
Radicalization in British Columbia Secondary Schools: The Principals' Perspective

By: Michael R. Mitchell ¹

Abstract

This essay summarizes a larger study into radicalization in secondary schools (Grades 8-12) in the Province of British Columbia, Canada, from the perspective of school principals and vice-principals (PVPs). In addition to determining the extent of radicalization, the study further explored the extent to which PVPs felt they were prepared to cope with radicalization in a school environment, and obtained their assessment of the training and resources available to help them deal with this phenomenon. Quantitative and qualitative data was acquired using a survey as well as interviews with PVPs. Research participants reported an unexpectedly low level of engagement by students in radical, extremist, or violent extremist behaviour during the 2014-2015 school year. Only 3% of PVPs surveyed believed that extremist or violent extremist behaviours had increased in their own schools during the previous three-year period, while 6.6% believed it had actually declined somewhat—or even substantially—during this timeframe. There was wide variance in the levels of confidence exhibited by PVPs in their capacity to deal with incidents of extreme or violently extreme behaviours, but most stated that they would welcome additional training on dealing with potential incidents. Only half of the interview participants claimed that the procedures and protocols in place to deal with incidents involving extremist behaviours were adequate. A consistently low level of radicalization was apparent in school environments where some factors that otherwise might trigger student radicalization were identified, explored, and resolved in a supportive and open minded manner by school staff.

Keywords: youth radicalization, extremism, violent extremism, violence in schools

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The Perceived State of Youth Radicalization in Canada

In late 2014, Lorne Dawson, a professor of sociology at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, and a leading authority on radicalization and terrorism, made the worrisome pronouncement that, “The age at which people are radicalizing is becoming younger and younger” (Kielburger & Kielburger, 2014). Reinforcing this conjecture, Sergeant Renu Dash, acting officer in charge for public engagement at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) stated, “We have kids who could be potentially at risk or vulnerable... We want to mitigate that risk and stop an individual from going down a path of behaviour that could potentially lead to violent extremism” (Luke, 2014).

These statements from Professor Dawson and Sergeant Dash prompted me to seek out primary data that would either corroborate or refute the postulation that radicalization among Canadian youth was indeed becoming a burgeoning problem. News headlines anecdotally supported the hypothesis that this was indeed the case, as shown by the following four notable examples of extremist behaviour widely reported in various national media:

- **Omar Khadr:** In 2002, Omar Khadr, a 15-year-old Canadian, of Egyptian decent, was detained in Afghanistan for allegedly killing a U.S. serviceman in a gun battle. Omar's father, believed to be a founding member of the terror group al-Qaeda (AQ), was considered to have been responsible for his radicalization (CBC, 2013). After serving 13 years in prison, Khadr was released in May 2015 (Perkel, 2015).
- **The Toronto 18:** In 2006, 18 men, who came to be known as “The Toronto 18”, were arrested in Toronto for allegedly planning two terrorist attacks in Canada (CBC, 2013). This group included 14 adult males and four minors. The adults were convicted on various terrorism charges, but all charges against the minors were stayed. It is believed that some of these group members were as young as 15 years of age.
- **Engaging in crime to finance jihadism:** In October 2014, a 15-year-old Montreal boy was arrested for robbing a convenience store at knifepoint, making off with approximately \$2,200. Two months later, the RCMP charged the boy with terrorism offences when he revealed that he committed the robbery with the intention of using the money to buy a plane ticket so that he could join militants overseas (CBC News, 2014).

- **Jihadi brides:** In 2014, three Somali-Canadian girls aged 15 to 18, living in Toronto, were lured through online websites to become brides for Islamic State (IS) fighters. They travelled as far as Turkey before being intercepted and returned home to Canada. They were not charged, nor were they placed into any remediation program. They were simply returned to the custody of their parents (Shephard, 2014).

A common thread linking all of the afore-mentioned cases is that each of the youth involved was a secondary school student, or at least of an age to attend such an institution. This common element was the catalyst for me to investigate the prevalence of radicalization within the Canadian secondary school environment.

The RCMP articulated the necessity for Canadian society to concentrate on preventing radicalization among our youth, and to engage with communities to help disengage youth from influences that may precipitate violence (RCMP, 2009). Christianne Boudreau, a Calgary mother, whose son was reportedly killed in 2014 while fighting in Syria with an extremist group, provided a clear summary of the situation when she stated:

There is not a lot of education and guidance out there... To tackle the problem, the first thing you've got to do is admit that you've got one... If we don't take steps to protect our youth, then they're [jihadist recruiters] going to keep coming back to get more of them (Luke, 2014).

Mrs. Boudreau's statements spotlight some shortcomings in Canada's ability to address the problem of youth radicalization. As she claimed, there was no primary data that measured the magnitude of the problem. Additionally, the absence of primary data deprives researchers of intelligence from which to craft valid protocols or guidelines for dealing with this dilemma.

In March 2015, the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV) opened its doors in Montreal, Quebec, with an aim to "prevent acts of violence related to radicalization, and to support individuals affected by this issue" (CPRLV, n.d.). Unlike similar initiatives which are police-led, this is an independent, non-profit organization that seeks to divert radicalization cases from the justice system, employing community and institutional resources to mitigate the problem through social action. In fact, a few months after the mayor of Montreal appointed him to head the CPRLV, Herman Deparice-Okomba claimed that he had cut the links between his organization and the police in an effort to ensure the confidentiality between the CPRLV and its clients (Solyom, 2015). However, Deparice-Okomba admitted that

the police would be contacted should there be a perceived risk to the individual or the community. Initial funding for this centre was provided by the City of Montreal and the Canadian Ministry of Public Safety. This innovative model, unique in North America, aspires to be a central repository of information, and centre of expertise on the subject. Between March and December 2015, more than 550 calls for help were received at the CPRLV, of which 100 were deemed to be "worthy of response" (Robertson, 2015). The CPRLV is still in its infancy, but the organizational concept holds promise, and will be worth monitoring in the years to come.

The Nature and Scope of the Study

My study examined how pervasive radicalization is in BC secondary schools (Grades 8-12), from the perspective of school principals and vice-principals (PVPs). It further explored the extent to which PVPs felt they were prepared to cope with radicalization in a school environment, and to obtain their assessment of the resources available to them to help them deal with the phenomenon. Grades 8-12 were selected because they represent an age group that, according to Bott (2009) and the RCMP (2009), appears to be highly susceptible to the lure of radicalization.

Nolan and Hiebert (2014) decried the fact that much of the emerging literature on the subject of radicalization and terrorism is based on theoretical arguments, and was lacking in empirical data (p. 43). This study was designed to address this shortcoming by initiating an exploration of this topic from the perspective of PVPs. Principals and vice-principals were invited to participate in this study due to their intimate knowledge of the school environment, and the study was a reflection of their unique viewpoints on the problem. As with many endeavours, crafting a policy without the benefit of data and perspectives gleaned from consultation with end users can lead to ineffective policy and poor results. The primary data collected from this study provided a reflection of the actual state of youth radicalization in BC, rather than relying on presumptive reasoning, to determine how extensive the problem is. It also provided a foundation of knowledge upon which future planning can be thoughtfully derived.

The initial direction of the study focussed on collecting data on the state of youth radicalization in BC and to assess the means available to PVPs to cope with it. However, as the study unfolded, and the low overall level of radicalization experienced in BC secondary schools

became apparent, some insights emerged as to why this may be so. These unforeseen observations became a providential byproduct of the research.

In order to investigate the extent to which radicalization was occurring among youth in BC, this mixed methods study employed an online survey as well as interviews to examine radicalization in BC secondary schools as viewed from the perspective of BC PVPs, professional educators with intimate exposure to the lives of the subjects in question. The study was guided by the following questions:

Primary Question. How pervasive is radicalization in BC secondary schools (Grades 8-12) from the perspective of school PVPs?

Secondary Question 1. What examples of radical, extremist, or violent extremist behaviour have been observed in Grade 8-12 students during the 2014-2015 school year?

Secondary Question 2. How has the degree of radical, extremist, or violent extremist behaviour changed over a three-year period?

Secondary Question 3. To what extent do PVPs feel that they are trained to cope with the phenomenon of radicalization?

Secondary Question 4. What training, protocols, or policies do PVPs think should be developed to help them identify and cope with radicalization?

Significant Definitions

Radicalization. The process by which individuals—usually young people—come to adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals that reject or undermine generally accepted norms (ISSA 2014; RCMP, 2009).

Radical. Someone who dissents significantly from prevailing norms (Bartlett and Miller, 2012). The radical mind tends to explore new or alternative ideas (open-minded).

Extremist. One who strives to create a homogeneous society based on rigid, dogmatic ideological tenets. They seek to make society conformist by suppressing all opposition and subjugating dissenting groups (Schmidt, 2013). The extremist mind is intolerant (closed-minded) of ideas that contradict his, or her, beliefs.

Violent Extremist. An extremist who perpetrates, or incites others to perform, criminal acts in pursuit of their goals, or the furtherance of their beliefs (RCMP, 2009; Schmidt, 2013).

