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‘Can you spot a terrorist in your classroom?’ Problematising the recruitment of schools to the ‘war on terror’ in the UK.

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Abstract

This article draws on theoretical insights from Foucault, Rose and the new sociology of childhood to critically examine the development and use of counter-extremism policies and practices in English schools. In particular, the article focuses on the introduction of *Learning Together to be Safe: a toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism* and its implications for the rights of British Muslim children and young people. It is argued that this initiative contributes to a process of disciplinary normalisation of young British Muslims, with the intention of producing governable subjects. The analysis reveals a contradictory relationship between the commitment of the British State to upholding and implementing children’s social and political rights (as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) whilst simultaneously pursuing policies and practices that constrain and undermine the social and political agency of British Muslim children and young people.

Introduction

On 19 February 2010 the *Times Educational Supplement* Newspaper (TES) featured an article entitled *Going to extremes* (Morrison, 2010) in which the author discusses the implementation of the British Government initiative *Learning Together to be Safe: a toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism* (Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF), 2008, hereafter abbreviated to *Learning Together to be Safe* or the Toolkit).

Immediately below the article there appeared a photo of a school pupil with the caption ‘Can you spot a terrorist in your classroom?’ The article is framed within official ‘counter-terrorism’ discourse – ‘the authorities claim that schools are a fruitful recruiting ground for those involved in extremism of all types. The Government wants teachers to take an active role in identifying children at risk’ (Morrison, 2010, *Going to extremes*, para. 1). Aside from posing the question of whether this is ‘a responsibility too far’ for already over-burdened teachers, and the inclusion of three sentences acknowledging that some dissent exists, the article (some 2,500 words long) is almost exclusively devoted to examples of interventions from schools where teachers have ‘successfully followed this guidance to identify pupils who could be vulnerable to extremism’ (Morrison, 2010, *Going to extremes*, para. 9). All of the examples cited involve schools with

high concentrations of 'Asian' (*sic*) children and young people, and focus on Muslim communities and Islam.

Sadly, the TES article is not atypical in its treatment of the subject. The popular media, Government-sponsored publications and much professional literature in the UK, whether intentionally or not, promotes and reinforces the stereotype that the 'terrorism' / 'extremism' 'problem' is primarily located within Muslim communities and is rooted in Islamic cultural and religious practices (Hickman et al, 2011). Such coverage constructs a distorted lens through which both the public and professionals access and filter knowledge and information about who poses a threat to national security and what ought to be done about, or rather 'to', them. As with all hegemonic discourses, this obscures and diverts attention away from wider fundamental issues that warrant exploration and interrogation. Recognising the dearth of critically oriented academic literature published on this subject, this article aims to identify some of these issues and open them up for debate.

The article is derived within an on-going research project investigating the impact of British Government anti-terror / counter-radicalisation strategies on the mental health and emotional wellbeing of Muslim children and young people and their families (Coppock & McGovern, *Centre for Children, Young People and Social Change, Edge Hill University, UK*). Elsewhere (Coppock & McGovern, 2014), we have focused on and challenged the mobilisation of particular mainstream traditions of social scientific epistemology and inquiry (for example those derived from strands of psychology and social movement theory) that discursively construct young British Muslims as 'psychologically vulnerable' to 'radicalisation' and, therefore, in need of 'protection'/'safeguarding'. We argue that these knowledge paradigms facilitate and legitimise pre-emptive, interventionist and securitising State practices - practices that may contribute to a sense of isolation, marginalisation and alienation among many young British Muslims.

The intention in the present article is to highlight and problematise the specific issue of the recruitment of teachers in English schools to assist in the late 'war on terror' through the introduction of *Learning Together to be Safe* (DCSF, 2008). Influenced by theoretical insights from Foucault (1979; 1988) Rose (1999) and the new sociology of childhood, the article explores the discursive construction of Muslim children and young people as 'politically risky' subjects (i.e., as 'would-be-terrorists'). It will be argued that the content and use of this Toolkit represents an unjustifiable extension of State surveillance practices into the classroom; distorts the concept of citizenship education; inhibits Muslim children and young people's rights to social and political agency; and may, paradoxically, serve to reproduce, reinforce and perpetuate anti-Muslim racism

and Islamophobia. While the article addresses itself to an examination of issues pertaining to the English context, it is important to note that worldwide, police, security services and justice systems are implementing similar strategies and practices (see for example, Fekete, 2009). In this sense the article speaks to the rights of Muslim children and young people across the globe.

