THE ART OF PREVENTION

A CREATIVE APPROACH TO SUPPORTING SCHOOLS IN THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

A partnership programme delivered by Lancashire Constabulary and Curious Minds
Curious Minds
Curious Minds is a charitable organisation building creative and collaborative partnerships to bring about positive personal and social change through the development of curiosity, creativity and learning.

We work towards a vision of society where children and young people have plentiful opportunities to participate actively in creative learning and cultural production, leading to the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to contribute fully to society and lead positive and productive lives.

We work towards a vision of schools where creative and sustainable approaches to teaching and learning lead to the development of creative learning communities, with schools at the heart of a diverse network of partners, working collaboratively to support and enrich learning.

Maximising curiosity is a key element of our work. Curious minds are engaged, purposeful, imaginative, playful and open. We aim to stimulate the curiosity of children and young people and help adults cultivate a curious attitude.

Through enabling a broad range of creative collaborations we contribute to building thriving and prosperous communities, growing capacity to apply creative solutions to the challenges and opportunities facing society.

Lancashire Constabulary
Lancashire Constabulary seeks to work closely with communities and our statutory and voluntary sector partners to achieve a safer Lancashire for everyone.

We work in this way for all aspects of crime prevention and we see no difference in this very complex and important area of crime prevention. Terrorism and violent extremism is another form of criminal activity. The nature of the global effect of terrorism present significant challenges for all of us, but we will only make a difference if we work together to a common goal. All of us want to be safe. It is this goal we are working towards.

Lancashire County Council and its partners have achieved Beacon status for Community Cohesion in 2009/10. We have only achieved this through partnership work and appreciating that the issues that face different communities can be difficult ones to resolve. Time and creative responses will help us in becoming even more cohesive.
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FOREWORD

The DCSF’s toolkit for how schools can contribute to preventing violent extremism, Learning Together to be Safe, highlights that young people have said they want more opportunities at school to explore complex issues. Through this project, Curious Minds have shown how art and creativity can be powerful media for doing that, helping young people to gain a better understanding of the issues and to develop their own skills and confidence at the same time. I was delighted to have the chance to see presentations from all of the schools featured in this booklet and hear first hand from the pupils involved. Each school chose a different approach but displayed similar levels of imagination, energy and talent. I hope others will find this booklet and DVD an inspiration to embark on similar projects in their schools.

Hermione Gough, Head of the Community Cohesion Unit, Department for Children, Schools and Families
INTRODUCTION

Lancashire, like many other parts of the UK and abroad, faces a threat from terrorism and violent extremism. A very small minority of people seek to harm innocent people in the name of an ideology which causes division, hatred and violence.

This position is not new to the county and Lancashire has had to address all forms of terrorism and violent extremism that have emanated from both the UK and overseas. Terrorism and use of violence are crimes and terrorists are criminals.

The violence arising from the issues around the IRA/UDA and their associated organisations has largely subsided, but is still of some concern. Issues around violent protest with regard to animal liberation are real and recent arrests and convictions (2007) have revealed activity within Lancashire. The violence attributed to the National Front, Combat 18 and other far right organisations (2006) has an even greater focus for us, especially as these organisations’ activities severely affect the wellbeing of all communities and people’s ability to feel safe.

Al-Qaeda inspired activity within the county is also real, as shown by arrests in Blackburn in 2003, 2004 and 2008. The intelligence picture shows an extensive network of individuals connected to criminal activity across the UK and overseas. Traditionally it has been the role of Lancashire Constabulary and other enforcement agencies to take the security measures needed to keep people safe. But a security response alone is not enough; as with so many other challenges, a multi-agency partnership approach is required for long term solutions.

We need to work in partnership with communities to challenge and undermine the ideology that sanctions and encourages indiscriminate violence. We need to work together to stop people, especially young people, getting drawn into illegal activities associated with violent extremism. We seek to empower communities to reject and condemn violent extremism.

