# DARE
### Depolarisation Activism for Resilient Europe

# HEALTHY CONFLICT & CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE CLASSROOM
## Educators' Guide to Depolarisation

## Co-funded by
## the European Union

# Healthy Conflict & Constructive Dialogue Classroom

## Educators' Guide to Depolarisation

---

## Author

Dr. Maja Nenadovic

Co-founder of the Croatian Education and Development Network for the Evolution of Communication - HERMES

*This guide is inspired by "Across Divides - Training Workshops for Depolarising Communication", a methodology that was developed by Dr. Maja Nenadovic and tested in a series of workshops and dialogues with both individuals using discriminatory and hate speech rhetoric, as well as with people targeted by it.*

## Acknowledgments

## About the DARE project

The 'DARE - Depolarisation Activism for Resilient Europe' project is a strategic partnership between five civil society organisations from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Germany, Serbia and Sweden. It was created to inspire a critical learning space and youth-led and action-oriented dialogue about various contemporary challenges such as polarisation, radicalisation, mental health, human rights violations. The DARE educational materials seek to strengthen active citizenship and European values and promote and amplify youth voices and civic engagement.

For more information, please visit the project website: www.depolarisation.eu

Croatian Education and Development Network for the Evolution of Communication - HERMES Croatia

Kreisau-Initiative e. V. Germany

Open Communication Serbia

TRANSFORM Sweden

Western Balkans Network Bosnia-Herzegovina

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, we have heard the word 'polarisation' mentioned with increased frequency. An argument could be made that polarisation is not a new phenomenon and that political opposition and division among groups with differing views is as old as politics itself. To cite Anne Applebaum,

> "Unity is an anomaly. Polarization is normal. Skepticism about liberal democracy is also normal. And the appeal of authoritarianism is eternal."[1]

Even though polarisation is not new, we are nonetheless faced with its current amplification in a world that is troubled by increasing and protracted uncertainty. This uncertainty is caused by, to just name a few factors, the pandemic, inflation, the war in Ukraine, and the increasingly frequent and scary demonstrations of the realities of climate change. Polarisation's amplification is further exacerbated by the rise of social media as the leading source of people's media consumption. Finally, the evolution of digital technology is a contributing factor in fuelling 'information disorder'[2] because it enables the creation and "viral spread of disinformation and misinformation."[3]

Why is this status quo a cause for concern? The DARE project seeks to address the challenges caused by the presence of polarisation in Europe, the most extreme form of which is radicalisation, coupled with the absence of youth voices, participation and agency in our current democratic systems. Research indicates that youth in Europe have become disillusioned with democracy and that their apathy and lack of participation are driven by this loss of faith in the system.[4] Moreover, this past decade has also witnessed a stalled process of enlargement and accession of new (Western Balkans) members to the European Union, along with the "democratic backsliding"[5] and illiberal tendencies in some of its member states (e.g. Hungary, Poland).

[1] Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*, 2020, p.56
[2] Council of Europe report defines information disorder as 'information pollution' of "three different types: mis-, dis- and mal-information. The differences between these three types of information are described using the dimensions of harm or falseness:
- Mis-information is when false information is shared, but no harm is meant.
- Dis-information is when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm.
- Mal-information is when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere."
For more information, see: Council of Europe, "Information Disorder", at:
www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/information-disorder (Accessed: December 10, 2022)
[3] Julie Posetti, "Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training", UNESCO publication, at: https://en.unesco.org/node/296052 (Accessed: December 10, 2022)
[4] For more information, see the 2020 report from the Centre for the Future of Democracy at the University of Cambridge research, summarized at: www.cam.ac.uk/stories/youthanddemocracy . For the full report, see: www.cam.ac.uk/system/files/youth_and_satisfaction_with_democracy.pdf (Accessed: December 11, 2022)
[5] See report on democratic backsliding in Europe by Staffan I. Lindberg, "The Nature of Democratic Backsliding in Europe," Carnegie Europe, July 24, 2018, at:
https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/07/24/nature-of-democratic-backsliding-in-europe-pub-76868 (Accessed: December 11, 2022)

The continuing presence of anti-European, anti-systemic and increasingly populist political parties and their voices in Europe is an additional legitimacy and stability threat.[6]

The worrisome elements described previously often spill over into schools and classrooms because we are all susceptible to the information pollution and divisions experienced in our societies. This can create new challenges in the classroom, raising questions on how to address the problem of fake news, political polarisation or extremist ideas and the resulting class dynamics and tension among students. This guide seeks to enhance teachers' and youth workers' skills in addressing and successfully engaging with polarising topics and views. It approaches conflict as an interpersonal and social inevitability, while focusing on our own agency in transforming disagreement and diversity of views into constructive engagement.

The guide is structured as follows: the next section de/constructs the phenomenon of **polarisation**, exploring its underlying psychology and sociology. It also introduces the concepts of **'healthy conflict'** and **'constructive dialogue'** as a positive way of redirecting polarisation towards deliberation and critical thinking. This is followed by an overview of the principles underpinning depolarisation efforts as well as an overview of the **learning goals** and benefits that can be gained from improving one's healthy conflict skills. A distinct section provides a brief **overview of all the educational materials** produced over the course of the DARE project, to facilitate their selection and use by educators. The Guide's final section contains several **activities and exercises** that revolve around building youth and adult learners' skills in depolarisation of communication (re/defining key concepts, de/constructing beliefs, listening).

We hope that educators and youth workers using this Guide will be more confident to engage with opposing or polarising views in their classroom or non-formal educational workshops, and that they will have an increased ability to adequately address difficult conversations or discussions on controversial topics. The Guide was designed to have a high transferability potential, as the activities and exercises invite each educator to draw on examples and current polarising topics from their own country, to contextualize the application of the material in a relevant and timely way.

[6] See: Laura Silver, "Populists in Europe — especially those on the right — have increased their vote shares in recent elections," Pew Research Center, October 06, 2022, at: www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/10/06/populists-in-europe-especially-those-on-the-right-have-increased-their-vote-shares-in-recent-elections/ (Accessed: December 11, 2022)

# POLARISATION

When we hear the word 'polarisation', different associations come to mind: disagreement, opposing or mutually exclusive perspectives and even distrust or fear. For many, it is the demonstration of two extremes at the opposite ends loudly expressing their views, while the moderate, uncertain majority is caught in the crossfire, silent, in the middle. Polarisation is uncomfortable and distressing because it spells out a warning – that we are at a critical point and that the passionate disagreement between us may lead to much bigger conflict between us down the line if left unaddressed. When faced with situations in which people express views opposite to their own, some people argue for their perspective, while others feel the need to withdraw from the conversation.

What are some issues that have fuelled high polarisation in the recent past? Immigration, vaccination, reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights are some of the topics that divide people into 'in favor' versus 'against' camps; climate change and COVID-19 are examples of issues that are divisive because some people believe they are, in fact, real, while others deny their existence. Why is polarisation problematic? In what way does it affect individuals, groups and society?

Polarisation, in part, occurs owing to a set of interrelated factors. The '**us versus them**' dynamic is closely connected to the natural human tendency to identify with members of own group, as opposed to with those perceived as belonging to another group. In social psychology, the concepts of '**ingroup**' and '**outgroup**' illustrate this identification with members of our nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, or political affiliation (i.e. our ingroup), and the absence of identification with those who do not share these identity elements (i.e. the outgroup), and it is related to social phenomena such as racism, sexism, nationalism, groupthink.[7] This need to belong to a group carries emotional benefits such as a sense of pride and self-esteem and it "helps us make sense of the world around us."[8]

Next to our group belonging and affiliation stemming from various identity markers, we humans are also susceptible to a series of cognitive biases – "systematic errors in thinking that occur when people are processing and interpreting information in the world around them and affect the decisions and judgments we make."[9] While many of these cognitive biases play a role

[7] Itamar Shatz, "Ingroups and Outgroups: How Social Identity Influences People," Effectiviology, at: https://effectiviology.com/ingroup-outgroup/ (Accessed: November 11, 2022).
[8] Alison Goldsworthy, Laura Osborne and Alexandra Chesterfield, *Poles Apart: Why People Turn Against Each Other, and How to Bring Them Together*, Penguin Random House, 2021, p.4-5
[9] Kendra Cherry, "What is Cognitive Bias?" VeryWellMind, at: www.verywellmind.com/what-is-a-cognitive-bias-2794963 (Accessed: November 11, 2022)

in polarisation dynamics, one that is particularly powerful is **confirmation bias** because it "causes people to search for, favour, interpret, and recall information in a way that confirms their pre-existing beliefs."[10] Why is this a problem? Because it entrenches polarised views, making people susceptible to 'sticking to their guns' rather than open to listening to, or understanding another perspective. Confirmation bias directly relates to the **backfire effect** – the curious cognitive bias that ensures that when faced with evidence, data, statistics that challenge their beliefs and opinions, instead of adjusting their beliefs, people "reject this evidence, and strengthen their support for their original stance."[11] The backfire effect explains why when you argue with someone about their beliefs, and you try to present them with research or data that you would expect their rational and logical minds to hear, what happens instead is the irrational side taking over.

The final set of factors we want to mention that amplify polarisation and aggravate relations between individuals and groups with differing views are related to our tendency to surround ourselves with information, sources and like-minded people that confirm our views. So-called '**echo chambers**' are "environments where a person only encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own" and as such, they can misinform and distort a person's perspective.[12] These echo chambers exist both in our real lives, but also online, where algorithms track our behaviour and preferences and over time ensure that we are exposed only to content we like. We end up in a '**filter bubble**' - receiving only information that we have expressed an interest in and being isolated from the new, the different, or the opposite of what we like or agree with.[13] As Justin Lee explains,

> "If you don't agree with my politics, my identity or my view of the world, I can easily block you or push you away and spend more time with the social circles who affirm what I already believe. The constant stream of approval is intoxicating and addictive. And we don't just get it on social media. We choose news sources, places of worship, and even forms of entertainment that affirm our existing views and demonize those people out there. Before we know it,

[10] Itamar Shatz, "The Confirmation Bias: Why People See What They Want to See," Effectiviology, at: https://effectiviology.com/confirmation-bias/ (Accessed: November 11, 2022).
[11] Itamar Shatz, "The Backfire Effect: Why Facts Don't Always Change Minds," Effectiviology, at: https://effectiviology.com/backfire-effect-facts-dont-change-minds/ (Accessed: November 14, 2022).
[12] Article and short animation about echo chambers, in: "Digital Media Literacy: What is an Echo Chamber?", at: https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/digital-media-literacy/what-is-an-echo-chamber/1/ (Accessed: November 14, 2022)
[13] Article and short animation about filter bubbles, in: "Digital Media Literacy: How Filter Bubbles Isolate You", at: https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/digital-media-literacy/how-filter-bubbles-isolate-you/1/ (Accessed: November 14, 2022)

we're living in echo chambers where we hear the same
perspectives over and over and over, all of us reinforcing
one another in the sense that we are the chosen ones,
we are the "good guys", and the people out there who
would oppose us are the enemy."[14]

This state of affairs becomes all the more problematic when we learn that "research has repeatedly shown that if a group of like-minded people are put in a room together and allowed to discuss an issue where they all tend to lean in the same direction, their constant affirmation of one another's views can cause the group as a whole to become more extreme.''[15]

In conclusion, there are a lot of social psychological factors, cognitive biases, digital tech and social media realities that contribute to polarisation and that are not, so to speak, working in our favor. How can we challenge these polarisation-driving and enabling factors and disarm or at least neutralize their effects? We address this topic next.