Jihad. An Arab word meaning ‘struggling’, or ‘striving’, but which is often translated as ‘holy war’. Described by the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad as a means of explaining how to be a good Muslim, the concept has been “hijacked” (Kabbani & Hendricks, n/d) and misused by many groups and individuals as a justification for violence.

Child, Youth and Young Person. The definition for these individuals varies widely from one country to another. Both the Government of Canada Youth Criminal Justice Act (2002), and the British Columbia Youth Justice Act (2003) define a *child* as someone who is less than 12 years of age, and a *young person* or *youth* as someone who has reached 12 years of age, but is less than 18 years of age.

Framing Behavioural Variations

In order to distinguish extremist motivators from those that precipitate other forms of misconduct, Borum (2011) framed three distinct characterizing elements: "(a) the ideas of the radical narrative provide a filter for understanding the world; (b) sociological factors compel an individual to embrace this radical narrative; and, (c) psychological factors, characteristics, pathologies, and triggers may prompt an individual to use violence in order to promote or consummate this narrative" (p. 44). Despite this attempt to differentiate between radicalization to violent extremism, and youth crime or gang activity, it is easy to see that there may be more similarities than distinctions between them (Munton et al., 2011).

Faced with these complex socio-psychological, sometimes divergent assertions, a layperson, such as some educators, could be forgiven if radicalization or extremist behaviour on the part of a student goes unidentified, misidentified, or simply dismissed. Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman (2009) claimed that a radical does not simply adopt a system of extreme beliefs, but also imposes them on the rest of society (p. 7). However, their interpretation, not unlike many others to be found in the literature, only serves to further muddy the waters by failing to differentiate between radical and extremist behaviours. The abundance of interpretations regarding these various forms of conduct would benefit from some form of illustration to more clearly differentiate them. Powers (2014) conceived a useful interpretive graph that served to draw lines between terrorism, extremism and radicalization (see Table 1).

Table 1: Comparative Model for Terrorism, Violent Extremism and Radicalization

	Definitions	Examples
Terrorism	Unlawful, politically motivated violence intentionally harming (via fear) a broader section of society than is physically targeted.	- Aum Shinrikyo (Japan): subway Sarin gas attack, Tokyo 1995.
Violent extremist	The use of ideologically motivated violence to further political goals.	- Anti-globalization violence. - Violence for causes such as environmental protection, or anti-gun control. - Anti-immigrant violence.
Radicalization	The process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs.	- Fascism - Islamic fundamentalism (e.g. Sharia Law) - Market fundamentalism

Note. Reproduced from "Conceptualizing Radicalization in a Market for Loyalties", by Shawn Mathew Powers, *Media, War* 7(2), p. 235. Copyright Shawn Mathew Powers. DOI: 10.1177/1750635214538620. Used with permission.

Using Table 1 as a foundation, I built a schematic representation to illustrate the progression of radicalization within certain types of groups (see Table 2). The purpose of this table was to help PVPs visualize generalized individual behaviours that may be pertinent to the school environment, and which may serve to illustrate potential progression along a path of

radicalization. It must be reiterated, as Bartlett and Miller (2012) pointed out, when trying to categorize individuals "no two radicals [are] the same" (p. 4).

Table 2: *Examples of the Radicalization Process*

Group Type	Radical	Extremist	CRIMINAL ACT	Violent Extremist
Religious	Advocates the subordination of state laws to religious ones, within a secular state. Intolerant of social norms that depart from canonical ordinances, such as gender equality.	Zealously denounces any group whose ideologies differ from his/her own. Attempts to impose ideological norms on others through intimidation.		Perpetrates (or incites others to perform) ideologically inspired criminal acts, such as attacking people of differing faiths, or desecration of religious monuments, symbols or buildings.
Gang	Joins or associates with an identifiable, possibly marginalized group, such as a motorcycle or neighbourhood gang.	Uses gang membership to intimidate, or exercise control over other individuals or groups, or to assert territorial dominance.		Under the authority, or direction of the gang, attacks individuals, rival gangs, or organizations, in order to sow fear, extort money, or dominate territory.

Racial	Aggressively asserts, or demands the recognition of race as a determining factor in political, social, or institutional proceedings.	In confrontations, reflexively asserts persecution on the basis of race, regardless of evidence or knowledge of the situation.	Persecutes, denigrates, or demeans other races or groups. May instigate riots, or distribute propaganda promoting hatred against a racial group.
Social Activist	Forcefully agitates for causes such as: animal rights; gender equality; labour rights; environmental protection.	Undertakes disruptive or nuisance acts such as wildcat strikes, or non-criminal misdemeanours such as obstructing logging of forests, or blockading a highway.	Destroys laboratories that conduct tests on animals; Threatens the lives of abortion providers; engages in cybercrime.
Cult	Embraces belief structures not associated with generally recognized religions. May endorse polygamy; adulate charismatic figures; prophesize catastrophe;	Obsessively engages in cult-driven behaviour such as non-regulated ritual animal slaughter, establishing a segregated community compound, or unquestioning devotion to a messianic individual.	Forces or intimidates individuals to remain within a cult or commune against their will; exhorting members to commit crimes to fund a cult; kidnapping and forcibly returning

				escaped cult members.
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Note. These are broad characterizations provided only to illustrate a potential progression of radicalization within some representative groups. It demonstrates the movement from a *radical* (open-minded, exploratory) position toward an *extremist* (closed-minded, fixated) one. Once criminal behaviour is introduced, a line is crossed into *violent extremism*. This chart is not intended to be comprehensive, merely illustrative. Copyright 2015 by Michael Mitchell.

Table 2 is provided to give some perspective on where lines might be drawn to distinguish the various classifications. It must be emphasized that a great deal of personal interpretation of individual attributes, and the incidents associated with them, must be taken into account when making judgments on which ‘box’ to fit individuals into, as Munton, et al. (2011) forewarned.

A Tumultuous Stage of Life

Although a mechanism to diagnose a radicalized youth through a specific set of standardized attributes remains elusive, it is worth exploring some of the underlying elements that distinguish this often tumultuous stage of life.

Erik Erikson (1950) published a much-cited theory of psychosocial development. He broke down the span of a human life into eight stages, and declared that each individual passes through each successive stage during the course of their lives, from birth to old age.

Table 3: Erikson's Eight Psychosocial Stages of Human Development

Stage	Approximate age	Description
1	Birth to 18 months	Trust versus mistrust
2	18 months to 3 years	Autonomy versus shame and doubt
3	3 to 6 years	Initiative versus guilt
4	6 to 12 years	Industry versus inferiority
5	12-20 years	Identity versus identity confusion
6	20-35 years	Intimacy versus isolation
7	35 years to retirement	Generativity versus self-absorption
8	Retirement years	Ego integrity versus despair

Note: As interpreted by Don Hamachek in "Evaluating Self-concept and Ego Development Within Erikson's Psychosocial Framework: A Formulation." *Journal of Counseling and Development: JCD*, 66(8), 354

McLeod (2013) further explained this theory by typifying these successive stages of psychosocial conflict as a clash between the psychological (psycho-) needs of the individual at each successive stage, with the needs of society (social). The human life stage most pertinent to this study is Stage 5: Identity versus Identity Confusion. This roughly spans ages 12-18, a period when adolescents are developing their sense of self and identity. Hamachek (1988) described Stage 5 as "monumental" in the life of an individual in comparison to the other seven, as this is the phase where the identity of the individual is established (p. 356). It is here that the personality of the youth emerges and, if it is a positive transition, plants a positive self-concept in the person. Similarly, Erikson (1960) suggested that this is when youth experiment with different roles, activities, and behaviours in their transit between childhood and adulthood. A

clinical study conducted by Marcia (1966) concluded that if individuals successfully deal with the conflicts that face them during this stage, and are properly encouraged and reinforced in their journey, they will emerge confident, possessing strengths that will last them a lifetime. However, if they fail to deal effectively with these conflicts, they may not emerge with a strong sense of self and identity (pp. 557-8).

A clear sense of personal identity contributes greatly to a sense of personal wellbeing (Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 1980). But individuals also belong to collectives. They are associated with, and affected by myriad groups: families, schools, religious institutions, clubs, clans, countries, and even non-physical ones such as online social media sites. To one degree or another, membership in these entities is likely to influence the development of a collective, group, or cultural identity (Nolan & Hiebert, 2014; Usborne & Taylor, 2010). Mayer (2012) explained how being connected to a community with which one identifies establishes a social home where a person feels recognized in an otherwise impersonal world (p. 26). Succumbing to the influence of a community, even an online one, places the individual in a position where they must face what Furedi (2004) calls “a test of emotional resilience” (p. 7).

An interim report by The Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence suggested that discussions, pronouncements, and decisions on the subject of extremism and terrorism were being made in isolation from provincial education officials (Senate of Canada, 2015). Indeed, of the 58 witnesses called by the Senate Committee convened for the purpose of examining recruitment and other aspects of these security threats, not a single member of the school educational communities in Canada was called (pp. 22-26). *Recommendation 4* of this interim report proposed that “The Government work to establish a program which provides information about clear and specific indicators of radicalization to frontline workers including teachers...” (p. vi). To the credit of this committee, *Recommendation 8* of this same document did propose that, “The federal government establish a regular dialogue with the provinces for the purpose of preventing extremism and radicalization within...schools....” (p. vi).

