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## **Exploring the role of 'RE' in Early Childhood Education and Care as a response to the PREVENT agenda in England**

Dr Catherine Meehan, Patrick Meehan

Keywords: RE, Early Childhood Education and Care, Compassion, Tolerance, Peace, radicalisation agenda, citizenship

### **Abstract**

By the time children are 8 years of age, their attitudes, values, identities and beliefs are shaped and becoming solidly formed. Early childhood educators are uniquely positioned in children's lives to promote positive values, beliefs and to foster authentic appreciation of difference. This important work is challenged by a discourse in wider society, based on fears of certain groups of people linked to extremism and terrorism. Recent policy and law changes in England, requires teachers to be gatekeepers and report concerns to authorities. Contextual Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used as the methodology to identify themes within the policy and curriculum documents reviewed in paper. This paper presents a case for early childhood academics and educators to consider a rationale for how they can promote values of tolerance and compassion and highlight and celebrate a range of religious and cultural traditions, and in order to promote a deeper respect and understanding.

### **Introduction**

At a time when nations around the world are escalating terror threats, discussions about religion, and the links to terrorism are constantly featured in the mainstream media. The recent influx of people seeking refuge in Europe highlights the importance of Religious Education (RE) in early years and schools that promote values of compassion and tolerance. This is vitally important to counterbalance the initiatives of governments, which require teachers to identify and report potential radicalization in children in their care.

This paper is original and makes a contribution to a contemporary conversation in the early childhood field. It is well documented that by the time children are 8 years of age, their

attitudes, values, identities and beliefs are shaped and becoming solidly formed. This places yet again another core responsibility on early childhood educators to ensure that children appreciate diversity and specifically related to religion and culture. Early Childhood educators are uniquely positioned in children's lives to promote positive values, beliefs and to foster authentic appreciation of difference. This important work however is challenged by a discourse in the media and wider society, based on fears of certain groups of people linked to extremism and terrorism.

Images of dead children on the beach in Greece escaping war torn Syria, the impact of migrants arriving in Europe, images of the jungle in Calais and feeling our borders are not safe, all contribute to the feelings of insecurity and fear. This is further perpetuated by right wing politicians who thrive on the fear generated, they promote a brand of patriotism and nationalism which have a nostalgic air to the message which take us back to the 1950s Britain, before multiculturalism and diversity. Following the 7/7 bombings in London, successive English governments, concerned about social cohesion, our safety and security, increased the importance of the CONTEST and Prevent strategies. In 2015, the strategy become statutory for schools and childcare providers to report concerns. The 2015, Counter-terrorism and Security Act (Section 26) requires teachers to give "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism." Poole (2016) asserts that Fundamental British Values (FBV) is an attempt to "promote integration through ideological constructions of national identity" and "highlights continued focus on Muslims as suspect community" (p.1).

Farrell (2016) succinctly suggests that education reform led by the Coalition and then Conservative governments in the UK which oversaw the introduction of Fundamental British Values is another example of the neo-liberal marketization of education and erodes the freedoms of schools and teachers. Fundamental British Values (FBV) were introduced into the Teachers' Standards (2012) and it should be noted that all references in this paper are for England. The devolved responsibility to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales for education, means that FBV are not recognized or adopted in the three other nations making up the country of Great Britain or the United Kingdom. Lander (2016) commented that the introduction of the FBV in England differs from previous strategies adopted by government when they faced terrorism from the IRA era of terrorism faced in the UK by the IRA, as in this current context there are concerns linked to race, radicalization, religion, security and national identity (p. 275).

These comments concur with McCully and Clarke's (2016) analysis that Northern Ireland's response to FBV is "distinctively tangential, involving little association with national security and Islamism as framed by the Prevent Strategy" (p. 354). Possibly the difference in approach taken by the British government is because the IRA had a clear leadership structure which could be negotiated with, including to enforce the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. It probably helped that the goals of the IRA were clearly articulated and finite, unlike the diffuse visions pursued by ISIS, and they usually preferred military rather than civilian targets. Arguably though, the IRA may have been treated differently simply because they were Christian in nature and white in appearance rather than being Islamic and Middle Eastern.

Such a view however, ignores the concrete realities (largely unknown to the English public), of how the British government actually responded to the IRA for three decades. Catholic residents of Northern Ireland would probably argue that the routine stop and searches, cordons of entire suburbs and house to house searches (often at night), use of water cannons and rubber bullets on demonstrations, bans on broadcasts by nationalist politicians etc. were far more intrusive than current measures taken against the Islamic communities in Great Britain.