Local authorities, the police and their partners in schools, other educational institutions and elsewhere, have a critical role in preventing violent extremism in Lancashire. This local understanding of the community context will enable the strategy to be delivered effectively as all partners continue to talk to our local communities, hear their concerns and enable people to work together.

It is very important to work together and by doing this effectively we can protect ourselves as individuals, as families and as communities. We can all help to identify and unlock new ways of working in partnership, develop and drive initiatives across diverse communities and provide sustained longevity essential to success. I am convinced that the work delivered by Curious Minds and their team of project managers and creative practitioners makes a real difference in people’s lives. It helps to give young people both an understanding of these complex issues and the confidence to make a difference, in order to enable us all to live and work in a safe society.

Superintendent Andrew Pratt, Lancashire Constabulary
THE CURIOUS MINDS APPROACH

How can creative approaches to learning develop young people’s skills and confidence to challenge extremist ideologies?

This was the question posed by Lancashire Constabulary when we were asked to devise a series of innovative projects in six secondary schools across Lancashire earlier this year.

The programme, funded by Lancashire Constabulary and delivered by Curious Minds, has been designed to support schools in the practical delivery of Learning Together to be Safe, a toolkit produced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families to help schools tackle issues around violent extremism.

Six Lancashire secondary schools have been involved in developing Curious Minds projects with a range of creative practitioners from a variety of artistic and creative backgrounds, including film, sound art, visual art and the performing arts. The projects were designed to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to articulate, challenge and debate complex and often controversial ideas around extremism in a safe environment. They also gave young people the opportunity to learn about different cultures and faiths and to challenge stereotypes and prejudice, while providing good links with the wider national curriculum and supporting the delivery of subjects as diverse as Citizenship, Media Studies, English, Geography, Art and Religious Education.

It is vital that this agenda is not seen as another bolt-on to the curriculum but as a long term approach designed to encourage teachers and pupils, along with community partners and creative practitioners to work together to keep asking and exploring the difficult questions and issues that are relevant to all of us today.

This publication, along with the accompanying DVD tells the story of a creative and challenging programme of work from the perspectives of the pupils, teachers and creative practitioners involved. Alongside the feature documentary on the DVD, produced by filmmaker Graham Kay, you will also find examples of the work produced by some of the schools involved in the projects.

We hope you will find the stories behind these projects illuminating and inspiring.

Kate Hobson
Director of Programmes,
Curious Minds
"VIOLENT EXTREMISM IS LIKE..."
SETTING FIRE TO YOUR HEART...
Marsden Heights Community College is an 11–16 college serving an area of considerable socio-economic disadvantage and attended by significant numbers of Asian heritage pupils. Our students face many challenges in their daily lives, ranging from economic hardship to vulnerability regarding drugs and alcohol abuse, anti-social behaviour, family breakdown and worklessness as well as issues relating to religious, ethnic, cultural and national identity.

At Marsden Heights Community College one of our core tenets and beliefs is in the safety and security of our students. We work wholeheartedly in partnership with a wide range of agencies to safeguard our students against all threats to their emotional, mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

We marshal, focus and develop our resources to create an environment and climate for learning which ensures that any prejudices and disadvantages which exist at home or in the wider community are left at the college gates. This establishes an ‘inclusion dome’, within which holistic learning and personal development can flourish, unhampered by the prejudices and barriers of the outside world.

There is significant evidence that individuals motivated to commit violence using both far right and Al Qaeda inspired ideology have been and continue to be present in our local community, and one of the potential threats to which our students are vulnerable is the possible targeting by religious or political extremists. We have therefore worked hard to create a cohesive learning community characterised by tolerance, mutual respect and support. This has been achieved by challenging inappropriate behaviours and attitudes through application of the policies, procedures and expectations of our college, thus enabling the safety and security of our students and staff.

