

## EDUCATING AGAINST EXTREMISM: TOWARDS A CRITICAL POLITICISATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

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**Abstract** – This paper is based on a recently published book, *Educating Against Extremism* (Davies, *Educating Against Extremism*, 2008), which explores the potential role of schools in averting the more negative and violent forms of extremism in a country. It examines the nature of extremism; identity formation and radicalisation; religious belief, faith schools and the myth of equal value; justice, revenge and honour; and free speech, humour and satire. The paper argues that religious fundamentalism, as well as state terrorism, needs to be addressed in schools. The argument in the book is for a greater politicisation of young people through the forging of critical (dis)respect and the use of a secular basis of human rights. Specific forms of citizenship education are needed, which provide skills to analyse the media and political or religious messages, but also enable critical idealism to be fostered.

**Résumé** – ÉDQUER CONTRE L'EXTREMISME : VERS UNE POLITISATION CRITIQUE DES JEUNES—Cette étude est basée sur un livre récemment publié, *Educating against Extremism* (Davies, *Educating Against Extremism*, 2008), qui explore le rôle potentiel des écoles pour empêcher les formes plus négatives et plus violentes d'extrémisme dans un pays. Elle examine la nature de l'extrémisme; la formation et la radicalisation de l'identité; la croyance religieuse, les écoles religieuses et le mythe de la valeur égale; la justice, la vengeance et l'honneur; ainsi que la libre parole, l'humour et la satire. Cette étude soutient que le fondamentalisme religieux doit être abordé dans les écoles, aussi bien que le terrorisme d'état. L'argumentation de ce livre plaide pour une plus grande politisation des jeunes par le forgeage d'un (ir)respect critique et l'utilisation d'un fondement séculaire des droits de l'homme. On a besoin de formes spécifiques d'éducation à la citoyenneté, qui fournissent des compétences pour analyser les médias et les messages politiques ou religieux, mais qui permettent également la stimulation d'un idéalisme critique.

**Zusammenfassung** – UNTERRICHTEN GEGEN EXTREMISMUS: FÜR EINE KRITISCHE POLITISIERUNG JUNGER MENSCHEN – Der Text baut auf dem kürzlich erschienenen Buch *Educating Against Extremism* (Davies, *Educating Against Extremism*, 2008) auf, in dem untersucht wird, welche Rolle Schulen bei der Vermeidung der schwerwiegenden und gewalttätigen Formen von Extremismus in einem Land spielen könnten. Untersucht werden das Wesen des Extremismus sowie Identitätsbildung und Radikalisierung; religiöse Überzeugung, Schulen mit religiöser Basis und der Mythos der Gleichwertigkeit; Gerechtigkeit, Rache und Ehre sowie freie Meinungsäußerung, Humor und Satire. Es wird die Ansicht vertreten, dass man sich in den Schulen mit den Themen religiöser Fundamentalismus und Staatsterrorismus befassen muss. Die Autorin plädiert für eine stärkere Politisierung junger Menschen, indem kritischer Respekt bzw. kritische Respektlosigkeit herausgebildet werden und die Menschenrechte auf einer säkularen Grundlage zur Anwendung kommen. Erforderlich

sind spezielle Arten staatsbürgerlicher Erziehung, mit deren Hilfe Fähigkeiten zur Analyse von Medien und politischen sowie religiösen Botschaften vermittelt werden, die zugleich aber auch die Förderung eines kritischen Idealismus ermöglichen.

**Resumen** – LA EDUCACIÓN CONTRA EL EXTREMISMO: HACIA UNA POLITIZACIÓN CRÍTICA DE LA GENTE JOVEN – Este trabajo está basado en un libro recientemente publicado con el título *Educating Against Extremism* (Davies, *Educating Against Extremism*, 2008) que explora el papel potencial que juegan las escuelas en la prevención de las formas más negativas y violentas del extremismo de un país. Examina la naturaleza del extremismo; la identificación y la radicalización; la fe religiosa, las escuelas religiosas y la creencia del igual valor; la justicia, la venganza y el honor; y el libre discurso, el humor y la sátira. El papel sostiene que el fundamentalismo religioso debe ser tratado en las escuelas de la misma forma que el terrorismo de Estado. El libro aboga por una mayor politización de las personas jóvenes mediante el fomento de una actitud crítica y el uso de una base secular de derechos humanos. Se necesitan formas específicas de educación cívica, que provean herramientas para analizar los mensajes políticos o religiosos difundidos por los medios, pero que también permitan desarrollar un idealismo crítico.

**Резюме** – ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ПРОТИВ ЭКСТРЕМИЗМА: КРАЙНЯЯ ПОЛИТИЗАЦИЯ МОЛОДЕЖИ – Данная статья основывается на недавно опубликованной книге *Educating Against Extremism* (Davies 2008), в которой исследуется потенциальная роль школ в предотвращении наиболее отрицательных и жестоких форм экстремизма в стране. В ней изучается сама природа экстремизма; формирование идентичности и радикализм; религиозные верования, школы и миф о равноценности; справедливость, мстительность и честь; а также свобода слова, юмор и сатира. В данной статье утверждается, что в школах необходимо обращать внимание на религиозный фундаментализм, также как и на государственный терроризм. В данной книге автор выступает за большую политизацию молодежи посредством проявления крайнего (не)уважения и использования основ прав человека. Для этого необходимы особые формы гражданского образования, которые формируют умения для анализа средств массовой информации и политических или религиозных заявлений, а также способствуют укреплению критического идеализма.

