

A Public Health Approach to Inclusive Schools

Reconnecting Young People and Preventing Violent Extremism

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Abstract

This chapter uses a public health approach to look at what we know about violence and violent extremism in the context of kindergarten-to-12th-grade school systems where schools are already trying to intervene and build resilience. The chapter presents issues to consider as we more intentionally try to leverage such programmes to address violent extremism. Efforts at preventing violent extremism (PVE) can be viewed on a continuum of opportunities for creating a safe and positive society in which all members find value, place, and belonging. Within an education context, PVE programmes help to identify and address risk factors for radicalization, strengthen protective factors, and build resilience. Because of the individualized nature of violent extremism, many PVE initiatives focus on individuals at risk; however, we consider the extent to which a comprehensive approach to social inclusion might minimize risk factors, strengthen protective factors, and build resilience across groups, thus reducing the need for law enforcement to intervene. We see schools as a place for social connection which links and broadly interrupts the path to violent extremism. We identify challenges that schools face in becoming centres of resilience and identify next steps for addressing these challenges.

Keywords

school health – social connection – violence prevention – democratic schooling

1 Introduction

Violent extremism has become a core concern in the early twenty-first century, with more than 62,000 incidents of terrorism occurring between 2011 and 2015 (Borum & Neer, 2017). As a result, national governments have worked individually and collectively to try and address violent extremism; however,

the scope of the problem stretching across substantially different contexts has brought with it a number of challenges to the design of policies and the implementation and evaluation of interventions. Our intent in this paper is twofold: first, to examine the issue broadly within the context of primary and secondary schools; and second, to offer a series of research-based recommendations for educators and education policymakers by applying a public health and inclusive approach to the issue. Because the context of violent extremism and educational systems differs substantially from country to country, our work will focus on broader principles for consideration rather than offering specific programme proposals.

2 Public Health Approach

A public health approach to violence prevention is not new. Indeed, some of the foundational work in the early part of this century regarding international efforts for preventing violence took a public health approach to the issue (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002). A public health approach generally requires six steps: (1) surveillance (definition and monitoring); (2) identification of risk factors; (3) identification of protective factors; (4) seeking and developing interventions (mitigating risk and strengthening protective factors in building resilience); (5) evaluating interventions; and (6) scaling up (Satcher & Higginbotham, 2008).

In 2002, the World Health Organization contextualized violence as a public health issue (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002) and followed that initial report with related reports looking at development agencies (World Health Organization [WHO], 2008); violence prevention (WHO, 2010); and status (Butchart & Mikton, 2014; Mikton et al., 2016). In 2018, the American Public Health Association (APHA) declared violence a public health concern. This work looks at issues of violence generally, however, and not at violent extremism or terrorism specifically. Indeed, the WHO categorization of violent extremism falls under the broader term of collective violence.

Parallel with and similar to developments in the public health sector, the crime prevention and education sectors have developed school-based and school-linked models focusing on preventing crime and violence and promoting social inclusion (Juvonen et al., 2019; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018). The research on inclusive schooling is extensive, and models describing multicomponent approaches have been published by United Nations (UN) agencies for years. These include a manual for child friendly schools (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2007) and a handbook on school-based violence prevention (WHO, 2019). This 'inclusive

schools' approach has been recommended by high-level authorities (UNICEF, 2017; Global Counter Terrorism Forum, 2017) as the framework for preventing violent extremism, student alienation, and isolation.

3 Surveillance/Overview of the Literature

The first step in a public health approach to the prevention of violent extremism is to define the problem (part of the surveillance of the issue within a public health framework). As Ghosh et al. (2017) point out, a major challenge within the PVE literature is the lack of a common definition of terms (including terms such as terrorism, violent extremism, collective violence, ideologically motivated violence) and approaches (countering violent extremism versus preventing violent extremism). Part of the problem is that the use of these terms is politically laden—that is, when violence takes on political or ideological purposes, it becomes an exercise of power. In such cases, the powerful are left to define who the terrorists and extremists are and, unsurprisingly, that tends to be those seeking changes in power relations, both within and among countries (Borum & Neer, 2017; Ucko, 2018). Further challenges arise in determining what constitutes extremism and to what extent efforts to address extremism might conflict with the principles of free thought and speech. For these reasons, the UN, in seeking to address terrorism and violent extremism, left the definition of the terms to its individual member states (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). There is additional ambiguity in how terms interact and overlap, with some researchers using the terms 'violent extremism' and 'terrorism' synonymously.