The article is divided into four parts. Part I foregrounds the theoretical orientation of the article. Part II provides a brief contextual overview of British Government anti-terrorism strategy that underpins the introduction of 'counter-extremism' policies and practices targeting children and young people such as *Learning Together to be Safe* (DCSF, 2008). Part III presents a critical analysis of the *Learning Together to be Safe* document to reveal problematic constructions of 'extremism', and its association with young British Muslims, that prefigure and inform equally problematic 'counter-extremism' practices directed at Muslim children and young people in schools. Part IV develops the concerns identified in Part III into a wider discussion of the discursive construction of the 'politically risky Muslim child' within the Toolkit and the implications of this for Muslim children and young people's social and political agency. It will be argued that the co-option and transformation of citizenship education into a discourse on national security facilitates a process of shaping (or re-shaping) the Muslim child 'self' to an idealised norm – 'the enlightened, moderate, Muslim'.

Producing governable subjects: theoretical insights from Foucault, Rose and the new sociology of childhood

For some time, the works of Michel Foucault and Nikolas Rose have been a fertile theoretical and methodological 'feeding ground' for academics and researchers interested in the study of children and childhood. In particular, theorising on the connection between discourse, power and knowledge, and processes of governmentality (Foucault, 1979; 1988; Rose, 1999) can facilitate critical examination of the complex and often contradictory relationships between the State, adults (professionals and parents) and children and young people. In the present article, official discourses on 'counter-extremism' and 'citizenship education' are critically analysed and processes of governmentality identified, alluding to the positioning of Muslim children as objects of knowledge, whereby their self-conduct can be fashioned in desired directions and their individual biographies shaped. Conceptualised as 'the conduct of conduct' or 'government at a distance' (Rose, 1999, p. xxii), governmentality establishes the contact between technologies of power and technologies of the self:

Which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

Following Foucault, Rose (1999), locates these processes ‘within a genealogy of political technologies of individuality’ (p. 221) emphasising the role of ‘psy’ discourse and expertise in constructing governable subjects in ways that are compatible with the principles of liberalism and democracy. Rose traces the construction and maintenance of a universal, idealised model of ‘normal’ childhood (and its binary opposite, the ‘abnormal’ or ‘pathological’ childhood) to the emergence of individual and developmental psychology in the late nineteenth century and its growing influence in the disciplinary networks and normalising practices of State welfare professionals.

These processes are evidenced in the long history of professional ‘interventions’ aimed at restoring ‘pathological’ childhoods to an imagined ‘normal’ childhood, and this history bears witness to the consequences for those children who are considered to have metaphorically ‘stepped outside of childhood’. In this, the school is recognised as a key site of disciplinary power and governance of children and young people in so far as it is heavily implicated in securing future adult docile bodies or ‘governable subjects’ (Foucault, 1979). When applied to the present analysis of policy and practice in countering ‘extremism’ in schools, the post-structural analyses of Foucault and Rose provide a means of disturbing taken-for-granted assumptions in official and professional discourse and facilitate observation of how historical, theoretical and conceptual influences continue to shape and inform contemporary responses to young British Muslims who are constructed as ‘outside of childhood’ and thus a potential threat to the State.

The analysis is also informed by perspectives from within the new sociology of childhood, which, since the late 1990s, has brought fresh theoretical, epistemological and ontological insights to the study of ‘childhood’ and the nature of ‘the child’ (Prout & James, 1997). Crucially, these perspectives have disrupted the core assumptions within traditional dominant discourses of child development in which children are positioned as essentially passive ‘human becomings’ as opposed to competent, capable, ‘human beings’ / social actors. However, as Kallio (2009) argues, while there has been much attention devoted to studying children’s social agency there has been significantly less attention to studying children as *political* actors. The neglect of the political dimension of children’s agency in childhood studies may be explained, at least in part, by two processes – first, the lingering paternalism that dominates adult-child relations and second, a narrow conceptualisation of ‘children’s politics’. In regard to the first, there are inherent tensions in the relationship between children’s *protection* rights and their *participation* rights, as articulated in the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) that pose challenges for the actualisation of children’s social and political agency. This, in turn, is a reflection of inherent tensions in the conceptualisation of children in the Convention as *both* future adult citizens *and*

as citizens in their own right – i.e., as both ‘being’ and ‘becoming’.