Minimising the threat of violent extremism within the school environment requires a high level of awareness of the possible nature of the threat, the means through which vulnerable young people are targeted and the often subtle behaviours and traits which indicate that these forces are at work. Equally, successful teaching to prevent the spread of violent extremism requires the capacity and willingness of all those involved to consistently challenge young people’s developing attitudes, behaviours and beliefs.

The fundamental difference between the imperative to forge and develop a cohesive learning community and the imperative to safeguard all members of that community is the level and nature of challenge. There are fundamental rights and wrongs which are not defined by religious, cultural and ethnic identity or culture. At every opportunity we must express the values that are incontrovertibly right and wrong, acceptable
and unacceptable and it is our duty to ensure that our students are clear about these moral absolutes. If these absolutes are seen as being open to debate then this can open the door to extremist attitudes, including the justification for violence which may ultimately lead to the taking of life.

It is for these reasons that we raise awareness in our school of the possible threats within our wider community, especially for those who may be perceived as vulnerable or at risk. We work in partnership with many different agencies and seek the support and funding for creative and innovative curricular and extracurricular approaches to support learning and personal development.

Our recent project, developed in partnership with Curious Minds, has enabled a group of our year 8 students to engage with the threat of violent extremism and what this might actually mean to them, their peers and the future of our society. The resultant film, developed in partnership with Proper Job Theatre Company, is a powerful testimony to the awareness our students have of the issues and threats present for young people today. Through this and the sharing of personal feelings, hopes, fears and experiences within a designated safe environment, they have developed a mutual respect for each other and the realities of the various lives they lead. Through the experience of working so intimately together, these students have developed greater skills in emotional literacy as well as becoming skilled in using the medium of film to express themselves so powerfully.

The powerful nature of the imagery and message combined with the work of our students is in stark contrast to the denial of many of the parents, community leaders and politicians in our area. It is this denial that constantly renews my commitment to address the Preventing Violent Extremism agenda through appropriate means of a robust and proactive nature. At Marsden Heights Community College we now have a group of students who are more confident and able to express themselves from an informed perspective about an issue that too many people of all ages and positions in society shy away from and even deny the existence of.

Young people don’t often talk about these issues in school so openly, and defining violent extremism is really difficult... but they are now really thinking about it and considering what it means to them.

James Beale, Project Director, Proper Job Theatre
"This really shows there are young people out there"
WHO WANT TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE
Koser Mahmood, English Teacher at Accrington Academy, shares her school’s experience of tackling the Prevent agenda through the establishment of a Community Ambassador programme and the creation of an exciting public art installation in the local community.

Accrington Academy is an average-sized school serving a community where there is significant social and economic hardship. The vast majority of students are white British although 18% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. At Accrington Academy we aim to promote positive relations, not only in the school community but also in the community in which the students reside, where obvious conflicts exist.

Our project was designed to create a team of 25 Community Ambassadors, a group drawn from a variety of pupils at the school who would communicate with the local community through art. The students were guided by myself, artist Jez Dolan and sound artist Dan Fox in developing their communication skills and in creating an opportunity for positive dialogue between the students and the local community.

The Prevent agenda highlights issues of violent extremism which can be perceived as very sensitive, especially where students involved are of Pakistani origin. Our approach was discussed at length by staff involved and it was agreed that if we began with the premise of ‘building positive relations with other community members,’ this would meet the criteria set by the Prevent agenda.

Our workshops began by asking pupils questions about their place in the school community and the local community and why they think conflict exists in these settings. The second wave of workshops involved discussions around video gaming, following comments by students that violent extremism and terrorism is often depicted through negative stereotyping in computer games. This evolved into a version of the Jeremy Kyle Show, which was filmed using characters from the video games discussed. The show explored the irrationality of violent extremism in a serious yet humorous and engaging way.