Youth Radicalization in Other Countries

The RCMP (2009) explained that the nature of the radicalization threat is different in Canada than it is in areas such as Europe and the United Kingdom (UK). This was attributed in part to the pluralist society, ease of integration, and equality of economic opportunities that

Canada offers. Radicalization has not yet taken hold in Canada to the same extent that it has in some other countries, which may account for the comparatively low level of action that has been taken to develop a comprehensive body of knowledge on the subject relative to this country. By contrast, the UK and Denmark for example, have spent several years developing programs to deal with youth radicalization. More recently, other countries such as Australia, have been investigating the creation of similarly comprehensive schemes to address the problem at the school level. Some of these international undertakings are described here.

United Kingdom

Sir Norman Bettison, Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police, and Britain's most senior officer in charge of terror prevention, estimated that in 2009, more than 200 British school children, some as young as 13 had been identified as potential terrorists (Hughes, 2009). This figure represented a dramatic leap from an estimate, made just 18 months earlier, that only 10 youth in the region had been categorized as being at risk of extremism. Identification, and efforts to safeguard these young people is assisted by a police-led, multi-agency partnership initiative called the 'Channel' project (HM Government, 2012). Channel uses partnerships such as those between schools, local authorities, and youth services to identify and assess individuals at risk, and develop support plans to direct them away from the offending influences (HM Government, 2012).

The counter-terrorism blueprint for the UK is detailed in *CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism* (Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2011). This strategy is based on four pillars: a) PURSUE - to stop terrorist attacks; PREVENT - to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism; c) PROTECT - to strengthen protection against terrorist attack; and, d) PREPARE - to mitigate the effect of a terrorist attack (SSHD, 2011, p.11). In detailing the objectives of the third pillar, PREVENT, the education field is included as one of the wide range of sectors (which also include criminal justice, faith, charities, the Internet, and health) where work is needed to address the risks of radicalization (p. 12, section 1.29). However, the involvement of the education sector is not merely an innocuous suggestion. In fact, the revised PREVENT duties and guidelines issued by HM Government in 2015 specified that educational authorities "are subject to the duty to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" (HM Government, 2015,

para. 64). In a broad sense, teachers are generally accustomed to safeguarding the children in their care. But if they are to be held responsible for identifying and reacting to this particular risk, then training and resources specifically oriented toward this phenomenon must be in place.

The UK Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published a comprehensive toolkit for schools entitled *Learning Together to be Safe: A Toolkit to Help Schools Contribute to the Prevention of Violent Extremism* (DCSF, 2008). This resource was designed to help educators understand the issues that attract youth towards radical behaviour. It provided practical advice on managing risks and responding in a supportive way to incidents or trends toward extremist activity. The following year, the DCSF, by now renamed the Department for Education (DFE), released a more theory-based companion document focusing on building resilience to extremism among young people (DFE, 2009). These two documents represented a fairly comprehensive package to prepare educators to deal with this problem, and elements of it could provide a framework within which similar guidelines for Canadian schools might be developed. However, while the Canadian experience with regard to youth radicalization may be less intense than what some other countries have encountered, caution must be exercised in the execution of such efforts. Any mitigating efforts applied in this country must reflect not only the actual Canadian worldview, but also the sensibilities of those agencies that would be invited to engage in the process.

Two years after the two aforementioned DFE documents were released, Sheikh, Sarwar, and Reed (2011) produced an analysis of teaching methods that helped to build resilience to extremism. They compared various literature related to countering gang and gun activity among youth in the UK to determine if the problem of extremism in the school milieu could be addressed in similar fashion. The first hurdle they encountered, one similarly identified by this study, was the dearth of comprehensive primary data, and youth extremism-specific studies to draw from. However, the Sheikh et al. (2011) study highlighted many similarities between root behaviour considerations related to mitigating extremist tendencies with those used to address youth gang, and other violent behaviour. The common preventative initiatives those authors identified included cognitive behavioural initiatives; mentoring; peer mediation; family and community-based approaches; and the development of youth opportunities for advancement and growth (p. 14). Sadly, Sheikh et al. (2011) discovered that these initiatives

were seldom thoroughly evaluated to determine whether they had any eventual positive impact on participants.

The UK experience has not gone unappreciated by Canadian organizations. In 2014 various Canadian police forces, including the Calgary Police Service (CPS) and the RCMP, undertook training in countering violent extremism conducted by UK police officials (Stark, 2015). This training supplemented the knowledge base of the ReDirect Strategy of the CPS, and the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) initiatives of the RCMP.

Denmark

Since 2009, Denmark has initiated several community-based radicalization prevention programs (Lindekilde & Sedgwick, 2012). One key program is the School-Social Services-Police (SSP) Partnership. SSP involves training teachers—even primary school teachers—to identify the signs of radicalization, and work with a community of resource personnel to moderate radical ideology and behaviour through mentoring and other techniques. It also suggested alternative sources of information to help reverse a negative development, and change attitudes or behaviour in order to help temper or redirect the trajectory the student had embarked upon (p. 28). Overall, the program, and the policies that drive it, seem well grounded. However, as Kuhle and Lindekilde (2009) unearthed, there was some initial resistance to this initiative among teachers who did not consider it their duty to “spot potential terrorists” (p. 130). This is a sentiment that may be shared by some Canadian teachers and PVPs, should they be charged with a similar role in their schools.

In 2008 Denmark accepted an invitation by the European Union Counter-Terrorism Coordinator to be the lead country on deradicalization within the EU (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2011). In 2009 the Danish Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs embarked on a pilot project on deradicalization. The study centered on the City of Aarhus, where the SSP and other local agencies perceived there to be an unusually high level of extremist views or discriminatory activity among youth. Later to become colloquially known as the Aarhus Project, this comprehensive program developed tools and training methods to help youth break away from the extremist circles to which they had become attached. Mentoring, individual counselling, motivating, and finding constructive alternatives to involvement in extremism, were the key ingredients in this successful program (Agerschou,

2014). Wherever possible, families of the individuals were integrated into the rehabilitative process. In cooperation with the Danish Security and Intelligence Service, lessons learned from the initial, follow-on, and related projects continue to be rigorously evaluated. An independent review of best practices on deradicalization among EU states gave a satisfactory evaluation of Denmark's sweeping initiatives on this subject (Lozano, 2014)

Australia

Evidence of the growth of radicalization among younger Australians has led that government to focus increased attention on the subject, with a specific emphasis on the role of schools (ASPI, 2015). Based on the assumption that radicalization involves spiritual mentorship and the establishment of social network bonds, the Australian government investigated the notion that the inability of youth to distinguish propaganda from truth, as a result of their undeveloped cognitive skills, might make them susceptible to recruitment (p.12). The study pointed to Sageman's (2004) conjecture that social networks and interpersonal relationships are instrumental to the recruitment process.

The ASPI (2015) study proposed that schools incorporate discussions regarding radicalization in the school curriculum as a means of countering one-sided messaging that may be derived from social media (p.53). In May 2015, Australian Education Ministers announced that they would work toward "[engaging] students at risk of radicalisation rather than marginalise them further" (Sydney Morning Herald, 2015). The role that school staff would play in this initiative remains undetermined.

Research Design and Conduct

In order to examine the perceptions and experiences of BC PVPs with radicalization in secondary schools, multiple sources of evidence were obtained by proceeding through a two phased, mixed methods study. Phase 1 involved an online survey of BC PVPs, while Phase 2 comprised PVP interviews.

Phase 1 - Survey of BC PVPs

In April 2015, following discussions with the executive director of the British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA), the endorsement of the study by that

organization was requested and granted. The BCPVPA is a professional association to which most BC PVPs belong, and which provides a forum for information sharing, advocacy and professional development of its membership.

The online survey gathered information on the number of Grade 8-12 students who had exhibited radical, extremist, or violent extremist behaviour during the 2013-2014 school year. The online survey consisted of 12 multiple-choice questions and one general comment box. Many of the multiple-choice questions allowed respondents to provide text comments on particular subjects. A total of 73 BCPVPA members responded to the survey.

Phase 2 - PVP Interviews

The interviews invited participants to comment on three distinct themes: (a) their thoughts on radicalization in general, particularly within the framework of the Canadian situation; (b) their observations of youth radicalization in the context of their school, as well as other schools in BC; and (c) their views on their readiness to cope with incidents of extremist activity, including steps they feel should be taken to more robustly prepare for such an eventuality. This primary qualitative data collection phase consisted of face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 12 PVPs.

Supplementing the PVP interviews was a discussion with Corporal Scott Hilderley who, at the time of this study, led the RCMP Drugs and Organized Crime Awareness Service (DOCAS) team on Vancouver Island, BC. An additional interview was conducted with Theresa Campbell, President of Safer Schools Together, the leading provider of violence prevention and intervention training to schools in BC. These two individuals are front line providers of programs and services in support of the safety and security of schools in BC. Their enlightened testimony provided a thorough overview of the environment within which schools must address concerns related to radicalization and other potential dangers.