### **Extremism: a global concern**

Extremism is a major concern globally, given the links to terrorism and religious fundamentalism. This paper is based on a recently published book, *Educating against Extremism* (Davies 2008), which explores how education could try to counter those forms of extremism which present a danger to societies globally. My argument is that formal education currently does little to prevent people joining extremist groups, or to enable young people to critically analyse fundamentalism. Many suicide bombers, for example, have had extensive schooling in state systems, even becoming doctors trained to save lives, not take them. While literacy is obviously key to enabling people

to read and interpret polemic, tracts and messages for themselves, much more is needed than basic literacy alone. This needs to be combined with political literacy and critical global citizenship. Young people do have a history of engaging around peace issues internationally, for example with the 55-year-old 7,500 strong UNESCO Associated Schools network, but exchange processes used to be slow. Global communications technologies now mean that the ways used by those young people who want to network in the interests of peace—or of terrorism—may lie mostly outside the school; but this does not mean that schools are without power. I propose a very different educational strategy to the conventional one of tolerant multiculturalism—which can imply the need for an indulgent or relativist stance towards actions done in the name of culture. We want young people to be idealistic and to challenge injustice where they see it; but the task is to politicise young people without cementing uncritical acceptance of single truths.

There is a reluctance to tackle issues of religious and other fundamentalisms beyond a plea for “respect” and “tolerance”; yet a critical analysis of beliefs, and of how certain interpretations lead to extremist acts, is central to understanding actions which are otherwise labelled “irrational”. The problem of state terrorism is also rarely addressed in schools, as it is not part of the curriculum nor of teachers’ confidence. Hence young people are rarely given skills to hold their own government to account in its actions towards other countries. I argue that specific forms of citizenship education are needed, which have a basis in human rights and which provide skills to analyse the media and political or religious messages. I look at how “respect” and “disrespect” can be handled under a rights framework, and how justice can be pursued without recourse to violence and revenge. In this paper I briefly consider the nature of extremism and the identity of the extremists, before looking at schools, justice, free speech and the fostering of a critical idealism within a rights framework.

### **The nature of extremism**

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in a debate in Doha, Qatar, defined extremism as “when you do not allow for a different point of view; when you hold your own views as being quite exclusive, when you don’t allow for the possibility of difference” (Tutu 2006). I would want to add “and when you want to impose this view on others using violence if necessary”. When extremism starts to have a political end—for example, to force governments to the negotiating table or to make some changes in their policy—it may involve the use of undemocratic methods to harm the functioning of the democratic order (Sieckelinck 2007).

Analyses of suicide terrorists, whether in the US, UK, Israel, Chechnya or Sri Lanka, show that they have a specific secular and strategic goal, which is to compel modern democracies to withdraw forces from territory that the

terrorists consider to be their homeland (Pape 2005). Pape argues interestingly that religion is rarely the root cause, although it is often used as a tool by terrorist organizations in recruiting and in other efforts for their cause. The other relevant part of the analysis is that suicide bombing works. Pape is able to show that suicide terrorism has a “strategic logic” as part of bigger campaigns, and that many such campaigns are successful. Such terrorism is not the random work of individual fanatics.

Much extremism and terrorism can only be understood in relation to specific political, economic and historical contexts. In his discussion of the “pedagogy of violence” and brutality manifested by whole societies as well as individuals, Jorge Nef (2003) sees terrorism as related to five global, interconnected manifestations of a political crisis: failed states with economic breakdown and internal conflicts fuelled by a vigorous arms trade; a surge in irredentist forms of ethnic and religious nationalism; the resurgence of neo-fascist right-wing tendencies in developed countries; expanding criminality enhanced by authoritarian or corrupt law enforcement; and the growing irrelevance of democratic politics resulting from neo-liberal policies and the erosion of civil society. Identities have to be understood in the context of specific geo-political developments—for Muslim extremists, this would be the violence and discrimination against Muslims in Palestine, Bosnia or Afghanistan; for Jewish extremists, the persecution in Tsarist Russia and Nazi Germany and the violence that they have faced from Palestinian terrorists; or for Hindu extremists, the partition of India at the demand of the Muslim minority, and the current antagonism towards Christians or Buddhists due to the fact that low caste Hindus are converting to escape their caste discrimination. Extremism is not actually about theological differences, but about power and control.

Extremism is often aligned with fundamentalism, which does have a religious base. Here, issues arise over literal interpretations of scriptures and the sexism, racism and homophobia that may result from such readings. Studies show that the stronger the religious conviction, the less tolerant individuals are likely to be towards gays and lesbians (Kahn 2006). Not all fundamentalists are extremists or terrorists, but fundamentalism may predispose adherents to “extreme” positions. The differences between forms of extremism can be summarised as relating to five main dimensions:

- Scale: from individual to state-funded;
- Roots: political, religious or combined;
- Expansionist: whether continually seeking to draw in new members;
- Goals: whether trying to force political change;
- Violence: whether force is seen as desirable or justified.

A fundamentalist group that neither seeks to expand itself nor to take violent action may not require any particular intervention; but when such groups become destructive, or indoctrinatory, or globally revolutionary, then

there is a question of how to respond—and an educational response may be most appropriate.