Students were asked to develop the learning arising from the workshops by creating a visual image which represented how they felt about their place in the community. They were asked to portray their hopes as well as their fears and to consider what their message would communicate to a member of the public. Images were then created using tile prints which were used to create lanterns. An exhibition for the public was created using these lanterns along with a sound installation, situated in an empty shop in the Arndale Centre in Accrington. Students talked to the public and asked for their views on community conflict and what their hopes and fears were. Most importantly, discussions focussed on possible and plausible solutions to the problems and explored how we could work together to create a proactively positive community.
The impact of the project was both positive and transformational. Pupils’ attitudes were explored and encouragement to change was promoted through mutual agreement and discussions with students. The key impact was that a body of students took a range of positive messages and views in to the community. Students’ positive attitudes were very apparent whilst they were discussing issues with the public, many of which were recorded and praised by the public in the comments book.

Students developed numerous skills, particularly in relation to developing speaking and listening, both in working with other students and with the public. They also developed the ability to relate positive messages regarding good community relations and were able to express their views around violent extremism. They have developed good group working skills and skills in working independently and they have also become more confident in expressing their own opinions to others.

The most significant aspect of the project relates to students’ awareness of their place within the community and a realisation that each and every person is an important part of it. A common vision has been created and a sense of belonging and awareness of life opportunities has been established. We feel that much was achieved by the students as community members in their own neighbourhood.

As a bilingual and dual nationality teacher at Accrington Academy, I felt at ease talking with students about violent extremism. It was assumed from the start that any questions asked were not meant to be racially discriminating and this gave me an unspoken license to explore issues in depth. The students we selected were from a variety of different backgrounds and some could be classed as ‘vulnerable.’ It was particularly satisfying to catalyse a sense of social awareness in these students.

Phase 1 of the Community Role Model project has created 25 Community Ambassadors who will now take their work forward on a national scale. We feel we have gained the skills to work with other communities and we intend to build links with other schools across the region and disseminate the work done thus far by creating a Community Role Model resource pack, which can be distributed to schools around the UK.

The words and images were very challenging and ambitious... If more adults could share the views expressed by pupils here, the community would be a much safer place.

Member of the public visiting the Accrington Academy installation
"I FEEL LIKE MY VOICE"

Pupil,
Rhyddings Business & Enterprise School
Isn’t that…

I feel like my voice.

HEARD
WE CHOOSE TO CREATE

A performing arts and filmmaking project in Rhyddings Business and Enterprise School, working creatively in partnership with Graham Kay from Fully Formed Films and Cath Ford from Action Factory Community Arts.

Rhyddings Business and Enterprise School in Oswaldtwistle wanted to develop a programme that would raise awareness of the issues surrounding violent extremism and build the skills, knowledge and confidence of pupils and staff to talk about the issue openly in a safe environment. The school also wanted to bring together pupils and staff from the Performing Arts and PSHE departments to look for ways to develop an engaging resource that could integrate this body of work creatively within the Citizenship curriculum for the benefit of future pupils. The resulting outcome was a film, made when twenty year 10 pupils came off timetable for a full week to work alongside Performing Arts staff and filmmaker Graham Kay.

The programme of work began with a series of interventions designed to raise pupils’ understanding and awareness of violent extremism. In Citizenship and PSHE lessons pupils looked at films, images and media representations of violent extremism and explored some of the reasons why people might turn to extremism. Pressure from peers, not having a voice and “feeling that one’s beliefs are constantly trashed in the media” were all emerging themes that pupils wanted to explore further.

Whilst pupils did not feel they could relate directly to the motives for extremist and violent behaviours, they did feel able to relate to some of the feelings that may be involved and could connect these to strong emotions and frustrations within their own lives. They wanted to show how difficult feelings and emotions can be expressed in positive and constructive ways, as embodied in the naming of their film, ‘We Choose to Create.’ Alongside powerful personal narratives within the film that highlight themes of empathy and understanding, the group devised a dance piece. This was something they chose to create as a means of communicating and expressing themselves in a positive way. The finished film is of high quality with a strong and thought provoking message and profiles a very positive contribution by pupils to a shared vision for the school.