Notwithstanding the heavy emphasis in the Convention on principles of autonomy and self-determination for children (derived principally in Article 12), the default position in practice is a tendency towards protectionism. This bias informs a position that suggests children’s ‘innocence’ is potentially ‘contaminated’ or harmed by ‘politics’ and so they ought to be excluded from ‘the political’ world, *in their own best interests*. Here, ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ are conceptualised as the preserve of *adults*. However, research undertaken with children in situations of armed conflict and/or post-conflict environments, for example, disturbs such taken-for-granted assumptions, exposing how:

Notions of children’s passivity and susceptibility disregard the important emotional, social economic and political contributions children make to family and community during periods of political violence, as well as trivialising their coping efforts (Boyden, 2003. *Children under Fire*, Para. 61).

In regard to the second, Kallio’s (2009) theorising of children as political selves alerts us to an understanding that ‘the study of children’s political agency...requires a wider interpretation of ‘the political’ than is usually employed in exploring child and youth policies and children’s participation’ (p. 8). In this she draws similarities with the way in which ‘the private’ and ‘the personal’ were not recognised as ‘political’ prior to their politicisation by the feminist movement and feminist researchers. She proposes a definition of children’s everyday politics, where:

Children’s own politics comprise intentional social activity which has particular meaning to its performer. This politics may involve adults or not, and parallel their action or oppose it. But the important point is that it serves its own ends and actualises wherever there is space for it. It is not set in motion by adult-led orientations, nor is it mobilised in adult-led practices (p. 8).

The present article reflects the author’s interest in how children and young people experience, navigate and negotiate their life worlds as social and political subjects. It theorises and analyses the precarious balance between structure (governance) and agency (self determination) in the lives of British Muslim children and young people caught between processes of disciplinary normalisation aimed at the production of governable bodies and exercising their ‘rights and freedoms’ as social and political actors.

Contextualising the introduction of ‘counter-extremism’ policies and practices in English schools

In the post-9/11 era many nation states widened their anti-terrorist policing strategies to include counter-radicalisation policies aimed at the prevention of violent extremism (PVE). The British Government's *Prevent* programme, a strand of its overarching *CONTEST* counter-terrorism strategy, is one of the most systematic and elaborate examples of this to date (Her Majesty's Government, 2011a and 2011b) and has been described as 'one of the most ambitious government social engineering projects in recent years' (*The Times*, cited in Kundnani, 2009, p. 10). *Prevent's* objectives are:

- *Ideology* – respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it
- *Individuals* – prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support and
- *Institutions* – work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation which we need to address (Her Majesty's Government, 2011a).

One component of *Prevent*, the *Channel* project (Her Majesty's Government, 2012a), was introduced in 2007 and is embedded within both adult and children's safeguarding protocols and practices. *Channel* relies on referrals from teachers, social workers, youth workers and community groups of those potentially 'at risk' and/or 'vulnerable' to recruitment to 'extremism'. These individuals are then 'channelled' away from 'extremism' through State interventions styled as 'support packages'. The UK Home Office (Her Majesty's Government, 2013) reports that in the five years from 2007 to 2012, 2,500 individuals were referred to *Channel* project practitioners for 'support'. Of these, over 500 were young people; 290 were under sixteen years old and fifty-five were under 12. Over 90 per cent were Muslim. It has been reported that school students have been referred through *Channel* after making strong pro-Palestinian statements (Kundnani, 2011).

In October 2008, additional guidance was issued by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to all primary, secondary and special schools in England, including independent schools, to assist them in their role in relation to *Channel* policy and procedures. That guidance was *Learning Together to be Safe: a toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism*. The Toolkit aims to:

1. raise **awareness** amongst schools of the threat from violent extremist groups and the risks for young people
2. provide **information** about what can cause violent extremism, about preventive actions taking place locally and nationally and about where schools can get additional information and advice

3. help schools understand the **positive contribution** they can make to empowering young people to create communities that are more resilient to extremism, and **protecting the wellbeing** of particular pupils or groups who may be vulnerable to being drawn into violent extremist activity
4. provide advice on **managing risks** and responding to incidents locally, nationally or internationally that might have an impact on the school community (DCSF, 2008, p. 5, emphasis in original).