### **Contextual Discourse Analysis**

Contextual Discourse Analysis (CDA) was the method used to identify themes within the policy and curriculum documents reviewed for this paper. The following documents were analysed as part of this review:

*Table 1: Documents included in the CDA process*

<b>Early Childhood</b>	<b>Religious Education</b>	<b>Prevent</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early years outcomes (2013)</li> <li>• Early Years Foundation Stage (2014)</li> <li>• Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage (2014)</li> <li>• School inspection handbook</li> <li>• OFSTED Handbook for inspecting schools in England under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (2016)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious Education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance (2010)</li> <li>• A Curriculum Framework for Religious Education in England (2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preventing violent extremism (2007)</li> <li>• Preventing Violent Extremism: Next steps for communities (2008)</li> <li>• The Prevent Strategy: A Guide for Local Partners in England Stopping people becoming or supporting terrorists and violent extremists (2008)</li> <li>• Preventing Violent Extremism: Sixth report of Session 2009-10 (House of Commons)</li> <li>• Delivering the Prevent Strategy: an updated guide for local partners (2009)</li> <li>• Prevent Strategy (2011)</li> <li>• Prevent Duty (2015)</li> </ul>

The following research questions were used to shape the exploration of the discourse embedded in the policy documents and an examination of the current related literature.

- What is the role of Religious Education in the early childhood curriculum in the PREVENT landscape in England?
- What is the purpose of Religious Education in England?
- What is the nature of Religious Education in the Early Childhood curriculum in England? Is it a feature? If so, what does it look like?

- How do the aspirations for the Religious Education curriculum fit with the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage?
- To what extent, is it possible to make explicit links to how the principles of the PREVENT strategy and Fundamental British Values are underpinned in the EYFS guidance?

The policy documents were analysed to explore the questions above, identify how the themes presented in the conceptual framework for this paper (Diagram 1). Drawing on McMillan and McConnell (2015), Ozga (1987), Taylor (1997) and Fairclough (2000) this method allowed for a multi-layered analysis and critical interrogation of the policy documents. The initial step, included an appreciation of the context in which the documents were written. Following this consideration was given to the difference versions of the policies and their evolution over time. In particular, the Prevent Strategy has three incarnations with a noticeable qualitative change between the first and third versions, which appears fueled by the external context. Examples drawn from the policy analysis are presented in this paper and were triangulated with a review of the literature.

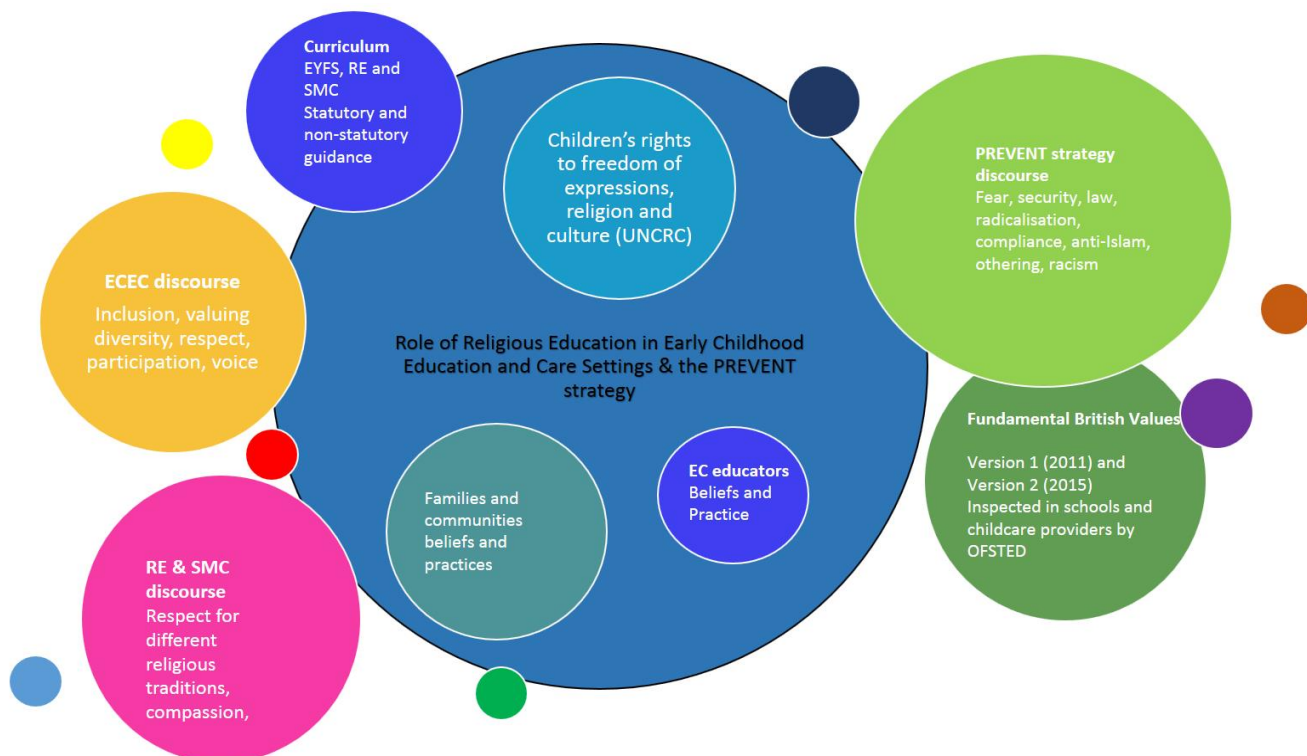


Diagram 1: Conceptual framework highlighting themes under exploration.

