Balancing securitization and education in schools: Teachers' agency in implementing the Prevent duty

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Balancing securitization and education in schools: Teachers' agency in implementing the Prevent duty

Since the introduction of the Prevent duty across the UK, schools have had to balance the need to fulfil their responsibilities under the duty – often understood to include monitoring and surveillance – with their ultimate purpose to educate their students. This positions teachers within a particular set of tensions about their own beliefs about education, their values, and their roles and relationships with young people and communities. This paper draws on interviews with classroom teachers and members of school leadership teams from ten schools, in order to compare how teachers have understood and responded to those tensions. The paper will focus on the various ways in which teachers frame the policy, and the ways in which they exercise agency in their responses. Drawing on an ecological approach to theorising teacher agency our data reveals how teachers develop different responses to anti-extremism policy depending on their role; their school contexts; and their own beliefs. Whilst in some important regards the statutory Prevent duty has 'closed down' some options, nevertheless teachers exercise agency to interpret and enact policy and, when translating the policy into a curriculum context, also make 'leaps' of interpretation as concepts such as fundamental British values are turned into lessons. Our analysis highlights how teacher agency helps to account for the variations in implementation and also opens up new avenues for investigating and critiquing anti-extremism policy in education.

Keywords: anti-extremism; counter-terrorism; teacher agency; securitization; schools; citizenship education

Introduction

Originally part of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy 'CONTEST' (dating back to 2003), the Prevent duty has now been made a statutory requirement for schools in England (along with a wide range of other public and private institutions). The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) requires schools to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" and the subsequent DfE advice

adds that schools should also "think about what they can do to protect children from the risk of radicalisation" (DfE 2015, 4). As a result of this legislation, schools have to balance the need to fulfil their responsibilities under the duty – often understood to include monitoring and surveillance – with their definitive purpose to educate their students.

It has been argued that Prevent is about monitoring, managing and mitigating risk (Jerome and Elwick 2017). Kundnani (2014) has discussed how a new profession of security experts has focused on the "low-probability and high consequence" (Bialostock and Whitman 2012, 4) processes of radicalisation, and produced the model of the 'conveyor belt' which in turn leads to new forms of surveillance and monitoring in order to mitigate such risks. As Ragazzi (2017, 9) notes: "grounded in security thinking, the notion allows governments to conceptualise a radicalisation process which can be prevented," and Durodie (2016) suggests those promoting this security agenda were pushing against an open door in education, where it resonates with more general concerns around safeguarding.

In 2015-16 over 7000 people were referred through the Prevent programme "due to concerns they were vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism" with the most referrals coming from the education sector (Home Office 2017). Against this backdrop of monitoring and referring individuals identified as being 'at risk', the DfE advice also urges schools to use citizenship education to:

> Build pupils' resilience to radicalisation by providing a safe environment for debating controversial issues and helping them to understand how they can influence and participate in decision-making. (DfE 2015, 8)

This guidance, in simultaneously encouraging open debate and the reporting of dissenting opinion, reflects a tension at the heart of the Prevent policy when it is

translated into educational contexts. Teachers are navigating between two paradigms, one inspired by the security agenda, which focuses on schools' capacity for intelligence gathering and safeguarding; and the other which focuses more explicitly on an educational agenda, where young people are encouraged to explore a range of opinions and beliefs in order to better understand terrorism, extremism and radicalisation (Sieckelink et al. 2015; Panjwani 2016). Ideas such as 'resilience' often function to mask the tension between these paradigms (Jerome and Elwick 2017). This paper explores those tensions in relation to the way in which teachers frame their approach to teaching about the Prevent duty, while also adhering to their statutory obligations, ultimately exploring the effect of the duty on teacher's agency.

Agency

In this paper we will focus on teachers' agency in implementing the Prevent duty in their schools and within their citizenship curricula. In particular we have adopted an ecological approach to agency which emphasises that agency is not a thing people possess but a composite of their belief about their capacity to act; their propensity to act; and their experiences of action. Our intention is to utilise this model of agency situated in context in order to understand why people do different things in relation to policy and why it is becoming increasingly difficult to talk about the Prevent policy as a single phenomenon. We illustrate how this stark distinction between the security and educational responses means teachers are adopting rather different interpretations of the policy, with the result that the policy is enacted in quite different ways.