The 'five strands' of the British Government's overarching *Prevent* strategy are directly applied to the school context as follows:

1. Understand how an extremist **narrative** which can lead to harm can be challenged by staff in schools; and model to pupils how diverse views can be heard, analysed and challenged in a way which values freedom of speech and freedom from harm
2. Understand how to **prevent harm** to pupils by individuals, groups or others who promote violent extremism, and manage risks within the school
3. Understand how to **support individuals** who are vulnerable through strategies to support, challenge and protect
4. Increase the **resilience of pupils and of school communities** through helping pupils acquire skills and knowledge to challenge extremist views, and promoting an ethos and values that promotes respect for others
5. Use teaching styles and curriculum opportunities which allow **grievances** to be aired, explored and demonstrate the role of conflict resolution and active citizenship (DCSF, 2008, p. 7, emphasis in original).

From here, four areas of practical advice are provided:

1. *Leadership and Values*
Aim: an ethos which upholds core values of shared responsibility and wellbeing for all pupils and promotes respect, equalities and understanding
2. *Teaching, Learning & the Curriculum*
Aim: a curriculum and pedagogy which promote knowledge skills and understanding to build the resilience of pupils and explore controversial issues
3. *Pupil Support Processes*
Aim: staff confident to take preventative and responsive steps working with partner professionals, families and communities
4. *Managing Risks and Responding to Events*

Aim: a school which monitors risks and is ready to deal appropriately with issues which arise (DCSF, 2008, p. 9-10).

Lists of 'possible school actions', roles and responsibilities delineate each of these four areas further and make up the remainder of the document (DCSF, 2008, p. 21-40). Teachers are also directed to additional online resources to support them in implementing the guidance.

Disassembling the 'extremism' narrative in *Learning Together to be Safe* *What is 'extremism'?*

Quite remarkably, while the word 'extremism' (or 'extremist') is used on all but one page of *Learning Together to be Safe*, there is no definition of 'extremism' to be found anywhere in the document. Rather, its meaning is assumed and inferred with reference to examples of 'extremist narratives' and 'understanding the causes of violent extremism'. 'Extremism' is an inherently vague concept and the absence of contextual definition may not be entirely unintentional, in that it allows for the re-construction, re-interpretation and re-articulation of what constitutes 'extremism' and the potential widening of a net of applicability to various individuals, groups, attitudes and actions. In this sense, it can be 'easily exploited to demonise anyone whose opinions are radically different' (Institute of Race Relations, 2010, p. 79).

It is claimed that the Toolkit takes a universal approach and is aimed at tackling all forms of 'extremism', including Far Right activities, however, the text barely mentions these. Rather, it is almost exclusively focused on Muslim children and their behaviour and practices. In the section devoted to 'Understanding the Issues' (DCSF, 2008, p. 11-20), the narrative explicitly locates the source of the 'threat' (nationally and locally) within the Muslim community – specifically the threat posed by 'UK-based violent extremists influenced by Al Qaida' (p. 11). Teachers are instructed in how to monitor for 'warning signs' of 'extremism'. Indicators include expressions of political ideology such as:

- support for the Islamic political system
- a focus on scripture as an exclusive moral source
- a conspiratorial mindset
- seeing the West as a source of evil in the world
- literalism in the reading of Muslim texts

From here they are presented with examples of 'persuasive extremist narratives', such as those that seek:

- to explain why I/my family/my community am/are experiencing disadvantage/suffering/lack of respect e.g. perceived persecution,

inequality, oppression by a governing class, national or international politics

- to explain why the conventional family/school/community solutions do not provide answers to the core grievances e.g. 'the law does not protect us, my family is isolated from 'real life' and does not know what it is like for young people' (DCSF, 2008, p. 16).

The discursive framing of 'extremist' = Muslim = 'threat', whether intentional or not, is unmistakable. Moreover, there is no recognition that there may be a different interpretation of these 'persuasive extremist narratives' - that is of Muslim children and young people giving voice to lived experiences of social injustice. Instead, denied political agency, such expressions of political dissent from Muslim children and young people are invalidated and pathologised as indicative of a potentially dangerous mind in need of 'treatment' or 'correction' (Coppock & McGovern, 2014).