The process of becoming a violent extremist or terrorist is also difficult to map, and it is therefore difficult to design interventions to prevent or counter it. The literature identifies multiple types of violent extremists or terrorists, ranging from lone offenders to loosely organized networks and highly organized groups. Further, the path towards personal engagement in extremist activity is diverse, with individual motivation to engage in violent extremism developing slowly over time and along variable pathways (Borum & Neer, 2017). In fact, some identified risk factors are so general as to be meaningless at best and harmful to prevention efforts at worst (Wynia et al., 2017).

While most articles acknowledge these problems, they also note that there are commonalities across the definitions. Terrorism is generally conceptualized through a description of the violent action, the actors (individuals and groups acting outside the scope of a nation or its military), the targets (advocating public violence against civilians), and the actors' motivations (advancing a particular political goal or seeking to create fear in populations). In the

Canadian context, the government defines these terms as follows (Canada Centre for Community Engagement Prevention of Violence, 2018):

1. *Radicalization* is a process by which an individual or a group gradually adopts extreme positions or ideologies that are opposed to the status quo and challenge mainstream ideas.
2. *Radicalization to violence* is the process by which individuals and groups adopt an ideology and/or belief system that justifies the use of violence in order to advance their cause.
3. *Violent extremism* is a term describing the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve extreme ideological, religious, or political goals.

In the United States, the APHA uses the term 'ideologically motivated violence'. For the purposes of this article, we are analysing the scholarship across these terms together but will discuss the collected research in terms of violent extremism. Despite the definitional difficulties, violence has been identified as a public health problem at national (American Public Health Association [APHA], 2018) and global levels (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002), with more than 62,000 incidents of violent extremism occurring between 2011 and 2015 (Borum & Neer, 2017).

4 Risk Factors

When looking at preventing violent extremism, there are two primary umbrella-terms: countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE). CVE was initially advanced by the Obama administration in the United States, although many of the prevention perspectives were present in earlier efforts in Europe. CVE focuses on the idea that governments and communities can take proactive steps to counter the recruitment and radicalization of followers by extremist organizations, ideas further incorporated in the UN's *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism* (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Both terms demonstrated a shift away from a more security-oriented approach to counterterrorism towards a focus on addressing the structural causes of violent extremism: lack of socioeconomic opportunities; marginalization and discrimination; poor government; violations of human rights and the rule of law; prolonged and unresolved conflicts; and radicalization in prisons (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). It is this broader approach to prevention that provides an opportunity for education policymakers to think about ways to contribute to the reduction of violence and extremism.

When looking at risk factors, the research literature talks about push and pull entry into extremist ideology and groups (Ghosh et al., 2017). Push factors are largely social conditions that create a vulnerability to extremist ideas and recruitment. Pull factors refer to intentional efforts to bring vulnerable individuals into extremist groups. This chapter focuses more on involving schools in addressing the push factors as a protective strategy rather than promoting involving schools directly in thwarting recruitment efforts. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) points out that ‘the role of education is, therefore, not to intercept violent extremists or identify individuals who may potentially become violent extremists, but to create the conditions that build the defences, within learners, against violent extremism and strengthen their commitment to non-violence and peace’ (2017, p. 22).

4.1 *Individual Indicators Identified in the Literature*

Identifying the risk factors for violent extremism is a complex undertaking. The path to violent extremism (radicalization) is generally thought to progress along five lines (Borum & Neer, 2017): (1) life experiences (such as discrimination or alienation); (2) activating/triggering situations (more recent events driving an extreme response in an individual); (3) predisposing vulnerabilities and propensities (psychological issues, such as the need for belonging); (4) social and group dynamics (engagement with a radical group); and (5) ideology or narrative (adoption of an extremist group’s ideas, beliefs, and values). Within these lines, a variety of individual and communal indicators associated with extremism have been identified in the literature (see Table 9.1). The risk factors include: lack of social control (lack of stable employment); social learning (radical peers); a history of psychological and mental health issues; experience of violence and abuse; a criminal record; isolation and separation from the mainstream identity; and experience of individual discrimination.