### **Who are the extremists?**

Who are the extremists that cause concern? In individual cases, it might be argued that certain “extremists” (such as Gandhi and Nelson Mandela) are necessary in order to demonstrate models of non-violent change. As a rule, however, extremism is seen as negative. There is a website ([Extremism on the net](#)) which monitors other websites devoted to extremism, including those that focus on “political fascism, skinhead fascism, Nazi parties, white supremacy, militia groups, Holocaust Denial, race hate, religious cults, anti-homosexuality, anti-Semitism, world conspiracy, Islamist militancy, pro-anorexia/bulimia, violent animal rights, sports hooliganism, violent political activism, bomb-making and suicide assistance”. By an irony, many of the Al-Qaeda websites are hosted by US companies.

One key issue for our times is state sponsorship of extremism. Many governments will use extreme measures to achieve their political and economic objectives. We can understand why the US and the UK have been accused of being “terrorists” in their invasions and in their support for Israel. It could be argued that military intervention is justified only if there is genocide or a real likelihood of attack—but not if the underlying intention is merely to topple a dictator. Timothy Garton Ash provides excellent insights into the way in which countries justify invasion, but concludes “I don’t yet see a single example of a post-intervention international occupation which has successfully ‘built’ a self-governing free country” (2004, p. 243).

The politicisation of religion can be linked with state interests in sponsoring extremism—the rapid growth of political Islam, the political reach of “born-again” Christianity, Jewish extremism, or the Hindutva movement. There is the exploitation of religious identity to feed into political polarisation, for example the Shariah-isation of Indonesia and Malaysia, despite a history of multiculturalism. Hanan Ashrawi, the Palestinian political activist and member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, made a very significant point: “The Israeli-Palestinian issue is not a religious conflict. It is an issue over land, legitimacy, history and politics. Bringing God into the conflict is a guarantee that it will never be solved” (Ashrawi 2007).

### **Identity and radicalisation**

One central issue—and challenge—in extremism is that of people’s identity. How do you give young people a secure identity without labelling or hardening this—what is sometimes called an “essentialist” identity, conditioning all behaviours? Social identity theory suggests that how we think about

ourselves tends to vary along a continuum, from the perception of self as unique to the perception of self as very similar or identical to in-group members. In certain situations, we become exemplars of them—a process of depersonalisation (Cairns 1996). Collective identity—and identity politics—may therefore be a disturbing force. “It is through the creation of collective identities that ethnic and national movements, and the land-right claims they make, gain their force ... they mobilise culture, tradition, religion and notions of history and place to evoke a sense of unity” (Cockburn 1998, p. 10).

Much is made of the need in our multicultural societies to acknowledge our multiple identities—being simultaneously white, British, female, music-loving, broccoli-hating and so on. Mostly these things are in relative harmony. The problem comes when one identity takes complete precedence. Amartya Sen claims “Being a Muslim is not an overarching identity that determines everything in which a person believes” (2006, p. 65)—although I am not sure whether that is in fact a choice for some Muslims, who talk of a total way of life. But Sen importantly draws attention to the failure to distinguish between Islamic history and the history of Muslim people (that is, not all priorities, activities and values need to be placed within their singular identity of being Muslim).

So there are two issues at this point: the choices that we make about our identities in particular contexts, and how we ascribe identities to others. We know much about the ascription of identities from the wars in the Balkans, how Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks had to choose an identity, and then would be seen in that light, as we do from the tensions in Rwanda between Hutus and Tutsis. Individuals were seen as representative of a “whole”, and of the history of conflict. Even five years after the end of the war in Bosnia, I talked to a Croat teenager who said, “I’m not sharing a desk with a Serb”. Adila Kreso (2008) gives a disturbing account of the continued divisive education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with schools segregated according to “nationality”, some of which have even been divided into “two schools under one roof”, with separate entrances or separate shifts. Textbooks give distorted and disparaging images of other ethnic groups, religions or language speakers, or promote a divided sense of ethnic “belonging” according to geography or history. Fights break out among students to decide which religion is “better”.

A strong sense of collective identity thus may mean a labelling of or even a hatred for “others”. For Michael Apple (2001), evangelicalism is crucially linked to identity, to “self” and to “other”. He describes how, in the USA, the religious Right has a sense of justice which includes “hate” for gays, despite the fact that the majority of conservative evangelicals see themselves as “nice” people and “real Americans” who are maintaining the old standards. There is even a Western Baptist site in the US which has the URL “godhatesfags”.

In the end, we need more than the concept of multiple identities. Personally, I prefer Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of "hybridity". He challenges the constructions and "exoticisation" of multiculturalism and cultural diversity, which stress the recognition of difference, and prefers longer histories of cultural and ethnic mixing. Many writers in Silva's (2002) collection on Sri Lanka draw on this, showing the "hidden history" of hybridity in culture, art or music, and challenging the notion of single or pure cultures. Extremism is often related to a call for some form of imagined purity.

Hybridity is not just a collection of multiple identities; it refers to new combinations of identities, and I like the idea that it entails the original "repeated as something different—a mutation, a hybrid ... at once a mode of appropriation and of resistance [to the mother culture]" (Bhabha 111, 120). In educational terms, therefore, the game is to play up such originality—rather than push children into camps by encouraging them to learn about Asian food or visits to the Sikh temple. The trick is to enhance the resistance to such simple labels and categorisations, and give children status by showing how original and special each of us is.

Where I do agree with Sen, therefore, is in his questioning of "community". Being assigned to a "community" (Muslim, Christian, Somali and so on) may imply the absence of choice. Sen explains:

When the prospects of good relations among different human beings are seen (as they increasingly are) primarily in terms of 'amity among civilisations' or 'dialogue between religious groups' or 'friendly relations between different communities' (ignoring the great many different ways in which people relate to each other), a serious miniaturisation of human beings precedes the devised programmes for peace (2006, p. xiii).