[14] Justin Lee, *Talking Across the Divide: How to Communicate with People You Disagree With and Maybe Even Change the World,* Penguin Random House: New York, 2018, p.7-8
[15] Ibid. p.17

# HEALTHY CONFLICT & CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

Much of our frustration and concern about polarisation stems from an aversion to conflict. According to the Collins dictionary, "conflict is a serious disagreement and argument about something important."[16] Situations of conflict cause people's stress levels to rise, and in such a state of heightened emotions, people may react in different ways:

- **Fight** = when having very strong feelings about the topic of disagreement, or being triggered by something that was stated, we might feel compelled to stand our ground and defend our position, verbally (or even physically) pushing back against the perceived attack on our values, attitudes or beliefs;
- **Flight** = sometimes, we have a hard time experiencing confrontation or opposition to our opinions and beliefs, so when such a situation occurs, we are compelled to withdraw from the argument. We might remove ourselves physically from the situation, or attempt to change the topic. Frequently, we might hide our true opinion and comply with the dominant party, to avoid the conflict (and its escalation);
- **Freeze** = this response occurs when we experience a sense of shock that causes us to process information at a slower rate than usual. For example, when confronted with a statement we strongly disagree with that leaves us tongue-tied, only to have our mind deliver what would have been a perfect response – a while later, after the incident.[17]

We all experience these different responses, depending on the conflict situation and how we respond to it – which is, in turn, shaped by our personalities, previous experiences, and our values, attitudes, and beliefs. It is also important to note that in our society, in public discourse we often witness the most polarising response, i.e. verbal fighting – passionate disagreement and heated debate between opposing viewpoints. On social media, these discussions turn even more volatile, where under the cloak of anonymity people may abandon any semblance of civility, issuing insults and ad hominem attacks on those who disagree with them, sometimes even going as far as descending into hate speech.

One response to conflict that we are not so used to witnessing in public discourse is one of calm confidence and a respectful invitation to engage in a conversation about each other's differences. In this section, we explore the concepts of 'healthy conflict' and 'constructive dialogue' as positive ways of redirecting polarisation towards deliberation, in the process transforming conflict into an opportunity for building and exercising critical thinking.

---

[16] https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/conflict
[17] Information below adapted from: Kathleen Kaut, "Fight, Flight or Freeze…Conflict Responses Are Very Personal", Mediate.com, July 30, 2021, at: https://mediate.com/fight-flight-or-freeze-conflict-responses-are-very-personal/ (Accessed: November 25, 2022). Some suggest that there is a fourth response to a stressful situation - "fawning", described as "bending over backward to please someone, not to be nice or considerate but rather as a response rooted in trauma." See: Perpetua Neo, "Fawning: The Fourth Trauma Response After Fight, Flight, Freeze", *MindBodyGreen*, at: www.mindbodygreen.com/articles/the-fight-flight-freeze-fawn-trauma-responses (Accessed: Mpvember 26, 2022).

**Healthy conflict** is best described as a situation "where different views can be aired, debated and resolved" and it should be considered a vital element found "at the core of a modern democracy".[18] Democratic values like freedom of religion, thought, expression, speech — all embody the element of respecting and honoring diversity as one of the key characteristics of our modern societies and, in the end, of the human condition. Conflict is inevitable, but how we respond to it is what makes all the difference in whether its effects will be destructive, or constructive. Healthy conflict requires open-mindedness, listening to other viewpoints and a dose of trust that you can express your own views and be met with a similar level of respect and courtesy that you are willing to extend to your counterpart. It is also a recognition that keeping your grievances pent up and shoving them under the carpet will eventually lead to a lot of resentment, which is a recipe for an explosive reaction and conflict escalation down the line. Facing conflict openly makes us vulnerable as our beliefs, attitudes and values may come under scrutiny and attack. At the same time, we build our resilience by intentionally entering situations of discomfort, calmly engaging with views and statements we might find challenging or worrisome.

**Constructive dialogue** seeks to promote understanding, resolve conflicts, and engage in a cooperative and co-creative search for solutions to various problems. It is characterized by active listening, open-mindedness, mutual respect and a willingness to consider different perspectives. Within the context of addressing polarisation, constructive dialogue seeks to build a shared understanding and reach mutually beneficial outcomes, rather than simply winning an argument or imposing one's own views on others. In the words of the Constructive Dialogue Institute, this form of communication "may lead people to enrich their own perspective or worldview, clarify their differences, discover common ground, or even create the possibility of future collaborative action that may have previously seemed impossible."[19]

In what way do healthy conflict and constructive dialogue address polarisation and hold the potential to neutralize its harms? Here are some examples:
- Polarisation hinders progress as it can lead to a lack of cooperation and compromise, making it difficult for people to come together forward and collectively address important issues. ⟶ Healthy conflict and constructive dialogue do precisely the opposite — they foster cooperation and compromise, and bring people together in addressing issues of mutual concern.

[18] Alison Goldsworthy, Laura Osborne and Alexandra Chesterfield, Poles Apart: Why People Turn Against Each Other, and How to Bring Them Together, Penguin Random House, 2021, p.4
[19] Constructive Dialogue Institute, at: https://constructivedialogue.org/what-is-constructive-dialogue (Accessed: November 25, 2022). For many resources on constructive dialogue, see: https://constructivedialogue.org/resources

- Polarisation increases tension and conflict and fuels an environment of distrust and animosity. ⟶ Healthy conflict and constructive dialogue decrease tension and seek to resolve conflict by embracing the discomfort of engaging in conversation with people who may hold views, attitudes and beliefs opposite to our own. In the process, respect and even trust may be built between the two sides engaged in dialogue.
- Polarisation limits understanding because when people are locked in a polarised disagreement, they are more likely to strive for 'winning the argument' and less likely to listen to and understand others' perspectives, making it harder to find common ground and work towards solutions. ⟶ In healthy conflict and constructive dialogue situations, the setting is designed to inspire the search for common ground, while also deepening everyone's understanding of the complex problems and situations that are being discussed.

Depolarising communication, in other words, requires making a deliberate effort to understand different perspectives and points of view, while also suspending one's judgment and biases as much as possible.

Before we explore different principles and learning goals underpinning depolarisation of communication, we need to make a distinction between debate and dialogue. As Lisa Schirch and David Campt write, "Dialogue requires a willingness to learn from those who believe differently."[20] Their table comparing characteristics between debate and dialogue is a useful explanation of the difference between the two modes of communication.[21] (see next page)

Here we need to emphasize the difference between formalized debate and the colloquial use of the term when applied to 'real life' situations of disagreement on issues. Formalized debate is a structured, often extracurricular educational activity that is characterized by a specific format, rules and guidelines. It is carried out in academic or competitive (tournament) settings, with participants presenting arguments and counter-arguments, delivering speeches within a specified time limit, and are judged by a professional debate adjudicator who applies a predetermined set of criteria for evaluation. Formalized debate is a great way of building one's argumentation, critical thinking and public speaking skills. Debate in real life, i.e. outside of competitive, formally adjudicated settings, is an informal discussion in which people exchange opinions.

[18] Alison Goldsworthy, Laura Osborne and Alexandra Chesterfield, Poles Apart: Why People Turn Against Each Other, and How to Bring Them Together, Penguin Random House, 2021, p.4
[19] Constructive Dialogue Institute, at: https://constructivedialogue.org/what-is-constructive-dialogue (Accessed: November 25, 2022). For many resources on constructive dialogue, see: https://constructivedialogue.org/resources
[20] Lisa Schirch & David Campt, The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects, Good Books: New York, 2007, p. 10
[21] Ibid. p.9

## HEALTHY CONFLICT & CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE (continued)

| DEBATE | DIALOGUE |
|---|---|
| The goal is to "win" the argument by affirming one's own views and discrediting other views. | The goal is to understand different perspectives and learn about other views. |
| People listen to others to find flaws in their arguments. | People listen to others to understand how their experiences shape their beliefs. |
| People critique the experiences of others as distorted and invalid. | People accept the experiences of others as real and valid. |
| People appear to be determined not to change their own views on the issue. | People appear to be somewhat open to expanding their understanding of the issue. |
| People speak based on assumptions made about others' positions and motivations. | People speak primarily from their own understanding and experience. |
| People oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong. | People work together towards common understanding. |
| Strong emotions like anger are often used to intimidate the other side. | Strong emotions like anger and sadness are appropriate when they convey the intensity of an experience or belief. |

Source: Lisa Schirch & David Campt, The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects
(note: the comparison here is between 'real life' debate and dialogue characteristics

The core difference between formalized and 'real life' debate is the existence (and absence) of formal criteria, rules or guidelines, and an arbiter or adjudicator to assess, at the end of the conversation, whose arguments were stronger, whose speeches better structured and more persuasive. This is why debate 'in real life' is not always a productive or constructive way of communicating differences of opinion or diverging perspectives. For this reason, the different debate tools and activities suggested in the activities and exercises later in this guide - are applied in the service of depolarising communication. They seek to intentionally overcome binary thinking (black vs. white, right vs. wrong) and inspire learners to search for a third (fourth, fifth, alternative) perspectives.

# DEPOLARISATION: LEARNING GOALS

The development of the 'depolarisation of communication' activities and exercises that are included in this guide was in part inspired by Tony Wagner's seminal book "The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach The New Survival Skills Our Children Need — and What We Can Do About It".[22] The core of the argument in Wagner's book is that there are certain life skills that schools (in the United States of America) are failing to teach and that educators and educational institutions need to focus on building these skills in students, in order to help them to 'bridge the global achievement gap'. Below is the summary[23] of these seven key skills:

**(1) Critical Thinking and Problem-solving**
Thinking and learning independently, overcoming preconceptions and self-direction. Being able to go beyond being mere receivers of information, to becoming users of information able to identify the problem questions.

