

Suggestions for How Teachers Can Protect Students in Connection with the 22 July Terror Trial in Oslo, 2012

- Reflections on protection and involvement

By Magne Raundalen¹, Jon-Håkon Schultz² and Åse Langballe²

¹Center for Crisis Psychology, Bergen, Norway

²Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies

This document was circulated to Norwegian schools prior to the terror trial in April 2012, by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. Another document was sent out prior to school starting in August 2001. These two documents provided principles for a national strategy on classroom communication about the 22 July terror attack in Norwegian schools. This strategy is a part of, what in these documents are defined as, Educational First Aid in Crisis. The target group for the preventive measures is all students that are indirectly affected through exposure to high-intensity media coverage of the terror attack.

Students need help understanding what is happening during the trial and information on how they can protect themselves from strong emotions. The schools should plan a pedagogical approach for this.

We will be facing a long trial concerning terror and mass murder that will be receiving unprecedented media coverage in Norwegian legal history. We will be receiving more detailed and magnified insight into very grotesque and frightening details. On some level or other, all of us, almost regardless of age, will be involved in what is happening in the courtroom.

The reflections we are presenting here are primarily meant as suggestions and inspiration for teachers at the intermediate and lower secondary levels of education. In the second half of this article, we will present specific suggestions on how we can talk about the trial and prepare the students.

A different point of departure than last summer

In many ways we have a better point of departure now, for both adults and children, compared with the shock that came from out of the blue in the middle of summer vacation on 22 July 2011. We now are all familiar with it. We have been prepared through broad coverage of the defence counsels' opinions, debates on the expert reports, and the detailed indictment that the Director General of Public Prosecutions has issued. We recommend that individual teachers who will be orienting and guiding students at different ages to read the Director General of

Public Prosecutions' indictment. We do not mean that the whole indictment should be read aloud to the students, but it is the actual basis for the trial, and it can, therefore, be useful background information for the teachers, perhaps primarily at the upper secondary school level.

We have previously suggested that teachers use direct language by referring to the bomb at the Government Complex as the *terrorist bombing* and what happened at Utøya as the *mass murder*. Each teacher must decide individually how they choose to refer to the perpetrator.

A therapeutic role and a pedagogical role

When we previously wrote about orienting students to crises and disasters that have received enormous media coverage, such as the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the tsunami in 2004/5, the nuclear disaster in Japan last year, and other crises, we have described our adult role as two-fold: the therapeutic role and the pedagogical role.

The therapeutic role means that the topics and information we choose to present should have a calming effect on those who may become anxious when thinking about the incident. We have referred to these “pegs” as adult help so that the children can clear their minds. Children need two pegs: one where they can hang unnecessary fears and one where they can hang disturbing confusion. The therapeutic perspective is more relevant the younger the student.

The pedagogical perspective for this trial concerns terrorism, crime and punishment, the judicial system, compensation, and, most importantly, how the health authorities have taken action to provide support and help those who have to continue on with their grief and their traumas. The actual media coverage and association with the immigration debate have many pedagogical angles, especially in dialogue with older students.

Creating predictability

The fact that there is a great deal of variation in students' detailed knowledge about 22 July is a challenge. They will follow the trial with different levels of interest. Some will grasp all the details, others will actively shield themselves, while others will not be particularly interested. We can look upon it as a pedagogical task to bring the students together to form a common knowledge base so that the students can move on together. We therefore recommend that a defined educational framework is established for when and how the trial should be brought into the classroom, so that it is predictable. For example, the Super Nytt news program for children can be shown at fixed times. Perhaps once or twice a week, and then there can be summarising discussions on what was revealed in the media over the last few days.

Instruct the students on how they can protect themselves

It is also important to instruct the students on how they can protect themselves against frightening details by limiting news from the Internet, newspapers, radio and TV, in order to not be overwhelmed by the enormous focus on the terrorist bombing and mass murder. It will also be necessary then to inform them why limiting consumption might be wise: "because you may easily become anxious, get frightened by the details and think a lot about it, and perhaps you will have difficulties sleeping, and this may affect your level of concentration at school".

We have research that shows that preparing to protect yourself is preferable to "just playing it by ear". Those who are prepared and have a strategy for facing what is coming find that their memory and concentration are affected much less, and, therefore, are better able to learn at school.

Below we have made some specific suggestions on how you can help compile the students' knowledge of the trial as a teacher, so that they are prepared to the greatest possible extent. The example below has been written out in full to provide a specific suggestion for teachers at the intermediate and lower secondary school levels. But it will be you as the teacher, together with your colleagues, who must decide on how you will open the doors for a discussion.

How to prepare the students for the trial – a specific suggestion

Children struggle with the same question as adults. They often ask more directly: "Why did he do it?" The authors have experience answering children from school age and upwards precisely in response to their direct questions. Our point of departure for answering has been the fact that he, the perpetrator, lived life as a normal young Norwegian. This is how we would start:

He became very concerned about what he felt was too many refugees coming into Norway. He disagreed strongly with Gro Harlem Brundtland, who was the Prime Minister for the Labour Party over 20 years ago, and with Jens Stoltenberg, who is the current Prime Minister for the Labour Party. He accused them of letting too many Muslims into the country. He also sought contact with political circles to find someone who shared his views, but left these circles over time because they did not feel as strongly as he did about how dangerous the Muslims were.