His concept of "miniaturisation" is a useful one, implying a reduction of ourselves to small and simple souls, rather than complex ones. I also share his doubts on "representatives" of a community. I too have problems with "community" (e.g. the Muslim community, the international community) when it reflects the assumption of a physical and homogeneous reality—and as Sen points out, the "well-integrated" community where residents do great things for each other can be the very same that throws bricks through the windows of immigrants. When does solidarity become xenophobia?

The problem with schools and identity is that schools can foster miniaturisation through the ascription of academic and non-academic identities. Even the most successful may continuously fear failure. As I have written before (Davies 2004), the testing regime in schools at best does not create secure identities and at worst creates a life time of anxieties—now being confirmed by research, noted by Harber (2005) in his book *Schooling as Violence*. And as in Rwanda, schooling success or failure can, among other things, be linked to ethnicity, creating even more frustration and anger. Hence, the task for education is to celebrate not a bland diversity, but a



resistant hybridity and originality in each child; and to try to mitigate the worst excesses of competition. It is also about not fearing “the other”.

The role of education is a complex one in the biographies of suicide bombers or those who join (and leave) extremist groups. Individuals are driven by a combination of certain experiences (trauma or humiliation, fear of outside groups, alienation, frustration, globalisation) and psychological predispositions (the need for cognitive closure, respect for authority, the need for uniqueness). It is difficult to find precise or sole educational experiences which propel people into extremism, although experiences of alienation, racism or isolation at school feature in some biographies. Some forms of education that seek to open minds and present alternatives to the single world view can be a trigger for the exit from extremism (Husain 2007). What is clear is that the twin drivers of extremism are absolutism (single truths, simple dualisms, black and white certainties, either enemy or friend) and the search for perfection, utopia or purity. Both absolutism and perfectionism may be promoted by education rather than challenged. The current obsession with excellence and standards may actually be conducive to extremism. This does not teach people to be at comfort with ambiguity or with the notion of a school or pupil being “good enough”.

### **Segregation, faith schools and the myth of equal value**

The issue of segregated schools and faith schools is particularly contentious. It is acknowledged that schools segregated by ethnicity or religion do not help social cohesion, whether in Sri Lanka (Colenso 2005) or Northern Ireland (Gallagher 2004). For Sen, faith schools encourage a “fragmentary” approach to the demands of living in a desegregated Britain.

Many of these new institutions are coming up precisely at a time when religious prioritization has been a major source of violence in the world (adding to the history of such violence in Britain itself, including Catholic-Protestant divisions in Northern Ireland)—not unconnected themselves with segmented schooling. Prime Minister Blair is certainly right to note that ‘there is a very strong sense of ethos and values in these schools’. But education is not just about getting children, even very young ones, immersed in an old, inherited ethos. It is also about helping children to develop the ability to reason about new decisions any grown-up person will have to take. The important goal is not formulaic ‘parity’ in relation to old Brits with their faith schools but what would best enhance the capability of the children to live ‘examined lives’ as they grow up in an integrated community (2006, p. 160).

Interestingly, Sen talks of the “uncanny similarity” between the problems Britain faces today and those that British India faced, and which Gandhi thought were receiving direct encouragement from the Raj. Gandhi was particularly critical of the official view that India was a collection of religious communities; at talks, he resented the fact that he was being depicted



primarily as a spokesman for Hindus, in particular “caste Hindus”, with the remaining half of the Indian population being represented by delegates of each of the “other communities”, chosen by the British Prime Minister. He insisted that while he himself was a Hindu, the political movement he led was staunchly Universalist and not a community-based movement; it had supporters from all the religious groups in India. Sen also draws attention to the very few home-grown terrorists produced by India, almost none of them linked to Al-Qaeda. This he links to the economy, but also to the nature of Indian democratic politics, and the acceptance of identities other than religious/ethnic ones.

The disastrous consequences of defining people by their religious ethnicity and giving predetermined priority to the community-based perspective over all other identities, which Gandhi thought was receiving support from India’s British rulers, may well have come, alas, to haunt the country of the rulers themselves (Sen 2006, p. 169).

In like vein, Tariq Ali (2005) says there should be a “moratorium” on the state sponsorship of religion. Over a third of British state schools are religious and the National Secular Society has published figures that reveal that Labour has allowed the Church of England to take over 40 more non-religious state secondaries, with another 54 on the cards. The then Education Secretary, a paid-up member of Opus Dei (a controversial right-wing Catholic organization which encourages corporal mortification), stressed that the “bombs” would not stop her encouraging the formation of more single-faith schools. I think that Gandhi, while supporting a resistant view, would not have agreed with her logic. As Sen puts it, the UK is not merely an “imagined community” but now “an imagined national federation of religious ethnicities” (Sen 2006, p. 165).

The problems with faith schools are thus not just isolation and segregation but the early labelling of children as having a confirmed religious identity. Richard Dawkins (2006) describes a “charming picture” in the *Independent* of a nativity play in which the Three Wise Men are played by Shadbreet (a Sikh), Musharaff (a Muslim) and Adele (a Christian), all aged four. He asks how any decent person could think it right to label 4-year-old children with the cosmic and theological opinions of their parents. He asks us to imagine an identical photograph, with the captions changed to Shadbreet (a Keynesian), Musharaff (a Monetarist) and Adele (a Marxist), all aged four. There would be letters of protest. But such is the privileging of religion in our society that there were no protests about the forced or assumed religious identities. He asks us then to imagine the outcry if the caption had read Shadbreet (an Atheist), Musharaff (an Agnostic) and Adele (a Secular Humanist), all aged four. The parents would probably have been investigated to see whether they were fit to bring up children (Dawkins 2006).

