabul, however, represented a victory to Islamic fundamentalism, who had yearned for the nostalgic past and had felt oppressed by the increased reforms, shifts in land and customs. The very nature of the rise of the Taliban, funded and supported historically by the American government, is now mostly lost in the contemporary political discourse surrounding the terrorist activities of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Yet, the understanding of the historical turmoil of this nation highlights the strife and trauma of the people, commonly invaded, conquered and oppressed from multiple regimes and multiple points of history. This (briefly and crudely portrayed) example is just a glimpse of what is lacking when students are asked to learn about history. Rather than simply having an understanding that the Taliban are ‘bad’ people, a more robust understanding of the history may account for the move toward more extremist stances given the historical legacy that has been largely unresolved, contested, and volatile.

If our contemporary understanding of a particular country such as Afghanistan is devoid of the broader historical, political and religious context that gives rise to extremist fundamentalism, then this creates a caricature of the complexity and spectrum of injustice that has occurred to redress the issue. Such a lack of understanding of how the Afghan people and its tribes and sub-tribes have battled and struggled, been manipulated and exploited, for the bigger positional global power by major countries, exacerbates the historical narrative held by extremist groups to propagate

their views. Rapoport (1989) notes that “for most commentators terrorism has no history, or at least they would have us believe that the ‘terrorist problem’ had no significance until the 1960s, when the full impact of modern technology was felt, endowing most individuals as individuals or as members of small groups, with capacities they never had before” (xii). In this sense, the deep history of societies is critical to better understanding the impetus for, and long-standing desperation of, particular individuals and groups to become radicalized. If we turn to the United States, a robust history of the country would include the precursors of the nation built upon colonialism, genocide, revolution, racism, oppression, overlaid upon the broader espoused civic dispositions of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness from their Declaration of Independence. In this way, Aislinn O’Donnell warns that “both schools and society more broadly offer cultural scripts that privilege certain kinds of responses to violence, which depend on the perceived identity of the perpetrator” (p. 480). In disrupting the cultural scripts that represent a more accurate portrayal of strife, the aim is to create an opening for more honest deliberation about how to “imagine and practice another future, one that will move beyond the current cycle of revenge” (Butler, 2004: p. 20).

In such instances when there has been such entangled injustices that remain unresolved, there is a second educational response worth considering: that of restorative justice. For understanding the past atrocities gives individuals better clarity of what is at stake when individuals become more radical, yet it does little to create another space where individuals can see beyond the one absolute truth told by radicalized groups. In this case, restorative justice calls upon individuals, institutions and societies to formally recognize and acknowledge past atrocities, and call for mechanisms for increased dialogue and reforms, to promote reconciliation and mitigate conflict over the past. O’Donnell contends that part of uncovering the historical genealogies help to make visible those who have been silenced. She states, “Renewed honest conversations and reimagined curricula would ask how we can respond to, and talk about, violence in the broader lived context of students. These conversations and curricula would find ways of including the voices of those who are pushed outside and beyond political consideration” (2015: p. 477). Without naming the historical legacy that informs and fuels contemporary radical movements, the potential for groups to capitalize and draw upon an historical narrative as evidence that they have been silenced, humiliated and shamed throughout history is compelling for a radicalized group to recruit and mobilize.

Inevitably such an approach might elicit concerns about further polarization of ideological differences. It is at this point that the pedagogical task of opening a deliberative space for critical reflection, and critical analysis of rhetoric comes into play. As part of the task of making explicit the conflicts in history, and in contemporary times, the task is then to develop students' capacities to examine, critique, and offer their voices to understanding these worldviews with the hope of developing more capacity to consider alternative perspectives and ways forward. If radicalized groups primary purpose is to espouse one view and one way forward, the educational response is to complicate and encourage a deliberative space where students can begin to unpack such rhetoric. There is no simple, definitive response to radicalization and/or the mobilization to a violent terror attack; however, combatting the rhetoric and providing alternative messaging may provide an opportunity for educators to help susceptible youth recognize the dangers of radicalization, challenge and debunk the false allure of violent extremism, and offer them another more productive pathway. To illustrate this point, a common educational practice is to look at the rhetoric and slogans used in commercials for children to understand how the slogans target particular individuals, create an association or identity with the product, and persuade them to ultimately buy and have an affinity with that product. Of the large brand names, we can point to Coca Cola's historical legacy of slogans that aligned their product with the good life (e.g. 1923, Enjoy life, 1964 Things go better with Coke, 1985 America's real choice, etc.²) The list is endless and targeted to particular political and social periods, different countries, and different emotions, dispositions and experiences. A teacher may draw upon this timeline to unpack the slogans and the targeted messaging that notes the ways in which the company tries to evoke more than buying the drink, but rather to create a positive experience in so doing.