Following the project, teaching staff have reported a significant increase in pupils’ understanding and awareness of violent extremism. One participating pupil commented that “young people need to be made aware of the message we are trying to get across because they are kept away from so much and they need to know about some of the negative things in the world.”

By the end of the project pupils were clearly able to articulate the difference between strong beliefs expressed within a human rights framework and ethos and strong beliefs arising from extremist ideologies. In addition to developing their understanding
of extremism, this programme of work has enabled pupils to learn how to communicate their own ideas and has built their resilience in challenging extremist views from an informed perspective.

The programme has also enabled pupils to work collaboratively as a team, working alongside other pupils with differing opinions to achieve a positive outcome. Pupils were able to shape the work themselves with minimal direction from adults, enabling them to have a real sense of ownership over the finished film which can now be used as a resource for others. Pupils have also been able to develop their creative skills alongside skills in script writing, storyboarding, performing, choreography, filming and editing.

In addition to contributing their own funds to the purchase of new filming kit and editing facilities, the school now has considerable experience of script development, professional filming and editing, resources which can be used to provide similar creative learning opportunities in the future. The programme has provided opportunities for different faculties to work together and for pupils to experience rich cross-curricular learning involving diverse curriculum areas such as PSHE, Citizenship, Drama, Performing Arts and Media Studies.

The DVD will now be used for teacher training activities, developing teachers’ skills in experimenting with new approaches and talking to pupils about contemporary and controversial issues in a meaningful way so that the theme of violent extremism can be fully integrated within the Citizenship curriculum.

The DVD will then be shown to all pupils in the school and followed up in lessons as a catalyst for discussion and learning. The DVD will also be shown at a sharing event for families and the wider community later this year, as part of an ongoing community programme to strengthen cohesion and links across the community as a whole.

In summing up the programme of work, headteacher Paul Trickett said, “The project has allowed students to focus on a current and particularly challenging theme. They have developed a range of solutions and expressed themselves through creative medias. I am extremely proud of the efforts of all the students and staff and immensely grateful for the support and guidance of Curious Minds.”

I’m tired of worrying about a family member abroad being killed through conflict...

Pupil, Rhyddings Business & Enterprise School

The film produced by Rhyddings pupils and filmmaker Graham Kay, along with a documentary evaluation film, is featured on the DVD.
"WHY DO THEY THINK FIGHTING..."
WILL STOP FIGHTING?
Chloe Whitehead, Project Director for Proper Job Theatre Company, describes the impact of their interactive theatre project on Year 7 pupils and teaching staff at Colne Primet High School.

The Preventing Violent Extremism project in Colne Primet High School took the form of an interactive theatre piece devised and performed by a group of year 7 pupils. The group were a mixture of Muslims and non-Muslims who were specifically chosen because of their sometimes challenging attitudes around race and religion. During the early stages of the project we realised that many of these young people held beliefs they had brought from home and never previously thought to question.

In order to widen the ownership and impact of the project in school we were keen to include thoughts and ideas from the whole year group. To do this the initial group split into 6 groups and devised a series of short and intentionally provocative scenes to perform to each year 7 class. These scenes, which were devised wholly by the pupils themselves, included statements such as ‘All young men are violent’, ‘All Asians are Muslims’ and ‘All Muslim women should cover their hair.’ Following these short performances, each class engaged in a structured discussion, putting forward their own ideas and beliefs, and it was these that informed the content of the devised piece of theatre we went on to deliver.

What emerged from these classroom debates was the willingness of the pupils to openly discuss ideas which the adults found uncomfortable. They positively welcomed a forum in which they could ask questions around a subject which had previously seemed taboo. Questions such as, ‘Is Islam a country? What does Jihad mean? If a white person went to Pakistan would they be killed?’ were all freely explored and discussed.