An ecological definition of agency does not refer to the innate capacity of individuals to act (Erss 2018) but instead reflects the "interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors as they come together in

particular and, in a sense, always unique situations" (Biesta and Tedder 2007, 137). Rather than defining agency as a characteristic that individuals can possess, Emirbayer and Mische (1998, 963) describe it as a complex, temporally-situated, interaction which "varies between different structural contexts of action." This definition was developed further by Priestley et al. (2015), who outline an ecological model of agency which is shaped by context and environment. In particular, Priestley et al. recognise the intentionality of agency (i.e. that it is partly about individuals' own intention and ability to act) but frame this within the contextual factors that have direct and indirect effects. They also emphasise the temporality of agency:

> Agency can therefore be characterized as an emergent phenomenon, something that occurs or is achieved within continually shifting contexts over time and with orientations towards past, future and present, which differ within each and every instance of agency achieved. (Priestley et al. 2015, 29)

Specifically in relation to teachers, such a conception means that professional and personal past experience are highly relevant, including, for instance, beliefs about subject identity or how "to do best for their students" (Priestley et al 2015, 32). Priestley et al. criticise policy which constrains teachers; which removes their ability to exercise judgement; and which restricts their ability to act, stating that teachers can only achieve agency when they are "able to choose between different options in any given situation" and their agency is restricted if their options are restricted (Priestley et al. 2015, 141). This reflects Ball et al.'s (2012) distinction between 'readerly' policy texts, which leave little room for teachers' active interpretation and 'writerly' texts, which require the teacher to fill in substantial detail in order to enact the policy. Whilst some policies are very detailed and prescriptive, and thus likely to be encountered as 'readerly' for most teachers, the ecological model helps to emphasise that the same national policy may appear to be more readerly or writerly to different teachers in different schools,

depending on contextual factors, including how much additional policy work has already been undertaken by advisors and senior colleagues, and the experience and ideas a teacher brings to the task of interpretation and enactment.

Agency is often used synonymously with autonomy, but the former will be adopted primarily in this paper given the distinction Erss (2018, 244) makes between the two terms: "autonomy is something that teachers have (or are believed to have), while agency is something they do." Recent changes to the national curriculum and to the school system in England have emphasised the autonomy (freedom from control) supposedly given to teachers and schools, but in reality, other factors have impinged upon this freedom:

> Subsequent experience suggests that the much-vaunted autonomy afforded by the new curricula remains elusive, as governments have tended to replace the former regulation of input with tight regulation of output, achieved via a combination of marketisation, the measurement of schools' performance in respect of attainment data and external inspections. (Priestley and Philippou 2018, 152)

While such factors may restrict the options of teachers in some areas, "correctly framed, regulations can contribute to agency" (Erss 2018, 243) and this paper will explore the ways in which one specific form of regulation – the Prevent duty – affects agency in both negative and positive ways. While in some important regards the statutory Prevent duty has 'closed down' some options and operated as a readerly text (Priestley et al. 2015), nevertheless teachers exercise agency to interpret and enact policy (Ball 1993; Braun et al. 2010) and when translating the policy into a curriculum context, also make 'leaps' of interpretation as concepts such as fundamental British values are turned into lessons (McCowan 2008).

In this article, after outlining the methodology of the research study, we will discuss two broadly oppositional positions in terms of the way that teachers and school

staff frame Prevent – as a securitization issue (concerned with safeguarding, monitoring and surveillance) and as an educational issue (concerned more with a curriculum approach) – and the way that these different approaches relate to teacher agency. In particular these sections will explore the very different outcomes which are possible from local, context-bound interpretations and actions and they reflect two of the dominant approaches to Prevent identified in the literature (see e.g. Busher et al. 2017). We then consider the wider context in which teachers operate, looking at the role that in-school Prevent training plays in terms of its effect on teacher agency and considering the ways that local issues affect teachers and schools.

Methodology

In 2015-16 the Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT) ran a project, funded by the Home Office, to develop a curriculum response to the Prevent policy in citizenship classes. The project ran in ten schools, where citizenship teachers were supported by ACT to plan locally relevant projects, ranging from a short sequence of 2-3 lessons, to a major scheme of work stretching over half a term. The authors of this article evaluated the project and were able to collect data from all the schools, including teachers, senior managers and young people (Jerome and Elwick, 2016). This article reports on interviews with classroom teachers, Heads of Department, Headteachers and other members of the senior leadership teams from these schools. The paper is based on our own interpretations of the data; there is no ongoing involvement with the Home Office.[i] During each school visit the interviewer observed a lesson and then interviewed the teacher with responsibility for the project (and the teacher whose lesson was observed where these were different) and, where possible, a senior member of staff with responsibility for Prevent. The semi-structured interviews included the following topics:

- Background questions about the schools' response so far to the Prevent duty, the level/type of training that the school had organised and the school's approach to the duty.
- Questions about the teachers' own beliefs around the Prevent policy.
- Questions about the scheme of work they developed and the rationale for their focus.
- Evaluative questions about how the students were responding to the lessons and how this had affected the teachers' thinking and what the next steps for the school might be.