There have been critiques of Dawkins as being a “secular fundamentalist” (Armstrong 2006), but his work on religion as an addiction is powerful, as is

his image of purpose-built sites (faith schools) with the pushers (teachers) being officially sanctioned to draw more children into the net (Dawkins 2005). It is true that schools need a strong value base and cannot be relativistic, but this base need not be a religious one, which has its dangers. The exhortation to extremist acts (whether bombing abortion clinics, issuing jihads or invading a country) is always more powerful if done in the name of a supernatural being that needs to be worshipped or defended. I am not, of course, saying that all faith schools promote extremism, but that an institution designed to foster belief in the supernatural and their “word” has, by definition, some difficulties in then equally fostering critical analysis of that persona and belief and, by extension, of those leaders appearing to act on the word and defend the faith.

The issue is of how values and behaviours are to be judged. We hear much of “respect”, yet this respect cannot be unconditional and uncritical. People’s beliefs and attitudes can be condoned, but behaviours that are adopted in the name of these beliefs cannot be “respected” simply because they have a cultural or religious root. They must be subject to scrutiny. My position is that a moral base is needed, that this base must at root be secular and that the best—or, like democracy, the “least worst”—base derives from international conventions on human rights. A wholly religious base does not work, for if one is saying that behaviour derives from what a god decrees must be done, then one has little basis for a critique of one’s own—or others’—religion and where it leads. Most Muslim scholars would entirely reject the claim that Islamic injunctions can require, sanction or even tolerate terrorism, although, according to Tariq Ali, many of them would argue that people would not cease to be Muslims even if they were to interpret their duties differently, as long as they adhered to the core Islamic beliefs and practices. I suppose we would ask what constitutes “core” beliefs and whether these include non-violence. Tariq Ali comments:

Meanwhile, ‘good’ Muslims are being paraded on TV arguing that violence is not advocated in the Koran and therefore the bombers are wrong. The implication here is that, if the Koran permitted them, such actions would be fine... The Koran of course has many different readings. The Old Testament on the other hand has no passages in praise of peace. Revenge, torture and rape are all available here. What if some Muslims convert to Christianity and start to implement the prescriptions contained therein? (Ali 2005, p. 86).

Extremism is founded on the notion that there is one right answer, truth or path, and that there are no alternatives. Conversely, critical education is founded on the principle of accepting multiple realities, feeling comfortable with ambiguity and searching for multiple truths, not one truth. An uncritical respect for beliefs must be superseded by a respect or disrespect for actions that are done in the name of these beliefs. Like Tariq Ali, Dawkins is very good on how exhortations to kill, maim or discriminate can be found in all religious texts if you look hard enough, leading to the question: on

what basis do you then accept or reject different parts of scriptures? There is a need for at least some form of underlying framework or benchmarks. It has to be stressed, however, that a rights base does not simply replace the Bible and the Koran with another set of precepts and exhortations, but provides a framework for analysis and for the encouragement of debate about competing rights.

As well as “respect”, much is made of the need for “tolerance”. This is both dangerous and mythological. Tolerance by definition implies superiority: one only tolerates things one does not like or that one disapproves of. Advocates of faith schools claim that, while upholding a particular set of religious values, they teach full tolerance of other belief systems. They value them all equally. This is either a myth or patently dishonest. A faith school exists by definition because it is felt that those faith values are better than or different from others and that children benefit from maximum exposure to them. Tolerance of others within this framework is therefore at best a pick-and-mix of bits of related religions—which mostly means covering the more superficial aspects of celebrations and festivals—again cementing otherness, difference and exoticisation. Any deeper examination within comparative religion would highlight the reality that while all different religions hold themselves to be true, not all can be equally valid (Barnes 2006).

My view is that schools segregated on the basis of language (such as those in Canada or Belgium) pose fewer problems in that it is easier to see other language speakers as equal. However, schools deliberately segregated on the basis of belief or ethnicity deny as part of their *raison d'être* the equality and value of other belief systems or other ethnic groups. This cannot help community cohesion.

### **Justice, revenge and honour**

Linked closely to identity and purity is the notion of revenge and honour—wanting to avenge what is seen as an insult to that identity or a sully of it. The problem for extremism is the amplification of violence through reciprocal acts of revenge. There is an old Chinese saying that “he who wants revenge must remember to dig two graves”. The Hamas phrase “We will not stop killing their children until they stop killing ours” is a chilling one, but by no means exclusive to that movement. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is characterised by retaliatory attacks on both sides—with the usual spirals and amplifications. The attacks by Israel on Lebanon in 2005 were a classic example of using one smallish incident to generate a massive attack and loss of life; but many of the arguments were about whether the attacks were “disproportionate”—as if there was ever anything proportionate about killing civilians.

A psychiatrist heading the Gaza community mental health project has studied the suicide bombers and found two roots: firstly, trauma—witnessing

suffering or personally suffering humiliation—and secondly, wanting to take revenge. “Arab honour has to take revenge for family honour and dignity. The vehicle is usually Islam, and the trigger is anger” (Eyad Sarraj, quoted in Goldenberg 2002). The settlement of debts is a prerequisite for martyrdom; otherwise the gates of paradise are closed to a bomber. The “shaming” experience of living under Israeli occupation is also discussed. Al-Qaeda documents claim that God has sanctioned punishment for the west, with the right to destroy not just villages and cities, but “the economy of those who have robbed our wealth” and to “kill civilians of the country which has killed ours”. This is not a “senseless” attack, as the media claim—and the war is not just religious or ideological, but economic.

