



Choices and Voices: An evaluation of the interactive resource for schools for Preventing Violent Extremism

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1. Introduction

Choices and Voices is an interactive resource for schools produced by the Serious Games Company, Playgen. It was designed in 2008 in the context of the government's *Preventing Violent Extremism* agenda, and was instigated and supported by West Midlands Police. The resource takes the form of a computer simulation of social scenarios depicting community issues, where students are presented with a series of decisions about whether to participate in events and whether to use violence. Different decisions then lead to different consequences, and these are then discussed in class under the lead of a teacher or community police officer (CPO) trained to use the resource.

The aim of the resource was

‘to provide an inspiring and interactive experience that acts as a catalyst and a focus to discuss, debate and unpick arguments with the aim to ultimately stop young people getting to the point where they may even contemplate cruelty and violence’¹

Both the designers and funders wanted an evaluation of the resource as it was being used in schools. The Centre for International Education and Research at the University of Birmingham was commissioned to conduct this research. This report examines the theoretical basis to the resource and then gives an account of the responses of students and teachers in five schools in the West Midlands who were asked to use it. The aim of the evaluation is to assess whether the resource meets its own aims and how it might make a contribution to preventing violent extremism. *Choices and Voices* has already undergone many improvements, and this report is aimed to enable ongoing development of this and other related initiatives.

2. Background to the resource

The game has as its foundation the awareness of the interacting factors which may predispose young people to be attracted to violent solutions and/or to join extremist groups. The game does not talk about extremism or religion as such, but brings out issues of absolutism, peer pressure, adventure, secrecy, belonging, grievance and following authoritarian leadership. The philosophy of the game is that by encouraging young people to explore different points of view in open dialogue, they can surface controversial issues in a safe and positive environment. The learning objectives are

- a) to promote honest and critical conversation in belief systems as well as social and economic equality
- b) to encourage productive teamwork in response to difficulties and get students working together
- c) to emphasise commonality between students.

¹ Memarza 2011

Choices and Voices is divided into two short scenarios, each further divided into acts and scenes. The scenarios take place in a diverse multicultural community in the West Midlands and the player is a local resident and school pupil. In Scenario 1, a new, relatively unknown group of people have settled within the player's community, and the player's friends, who have negative opinions of the unnamed group, are planning to attack their community meeting with eggs. The player can join in or has the opportunity to tell the authorities about this attack and about a more dangerous one to follow. Scenario 1 includes issues of peer pressure and the seductive power of adventure and the sense of belonging. Scenario 2 has the player actually leading the events and controlling the choices on offer. A large scale regeneration of a local park is planned and the young people are unhappy. The player wants to stop the development and must decide between violent or peaceful protest. Scenario 2 includes examples of an unquestioning respect for a self-proclaimed authority, but also aspects of working together for a common goal and committing to honest dialogue.

The game is set in the West Midlands, and after piloting, copies were to be sent to 500 secondary schools in this area. A teacher's pack accompanies the game, which outlines the theoretical background to extremism and violence and the assumptions and objectives of the game. It suggests how to generate discussion from it and explains how it links to the National Curriculum for Citizenship. Follow-up activities are suggested for students to explore issues relevant to the game and to research media coverage of violence and extremism, which might ensure more sustainability of the reflection on the game.

The resource was piloted in four schools, and many changes made as a result of student and teacher comments – for example with regard to the language and the realism as well as sorting out technical issues of firewalls or headphones. Students raised issues of whether to play truthfully and honestly or just play to cause havoc, and suggested more scenarios and different characterisation. Teachers commented on the toolkit and the need to make it user friendly, signposting the curriculum areas. It was found that a separate IT information sheet was needed outlining how to get the game downloaded and get the best possible setting.

3. The research in schools

3.1 Methodology

The research used a qualitative approach, as perceptions, behaviours and interpretations are the key source of evaluation. A fully statistical approach in terms of impact was not seen as appropriate, as it cannot be expected that one lesson

would change students' attitudes sufficiently to merit a pre-test/post-test design, nor the use of a control group. The aim of the research was fourfold:

- a) to see whether the specific learning objectives are met (for dialogue, teamwork and commonality)
- b) to explore which particular aspects of social, political and religious issues are generated by the discussion
- c) to evaluate and compare the views of students and teachers on the value, enjoyment and sustainability of the game
- d) To see whether there are differences in student experiences according to age, gender, ethnicity or religion.