These risk factors are not unique to violent extremism and have, in fact, been associated with a number of violence-related social problems, including gang membership (Eisenman & Flavahan, 2017), criminal involvement (Clemmow et al., 2020), school dropout (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2016), and violent behaviour (Clemmow et al., 2020). This broad overlap of risk factors associated with a diversity of negative longer-term indicators suggests that a broad-based approach to intervention could address multiple potential negative outcomes.

4.2 *Communal Indicators Identified in the Literature*

Individual risk factors are only one part of the story when looking at violence and violent extremism. Breakdowns of the community can also contribute to

TABLE 9.1 Risk factors and protective factors for violent extremism

Risk factors		Protective factors	
Individual	Communal	Social connection	Social linkage
Lack of social control	Economic discrimination	Connection with community	Political power-sharing, voting
Social learning/peers	Separation from the common good	Connection with public institutions	School completion
Mental health issues	Weak links to public institutions	Connection with public values/citizenship	Post-secondary involvement
Violence and abuse			
Criminal history			
Isolation/separation			
Discrimination			

increased risk. Experiencing economic discrimination (UNESCO, 2016), community stigma and isolation (UNESCO, 2016, 2017), and separation from experiences of the common good (Kurlychek et al., 2012) can also lead to involvement in extremism and violence. Again, these indicators are not unique to the type of violent extremism identified here and have been more broadly associated with criminal and gang activity.

5 Protective Factors

Just as there are life experiences that can increase one's risk for violent extremism, there are also experiences that can build resilience, i.e. the capacity to resist engaging in such negative behaviours (see Table 9.1). Without wishing to oversimplify, many of the protective factors are essentially the opposite of the risk factors. Rather than social isolation, there is a social connection; instead of separation from the common good, there is trust in public institutions; and rather than a lack of social control, there is power-sharing and self-governance.

5.1 Social Connection

Social connection refers to the idea that individuals feel a connection to the people in their communities, resulting in a reduced impetus to harm that

community. While isolation and alienation are associated with extremist involvement, strong social connections with public institutions and communities can serve as important protective factors (Policy Research, Justice Canada, Canadian Heritage, 2001).

When individuals embrace a common purpose and hold common values within their communities (feeling membership of an ethnic, cultural, religious, or other type of community), the impetus for harming that community is reduced (Ellis & Abdi, 2017). Similarly, embracing common purposes and values across separately identifiable communities (separate communities united by common values and goals, such as diversity, liberty, democracy) can also build resilience to violence and violent engagement (Ellis & Abdi, 2017).

While social connection is important, it rests within the broader public values of that community. As identified under the heading of risk factors, if the values of the community are extreme, then a sense of social connection to those views obviously connects the individual to extremism. Some research has shown that a strong social connection can result in the dehumanization of people outside of the social grouping (Waytz & Epley, 2012), potentially increasing the risk of extremism. In short, social connection depends strongly on the 'what' that individuals are connected with.

5.2 *Social Linkage*

A key aspect in ensuring a positive social connection is the extent to which that connection is part of a linkage between the community and broader public values and institutions. Building trust in public institutions, involvement in activities to advance community goals, sharing power, and strengthening community self-governance, decision making, and outcomes can help build resilience to violent extremism (Ellis & Abdi, 2017).

Resorting to violence and extremism may be an indicator that non-violent behaviours are not seen as viable paths for realizing desired personal and social outcomes. A sense of social connection and a belief in common values across diverse communities suggests that desired outcomes can be achieved within non-violent and socially acceptable norms.

As with the risk factors, these protective factors are also associated with building resilience to other negative outcomes, again including violence, crime, and gang activity (Mendelson et al., 2018; Kia-Keating et al., 2011). Further, these factors are related to positive social outcomes such as political participation (Briggs, 2010), school completion, post-secondary involvement, and lifetime earnings (David-Ferdon et al., 2016). Finally, schools are an important place for building these social connections and for community linkages (Blank et al., 2003; Johnson, 2009).

6 Intervening

Schools act as a cultural focal point for the community (Blank et al., 2003). As centres of cultural transference, schools serve as a uniting force within the community; they can help minimize individual and communal risk factors, strengthen protective factors, and build resilience in students, families, and the broader community.