For this article the interview transcripts were revisited to consider the ways in which the teachers were able to exercise agency in their role as teachers of citizenship and school leaders, with a particular focus on the impact of training and other contextual factors (e.g. the local context in which the school was situated, the cultural/ethnic background of pupils); the role of teachers' own beliefs and values in their approach to teaching (particularly with reference to their framing of the Prevent duty within their own classroom); and the wider role that the Prevent duty plays within their school (with particular regards to the level of seniority of staff and their responsibility within their school). Clearly, as these schools opted in to the ACT project, one would expect the citizenship teachers and Heads of Department to feel they had some agency in generating their own responses to the policy. However, the data also indicates how these two paradigms – the security and educational responses – continue to be evident in different ways.

Framing the Prevent duty as a security issue

As has been suggested above, the Prevent duty can either close-down or open-up

options for teachers, depending on the way it is interpreted, framed and used. Such decisions may not always be the choice of the teachers directly involved and may be strongly affected or indeed entirely determined by factors outside of their control (e.g. their school policies, or their local context), but one of the most prominent findings throughout this research study was the variation in approaches taken by teachers regarding factors that were within their control. This section broadly groups such responses (from both teachers and Heads of Department working directly in classrooms and more senior staff with oversight or compliance responsibilities) that frame the Prevent issue as one of securitization. This is an approach which is perhaps faithful to the original intention of the Prevent duty and the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) (Home Office 2018). It largely portrays pupils as vulnerable to radicalisation and adopts a safeguarding approach, as one can see from the Deputy Head's response in School 7, a Christian Faith School with above average numbers of children with EAL, SEN and from minority ethnic backgrounds (in particular Muslims):

> I go about my business and if something comes up that worries me I would report that to the appropriate authorities. Whether that's the police, whether it's children's social care, whether it's families first or any other agency, Barnardo's or Turnaround or the other agencies we work with in school. I report those things with the very best of intentions. So, if it's a Prevent issue then I'm reporting those things, possibly to nip something in the bud so that it doesn't develop, possibly to keep people safe (Senior Leader, School 7).

The staff in this school in particular expressed a belief that Prevent was in some way removed from their day-to-day classroom activities: an arms-length approach which readily accepted that when the policy had been used to report a student or to raise a concern, that would then be dealt with by other people/agencies and would no longer be a matter for teaching staff. The same respondent continued:

> We don't get much in the way of feedback about that and I wouldn't really expect [it] to be honest. We flag it up and they deal with it. I would expect intelligence back if they felt there was something we needed to be aware of. If there isn't then that's fine, they've done their job and we feel we've done ours (Senior Leader, School 7).

Similarly, the Head of Department (the only specialist citizenship teacher employed) in School 7 recounted a story of getting to know a pupil who held 'extremist views'. He established a regular dialogue with the child and gained their confidence, up to the point at which he reported the pupil to senior staff. While this citizenship teacher expressed regret about the eventual involvement of police in the matter they nonetheless felt that it was no longer their prerogative to be involved: "I believe he's OK but I don't know what happened afterwards at all. I wouldn't expect to know with Prevent" (Head of Department, School 7).

It is important not to fall into a trap of blaming teachers here: schools are placed under a legal obligation to act and, while guidance (and legislation) has been criticised as being somewhat vague (Ramsay 2017), the ramifications of not complying with the policy are potentially significant for teachers. Some organisations have publicly expressed their opposition to Prevent (e.g. NUS 2017, National Education Union 2017) but, for individual schools and teachers, adopting an oppositional stance is not necessarily feasible. However, on occasion some teachers do not simply adopt an uncritical and compliant stance, rather their response reflects an over-zealous approach to identifying risk:

> We had a boy ask a D&T teacher if he could buy something like 20 little electronic switches, may have been completely innocent, may not have been, just for little electric motors is how they're used in school. They make little plastic boats basically, with a little motor in, and it was a switch for that that he was after. We flagged that up. So, the staff are aware that these things are happening out there

> and that [our area] is very multicultural and not all our students will be safe from being radicalised themselves. We can do what we can do (Senior Leader, School 7).