This would enable inferences to be made about the game's contribution to challenging predispositions to violence or extremism, and/or to young people influencing each other in positive non-violent directions. It was to enable insights into whether young people made the conceptual connections between the scenarios in the game and questions of theological distortion and misrepresentation, respect for others, religious and other identities, following leaders, trust in the local community, grievances about the political system and so on, or whether they remain within the contexts of the game itself.

The design comprised:

- a) questionnaire/proforma for all teachers using the game in their lesson
- b) brief feedback sheet for wide sample of students
- c) observation of a sample of lessons
- d) focus group interviews with a sample of students
- e) interviews with a sample of teachers and community police officers

Ethical clearance was sought and given by the University of Birmingham for working in this sensitive area. All respondents and schools are anonymised. Students were asked permission to be observed and interviewed; no photographs were taken. Letters were sent to parents/carers asking for permission for their children to participate. No inferences were made which could be used to stereotype or defame particular groups.

The **proforma for teachers** asked them to note down as the lesson progresses or immediately afterwards what issues were generated and discussed, what styles of conversation and dialogue ensued, which students participated in discussion, and whether students made conceptual links (and/or whether this needed to be encouraged by the teacher). It will also ask whether any home study was suggested to explore issues further (see *Appendix 1*).

The **feedback sheet for students** was mainly sentence completion (e.g. 'This game made me think about.....', 'What I liked/disliked most was.....', 'The bit that was closest to my experience or my feelings was when.....') The feedback sheet asked age, gender, and ethnic background, but did not want to use this to make inferences about propensities for violence, rather to see what experiences they might have had (see *Appendix 2*).

The **observation** looked at the students as they played the game, noting responses, discussion, argument, teamwork etc., and noting down (similar to the teacher proforma) what was raised, and how the students responded. It was to see if there were any misunderstandings of the language, aims and connections. It attempted to be alert to any negative outcomes of the game and the ensuing discussion, in terms of student cohesion. It was also to note down what the teacher's role was in terms of generating and guiding discussion.

The **focus group student interviews** asked what they thought the game was trying to do, whether they enjoyed it or trusted it, how they thought it could be improved, and whether they thought it would influence them or others. Questions on whether it represented real life and whether it was able to make them reflect on commonality and on teamwork for community action were to be raised.

The **teacher and CPO interviews** explored perceptions of relevance of the game, how it fitted within existing teaching plans and what follow-up work could be generated. They were to probe whether there are any 'no-go' areas for teachers, that is, areas that are taboo to talk about, or present difficulties.

This evaluation does not concern the technical issues of production, only insofar as they impact on student or teachers' perceptions.

Feedback was obtained from 83 students, 5 teachers and two community police officers across five schools. Data from the designers of the game, who also worked and interviewed in the school during the pilot phase and afterwards, was also used. In the end, it was found that the numbers of responses were too small to generate robust conclusions about gender and ethnic differences, and responses seemed to cut across all apparent divisions. The findings therefore do not in the end make these differentiations, nor attempt what could look like stereotypical assumptions.

3.2 Findings from the students

This section reports student responses from the questionnaire and from the focus group interviews.

Student responses operated continuously at different levels, in terms of technical concerns and substantive content of the game, but these interlinked in their reactions.

In terms of **what they liked** about the game, there were three major themes. The first was appreciation of the realism and topicality of the game, for example:

It was based on real life events

The scenarios were very realistic

They involved a lot of real life situations and how people deal with them

*It had discussed things that are an issue today
That is presented situations that happen like discrimination
The graphics were excellent! Puts you in a modern day situation and reflects the
events that happen in the local area*

The second equally important theme related to the liking of making choices and seeing where those decisions went, for example:

*How I got to choose
What decision making leads to
That we get to pick our own choices
When they asked your point of view
The fact that you had multiple choices to make*

They felt a sense of power:

*My decisions were actually listened to!
People listen to you, if you do the right thing, you can bring people along with you.*

The implication is that this decision-making is somewhat unusual in their learning experience, and gave them a sense of control and ownership. Many students wanted to play it again, just to see where it went with different decisions. Students were aware that this then enabled them to reflect:

*That it helps you think about what you would do in those situations
It made you think about what you were doing*

Technically, all this was helped by the fact that the game was interactive and 'funny':

*I liked the way the questions were presented. They were fairly interactive
Very interesting, fun and interactive
How it got me involved in it
It was quite interactive
I did find it funny also because of the characters; faces*

For one student, the one thing he liked was 'egging people'.