6.1 *Schools as Centres for Social Connection and Linkage*

A social connection is created when individuals in schools and communities embrace common values and purposes within a broader cultural framework, resulting in an educated citizenry able to participate fully in the economy. These connections are realized through linkages between individuals and the broader society and positively influence a number of health and mortality outcomes (Holt-Lunstad, et al., 2017; Pate et al., 2016; Patton et al., 2017). Schools that are envisioned as a public good and a source of cultural transference empower students and their families with a sense of control over their intellectual, cultural, and economic future.

As public enterprises, schools in many countries are guided by locally elected school boards. By involving the community in selecting the stewards for the local schools, the community is empowered in guiding the development of its children towards a common set of values, and this personal investment in the broader society can serve as a protective factor guiding participants to live within the norms of the community (Land, 2002).

Within schools, parent groups further help to give voice to the community and to empower its members to experience some sense of involvement and control over their child's education. Envisioned this way, public schools are widely accessible in most countries and provide a ubiquitous intervention point for building social connection and community empowerment (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2017).

6.2 *Educational Programmes and Pedagogy*

The view of schools as centres for the community and as focal points for addressing society's problems is neither new nor unique (Blank et al., 2003). Activists see schools as a place for teaching future generations about issues they see as important and as a result, there are a large number of programmes and structures proposed for schools and their communities. By arguing for changes in the curriculum and in schools through teacher preparation and professional development, extracurricular activities, and school-wide reform, activists

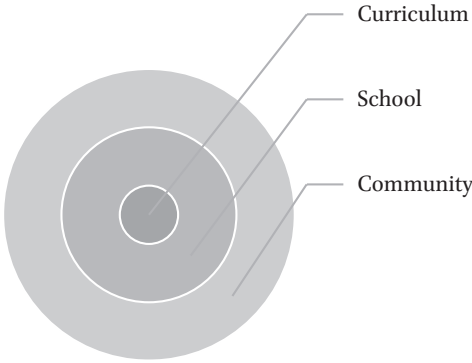


FIGURE 9.1 Educational intervention points

can seek to realize social change within the broader curriculum (see Figure 9.1) that might increase social inclusion, reduce bullying, build intercultural understanding, and promote a host of other potential outcomes (Juvonen et al., 2019). While this very crowded curriculum can become a barrier to groups seeking to introduce new programmes (such as antiterrorism education), it also provides a broad base of programmes already designed to address many of the risk and protective factors identified in the literature. To strengthen PVE interventions and intervention points, target schools and districts should be surveyed to determine the presence of existing programs already focused on the target risk and protective factors (see Table 9.2).

TABLE 9.2 Selected educational programmes addressing similar PVE risk and protective factors

Curriculum and learning	School/institutional focused	Community programmes
Global citizenship education	Inclusive/child-friendly schools	Parent/adult programmes
Social and emotional learning	Whole school/child programmes	Career development
Intercultural education	Positive behaviour support	Cultural programmes, etc.
Media literacy and internet safety programmes	Youth engagement	Child care, meal programmes
Anti-bullying programmes	Restorative justice	Extracurricular programmes

In Canada, for example, all jurisdictions have a core curriculum on health and personal and social development that is delivered in a variety of ways. Several Canadian provinces have recently jointly moved towards a competency-based, cross-curricular framework that includes many aspects related to social inclusion and global competencies (Council of Ministers of Education, 2020). Canadian jurisdictions were able to incorporate with relative ease the curriculum adjustments, instructional programmes, and teacher training on extremism that have already been developed and implemented in other countries.

All Canadian jurisdictions also already use multicomponent approaches to health and welfare that have broad support in research and experience (McCall & Laitsch, 2017). These include inclusive and child-friendly schools, safe schools, healthy schools, and community schools. Other multi-intervention programmes in use include social and emotional learning, positive behaviour support, and gang prevention. Consequently, a hybrid multicomponent approach for preventing violent extremism and promoting social inclusion was easily understood and embraced by Canadian educators (see Table 9.3). A recent research review undertaken for the Department of Education in the United Kingdom has already recommended a similar multicomponent approach there (Sheikh et al., 2010).