This paper presents a case for early childhood academics, teachers and educators to consider a rationale for how Religious Education (RE) or Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) education for young children can be used to promote values of tolerance and compassion. The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum is examined in relation to other curriculum documents and this raises some questions about how can educators engage with very complex issues around the promotion of harmony and peace as opposed to fear and suspicion. Specifically, a range of views will be presented about what RE is, the nature of young children's learning and specifically their learning in RE. There will also be consideration of young children's capacity to learn and how teachers and early years' educators can support these children in meaningful learning experiences that extend beyond the syllabus and curriculum documents. This is critical in times when tensions between religion and culture dominate the discourse of social media and political responses to terrorism.

### **Religious Education, Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural education and the EYFS**

Just like education itself, Religious Education (RE) is the subject of much global debate. The questions about what to teach, what to assess and what knowledge is sought for children to possess are central to these debates. This paper explores some key issues related particularly to young children and ways in which to engage them in meaningful learning experiences as a foundation for the rest of their life with regard to the appreciation of diversity and the recent fears about radicalization

In the UK context, teachers are focused on the demands of the National Curriculum and are not always able to allow time to consider the social, emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual dimensions of children when planning their curriculum. The role of religion and the church in family life is changing and the pluralism and multiplicity of Religious beliefs enrich the tapestry of life and culture in modern Britain. With this in mind, there are many challenges for teachers of RE and in particular the RE of very young children. This paper will present a view about what RE is, and how this can implement the declaratory intentions of the PREVENT policy in a holistic way rather than attempting to position teachers in a 'surveillance' role.

Education as represented by mass compulsory formal schooling, has evolved over time and within it RE as a subject has evolved in ways that are reflective of broader educational trends.

This has also been the case for RE in the early years has followed the trends in the wider curriculum development. Central to the debate about what RE is and should be centres on our understanding of what young children are capable of knowing and how they can understand some very abstract concepts. The three questions remain about the nature of the subject of RE, (1) Is it learning about Religion/s? (an historical/cultural view), (2) Is it learning from Religion/s? (a philosophical view) or (3) Is it learning to be religious? (a catechetical view) (Meehan, 2007; Teece, 2010)

The first two questions are typically the case for RE in England. *Learning to be religious* is limited to faith schools in which the ethos of the religion is enacted in daily life in the school, children's participation in wider religious community/parish, for example baptism and parental church attendance as an entry criteria and an expectation of the school. The aims of RE in English schools are to support children's investigation of religions and world views through varied approaches and disciplines, to reflect on and express their own ideas and those of others and to become increasingly able to respond in an informed and insightful way (2013, p. 10). RE in the English school system, the National Curriculum states Schools have a legal requirement to ensure that the

curriculum is balanced and broadly based, promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils, and prepares pupils at schools for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life... and all state schools must teach RE (REC, 2013, p. 8).

The nature of the subject is that it is for learning about Religion/s and learning from Religions is echoed in the foreword of the RE Curriculum (2013), by the then Secretary of State, Michael Gove (2013):

All children need to acquire core knowledge and understandings of the beliefs and practices of the religions and worldviews which not only shape history and culture but which guide their own development. The modern world needs young people who are sufficiently confident in their own beliefs and values that they can respect the religious and cultural differences of others, and contribute to a cohesive and compassionate society.

Such a view appears reflective of Gove's overall views that education is mainly a tool for national economic growth and that stratification of children's educational experiences and



life outcomes are unrelated to government policies which privilege Grammar and Public schools.

“When this government was formed in 2010 we inherited one of the most segregated and stratified education systems in the developed world. More than a fifth of children left primary school without reaching a basic level of literacy and numeracy; two-fifths finished full-time education without even the bare minimum qualifications that most employers and universities demand. And what made this scandal more shameful was the inequality it entrenched. The poorest students overwhelmingly attended the weakest schools. And as children made their way through the education system in England, the gap between rich and poor widened.” Gove (2014a)

It appears that for Gove, education consists of the transmission of large amounts of propositional information (e.g. multiplication tables and monarchs of England), which the British child is expected to attain mastery of within a finite period and to an arbitrary standard.

“I think there are certain core subjects where we should give parents a clear understand of the knowledge children are expected to have – English, maths and science, certainly – but I think we should then have a debate about which additional subjects we mandate from the centre and then after that you free it up.” Gove (2014b)

In a speech to the Conservative Party in 2010 Gove stated that Britain’s poor educational outcomes were the result of :

“..those educational theorists who have argued that teachers shouldn't think they have the authority to instruct - they shouldn't be doing anything so old-fashioned as passing on knowledge, requiring children to work hard, or immersing them in anything like dates in history or times tables in mathematics.”

