

EX POST PAPER

‘Empowering and supporting teachers’

‘Pedagogical role requires time and training’

The RAN Education (EDU) Working Group¹ is one of the ‘new’ working groups within the RAN. RAN EDU focuses on better equipping teachers, school leaders, and the rest of the school staff so they can play a crucial role in preventing radicalisation. The aim is to raise awareness of the topic, but moreover to empower and build capacity to prevent and deal with radicalisation in educational settings.

This ex post paper is based on the outcomes of the RAN EDU working group meeting for teachers at the Segerstedt Institute in Gothenburg (24-25 February 2016).

This paper will address the empowerment of teachers so that they are confident and well equipped pedagogues. Teachers should be able to create safes spaces where pupils can experience democracy in difficult but important conversations.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-edu/index_en.htm

Introduction

The discussion on the pedagogical role of teachers, and how to empower them, is one that touches the heart of education. It are teachers who are leading in the classroom. They need to be empowered. Their role can however not be discussed without paying attention to the school and its role.

In this ex post paper for RAN EDU, we will therefore touch upon:

- The school as an instrument for change and training ground for democracy
- Is the teacher a superman? – about limitations
- The teacher is not a spy
- Available materials
- Training for teachers: not mere tools, but also real empowerment
- Two times the factor time
- Teachers union's, an important stakeholder
- Promising practice: the Tolerance project or Kungälv Model (SE)

The school as an instrument for change and a training ground for democracy

Schools are the biggest societal projects targeting our children. They are the main mechanism for reproducing social values and insights.

Schools are looked upon to play a crucial role in 'promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination'². The challenge is doing it in a way that encourages teachers, and perhaps even more necessary, in a way that empowers teachers. They need to be mandated, supported, well trained, equipped and honored. And the didactical and pedagogical challenge is to engage with pupils in a way that relates to the experiences, perceptions and world views of the pupils.

"The primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes and to embed fundamental values, but also to help young people – in close cooperation with parents and families – to become active, responsible, open-minded members of society"
Paris Declaration on Promotion citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education

² 'Mobilisation Europeene pour l'education aux valeurs citoyens, The Paris Declaration, 17 March 2015.

Is the teacher a superman? – about limitations

Schools and teachers are seen as the solution to many problems in society. The school as the place where pupils are offered an opportunity to experiment with democracy and citizenship, creates challenges for teachers. The first one is the time-restraint. Many teachers already experience a full packed school day teaching the curriculum. Dealing with the discussions following the aftermath of incidents that are in the news, comes on top of all of that. They feel that the school is being tasked to solve all kinds of problems that parents or society are not able to cope with. The teacher as Superman coming to the rescue. Prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism is often felt as an extra task for teachers. This point of view can be challenged. Part of it is about framing. Security and preventing extremism sound for some distant, but citizenship and democracy are not so unfamiliar for teachers. Creating a safe space for pupils to find their place in society is more in line with teachers view on society. A safe space means also a space where pupils are safe for anti-democratic propaganda and blunt recruitment.

One other restraint is the confidence, the professional skills and attitudes of the teacher. The teacher might find out he or she is part of the difficult discussions and the teacher will confronted with his or her own views, presumptions, attitudes, prejudices and verbal and non-verbal communication styles. That can help - but also hinder.

The teacher is not a spy

Teachers are often asked to monitor pupils, keep an eye on them, and refer a pupils to appropriate authorities if they have developed in a potentially dangerous direction. In the UK it is even statutory to report. Teachers and schools have reported really concerning cases, but in the gray zone they do not always share concerns. They are not always sure if it is their role, and are sometime afraid of the consequences for the pupil or his or her own situation. There are stories where teachers are surprised or even angry about police overreacting to signs that came from schools. The reason hear most often, is the fear of losing the trust of pupils. If pupils think the teacher might have a double agenda, education and monitoring for the sake of security, they might be afraid to participate in classroom conversations.

The school is and should be the place where young people are allowed to speak out and raise questions. Even ones that are not mainstream, or straightforward shocking and part of conspiracy theories. If these conversations cannot be held at school, where else will they take place?

Available materials

Citizenship and democracy are no new topics for schools. So, in many countries there are materials and approaches to promote democracy and fundamental values. The question is

legitimate if these materials are also suitable to support teachers when they are faced with the heated emotions and debates after Charlie Hebdo, empathy for Daesh³ or incidents and online propaganda. The teacher should be able to build a bridge between the teaching materials available and the things that students want to talk about.

Some 'old school' and off line materials might work well to address issues around identity and prejudices. But in the light of recent developments and the off line and online conversations these materials will not be effective. If the pupils feel the need to discuss specific ideologies, conspiracy theories and incidents, teachers are helped with up to date materials.

Since the online propaganda and mobilisation for the different extremist ideologies have exploded, and social media determine the world orientation of pupils, media literacy should be a necessary component of materials available to teachers. And they probably need to be introduced to use it.