**(2) Agility and Adaptability**
Ability to embrace change, complexity and occasional ambiguity of the modern world. Flexibility, understanding others, accepting responsibility and thinking on one's feet.

**(3) Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence**
Ability to work with people from different backgrounds and cultures, appreciating and respecting diversity. Creating networks beyond classrooms, awareness of one's own influence and potential.

**(4) Initiative and Entrepreneurship**
Ability to turn ideas into action, developing creativity and innovation, proactivity, initiative, perseverance.

**(5) Effective Oral and Written Communication**
Verbal and written skills, argumentation, presentation skills. The ability to express one's ideas, exchange opinions. Ability to frame and deliver information in an engaging way, adapted to any given audience and through multiple media.

**(6) Accessing and Analysing Information**
Research skills, prioritization of gathered information, ability to collect data and analyse it. Ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, ability to evaluate the arguments of others, assess multiple sources of information, manage conflicting or contradictory arguments or information.

**(7) Curiosity and Imagination**
Openness to collaboration, communication, project-based learning, experiencing new things, learning new skills.

[22] Tony Wagner, The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach The New Survival Skills Our Children Need — and What We Can Do About It, New York: Basic Books, 2008
[23] Adapted from Wagner's book, chapter 1 "The New World of Work and the Seven Survival Skills".

## DEPOLARISATION: LEARNING GOALS (continued)

This section presents some of the principles and learning goals behind developing learners' depolarisation skills. Next to Wagner's list of 21st-century skills, the depolarisation of communication methodology is also inspired by **'active citizenship'** educational approaches that seek to shape attitudes, influence behaviour, increase knowledge and shape youth into responsible citizens. The European Economic and Social Committee has also taken an interest in building active citizenship, as it is seen as "the glue that keeps societies together" and one that is indispensable for the health of democracies.[24]

Another interdisciplinary area of education seeking to foster non-violent conflict resolution skills in students is **'peace education'**. Peace is a central value promoted in this educational approach and it operates reactively (e.g. in post-conflict societies, focusing on fostering reconciliation, inter-group contact, multiperspectivity in history education, etc.) as well as proactively (preventing conflict, promoting peaceful coexistence and social justice, and appreciation of diversity, tolerance, equality).[25] The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) defines peace education as "the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to bring about behavior change that will enable children, youth, and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an interpersonal, intergroup, national, or international level."[26]

On the following pages, you will find more information about some of the identified core skills, along with an explanation of how strengthening one's depolarisation abilities holds the potential for simultaneously fostering...
- critical thinking and problem solving;
- agility and adaptability;
- collaboration and initiative;
- effective (non-violent) communication;
- curiosity, imagination and empathy.

[24] Active Citizenship for a Better European Society guidebook, www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/eesc-2011-35-en.pdf
[25] See: "The Development of Peace Education and Its Basic Principles", at: http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2314/Peace-Education.html (Accessed: December 1, 2022)
[26] Definition of peace education from INEE website, at: https://inee.org/eie-glossary/peace-education (Accessed: December 1, 2022)

## Critical Thinking & Problem-Solving

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "critical thinking is the process of thinking carefully about a subject or idea, without allowing feelings or opinions to affect you."[27] It is in high demand as one of the core skills required both in academia and in the labour market, but is at the same time notoriously elusive and hard to teach and learn due its status as a complex, higher-order skill.[28]

Many of the factors that play a role in polarisation are impeding the development of critical thinking: our biases and preconceptions interfere with our ability to think objectively; our emotional involvement, identification with our own thoughts and views held by groups we see ourselves belonging to are an obstacle to critical thinking; finally, human resistance to change and commitment to long-held (often unexamined) beliefs and attitudes also make it hard to develop and strengthen critical thinking. Finally, in terms of teaching, there is no 'quick fix' when it comes to critical thinking, as it requires a long-term, experiential and collaborative approach that is not always possible to create in different teaching contexts.

In what way does building depolarisation skills foster critical thinking and problem-solving? Many of the activities in this Guide invite learners to re-examine their beliefs and opinions, and to evaluate their own arguments as well as others' arguments about topics or issues in question. Furthermore, learners are required to research and seek out alternative points of view, while also scrutinizing sources of information, and distinguishing fact from opinion.

## Agility & Adaptability

Agility is "the ability and willingness to learn from experience, and then apply that learning to perform successfully under new situations", while adaptability is "embracing change."[29] In our quick-paced world, both of these skills are required for people to be able to keep up with innovation and our rapidly changing circumstances.

Polarisation, by definition, occurs when people's agility and adaptability are low and when they cling to their old views and beliefs, their minds closed to different perspectives and new ways of thinking. When individuals, groups, organisations or society as a whole are unable to effectively respond to change, this can deepen polarisation between those who are more adaptable and agile, and those who resist change, thus often making conflict inevitable.

[27] See: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/critical-thinking (Accessed: December 1, 2022)
[28] Althea Need Kaminske, "Can We Teach Critical Thinking?", at:
www.learningscientists.org/blog/2019/2/28/can-we-teach-critical-thinking (Accessed: December 1, 2022)
[29] Critical Issues in Educational Technology, "Agility and Adaptability", at:
https://sites.google.com/site/criticalissuesinedtech/agility-and-adaptability (Accessed: December 02, 2022)

## Agility & Adaptability (continued)

In what way does building depolarisation skills foster agility and adaptability? By being open to listening to others' perspectives, learners are enhancing their tolerance for complexity, simultaneously diminishing their propensity towards black-and-white and either-or scenarios. Furthermore, by intentionally seeking out alternative perspectives and applying diverse analytical lenses, learners can strengthen their adaptability and agility, and 'thinking outside of the box' skills.

## Collaboration & Initiative

According to the British Council, "Being an effective collaborator means not only being able to work with others, but also being able to learn from, share with, and express oneself to them."[30] Taking initiative and exhibiting a proactive attitude also requires us to be able to communicate our ideas and engage and involve others to gather support.

Polarisation, as a social phenomenon, can inspire both collaboration and initiative – but of a destructive kind. Group-think (individuals conforming to the opinions of the majority, instead of thinking independently and critically) can lead us to seek confirmation and approval exclusively from like-minded individuals – which may run the risk of increasing our blind spots and narrowing our perspective on a given situation or an issue.

In what way does building depolarisation skills foster genuine collaboration and prosocial initiative-taking? By promoting understanding and appreciation of diversity, depolarisation skills encourage dialogue, reduce tensions among groups, and enhance mutual trust and consideration for common interests, rather than those of a particular group. By having diverse groups communicate about shared concerns, this increases the likelihood of joint action toward devising solutions or initiatives to address these issues.

## Effective (Non-Violent) Communication

Communication, both written and oral, is an essential skill – it affects our ability to express our ideas and to inform, persuade and inspire action. Non-violent communication (NVC) is a communication and conflict-resolution process developed by the psychologist Marshall B. Rosenberg[31], consisting of four principles:
- Observations (objectively assessing the situation, while suspending judgment and focusing on the facts)
- Feelings (expressing one's feelings about the issue or situation, without blaming or accusing others)
- Needs (correctly identifying and expressing one's needs and seeking to understand other's needs)

[30] British Council, "21st Century Skills – Creativity and Collaboration", at: www.britishcouncil.my/english/courses-children/resources/21st-century-skills (Accessed: December 02, 2022)
[31] Marshall B. Rosenberg, Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, PuddleDancer Press, 2015

## Effective (Non-Violent) Communication (continued)

- Requests (concrete requests or actions that seek to improve the situation, addressing everyone's needs)

Non-violent communication seeks to enhance understanding and compassion in human interactions, reducing the likelihood of conflict.

Polarisation is in many ways exacerbated by people's poor communication skills, or the absence of the ability for non-violent communication. Because polarisation incites our emotions, makes us more susceptible to various cognitive biases and contextualizes communication as a zero-sum game, changing how we react and communicate in heated situations is incredibly important.

In what way does building depolarisation skills stand to improve people's (non-violent) communication? In many ways, depolarisation skills are synonymous with non-violent communication, as both seek to better understand and connect with others, regardless of differing opinions or beliefs. Furthermore, improving one's depolarisation skills is likely to diminish defensiveness and blame in conversations around differences, improving one's ability to regulate own emotions and reactions, especially on triggering topics.

## Curiosity, Imagination & Empathy

Curiosity is an important element of learning, to the point that "neuroscientists from the University of California at Davis found that high curiosity may improve individual's memory for information they acquire, and they suggest 'stimulating curiosity ahead of knowledge acquisition could enhance learning success.'"[32] Imagination is an equally important skill, as it is believed to help us overcome boundaries, make new connections, come up with creative solutions to problems, improve our ability to think abstractly, improve our emotional and mental well-being, help us deal with stress and adversity, and have many more benefits.[33] Finally, both curiosity and imagination are relevant for fostering empathy, "the ability to sense other people's emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling."[34]

[30] British Council, "21st Century Skills – Creativity and Collaboration", at:
www.britishcouncil.my/english/courses-children/resources/21st-century-skills (Accessed: December 02, 2022)
[32] Andrew P. Minigan, "The Importance of Curiosity and Questions in 21st Century Learning", Education Week, May 24, 2017, at: www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-the-importance-of-curiosity-and-questions-in-21st-century-learning/2017/05 (Accessed: December 27, 2022)
[33] "Why is Imagination Important? 20 Reasons", Enlightio, December 13, 2022, at:
https://enlightio.com/why-is-imagination-important (Accessed: December 27, 2022)
[34] "What is Empathy?", Great Good Magazine, at:
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/empathy/definition (Accessed: December 27, 2022)

## Curiosity, Imagination & Empathy (continued)

The absence of curiosity and empathy is a contributing factor in societal polarisation, as it marks people's unwillingness to engage with other points of view. Without being open to or able to imagine (several) alternative possibilities and viewpoints, polarisation thrives in situations characterised by empathy deficit.

In what way does building depolarisation skills contribute to fostering curiosity, imagination and empathy? Depolarisation requires stepping out of one's comfort zone, exposing oneself to differences and challenges to own views, beliefs and attitudes. As such, depolarisation requires openness, empathy and genuine curiosity for where others are coming from.