This common activity is useful for students to understand rhetoric in a non-threatening manner in how rhetoric, and specifically slogans, inform our perceptions of a particular phenomenon. Yet, there is a missed opportunity to then look at political slogans that do the same with particular movements. For instance, the Irish Republican Army commonly would use the slogan, "Tiocfaidh ár lá" (our day will come) to incite solidarity and as a reminder to the historical injustices felt by the movement. Popularized by Booy Sands, an IRA prisoner who wrote prolifically from his cell, the latter used the Irish language to both revitalize the language

2 For a full list, see Wikipedia "coca cola slogans" Wikipedia (2018) List of coca-cola slogans. Retrieved on July 30, 2018 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Coca-Cola_slogans

as part of the broader movement to preserve their culture, but also to keep secrets from the prison wardens and smuggle out radicalized ideas to other republicans. The phrase was a rally cry and would be drawn in the songs of the IRA, written in the speeches and used in the protest marches.

Like the rhetoric used by the IRA, terrorist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al Qaeda (AQ) use the word ‘jihad’ to describe a declaration of war or a ‘holy war’ against their enemies. They have hijacked the concept of ‘jihad’ to justify various forms of violence. However, jihad, as described by the Quran, has many meanings. It can refer to internal as well as external efforts to be a good Muslim or believer; jihad means the striving or struggle to be good. When returning from a military campaign, the Prophet Mohammed told his followers that “the jihad of the battlefield is a lesser form of the concept when compared to the greatest jihad – jihad ul-nafs – the inner struggle to lead an ethical and pious life” (Awad, 2015). Other verses in the Quran have also been used by terrorist groups to convince suicide bombers that they will inherit paradise:

Those who believe and who have forsaken the domain of evil and have striven [jihad] hard in God’s cause with their possessions and their lives have the highest rank in the sight of God; and it is they, they who shall triumph in the end! Their Sustainer gives them glad tidings of the grace that flows from Him, and of His goodly acceptance, and of the gardens which await them, full of lasting bliss, therein to abide beyond the count of time. Verily, with God is a mighty reward! (Rogers-Melnick, 2001: para 7)

These verses have been taken out of context by terrorist groups and have been promoted to those who do not understand their true meaning. The violent rhetoric espoused by terrorist groups contradict and violate the fundamental tenets of Islam and they “do not give blanket permission to condemn or kill those who hold political or religious views other than your own” (Rogers-Melnick, 2001: para 8).

The explicit unpacking of slogans and rhetoric for radicalized groups thus shows the power of permeating and disseminating its message. For students to unpack political and social slogans and rhetoric with an ability for critical analysis and critique, may both offer acknowledgement to the rise of those movements, but also create a disruption to how they may narrow one’s own scope.

The recent slogan, ‘Make America Great Again’, similarly harkens back to a perceived golden age when the United States was considered a dominant global power (Edwards, 2018). Yet, it also lingers of times when

held power over blacks, and when there was an explicit isolationist stance by the country. It further underpins more Christian fundamentalist perspectives, commonly interwoven with Far Right policies, that commonly advocate for social conservative policies on aspects of reproductive rights and women's rights. Conversely, if we look to the key phrases espoused by Malcolm X, you can note the rise of African American rights, but different from Martin Luther King Junior. In this way, the phrases provided a call to action, and sometimes justified use of force. One such slogan by Malcom X: "I don't even call it violence when it's in self-defense; I call it intelligence", provides the justification of violence and one's credibility. On this view, to not defend oneself suggests a weakness, and a lack of judgment or discretion to not take action. Violence is justified under the guise of self-defense, and is linked to the greater cause of the rights of African Americans.

By unpacking the language that is commonly seen on t-shirts, protest marches, speeches, songs, and so forth, the intent is to build the capacity of students to engage in civil discourse. Paula McAvoy and Diana Hess (2013) note how one teacher captures this sentiment aptly, by stating:

I think students should be able to carry out an intelligent conversation using civil discourse to express themselves and not to be simply a political pundit... and express themselves in an appropriate manner and have honest, genuine discussions with one another about these issues. I think what they see a lot of times, in the media today, it is not really modelling civil discourse. (p. 15).