Everyone in Norway is entitled to their own opinions and the perpetrator was always searching the Internet to find someone who agreed with him. A number of the individuals he found on the Internet wrote that Norway and Europe were in a kind of war. We had to get even with the Muslims, get them out and close our borders, because the Muslims wanted to take over Norway and Europe. They had a plan to turn us all into a new nation called Eurabia. These ideas are no longer completely normal, at least not if you believe a real war is necessary in order to stop immigration, and these ideas have become "error ideas". However, you are allowed to have such ideas, to express them, and to write them. This is what is known as freedom of speech. Those who had the most error ideas felt that we had to prepare ourselves for war and violence in order to save Norway and the rest of Europe. We now know a lot about what the perpetrator was thinking, because he wrote a book of several hundred pages which he published on the Internet the day he blew up the Government Complex and carried out the mass murders on Utøya. After we read what he wrote, we understand that his error ideas were totally out of perspective.

The experts

The whole country is preparing for the trial. A lot has been written about the two doctors the court sent to the prison to have many conversations with the perpetrator in order to find out why he did it. These two doctors are referred to as experts, and this means that they are doctors and have studied what we call thinking diseases for many years. The experts studied medicine at a university first and learned a lot about diseases of the body, and then they worked many years at psychiatric hospitals and learned a lot about diseases of the mind, what we choose to call "thought diseases". It is more difficult to find out about thought

diseases than diseases of the body. Your doctor can tell you with absolute certainty if you have pneumonia, but many people believe that experts cannot say with absolute certainty whether the perpetrator had or has a thought disease.

Paranoid schizophrenia

The name of the thought disease that the two appointed experts first found that the perpetrator had, and has, is called paranoid schizophrenia. A person who acts based on this thought disease does not know what he is doing. It is the disease that is controlling the person's thoughts and horrible actions. The experts also have a special name for this and it is called insane. This means that we cannot regard him as normal and healthy that he knew what he was doing; he was schizophrenic and sick. In Norwegian law, people who are sick and insane cannot be sentenced to imprisonment. They must be cared for when they have carried out serious actions and may possibly do so again, or when they are not able to take care of themselves, and they have to stay in the hospital. There are very few people who have such serious thought diseases, and most of them get good help in the hospital.

Let us imagine that all our thoughts, about ourselves, about who we are, about Norway and politics and PM Stoltenberg, mommy, daddy, school, the past and the future – are a nice and complete puzzle comprised of many pieces inside our world of thought. We have a normal view of ourselves and a normal perception of what others think of us. A thought disease may be like all the pieces falling into a single pile and the sick person putting them back together wherever he made them fit, and not where the pieces belonged. Some people feel that the perpetrator is controlled by mistaken thoughts now, he has painted a picture of himself, created his own uniform, become a warrior who has to go out to bomb and kill, and he thinks he will become the king of the Norwegian people.

Insane

As you probably have understood from the news, there were many people who knew about thought diseases who wanted to discuss whether the perpetrator should go to prison because he was sane and did not have a thought disease – or whether he should remain in the hospital because he was insane and did not know what he was doing. In the end there was so much doubt about the perpetrator's sanity that the court decided to find two new experts who would speak to him and observe him. The two new experts were to give their opinions and state whether they agreed or disagreed with the other experts. This is why there is so much talk about this in the trial. It is the court who will decide whether he will be imprisoned or locked up in a hospital. Regardless, he will be locked up and looked after, most likely for the rest of his life.

What does the perpetrator himself think?

The perpetrator has claimed all along that he is sane and knew what he was doing. He planned everything in detail, and tricked the youths on Utøya in a horrible way by dressing up as a policeman and saying that he would protect them. Nevertheless, you can say that it was completely sick what he did and what he writes and says seems absolutely sick. We already know that normal people can also do absolutely sick things. Therefore it will be up to the experts and the court to determine whether the perpetrator has a mental illness that means that he will need to be taken care of in a hospital in the future.

What now?

What we have written is about understanding why he did it. When we struggle to understand and explain horrible things, it can almost seem as though we are making excuses for horrible things. This is not how it is. Therefore it is important to differentiate between wanting to understand and the fact that the horrible actions do absolutely not become less horrible because we understand more.

The most important things

It is important that we do not spend more time than necessary on these questions and that we gradually try to put them behind us and carry on with normal things in our lives. The most important thing in the future for all of us is that those who were injured receive our help, support and respect, and that the same applies to all of those who are grieving over the great loss of human life. Many of those who were not physically injured when they were in the Government Complex or on Utøya must also be given help and support to get over their horrible memories and to get on with their lives at school, their studies or their jobs.

More useful information on the trial can be found on the Oslo Courthouse's website:
www.domstol.no/22-7

Magne Raundalen	Child psychologist at the Center for Crisis Psychology in Bergen, Norway.
Jon-Håkon Schultz	Educational psychologist and researcher at the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies.
Åse Langballe	Educational psychologist and researcher at the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies.

Norwegian Centre for Violence
and Traumatic Stress Studies

post address: Pb 181 Nydalen, 0409 Oslo
www.nkvts.no