## EXERCISES & ACTIVITIES

The following section contains 9 unique exercises that can be implemented in formal or non-formal educational settings.

Each activity is designed to fit a 45-minute lesson, though different parts can be extended or shortened, depending on the group size and engagement.

| Exercise | Objectives |
|---|---|
| **The Power of Definition** | To evoke (self-) reflection<br>To foster critical thinking<br>To build (situational) awareness |
| **Bohmian Dialogue** | To foster self-awareness<br>To enhance listening skills<br>To deepen understanding of various social issues |
| **Anatomy of Our Beliefs** | To better understand own beliefs<br>Tobuild understanding for the positions and viewpoints of others |
| **Moderating Our Reactiveness** | To foster emotional self-awareness<br>To build an understanding of reactivity or reactiveness, how it arises  and how to moderate it |
| **Social Dilemma Debate** | To build argumentation and listening skills<br>To demonstrate the benefit and the power of seeking 'the third way' (an alternative viewpoint to the two divided sides) |
| **Standing For or Against** | To improve research and argumentation skills<br>To practice public speaking and persuasion |
| **Exercises in Empathy** | To build empathy "muscle" by applying imagination, curiosity and/or compassion<br>To practice self-kindness and silencing the inner critic |
| **Problem Analysis** | To apply & practice problem tree analysis<br>To improve team-work, critical and analytical thinking skills |
| **Food for Thought Quotes** | To foster reflection and conversation about (de)polarisation |

This exercise, consisting of 3 parts, is designed to get us to re-examine our own assumptions about the meaning of certain concepts that often lie at the heart of polarization. It is meant to get everyone to think, get creative if necessary, and at the same time - loosen their attachment to definitions or understandings of specific terms.

## Part 1: Definitions Game

OBJECTIVES
> To deconstruct and redefine certain core terms
> To explore thinking outside of the box of assumed shared meaning
> To foster creativity and intellectual emancipation

TIME
> 15 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED
> Pieces of paper (one blank sheet per participant)
> Markers & Pens

DESCRIPTION

First, the trainer/instructor explains the task: each participant takes a word/concept (related to polarisation, identity, -isms), and writes 3 different brief/basic definitions of that concept - a positive (sounding) one, a negative (sounding) one, and a neutral (sounding) one.

Next, participants complete the task by writing out three definitions of their chosen or assigned key term - positive definition, negative definition, and neutral one.

On the following page, you can see an example of a filled-out definition sheet, using the key term 'DEMOCRACY' and defining it in three distinct ways.

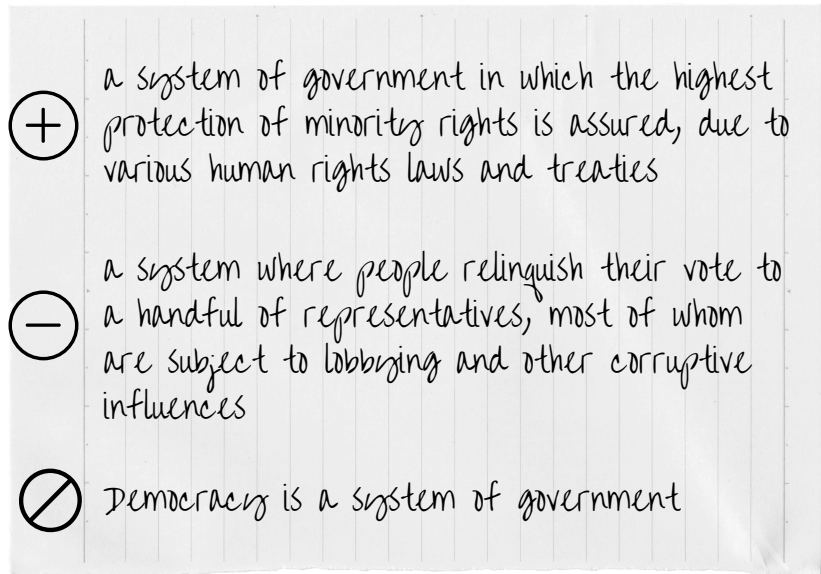*Sample of Participant's Filled Out Definitions Sheet*

**DEMOCRACY**
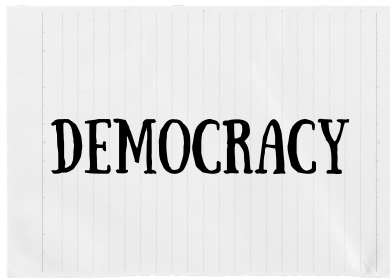
front page
(the side visible to all the
participants)

(+) a system of government in which the highest protection of minority rights is assured, due to various human rights laws and treaties

(−) a system where people relinquish their vote to a handful of representatives, most of whom are subject to lobbying and other corruptive influences

(⊘) Democracy is a system of government

back page
(the side visible only to the presenter / author)

## Part 2: Presentations & 'Voting'

OBJECTIVES
> To get participants engaged and entertained
> To evoke and get participants attuned to their emotional response
> To elicit confusion, surprise, cognitive dissonance

TIME
> 20 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED
> Participants' filled out definition sheets

DESCRIPTION

Prior to participants presenting their different definitions of the same concept / word, the trainer gives the following instructions:

**To the participant / presenter:** shuffle the order in which you will read out your definitions (i.e. do not always follow the positive-negative-neutral sequence in which you wrote the definitions). Do not announce which type of definition you are reading (conceal whether you are sharing the positive, negative or neutral definition of your assigned / chosen concept).

**To the group:** as you hear the presenter's definition, vote with your hand, whether you think that was the positive, negative or neutral definition you just heard.

21

if the definition
you heard
sounds positive
to you, show
thumbs up

if the definition
you heard
sounds negative
to you, show
thumbs down

if the definition you
heard sounds neutral
to you, show a circle
with thumb and
index finger

As the presentations proceed from one participant to the next, the instructor/trainer will need to keep on reminding everyone of the rules, in order to keep up the focus and the engagement of the group. Remind everyone to vote whenever they hear a definition. Remind the presenters not to reveal/disclose the type of definition they are reading.

In order to keep the exercise dynamic and fun, the instructor should encourage participants to take quick turns and, where adequate, could even use humorous remarks.

## Part 3: Reflection

OBJECTIVES
       To evoke (self-) reflection
       To foster critical thinking
       To build (situational) awareness and intentive personal agency

TIME
       10 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED          N/A

DESCRIPTION

The instructor invites a few participants to volunteer how they felt doing this activity. What did they notice, when voting on different types of definitions? Why is it that very often, the group voted differently on definitions they heard? (Why did they sound positive to some, while negative or neutral to others?)

The instructor finishes the activity by alerting participants to the following: words...have an emotional charge. We have the tendency to adopt definitions we hear, without questioning them, and we engage in discussions with people while often having the assumption that our definition of the topic X that we are talking about - is shared (while in fact, many times in disagreements, the understanding or the meaning behind a concept is **not** shared).

Finish the reflection with instructor's advice, or 'call to action':

**Call to action:** be intentional about defining concepts at the outset of discussions that may get 'charged'. Bear in mind that 'neutral' definitions can often get you further in conversation and closer to generating a shared understanding with your interlocutor, than strongly positive or negative ones.

Notes:

You can adapt the vocabulary or terminology of key terms that you will be using in this de/construction exercise to the content and context of your own discipline (e.g. Sociology, Psychology, Political Science). The more familiar the terms are to your participants, the more engaging they will find the activity.

Depending on how much direction you wish to exert within the activity, you can either have the participants choose their own key term, or assign them with the terms you want them to focus on.

 In case you are struggling with which key concepts to choose, here are some for you to choose from that usually play a role in different polarized discussions, owing to the complexity or controversy associated with them:

*(in alphabetical order)*

diversity
Donald Trump (or any other polarizing individual/figure)
Croatia, Serbia, Germany... (or any other country, region)
Croatian, Swedish... (or any other nationality or citizenship)
feminism
gay
gender
human rights
immigrant
inclusion
man
marriage
minority (as a concept, or you can use specific minority groups)
nation
nationalism
political party (as a concept, or you can use specific parties by name)
politics
race
racism
refugee
trans
university (as a concept, or you can use a specific university)
woman
Zagreb, Belgrade, Sarajevo... (or any other town, locality, province)

David Bohm (1917 - 1992) was one of the most important theoretical physicists of the 20th century whose work contributed original ideas in the fields of quantum theory, neuropsychology, and philosophy of mind. Bohmian dialogue (also known as 'Bohm Dialogue') is a free-flowing group conversation whose purpose is to enhance collective understanding about a selected topic by inviting everyone's points of view, listening to them while suspending judgment, and by examining one's own assumptions, emotions and opinions in the process. This form of dialogue allows the group to experience a collective stream of consciousness whereby participants can become mindful of their thoughts and how they arise, change and evoke emotional responses as a result of listening, being inspired or triggered by other people's statements.

It is important to emphasize that dialogue, as a group communication format, is not a discussion, or a debate. In Bohm's words,

> "*A key difference between a dialogue and an ordinary discussion is that, within the latter, people usually hold relatively fixed positions and argue in favor of their views as they try to convince others to change. At best this may produce agreement or compromise, but it does not give rise to anything creative. Moreover, whenever anything of fundamental significance is involved, then positions tend to be rigidly non-negotiable and talk degenerates either into a confrontation in which there is no solution, or into a polite avoidance of the issues. Both these outcomes are extremely harmful, for they prevent the free play of thought in communication and therefore impede creativity.*"\*

A necessary condition for one to participate in a Bohmian dialogue is to acquire a 'dialogic mindset' - an attitude of openness and mindful perception that excludes judgment. Suspending judgment is necessary in order to observe, listen and 'tap into' the group's stream of consciousness, allowing us in the process to recognize our own assumptions - without judging ourselves - and to question them, rather than defend them against perceived or imagined attacks. Assumptions are often at the foundation of our thoughts, and Bohm believed that unexamined assumptions are problematic, as they fuel rigidity of stances, attitudes and perspectives, and give rise to polarization and conflict.

In an ideal setting, Bohmian dialogue would not need a facilitator - it would be a gathering of equals, individuals all of whom have read Bohm's book 'On Dialogue' and whose familiarity with the core principles dissolves the need for a facilitator with authority to guide the process. In the absence of this requirement, a facilitator is needed in order to introduce specific dialogic principles that need to hold in order to make the Bohmian dialogue possible:

- **Participation**: everyone's contribution is welcome, valuable and valid - all are invited and included to share their thoughts;

- **Respect**: even in situations where someone shares something that one finds upsetting, one is to listen without prejudice while focusing on what is happening within oneself and within the group;

\* *The essential David Bohm*, edited by Lee Nichol, Psychology Press, 2003 p.295

- **Proprioception of Thought**: self-awareness, mindfulness and attempt to notice a thought arising, rather than instantly identifying oneself with it. It also involves awareness of the way our thoughts influence our perceptions, feelings and actions.