Participant Selection

As Punch (2006) noted, all empirical research involves sampling, and the logic of the research dictates the sampling strategy to be used (p. 50). The nature of the topic to be studied (radicalization in BC secondary schools) necessitated gathering empirical data from a source with intimate knowledge of the setting (secondary schools) and the subjects (students) being

examined. For the reasons described below, I determined that PVPs offered one of the richest potential sources of information on the subject. Therefore, a purposive volunteer sampling strategy was used to recruit participants for this study.

The BCPVPA was selected as an optimum organizational vehicle with which to connect to PVPs in BC, and solicit volunteer participants for both the survey and interview phases of the study. Membership in this organizations consists of more than 600 PVPs. The reason for using BC PVPs was to obtain empirical data from a group of school administrators who were situated on the ‘front line’ of the educational preserve. This sample group provides a generally homogenous baseline of participants possessing common valuable attributes:

- They are privy to the daily interchange between students, teachers, and other school staff members, as well the larger community to which the school belongs.
- They are well informed on school board, as well as departmental policies and programs.
- PVPs possess substantial academic qualifications, in the form of undergraduate and advanced degrees, as well as a variety of specialized certifications. This formal education, combined with their on-the-job experience, would suggest that they are well equipped to provide reasoned comment on this topic as it pertains to the school environment.
- BC PVPs represent a microcosm of professionals with counterparts in other Canadian provinces and territories. This allows for the methodology used in this study to be readily adapted for replication in other jurisdictions.

The individual and collective voice of PVPs carries significant authority and respect in both the educational and broader community. Therefore, their contribution to, and support of the findings and conclusions of this study could impel the generation, adaptation and acceptance of relevant protocols.

FluidSurveys (ULTRA version), a Canadian-based, computer-assisted survey development tool, was employed to construct and deliver the online questionnaire. This software allowed the BCPVPA to include the survey link in an email to their membership, with all results being channelled directly to the researcher, providing a strong assurance of data security (Fink, 2009). FluidSurveys allows for secure and anonymous data collection and

storage. Data was stored on the FluidSurveys Canadian server and was accessible only to the researcher. The ULTRA version of this platform provides advanced text response analysis, as well as data export, to SPSS, .csv, and .xls spreadsheet formats as required.

Survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, averages, and percentages, and was represented in the form of graphs, charts and tables. For qualitative analysis, NVivo software was used to apply open coding to the interview transcripts. This software helped to identify common and divergent ideas, and helped to distinguish quotable excerpts from the transcribed interviews. The data was first coded according to the three main topic areas and the general research question. The data was then sub-coded according to the most popular responses and the most frequently occurring themes. An electronic codebook was created to sort the data for ease of reference.

Findings

Overview

Research participants were asked about their thoughts on radicalization, or if they had ever witnessed evidence or incidents of radical behaviour among their students. They were also asked about their thoughts with regard to coping with radicalization in their schools. Some of the survey questions allowed for text comments by respondents. When these were provided, the information was coded so that the data could be blended, where appropriate, with the data sourced from the interviews. Four graphs are provided to illustrate significant findings.

One of the three main topic areas of this study concerned PVPs' thoughts on radicalization. Research participants were asked about their thoughts on radicalization in Canada in general, and specifically as it pertains to youth. Participants were also asked about their views on the rise of radicalization among youth. Finally, PVPs were asked how dangerous they thought radicalization is.

General Thoughts on Radicalization

Research participants indicated that they believe radicalization is occurring. They expressed a general lack of experience with radicalization, and also discussed the issue not only of their own naïveté surrounding radicalization, but also how this might be a condition shared

by other Canadians.

Believe radicalization is occurring. When asked about radicalization in Canada, two of the 12 interviewees indicated that they believe radicalization is occurring. Survey participants were more decided that radicalization is indeed occurring among students in BC. In fact, 13 (or approximately 41%) of the survey participants affirmed that they believed radicalization is occurring, while only seven (or 22%) of the survey respondents did not believe it is happening (see Figure 1). An additional 12 survey participants were uncertain as to whether radicalization was occurring or not.

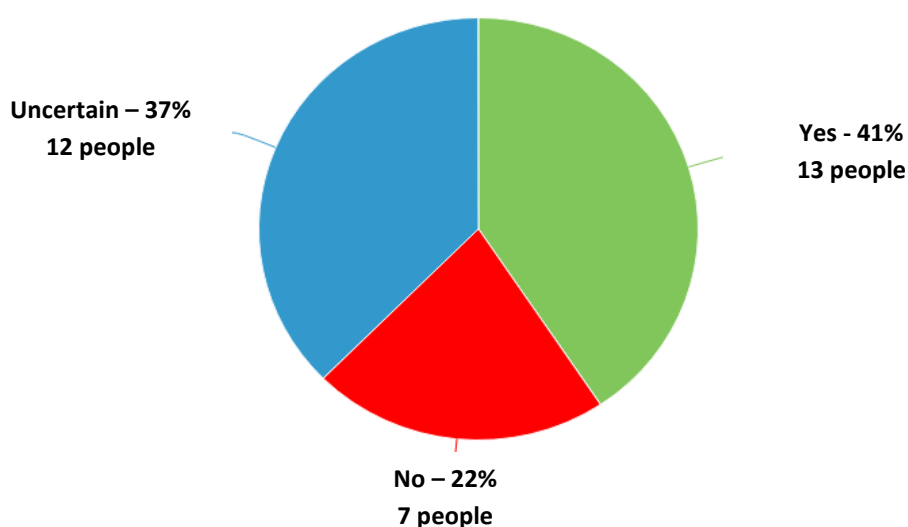


Figure 1. Survey respondents' views on the occurrence of radicalization among BC students.

Lack of experience. Not every participant had experienced radicalization among students: For example, two out of 12 interview participants expressed a lack of experience with radicalization. One PVP explained his inexperience with radicalization: “I haven’t had a lot of experience with it. I haven’t really experienced any radicalization as far as students becoming aggressive, or preaching a point of view to the point of not being tolerant to other people’s point of view.”

Naïveté. When asked about their views on radicalization, two of the 12 interview participants discussed the issue of naïveté. As one explained, the issue of naïveté regarding

radicalization in Canada might stem from assumptions that may generally be made about who the perpetrators of radicalization are: “We would be very naïve if we thought that it was only adults, or only a small group of people, or someone from the outside who’s just come here and it’s not going on, when we’ve had several different scenarios.” Similarly, another PVP highlighted the issue of naïveté regarding radicalization in Canada may stem from the assumption that it does not occur at all: “I’m not aware of any incidents of radicalization. However, it would be naïve to presume that it isn’t happening.”

Rise of Radicalization Among Youth

In addition to being asked about their general thoughts on radicalization in Canada, research participants were also asked about their thoughts with regard to the rise of radicalization among youth. Their responses reveal the link between attachment and belonging, to the rise of radicalization among youth, as well as the degree to which the level of extremist, or violent extremist behaviour among students over the past three years has changed. Finally, research participants were asked about the factors which might foster radicalization among school-aged youth.

Change in behaviour among students over the past three years. Survey participants were asked to describe the level of change in extremist, or violent extremist behaviour among BC secondary students in general, as well as in their own students, over the past three years. Relatively few survey participants describe a rise in extremist, or violent extremist behaviour among BC secondary students during this timeframe. In fact, only 23% of the 73 survey participants describe extremist or violent extremist behaviour as increasing somewhat (see Figure 2). Furthermore, none of the survey participants described extremist or violent extremist behaviour as increasing substantially. A significant proportion of the survey participants (30%) indicated no noticeable change in extremist, or violent extremist behaviour among BC secondary students over the past three years. An even larger number of survey participants (40%) indicated that they were unsure if the level of such behaviour among students had changed. It is interesting to note that a very small proportion of the survey participants indicated that this behaviour had decreased either somewhat (3%) or substantially (3%).

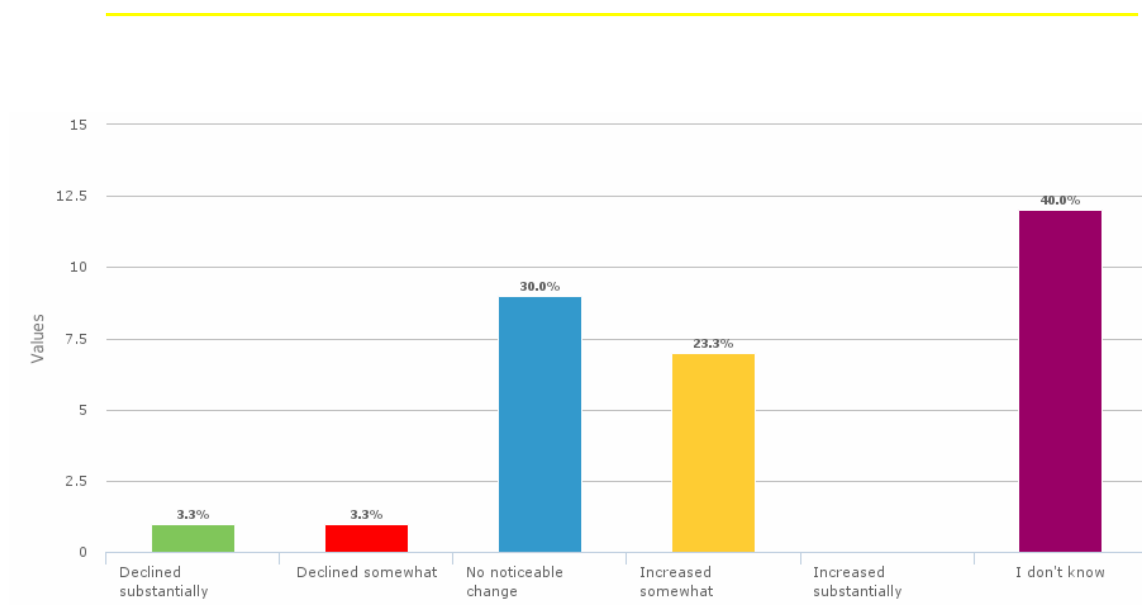


Figure 2. PVPs' perceptions regarding the change in extremist behaviour among BC students over the past three years.