In terms of **what was disliked** however, other students did have some contrary views, particularly with regard to the realism:

*The way that they threw eggs was not that realistic
That they threw eggs at the community
That it was all rude stuff like throwing eggs
Some elements of the game did not really make sense
I thought the game's scenarios weren't realistic (Scenario 2: very few people would
actually protest to keep a park)
Scenario 1 could have had more real life answers. They didn't seem like something
anyone would say*

The headteacher texting! Not real!

They wanted more scenarios related to their experience, such as mugging, drugs, or gang violence, thinking that eviction from your house was actually rare.

The other major gripe was about the graphics, with many mentions such as:

*The graphics were not up to date
I wasn't too keen on the graphics. I thought they were a bit basic and not very lifelike
Rubbish graphics*

A couple of students wanted even more choices; and a couple just disliked 'the bad things that the friends did' which was not a critique of the game as such. Some found it 'boring', 'cos most of the time you're talking to the same people'. As one said in the focus group:

I think the game was boring and there wasn't many choices and trust me the facebook bebo finky wouldn't work.

At least two students were deeply suspicious about the game:

*I thought it was crap.....and it is a brain washing programme
The game is just trying to change the minds of the kids and it's full of bull. Really because you're just trying to make them take the easy option.*

Overall, however, there were far more positive comments about the game than negative ones. If they were **telling people about the game**, they would say it was 'kool', 'true', 'interesting' and 'great'. Many mentions talked of how it made you think and made you reflect on choices and decisions that you made:

*It is a cool game that gets you thinking
It's brilliant cos it makes you think
You should have a go at it as everyone learns something from it
The game is good for us to now (sic) the right things
It goes over many issues everyone goes through it makes you realise you have a choice
That this game is a game that can help you think about issues like bullying and help you to make decisions*

A few of course were a little less enthusiastic:

*Check it out if you have a spare five minutes but don't expect anything amazing
It was OK but could have been better
Whenever you're bored go on this site*

However, the great majority would recommend the game to others, some directly relaying the impact on their own learning:

*Do not listen to your friends go your own way
That it is really good for people to go against bad things
That I'd love to protest in real life. It seems awesome.*

The statement about **'the bit in the game closest to my experience was....'**

Again elicited many comments about peer pressure, bullying, 'having to make decisions' as well as use of social media 'when they went on facefriends'.

*Mates saying you're scared and would keep repeating it until I would change my mind
The protest because I have been asked to join a protest along with others
Using internet to protest
The egging bit but we never did it
The bit where they were saying 'why do I always have to make the choices'?*

The big question remains however whether the game met its objectives of preventing young people being drawn to violence and joining extremist groups. When asked to complete the open statement **'This game made me think about....'** the great majority of students were able to cite things that the game made them ponder on, showing that it did provoke reflection. Students talked about broad moral issues: 'right from wrong', 'honesty' 'telling the truth' 'behaviour' and 'picking right decisions for our own good'. They also often talked about peer pressure and *'the stress that "friends" go through dealing with pressure'*. It was noticeable that peer pressure was a concern equally for boys and girls. They talked about the choices they would make in life. Only one mentioned violence as such:

Choices you take in life and you shouldn't be barbaric

There were a few more politicised reactions:

*How there is a lot of things going on around us that we don't know about
How different choices change events
Inequalities in the society*

But overall students reacted, predictably, at a more personal level related to their peers and to their own past and future decision-making experience.

Later questions in the questionnaire did ask the direct questions **'Did the game make you think about the gaps between rich and poor?'** and **'Did the game make you think about different religious beliefs?'** With regard to inequalities, the slight majority said it did not, yet with a minority saying that it did, with some very varied responses:

*Poor don't have much say
In number 2 the people's house that were being knocked down couldn't afford a new home
It showed how they were so desperate to keep what they had
It shows the problems people are facing every day*

We just say random things to people and don't realise how they'd feel

The game was clearly making some at least experience empathy with those facing problems.