- **Suspension:** of value judgments (of others and self), of personal assumptions, fixed opinions;

- **No agenda, no goal:** engaging in a free flow and play of ideas while participating in an undirected inquiry - there is no purpose, no goal, no result that the group is trying to arrive at;

- **Silence:** tolerate and accept silence during the dialogue, either when it is called for by a group member, or when it occurs spontaneously - there is no need to 'fill it' with words just to avoid the discomfort that some might feel if silence falls upon the group.

### Bohmian dialogue session

Below is a description of the flow of a session of Bohmian dialogue. Even though these sessions can often last several hours, and are ideally conducted in groups that are 20+ participants, it is possible to adopt the same flow and dialogic principles and run the session in a shorter time frame, or with fewer (or more) participants. (Session length and the number of participants involved will affect the depth of the engagement.)

OBJECTIVES
>	To foster self-awareness in participants (by encouraging them to examine their thoughts and assumptions)
>	To enhance participants' listening skills
>	To deepen participants' understanding of various issues (each dialogue session can revolve around a different topic)

TIME
>	45+ minutes (a dialogue session can last as long as the conversation flows)

MATERIALS NEEDED
>	a softball or plush toy (the person holding it speaks)
>	chairs organized in a circle (so everyone sees each other)

DESCRIPTION

1. The group first decides what topic they wish to 'put under the lens' during the dialogue session. It can be a randomly selected topic (for e.g. 'love', or 'justice', or 'knowledge', etc.), or one that relates to a current event or a social issue of concern (e.g. 'climate change', 'women's rights', etc.).
2. The facilitator shares some of the main principles all participants should bear in mind during the dialogue session (see the previous page).
3. One person starts by sharing their thoughts, opinion or concerns about the topic at hand. The questions that facilitate this start could be:
   - When you hear the word 'justice', what is your first association with it? (if you choose this question, then you go around the room for a quick 'associations download' - the softball is quickly changing hands as everyone is sharing their associations)
   - How would you define 'justice'?
4. The dialogue rolls onward either by people raising their hand to indicate a willingness to speak (in which case the previous speaker throws them the softball), or by the previous speaker tossing the softball at random to another participant.
5. Participants asking questions (related to the topic, or taking the conversation in another direction), sharing stories, and expressing confusion or concerns - are all valid ways of participating.
6. It is advised that the session concludes with a round where everyone shares their reflection on the dialogue. (Consider posing inviting questions such as, "What is your key takeaway?", "What is something that you will take with you from this dialogue experience?")

### Sources about the Bohmian dialogue method

A documentary on the life and work of David Bohm: www.infinitepotential.com

David Bohm, *On Dialogue*, edited by Lee Nichol, London: Routledge, 1996

Website dedicated to Bohmian dialogue: www.bohmdialogue.org

### Selected quotes by David Bohm

" *Dialogue is really aimed at going into the whole thought process and changing the way the thought process occurs collectively. We haven't really paid much attention to thought as a process. We have engaged in thoughts, but we have only paid attention to the content, not to the process.* "

" *Suppose we were able to share meanings freely without a compulsive urge to impose our view or conform to those of others and without distortion and self-deception. Would this not constitute a real revolution in culture?* "

" *A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.* "

" *The point is that this notion of dialogue and common consciousness suggests that there is some way out of our collective difficulties.* "

" *Perhaps there is more sense in our nonsense and more nonsense in our 'sense' than we would care to believe.* "

" *It is proposed that a form of free dialogue may well be one of the most effective ways of investigating the crisis which faces society, and indeed the whole of human nature and consciousness today. Moreover, it may turn out that such a form of free exchange of ideas and information is of fundamental relevance for transforming culture and freeing it of destructive misinformation, so that creativity can be liberated.* "

" *All effort to bring order into disorder is disorder.* "

27

This exercise is designed to get us to re-examine our beliefs by reflecting on their origin as well as their anatomy. It is meant to foster understanding for other points of view as well as to expand the elasticity (while decreasing the rigidity) of some of our beliefs that play an important role in polarisation, disagreements and conflicts among people. The total activity duration is 90 minutes.

## Part 1: Warming Up

OBJECTIVES
> To ease participants into the session on beliefs and values
> To build a shared understanding of the meaning of beliefs and values

TIME
> 15 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED
> N/A (conversation)

DESCRIPTION
The facilitator should open up the session by announcing that it will focus on the topic of 'beliefs' and 'values'. The suggested questions for the entire group to warm up on the topic could be...
- When you hear the word 'belief', what is something that first comes to your mind?
- Are beliefs the same as 'values'? What are the similarities between the two concepts?
- What purpose do you think beliefs serve or have in our lives?
- Who would we be without them?

The facilitator should wrap up this initial brainstorm by concluding that beliefs and values are something intrinsic to what makes us human, and that as such these are very important concepts to be aware of, and to explore further.

## Part 2: Creating the Dialogue Teams - Silent Opinion Lines

OBJECTIVES
> To explore one another's beliefs and values
> To enhance participants' listening skills
> To build understanding for the positions and viewpoints of others

TIME
> 15 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED
> N/A (conversation)

DESCRIPTION
The facilitator should open the activity with a disclaimer (or a 'trigger warning', as appropriate): "I will ask some questions, addressing some topics that you may find uncomfortable. While the general decorum or etiquette rule for social situations is 'no talk about money, sex, religion or politics', in this session we will address some of these topics because we need to talk about these matters, even if and especially if we disagree. A part of the problem in today's society is that individuals and groups who disagree do not talk with, but about one another... If you are feeling uncomfortable, please try to participate and withstand the discomfort. If the topic is too uncomfortable, no questions asked - do not participate in that round, wait for another less confrontational topic to be introduced."

(facilitator explains the activity)
"I will now read out some statements in order to identify some of the beliefs we here hold, and to find which ones we share, and which we differ on."

The facilitator then proceeds to run several silent opinion lines. One corner of the room is marked as 'YES' (or strongly agree), the other corner as 'NO' (strongly disagree). As the facilitator reads a statement, the participants are asked to position themselves on this imaginary opinion line, depending on their own viewpoint on the given topic. (One can stand in the very corners, or somewhere in the middle if undecided.)

The statements could be anything controversial within a given context or society while taking care to discuss matters appropriate for the age group of the participants. Examples of the statements to give for the silent opinion lines (each facilitator should come up with own statements uniquely suited to their respective context):

*Women should have the right to choose what to do with their bodies.*
*The age of legal drinking should be lowered to 16.*
*Gay couples should be given the right to adopt children.*
*European Union should open its borders to refugees.*

The purpose of the silent opinion line is to create pairs. In each round of silent opinion line, seek to create pairs by putting together people standing on the opposing ends of the line. If a topic/statement is particularly divisive or controversial, feel free to make all pairs on the basis of that one statement, pairing up individuals with differing opinions.

When everyone is in pairs, sitting (or standing) and facing one another, at a comfortable distance from other pairs so that the conversations do not end up in cacophony, the facilitator asks each pair to have one stopwatch or timer (on their smartphone) handy, as the next activity will be time-bound.

## Part 3: Facilitated Dialogue

OBJECTIVES
> To get participants to reflect on their own beliefs and values
> To practice deep listening

TIME
> 30 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED
> N/A (conversation)

DESCRIPTION
The facilitator proceeds by guiding the activity in the following way:

"Now that you have identified your dialogue partners, I will give you a few questions to speak about, and listen to each other. Each question round will take around 5 minutes, and each will have the same structure:
- Speaker 1 will speak for 60 seconds;
- Speaker 2 will speak for 60 seconds;
- 3 minutes will be left for conversation and deeper inquiry, for asking each other clarifying questions, etc.

Please use your stopwatch or timer to make sure you do not go over the allocated time frame."

(each pair addresses the topic they had opposing opinion on, from the silent opinion lines)

**Question Round 1**    What is your belief on this shared topic?

**Question Round 2**    Do you recall the time and context when you heard about or experienced this issue (for the first time)?

**Question Round 3**    Do you think this issue divides society, and if yes, how? Why is it difficult to just 'agree to disagree' and let it be?

**Question Round 4**    If you had to put yourself in your partner's shoes: can you imagine why one would have that belief? Mirror as best you can what you heard from your partner.

**Question Round 5**    If you wake up tomorrow in a world where the opposite of your belief is the truth, or the norm - how would you feel? How would you act?

**Question Round 6**    What would need to happen for this issue not to exist, for this issue not to be a problem? Is there a way of preventing the problem or issue from arising?

30

## Part 4: Group Reflection

OBJECTIVES
 To get participants to reflect on the overall session experience

TIME
 30 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED
 N/A (conversation)

DESCRIPTION
The facilitator asks everyone to reflect on their experience of the dialogue.
How was it?
Was it challenging or difficult in any way?
Did you experience any revelations or a-ha moments?
(add more inviting questions)

The session could close with each participant giving their one-sentence
conclusion, reflection or take-away from the activity.

This activity is designed to get people to reflect on their reactiveness (in terms of comments or topics that evoke strong negative emotional reactions) and to become more mindful and composed when engaging in conversation about divisive or controversial topics. The total activity duration is 45 minutes.

## Part 1: Warming Up

OBJECTIVES
> To build an atmosphere of positive anticipation
> To gently introduce self-reflection in relation to different topics
> To foster emotional self-awareness

TIME
> 15 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED
> None (conversation-based activity)

DESCRIPTION

This activity consists of two parts.

First, the trainer/instructor explains the activity as an exercise in fostering self-awareness and listening to one's own rising emotions. S/he will read a sentence, and everyone needs to position their arms the following way:

 If at hearing the sentence/statement read by the instructor you find yourself feeling indifferent - there are no rising emotions inside you, you do not really care about the topic, etc. - then you need to cross your arms.

 If at hearing the sentence/statement read by the instructor you find yourself having rising emotions - these could be pleasant ones (happiness, excitement, confidence, curiosity), or unpleasant ones (e.g. anger, sadness, fear, annoyance) - then you need to lift your arms. (Note: agreeing, or disagreeing strongly with the statement equals emotional reaction.)

On the following page you have some examples of sentences or statements that the instructor can read in order to carry out this activity.

