

The iNEAR: A RESILIENCE PROGRAM for SCHOOL CHILDREN and YOUNG PEOPLE.

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BACKGROUND

Speaking of the threat against the British way of life and the risk of youth ‘radicalisation’, the Prime Minister, David Cameron (July 20th, 2015) identifies the root cause as the “extremist ideology itself”. At the heart of the Prime Minister’s plans to address extremism and the existential menaces associated with it sits “our strongest weapon: our own liberal values”. These can scaffold meaningful philosophical conversations and the development of positive and resilient identities within and through positive and resilient communities.

Resilience is also identified as a key social resource in the Department for Education’s “Prevent Duty” paper advising schools and childcare providers in their contribution to preventing young people from being “drawn into terrorism” (DFE, June 2015). Firstly, the paper emphasises the need to build “children’s resilience to radicalisation by providing a safe environment for debating controversial issues and helping them to understand how they can influence and participate in decision-making” (p.8). A primary concern is to raise awareness and equip pupils with skills involved in recognising and managing risks to personal safety and wellbeing, including resisting pressures to adopt certain views or ways of behaving, through engendering choice, reasoned argument, and personal agency. This can be embedded within existing school curriculum activities designed to address critical thinking together with spiritual, moral, and cultural development of pupils in ways that are sensitive to and celebrate diversity and engaged citizenship. Secondly, the “Prevent Duty” paper highlights the benefit of promoting the development of “positive character traits” such as “resilience, determination, self-esteem, and confidence” which can help “prepare them to play a full and active part in society” (p.8). Here the focus is on skills and resources that enhance pupils’ individual capacity for emotional and social resilience necessary for personal flourishing, positive relationships and civic participation.

The concept of resilience therefore can be usefully conceived as both: as a psychological shield to the risk of adopting extreme beliefs systems and as a positive character trait that can be developed towards optimal growth, self-actualisation and wellbeing and, we argue, implicitly lower the risk of ‘radicalisation’ (Tunariu & Tribe, 2015a).

PROPOSAL

A 5-day Resilience programme – The iNEAR intervention (Tunariu, 2016a) – has been developed and we are currently in conversations with a school in Cambridge (approximately 960 pupils aged 11 – 16) about the possibility of piloting it in the autumn of 2015.

As an invitation to open up multidisciplinary collaborations, the present document aims to showcase a way of approaching the issue of radicalisation indirectly yet without minimising or avoiding it. The proposal is to tackle it as an implicit outcome of psycho-social interventions that focus on individual capacity for growth and resilience as a pivotal social asset. Drawing on principles from positive psychology, developmental coaching and psychotherapy we wish to promote the view that temporarily suspending the imperative for political positioning or diagnostic categorization can offer a valuable and unique window for early interventions and subsequently, can contribute to safeguarding against the adoption of extreme views or beliefs without problematizing or adding to controversy (Tunariu & Tribe, 2015 a&b).

The iNEAR intervention (Tunariu, 2016a) is informed by principles and research from existential positive psychology as well coaching and counselling psychology. This integrated theoretical approach allows for delivering bespoke psychological interventions that can instigate meaningful, lasting change without re-problematizing groups that may be already disenfranchised or vulnerable in some way (e.g., Tunariu, 2016b; Boniwell & Tunariu, 2010). Community awareness and engagement, as framed by the NICE guidelines, act as the ethical background to the intervention (Lane & Tribe, 2010). The iNEAR is focused on the formation of positive identities and the acquisition of skills for growth and flourishing. It considers common psychological ‘traps’ to optimal functioning that delineate internal life-worlds of the developing young individual. It follows an appreciative inquiry approach and builds on personal strengths as a way of deriving new resources, meanings and motivation as well engagement with the notion of citizenship (Tunariu, 2016b).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- ✚ The term ‘positive’ is used to denote an appreciative inquiry approach seeking to apply knowledge about optimal human functioning to enable individuals and communities to thrive (Boniwell & Tunariu, 2011).
- ✚ The concept of resilience refers the ability to bounce-back from adversity, to act towards wellbeing in spite of life limitations and challenges. Resilience is defined as:
 - The “process of, capacity for, outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1990, p. 426).
 - An enduring and yet fluid “personality characteristic” related to an individual’s repertoires of “adaptation” (Wagnild, 2003, p. 45) which is always already shaped (hindered or aided) by current cultural and social discourses and practices (Tunariu, 2012).