Gove’s instrumentalist views on education seem to derive from the theories of American educational theorists E.D. Hirsch and Daniel T Willingham which proclaim a view of education as a ‘core curriculum’ of knowledge for all children to possess. Those theorists (and Gove), however, seem unconcerned by the cultural construction and specificity of much of this ‘core’ curriculum. A clear example of this occurred in January 2011 when Gove was prevented by Prime Minister David Cameron from using £370,000 of public funds to send

each school in the UK a copy of the King James Bible with a foreword by Gove himself. The proposal drew widespread criticism from teachers as a waste of money and from various secular and humanist groups for promoting an antiquated version of a single religion. The criticism did not however halt the proposal, it merely forced Gove to obtain the funds from a number of Tory donors with strong views on the promotion of Christianity including former Hedge fund manager Lord Stanley Fink, car dealer Lord Robert Edmiston and carpet magnate Lord Phillip Harris. In answer to the criticism Gove said that the Bible was chosen for its historical literary importance but ignored questions as to why the Koran, Talmud and Bhagavad Gita or even the work of Charles Darwin did not receive equal treatment, Shepherd (2012).

Arguably, public education in the UK has always been driven at least partially by a desire of rich Christians to 'improve the poor' and this process is clearly discernible in the various Acts to extend educational funding beginning with the Parochial Schools Bill of 1807 and culminating in the Elementary Education Act 1870. Throughout this period educational policy and funding privileged Christianity in general and Anglicanism in particular, Gillard (2011).

Moreover, Booth (1983) and Archer (2000) discuss how politicians at both national and municipal levels have often explicitly equated Britishness with Anglicanism and sponsored (or at least tolerated), periodic 'Church and King' riots against other religious groups as a means of cementing particular forms of public unity.

During the period 1870-1919 mass compulsory education in most countries, but especially Britain sought to create a standard type of nationalist citizen through schooling, and religious /moral education played a key role in this process, Hendrick (1997). Such education aimed to provide "a childhood for everyone, even if it meant squeezing some of them into the mould." Sommerville (1982)

This is not to suggest that religious / moral education is inherently bad. Indeed, Vermeer (2010) argued that RE in the curriculum of a liberal democracy may have "great civic value" with regard to promoting social cohesion, supporting positive identity formation and equipping children and young people with critical and reflective skills. It was suggested by Rymarz (2013) that RE should aid the "development of insights, principles, beliefs, attitudes and values, which guide and motivate". In the same way that people can learn about fanatical

and extreme religious behaviours, there is also the same opportunity for RE to teach peace, tolerance, dignity, compassion, fairness and justice.

The RE curriculum (2013) for schooling in England aims to:

- Investigate religions and worldviews through varied experiences, approach and disciplines;
- Reflect on and express their own ideas and the ideas of others with increasing creativity and clarity
- Become increasingly able to respond to religions, worldviews in an informed, rational and insightful way (p. 10 ).

In addition to the RE requirements, schools in England are required by law to promote the Spiritual, Moral, Social, and Cultural development of children (Education Act, 2002, Section 78). RE must be taught and children should be involved in collective worship (by which Anglican Christianity is implied), and learn about community membership and appreciating different faiths and beliefs. At the same time, the role of religion and culture in family life is changing and the pluralism and multiplicity of religious beliefs enrich the tapestry of life and culture in modern Britain. With this in mind, there are many challenges for teachers of RE and in particular the RE of very young children.

Beyond the curriculum documents, Watson (2007) argues that children and young people learning about morality from non-Christian perspectives can allow school to maintain their statutory responsibility to education children spiritually and morally. Discussion of ethical dilemmas, may allow for a deeper and richer debate away from traditional Christian values. A variety of pedagogical approaches may also be employed to engage students in learning RE. For example, Rymarz (2013) suggests that there is room for direct instruction in RE as this pedagogical approach which is non-catechetical can provide scaffolding and support for students' learning through a process step by step.

### **Citizenship, Fundamental British Values, Prevent and the EYFS**

The positioning of citizenship, Fundamental British Values, the Prevent Duty in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, presents a mismatch and misalignment. For example, Luff, Kanyal, Shehu and Brewis (2016) note that citizenship is not part of the early years curriculum in the Personal, Social and Emotional development of specific area

‘Knowledge of the World’. The formal Citizenship Curriculum in England is only for students at Key Stage 3 and 4. In Early Childhood, the aim of citizenship education, is to support children’s full participation into society by equipping them with knowledge, skills and values. Given that the UK is a signatory to the UNCRC, there is a gap between the rhetoric of participation and the reality in terms of the EYFS.