When asked about the change in the level of extremist, or violent extremist behaviour among their own students over the past three years, the vast majority (83%) of survey participants indicated no noticeable change (see Figure 3). An additional 13% of survey participants indicated that they were unsure if the level had changed. Finally, only a very small proportion (3%) of the survey participants indicated that the level of extremist, or violent extremist behaviour among their students had increased somewhat.

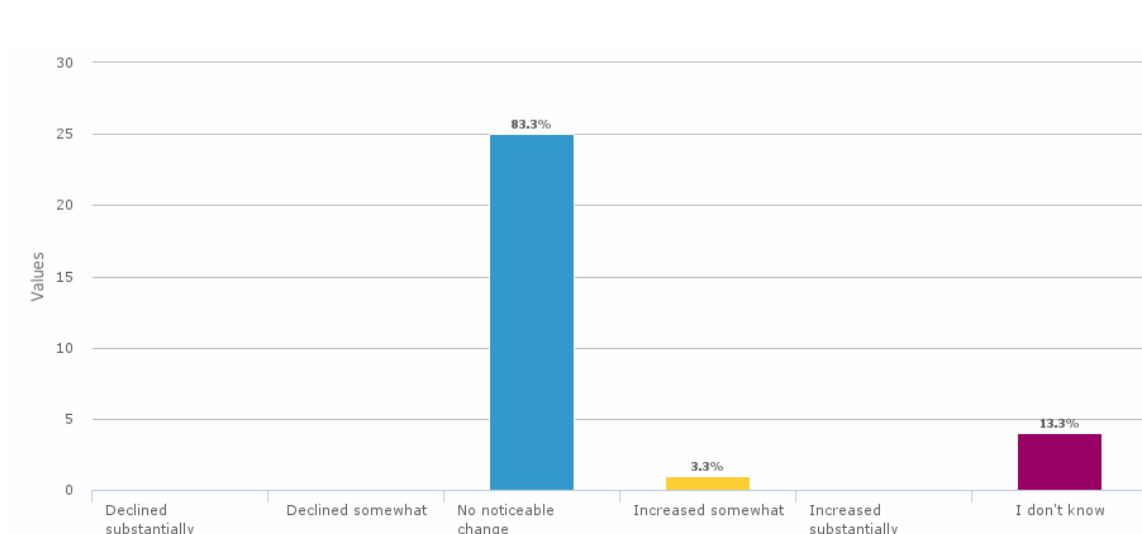


Figure 3. PVPs' views on the changes in extremist behaviours among their own students over the past three years.

Factors Which Might Affect Radicalization Among Youth

Survey participants were asked about the factors which might foster radicalization among youth. Their responses revealed that one of the main factors is a personal identity crisis. In fact, 92% of survey participants indicated personal identity crisis as a factor which might foster radicalization among youth (see Figure 4). Alienation, or social isolation, was seen as a contributing influence by 85% of survey respondents. Similarly, 77% of survey participants indicated cultural conflict or bias as a factor. Sixty-nine percent indicated seduction by the perceived excitement, or ‘cool factor’, as something that might foster radicalization. Finally, 64% of the survey participants indicated group identity crisis, and pressure from family, community, or faith groups as factors which might nurture radicalization. One participant noted how the presence of some factors can set the stage for radicalization to occur: "Anytime youth isolate themselves, they're vulnerable. With communities in British Columbia, there are many ways that youth will pull away from the mainstream."

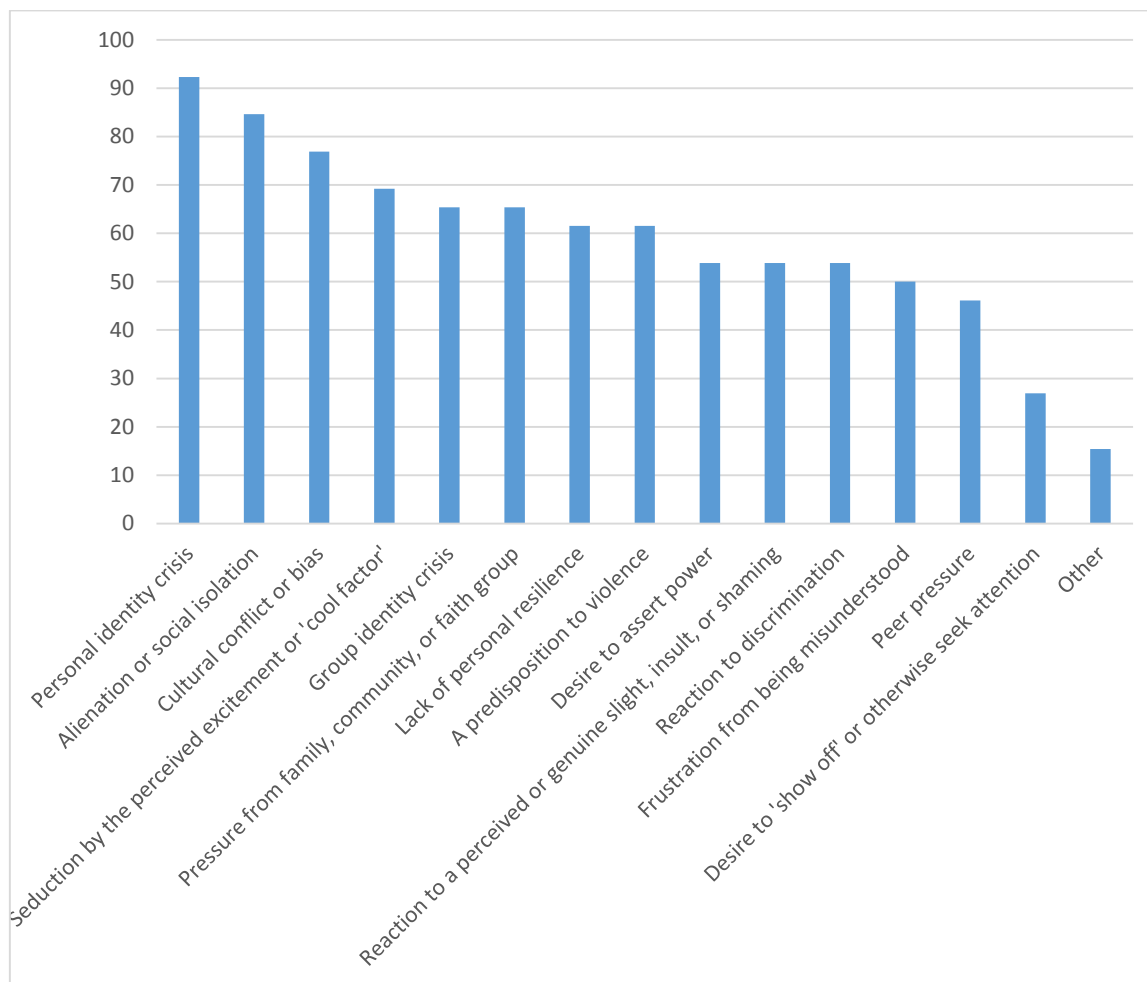


Figure 4. Percentage of PVP survey respondents who thought that each of the factors listed contributed to radicalization among youth.

Three of the 12 interviewees discussed the link between attachment and belonging and the rise of radicalization among youth. One explained how he believed the issue of attachment compounds with other factors, contributing to a rise of radicalization among youth:

From my perspective I don't really see diverse populations as being a source of radicalization. I think poverty, children that are not firmly attached to a loving and caring adult in their life—a genuine attachment with a loving and caring adult—those kids are at risk. And when you combine those two factors you get an even higher level of risk. That could be somebody from any ethnic background. It doesn't matter which ethnic background.

Similarly, another PVP explained how a rise in the struggle to belong contributes to a rise of

radicalization among youth:

I see a rise in kids who struggle to belong, such as in a high school peer group. They have access, faster and quicker, to higher levels of gang type behaviour because of social media. Because they can spend so much time on the Internet, because they become isolated, and they're looking to belong to certain groups, they can quickly become very knowledgeable about those groups. All kids are looking, in that very important developmental age, to define themselves as something.

How Dangerous is Radicalization?