The whole issue of honour, shame and insult is a difficult one, as we see from the controversy over the Danish cartoons of Mohamed which appeared in the newspaper *Jyllands Posten* in 2005 and the treatment of Salman Rushdie over his book *The Satanic Verses*. The examination of blasphemy laws makes an interesting school project. Yet we hear also of young people attacking others simply for “looking” at them in the wrong way, which they interpret as needing to be avenged through violence. Can schools intervene in this culture in any way?

In theory, the opposite or alternative to revenge is restorative justice. This is an attempt to refocus crime as a conflict between people, to bring together those people directly involved and to address the impact of an offence on the victim, the offender and the community. Unlike retribution and the “eye for an eye” approach, the theory of restorative justice has developed from utilitarianism (Robinson 2003) which seeks the greatest good or happiness for the greatest number of people. More suffering should not be inflicted; collaboration seeks to repair damage, giving the offender an opportunity to express remorse and make amends. It is often part of truth and reconciliation programmes, for example in South Africa, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. The “3 Rs” of restorative justice outlined by Alexander (2001) in his work on the “citizenship school” are: recognition (recognising the reasons behind the action and the needs driving violent behaviour); responsibility (whereby perpetrators take responsibility for their actions and accept that they have done wrong); and retribution (the perpetrator makes reparations, which might include restitution, restoration and reconciliation, to settle differences).

We should nonetheless acknowledge some difficulties in applying this approach to schools. It can be particularly contentious to identify victims and offenders: if a pupil attacks a teacher with a knife, then this seems a clear case of an offence; yet in this, and certainly in more minor confrontations, the pupil may claim that the attack was in fact a reaction to a series of “offences” by the teacher. Certainly in my own and others’ research, pupils will claim that their responses were provoked by a series of “offences” and insults by teachers (Davies and Leoni 2007). Restorative justice, unlike “no-blame” approaches, does not mean that wrongdoers evade responsibility: amends must be made, but these may need to be on both sides. Yet the key

is that making amends does not equate to taking revenge. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Committee, and the case studies of *Advocacy for Social Justice* in the Oxfam Advocacy Institute Manual (Cohen et al. 2001), do want to bring to justice the perpetrators of crimes or genocide; however, this is not the same as committing the same offence in a retaliatory fashion.

A core problem is that schools in many countries unfortunately still condone and use revenge in their punishment regimes—actions unrelated to the “offence”, such as detentions for rudeness, or, in some countries, beating a child for being late or for giving the wrong answer. As one child in our Angolan research said, “Our teacher is very good. He only hits us if we don't learn” (Davies 2007). The message is that it is acceptable for the powerful to exact swift retribution. One task of a school which is aiming to promote peace is to question the efficacy of revenge in and out of school settings, and to explore alternatives.

### **Humour, satire and free speech**

A key role of the media in a free society is that of satire. This section addresses the thin dividing line between giving offence and harmless mockery. There is a wonderful scene in the film *The Life of Brian* when Jesus heals the leper and the leper is furious because his livelihood of begging is gone. “Bloody do-gooder!” he says gloomily.

The study of the legal position on blasphemy is instructive. Religions do not have rights, only individuals, but even within those individual rights the law makes no provision for a right not to be offended. Debates continue in the UK on a bill against the incitement of religious hatred. This has worried those—not only just comedians, but also theologians—who are concerned that this would outlaw jokes about religion or religious leaders. We actually already have plenty of laws on this area, and it plays into the hands of the fundamentalists. The co-author of *Jerry Springer the Opera*, for example, received a death threat from Christian fundamentalists. He says, “It's the duty of comedians to attack religious belief because you test the elastic limit of a thing by probing it, and belief systems based on faith rather than facts need to be tested”. The wonderful website *Ship of Fools* is one run by committed Christians but which pokes fun at the “crazy things that go wrong with the church”. It has religious jokes as well as debates and a feature called “The Mystery Worshipper” which (like restaurant critics) critically reviews church services across the world. The Ship's editor says on the home page, “Our aim is to help Christians be self-critical and honest about the failings of Christianity, as we believe honesty can only strengthen faith”. The “Laugh Judgement” in 2005 was a competition about the funniest/most offensive religious joke, and was won in fact by a joke about extremism ([http://www.shipoffools.com/features/2005/laugh\\_judgment\\_results.html](http://www.shipoffools.com/features/2005/laugh_judgment_results.html)).

Macintyre (2005) points out that “Satire is the mark of a healthy democracy, the pricking of pomposity that reminds our leaders that they are not self-anointed”. As George Orwell said, “Every joke is a tiny revolution. Whatever destroys dignity and brings down the mighty from their seats, preferably with a bump, is funny”. Osama bin Laden became the staple of playground humour as tasteless and defiant jokes began to emerge after 9/11 as a natural response to the oppression of terror—a tiny revolution against fear. The wonderful female Muslim comedian Shazia Mirza started one of her shows with: “My name’s Shazia Mirza. Or at least, that’s what it says on my pilot’s licence”.