Teachers are urged to 'use their professional judgement to consider whether a young person might be at risk' (DCSF, 2008, p. 19). However, 'professional judgement', exercised in the absence of *full and accurate* information, may be highly speculative in nature and involve a very open interpretation of behaviours that may constitute engagement with 'extremism'. Furthermore, in making such judgements, teachers are not immune from the influence of popular media discourses surrounding Muslims, such as suspicion that extended family trips to Pakistan and Afghanistan may indicate involvement in terrorist training camps (Hickman et al, 2011). In this sense *Learning Together to Be Safe* appears to reinforce rather than challenge Islamophobic discourse, with potentially serious consequences for Muslim children and young people who may be exposed to intensified surveillance practices *simply because they are Muslim*. Interviews with young British Muslims lend support to this argument. Ahmed (2009) reports that:

Over and above the negative backlash on the Muslim community since the terrorist attacks [of 9/11 in the USA and 7/7 in Britain], young Muslims have felt that the wider community is watching and scrutinising both Islam and Muslims (p. 42).

That message is echoed in research by Choudhury & Fenwick (2011) where participants reported feeling that *Prevent* policies and practices in general were 'contributing towards hostility to Muslims by treating Muslims as a 'suspect group', and creating a climate of fear and suspicion towards them' (p. v). The Toolkit shifts attention away from the civil rights implications of these practices and from broader social and environmental factors impacting the lives of Muslim

children and young people; namely racism, Islamophobia, social exclusion and everyday violence (Institute of Race Relations, 2010).

What causes 'extremism'?

In addressing the question 'what can make a young person susceptible to adopting extremist views and supporting violence?' (DCSF, 2008, p. 17), the Toolkit presents 'available evidence' based on advice from The Quilliam Foundation – 'an independent UK-based think tank created by former activists who have rejected extremism' (p. 19) and provider of Radicalisation Awareness Programme Training for teachers and other local authority workers on how to spot signs that 'could indicate a young person is being influenced by Al Qaida-associated extremists' (p. 19). Although the text acknowledges that 'there is no single profile of a person likely to become involved in extremism, or single indicator of when a person might move to adopt violence in support of extremist ideas' (p. 19), the inclusion of a list of five 'triggers' that 'may', or are 'likely to', influence a young person's decision to become involved with 'extremism', gives the impression that it *is* possible to 'spot a terrorist in your classroom'. The five 'triggers' cited are:

1. May begin with a search for answers to questions about identity, faith and belonging
2. May be driven by the desire for 'adventure' and excitement
3. Maybe driven by a desire to enhance the self esteem of the individual and promote their 'street cred'
4. Is likely to involve identification with a charismatic individual and attraction to a group which can offer identity, social network and support'
5. Is likely to be fuelled by a sense of grievance that can be triggered by personal experiences of racism or discrimination (DCSF, 2008, p. 17).

The notion of 'identity crisis' is frequently cited as a 'risk factor' in the 'psychology of terrorism' literature that underpins the *Prevent* strategy and initiatives such as *Learning Together to be Safe*. The hypothesis is that 'identity threat' may pose particular difficulties for young British Muslims as they struggle to reconcile being British and being Muslim (Wiktorowitz, 2005). It is claimed that such 'within-person' conflicts may then provide an opportunity for 'extremist' narratives to prey on 'vulnerable' minds (see Coppock & McGovern, 2014, for a fuller critique of the construction of children and young people's 'vulnerability to radicalisation'). However, there is very little research that supports the alleged link between potential identity crisis and engagement with an 'extremist' group. As with the 'evidence' from The Quilliam Foundation, most research in this area is based on retrospective case studies of 'extremists', most

of which are highly personal, inevitably subjective and lack the level of scientific rigour that would render them reliable as predictors of potential future behaviour. Yet it is precisely this kind of shaky 'evidence' that underpins the risk assessment tools that teachers and practitioners are now directed to use in their everyday work with children and young people (Coppock & McGovern, 2014; Her Majesty's Government, 2012b). In his systematic review of the scholarly literature on the process(es) of radicalisation (particularly among young people), and the availability of interventions to prevent 'extremism', Christmann (2012) concludes, 'the evidence base for effective preventing violent extremism interventions is very limited. Despite a prolific output of research, few studies contained empirical data or systematic data analysis' (p. 4).