From the teachers and creative practitioners perspectives there was a realisation that much of the apprehension around approaching this topic was mainly down to our own fears; fear of offending and fear of our own ignorance, states of mind which the pupils have not yet inherited.

Setting up a safe framework for the discussion and witnessing the pupils’ willingness to participate has given the teaching staff real confidence to continue the debate after the end of the project.

Equipped with the ideas, questions and statements gathered from the whole year group, the original group of pupils met again to begin devising a piece of interactive theatre. The group wanted to focus on Islamic extremism and were determined to tackle the subject head on, led by Muslim pupils in the group wanting to speak out against extremism. The process was challenging but by working intensively over a short period of time, the individuals began to get to know each other in a different way, where previously they had relied on assumptions.

This shift was summed up by one pupil who is known to express racist attitudes, who towards the end of the project was recorded saying, “Well we’re all the same inside - we’re all equal.”
This shift in attitude amongst pupils was noted by the teaching staff. One teacher commented, “I was particularly pleased with how positively the Muslim students responded to this subject, I thought some pupils may have found it difficult.”

The interactive nature of the performance forced the audience to confront some of their own prejudices and again we found that it was often the adults in the audience who made the most assumptions and the pupils who had a much greater ability to perceive and explore ideas with an open mind. Interestingly, we had the opportunity to run one interactive element of the performance with year 10 pupils and we felt that their views and attitudes had become more entrenched and predictable. This led us to draw the conclusion that a project of this nature may well have the most impact with year 7 or year 8 pupils or even younger, pupils who are still very much in the process of forming their own personal beliefs and values.

The hopefully longer term impacts of the project have also been noted by the teachers; “Pupils are far more willing to discuss the subject openly and are not afraid to ask questions, ultimately this will lead to them holding more rounded beliefs rather than merely those inherited from home. Teachers also feel more comfortable with the subject now, it is as if the box has been opened.”

The teaching staff have contributed greatly to ensuring the sustained impact of the project by rewriting the Diversity module within the Humanities curriculum to reflect and complement the work. This has ensured that even without the performance process experienced by this year 7 group, next year’s pupils will still gain an understanding of the process and be able to engage in similar discussions.

So how can creative approaches to learning develop young people’s skills and confidence to challenge extremist ideology? This project has demonstrated that a creative approach enables the possibilities for open dialogue. And perhaps we adults should listen more to our young people as they often express issues with a beautiful simplicity - for example, “Why do we think fighting will stop fighting?”

I was pleased with how positively the Muslim students responded to this subject, I thought they may have found it difficult.

Teacher, Colne Primet High School
“EXTREMISM IS WHEN ONE PERSON OR A GROUP OF PEOPLE...”
Extremism is when one person or a group of people put terror into someone's heart.
Sharon Connery, a training development worker and Sean Lovell from Seal Films have been working with a targeted group of pupils, identified by the school via various concerns raised about their attitudes from staff within the college.

Developed by Project Manager Paul Hartley, this project was established to explore violent extremism, fundamentalism and terrorism, issues very often avoided within most school environments and very often surrounded by myth and conjecture. The project began with a series of interactive and creative workshops where young people could openly and honestly explore their thoughts, feelings and general understanding around extremism. Working together on exercises about making judgements and looking at how they view one other and themselves built trust, mutual respect and understanding amongst all participants. Workshops took place in a neutral space within the school called the Open Mind Centre and were facilitated in an informal manner. Students were supported and encouraged to take the lead to discuss issues that affected them directly.

During the project pupils devised a series of storyboard scenarios and in the final few weeks made a short piece of dramatic film and filmed a series of interviews about pupils’ understanding of extremism.

The project was seen as an opportunity to look at how pupils can challenge others whose views are different from their own, in an appropriate way. Asian heritage males explained that they were often called ‘terrorists’ by other non-Asian heritage young people. This frustration often manifested itself as violent behaviour both out of school and occasionally within the school environment. One pupil described what they had been doing during the course of the project, “We have looked at ways of expressing ourselves without using violence and developed the art of debate. We have also discussed appropriate ways of challenging what we feel is unacceptable behaviour.”