Tyrants and terrorists try to elevate themselves above humour. As anti-Nazi jokes flourished outside Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, so they became punishable by death in the country itself. In North Korea, satire is banned for the simple reason that since the Communist state is officially perfect, there is nothing to satirise. “The first sign that a tyrant’s days are numbered comes not with the sound of gunfire but the gentle ripple of disrespectful laughter” (Macintyre 2005). The joke going round Baghdad cafes was “following the attack, the Iraqi Information Minister has summoned all Saddam’s body doubles to a meeting to tell them: the good news is that our beloved leader has survived, so you all still have jobs. The bad news is that he has lost an arm”. As Macintyre pointed out, the snigger is mightier than the sword.

However, while we might all agree that political satire is necessary and important, satirising religious leaders provokes a great deal more debate. For believers, such leaders are not self-appointed; like the political leader Kim Jong Il in North Korea, they are perfect; and to joke about them is to joke about the entire belief system which they represent. Yet it is a puzzle that if these leaders are indeed all powerful, why can’t they take a joke? This would seem to display an insecurity about their own mandate and its spokespersons. Nonetheless, part of humour education would be to discuss the whole notion of “insult” and “offence” and when it is necessary and when it is gratuitous.

Humour education is, of course, part of a bigger programme of political education and media education. In 2007 I was working in Sri Lanka with the Ministry of Education to develop a national framework for education for social cohesion and peace. Clearly, the key concerns in Sri Lanka are the Tamil Tigers and the Sinhala/Tamil divide. The Ministry has good materials on resolving interpersonal conflict and achieving “inner peace”, but it also recognises the need for more media education and political education. As Chomsky (1997, p. 5) has stated, “a democratic society is one in which the public has the means to participate in some meaningful way in the management of their own affairs and the means of information are open and free”.

This implies two things: a fundamental responsibility on the part of the media and the ability of the readership to deconstruct messages. In conflict societies, however, the hate media has been a counter to democracy and

peace. Hate radio played a key role in starting the genocide in Rwanda (Gardner 2001). Privately owned but government controlled, RTLM (Radio Mille Collines) was created in mid-1993 with shareholders that had strong ties to the ruling regime and its security forces. After securing a regular audience through pop music, it then broadcast political propaganda and death warrants, encouraging the killing of Tutsis. It even read over the air the names of people to be killed. In the Balkans, confrontations between peacekeeping troops and Serb hardliners for control of television stations in Bosnia's Srpska Republic illustrate how valuable broadcasting as a line of communication can be in a conflict situation. It is ironic that in the so-called defence of liberation and free speech, the Americans bombed the Al-Jazeera TV stations which were presenting a view of the situation in Iraq that differed from that featured in US propaganda.

Thus critical media education plays a crucial role—both in analysing spin and propaganda, and conversely in recognising the importance of media in investigative journalism and in freedom of speech and critique. Buying a newspaper is a micro-political act. Being part of the public voice is both a danger and an opportunity for politicians. In looking at the justification for extremism we need to look at “truth” and “myth”, as well as the power of rumour. Furthermore, the strong amplifying effect of fear needs to be addressed. The vulnerability of certain groups can mean that fear drives them into pre-emptive strikes. The same “fear” is what lent some public support in the US and the UK to a pre-emptive strike on Iraq. The power of small bits of (mis)information—the 45 min strike—is enough to cause or justify aggression on a massive scale.

By extension, the question we might ask ourselves now is how to spread rumours about peace. Is fear so much more powerful than happiness? Will reporting ethnic violence incite more violence? Is withholding information for the sake of social and communal peace morally correct and ethically appropriate? It is a debatable point. Or, as Plato said, “Those who tell the stories also rule the society” (*The Republic*).

Yet political and media literacy in schools is not always seen as a vital part of language learning: in Brcko, the teachers working on curriculum harmonisation whom I was “advising” preferred to adhere to the safety of literature and comprehension rather than to use newspapers as resources, feeling threatened by anything that appeared “political”. Teacher training may be a key area here, enabling the development of skills and orientations towards teaching controversial issues and analysing discourse. A valuable teaching programme, *Facing History* ([www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)), uses interpretations of history to explore current moral choices, looking at racism, discrimination and genocide. A key tenet of the programme is moving from being a bystander to injustice to being an “upstander”, defending one’s own rights and those of others. Language as well as history teachers can use such resources to explore controversies and discourses in history and in current political and social life.



Media education entails a need for education about the web and cyberspace. The internet can be democratic and peace promoting, such as the Cyber Peace project which fosters dialogue between Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians through intergroup conversations. But it can also contribute to polarisation and foster bigotry through hate-based and conspiracy websites and films (Kaplan and Bjorgo 1998). One of the terrorist bombers whose rucksack failed to explode during the attempted attacks on the London transport system on 21st July, 2005 told investigators that the would be bombers had psyched themselves for the attacks by watching “films on the war on Iraq... Especially those where women and children were being killed and exterminated by British and American soldiers... of widows, mothers and daughters that cry” (Ali 2005, p. 52).

### **Critical action**

In the argument for a secular and integrated education system, the problem of living with ambiguity and value pluralism is acknowledged, and I have posited that the need for a clear position on values can be met by a basis in human rights. UNICEF’s Rights Respecting Schools offer a very good example (see Howe and Covell 2005 and the UNICEF website). We can look too at the African and Islamic Charters on rights, despite their differences; but my argument is that it is essential to have an acknowledged value base that is established by real people so that it can be contested rather than held up as sacred. A strong civil society is one that is not afraid to critique, but at the same time has people with the skills and dispositions to do so without recourse to violence.