While some participants thought that radicalization is dangerous, other research participants labelled radicalization simply as a cause for concern, or stated that they were unsure of how dangerous it might be. While there is no apparent consensus on the degree of danger attributed to radicalization, interviewees provided interestingly divergent viewpoints on it.

Dangerous. Two of the 12 interviewees indicated that radicalization is dangerous. One PVP explained how radicalization is dangerous but not a major issue: "I think radicalization is dangerous. But I also don't want to give the impression that we are so focused on it that it's a major issue." He continues, explaining the importance of taking the danger seriously:

I would say we don't want to take it for granted, but it is becoming more and more evident that this could be a problem. And you don't want to be left with your hands in your pocket when you see an inkling, whether it's reporting from other students or from parents or you yourself have heard comments. You want to be prepared for that. And so I think it's dangerous, from what I see and what I read.

Another PVP expressed her concern for a variety of issues that makes BC particularly susceptible to radicalization:

I think that radicalization in BC in particular is something we should be really concerned about. I think there's a real big danger because we have a province that is accessible, attractive, transient, and we have a lot of different groups of people that we are always holding up in our high esteem. We are always saying how we're accepting of all people, and we're so open, so friendly. But people aren't really paying attention to the way that youth are isolating themselves.

Cause for concern. While some participants saw radicalization as dangerous, others

perceived it as 'a cause for concern'. As one explained:

I think it's something that we should be concerned about, but I don't think it's something that is rampant in the general population. I think that it might be occurring in small sectors or in small areas where there's a family concern or local concern, but I haven't seen it here or in BC.

Unsure. When asked about how dangerous she thinks radicalization is, one interviewee indicated that she is unsure whether radicalization is a danger in Canada:

My experience in education primarily comes from [location deleted] and we are in a little bit of a bubble, so I don't believe that we have experienced what my colleagues experienced in Vancouver. We don't have high immigrant populations but we do have Aboriginal populations that tend to sometimes be an at-risk or marginalized population. And so we deal with indigenous issues, but I don't believe that that's huge. In Vancouver as a whole, or Canada as a whole, I'm not really sure.

Radicalization in PVPs' Schools

Research participants were also asked about radicalization in their schools. In particular, they were asked if they had ever witnessed evidence or incidents of radical behaviour among students, as well as whether the subject of radicalization or extremism in general was a topic of conversations or discussion among students. When asked if they had ever witnessed evidence or incidents of radical behaviour among students, many interviewees indicated that they had never witnessed it. In addition, three research participants indicated that while they had never witnessed radical behaviour specifically, they had witnessed evidence or incidents of gang crime among students.

Among those interviewees who indicated they had never witnessed evidence or incidents of radical behaviour among students, four out of 12 referenced the context of the school or the surrounding area in their responses. Some of the reasons provided for why they thought radicalization was not occurring included: (a) a healthy economic situation; (b) young people were otherwise engaged; and (c) there are few Muslims in the area. For instance, one PVP believed she had never witnessed evidence or incidents of radical behaviour among students, because of the economic situation and connections that students have to their place, family and community:

I personally have not had any dealings with it. If there are fewer incidents reported, it may have something to do with the economic situation – a relatively well off province, we don't have high unemployment, lifestyle, predominantly healthy, family, outdoor type lifestyle. I think family plays a large role in BC and so there is definitely connectedness among families, which I would think is helpful in ensuring that young people do feel cared for, and listened to.

Another PVP explained the reason why she believed she had never witnessed such behaviour had to do with keeping young people engaged. She suggested that youth engagement helps them avoid extremism:

I think it's important to keep students in school. And we do have a high graduation rate in BC, so that speaks well to keeping young people engaged. Also generally the school staffs in BC are fairly multicultural, which I think helps foster connections with families who may not be native English or French speakers, as well as making a connection with students.

Some participants attributed the lack of radicalization to the ethnic composition of their communities which have few Muslims. As one explained: "Well, certainly we don't have a large Muslim population that I've been able to tell, so in terms of radicalization toward Islam, I don't see it. And I highly doubt that it's a big threat in my area." It was interesting to note that this was the only incidence of an interviewee offering any correlation between incidents of radical behaviour and the presence of a Muslim population in the community.

One interviewee described an interesting case where an emergent radical issue was transformed into an institutionally sanctioned educational experience. Some students and staff in her school felt compelled to participate in a political protest related to a locally significant ecological issue. In this instance, factors related to the issue were discussed in class beforehand so that all students were aware of the implications and arguments surrounding the matter, and had an opportunity to debate the subject beforehand. Participation in the protest by students was voluntary and, following their participation in the protest, a debrief on the event was conducted in class to round out the learning experience by reviewing the lessons learned from the activity. This proved to be an excellent example of how an activity that might be regarded as radical or extremist behaviour can be thoughtfully integrated into the learning process in a safe, controlled and enlightened fashion.

Three research participants indicated that, while they had never witnessed evidence or incidents of radical behaviour among students, they had witnessed evidence or incidents of gang crime. For example, when asked if he had observed incidents in the community where other people from the community may have been recruiting individuals from within the student body, one participant responded by explaining that while he had not observed any religious or racial extremism, he had observed gang radicalization:

I wouldn't say, not religious extremism or racial extremism. I have observed gang radicalization. And I have directly observed individuals coming in or around the school area and attempting to draw in other students from our school. And that's been an issue that I've only encountered in the last year or two.

Coping with Radicalization

Research participants were also asked to share their thoughts specifically with regard to how prepared they were to cope with radicalization. In particular, they were asked: (a) if they had ever received any training to deal it; (b) if they had any protocols or procedures in place to address any potential incidents of radicalization in their schools; and (c) what resources, tools and support did they have at hand to cope with radicalization.

Training

Results showed that the level of (and access to) training in regard to radicalization differed from school to school. While some interviewees reported having some formal training through their school districts or the Ministry of Education, others had no relevant training.

No programs or formal training. Four interviewees indicated that they had never received formal training on the subject. One explained that, while many staff at his school had received other forms of training, he was unaware of any specific training opportunities for coping with radicalization among students: "We have a number of people who have other training around counseling or support, or have connections within the community through those training and supports for those students, but I can't think of any program." Similarly, another PVP pointed out a lack of training for coping with radicalization.

Another participant also indicated that they had not been offered any formal program to cope with radicalization. She also provided an explanation for why this hasn't been offered:

Part of that lack of training might have to do with the fact that I work in a religious environment that is maybe a little bit of a closed network. So I would say that I'm not aware of it arising in the religious environment that I work in. So, no, we haven't had any training.

A further interviewee provided an explanation as to why further training was unnecessary at his particular school, due to its size: "It's a small school [of 35 students] and we know the students quite well."

Some programs or formal training. An additional four interviewees indicated that they had received some formal training. Among these participants, two indicated that they received formal training through their District or the Ministry of Education, including training in threat assessment. One interviewee explained the training she received starting with level one: "In our district, we had a really good comprehensive level approach threat assessment so that we can be prepared for various situations. The sessions were quite far apart—we have usually one level per year..." She explained the initial phases of the training:

We started with level one, which is looking at basic bullying situations and how to help students and teens deal with that, and how to protect your territory, your staff, your school and how to become more aware. Level two was a lot about mental illness, and unfortunately, what we see is the increase in mental illness and isolation for all people and especially in youth. Level three was basically a nice summation of how to approach these problems and where to get help.

Additional Training Needed

Interviewees were asked to identify specific areas in which they felt they could benefit from additional training. Their suggestions included: mental health; identifying problems or threats; working with kids at risk; and, having more in-person presentations, as areas that should receive further attention. Here is how one interviewee described the need for more mental health training:

We've seen that mental health issues are on the rise. We talk about it at almost every ProD [professional development] day. We talk about student mental health, teacher mental health, parent mental health, how to get kids connected, and we have a working

group in the school who deal with just mental health alone. They meet on their own, one hour a month, just to talk about mental health and what we can do in the school to improve the conditions for our students struggling with mental health issues.

Another area where research participants suggested a need for additional training was in identifying problems or threats. One PVP described this necessity, “The consequences of things like that would be good for us to know about, as well as other things that might lead to radicalization. We could use some training to watch for triggers of behaviour that might be out of the ordinary.”

One PVP described the necessity for additional training surrounding working with kids at risk, “I’m not sure that we need to learn any more about radicalization specifically. But we do have kids at risk for bullying or mistreatment out in the community. And particularly the First Nations kids.” Another PVP indicated more in-person presentations are needed to supplement existing training:

I think the most effective training would involve something that makes a more personal connection, such as a former gang member coming and doing a presentation to staff and talking about what led to going down that path. I would find that much more impactful than reading about what to do.

Protocols and Procedures

Both survey and interview participants were asked if their schools had any protocols in place to help them recognize and deal with incidents of extremist or violent extremist behaviour. Only half of the quantitative research participants indicated that their schools had such protocols in place. A similar pattern was observed in the interviews, with some participants reporting having such protocols in place while others commented on the lack of such measures in their schools

No protocols or procedures. Two of the interview participants indicated that they had no such protocols or procedures in their schools. As one PVP explained, there was a ‘cannot happen here’ attitude which constrains the development of any protocols or procedures:

One of my concerns is that sometimes there are blinders on about ‘surely it could not happen here’, and that the area, although a fair sized city, is still perceived by many as a small community where bad things don’t happen. We are not adequately prepared for

a number of serious situations that could arise. And, yes, we do need to accept that radicalization is happening in BC, but we are not well trained to spot it or support students in facing these difficult situations.