Some pupils suggested that a clear and concise information pack should be made available for young people. One young person commented, “This is the first opportunity I have ever had to ask questions about extremism, it’s definitely not something I could discuss with my family or in the community.” Another pupil said, “I have found out that I know a lot more than many others and this project has given me the chance to tell others about it. At home we don’t talk about terrorism, I just get told stuff but I can’t ask questions, I have been able to do this with this project.”
The staff team have commented on the changing attitudes of the boys, especially Asian heritage boys. Samina Kauser, Youth & Community Manager at the school said, “Concern was expressed by some staff who felt some of the targeted students would not last or would disrupt the project. Staff were surprised at the level of participation throughout the duration of the project, as well as the quality of the end result. The level of conversation by students engaged in the project has definitely improved.”

We still feel we have only scratched the surface with this project and the students have expressed an interest in wanting to take this work further and develop a peer-led initiative to ensure they get the message across to as many people as possible. They have asked to develop the display boards produced during the project in the Open Mind Centre within the college with pictures and words exploring the Prevent agenda further and are also inviting other pupils to be part of the discussions. The group have also discussed devising a toolkit of their own which would be used to share their understanding of Prevent with other students, teachers, families and the wider community.

This project has enabled young people to voice their opinions and appropriately challenge others whose views are different, managing difficult situations in a non-confrontational manner. In the past there has been no appropriate forum for these views to be expressed and for myths to be quashed. When these issues have arisen outside school they have often developed into acts of violence, as there has been no appropriate mediation available. There have also been fears expressed amongst young people around searching the internet for this type of information and around asking questions within the community. The future aspiration is to work with young people directly in their local communities to strengthen cohesion and to ensure that there is an intergenerational understanding of how extremism and fundamentalism can manifest itself and how communities can work together to resist it.

I used to think a terrorist looked Asian and had a beard, because of the media. Now I’ve learned that a terrorist can look like anyone, like you or me. Anyone can be an extremist.

Pupil, Pendle Vale College

The film produced by Pendle Vale Pupils and Sean Loters of Seal Films is featured on the DVD.
THE MAIN THING IS, WE ARE ALL ONE...
THAT’S WHAT I WANT TO SAY TO EVERYONE WHO DOESN’T REALISE THE SAME THING...
Darwen Aldridge Community Academy selected 25 pupils from years 7-10 to take a lead in developing a piece of visual art based on their understanding of the Preventing Violent Extremism agenda. Their brief was to develop something sustainable and long lasting so that the final piece could both be on display within the school and could travel to public spaces in the wider community.

It was a challenging theme to develop, particularly as the school has very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. It was quite difficult at first in the brainstorming sessions to open up discussions about violent extremism. The starting point was a collection of ideas that would lead to the development of a piece of sculpture. Many ideas had to be narrowed down, from making jigsaws through to creating canvas paintings. It was essential that the final piece represented the ideas that came directly from the students.

Together we came up with the idea of a cube representing on each side different countries, people, cultures and faiths. We felt that the inside of a cube was a representation of our homes, a private and safe space in which we could be internal. Externally we wanted to show the importance of being ‘all one’ as a counter to violent extremism and conflict in the world. Pupils were split into groups and designed different sides of the cube.

It was really exciting to use creativity as a tool to develop and explore such a sensitive and challenging topic. Creativity allowed freedom of expression and room for openness within a safe platform. The pupils felt they had created something they had ownership of and the message they wanted to give everybody is ‘we are all one,’ no matter what race, colour, culture or gender. The school are now touring the cube around a range of community venues.