Note: feel free to use whatever statements fit your classroom and context the best. Ideally, the instructor will read out 6-7 statements during the first part of the activity.

Example statements:
- (Country name) is the best country in the world!
- Today is Wednesday.
- Women still do not have the same rights as men.
- Trees are green.
- There are currently 40 million estimated enslaved people in the world.
- There is no corruption in our country.
- Playstation is better than Xbox.
- Taylor Swift has great songs.
- Water is wet.
- Dogs and cats make us better humans.
- The Earth is round.

In the second part of this activity, the instructor invites the students to come up with their own statements against which the rest of the class needs to assess their emotional reaction. Since this activity focuses on becoming aware of our instant emotional reactions, it is important that participants do not analyse or ponder much on their answer. The instructor should remind and encourage students to show their very first instinctive reaction, and that there are no right or wrong choices.

## Part 2: Reflection

OBJECTIVES
> To build an understanding of reactivity
> To reflect on own soft spots for reactiveness
> To raise awareness about links between cognition and emotions

TIME
> 15 minutes
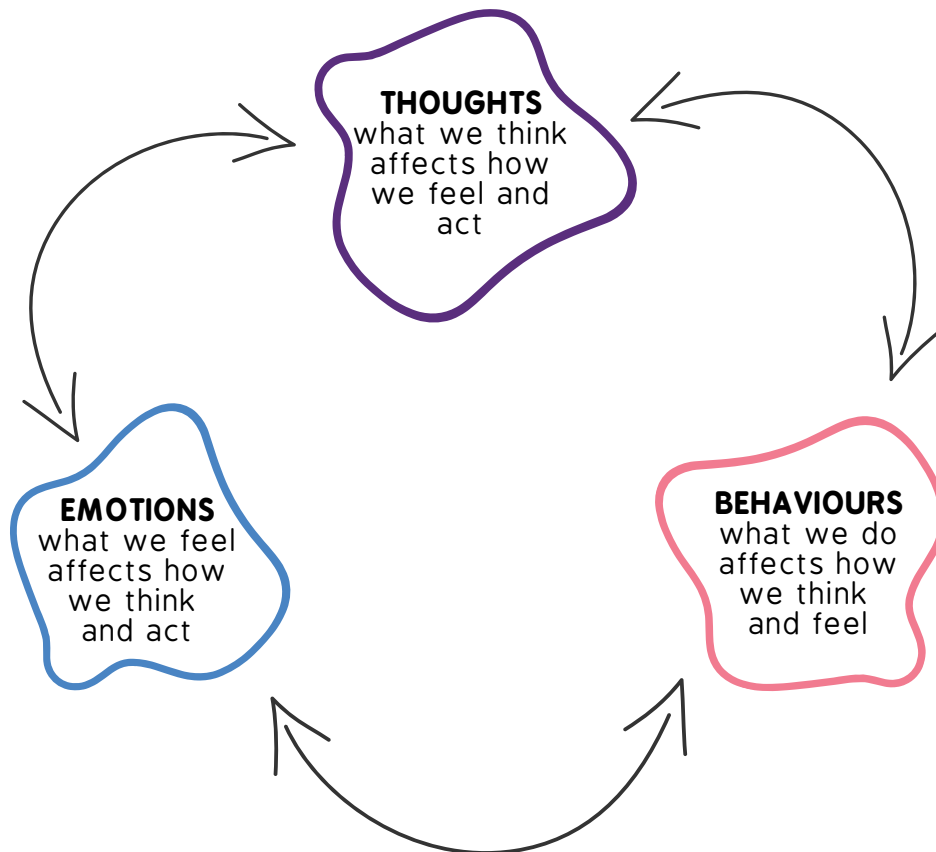
MATERIALS NEEDED
> None (conversation-based activity)

DESCRIPTION

Following the conclusion of the first activity, the instructor asks the students to get seated and facilitates a reflection on the topic of reactiveness. The first question could be to invite students to reflect on how it felt to listen to their emotions as the statements were being read out. What did they notice about the strongest emotional reactions - did the emotion precede the cognitive or thinking process (e.g. "Such an annoying statement", or "I totally agree/disagree with this!", etc.), or was it the thought that generated the emotion in them? Another reflection question could be what participants think about why there were individual differences between reactions (why a sentence is neutral to some but emotional to others).

The following question could be, "What is it that makes us react or that triggers our emotions when we hear something we agree, or disagree with?" The instructor should guide the students' brainstorming to the link between thoughts and emotions. The next page offers useful information and tips on what to address during this group reflection activity.

**THOUGHTS**
what we think
affects how
we feel and
act

**EMOTIONS**
what we feel
affects how
we think
and act

**BEHAVIOURS**
what we do
affects how
we think
and feel

As this image (adapted from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy models) suggests, our emotional experiences are formed from three different components: thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

In simple terms, thoughts are the process whereby we make sense of situations in our life. They can be verbal (e.g. sentences, ideas, words), or non-verbal (e.g. mental images). Emotions are physiological manifestations (e.g. when we feel stressed or upset, our heartbeat may pound faster; when we feel embarrassed, our face may flush, etc.). Finally, behaviors are our actions - the things we do, or not do.
(For more information, see the source: https://cogbtherapy.com/cbt-model-of-emotions)

Relate the conversation to the initial warming-up activity, and explore what sentences or topics made students' emotions rise, and in what way. Emotional reactiveness or reactivity is when some situations, topics or comments "trigger" us, which leads us to get into heated discussions or debates, say something hurtful without thinking things through, or in general jump to conclusions or assumptions on the motivations, or identity of the person we are speaking with. What is the problem with this happening?
- It prevents communication and dialogue;
- It leads to conflict and the deepening of prejudice;
- It is both an impetus of and a strengthening of our confirmation bias.

34

Note: confirmation bias is the tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs. The problem with confirmation bias is that it makes us less likely to engage with opinions or ideas that we disagree with; it makes us seek information or research that confirms our views (as opposed to challenges them); it prevents or inhibits curiosity, open-mindedness and problem solving.

## Part 3: Exploring Coping Mechanisms

In the final part of the lesson, the instructor facilitates students' discussion and exchange about different techniques, strategies and steps that one can take in order to moderate one's reactiveness. How can we pause our emotional reactions when we hear something that bothers us or annoys us? How can we learn to wait and process emotions, before reacting?

OBJECTIVES
To explore different ways of moderating reactiveness
To reflect on different strategies and techniques of mindfulness
To enhance coping mechanisms against being triggered in discussions

TIME
15 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED
Flipchart/Blackboard/Whiteboard (for collecting everyone's ideas)

DESCRIPTION

Firstly, the trainer/instructor asks the students to think about different ways of moderating their reactiveness. How can we pause ourselves when experiencing an onslaught of emotions resulting from someone saying something we disagree with? As students are offering their ideas and suggestions, the instructor notes them all down on a black/white/smartboard.

Then, the instructor facilitates a group conversation about these different coping mechanisms and strategies, making sure that each of them is well explained (defined and described). With each of them, the instructor is also nudging the students to offer 'how-to' advice to each other.

On the following page, you can see an example of different techniques or strategies that students might mention (or, if they do not get mentioned, the instructor should make sure to introduce them), followed by definitions as well as actionable steps or suggestions.

| TECHNIQUE | DEFINITION | HOW TO DO IT? |
|---|---|---|
| **PRACTISING MINDFULNESS** | focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations | • learn how to meditate;<br>• take a deep breath once in a while;<br>• focus your full attention (e.g. observe something) |
| **QUESTIONING OWN ASSUMPTIONS** | learning to question one's own reaction, and understanding or assessment of the situation or of what is being said, with what intention | • ask yourself why you are getting annoyed - what in particular bothers you;<br>• ask clarifying questions - assume attitude of curiosity |
| **TAKE A TIMEOUT** | a form of behavioural modification or anger management whereby one takes oneself out of the situation that is causing heightened emotions | • make a decision to disengage;<br>• take yourself outside of the 'game' - "not now, thank you";<br>• walk away |

Other coping mechanisms or techniques that might get mentioned by students during the brainstorming phase could be...
- not taking things personally
- taking a deep breath
- counting to ten (on the inside) before responding
- identify and name your feelings
- postpone the confrontation ("I need to think about it, can we table this for now and come back to it later?")
- if possible, try to look for the positive interpretation of what is being said, i.e. try taking the situation or the conversation lightheartedly
- etc.

This activity simulates a debate about different social dilemmas and controversial or divisive topics. It is advised that the assignment to prepare the debate is delivered to students as homework and that the actual debate and post-debate reflection take place during class time. The class-based activity requires 45 minutes.

## Part 1: Assigning the debate motion & the preparation assignment

OBJECTIVES
> To select a topic of shared concern that will engage all students
> To allow students time to prepare their arguments & position

TIME
> N/A (preparatory work preceding the class/session)

MATERIALS NEEDED
> debate format instructions (multiple options possible)
> online survey (for e.g. google form) to select the debate topic

DESCRIPTION
The educator sends a survey to students, to identify the topic of debate. Ideally, the topic should be a current or contemporary social dilemma or an issue, so that students' preparation can be informed not just by research, but also by interviewing and getting the opinions from their peers, families, and friends.

When phrasing the wording of the debate motion, the educator should take care to frame the issue in such a way that it is debatable by both sides. In other words, the debate should be balanced.

The instructor should decide what debate format to use (adapting it to the students' previous experience with debate, different formats, etc.). You can find the two suggested formats' descriptions and rules on the next page.

## Part 2: Debate

OBJECTIVES
> To build participants' argumentation and listening skills
> To demonstrate the benefit and the power of seeking 'the third way', i.e. an alternative viewpoint to the two divided sides

TIME
> 30 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED
> debaters should have papers and pens for catching notes during the debate, and any debate case material and research they have carried out prior to the debate
> the instructor should have a timer (ideally, it will be displayed in such a way so that everyone is aware of it at all times)

DEBATE FORMAT A: "**Integrated Compromise Debate**"

Note: the teams assigned to prepare the debate should decide among themselves who will be the speakers among them, and who will help with the research and preparation of their respective cases.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Proposition Speaker 1** | Presents and defines the debate motion's social issue/problem, from the perspective of the proposition + presents arguments for what solution to the problem would be the most beneficial from the Proposition's point of view. |
| **Opposition Speaker 1** | Presents and defines the debate motion's social issue/problem, from the perspective of the opposition + presents arguments for what solution to the problem would be the most beneficial from the Opposition's point of view. |
| **Proposition Speaker 2** | Accepts and acknowledges the valid points of the Opposition, while refuting the arguments that Proposition still considers unacceptable. Adds new arguments and examples to advance the Proposition position and case. |
| **Opposition Speaker 2** | Accepts and acknowledges the valid points of the Proposition, while refuting the arguments that the Opposition still considers unacceptable. Adds new arguments and examples to advance the Opposition position and case. |
| **Proposition Speaker 3** | Responds to the second speaker of the Opposition, in both appreciative (emphasizing arguments and examples you liked), and contentious way (still pointing out areas of disagreement). Closing the case for Proposition. |
| **Opposition Speaker 3** | Responds to the third speaker of the Proposition, in both appreciative (emphasizing arguments and examples you liked), and contentious way (still pointing out areas of disagreement). Closing the case for Opposition. |

Each speaker speaks for 5 minutes. Questions from the other side's teams are allowed - the speaker chooses whether to accept or reject them. The questions should be very brief - these interventions should not last more than 10 seconds.