Here the mention of the school's 'multicultural' nature clearly draws a connection between the significant Muslim population and the perceived risk of radicalisation. This reflects Sian's (2017) concerns that, for some teachers, the securitised agenda seems to override established messages about inclusion and anti-racism.

Security concerns were also evident in the way some of the teachers spoke about their curriculum-based responses to Prevent. In the following example, one can see how the securitization approach informs the way the Head of Department (who leads citizenship and PSHE) frames their teaching in School 8 (which has 80 per cent EAL and 30 per cent FSM pupils, and has experienced older siblings of some children running away to fight in Syria):

> I mean we have got some lessons which are 'don't become a terrorist, this is how a terrorist is going to come at you' but the tutorial programme, which is built on the so-called British values, it's teaching people how democracy works, how the rule of law works, how you can support the rule of law… (Head of Department, School 8).

In this school, it was clear that the teachers we spoke to framed the policy very much in relation to the risk that a small number of children might follow these older siblings' examples to join armed conflicts overseas. A local network of schools regularly came together to share information and examples of 'Prevent' practice they had developed. In this approach, the curriculum response appears to provide an extended opportunity for addressing the vulnerability of local young people. Similar sentiments were also expressed regarding a whole school approach to promoting the 'right' values, as this extract from an interview with a Headteacher at School 9 (predominantly white with

lower than average numbers of children with EAL, SEN, FSM or from BME backgrounds) illustrates:

> We have many staff meetings, and we have explained everything to them. But, I think it's not a direct thing. Things like what's happening today [the lesson observed] permeate through the schools and all the staff are singing from the same hymn sheet and getting across to the children the right points of view (Headteacher, School 9).

This has the effect of closing down debate and ultimately of reducing a teacher's agency – limiting the opinions and views that can be expressed and debated because one has already been pre-determined as 'correct'.

Such a narrow perspective from senior staff can lead to situations where different viewpoints are suppressed, where controversial views cannot be expressed without them being challenged as being 'wrong'. This seems to reflect a position whereby teachers accept the notion of 'fundamental British values' as uncontested truths, as the following quote shows, from a senior leader who had responsibility for citizenship, PSHE and the pastoral programme in School 5 (which was predominantly white with lower than average numbers of children with EAL, SEN, or from BME backgrounds, and where approximately 30 per cent of students are FSM):

> It's to provide challenge to those comments, that when a student expresses a view that is not in line with our British values that actually they question it (Senior Leader, School 5).

In this school, the teacher was responding to the threat of far-right extremism, which was perceived to be a feature of the local white working class population. The nature of Prevent, and of the way that it is positioned in some schools, leads some teachers to openly worry about giving the 'right' response to students. When discussing how colleagues had approached this project, one Head of Department (who was in charge of

citizenship and responsible for Prevent in his school) noted that, "the delivery of the content wasn't really the biggest worry for them, it was actually how they respond to the questions" (School 1). School 1 has 60 per cent EAL pupils, 25 per cent FSM and the school is in one of the most diverse boroughs in the country, which may have particularly influenced this response, as the teacher felt his younger non-specialist colleagues were concerned that many of the students would be better informed about current affairs and international news than the staff. Such an overriding concern is likely to reduce the agency teachers enjoy in their practice – restricting their approach to a narrower range of possibilities, and encouraging them to minimise risks. Whilst not entirely closing down alternative approaches, it seems the individual is likely to perceive greater personal risks if they stray from this narrow line.

An educational response to Prevent

There was a markedly different response towards the Prevent duty in other schools involved in the research (and sometimes from individual teachers within the schools already discussed) – one which reflects the educational paradigm rather than the security one. In these schools teachers talked more about what they wanted students to learn, and rejected an overtly suspicious attitude towards pupils. This is more closely associated with Panjwani's aspiration that "the sooner the securitisation approach is replaced by an educational approach the better" (Panjwani 2016, 338). Framing Prevent educationally allows teachers to open up issues and was portrayed by many teachers as an inherently progressive approach to the issue. A specialist citizenship teacher from School 9 adopted such an open response, in direct contrast to their Headteacher's view (above) that there was a uniformity of approach towards Prevent in their school:

> I think education is more effective than actually reporting people when it's too late and trying to re-educate them … let's deal with it in the classroom situation rather than siphoning people off through the Channel process (Head of Department, School 9).