Alongside this piece of work the pupils are very keen to develop their work further and have come up with the idea of creating a ‘we are all one’ wristband. These could be made with a range of different materials and pupils would like to design one with impregnated mosquito repellent to be sent to countries in the developing world as gifts. Pupils are also planning to distribute wristbands in the local community numbered 1-1000. They will create a tracker system on the internet where people can register their wristband and will be encouraged to swap wristbands or give their wristband away when they meet someone new within the community. Darwen Aldridge Community Academy is a school specialising in enterprise and with a real interest in community engagement and so is looking forward to building on the success of the current project by supporting pupils in this exciting endeavour.
Alongside this piece of work the pupils are very keen to develop their work further and have come up with the idea of creating a "we are all one" wristband.

Shahida Ahmed,
Artist and Project Manager
Developing this programme has provided Curious Minds with a fresh creative challenge that we have relished. We started from a position of knowing a great deal about engaging young people in creative processes, but very little about preventing violent extremism. In the course of the last year we have learned a huge amount and are grateful to all our partners, in particular Lancashire Constabulary, for sharing their learning freely with one another and with us.

From the start of this project it was clear that schools and teachers were nervous about engaging with these challenging issues, but in the schools that rose to the challenge we observed admirable courage amongst colleagues in facing up to their full educational responsibilities. We learned that schools need practical support in dealing with the complexities surrounding the Prevent agenda and that using creative approaches to teaching and learning, facilitated by experienced creative practitioners and developed in close partnership with teachers and young people, was highly effective in engaging young people in constructive dialogue and the expression of their ideas. We also learned that developing creative approaches to these issues led to the development of new friendships, a greater sense of cohesion, improvements in behaviour and significant improvements in young people’s understanding of issues that had previously confused them.

For Curious Minds this is the start of what we anticipate will be a long-term commitment to assisting this area of educational development. We offer the following recommendations as a prompt for continued dialogue and action.

The project has been very positive yet it has only been able to scratch the surface of issues that need to be expanded upon with further work, and this must be done on a more regular basis if it is to have real impact.

From a teacher’s evaluation comments, Curious Minds Prevent programme 2009
The DCSF toolkit, Learning together to be safe - a toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism is an invaluable resource for schools. We recommend that schools read the toolkit with the following question in mind, ‘How could our school develop a creative approach to dealing with these issues by working in partnership with creative and cultural organisations?’

Schools’ difficulties in engaging with issues associated with preventing violent extremism can be addressed through the use of creative teaching and learning methods developed in partnership with creative and cultural organisations. Creative approaches lead to increased engagement, improved dialogue and greater understanding of the issues involved. We recommend that the DCSF further encourages schools to work in partnership with creative and cultural organisations and that creative and cultural organisations work with one another to share learning arising from their experiences of developing projects and programmes that address Prevent objectives.

While ‘one-off’ visits to schools by theatre companies and workshop presenters undoubtedly make a valuable contribution to the Prevent agenda, we believe that it is only through developing a long-term approach to these issues that significant progress will be made. We therefore recommend that schools aim to create a whole-school and long-term programme of activity, closely aligned with work around citizenship, community cohesion and race equality. We also recommend that young people should play a key role in shaping and managing the programme themselves in order that they are fully engaged in learning processes. We further recommend that teachers enable young people to ask, ‘What is our school doing to help us understand violent extremism and how can we talk about these issues in a safe and supportive environment across the whole school community?’

Connecting school-based programmes with the broader programme of community cohesion and capacity building work taking place in communities is crucial in order to obtain parental and community support and to overcome the negative feelings that the Prevent agenda sometimes generates. We therefore recommend that schools continue to develop close working relationships with community, faith and voluntary sector organisations, together with parents, and that creative approaches developed in partnership with cultural organisations are used as part of this process of community engagement. As an organisation committed to enabling children and young people to realise their creative potential we are happy to enter into dialogue with others who share our commitment to engaging with the issues this publication has started to explore. Please get in touch if you would like to continue the conversation.

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