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Davies, Lynn (2008). *Educating Against Extremism*. Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books.

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In *The Islamist*, Ed Husain (2007) recounts the years he spent as a radical Islamist in Britain, and the handful of college teachers who helped him see a way out. For Husain and many others, education was key to their rejection of extremist ideologies. How can educators in democratic states develop techniques to combat extremism? How can students be prepared with the civic competencies to challenge extremist positions?

Lynn Davies seeks to address these questions, proposing to “explore how education could counter the forms of extremism which present a danger to societies globally” (p. 1). She takes as a given that “currently formal education does little to prevent people joining extremist groups, or to enable young people critically to analyze fundamentalism” (p. 1). She articulates a clear organizing structure of the book: first, a survey of writing related to extremism and

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fundamentalism; second, a review of scholarship on educational practice and its implications for extremism; and finally the development of a “practical programme for educational institutions” (p. 2). The model she presents is consistent with other active citizenship pedagogy, but Davies combines these elements in an original form. While the integrity of her analysis is compromised by an overly broad critique of religious moral reasoning, the book admirably explores a topic that has received little attention in comparative education, and will be particularly useful to scholars interested in peace education and multiculturalism.

Davies is not initially specific about her geographic focus. In the early chapters, given the frequent examples of international extremist incidents, the reader is left to conclude that the scope is universal and the prescriptions generalizable. Yet extremism and appropriate educational responses to it would look quite different in London and Karachi. It is not until the third chapter that there are indications of a UK focus. In relating the legacy of religious animosity that resulted from the partition of India and Pakistan, she writes: “It is crucial that the UK learns from international comparisons and histories before it is too late” (p. 80). Similarly, reacting to a section on identity construction she writes: “The discussion above indicates a need to look at whether or how a national identity, or in Britain, Britishness, is a way to unite students and protect against other more extreme or alienating identities” (p. 90). These indicate an interest in the UK, but Davies never explicitly orients her efforts in a national direction.

Limiting the scope of this study to the UK and other similarly cohesive societies would aid the reader in positioning the book within broader scholarship on education and conflict. Much recent literature on education in conflicted societies focuses on contexts where the political objectives of two or more distinct social or ethnic groups are opposed. This presumes two or more ways of knowing, epistemic positions that must be resolved, mitigated or at least recognized in the classroom. In conflicted societies where two or more perspectives

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compete for dominance (e.g. Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina) the educational challenge is to balance competing truth claims.

However, this kind of bi-polar or multi-polar frame does not necessarily represent how extremism is experienced in the classrooms of socially cohesive communities such as the UK or US. In these contexts, conflict occurs when one dominant socio-cultural framework is challenged by a sub-national minority claim. The challenge to educators in relatively cohesive societies is to respond to extremist minority positions that threaten the safety of the national community. Both the prognosis and treatment prescribed in *Educating Against Extremism* are best applied to these kind of cohesive societies.

Since one person's extremist is another's patriot, Davies recognizes the need for a universally appropriate value system to provide the basis for public deliberation of extremism and fundamentalism, and suggests human rights as an orienting framework. She argues that human rights "are both more direct and less dangerous than theist forms of the 'ultimate good'" (p. 7). That rights claims, rather than religious belief, should inform public deliberation on the 'ultimate good' would seem to be an uncontroversial claim within liberal democracies. It would be appropriate, even expected, for Davies to acknowledge the longstanding tradition of a rights framework as the common denominator of moral reasoning in public settings and move on to what the reader anticipates will be the more difficult task of elucidating how—given a rights framework—education can mitigate extremist views. Instead, Davies' devotes much of her argument to demonstrating the insufficiencies of religious fundamentalism as a modern moral framework and the incompatibility of religious schooling with the demands of civic education. The result is a broad critique of religion in public education. In chapter 3, she provides no less than 12 arguments against faith-based schools. In chapter 4 she extensively discusses the abhorrent practice of "honor killings." These are convincing arguments against religious fundamentalism, but they seem secondary to the stated goal of articulating an educational program that combats

extremism. Since they are presented as part of the core argument, the impression is that vigilant secularism is a prerequisite for anti-extremist education.

As her argument develops, Davies extends this critique of religious reasoning to more mainstream voices. In a subsection of her conclusion titled “A value base: the need for a secular morality” Davies offers the following example:

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, rejects the suggestion that religion poses problems in education. ‘Every religion has a concept of human dignity and worth which exceeds any account that secular people can give, and I think that’s something very necessary in education’, he asserts grandly (reported in Kingston, 2007). Leaving aside his ignoring of the many indignities done to others in the name of religion, this is breathtaking in its intolerance and superior attitude (p. 160).

On the contrary, Williams seems to offer a thoroughly reasonable position for a person of faith—just as reasonable as Davies’ emphasis on human rights as a superior moral framework for public deliberation. It is not necessary to undermine religious reasoning in order to argue that—given religious pluralism—a rights orientation in classrooms is preferable as a common framework for civic dialogue. Davies’ insistence on the insufficiency of religious reasoning is in its own way unreasonable, and this undermines the very sensible prescriptions she develops.

In the final chapter, Davies attempts to bring together the many educational implications raised in the book and apply them in a coherent educational program. Her model borrows from the expansive education ideas developed by Ben-Porath (2006), and adds a deliberative component reminiscent of the work of Diana Hess (2009). Davies presents a binary schematic contrasting anti-extremist education with education that “cements extremist divides and attitudes” (p. 181). The anti-extremist model emphasizes commonality, a human rights orientation, and student skill-building in critical thinking and deliberation, as well as

unique elements such as ‘hybridity’ in student identity formation and humor/satire. Davies notes that this model is “unashamedly bipolar, to make the contrast starkly” (p. 181). Often such binary models are meant to portray two extremes or ideal types, and practitioners are encouraged to chart a path somewhere in between. But in explaining her model, Davies stresses “*all* the components are necessary for anti-extremist education to be coherent” (p. 181). Presenting her concluding schematic as a rigid, all or nothing binary seems a curious stylistic move. Often in the preceding chapters Davies criticizes absolutist ways of thinking that emphasize choices in black and white terms. And in the end it is not clear that all the elements she suggests are necessary to maintain coherence; some elements, such as *humor*, remain underdeveloped and may indeed be unnecessary or only marginally useful.

Extremism and religious fundamentalism are important political and cultural forces that have received little attention within comparative education research. *Educating Against Extremism* opens new areas for scholarly attention within peace education, multicultural education and other subfields to explore how these current forces can be mitigated in the classroom. The kinds of competencies Davies has in mind have much in common with current scholarship on active citizenship education. *Educating Against Extremism* will be useful particularly for scholars interested in exploring new areas in the field of education and conflict, and will likely offer more to practitioners in the UK and other cohesive societies than those concerned with deeply divided contexts. However, if anti-extremist education is to gain broad support, scholars and practitioners alike will need to develop a more conciliatory strategy to engage people of faith and match the conviction of a rights framework for public deliberation with a critical respect for diverse viewpoints.

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