The aim is that by deliberating through these issues, such as rhetoric and slogan, it can create more political engagement. Furthermore, Diana Mutz (2006) contends that not only does talking across political spectrums build civic discourse – a term she coins 'cross-cutting political talk' – the process itself creates more political tolerance among those from diverse perspectives. When a classroom creates such a learning environment that invites respectful dialogue and deliberation, students may better be equipped to develop dispositions that weigh the evidence, understand the diversity of values and beliefs at play, and be more apt to listen and consider alternative perspectives. And while they may not shift their view or change their perspective, they may have a bit more empathy, understanding or tolerance to the different perspective. It opens up the ability to think beyond the limited narrow view of oneself and their own perspective, and rather consider that all views do not hold an 'absolute truth', but are located in a particular time and place, and highly contextual. This disruption and interruption of an absolute, narrow perspective compromises

the radicalized group's mandate. Giving voice to students – simply, letting students talk about such issues – arguably is a strong determinant of creating more openness for political engagement and deliberation (McAvoy and Hess, 2013).

This leads to the final point. That when students can see themselves as part of the conversation, not silenced, marginalized or oppressed, there is a greater chance that those students will not feel hopeless, destitute, and desperate. For those students who do not have a sense of hope or optimism, where they do not see themselves as part of broader society, there is greater chance that radicalized groups can seduce and recruit based on their vulnerabilities and emotional burden that they carry. A call for empathy and inclusion, while reconciling very different worldviews, may provide an opening to create some cautious optimism whereby the individual can see themselves as living out a flourishing life rather than a life of desperation and despondency. In this regard, schools have a great role to play in ensuring that students see their rightful place among their peers in this community. For example, programs that physically remove individuals into targeted programs (for instance, English Language Learners for refugee students) on the one hand may provide targeted support for language skills; unintentionally, however, the language program may physically remove students who do not have the opportunities to meet other students in the school, and to have such opportunities for deliberation, belonging, or a sense of community. It is a missed opportunity for both the refugee students who do not become enculturated with other students from diverse backgrounds; it is also a missed opportunity for those students who may have stereotypes of refugee students, or worse, do not see them at all and are metaphorically 'invisible' to the school population. The mechanisms to create substantive opportunities for support and belonging to a range of communities in and beyond the school are critical to ensure that individuals who may feel on the periphery feel otherwise. When individuals see opportunities that they can lead fulfilling lives beyond the walls of the school, then there is more optimism that the future is worth pursuing for oneself. When little future opportunity exists, and students remain isolated from their peers and their communities, radicalized groups see the opportunity to create a collective identity that is currently lacking in that individual.

Conclusion

We began this article with some indicators of why youth may turn to radicalized groups. And while these indicators are not definitive or set, they suggest that the indicators are fairly mundane and normal, and do

not necessarily require a strong indoctrinatory upbringing or extremist community for it to rise. Further, the indicators suggest that there are far more youth who may be radicalized than is perceived by the greater public. Given that the youth need not commit an act of violence, but rather have a narrowing of extremist views, it suggests that the numbers are beyond the rare individual, and there may be more youth who are increasingly becoming radicalized. This is troubling given that there is some evidence to suggest that youth are more susceptible to radicalization than adults. The nature of recruiting youth makes it easier to conform and create allegiances among youth who are negotiating their own cognitive and emotional development as adolescents. It thus begs the question of whether schools are able to attend to this concern.

In this way, we argue that schools ought to provide more robust political deliberation in classrooms. The ability for students to better negotiate the complex historical, political, social and religious discourses builds capacity to trouble single narratives and rhetoric that perpetuates a superficial account of the 'Other'. Giving voice to students may help unpack the issues, rhetoric and power, and in so doing, help develop the dispositions that create more political engagement and tolerance. And while we do not suggest that students may drastically shift their ideological stances, it may better create a possibility that the other perspective may hold some weight. In an effort to disrupt polarized radical views, educators can build students' capacity to create a complexity to such long contested and complex issues, as part of the effort to prevent socialization into violent extremist movements.

Finally, in so doing, we do not suggest that this is yet another additive burden that teachers must do to solve society's ills. Nor do we think that schools shoulder the burden for redressing the radicalization of youth. Yet, these recommendations call for a shift in pedagogy to what is currently done, that creates a deliberative space for students to feel included and empowered. In this way, the suggestions offered above support good pedagogical practices that are helpful to all students – not simply the ones who may be more susceptible and at-risk for radicalization. The ability to negotiate and wrestle with the historical and contemporary political discourses in a controlled learning environment, may better allow individuals to negotiate a more nuanced perspective more generally that does not revert back to 'absolute truths' and 'rhetorical slogans'.

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