One of the primary tenets of such an approach revolved around the trust that pupils have for their teachers – and the danger that Prevent may threaten that trust. Reflecting on his experience of having reported a pupil in relation to Prevent, the Head of Department in School 7 noted that "trust is easy to lose and hard to gain and I think that's one thing that we need to remember when we're in schools." Another teacher contrasted the educational approach with one of securitization which comes close to 'criminalising' children and explicitly suggested that the latter could break the trust relationship. Discussing the Prevent policy, the teacher said:

> To me it needs to have a specific dimension that's more directed to schools to make sure it's not just about identifying children to go up through the system, it needs to be brought back through education and stopping things happening before they get referred to Channel and before children become criminalised, if you like, because we're going to make a difference within homes and on the streets because that's where it's going to happen and we can't wait until it gets too late and hoping we can identify children. And possibly putting huge gaps in … and almost breaking the trust then between teacher and student (Head of Department, School 9).

It is precisely because of this level of trust that teachers have such power and responsibility in their classrooms, but also such freedom and opportunity: as one specialist citizenship teacher noted, "you are in a better place of trust, in the students' eyes, and a lot of them take what you say as gospel" (School 6). This school is predominantly white, with relatively low levels of EAL, and FSM, but there is a large mosque near the school which had attracted some EDL protests in the period just before the research visit. This quotation highlights both the possibilities on offer for teachers,

but also makes plain the threat of closing down debate and presenting one viewpoint (given the weight that students are liable to place on such words).

Sieckelinck et al.'s (2015) asserted that teachers tend to assume optimistic beliefs about the transformative potential of learning, and of the positive benefits to be derived from encouraging young people to explore various ways of thinking. These teachers often focused on providing alternative viewpoints and perspectives for their pupils to consider. Teachers were often empowered not by providing the 'right' answers for their pupils, but by enabling them to see things differently, as one teacher investigating local anti-migrant violence noted:

> I'm really glad to have had that lesson and it was just that moment when you suddenly thought, OK, for one kid he's now seeing behind that [media coverage of immigrants] and it might not make a massive difference, but he's going to start seeing things in a different way (Head of Department, School 9).

Many of those interviewed through the research talked about opening up space for discussion with their pupils and the benefits that such an approach can bring:

> Actually the best thing that staff have done here is engaging with it and trying to discuss it with students, rather than sweeping it under the table and saying it's something we have to do when something comes up (Head of Department, School 1).

This kind of educational approach also led teachers to focus on the role of knowledge and evidence in helping young people develop informed opinions (see Jerome and Elwick 2017).

Some of these teachers also recognised the apparent contradictions between these two responses to the Prevent policy. These tensions caused discomfort and disquiet for some:

> You had Nicky Morgan [Secretary of State for Education at the time] saying she didn't want to shut down … open discussion, and then when you look at the Prevent policy it kind of does if you interpret it that way, shut down discussion because if you haven't had a discussion with someone else about Prevent policy, if you just had the Channel training, a discussion with a class could result in a referral for 30 children, so, the policy itself to me is incredibly vague (Head of Department, School 1).

Such imprecision is inherent in the Prevent duty and in particular around the lack of definitions of many of the concepts which it addresses (O'Donnell 2016). However, these teachers' responses demonstrate that the approach taken by teachers (and their schools) can ultimately determine whether the policy enhances or reduces individual agency.

Despite the apparent freedoms that emerge through framing Prevent educationally, staff remained aware of the risks involved in their interpretation and enactment of policy:

> I think a lot of people have the fear of being tarnished as … kind of anti or pro one side or the other … you know in all my lessons I was completely neutral, and I put across to kids this is really bad what they're doing, however, can you see the reason why they may want to do it? (Head of Department, School 1).

In such cases it is possible to suggest that this way of teaching about Prevent might actually inhibit teachers and might restrict their agency because of the discomfort they feel. Nonetheless, presenting alternative viewpoints as a way of encouraging students to be empathetic, was held by some to be paramount in their teaching around the issue and an essential component of teacher agency. This was evident in the response of the following teacher who was the only specialist citizenship teacher in her school (a predominantly white school with slightly lower than average EAL, FSM and SEN pupils):

> I want them to understand the purposes behind the decisions that people make… So, if we hear that there was an attack in Paris, and all we know is that it was a terrorist attack, of course our response is going to be that we disagree with the terrorist attack. But, if we know what caused it, what the history of the communities were, we might have a response where we disagree, but we understand that there may be fault on more than one part, rather than one person who just decided to do something wrong (Head of Department, School 3).