Some protocols or procedures. Participants who indicated that there are some protocols and procedures in their schools pointed to systems for lockdown, as well as threat assessment, as the basis of their likely response. They also indicated that, should a serious incident occur, they would call the police. Two of the research participants explained their protocols and procedures for lockdown and for threat assessment. For example, one PVP explained how, in his school, “Like in most schools, we have lockdown procedures. Everybody is trained in what to do in the event of something that happens.” Two PVPs indicated that their standard procedure would be to call the police. For example, as one PVP explained:

If I heard about an incident of violent extremism that was imminent, that was about to happen, yes, I would call the police. And it wouldn't be my police liaison officer necessarily. It would be 9-1-1. I'm pretty well connected with local police in terms of the switchboard or emergency numbers, so that would be what I would do there. If it's an emergency they're right over.

Resources, Tools and Support

Interviewees were asked about what resources, tools, and support they could access to cope with radicalization in their schools. Several research participants discussed resources in their communities, as well as the high ratio of staff to students. Three interviewees described resources they have accessed in their communities. For example, one PVP explained how, in his school, they utilized programs at their local Kiwanis club and other organizations during the interim when there are no classes, in order to keep their students connected.

In addition to noting the resources they have accessed in their communities, two PVPs described how the high ratio of staff to students helped them cope with radicalization in their schools. One PVP explained how this works in her school:

The staff ratio is quite high. The students feel very comfortable coming forward and saying, ‘Such and such is going on’. So before something becomes really, really serious, you're going to get wind of what's going on, I would say nine times out of ten.

Discussion and Conclusions

The idea to use PVPs as the source of primary data was decided upon based on the unique lens provided by these educational professionals who have a consistently intimate familiarity with this segment of the population. PVPs are in a position on an almost daily basis to observe the behaviours of youth, usually on a multi-year basis, as they pass through this critical developmental phase of their lives. My study was guided by four research questions, and the results pertaining to each is discussed below.

Question 1: What examples of radical, extremist, or violent extremist behaviour have been observed in Grade 8-12 students during the 2014-2015 school year?

Research participants reported a marked lack of awareness of specific incidents of engagement by students in radical, extremist, or violent extremist behaviour during the 2014-2015 school year, and about the subject of radicalization as a whole.

One notable exception to the general lack of personal exposure to radical incidents was the incident, described earlier, where the school embraced the educational opportunity for social engagement presented by participation in a political protest. This particular example demonstrates how one type of conflict, in this case a protest, bears some hallmarks of similarity to other forms of radical or extremist behaviour, which have at their foundation the element of disagreement. Stone, Patton, and Heen (2010) posited that disagreement, much as was discussed earlier in this paper regarding radicalization, is not necessarily a bad thing. PVPs and their staff engage adeptly with students routinely on issues that can, and sometimes do emerge as conflicts of various natures and intensity. The manner in which PVPs address these issues may curtail the eruption of what begins as a disagreement or differing viewpoint, into an extremist attitude or even a violent extremist action.

In their testimonies, the interview participants demonstrated sincere commitment to providing a safe, nurturing, and supportive environment where divergent positions held by students can not only be tolerated, but also used as the basis for further exploration and deeper understanding of what could otherwise instigate a conflict. Available literature supports the premise that common core elements including: a frank discourse on the feelings, identity issues, and perceptions on the issue; listening to, and consideration for all points of view; working

together to find a way to resolve, or at least manage the problem; and leaving the door open to future discussion on the matter, should the need arise, can all lead to positive outcomes (Bartlett, Birdwell & King, 2010; Quartermaine, 2014; Stone et al., 2010). The supportive practices portrayed by PVPs during the interview phase mirror the best practices advanced in the literature. This high standard of student care and cultivation may be key to explaining not only the infrequency of incidents involving radical, extremist or violent extremist behaviour, but also the apparent low level of intensity associated with any incidents that do transpire.

The fundamental approaches that the research participants apply to dealing with various conflicts involving students appears to contributed to a high level of student well being, and a consequential low level of student discord, including radicalization.

Question 2: How has the degree of radical, extremist, or violent extremist behaviour changed over a three-year period?

It was interesting to note the dichotomy between how PVPs responded to this quantitative question when comparing the situation in their own schools, to BC schools in general. While only 3% of survey respondents believed that extremist or violent extremist behaviours had increased in their own schools during the previous three-year period, 23.3% believed such behaviours had increased somewhat in BC schools in general. It was encouraging to note that 6.6% of survey respondents believed incidents of extremist or violent extremist behaviours among BC youth to have declined somewhat or substantially during this timeframe.

Interestingly, 40% of survey respondents did not know if there had been any change in extremist or violent extremist behaviours among BC students during the three previous years. This general lack of knowledge among PVPs, on both the subject of youth radicalization and the statistics associated with it, was affirmed in the interviews. Most research participants, and the interviewees in particular, expressed some unease with their own lack of knowledge on the subject of youth radicalization and their consequent ability to comment authoritatively on the state of radicalization within the BC school system, past or present. Interviewees each made a point of reviewing the various definitions provided in the preamble to the interview, and none offered any differing or contradictory viewpoints on those definitions. There was no attestation by research participants that extremist or violent extremist behaviour had been, currently is, or may imminently be a cause of any considerable concern within BC schools. However, during

many of the interviews there was discussion that pointed to an apprehension that what PVPs might have experienced or observed over the past three years in the BC school system may not be indicative of what the future portends. Ubiquitous media reportage on radical and terrorist events, coupled with mushrooming Internet and social media presence related to those subjects, was cited by several PVPs as a strong inducement for them to take proactive measures to prepare to deal with related incidents in the future.

Survey respondents were given a list of 14 possible factors which might foster radicalization in youth. To one extent or another, all of the factors listed were determined to be possible contributors. The most often selected factor was *personal identity crisis* which was chosen by 92.3% of respondents. Even the lowest scoring factor, *desire to show off, or otherwise seek attention* was chosen by 26.9% of respondents as being a possible contributor. In effect, from the PVP viewpoint, virtually any disturbing influence that was presented to them in the survey question, from alienation through to culture, peer pressure, or general frustration, could conceivably trigger a move toward radicalization. It would be interesting to see how PVPs would assess these same factors as contributors to other behaviours such as gang, criminal, or bullying activity.

Question 3: To what extent do PVPs feel that they are trained to cope with the phenomenon of radicalization?

The training received by interviewees to cope with radicalization ranged from none to comprehensive. Consequently, there was corresponding variance in the resulting levels of confidence exhibited by PVPs in their capacity to deal with incidents of extreme or violently extreme behaviours. The default counteraction promoted by many respondents was to call upon police assistance if faced with a perceived danger to any school personnel. However, responses to more emergent cases of radicalization which posed less immediate danger were less consistent. While most PVPs thought they could use additional training to cope with radicalization, some considered the training they had received in general behavioural problem mitigation could be somewhat useful and applicable in this scenario.

Some survey and interview participants spoke with high regard of a multi-level training program of threat assessment, prevention, and intervention strategies created and presented by a BC-based company called *Safer Schools Together*. PVPs who had taken one or more of the

three available training levels in this program consistently expressed a high degree of confidence in their ability to handle incidents of extreme or violently extreme behaviour among students as a result of this instruction. The president of *Safer Schools Together*, Theresa Campbell, and her associate J. Kevin Cameron have been contracted by the BC Ministry of Education to conduct such training to all school districts in the province. At the time of this study, they were approximately halfway through this undertaking (T. Campbell, interview, June 28, 2015). Campbell and Cameron provide similar services throughout much of Canada and also in various regions of the United States.

Question 4: What training, protocols, or policies do PVPs think should be developed to help them identify and cope with radicalization?

Only half of the survey participants indicated that protocols and procedures were in place at their school to deal with incidents of extremist or violent behaviour. Some interviewees attributed the absence of such measure to a conventional—and perhaps naïve—belief that such behaviours ‘could not happen here’. Others expressed varying degrees of confidence that their procedures for dealing with other behavioural issues would suffice when dealing with an incident of extremism or violent extremism. Regardless of the presence, or presumed sufficiency of training, protocols, or policies for dealing with radicalization in schools, the general consensus among PVPs was that they could benefit from some form of practical instruction on the subject.

The BC Ministry of Education has compiled a comprehensive set of guides for PVPs, school staff, and even parents, under the auspices of their Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools division. The ministry website provides a wide array of downloadable resources, as well as organizational and related governmental links. This body of resources covers multiple facets of behavioural issues, threat assessment and response, and even critical incidence response following a tragedy. In 1999, the BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association produced its own handbook entitled *Keeping Schools Safe: A Practical Guide for Principals and Vice-Principals*, which included worksheets from which PVPs could create their own standard procedures for various eventualities. While none of the listed resources touch on the subject of radicalization or extremist behaviour specifically, the many subjects with which they do deal would certainly provide a reasonably sound foundation for dealing with issues of a radical or

extremist nature. Updating many of these resources to include a discussion of radical or extremist behaviour would appear to be a minor task in some instances.