With regard to religion, here there was more impact. Over twice as many students said that it did make them think about this than said not. This was interesting, as the game did not specifically mention religious identity for the community that was being attacked.

Because when we egged the people I was thinking what's wrong with them and their religion

Most responses here alluded to respect for beliefs and cultures:

*Because no matter where your from never judge someone if you don't know them
You should be open to different cultures and religion
Everyone's equal
Because it is not about their culture it is the way they act
Everyone's different, violence isn't right
Because different religions have different points of view
We are all the same and shouldn't be punished or discriminated for who we are and what we believe in.*

We can see here the mixture of respecting difference and saying we are all equal.

The other direct statement was related specifically to violent extremism, with the sentence completion request **'If I was making a game like this about preventing violent extremism, I would....'**. Here some simply said 'do the same'. Others went back to their technical concerns, such as: 'make some bold graphics'. 'remove the accents used', 'make it more interactive'. Others did relate to content:

*Show the peaceful way to protest
Get a deeper message across, e.g. racism
Include 2 ways the game could end, violence, peaceful
Make some questions and for people to answer to push them and to think*

Interestingly, while some students wanted greater realism, projecting everyday problems, 'show what gangs are like and the positions it puts people in', one thought violence should not be portrayed at all:

Eliminate violent parts and don't include anything to do with violence'

One girl in her focus group said the game should not go into particularly deeper issues related to religion or religious extremism 'as someone could get freaked out'. Yet the backing for the whole idea within the game of making choices and seeing the consequences of those choices would imply that a choice of violence or peace in

portraying extremism would be supported by most respondents, rather than simply preaching peace.

The focus group discussions in particular revealed that students were thinking about the reasons for protests or about the causes of crime or violence.

*If the law were more harsh, it would make people think. Should give people harsh sentences, it would make them think
We need more youth clubs, it would stop youth doing things
People want to make a mark.
Behind a gang, there's always one who influences*

They were happy for this to become part of citizenship lessons and to develop some ideas for their homework or project work.

3.3 Responses and use by teachers and Community Police Officers (CPOs)

Sometimes the student questionnaires were completed *after* the follow up discussion, which was led by a teacher or community police officer. If so, the content of that discussion might have influenced what the responses were. This section reports the teachers' and CPOs' own responses to the game as well as their interpretations of what students thought. In one session observed, the teacher dwelt very much on peer pressure and influences, and that may have driven some of the student answers. An interesting response from a teacher about what surprised her about the issues that students brought up was

Didn't seem to think that adult influences to discussions were particularly important

This is significant in concerns about radicalisation, where it may be a respected member of a community who is the major influence, rather than peers. This would have implications for any future development of the game (as discussed more below).

Teachers said that students also brought up issues of gaps between poor/rich, ignorance, protest, as well as bullying and peer pressure. While it was mentioned that some students thought the scenarios were not realistic, and that the language could be closer to 'street speak', teachers were positive about the game for their own use as educators:

*Engages pupils with interactive approach
An excellent tool to generate pupil views – stimulates discussion
This is definitely an interesting and engaging tool for looking at issues of this nature – a world away from 'Death by worksheet' or standard DVD productions
Lesson plans useful – ideal for cross-curricular themes.*

Teachers had some ideas on development with regard to dealing specifically with violent extremism:

Influences on young people – why some are led to hold extremist views and not others

Strategies to withstand negative influences

Focus on consequences/impact of extremism

Thought balloons to show that characters were thinking privately as well as what they were saying out loud, to emphasise the idea of peer pressure and situational inertia

One CPO very much liked the 'soft' approach of the game, whereby it did *not* talk directly about extremism. She thought this the best way forward for a Prevent approach, and that this was current thinking. Another CPO thought it linked to counter-terror – not directly, but that *'it's like gangs and guns, joining in, peer pressure, bullying, same thing really'*.

Clearly, the use and effectiveness of any game will link to the follow-up discussion, both immediately after the game has been played and any later curriculum work and homework. Contrasting styles were observed, relating to the teacher or CPO's concerns, to their preference for 'hard' or 'soft' approaches, as well as to their own pedagogic style. One CPO took a 'recap' approach, asking questions about what happened in the game, and how many students had burnt the schools down or had rebelled against the council. This led to moral messages about the 'right thing to do', but also to questions about action taken. She asked *'what frustrates us in our community?'*, and when the answer was *'rubbish'* this led to a discussion of what we could do, who is responsible for the rubbish, and who would listen to a protest. The question *'who's going to listen if there is damage or violence?'* did seem to evoke a genuine response by students of *'no-one'*, with one girl stating *'if you do something peacefully, you get your way'*. The CPO stated that councillors did listen to the voices of young people, that *'you are the citizens'*.