In these first two sections we have illustrated how the approach teachers adopt to frame their responses to the Prevent duty opens up some options, and closes down others. We have seen though that the teachers did not simply to choose to frame their response as either a security issue or an educational one, rather their responses showed they were striking a range of different balances between these two dimensions. In School 7, whilst both interviewees acknowledged that a 'Prevent referral' would take the matter out of their hands, the Head of Department also embarked on a substantial scheme of work exploring the nature of extremism, the process of radicalisation, the far right, and ISIS. In school 8, although the interviewees both seemed more confident that they would not have to regularly refer students to external agencies, they tended to frame their pastoral and curriculum planning as responses to children's vulnerabilities. In the following sections we consider some of the contextual factors that emerged as significant in these teachers' accounts.

In-school training and policy

Following Priestley et al.'s ecological model of agency (2015) context is a key concern when considering the options available to teachers and the level of agency they are able to employ in their own practice. While we have explored the different ways that the Prevent duty was interpreted and enacted in schools, there were also significant differences evident in the approach to in-school training around Prevent which, it could

be suggested, also constrain or enable teachers to exercise agency. Training was variably delivered by the Local Authority (LA), the police, external and internal specialists, and sometimes by colleagues without formal expertise. Clearly, the interpretation and motivation of the trainer influences subsequent approaches and understandings of the policy (Lundie, 2017), as is evident in the following quotation from a Head of Department:

> When it was first released there was a negative stigma attached to the whole policy, which I could understand myself from people, not just in my school, [the] LA as a whole… I arranged the first Channel training [part of the mechanism for dealing with Prevent referrals]… and the Channel training was delivered by X and a police officer (X working for the LA)… the content that was delivered, itself wasn't bad in terms of the Channel training, however the way in which it was delivered, specifically by the police officer, made people in the room uncomfortable and made people in the room not want to engage with the policy at all. That's not to say the police officer was in the wrong or did anything wrong, but the police are coming from this way of thinking and we're coming at it from that way of thinking and the way it was sold or pointed out to people is that if this discussion opens up, you must report (Head of Department, School 1).

This presents a clear example where external agencies bring a different perspective, one which does not always resonate with the educational and pastoral motivations of teachers. In this example the Head of Department felt the training had closed down some interpretations of policy. As a consequence he scheduled a further training programme without the police officer, in which the LA member of staff "opened up the floor and he opened it up for comments and he asked people 'well how would you approach teaching that then, what do you think of what has been said here?'". This approach, according to the interviewee, gave staff more confidence to deal with Prevent in their own classrooms.

There was a recognition amongst some of the more experienced interviewees

(especially those with, for instance, a background in Religious Studies – as in the below quote) that across the whole staff body some teachers may not have been as comfortable dealing with all the issues that such topics inevitably raise, and that more training might have been appropriate:

> I know that, again, from my RS background, this is something that I deal with every week anyway, so I think naturally I'm probably a good candidate in order to deliver it because it's something that I try to implement in my own curriculum, through RS, anyway. I don't know about teacher Y, I'd be interested to know how he felt with regards to the training and maybe if I'd been in his position it would maybe have been nice to have a bit more training for it (teacher, School 5).

As above, the training can restrict teacher agency when it is prescriptive in its approach, but clearly can also be beneficial, particularly for non-specialists. In the following extract a subject specialist Head of Department discussed how they supported non-specialist colleagues through fairly intensive one to one sessions where they rehearsed classroom strategies:

> OK if you're doing this lesson and child says this, how could you respond to it? And I think you need much more of that because you can't just presume that because we're professionals that we automatically know everything. There does need to be regular training I think (Head of Department, School 7).

When training is delivered in a more open and collaborative way, staff in some schools suggested it helped them to be more open in their own practice and was a powerful enabler of their agency.

Similarly, when training was led internally, there were examples of more collaborative approaches that had either taken place or, as in the case of the following quotation, were planned to take place:

> I'm the only one that's teaching this. That was a request by my Headteacher to do it that way. What I am doing though is, at the end of the project, I'm sharing all the resources in a department meeting. I've already said to them I want their feedback, and I'll show them all the stuff I've made, and I want to know their perspective on whether or not they would feel confident to deliver it. Then I'm better informed about next year and whether I need to change it to help (Head of Department, School 7).