Although they have made these various resources available to schools, the Ministry of Education is not responsible for ensuring schools have response protocols in place. This responsibility lies with the respective District Boards of Education (BCEd, 2010, p. 7). As the priority given to the need for such protocols rests with the respective Boards, this may account for the inconsistent presence of such procedures.

A recurring view among study participants was that having access to some templates, booklets, or other pro forma materials to help guide them in crafting some conventions would be very helpful. Two interviewees stated that they would benefit from the opportunity to participate in a forum with individuals who had lived an extremist or violent extremist lifestyle. According to one PVP, this raw, first-hand interaction with an extremist practitioner would provide greater insight than could be found in any pamphlet.

At the very least, most research participants considered a review of school protocols and procedures relating to dealing with potential threats to be in order, with an eye to integrating the added dimension of radicalization. In some cases, intransigence on the part of some players, such as some school staff or administrators at higher levels, regarding the necessity to expend energy and resources on a peril not in evidence, was seen as a possible roadblock to this enterprise. Just the same, PVPs seemed attuned to the need to adjust their current conventions, to keep pace with the realities of an ever-changing and arguably more dangerous world.

Validating PVP Perspectives

While research participants were conversant on the rudiments of radicalization among youth, none of the participants claimed to possess what might be regarded as a particularly high level of expertise on the subject. Nor was that expected from a group whose profession gave them only transitory exposure to such behaviour, for the most part. Recognition of this limitation in overall expertise among participants gave rise to the notion that information obtained from PVPs might warrant greater merit if findings based on their testimony were corroborated by police statistics. This exercise would demonstrate how the observations and perspectives of PVPs corresponded to the frequency of reported incidents of radical activity by

youth in BC, as reported in police records for the same period (June 2014 to June 2015). To this end, the assistance of the RCMP was sought.

The RCMP hosts the Integrated National Security Enforcement Teams (INSET) which collect, share, and analyze intelligence on both individuals and entities that are a danger to Canada's national security (RCMP, 2014). The teams are comprised of representatives from the RCMP, federal partners and agencies such as Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), as well as provincial and municipal police services. I was grateful for the support of RCMP Corporal Scott Hilderley who provided the data shown below sourced from the INSET Vancouver office (S. Hilderley, personal correspondence, August 7, 2015):

- The following data is specific to incidents involving threats to national security, not to general criminal activity.
- The data encompasses all Subjects of Complaint (SOCs) recorded in BC for the year ending July 2015. An SOC refers to a person who was alleged to have committed an offence (not necessarily charged with one) either through information provided by a complainant, or via the accumulation of information acquired through investigation.
- Of all SOC's, 0.05% were classified as young offenders, and of these only 0.026% were deemed to have displayed behaviours that may be considered radical. Therefore, roughly only 1 out of every 76,900 SOC's would be classified as a radical youth offender.
- INSET investigated a total of 14 individuals who were classified as radical young offenders, during the year ending July 2015.

Based on the very small percentage of SOC's ascribed to the radical BC youth sub-group, it may be concluded that there would likely be little incidence of radical behaviour by youth in BC secondary schools at the present time, and therefore the appraisals proffered by most of the research participants in this regard are validated. This conclusion notwithstanding, a marked increase in both the number and sophistication of online sites inciting youth to engage in extremist activity, juxtaposed with abundant media coverage of extremist and terrorist activities, has convinced many research participants of the need to fortify their capacity to cope with potential future threats.

Building on Existing Practices

Initiatives to deal with radicalization in schools need not precipitate the creation of new layers of protocols. Well crafted existing models for contending with crime, bullying, drug activity, or other behavioural and safety issues may only require small adaptations to incorporate this added dimension to the threat matrix. Of course, new initiatives developed specifically to tackle radicalization might also provide the impetus to challenge existing practices, to take a fresh look at how to deal with the panoply of conflicts that may challenge the schools of today and tomorrow.

Since 2004, the BC Ministry of Education has published, and periodically updates, a statement of policy outlining prevention and intervention strategies to create safe and inclusive learning environments (BCEd, 2008; Safe and Caring School Communities, 2012). This convention rationalized that student safety is dependent upon schools having prevention and intervention strategies in place for dealing with harmful behaviour, as well as threats or risk of violence. The policy statement suggests that individual boards of education should have a district safe school coordinator and team in place to monitor safety initiatives and develop the capacity within schools to deal with bullying and violence. Inserting the element of radicalization into this ministry-generated statement of policy could serve as an impetus for schools and school districts to add this item to their development agendas.

Recommendations

This research validated the premise that an examination of the perspectives of PVPs can provide a dependable metric of the current state of radicalization among youth within their respective school communities. Most PVPs who participated in this research identified the requirement to enhance their capability to cope with an anticipated increase in incidents of radicalization in schools. Some identified possible obstacles to their achieving this goal. Others made positive suggestions from which all might benefit. The recommendations shown below incorporate suggestions put forth by PVPs, and others, evinced by the research outcomes.

1. Encourage the adoption of more consistent safety and security measures.

The BC Ministry of Education publishes policy outlining prevention and intervention strategies to create safe and inclusive learning environments (BCEd, 2008; BCEd 2010; Safe and Caring School Communities, 2012). Current policy only recommends that lower level jurisdictions establish their own measures to address discipline and behavioural matters as they see fit. Consequently, there is wide variation in the presence and efficacy of these plans at the school level. The ministry should encourage school boards to mandate the preparation of safe school protocols for every school in their jurisdiction, with consideration for the particular characteristics of the schools these strategies seek to serve. The ministry may have to provide resources, such as expert advisors, to assist in this process.

2. Expand on *Safe, Caring, and Orderly Schools* initiatives.

This study demonstrated a wide variance in the level of confidence possessed by individual PVPs to authoritatively and effectively respond to emerging threats associated with radicalization and extremism. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education expand its current body of Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools resources and expertise to include youth extremism and radicalization. Proactive initiatives such as a periodic online safety and security newsletter could help PVPs stay abreast of new developments while acting as an instrument wherein their questions on such matters could be addressed.

3. Continue, and expand violence assessment and intervention training.

Many PVPs reported they were lacking in, but perceived the need to receive, further training in violence assessment and intervention, especially with regard to radical or extremist behaviour. Some PVPs expressed high regard for the training they received in this area from two specific sources: Safer Schools Together (SST), headed by Theresa Campbell; and the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (CCTATR), headed by Kevin Cameron. Multi-level training is currently being provided by these two organizations to some schools in BC, and the scope of their training is expanding to encompass youth radicalization, as well as other threats as they emerge. It is recommended that the pace of training being provided by such organizations as SST and CCTATR be accelerated.

4. Replicate this study in other regions.

Only a small portion of the PVP population in BC was involved in this study sample. Replicating this study with a larger sample group will likely result in even a richer pool of data for analysis. More primary research on the subject of youth radicalization is required. It is recommended that all Canadian provincial and territorial ministries of education exhort participation by school boards and individual schools in studies, similar to this one, to obtain more comprehensive data on the state of radicalization, and help them prepare strategies for dealing with it.

5. Provide opportunities for additional PVP input.

This study allowed for only limited discourse on radicalization with a small group of PVPs. The interest and concern exhibited by interviewees suggests that information sharing opportunities such as round-table discussions, lectures, or workshops, could be useful inclusions in professional development sessions, conventions or other forums. From such colloquia might emerge previously unidentified concerns, novel solutions, or new thoughts on the subject worthy of further examination.

6. Acknowledge and publish the best practices exhibited by PVPs.

This study determined that the overall level of youth radicalization, as well as many other behavioural problems, is remarkably low in BC, at least based on results gleaned from the small participant group. While any combination of factors may account for why this is so, some common positive traits were observed that likely contributed to this outcome including: a safe school environment where student wellbeing and success were the first priority; the presence of strong leadership, and accessible youth-adult mentoring opportunities; and compassionate conflict resolution practices. Some of the success stories that surfaced during this research were deserving of being assembled into a compendium of pedagogical and leadership best practices case studies. It is recommended that such a project be undertaken. The pedagogical and social benefits to be derived from such a digest may help some schools improve their environment, and contribute to a reduction in the frequency of behavioural interventions.

Summary

Ferrero (2005) portrayed radicalization as a reaction to failure or frustration. PVPs consistently demonstrated how their school environments were preserves in which students are nurtured and stimulated to prosper academically, socially and to some extent, spiritually. Conjointly, a consistent thread running through both the qualitative and quantitative research was the general scarcity of exhibited radical behaviour noted by PVPs among their students. It might be inferred that the presence of an enriching school milieu may diminish the inducement to embrace radicalization. A school that provides the conditions and inspiration for success is one that endows students with the power to overcome failure and frustration. Certainly I came away from this enterprise instilled with confidence that the destiny of the youth of British Columbia could not be entrusted to more capable people than the school principals and vice-principals who are dedicated to their success.

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