Activists interested in advancing their programmes are used to thinking of schools as knowledge centres—centres of learning that are designed to transmit knowledge about an issue to students. While teaching students specific knowledge or skills may contribute to resilience in students at risk of violent extremism (Ghosh et al., 2017; Sheikh et al., 2010), building trust in institutions, communities, and peers can also be accomplished by considering the way we teach (pedagogies) and the customs and rules (culture) of the institution. In particular, by using pedagogies and cultural practices that support students' intrinsic motivation to engage with their school, we can strengthen their resilience for facing challenging situations. In other words, while we might *teach* students what democracy is through the curriculum, we can help them *experience* democracy by using democratic practices within the classroom, school, and community (see Figure 9.2).

Classroom management is a core part of teaching, and the establishment of classroom rules and norms sends a powerful message to students the values of their society and culture. Classroom rules that are *imposed* by the teacher or principal send a clear message to student that obedience to authority is paramount. On the other hand, classroom rules and norms that are *discussed, negotiated, and democratically determined* send a message that rules are determined collectively. Students then become active participants in making the

TABLE 9.3 Violent extremism risk factors and protective factors and the example educational programmes that address them

Risk factors		Protective factors	
Individual risk factors	Educational programmes	Social connection	Educational programmes
Lack of social control	Global citizenship education	Connection with community	Parent/adult programmes Career development Cultural programmes
Social learning/peers	Social and emotional learning Inclusive/child-friendly schools	Connection with public institutions	Emergency shelters School boards Health care Multiagency service coordination
Mental health issues	Positive behaviour support	Connection with public values/citizenship	Parent/adult programmes Immigration and refugee services
Violence and abuse	Anti-bullying programmes	Social linkage	Educational programmes
Criminal history	Gang prevention Youth engagement	Political power-sharing, voting	Voting centres School boards
Isolation/separation	Inclusive/child-friendly schools	Completion of school education	Adult education Alternative programmes
Discrimination	Intercultural education	Post-secondary engagement	Bridge programmes Career preparation
Communal risk factors	Educational programmes		
Economic discrimination	Career development Post-secondary preparation Home economics		
Separation from the common good	Restorative justice Intercultural education		
Weak links to public institutions	Global citizenship education Government		

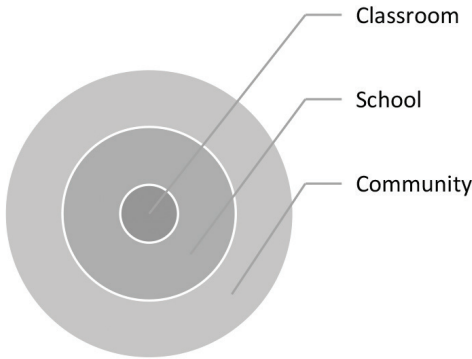


FIGURE 9.2
Cultural intervention points

system work rather than being oppressed and powerless participants in an externally determined system.

Democratic classroom pedagogies focus on relationship building and trust by creating communities of learning. Students build connections with each other and with the institution, including its practices and procedures. When rules and norms are broken, the use of positive discipline (Luiselli et al., 2005) and restorative justice programmes (Finley, 2011) can strengthen students' connection with their peers and their community and empower them to participate in the resolution process rather than being alienated, isolated, or pushed away from community through punishments like suspension, removal from class, or after-school detention. These types of programmes are in many ways about teaching the skills and behaviours, and thereby giving students actual experience of, democracy and justice.

Bringing the community into the school can also have substantial benefits by building social connections and linkages, including reductions in dropout and risky behaviour (Heers et al., 2016). The concept of community schools sees schools as centres of cooperation with other public health and social service institutions. It involves parents in school governance and activities and offers extracurricular activities to students and the broader community (Heers et al., 2016).

7 Programme Design, Development, and Implementation

Designing school-based programmes to address the risk of terrorism and violent extremism will be challenging. The lack of a common definition for terrorism and violent extremism makes it difficult both to design and test specific programmes. The lack of a specific typology and pathway for terrorism and

violent extremism also makes it challenging to adopt a particular programmatic approach for intervention due to the complexity and uncertainty regarding the specific indicators or behaviours that can be targeted for disruption (Horgan et al., 2018). Finally, a significant risk factor for violent extremism is alienation from public institutions (e.g. government). A core part of any intervention must include an intentional effort to build trust between the community and public institutions. An authoritarian approach to prevention based on discipline and reporting risks alienating the very community it needs to engage (Kundnani, 2009; Wynia et al., 2017).