One teacher observed took a different approach, again starting from a recap question of what the game was about which evoked the response *'a group of people who are different'*. This led to discussion of how they were different (*dress, not showering, think they want to take over the place*), why one group holds different views and why there was hostility. The teacher picked up on a response about the media to ask what sort of media (*celebrities, the Sun, tabloids*) before moving on to the question of the reaction of the students to a leader, whether they following this leader and thus to questions of peer pressure and bullying. Students were encouraged to think about the strategies that bullies use, but also why people get involved in dodgy situations, with the students responding with *'boredom', 'curiosity', 'fear'* and, interestingly, *'family'*. After Scenario 2, she, like the CPO, moved into questions of how to get people to listen to you when there is a problem in the community, with students suggesting a peaceful protest, getting and giving information so that there is *'more of an edge'*, a strike and making a Facebook group. A particularly interesting discussion ended the session, with the teacher asking what can go wrong with a protest and what had happened at a recent one.

*A minority changes everything, they act differently
Some were angry, not getting what they want
[Teacher: Was there peer pressure?]
No, not really. It was lack of patience. They weren't getting anything, frustrated
It wasn't peer pressure.
Everyone could have acted in their own way
It could just take a split second for them to act
The protesters were mostly adults, not peer pressure*

It was significant that the students did not succumb to the teacher pressure to align everything with peer pressure! One teacher in fact raised the context of the student revolution in Iran that was currently happening. Pupils had an interesting reaction and fierce debate:

*I think they're doing it all wrong, all aggressive
But if they feel like if they're just signing petitions and stuff, nothing will happen
A group of protesters need people to take notice*

This enabled a return to discussion of protest in UK and what routes people do have. The teacher talked of how Gandhi and Martin Luther King were able to create change through peaceful means.

In the testing sessions, two teachers thought it would be very useful to have some form of feedback that students could fill in while playing the game – perhaps a handout given or, at pivotal decision points, a box with a limited word count appearing for them to jot down their reasoning or feelings. Whether this would make the whole experience too 'pedagogic' and worksheet-like would need to be considered. We did feel during observations of how the students played the game that they made the 'decisions' incredibly quickly, just as playing a fast computer game or texting. There was little apparent reflection as such, and something to slow this down might be considered. Yet on balance it would be important not to hinder the enjoyment and fun of the game. The actual decisions are less important than the fact that decisions are being made that have certain consequences. Nonetheless, collecting some written feedback immediately afterwards in order to trigger the discussion, and using two lessons instead of one, would help the reflective process

4. Conclusion

Overall, *Choices and Voices* can be evaluated as making a positive contribution to the Prevent strategy and to its goals of enabling young people to reflect on their actions and others' actions when faced with community tensions. The students were involved in the game, appreciated its interactive nature, liked the opportunity to make choices and see the consequences, and took part vigorously in the ensuing discussion. Clearly, without a follow up longitudinal study it is impossible to track whether the game would change or prevent future behaviours, but it did seem a very useful tool for discussion and surfacing young people's concerns about how they made choices in their lives. Not all liked the graphics, but this is a problem with

the sophisticated imagery they see everyday on the internet or television. It did not seem to detract too much from their involvement in the scenarios. A key and most significant comment was

It's better than the usual stuff we do at school.

There were inevitably some concerns or dilemmas. The first is realism. Even though (or perhaps because) this is a computer simulation, it is important that a game matches reality as far as is feasible. Students did get side-tracked into discussion of whether throwing eggs was realistic. *'One kid did arson. Should have just got him into a corner and hit him'*. The second scenario was seen as much more hard-hitting and realistic. It would be important for a game that is aimed to prevent violent extremism that it does not shy away from real violence in real situations (which students will have seen on television, if not in 'real life'). However, there would no doubt be some reaction from parents and community if there was yet more exposure to violence in the classroom. All that can be said here is that it is an issue for future development. Some of the theatre productions and DVDs designed for Prevent² do manage to tackle the violence 'offstage' without too much obvious blood.