The approach adopted in this example clearly illustrates how individual teacher agency in relation to the Prevent duty can also be harnessed to further develop agency among colleagues.

Local context

Schools do not operate within a vacuum and staff often referred to their local context, either in terms of specific issues that they and their students faced, or more broadly to characterise their pupils (and their parents). Their responses to the Prevent duty therefore reflect their reading of the local context and their perceptions of local needs and challenges. Such issues are another facet which must be considered when characterising teacher agency – highlighting that Prevent does not just constrain/enable teacher agency as a policy text to be interpreted, but also through the various ways in which local communities and other relevant agents interpret and respond to the policy (for example do parents engage positively or with scepticism; does the LA have specialist staff to support schools or not; are there local organisations campaigning?). In this regard Prevent has been heavily criticised for disproportionately affecting Muslims (Versi 2017), which is likely to provide different challenges to schools with different demographics (Busher et al. 2017). The schools involved in this research were from different parts of England and differed greatly in their locale, their student bodies and the local issues that were particularly relevant.

An example of how teaching responded to local issues was provided by School 9 where the project focused on recent local protests and counter-protests involving the English Defence League. This provided the background to much of the work around Prevent and discussion of extremism and the role of the police. This Head of Department explained:

> For the theoretical stuff to really take hold, they have to have some practicality, and see something that actually affects their lives. So local protests and fighting on their streets, well that affects them (Head of Department, School 9).

But not all the schools identified urgent local issues to respond to, some formulated their teaching plans in response to problems they perceived with the students or parents' beliefs.

In particular the role of parents was referenced by several staff, often somewhat derisorily regarding the effect of parents' views on their children:

> I think we need to help children understand that maybe what their mum or dad says may not be true because a lot of them come in and just, you know, say what their parents say (teacher, School 5).

> The biggest thing for us is to educate the students so they have their own point of view rather than the view of their parents (Headteacher, School 9).

In one school a Head of Department and citizenship specialist reported that in a parents' evening conversation:

> A parent got very confrontational with me because we were teaching about Islam and she didn't understand why… and she was very angry (Head of Department, School 6).

This was discussed to justify why the school project focused on tackling Islamophobia. In this instance, the curriculum project was devised to counteract undesirable attitudes

in the local community. This illustrates how the Prevent policy is beginning to affect some white working class communities, in addition to Muslim communities, where far-right extremism becomes the focus (Abbas 2017).

We have already referred to examples where teachers seemed to be negatively stereotyping Muslim students. By contrast, in another school the Head of Department argued that there were particular benefits in creating spaces for Muslim students to articulate their own responses to Islamic terrorism:

> I think the biggest help it's had for our Muslim children is that within a classroom it's allowed them to say, this is IS [Islamic State], this is Islam. These people say they are Muslim but they are going against beliefs that we hold (Head of Department, School 1).

By contrast, others suggested that it wasn't a relevant factor:

> But teaching it in this context, as in a multicultural school … I don't think it's a challenge because they're actually really open to talk about it (Head of Department, School 7).

Thus we can see how the teachers variously responded to their contexts, and to their reading of those contexts. One respondent seemed to default to the assumption that Muslim students were part of the target group for Prevent; another saw Prevent as opening up a space for Muslim students to articulate their religious and cultural identities in positive ways; whilst another assumed their school was already open and inclusive. These interpretations play a part in shaping the kinds of responses adopted in the school, but they also arise from active processes of interpretation by some members of staff. As many of these extracts were taken from interviews with the Heads of Department, we can see how their interpretations represent aspects of their own agency, but this also illustrates how the decisions they take serve, in turn, to influence the

agency of their more junior colleagues. For example, once the Head of Department in School 6 decided that their Prevent project should focus on Islamophobia (because of their perception of local prejudices among the predominantly white population) their colleagues were committed to adopting this approach in their own teaching. Similarly, having decided the police input to whole school training was problematic, the Head of Department in School 1 exercised his own agency to arrange new training, and thus sought to increase colleagues' sense of agency over how to interpret the policy.

