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Thomas, Paul

Prevent - The need for Engagement with 'White Communities'

### Original Citation

Thomas, Paul (2013) Prevent - The need for Engagement with 'White Communities'. In: Wales Conference on Young People and Far-Right Extremism, 22nd October, 2013, Welsh Assembly, Cardiff.

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Educating tomorrow's professionals

**Prevent – The need for engagement with ‘White Communities’**

**Professor Paul Thomas**

**Wales Conference on Young People and Far-Right Extremism**

**22nd October 2013**



*University of*  
**HUDDERSFIELD**

## Key Messages

- A long-term policy failure to effectively engage with extremism and racism within White communities
- Economic and social issues within many White (and non-White) communities mean a real threat of growing extremism and aggressive intolerance
- To be effective, policy interventions need to be educative and non-judgmental, whilst also being challenging
- Prevent should be supporting such targeted work, but also situating it in close alignment with wider community cohesion and citizenship work.

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# Extremism and Racism within White communities

- Significant levels of racial harassment and violence and the support for/ association with the name and stance of groups like the EDL/WDL demonstrates that there is a significant problem of racism within White communities
- Our research in Oldham/Rochdale suggests that some white young people seem resistant to and pessimistic about ethnic-mixing: **60% of the group self-identifying as Muslim (n=76) agreed that 'Britain is a stronger country because of difference' as opposed to 23% of white young people (n=172). In response to the converse statement that 'Britain is stronger if groups live separately', only 16% of Muslims definitely agreed and 71% definitely disagreed, as opposed to 36% of the white group definitely agreeing and 30% definitely disagreeing, so displaying a small but significant white majority in support of the idea that even greater ethnic segregation would be better for all concerned**
- (Thomas and Sanderson, 2013, 'Crossing the line: White young people and Community Cohesion', in *Critical Social Policy*, 33:1, 160-180)
- Also evidence growing support for a racialised and exclusive 'Englishness'

# Extremism and Racism within White communities

- White communities are much more monocultural and 'segregated' than non-white communities and have less experience of ethnic diversity (even if we question 'white flight')
- The previous policy approach to multiculturalism had the unintended consequence of leaving majority White communities less sure of their 'identity' (Nayak, 1999), as in the Netherlands (Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2009)
- At the same time, economic change has significantly un-made many industrial communities – Baumann's 'liquid modernity'
- In parallel, discussion of 'class' identity and inequality has diminished, as discussion of ethnic identity has grown, leading to racialised understandings of the 'white working class', with social class resentment 'acted out' as 'race'

## Policy and White communities

- Multiculturalism never knew how to describe or engage with 'White communities'
- Some positive multicultural and anti-racist education work happened in schools and youth work, but other attempts were clumsy and counter-productive, leading to a 'White backlash' (Hewitt, 2005)
- Central to this was a failure to focus on the aims of such work and on the skills and confidence of the educational practitioners involved
- Community Cohesion recognised this, but has found it hard to engage some White communities

## Prevent and White communities

- Prevent largely focusses on Muslims only, ignoring the cohesion analysis of how oppositional identities harden and that of 'cumulative extremism' (Eatwell, 2006), whilst doing very little really anti-extremism educational work
- Prevent continues to ignore far-right extremism, despite Breivik's Norway attack – an unbalanced understanding of 'terrorism', with 'radicalisation' remaining a controversial concept (Kundnani, 2012)
- The Labour 'Connecting Communities' programme showed the potential to extend Prevent work to White communities ('communities under pressure').

# Why we need more Think Projects!

- The Think Project overtly engages with White young people, doing so in a challenging but supportive and educational environment
- It provides space for young people to discuss feelings and beliefs in an open manner, with the mixed team enabling dialogue with and questioning of 'other' people and the role of EYST making cohesion work a possible next step
- It has clear aims and carefully-designed educational approaches
- It also has multi-agency support and guidance – such support will be vital for this work to be developed and sustained

## Moving Forward – Prevent and White communities

- Prevent at the national and local level needs to accept White young people as an important and legitimate group for engagement
- Prevent should help the development and sustainability of the Think Project's work
- Prevent needs much more focus on the training and mentoring of professionals doing anti-extremist work and the Think Project's materials and approach have much to offer here
- Prevent work needs to be linked much more closely to wider cohesion and youth participation/volunteering work

## Contact details

Paul Thomas

School of Education and Professional  
Development,

University of Huddersfield, UK

[d.p.thomas@hud.ac.uk](mailto:d.p.thomas@hud.ac.uk)