IC Thinking, a promising holistic and comprehensive approach

A fundamental different approach was presented by Cambridge University. IC thinking is an approach based upon the scientific neurological insights. Science shows that our brain falls back to the limbic brain when we are confronted with perceived threats and danger. As a result the cognitive lens narrows. The Integrative Complexity is minimised. People fall back to simple black and white, us an them, good and wrong. IC thinking is an approach that make people understand this process and creates opportunities for accepting the grey in between the black and white, to see the big picture.

The IC Thinking is woven into programmes with 8 sessions (16 hours) that focus on identity and life skills. So pupils learn how to manage their *integrative complexity*. The participants in Gothenburg and two years ago in Manchester⁴ were impressed by the method and materials.

Training for teachers: not mere tools, but also real empowerment

Even with proper and up to date materials at hand, teachers still find it a pedagogical challenge to be confident and effective. For example in leading difficult conversations, on sensitive topics in a society with fear, tensions and polarisation.

That's why RAN EDU looked at two approaches that invest in the professional role of the teacher, with attention for the person. School management should support this investment in teachers.

³ We use Daesh while others use IS, ISIL or ISIS for the so called Islamic State or Caliphate.

⁴ RAN Prevent meeting in Manchester, 3-4 March

Training for teachers on communication and identity, with a focus on their own attitude and behaviour (GO! Antwerpen, Belgium)

Koninklijk Atheneum Antwerpen faced big challenges in their school. They witnessed infiltration by radical islamists and there were conflicts around religious symbols. Demonstrations and clashes took place outside the school and the school was in the national and international press. The school took serious measures by banning the veil on the one hand, and at the same time invested seriously in the staff with an intensive programme in personal communication. The teachers learned to listen to themselves. How to deal with emotions that might not help if they result in a reaction by the teacher? The teacher needs to go beyond reactivity. It starts by how the body reacts to emotions. The training uses neuro-logical principles around experiences, emotions, behaviour, capacities, roles and identities

The programme was intensive and sometimes confronting for the teachers, but they definitely felt more empowered. This is an example of an effective teachers empowerment with effects on preventing radicalisation but also other challenges for teachers.

Teachers Empowered, a programme on the role of the teacher as leader in the classroom, is a practice that was presented in RAN before. It is appreciated for the same reasons as the above: this is not an anti-radicalisation programme, initiated in response to terrorist attacks, but a sincere investment in the power of the teachers. That will make teachers effective leaders in the school community, and in that capacity crucial in early prevention and in coping with tense situations and difficult conversations.

Two times the factor time

The factor time was touched upon several times in the several RAN EDU meetings. From two different perspectives.

At the kick off meeting in Prague and at the meeting in Gothenburg time teachers asked for time. Teachers and schools need more time to develop the curriculum. They also need time for training and incorporating the materials.

The other aspect of time is the sustainability. The Kungälv Model / Swedish Toleranz project (described below) was seen as successful because it wasn't an add on to the existing curriculum. It was incorporated in the curriculum, part of the day to day prevention and is running for over 20 years already.

Teachers empowered, in depth investing in teachers Promising practice

The training is a 5 – 10 day programme where the teacher finds his strength. The focus is on his own personality and capacity as leader in the classroom. How am I in my role as teacher? How do I communicate effectively, verbal and non-verbal? How to establish classroom leadership? How can I address the organisation as a whole, to gain support?

Not specifically designed for 'preventing radicalisation', the programme makes the teacher stronger to face challenges, including holding difficult conversations and dealing with crisis.

Teachers unions, an important stakeholder

Teachers unions can make a big difference in helping to create the conditions for schools and teachers to be able to deliver their contributions. In the policy arena and in the public opinion teachers unions are the critical representant of the interests of teachers. As was mentioned in all RAN EDU meetings, allover Europe teachers are understaffed, underpaid and confronted with a heavy workload. In most countries the efforts by teachers in their pedagogical role are not being evaluated or honored. Governments, police and other network partners are pointing fingers at schools because they look away and do not report.

In Gothenburg RAN EDU had the privilege of having two representants of teachers unions participating in the programme. Both explicitely expressed the need to invest in teachers, to ensure that they are trained and equipped to help promote democracy and challenge extremism.

Following the above analysis, one other suggestion is for RAN EDU to engage with the ones who are crucial in determining the boundaries for schools and teachers : the national governments and more precise the Minisitries for Education. RAN could consider a targeted activity to reach out to the Ministries for Education in the 28 Member States.

Promising practice: the Tolerance project or Kungälv Model (SE)

The Kungälv Model^{5 6} is the new name used for the Swedish Tolerance project. The project started after the killing of a young boy by skinheads in the town Kungälv in 1995. The project runs now for over 20 years. The basic idea is to split the structure of a group, provide a different setting for teaching and social-pedagogical work. The approach uses the image of a grape to picture the different roles in a group. They found out where youth are most accessible in daily life and find partners there: school institutions, teachers, parents and social workers. In Kungälv they capitalised the costs related to extremism and the costs for prevention and they claim the benefits are a tenfold of the costs. The Kungälv model is a well thought project and will be included in the RAN Collection.

“Magic ingredients: imagination (things can change), humour, curiosity, time and empathy (being and demanding)”

⁵ <http://www.osce.org/odihr/105385?download=true>

⁶ http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/rooting-out-intolerance-the-kungalv-model/