Conclusions

We have argued that teacher agency in relation to the Prevent duty is evident in the combination of a teacher's individual capacity to act; their beliefs, prior conceptions and understandings; and their context (including factors within the school and in the local community). Regardless of the external constraints, teachers' moral and philosophical approach towards the Prevent duty is clearly a key component in accounting for the opportunities available to them. In this article we have explored how differently Prevent can be framed within a school and the effect that such framing can have on teacher agency. Conversely, teacher agency can also account for some of the variations in implementation of the policy and in particular the key variation between framing Prevent largely as an issue of securitisation and safeguarding, or framing it educationally as a way to open up dialogue with students and engage them in debate and discussion around controversial issues. There is often a lack of criticality amongst some teachers around the securitisation approach to Prevent – with safeguarding responses to the policy an inevitably more straightforward way to comply with requirements, often encouraged by those "in the policing and security sector [who] often wished to locate Prevent as a safeguarding concern" (Lundie2017). Sian has similarly identified teacher responses which show uncritical internalization of "the Muslim 'threat' logic", going on

to make the point that continual rhetoric around inequality and anti-racism has led to the current situation (2017). Presentation of the policy as an issue of security (especially by those providing training or advice to schools) elicits a specific set of responses: where teachers frame Prevent as a securitisation issue this tends to locate it in such a way that equality is less of a concern – such approaches are othering, potentially unconsciously perpetuate racism, and continue Islamophobic stereotypes (Sian 2017).

Much of the literature about Prevent in education has focused on the negative implications of the policy, but, by contrast, one of our interviewees argued that the existence of this high profile policy had the advantage of compelling schools to formulate some kind of response. He argued this created a space which could be used by teachers to engage young people in meaningful educational discussions to inform them about terrorism, extremism and radicalisation, and the ways in which these phenomena are used in political and media discourses. Without such a policy, he believed it is unlikely that schools would be able to respond, given the overwhelming pressures they faced in relation to the curriculum, examinations and accountability regimes.

> We've got to try to talk them round and expose them and help them make the right decision at the right time and unless that's specifically written in somewhere in some kind of curriculum for citizenship or some kind of directed guidance from DfE or from the Home Office then many schools won't see it as a valuable thing to do because the curriculum is really squeezed and so I'm afraid it will have to be written down somewhere that you must do it and that's what I think would be really helpful if it's going to be effective (Head of Department, School 9).

We have argued that the implementation of Prevent is both an outcome of teacher agency and a factor which modulates it (alongside a range of other contextual factors). The ways in which this plays out in practice, and the kinds of factors that influence

these processes, is an area which further research should explore (given that this project was relatively small-scale, involving only ten schools). Nonetheless, this article has demonstrated how an ecological theory of agency can be used to understand the implementation of UK counter-terrorism policy and its effects on teacher practice. Adopting such an approach allows a nuanced account of the policy, and also highlights how the spaces created by the policy can be shaped by teacher agency to provide young people with a range of possible experiences. Some commentators have called for the Prevent policy to be scrapped (e.g. Elgot 2016), but it is useful to bear in mind that some of our teachers valued the fact that it has created spaces to learn about terrorism and extremism, and the students we spoke to have similarly argued that they need schools to teach them about these issues (Jerome and Elwick 2017). Our data shows that teachers can interpret and enact this policy in ways which seem to address the need to build young people's understanding of terrorism and extremism, but we have also demonstrated that relying on teacher agency also means the policy is open to more restrictive, and less obviously educational, interpretations. We believe a closer focus on the processes of interpretation, as well as the impact on young people, will highlight some possible avenues for future reform of the policy, guidance, training and support.

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[i] The research on which this paper reports was a small-scale project which we nonetheless believe is important, owing to the lack of current studies which explore the role of Prevent with teachers and in classrooms. Given its scale we have not made extensive claims nor sought to generalise our findings and would – as with any qualitative research of this type – advise readers to consider the inevitable limitations of such research, including our own subjectivity; our role as researchers; and the self-selecting nature of the participants. Our data was collected as part of the Building Resilience project run by the Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT), and the schools generally participated in the project because they were already within ACT's network, and the decision to participate was led by Citizenship teachers in each school. Their interest was in developing a curriculum-based project to incorporate an aspect of Prevent policy, and one of the appealing aspects of participation was teachers' access to specialist consultants from ACT to support their planning. As we have stated, the Home Office provided a small amount of funding to enable ACT to run the project and employ us as evaluators and so some commentators might question whether this impacted upon our findings – both in terms of what our interviewees told us and our role in analysing and interpreting the data. We have maintained the highest standards of transparency throughout the project and while we believe that we have explicitly addressed the effect that teachers' positions, beliefs and values might have had on their responses in relation to Prevent – and we have sought to evidence all our assertions by providing direct quotations from our participants – we hope readers feel sufficiently informed in order to make their own judgements on this matter. The full evaluation report and methodology is available on ACT's website www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk