**To show or not to show? Watching ‘Adolescence’ in schools**

The miniseries Adolescence first aired on Netflix on March 13, 2025 and dramatically depicts the murder of a young woman, ‘Katie’. The series has now been made available free to schools, and some colleagues have suggested that it should be shown as part of RSHE / PSHE lessons. As a PSHE teacher, school leader, and Advisor with more than 45 years of experience, I would urge against showing Adolescence to a general audience in school, although it is an exceptional drama, and may be of interest to staff, parents and other stakeholders.

Some concerns include:

What would we like young people to take from ‘Adolescence’, apart from the obvious distress that youth violence causes friends and family? Educators must help create and be part of the solution, not just highlight the problems. Adolescence is an excellent drama, but it is not designed as a teaching resource. We should explore other educational resources better suited to addressing these topics, which are more school-appropriate and pedagogically sound.

The drama explores sensitive topics such as cyberbullying, revenge porn, toxic online influences, and violence, which may be emotionally challenging or inappropriate for younger or more vulnerable students. The series includes scenes of violence and references to sexual content and strong language, which could be upsetting or unsuitable in a school environment.

There will inevitably be some young people (and adults) who have been significantly affected by knife crime and/or adolescent death, and this would need to be managed very carefully. Victims and survivors could be retraumatised, silenced, targeted, or alienated if the content is shown without skilled facilitation.

Adolescence says almost nothing about girls and young women. What are they supposed to do with it? Research consistently shows that shame—and fear-based messaging is ineffective and counterproductive. It may alienate those who most need support rather than bring about self-reflection or change. The series could also normalise radicalisation rather than prevent it.

Some online conversations have already argued that ‘Katie’ deserved to be harmed and that she brought the violence upon herself, or that ‘Jamie’ was justified in his anger as a result of her comments and rejection. This perspective is inherently misogynistic, hypocritical and contradictory.

The series touches on online radicalisation and ‘toxic masculinity’ (not always a helpful phrase), but the nuances and complexities of these issues might be oversimplified or misinterpreted. The classroom may not allow in-depth and individualised discussions, which are needed to process the themes and ensure students understand the intended messages. Few staff have had appropriate or adequate training to manage highly sensitive discussions. Schools are already under immense pressure from competing demands, resourcing, and time. After this content, they would almost certainly have to manage disclosures, emotional distress, defensive and triggered responses, and controversial discussions. This is neither fair nor safe.

Using emojis as codes is extremely niche and changes fast, but is presented as common. Teachers may unintentionally appear out of touch or even laughable by taking these fictional representations at face value. When adults react strongly to misunderstood or exaggerated online behaviour, they risk becoming figures of ridicule, undermining their credibility and authority.

As Adolescence is rated as 15, it should not be shown to younger students, which presumably means that some students in Year 10 can watch it, and others can't? Parents will have different opinions on the appropriateness of such mature content being shown in schools, leading to potential conflicts and objections.

The ambiguity (which makes for good adult drama) and nuance (which may be lost on many young people) are unlikely to be age-appropriate simply because it depicts characters of school age, which does not make it suitable for that audience.

The series was not made for children and young people, so there may be unfortunate/ inappropriate images or consequences from discussions. The series depicts an extreme case of violence, which might not be representative of the everyday challenges and issues faced by most adolescents. Teenagers may react with cynicism or mockery, especially if they perceive the presentation as one where adults attempt to lecture them on social issues.

There are some small holes in the plot line (how did the police have a child’s school reports by 7 am from an assault committed after 10 pm the previous evening?) There’s also a danger that young people might perceive that Jamie was only caught because of CCTV, so the unintended consequence might be ‘avoid CCTV and you might not get caught’.

Some of the images and dialogue in episode two (in the secondary school) are not helpful models to show young people, and schools are unlikely to have five hours of curriculum time into which this can easily be shoehorned.

A key theme in Adolescence is that teachers and educators disengage from meaningful learning by simply showing videos instead of actively teaching. By asking schools to show this video as a national resource with no additional support, the government risks mirroring and reinforcing the exact critique in the drama. Is forcing young people to watch something that they may not want to see appropriate?

Although we have recently emerged from a global pandemic, schools are still not adequately supported to provide theory-driven, evidence-informed approaches that are likely to produce health benefits for children and young people. The statutory components of R(S)HE should be provided as part of a wider programme of PSHE education. As the current statutory guidance reminds us, when well taught, this can improve the physical health and emotional well-being of pupils and contribute to learning and attainment across the curriculum

I welcome any government support for PSHE, which has been historically neglected and underfunded. Learning in PSHE should encourage and enable children to live non-violent, compassionate, supportive, positive lives, rather than show depictions of murder, violence, abuse, and trauma as an approach to deterrence.

It would be of greater benefit to schools if the DfE improved the statutory expectations to note the importance of skill acquisition and development in addition to the knowledge and attributes already identified, and encouraged the development of theory-driven, evidence-informed approaches to learning and teaching and invested adequately in staff CPD.

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