Understanding the diversity of risk factors that are correlated with violence and violent extremism can help us in examining approaches that can mitigate the risks and help build resilience (see Table 9.4). In thinking about interventions in this manner, however, there are three important caveats to keep in mind. First, the path to violent extremism is non-linear and generally the culmination of multiple push and pull risk factors; second, the research is not conclusive on many risk factors with different studies at times offering conflicting outcomes (Clemmow et al., 2020); and third, we need to ensure that we are not creating a deficit model of symptoms to be addressed but instead focus on creating a healthy culture and community.

7.1 *Contextual Challenges: Authentic Change*

Public schools occupy a special place in communities and are highly visible institutions. While schools may not necessarily be seen by the public as an arm of the government, as publicly funded and governed entities, they play a key role in strengthening social linkage through building trust in other public institutions, establishing common goals and purposes, and power-sharing. However, in realizing the power of schools to build social linkages between communities and the broader public, a number of technical and authentic challenges arise.

7.2 *Technical Challenges*

One of the biggest challenges in strengthening the role of schools in promoting social linkage is the deficit model approach to change as represented by many intervention programmes. As highlighted earlier, schools are seen as important intervention points in addressing social problems. Schools have been asked to ‘fix’ many of society’s problems—including obesity, media literacy, gender equity, and racism—even while they are being labelled the protectors of privilege and the status quo because their structures reinforce capitalist and neoliberal values that protect those in power through a hidden curriculum (Portelli & Konecny, 2013). Adding another problem, namely violent extremism, to the

TABLE 9.4 List of overlapping risk factors and protective factors for violence in schools and for violent extremism

Risk factors	Protective factors
Individual and peer	
Alcohol/drug use	Pro-social/non-violent peers
Previous violent, delinquent, or antisocial behaviour/arrest record	
Antisocial or aggressive beliefs and attitudes	
Association with antisocial or delinquent peers	
Impulsivity	
Lack of supervision	
Mental health challenges (depression, anxiety, chronic stress, trauma)	
School	
Low academic achievement	Positive adult relations
Low school engagement or commitment	School connectedness Academic achievement
Family	
Poor family management	Positive adult/familial relations
Community	
Community norms conducive to violent or antisocial behaviour	Positive adult relations
Situational risk factors	Economic opportunity
Poor economic growth/stability	Pro-social non-violent community
Unemployment	
Poverty	

list—particularly when it may be seen as protecting those in power at the expense of the local community—is unlikely to result in significant uptake by educators, even if it is mandated by the state.

Instead of conceptualizing PVE work as another specific problem for the community or for schools to address, we propose focusing on the broader role of schools in building a resilient culture in which violent extremism is not a viable alternative. This can be done through the consideration of whole school or whole child approaches to change that emphasize and support healthy children, cultures, and communities. Broad interventions supporting democratic schooling, citizenship education, personal health, and other programmes focused on personal wellness (see Table 9.3) can help minimize the push factors that drive children to violence.

There are several well-established school-based or school-linked multi-component approaches that can provide policy or programme frameworks that ‘offer a home’ for methods for preventing student alienation, isolation, potential violent extremism and that promote social inclusion. These include approaches such as child friendly and inclusive schools, safe and caring schools, healthy schools, community schools, intercultural education, disaster risk reduction, and peace education, among others.

There are also several well-established multi-intervention programmes (MIP) that can be adapted to include greater attention to student alienation and isolation. These include anti-bullying programmes, positive behaviour supports (PBS), dropout prevention, gang prevention, mental health programmes, resistance training in substance abuse prevention, school climate improvement programmes, and others.

These multifaceted approaches and programmes represent an existing infrastructure and capacity to build on while addressing violent extremism. They should be continued, but we are not simply recommending a ‘rising tide lifts all boats’ approach. The existing approaches, programmes, and single interventions need to be modified to include isolated and alienated students who may *not* be acting out in school and thereby calling attention to themselves. This is the ‘child-seeking approach’, which is one of the tenets of the child friendly schools model.