Notwithstanding these empirical weaknesses, there is a fundamental conceptual and ontological problem in the framing of those characteristics of personhood that are presented as indicative of a 'susceptibility to violent extremism' (DCSF, 2008, p. 17, listed above). In this, features of 'normal' personal and social development – 'a search for answers to questions about identity, faith and belonging'; 'a desire for 'adventure' and excitement'; 'a desire to enhance...self esteem'; 'identification with a charismatic individual and attraction to a group which can offer identity, social network and support' – are reframed as psychopathological traits associated with a propensity towards 'violent extremism'. The work of former CIA officer, Marc Sageman, (another high profile contributor to the 'psychology of terrorism' literature) is significant here. Sageman (2004) has developed what is known as the 'bunch of guys' theory in which he identifies informal social networks, peer groups and friendship and kinship bonds as primary sites for the cultivation of 'extremism'. In particular, the bonds of childhood and youth friendships are central to Sageman's conceptualisation of the formation of 'risky identities' that may be linked to the 'causes of terrorism'. These discursive constructions are also gendered, resting predominantly on the imagined 'threat' of Muslim masculinities and young Muslim men as a 'new folk devil' (Alexander, 2000), and they are instrumental in providing ideological justification for normalising state practices of discipline and social control of Muslim boys and young men, in the name of national security.

Disassembling the 'citizenship education' narrative in *Learning Together to be Safe*

In the introduction to *Learning Together to be Safe* Ed Balls (former UK Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families) states:

Education can...[equip] young people with the knowledge, skills and reflex to think for themselves, to challenge and to debate...giving young people the opportunity to learn about different cultures and faiths and,

crucially, to gain an understanding of the values we share (DCSF, 2008, p. 3).

He goes on:

Exploring ideas, developing a sense of identity and forming views are a normal part of growing up. Schools can support young people in this: providing a safe environment for discussing controversial issues and helping young people understand how they can influence and participate in decision-making (p. 3-4).

As abstract principles, the educational objectives expressed here seem relatively unproblematic in so far as they are consistent with familiar ideals and practices in both multi-cultural and citizenship education. However, when contextualised within the Toolkit and its proposed practices, these principles begin to sound like empty rhetoric.

The *Prevent* strategy as a whole, and *Learning Together to be Safe* in particular, is premised on winning the 'hearts and minds' of young Muslims to unite around 'shared British values'. Here, 'British values' are held up as the 'gold standard' for democratic citizenship and Muslim culture, traditions and values are pathologised as 'other' and considered a threat to British society. This is a distorted model of 'citizenship education'. Moreover, it points to the dubious role of *Learning Together to be Safe* in normatively shaping the psyche and socio-political consciousness of Muslim children and young people in line with the interests of the British State; namely the shaping of a Muslim identity towards the formation of an idealised norm of 'the moderate Muslim'. In this sense it is possible to observe how 'citizenship discourse' can embrace the language of rights and inclusion, but may serve to cloak more subtle techniques of governance. This can be illustrated further through close analysis of the discourses of 'the British Muslim child' in *Learning Together to be Safe*.

The emphasis on encouraging flexible thinking and critical evaluation skills so that children and young people can question and challenge the information they receive and avoid 'absolutism' sounds entirely consistent with a positive model of childhood which sees children as capable, rational, competent, legitimate social and political actors. Indeed, these are precisely the cognitive pre-requisites for promoting resilience against 'extremist' ideology and preventing 'violent extremism' identified by prominent social psychologists writing in the field (see for example, Moghaddam, 2005). Yet tensions and inconsistencies are evident in the image or model of the 'child' in *Learning Together to be Safe* that have significant implications for the actualisation of Muslim children and young people's rights to political agency. Furthermore, it is possible to see how several

articles of the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) are potentially compromised, if not blatantly disregarded, in the discourses and practices associated with *Learning Together to be Safe*, specifically:

- Article 12 – the child’s right to express a view and for due weight to be given to it
- Article 13 – the child’s right to freedom of expression
- Article 14 – the child’s right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- Article 29 – the education of the child shall be directed to the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