The discipline of Positive Psychology offers evidence-based theory, principles and applications concerned with building and celebrating what-works-well rather than focusing on deficit, abnormality and indirect alienation of aspects of human experience that fall outside the norm. It offers a way of approaching the task of understanding and working with (young) people that facilitates positive change and transformation (Parks & Schueller, 2014). Positive Psychological Interventions have been successfully applied in the education (e.g., Boniwell & Tunariu, 2011; MacConville & Rae, 2012; Nearchou *et al.*, 2014) and youth restorative justice contexts (e.g., Boniwell & Tunariu, 2010; Tunariu, 2012) to increase participants’ reported levels of happiness, motivation and self-determination, as well as their capacity to be resilient and adopt a positive perspective of the future. The path to autonomy and authentic, mature self-concept is complex and wrought with challenges, ambivalence and vulnerability. Developing a firm self-concept entails risk and commitment; an initially fragile ego opens itself out to understanding, assimilating and

committing itself to a mode of being that holds the promise of acceptance and valuing from significant others and the society at large. It entails personal resilience.

Identity formation is accelerated during the teenage years and remains an ongoing process in a (young) person's life as they search for a self-authored identity and synthesis of personal systems of value. Unsurprisingly the person-in-becoming is often vulnerable to strong reactions, confusions, resistance to perceived rigid authority, dis-alignment from the familiar as an over-compensation for the need to 'stand out' as unique (Tunariu, 2016c). At the same time, there is the preoccupation to secure belonging to a group which is attributed with kudos, social influence and currency fit to render them a meaningful identity by association. Experiencing validation by others is an essential ingredient of effective group belonging and would typically involve feelings of acceptance and endorsements of individual contributions and achievements. Positive, non-judgmental, collaborative interventions during this process can open conversations, and unique opportunities for aiding development, self-efficacy, resilience, empathy and hope and meaning for the future (e.g., Correy & Correy, 2014). Amongst other things, greater resilience capacity can improve problem solving skills and increase creativity. Together with exposure to positive emotions, it has been found to also increase flexibility of thought, help combat learnt helplessness as well as depression (e.g., Schroder & Ollis, 2013), and to catalyse greater academic achievements (e.g., Nearchou, *et al.*, 2014).

AIMS of the INTERVENTION

Like the capacity to learn and the capacity to care (for self and for others), personal resilience is a capacity that can be expanded and cultivated (e.g., Tunariu *et al.*, 2011; Parks & Schueller, 2014). It can be developed through interactions between an individual's internal assets, guided responses to environmental variables, and individualised repertoires of protective factors (e.g., Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). The iNEAR programme proposed here (Tunariu, 2016a) is designed to offer such intervention and has the concept of personal resilience at its heart. It constitutes a set of self-contained activities that can be usefully housed by a larger positive-education curriculum or a psycho-education programme (Tunariu, 2016b). The range of materials developed to support its activities are original yet embedded in research and some are adapted from relevant tool-oriented publications (e.g., MacConville & Rae, 2012; Corey & Corey, 2014).

iNEAR intervention is focused on "I" as a platform to develop, invest in and own:

- | | |
|---|--|
| N | New knowledge about myself |
| E | Emotional resources and emotional intelligence |
| A | Awareness of values, of options, of choice |
| R | Responding with growth 'in spite of ...' |

OUTCOMES

The core, underlining principle of the iNEAR intervention is *transformation through participation*. The activities are designed to serve as catalysts for change. The change will follow a collective direction towards growth and optimal functioning while at the same time, it will be unique and subjectively meaningful to each individual.

Overall, outcomes of the programme

1. Positive self-concept: working with signature strengths
2. Emotional competence: harnessing the 'good' from positive and negative emotions

3. The power of perception: challenge and re-author own perceptions / interpretations
4. Choice and freedom: finding meaning in adversity and develop self-soothing resources

Implicit, long term outcomes of the programme

1. Increased self-knowledge, more sophisticated appraisal of self-worth, greater sense of self-efficacy
2. Greater emotional intelligence and emphatic responses towards others
3. Greater ideological malleability and flexibility of thinking (self-governing vs. compliance to peer and/or ideological pressure)
4. Adopting Positive Future Perspectives: wellbeing goals and visibility of future aspirations

And

5. A general increase in ego / personal resilience
6. A general increased subjective well-being
7. A general reduction of undesirable / disruptive behaviour and an increased engagement with learning

MEASURES of IMPACT

Impact will be measured via a combination of Psychometric Measures (standardised and used in other research) and bespoke measures (e.g., questionnaires and interviews) and routine measures already used in the school (e.g., engagement with learning; grades). These will be administered before and after the intervention. Ethical approval, local to the school and via the University systems will be sought and secured.

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