The second issue is how the game is used afterwards and how teachers orchestrate a discussion. We noted some very distinct follow-up work, with teachers or CPOs sometimes clearly 'leading' the pupils into moral discussions and answers, other times such staff encouraging more open-ended debates. Our view is that the latter should prevail as far as possible, so that the game does not become seen as a substitute for other sorts of lessons in PSHE, and students becoming suspicious of it as yet another form of teacher moralising. This did not happen in the sessions we observed, but could be a danger, as was seen in the earlier comments from students about 'brainwashing'.

A third, linked, issue is the central focus of the post-play discussion. If this gets stuck on peer pressure, then it may not reach the question of adult authority and influence. A key question of whether violence is ever effective can be ignored, if the class is talking only of friends. We asked one class the direct question *'does violence work'*? and while most said no, quite a few said *'sometimes'*. There was no time to develop the question of when and where students think violence works, but this is an important social and political issue. While wanting to relate to students' personal experiences, teachers may need to move discussion on to tackle some critical and contentious areas nationally and globally.

This relates, finally, to the question of approaches to tackling extremism. Students – and teachers – often commented on the importance of 'knowing right from wrong'. Yet some pedagogic approaches with regard to challenging extremism and fundamentalism will focus more on comfort with ambiguity³, that is, being aware that most issues are not simple black and white, and that a range of responses or actions might be appropriate in different circumstances. Extremists do see the world

² See The Play House's *Tapstry*; or the DVD *Challenging Extremism* from GOT project

³ See Davies, L (2008) *Educating Against Extremism* Trentham books

in polarised ways, good/bad, friend/enemy, allowed/forbidden. It would be important that a game such as this did permit and encourage discussion of grey areas, so that thinking about right and wrong remains provisional, and a range of tools explored for making the distinctions – such as human rights as well as (competing) religious tenets.

Choices and Voices is nonetheless in a very good position to open up alternatives in thinking to students. In contrast to simply watching a DVD or theatre production, students are involved in decisions at every point, and this is perhaps one of the most innovative and useful aspects to it. Some drama productions are equally interactive, but they have the disadvantage of being a resource which is often 'one-off' and sometimes expensive to mount, relying on bringing in outsiders. While *Choices and* has been relatively costly and time-consuming in its conceptual and technical production, it now represents an accessible and flexible resource which can form part of any school's strategy for tackling violent extremism.

APPENDIX 1

CHOICES AND VOICES: FEEDBACK SHEET FOR STUDENTS

We would be grateful if you could fill in this short feedback sheet so we can think about the impact of the game.

A: Your ideas:

1. Please complete these sentences:

What I liked about this game was

What I disliked about this game was

This game made me think about

The bit in the game closest to my experience was

If I was telling someone else about this game, I would say

If I was making a game like this about preventing violent extremism, I would.....

2. Did the game make you think about the gaps between rich and poor?
Yes No If yes, how?

3. Did the game make you think about different religious beliefs?
Yes No If yes, how?.....

B: About You:

4. Please give your age.....

5. Please tick: Male Female

6. Please give your background by putting a tick in the appropriate box:

White	Mixed	Black or Black British
British	White and Black Caribbean	Caribbean

Irish	White and Black African	African
Any other White background	White and Asian	Any other Black background
Any other mixed background: please say		
Asian or Asian British	Other Ethnic groups	Not Stated
Indian	Chinese	
Pakistani	Any other ethnic group	I don't wish to say my ethnic group
Bangladeshi	Any other Asian background	

Thank you very much for your help.

APPENDIX 2

CHOICES AND VOICES: FEEDBACK SHEET FOR TEACHERS

We would be grateful if you could fill in this short feedback sheet so we can evaluate the impact of the game.

1. School.....
2. Date and length of lesson.....
3. Age range of students.....
- 4.. As soon as possible after the lesson, please note down:
 - What issues the students brought up
(Did these issues include religious beliefs? Gaps between rich and poor?)

 - What surprised you about the issues that they brought up?

 - Whether there was a debate or argument among the students about particular issues
5. If you were telling another teacher about the game, what would you say?

6. If you were to write a game about preventing violent extremism, what would it contain?

7. Any other comments on the game?

Many thanks for your help

Centre for International Education and Research, University of Birmingham