At a time when globally there is a shift to the political right and towards nationalism, Shain (2013) suggests that recent policy stances “appeal to British sentimentalism, patriotism, cohesion, [particularly]... at a time when disadvantage and inequality show gaps in society at a time of austerity cuts.” The Coalition government and Secretary of State, Michael Gove took the opportunity to formalize the idea of ‘British Citizenship and Fundamental British Values’ through the curriculum reform he introduced. The Gove era reeked of nostalgia and in 2010, he wrote:

Children are growing up ignorant of one of the most inspiring stories I know- the history of our United Kingdom... our history has moments of pride and shame, but unless we fully understand the struggles of the past we will not properly value the liberties of the present.

Such views reappear in Gove’s pro-Brexit statement in *The Independent* (20/2/2016) where he lists the things which supposedly set the UK apart from the other nations of the EU. As ever though, he neglects to mention that all the things he applauds such as universal suffrage, creation of the welfare state, transformation from Empire to Commonwealth were achieved after considerable struggle against largely Tory opposition which still favours a more individualist and monolithic version of Britishness. Coulson (2017), Goodman (2017)

Fundamental British Values became a statutory requirement in 2015, when they were added to the OFSTED inspection framework for schools and childcare providers. Prior to 2015, there was a 2011 version of FBV. The table below illustrates the two versions.

*Table 2: Variations between PREVENT Strategy- Shared Values (2008) and Fundamental British Values (2011, 2015)*

<b>Shared Values (2008)</b>	<b>Fundamental British Values (2011)</b>	<b>Fundamental British Values (2015)</b>
	Democracy	Democracy
	Rule of law	Rule of Law
Equality	Equality of opportunity	
	Freedom of speech	
Reject and condemn violent extremism	Right to live free from persecution of any kind	Individual liberty
Tolerance Respect		Mutual respect and tolerance

There is a notable shift from 2008 to 2015. The 2008 ‘Shared Values’ appear to be clear and precise on one level, but broad and lacking in specific detail. Under the Labour administration in 2008, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) recognises the importance of focusing on younger age groups. The aim of the Shared Values statement was to:

Build resilience to the threat of violent extremism in the longer term. DCSF is leading work with partners across children’s and youth services and schools in order to raise awareness and capability to contribute to preventing extremism, as well as engaging directly with young people to encourage them to take a lead in rejecting violent extremism. (2008, p. 66)

Latterly, the two versions of Fundamental British values include Democracy and Rule of Law as principles. These principles are the cornerstones of a ‘civil’ society and encourage citizens to respect the laws of the country, respect other people and respect for democracy and democratic processes. In the 2011 version of equality of opportunity, freedom of speech and

the right to live free from persecution of any kind were replaced in the 2015 version with individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance. The omission of equality of opportunity and freedom of speech, suggest an explicit move by the government to change the nature of the fundamental values.

It is therefore interesting that these evolutions of government policy documents so freely use terms such as ‘Rule of Law’ without troubling to define them. This failure throws us back on the famous definition provided by Dicey (1885) that it is based on three principles. Firstly, that legal duties, and the liability to punishment of all citizens, is determined by the ordinary (regular) law and not by any arbitrary official fiat, government decree, or non-specific discretionary-powers. Secondly, that any disputes between citizens and government officials should be determined by the ordinary courts applying ordinary law. Finally that the fundamental rights of citizens such as freedom of the person, freedom of association, and freedom of speech derive from the natural law, and do not depend upon any abstract constitutional concepts, declarations, or guarantees offered by a government.

Fuller (1964) argued that to qualify as a legal system rather than merely a governmental regime, any system of laws enacted by a particular government must be directed toward maximising the opportunities for individuals to pursue a life of their choosing. With these ideas in mind, the exclusion of freedom of speech and equality of opportunity from the later incarnations of the PREVENT Strategy are a worrying occurrence.

### **Religion, Radicalization and Racism**

The three ‘R’s of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are religion, radicalization and racism. In modern western societies, there is a challenge for governments to manage diversity and promote harmony. For example, Peterson and Bentley (2016) highlighted that in the Australian context, ‘securitisation’, counterterrorism, home grown terrorists as a discourse are shaping the debates about citizenship and values. This is a significant shift from the previous discourse that valued multiculturalism and diversity. Similarly in the UK, Shain (2013) remarked that the approach to managing diversity has altered. Namely, through different policy approaches each embedded in its own ideological assumptions. For example, assimilation, integration and multiculturalism view diversity and inclusion in society through varied mechanisms (Shain, 2013). In 2010, the Coalition government in the UK promoted an ‘integrated’ approach as the means to manage ethnic diversity.

In times of difficulty, people look for someone to blame. When an act of ‘terrorism’ occurs, more often than not it is linked to ‘religious’ ideology. Shain (2013) cites the example following the 7/7 bombing London of the enemy within.