DEBATE FORMAT B: "**The Third Way or Alternative Approach Debate**"

Note: the teams assigned to prepare the debate should decide among themselves who will be the speakers among them, and who will help with the research and preparation of their respective cases. Each speaker speaks for 3 minutes. Questions from the other side's teams are allowed - the speaker chooses whether to accept or reject them. The questions should be very brief - these interventions should not last more than 10 seconds.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **PROBLEM DEFINITION** | 1st proposition speaker | 1st opposition speaker | 1st alternative approach speaker |
| **SOLUTION** | 2nd proposition speaker | 2nd opposition speaker | 2nd alternative approach speaker |
| **REFUTATION** | 3rd proposition speaker | 3rd opposition speaker | 3rd alternative approach speaker |
| **CONCLUSION** | 4th proposition speaker | 4th opposition speaker | 4th alternative approach speaker |

DEBATE FORMAT B: "The Third Way or Alternative Approach Debate" - continued

The speakers from the three teams should speak in consecutive order, addressing the different aspects of their cases (problem definition, solution, refutation of other teams' cases, and conclusion).

The 'Alternative Approach' team should seek to either reconcile the strongest points from the Proposition and the Opposition teams and/or come up with a completely different (nuanced, balanced) perspective on the social problem that is being debated.

## Part 3: Reflection on the debate

OBJECTIVES
> To allow students to reflect on their debate experience
> To compare adversarial- and alternative way-oriented mindsets

TIME
> 10 - 15 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED
> N/A (conversational)

DESCRIPTION
The instructor invites the students (debaters who spoke in the simulation, as well as students who supported teams with research or observed the debates as audience members) to share their impressions:
- What did you think about the debate?
- Which team seemed the most convincing?
- (to debaters) Was it difficult to accept and praise points from the other team?
- We don't often see someone in a public debate actively seeking to agree or appreciate points from the 'other side'. Why do you think that is?
  - What is it that motivates and rewards our adversarial, as opposed to our reconciliatory mindset and attitude?
- How can we nurture the 'alternative approach' perspective and standpoint in ourselves? (In other words, in a world that often paints issues as black or white - how can we learn to perceive things in a more balanced, 'grey' way?)

This activity is designed as an exercise in persuasion, deep listening, empathy and consideration of others' viewpoints. The assignment for speech preparation should be given to students ahead of the class. In a class that lasts 45 minutes, it is advised that a maximum of 4 students deliver their persuasion speeches, as this will allow sufficient time for feedback and questions from peers, while not overburdening students' attention capacity for discussing different topics.

Alternatively, instead of delivering the speech in class in front of the students, the assignment can also be delivered in writing, following the same structure (while altering the communication mode from spoken to written form).

## Part 1: Speech Preparation Assignment

OBJECTIVES
>To improve participants' research and argumentation skills
>To create the opportunity for exercising empathy and consideration of viewpoints contrary to one's own

TIME
>N/A (preparatory work preceding the class/session)

MATERIALS NEEDED
>persuasive speech format instructions

DESCRIPTION
The text of the assignment that the instructor should share with the students is below (feel free to adapt to your own class context or circumstances).

### PERSUASIVE SPEECH ASSIGNMENT: FOR or AGAINST

1. Choose a topic close to you - something you really care about, a change you would like to see happen in society, or solution to an existing problem, or an injustice that you strongly feel needs to be addressed.
2. Get your topic approved by the instructor (submit it for approval prior to starting the preparation process).
3. After your topic has been approved, research the issue using the school library, or the internet, by talking to experts and/or teachers, family and friends.
4. The goal of your persuasive speech is to persuade your classmates to agree with your perspective on the issue.
5. Your speech should last maximum 5 minutes.
6. Your speech should have the following elements (you are free to structure and include them as best you see fit):
   a. **ISSUE DEFINITION, EXPLANATION AND ILLUSTRATION** (what are you talking about? "Did you know that (statistics/data)...?")
   b. **RELEVANCE & RELATABILITY** (why should we all care about this?)

(assignment, continued)

    c. **PRE-EMPTIVE CONCILIATORY RESPONSE TO CRITICS** (make an appeal to those who disagree with your view on this topic - what would you tell them to convince them to change their minds? How would you address their concerns and acknowledge their point of view, while at the same time advocating for your proposed solution/idea?))

    d. **CALL TO ACTION** (what can or should each of us do to contribute to the solution to this problem? how can we all play an active role in making our world a better place?)

Note: whenever you are referring to carried-out research, statistics, or examples, make sure you mention the source that you are citing (this requirement should be upheld in the speech-version of the assignment, i.e. oral delivery, as well as in the written persuasive essay version).

**Part 2: Speeches Delivery in the Classroom**

OBJECTIVES

    To improve students' persuasiveness and public speaking skills
    To foster understanding and nuance even when facing opposition to one's perspective or point of view

TIME

    10 minutes (per speech + reflection)

MATERIALS NEEDED

    None (conversation-based activity)

DESCRIPTION

Each student's speech is to last maximum 5 minutes. The audience (i.e. students not delivering their speeches) are asked to take notes during the speech delivery, and prepare different types of reflections on the speech (they can choose):

- **Question** (that you ask the speaker to answer - it could be a clarification question, or one pointing out a flaw or gap in their argument, etc.)
- **Feedback** (your opinion on the speech topic - what was your opinion before hearing the speech, and what is it now? did the speaker change your mind in any way?)
- **Praise or Criticism** (why you agree or disagree with the speaker's point of view)

After the speaker concludes their speech, the instructor should randomly invite 5-6 students to offer their reflections.

Note: while some of these interventions may incite a debate between the speaker and the audience member, you should moderate the interaction and make sure that the peers' reflections on the given speech do not exceed 5 minutes, so as to get the class ready for the next student's speech.

This activity offers several variations of exercises that can be used to foster reflection about the importance of empathy. The exercises can be implemented in class, or assigned as homework in the form of a written essay.

As some of the topics might be personal, exercise your good judgment in terms of how to adapt the assignment and whether you want to make it classroom-based (meaning, have students present their work in public), written submission-based (meaning, only you will read it and assess it), or fully personal (meaning, there will be no way of checking whether students actually completed it).

## Exercise 1: Reimagining Fairytales

OBJECTIVES
> To creatively challenge traditional fairytale narratives
> To practice empathy through humor

TIME
> N/A

MATERIALS NEEDED
> assignment instructions (see below)

DESCRIPTION
We all grow up with fairytales - stories whose common denominator is usually good winning over evil. This archetype story or narrative transcends fairytales and is present in literature, as well as cinematography. This activity challenges the 'good vs. evil' narrative combining creativity and role-playing.

The text of the assignment that the instructor should share with the students is below (feel free to adapt it to your own class context or circumstances).

### EMPATHY FOR THE VILLAIN

- Choose a traditional fairytale (Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Little Mermaid, Goldilocks and the three bears, etc.), a Disney movie, a superhero movie (Spiderman, Avengers, etc.) - any fictional story that you know very well;
- Imagine yourself to be in the position of a defense lawyer for the villain of your chosen story - you need to come up with a strong case presenting different arguments and reasons as to why your client is innocent and has been wronged by the existing narrative;
- The goal of your defense case or defense speech is to persuade your classmates to agree with your client's innocence;
- Feel free to use humor and creativity in coming up with explanations and justifications for your client's behavior or actions.

42

## Exercise 2: Trading Places

OBJECTIVES
> To build students' empathy "muscle"
> To apply one's imagination, curiosity and / or compassion

TIME
> N / A

MATERIALS NEEDED
> assignment instructions (see below)

DESCRIPTION
Most of the time, our own perspective and self-interest dominate our thoughts and emotions. This exercise is meant to help students step outside of their own position, and actively consider the motivations and the background behind someone else's behavior and actions.

The text of the assignment that the instructor should share with the students is below (feel free to adapt it to your own class context or circumstances).

Note: this exercise is more suited for a written essay assignment.

### PUTTING YOURSELF IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES

- Think of someone from your own life whom you often disagree with (e.g. grandfather, mother, teacher, classmate, etc.);
- Choose a particular incident in your mind when you had a clash (disagreement) with this person;
- Imagine this incident replaying, except this time, you are in their shoes. (You are your mother, teacher, etc.) Consider the following questions:
  - What is bothering you about this situation? Is there anything in particular triggering you right now?
  - Why are you disagreeing?
  - What needs of yours are not being met right now?
- Write the analysis of this 'trading places' imaginary experience. Make sure to describe:
  - What is the situation / incident (one sentence statement)
    - Your own perspective
    - Your 'other shoes' perspective (your parent, sibling, etc.)
    - Objectively looking (is there a middle-way perspective on this?)
  - How could the situation or the disagreement get resolved?
    - What concessions could you make?
    - What concessions could your 'other shoes' person make?
  - As an objective mediator or analyst of this situation, from the outside, what would you advise yourself in the future, in case a similar situation happens again? (In what ways, if any, should you change your behavior, statements, actions?)

43

## Exercise 3: Self-Empathy

OBJECTIVES
    To build students' self-empathy "muscle"
    To practice self-kindness and silencing of one's inner critic*

TIME
    N/A

MATERIALS
    assignment instructions (see below)

DESCRIPTION
The feelings of guilt and shame can sometimes be very pervasive and lead to intensive rumination.** While both feelings can be healthy and productive, leading to one assuming responsibility for one's actions, and openness to consequences. However, in cases of excessive guilt or shame, especially when the act or event causing it is disproportionate to the negative feelings and thoughts that arise, one can benefit from an exercise in self-empathy and self-compassion.