As established above, the discourse of ‘extremism’ in the Toolkit rests principally upon the construction of the young British Muslim as a ‘politically risky’ subject – i.e., as ‘would-be-terrorist’. This discursive construction contradicts and undermines the assertion that schools offer children and young people ‘a safe environment in which to explore controversial issues’ (DCSF, 2008, p. 3-4). For example, the fifth strand of how *Prevent* applies in a school context states, ‘use teaching styles and curriculum opportunities which allow **grievances** to be aired, explored and demonstrate the role of conflict resolution and active citizenship’ (DCSF, 2008, p. 7, emphasis in original). But how is it possible for Muslim children and young people to ‘air their grievances safely’ when giving voice to their experiences of injustice runs the risk of teachers interpreting this as an indicator of potential involvement in ‘extremism’? (i.e., extremism ‘is likely to be fuelled by a sense of grievance that can be triggered by personal experiences of racism or discrimination’ (DCSF, 2008, p. 17). In this context, airing one’s opinions is clearly a ‘politically risky’ enterprise *for* children and young people, with potentially serious consequences for their civil liberties if it results in a *Channel* referral. Thus, it is unsurprising that many Muslim children and young people choose to remain silent. This example also points to the overarching fundamental problem of associating citizenship education directly with the wider preventing violent extremism agenda and its pejorative link with Muslim communities.

Furthermore, while *Learning Together to be Safe* ‘talks up’ participation and consultation with young people as stakeholders, the dominant voices are those of adults – whether politicians or ‘experts’. For example, much is made of consultation with members of the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) in the development of the Toolkit. However, in oral evidence to the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (2010), one young person from UKYP stated:

It is quite disempowering as young people to see our report be completely ignored by government...[W]e made a constructive criticism to DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) on the terrorism toolkit, based on consultations with teachers and youth workers. From what we heard and in our opinion, it was not working and it was not being as effective as potentially it could have been. When we presented that view to them, it was completely shot down and ignored.

The selective reporting of the views of these young people suggests that the processes they took part in were little more than tokenism on the part of the British Government.

Conclusion

This article has critically examined the complex relationship between official policy discourse and developments in counter-extremism practices directed at children and young people in the UK. Specifically, it has problematised the recruitment of schools and teachers in counter-extremism practices in England through the introduction of *Learning Together to be Safe: a toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism* and has discussed its implications for the social and political agency of young British Muslims. In this, the Toolkit (and the practices that arise from it) has been implicated in extending the scope and reach of the late modern neo-liberal disciplinary State in the governance of Muslim children and young people through their discursive construction as 'risky' subjects requiring 'protection' and/or 'support'. Moreover, rather than a positive initiative within 'citizenship education' *Learning Together to be Safe* has been more accurately identified as an exercise in disciplinary normalisation of the British Muslim child aimed at producing a governable subject - 'the enlightened, moderate Muslim'.

In many ways these practices resonate with wider developments that characterise neo-liberal childhood – an obsession with controlling 'risk', the re-framing of authoritarian practices within protectionist children's rights discourse, and the dispersal of discipline through the universal approach to child welfare (Hendrick, 2009). As such, though space precludes elaboration here, the implications of the critique developed in this paper extend beyond the educational context and speak to children and young people's practitioners working across *all* disciplines and sectors. The routinisation of professional practices of monitoring, surveillance and 'disciplining' of Muslim children and young people, 'in their best interests', on behalf of the State, distorts and disrespects Muslim children and young people's citizenship rights. With this in mind, practitioners should familiarise themselves with the wider critical literature surrounding *Prevent*, and develop practices that are consistent with an authentic 'citizenship for all' model. A useful framework for such a model has

been developed by the UK Race in Europe Network (UKREN, 2009) who propose 5 central principles:

1. Muslim voice

Muslim views and voices about British citizenship should be heard and attended to in current debates.

2. Identity and belonging

Each young Muslim person in modern Britain should be supported and assisted in the development of their sense of personal identity and self-esteem, and of where they belong.

3. Duties and responsibilities

Young Muslim citizens of the UK should be helped to balance their various duties and responsibilities towards others and themselves.

4. Challenging prejudice

There is an urgent need, if young people of Muslim heritage are to play a full part in Britain as citizens, to challenge, combat and resist Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism.

5. Participation

Young Muslim citizens should be helped to develop political literacy and participation skills, and skills in effecting change (p. 16).

All children and young people, regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds, should have access to social spaces where they are free to explore ideas as well as develop their sense of identity and belonging. Teachers (and other adults working with children) have a vital role to play both in creating *safe* environments where they can do so, and in facilitating, not stifling, children and young people's political agency and political engagement in society.

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