Muslim young men were identified as the perpetrators, named as extremists

*equals*

terror

*therefore*

Islam is to blame and linked to the wider Muslim community.

It could be argued that communities, provide a place in which values and attitudes are formed. These communities can also shun extremism rather than condone it. Shain (2013) suggests that the link between ethnic communities and terrorism, is more complex than is presented in the media. Educators have through the Prevent Strategy been placed into a ‘policing’ and surveillance role and part of the mechanism implemented by the state to identify children at risk of radicalisation (Stanley and Guru, 2015). The Prevent strategy is a “pre-emptive, increasingly coercive, punitive state approach.... Justified through a ‘security discourse... implicated education professionals in the surveillance and containment of ‘problem’ ethnic minority students” (Shain, 2013, p. 75)

The UK Government defines extremism as:

Vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces PREVENT (2011).

Furthermore, the UK Government define radicalization as: “the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups” PREVENT (2011). Conversely, Sukarariah and Tannock (2015) challenge the idea about radicalisation and draw on Paul McLaughlin to define it as “To be radical is to seek (practically or theoretically) to uncover and uproot the roots, foundations or origins of a problem.” In the 20th century, the work of Paulo Freire was revered in “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” and educational philosophy that promoted radical social movements, as a means of promoting liberation and required commitment to the cause.

The conflicting, simplistic and dichotomous views, good vs evil are problematic for those working with young children. Creating a classroom environment that promotes diversity and tolerance counterbalanced with safeguarding and statutory requirements. The role of the early childhood educator is key to promoting a more balanced and holistic viewpoint.

Concerns have been raised since the inception of the PREVENT agenda regarding its failure to address radicalization and extremism by UK Nationalist groups such as the English Defence League (EDL) , Britain First, and British National Party. It appears that these criticisms are justified as an examination of Risk Assessments conducted by several schools in the North East of England where those groups are traditionally strong, indicates a focus on Islamic forms of extremism blinds schools to equally dangerous nationalist forms, Newman (2015). Similar concerns were raised by Copsey (2010), Jackson and Feldman (2011) particularly regarding the EDL and the willingness of its members to use overt violence against individuals of non-white or non-Christian backgrounds.

Both studies noted that despite their official organizational rhetoric of adherence to law and opposition only to 'radical' forms of Islam, many members individually are much more open in holding and acting upon, views contrary to the PREVENT strategy.

If the PREVENT strategy is to make a meaningful difference to social cohesion rather than further stigmatise visibly different minority groups then the threat presented by homegrown nationalist groups must be included in any educational efforts.

### **Can babies and young children really be at risk of radicalization?**

The recent introduction of the Prevent Duty into all schools and childcare providers in England, means that those adults working with children under five years of age are required by law to promote British values, be on the look-out for evidence of radicalization and duly report it to authorities, and use the learning and development guidance in the EYFS to support children's development in personal, social and emotional development and understanding of the world. There are some guidelines for educators about what teachers should be aware of, and in particular circumstances that may see children are at risk. In the same way, educators and teachers are vigilant about safeguarding concerns for children, radicalization is viewed as another area teachers should have heightened awareness.



There is a statutory requirement under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act (2015) that states that “to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.” The Prevent Duty is inspected as part of the OFSTED inspection framework.

There is an increasing body of research suggesting that a very small percentage of the population are at risk of radicalization. Attempts to profile such individuals at risk of joining extremist organisations, suggest that a number of factors converge. Where young people feel isolated, disconnected from family and community, are mesmerized by a charismatic leader, experience marginalization, discrimination and abuse may be contributing factors (Shain, 2013). In addition, faith, identity, finding belonging in a social network, excitement, youthful rebellion and rejection of family values, low self-esteem, adventure, a grievance triggered by racism and discrimination, enhancing self-esteem, and seeking a ‘father-figure’. In addition to those factors above the Prevent Strategy (2008) identified the global extremist narrative, access to extremist materials, underemployment, links to criminality and a changed situation or circumstance that leave a person vulnerable (pp. 69-70).

Many of these characteristics are synonymous with the transition between adolescence and adulthood. Making adolescents and young adults vulnerable to radicalization, if a number of the above factors converge. For example, some of the research from the USA and Northern Ireland suggests that there are a number of protective factors that communities can do to support children’s development of identity and positive feeling toward their family, community and society. It is more likely that children with secure emotional attachments are less likely to become involved in extremist groups.