If we have established critical thinking and a critical value base for this in Universalist human and children’s rights, I turn finally to what can be done. This for me is about both the big and abstract idea of “building civil society” and individual acts of resistance to violence and extremism. The international treaty to ban landmines provides one good example of how this can be achieved. When Jody Williams, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work to make this treaty possible, was asked how she did it, she replied “e-mail” (Garton Ash 2004, p. 251). This highlights the importance of striving to “refuse the illusion of impotence”.

It is interesting that extremist reform in Pakistan has not completely eradicated the human rights movement; so why is this case? Sen’s take on this is that the resistance comes from:

- the use of civil laws;
- the courage and commitment of civil dissidents;
- the fair-mindedness of many upright members of the judiciary;
- the presence of a large body of social and progressive public opinion; and
- the effectiveness of the media in drawing attention to inhumanity and the

violation of civil decency as issues for the attention of a “reflective public” (2004, p. 73).

In the case of the US-led war on terror, the problem has been that a pre-occupation with military solutions has caused the importance of civil society to be neglected. In the UK, ministers who arranged numerous meetings with “Muslim leaders” bolstered and strengthened the voice of religious authorities while downgrading the importance of non-religious institutions and movements. The problem is that we do not have “secular leaders” or “humanist leaders”. Besides that, I don’t necessarily want people to speak for me, unless I directly request them to do so.

I am therefore cheered by the growth of active and non-sectarian citizenship education in many schools and countries, which is encouraging action in the community as well as in school. In 2006 a team at our Centre conducted a review for the Carnegie Foundation on the impact of pupil decision-making in school and the community, and, looking at over 80 studies worldwide, found evidence of young people taking action not just to improve the community, but to hold local and national government to account (Davies et al. 2006). Young people’s J8 (the parallel youth summit to the G8 meeting), Youth Parliaments and Local Government consultation groups may not have a lot of teeth, but they are at least teaching skills of advocacy, lobbying, negotiation—that is, creating change not through violent means but through legal and micro-political processes. Again, this is teaching people to become “upstanders”.

One large-scale study found that in schools committed to giving their students a voice, students were much more confident in expressing their views about a range of topics, including government policy, than students in schools where there were few opportunities for students to express their opinions (Hannam 2004). Similarly, our Centre’s recently completed project on developing School Councils found—unsurprisingly—that students who are given powers and responsibility develop a sense of agency and improve their confidence to change the status quo (Davies and Yamashita 2007). This is not “rocket science”—but it is interesting how resistant some teachers are to student involvement. The part of the project which involved pupils observing teachers to provide systematic feedback on teaching and learning evoked the following response from one teacher: “I’m not having kids watching me teach...”

I do not underplay the individual and institutional barriers to an education which might tackle extremism. Nor would I or should I speak for those in far more difficult circumstances than I myself or children in UK schools. When our Centre conducted a Global Review for UNESCO on their Associated Schools, we asked schools what activities they were carrying out in the community to foster peace and tolerance and so on. (Davies et al. 2003). We found some inspirational examples, but we also had bitter responses from children in occupied Palestine and the Gaza strip who said that a) they were not allowed free movement, and that the checkpoints, walls and brutality

from Israeli soldiers prevented them from doing anything, and b) we should therefore, be asking the Israelis about peace, not them. Given the huge diversity in the political contexts, particularly in the causes of extremism mentioned above, it would therefore be facile to suggest some universal panacea or curriculum for education against extremism.

There are hence a number of paradoxes in arguing for a form of education which will challenge extremism or an education for political participation and agency. The inherent irony is akin to that of a sign that was spotted at the World Trade Conference: "Join the World Wide Movement against Globalisation". The paradox can be summarised as wanting young people to have ideals; acknowledging that these ideals should not be or cannot be imposed or indoctrinated in a democratic society; and yet realising that the pursuit of ideals may lead into avenues which are seen as harmful. Sieckelink and De Ruyter acknowledge some of these dilemmas.

What we try to preserve through counter-terror education can only flourish by exchange of different ideals, while at the same time the educational entrance against extremism is apparently the warning against ideals. (2006, p. 13)

Yet for idealism not to become extremist in the sense of causing harm, I conclude that students and teachers need to adopt five types of criticality:

- critical scholarship—a sound political education which includes conflict studies, comparative religion, non-nationalistic citizenship and political skills;
- critical (dis)respect—a sound understanding of universal rights and responsibilities;
- critical thinking—the skills to weigh up alternative ideals and the means to pursue them;
- critical doubt—the acceptance that ideals should be provisional; and finally
- critical lightness—the acceptance that ideals and their holders may be mocked.

The answer to extremism is not moderation, but a highly critical and informed idealism. Extremism's major enemy is also a lightness of touch.

### *Math teacher arrested at airport*

**New York:** A public school teacher was arrested today at JFK International Airport as he attempted to board a flight while in possession of a ruler, a protractor, a set square and a calculator. At a morning press conference, Attorney Alberto Gonzales said he believes the man is a member of the notorious Al-gebra movement. He did not identify the man, who has been charged by the FBI with carrying weapons of math instruction. "Al-gebra is a problem to us," Gonzales said. "They desire solutions by means and extremes and sometimes go off at tangents in search of absolute values. They

use secret code names like ‘x’ and ‘y’ and refer to themselves as ‘unknowns’, but we have determined that they belong to a common denominator of the axis of med-ieval, with coordinates in every country.” When asked to comment on their arrest, President Bush said “If God had wanted us to have better weapons of math instruction; he would have given us more fingers and toes.” White House aides told reporters they could not recall a more intelligent and profound statement by the President.

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