At the same time, we cannot allow ourselves to bias our actions with a Westernized view of introvert and extrovert behaviour. Introspection is not always isolating. Alienation, or at least seeking to be independent from the views of our parents and from the traditional norms in our communities, is usually a healthy part of becoming an adult. At the same time, schools are the first social institution that young people encounter as they begin to recognize and understand their own family and cultural backgrounds and that of the others around

them. The formation of their identity at this stage of life is critical. If they perceive that there is no place for them, or if the groups or individuals with whom they have formed relationships are somehow stigmatized or disadvantaged, then essential bonding or attachments can be stalled or disrupted.

Rather than a narrow interpretation of schools as centres of academic instruction oriented towards economic prosperity in a competitive market place, schools should be reconceptualized as centres of the community, models of democracy, and a force for advancing the health and wellness of community members. By building strong links to the health of the community, the drivers for extremism can be interrupted.

Finally, the narrative of schools as places of violence and failure—particularly in already vulnerable and isolated communities—needs to be interrupted. Think tanks and advocacy groups engaged in broad-based efforts to privatize education, particularly in North America, have attempted to create a sense of crisis in public education and, more broadly, government in general, portraying public institutions as a failing system in order to drive parents to the private sector (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Thunert, 2003; Anderson & Donchik, 2016; Sturges, 2015; Verger et al., 2016). By creating dissatisfaction and distrust in public institutions, these think tanks are in actual fact interrupting the social linking forces that serve as protective mechanisms against violence and violent extremism.

Schools, particularly those in vulnerable and marginalized communities, need to be seen as safe places that can be entrusted with looking after the best interests of their students and the communities in which they reside. Building trust in social institutions is consistently identified as an important part of PVE and needs to be a core component of any effort to address violent extremism in schools.

7.3 *Authentic Challenges*

An additional challenge faced in PVE within the school context is identifying the appropriate intervention point. Violence and violent extremism are often conceptualized as an individual act or an isolated problem; however, they are embedded in the broader societal context. This creates a tension between the problem (individual action) and the context (societally based) and suggests that efforts to address violence in one area may be undercut by the context of the other area. A focus on interrupting the push factors influencing an individual student can themselves be interrupted by pull factors originating from the community. Similarly, a focus on strengthening the community without also supporting the individual in many respects represents the current approach that schools take to social change, whereby they rely on individuals to take responsibility for their own learning.

The programmatic nature of interventions can also create a challenge to implementation as funding and support are provided on a limited basis rather than as core funding (Moffett et al., 2016). The fragmented nature of a programmatic approach can also create challenges (WHO, 2008). Coordination across community organizations and multiple programmes can be difficult unless it is an intentionally designed component of the intervention. Finally, national education strategies to support the completion of education (all the way through secondary school), housing strategies, and poverty reduction strategies are lacking in many countries (Butchart & Mikton, 2014; Mikton et al., 2016; WHO, 2008).

8 Next Steps and Conclusion

Research looking at the efficacy of isolated, individual programmes for addressing violent extremism has found few, if any, effective programmes (Pistone et al., 2019). For the reasons referenced throughout this paper, it seems unlikely that any single programme will result in widespread implementation or change in practice. Instead, advocates need to create comprehensive approaches that encompass the multiple existing programmes already aimed at reducing violence and other antisocial behaviours as well as other policies, services, practices, and changes in schools that strengthen protective factors.

Such a comprehensive approach should conceptualize schools as public institutions for strengthening social linkage and building individual and community trust, for establishing goals and purposes to advance the common good across the community, and for supporting involvement in collective democratic actions, power-sharing, and community empowerment. Importantly, this means countering the political narrative of public schools as being violent, unsafe, and ineffective. Further, it means embracing schools as centres of citizenship and community (Ghosh et al., 2017), rather than providers of individual economic productivity and workforce preparation. Finally, as centres of democratic engagement and empowerment, schools must be empowered to represent the diversity of the community and resist the villainization of competing political views.

Within these broad principles, schools should maintain a specific focus on academic achievement and school connectedness as well as on establishing positive adult relationships, supporting a community of prosocial non-violent peers, and advancing economic opportunity for students and the community (Stewart & Sun, 2004). Schools should be seen as tools for addressing short- and long-term risk factors for violence and violent extremism, including poverty,

student mobility and transience, positive adult and peer relationships, mental health, and social development. Viewed this way, we can create a culture of inclusion, health, and safety that maximizes the protective factors of education as an institution rather than seeing schools as places where violent and dangerous individuals can be identified and removed.

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