### **Shaping young children’s attitudes, values, identities and beliefs**

The first eight years of life provide an opportunity for children’s attitudes, values and identities and beliefs to be formed. Through interactions with others, young children learn about friendship, compassion and these opportunities create spaces for dialogue. Ipgrave (2008) suggests that play provides a space for children to have intercultural encounters which can be positive and allow for productive dialogue about diversity and difference. The Curriculum Framework for Religious Education in England (2013) recommends that through “special people, books, times, places and objects and by visiting places of worship”, these experiences allow children to be exposed to a range of religions and perspectives. It is recommended that educators working with young children use appropriate pedagogical

approaches to introduce children to words and concepts that support an exploration of faith and beliefs, and support children's curiosity as they explore the world they live in. These views are consistent with the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum which has a statutory place in the schooling for children from birth to five years. Within the curriculum, there are prime areas of learning and development (Communication and language development, Personal, social and emotional development, Physical development) and specific areas which include Literacy, Mathematics, Expressive arts and design and Understanding the world. Adams, Bull and Maynes (2015) identified that the spiritual element is overtly missing from the EYFS. It is however, an explicit element of other curricula, for example in Wales (UK) (DCELLS, 2008), Australia's (Being, Belonging and Becoming) (DEEWR, 2009) and New Zealand's Te Whariki (Ministry of Education, 1996). Adams et al (2015) concluded that providing a 'space' in early childhood settings for children's exploration of who they are, how they belong and to foster the sense of awe, wonder and curiosity enable children to make sense of themselves and relationships with others.

The Personal, Social and Emotional development and the Understanding the World elements of the EYFS, potentially provide a vehicle for exploring religion, spirituality, values, citizenship and culture. These learning experiences with very young children are formative and critical in terms of fostering respect and tolerance. The NDNA chief executive, Purnima Tanuku was quoted as stating:

In the Early Years teachers can give positive messages to children about people's views, customs, and religions that are celebrated and respected. Early Years staff are well placed to teach tolerant values during sensitive and formative years (Weale, 2016).

Interactions that occur daily in classrooms also provide opportunities for children to learn positive ways of appreciating diversity. Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2016) suggest that adults working with young children are in position to work with children to explore 'power' in relationships and to support children's engagement and negotiation of the complexity and diversity of relationships. Children learn socially and emotionally through relationships and the development of empathy and the perspectives of others is critical in fostering respect and tolerance.

A further consideration about the EYFS, is the opportunity it allows educators to support the three states of childhood: being, belonging and becoming. Meehan (2011) described these states in relation to RE in the early years.

Being is “a time to be, to seek and make meaning of the world”- children’s awe and wonder, environment, space and time, curiosity, imagination, confidence, creativity and enthusiasm.

Becoming is a change process related to learning and development, leading towards full participation- community of knowers, children’s identities, knowledge and understandings, capacities and skills.

Belonging is “knowing where and with whom you belong” shapes who children are and who they become, connectedness with self and others.

By recognizing these states and enabling children space and time to explore this adopting a dispositional framework to supporting children’s learning about religion, tolerance and diversity; Hyde (2010) proposes that learning is more than the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities. Hyde drew on Claxton (2008) to describe learning in the early years as attention to the immediate experience, with a ‘sensitivity’ to the relationship between emotion and learning. This approach moves away from a competence and outcomes focused model and supports children’s capability rather than ability or attainment. A dispositional framework assumes that the learner is “ready, willing and able” to participate in learning (Claxton and Carr, 2004, p. 87).

Table 3: Learning dispositions to support RE in EY in the context of the PREVENT strategy

Dispositions (Caxton and Carr, 2001)	Description of cues in the context of Catholic RE (Hyde, 2010)	Examples embedding Religious Education concepts and values in ECEC with the PREVENT strategy in mind (multi-faith perspective)
Curiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sense of awe and wonder</li> <li>• Capturing interest</li> <li>• Being drawn towards story, (liturgical) action, symbol, sign, gesture, ritual</li> <li>• Recognising the familiar and enjoying the unfamiliar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with children’s observations and questions about religious and cultural practices from everyday experiences, media and family events</li> <li>• Engage children in pondering about the ‘big questions’ e.g. Where do I come from? What happens when we die? Giving children opportunities to think about who they are.</li> <li>• Inviting ‘special people’ into the setting and participating in cultural and religious ceremonies and activities, new and familiar</li> <li>• Read, view, discuss books, photographs, artefacts related to familiar and unfamiliar religion and cultural activities</li> <li>• Include symbols and signs associated with religion and culture in dramatic play areas</li> </ul>
Being dialogical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogue as play</li> <li>• Dialogue as partners in a game</li> <li>• Engaging in dialogue with self and other</li> <li>• Being playful with others and or materials</li> <li>• Deep listening</li> <li>• Engaging in dialogue with story, liturgical action, sign, symbol, gesture, ritual</li> <li>• Trusting others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with children’s observations and questions about religious and cultural practices from everyday experiences, media and family events</li> <li>• Discussions about friendship, use these opportunities to consider intercultural or interfaith conversations</li> <li>• Engage children in discussions about their perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and observations about religion, culture, relationships and celebrating diversity</li> <li>• Find opportunities to enhance children’s religious literacy, using correct terminology when referring to signs, symbols and artefacts associated with particular religious traditions</li> <li>• Encourage children to be empathic in social interactions, e.g. when friendships have difficulties, encourage children to consider the perspective of others</li> <li>• Use real life stories and other media about people who have demonstrated positive and pro-social qualities related to religion and culture, that promote harmony and have good ‘morals’ or lessons to be learned and discussed</li> </ul>
Persisting/living with uncertainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paying attention for a sustained period</li> <li>• Sitting with ambiguity</li> <li>• Deep questioning and wondering about</li> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Lateral thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When opportunities present themselves, allow children to play with materials and idea linked to religion and culture for extended periods</li> <li>• Engage children with opportunities to ask questions and to ponder about why some questions may not have easy answers</li> </ul>

Dispositions (Caxton and Carr, 2001)	Description of cues in the context of Catholic RE (Hyde, 2010)	Examples embedding Religious Education concepts and values in ECEC with the PREVENT strategy in mind (multi-faith perspective)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage children to find alternative solutions to problems, that are unique to the child and their context</li> <li>• Support children in working with others to solve problems and to take on multiple perspectives</li> <li>• Support children in appreciating that ‘failure’ is an important part of learning</li> </ul>
Meaning making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being moved to express (verbal and kinesthetic)</li> <li>• Verbal and non-verbal communication</li> <li>• Immersed in deep play</li> <li>• Intuitive response beyond words</li> <li>• Discovering/unpacking</li> <li>• Co-creator/co-constructor of the traditions</li> <li>• Communication of meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating space and time for children to express themselves through play, creativity in the arts, through construction, alone or with others as they tackle some of the ‘big questions’ they are exploring about religion, faith, beliefs, morality and culture</li> <li>• Create opportunities for children to make discoveries, to ask questions about themselves, their lives, right and wrong, good and bad and all the points between the dichotomies society presents</li> <li>• Provide a range of ‘resources’ for children to use to communicate their ideas that are more than words, non-verbal, kinesthetic, and other expressions of their identity and learning about religion and culture</li> <li>• Creating opportunities for children to ‘be, belong and become’ as individuals, citizens and members of communities</li> </ul>
Taking responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking action that matters</li> <li>• Thinking the learning through into action</li> <li>• Owning the learning</li> <li>• Empower/commitment to a sense of justice</li> <li>• Making a difference for good</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for children to advocate and articulate their learning about religion and culture using a range of media</li> <li>• Use pedagogical documentation to showcase children’s learning in order to give value to children’s words, ideas and actions</li> </ul>

## **Conclusion**

Early Childhood Educators are well placed in their work with young children to promote positive values and beliefs which give rise to greater social inclusion and cohesion. Religious Education in early childhood lays the foundation for later learning, but the EYFS does not explicitly address RE or Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural education or Citizenship. The EYFS instead takes a broad approach such as providing guidance to early childhood educators about Personal, Social and Emotional Development in young children with a focus on making relationships, self –confidence and self-awareness, and managing feelings and behaviour. In the specific area of learning, “Understanding the World”, people and communities and the world are two areas described for young children to engage with. If education is critical in preventing children from radicalization and extremism, then the early years are a critical period for beginning the education for diversity and tolerance which are central to the PREVENT strategy (Shain, 2013). The mainstream versions of most religious traditions centre on respect, tolerance, living harmoniously and appreciating diversity.

Arguably though both Christianity and Islam have significant historical and contemporary emphasis on proselytization and a binary view of the destiny of the human race.

Understanding this, explains both the rise of ISIS and also the resurgence of the Evangelical Right in the USA. Although not truly mainstream in either religion for several centuries, a fundamentalist view persists (and is growing) that posits the destiny of humanity as being resolved through cataclysmic conflict rather than evolutionary tolerance. A deeper understanding of the complexities of social, ethnic, cultural and religious perspectives on children’s social learning and development forms the basis of this text whilst exploring children through three states: being, belonging and becoming. This view promotes aspirations for children as active and informed citizens seeking to make positive individual and collective contributions to British and global society. Such views are necessarily based on core values that includes respect for persons and tolerance of diversity coupled with appreciation of commonalities.

There is a space in the early childhood education for RE and for beginning to explore similarities and differences between value systems and beliefs within a context which fosters an appreciation of those differing perspectives. The adoption of a proactive approach to working with children to engender pro-social attitudes and behaviours in the early years of life, may remove the need for a reactive, statutory and policing approach that the PREVENT Duty (2015) implies.

The current versions of Fundamental British Values pursue uncontroversial concepts like democracy, rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect as paramount. These are clearly important foundations, but the exclusion of more contestable issues like equality, right to live free from persecution and freedom of speech and the rejection and condemnation of violent extremism potentially fails to recognize the complexity of paths toward radicalization. In doing so it ignores socio-economic as well as cultural challenges to social harmony and the impact of marginalisation on individuals who may then become vulnerable to seeking affiliation with extremists (whether they be linked to political, religious or social groups).

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