The text of the assignment that the instructor should share with the students is below (it should be adapted it class context or circumstances).

Note: this exercise is more suited for a written essay assignment, or for a personal (private) journal entry.

### LEARNING TO FORGIVE YOURSELF

- Think of a time or a situation when you did something wrong, when you failed at something you gave your best effort, or something you said or did that made you feel ashamed or guilty;
- Think of the 'inner critic' voice inside your mind, telling you all sorts of negative and harsh things;
- Write out some of the thoughts or statements that might be coming from the 'inner critic', and then counteract them with kindness, empathy and compassionate words of comfort;
- What self-empathy approach is the most efficient in silencing your inner critic?
- Imagine what you would tell to a good friend who is in the same situation as you and has the same thoughts and feelings. How would you comfort and support him/her and encourage him/her to feel better about himself/herself and the situation? What can you tell as a good friend to yourself?

* For more information about the inner critic, see: www.psychalive.org/critical-inner-voice/ (Accessed: January 09, 2023)
** "Rumination is defined as engaging in a repetitive negative thought process that loops continuously in the mind without end or completion. The pattern can be distressing, difficult to stop, and unusually involves repeating a negative thought or trying to solve an evasive problem." Source: https://theocdandanxietycenter.com/rumination/

Note: while this exercise is best suited for a private written assignment, you could ask students to bring to share in class a haiku poem, a motto, a slogan, or a single-sentence message inspired by self-empathy, self-kindness and self-compassion.

Following this exercise, the instructor should conduct a class reflection on the difference between having a healthy and an unhealthy inner critic

| HEALTHY CRITIC | UNHEALTHY CRITIC |
|---|---|
| • Encourages self-improvement: it can push us to become better versions of ourselves. By pointing out our mistakes and shortcomings, it motivates us to work on our weaknesses and improve our performance.<br>• Helps us stay accountable: the inner critic can hold us accountable for our actions and decisions. It reminds us of our values and goals and encourages us to take responsibility for our behavior.<br>• Promotes self-awareness: it can help us become more self-aware. By reflecting on our thoughts and actions, we can better understand ourselves and our motivations, and make more conscious choices.<br>• Protects us from harm: the inner critic can warn us about potential dangers and risks, and help us avoid making mistakes that could have negative consequences.<br>• Builds resilience: the inner critic can help us develop resilience and cope with challenges. By acknowledging our mistakes and failures, we can learn from them and become more resilient in the face of adversity. | • Self-criticism can be excessive and relentless: when the inner critic is too harsh and negative, it can become overwhelming and demoralizing, leading to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and even depression.<br>• Inner critic can lead to self-doubt: it can create a constant sense of self-doubt and uncertainty, which can prevent us from taking risks, trying new things, and pursuing our goals.<br>• When the inner critic is overly critical and negative, causing stress and anxiety, this can lead to physical symptoms such as headaches, muscle tension, and digestive problems.<br>• Inner critic can undermine relationships when it is directed towards others. It can create tension and conflict. Criticising others excessively can lead to resentment, defensiveness, and emotional distance.<br>• Unhealthy inner critic can lead to perfectionism: when the inner critic sets impossibly high standards, it can create a cycle of perfectionism that can be difficult to break. This can lead to burnout, anxiety, and a sense of never being good enough. |

## Useful Reflection Questions (to follow Empathy Exercise)

What were we practicing here? (for e.g., that we can see the good in everyone, we can feel empathy, etc.)

What is needed for us to get into an empathy-informed mindset?for e.g. perspective change, creativity and imagination, curiosity about the other's story.)

Was it easy or difficult to step into the other person's shoes? Why? What did you learn by taking their perspective?

This activity revolves around problem analysis, as one of the key building blocks of critical thinking. One way that problem analysis contributes to depolarisation is through participants exploring a complex issue from different perspectives, which enhances their understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of different problems' causes and effects.

This activity is best implemented in the class, as a small-group or whole-class activity (depending on the group size). Once the initial analytical exercise has been carried out in class, the instructor can assign follow-up analytical homework exercises.

## Part 1: Explaining Problem Tree Analysis

OBJECTIVES
To introduce the concept of problem analysis
To model problem tree analytical framework
To identify common problems and concerns

TIME
25 min

MATERIALS NEEDED
black/white/smart board and/or flipchart papers, markers

DESCRIPTION
The activity should start with the instructor doing a quick (max. 5 minutes) brainstorm based on the question, "In your opinion, what are contemporary most pressing societal problems, challenges or concerns we face?" All participants should contribute their ideas, with instructor noting them all on the board.

Next, the instructor announces that today's class session will be dedicated to problem analysis. Each student gets one 'vote' and goes up to the board and marks which problem/challenge/concern they find most pressing, so that collectively, they select the issue that the instructor will use for modeling problem analysis steps.

Once the issue has been identified, the instructor explains the 'problem tree analysis'. (See image on the next page.)

By prompting the class with various questions and nudges (see a list of suggested questions on the next page), together under instructor's guidance, the group creates problem tree analysis for their selected issue.

EFFECTS EFFECTS EFFECTS EFFECTS

PROBLEM

**ROOT CAUSES**

**Suggested questions** for inspiring the class to analyse their issue and fill out the problem tree (feel free to adapt, add or skip questions):
- Let's describe the problem - what is the problem? Why is this a problem?
- Who is most affected by this problem? (think individuals, particular groups in society, society on the whole)
  - Why are these groups affected? (and not others)
  - In what way are these different groups affected?
- What is the cause of this problem?
  - When did the problem first appear? (Why then?)
  - Where did the problem appear? (Why there?)
- What are the symptoms or effects of the problem?
  - How do we know that the problem exists?
  - Where do we see the effects, how do the symptoms exhibit themselves?

Once the class has identified several root causes, as well as multiple effects of the problem, the instructor randomly assigns students into smaller groups.

## Part 2: Group work and presentations

OBJECTIVES

To give students the chance to apply & practice problem tree analysis
To improve students' team-work, critical and analytical thinking skills

TIME

20 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED

flipchart papers, markers

DESCRIPTION

After students have been divided into smaller groups, each group should agree on the problem that they will analyse together. (They can select one of the problems/challenges/concerns identified previously during the initial brainstorm, or choose another issue to work on.)

The groups will have 15 minutes to create their own analytical problem trees, with one small change (differing from the collective analysis conducted previously): the final step of the analysis should be identifying one or two '**solutions**' (actions, policies, laws, or something that each one of us as individuals or active citizens can do) that would contribute to minimizing, or solving the analysed problem.

Each group should create their own problem tree analysis **poster**, including their two solutions.

The final 5 minutes of the class should be dedicated to a 'gallery visit': all the small groups' problem trees and solutions, presented on flip-chart papers, should be put on the wall so that everyone can view them.

If you want to make this viewing interactive, you can invite gallery visitors to make notes on other groups' problem trees, adding root causes, effects, or solutions that may not have been mentioned.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT QUOTES- page 1/4

This activity offers several quotes that can serve to foster reflection and as conversation starters about different topics related to (de)polarisation.

### Option 1: Large Group Plenary - Bohmian Dialogue

Take one quote to kick off a whole class reflection about it. Read out the quote and ask students to share their thoughts - what are their first associations when they hear this quote? What does it remind them of? Do they have any personal experience with the sentiment expressed with the quote?, etc.

By using Bohmian dialogue principles (see: second activity in this Guide), the group will share their personal impressions, thoughts and experiences, weaving together a rich tapestry of meaning and reflection about the quote, and its individual-social-cultural-political-psychological significance.

### Option 2: Small Group Discussions

Divide the class into several small groups, and assign each group one of the quotes. Ask them to reflect on the quote, by exploring its meaning, personal experiences group members might have with its sentiment, and societal or contemporary relevance.

Each small group should have the assignment to come up with the answer to the following question at the end of their group discussion, to share with the rest of the class: "What does this quote teach us, and in what way can each of us adopt some of its lessons in our own (personal and/or professional) lives?"

The class should end with all groups sharing their key takeaways about their respective assigned quotes.

### Option 3: Homework Assignment - Personal Essay or Presentation

Assign each student one of the quotes or have them pick their own, on the topic related to miscommunication, polarisation, conflict. The assignment could be either to write a personal reflection essay about the quote, dissecting its meaning and relevance for today, or to create a presentation for the whole class.

The 'call to action' should still remain as part of the assignment, i.e. "What does this quote teach us, and in what way can each of us adopt some of its lessons in our own (personal and/or professional) lives?"

49

" *He who cannot put his thoughts on ice should not enter into the heat of dispute.*
— Friedrich Nietzsche "

" *Do I contradict myself?
Very well,
then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)*
-Walt Whitman "

" *People often silence themselves, or "agree to disagree" without fully exploring the actual nature of the disagreement, for the sake of protecting a relationship and maintaining connection. But when we avoid certain conversations, and never fully learn how the other person feels about all of the issues, we sometimes end up making assumptions that not only perpetuate but deepen misunderstandings, and that can generate resentment.*
— Brené Brown "

" *Love is wise; hatred is foolish. In this world, which is getting more and more closely interconnected, we have to learn to tolerate each other, we have to learn to put up with the fact that some people say things that we don't like. We can only live together in that way. But if we are to live together, and not die together, we must learn a kind of charity and a kind of tolerance, which is absolutely vital to the continuation of human life on this planet.*
— Bertrand Russell "

"
*The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.*
-George Bernard Shaw
"

"
*I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.*
-Evelyn Beatrice Hall
"

"
*The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said.*
-Peter Drucker
"

"
*It is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it.*
-Joseph Joubert
"

"
*When we change the way we communicate, we change society.*
-Clay Shirky
"

"
*Assumptions are the termites of relationships.*
-Henry Winkler
"

"
*The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.*
- F. Scott Fitzgerald
"

"If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy.
Then he becomes your partner."
-Nelson Mandela

"You do not change people's minds by defeating them with logic."
— Herbert Simon

"A wise man changes his mind, a fool never will."
-proverb

"Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."
-George Bernard Shaw

"I believe that if we stop talking at one another, and start talking with one another, we can get a lot done."
— Barack Obama

"The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply."
-Stephen Covey

"When nothing is sure, everything is possible."
-Margaret Drabble

The DARE short films, animations, European values educational cards, activities and lesson plans are inspired by the themes of addressing polarisation, fostering civic engagement, building critical thinking and resilience. The topics covered by the animations and short films are at times controversial and may fuel polarisation, or can be its end result (for e.g. extremism).

This section contains a brief introduction to the different DARE educational materials produced by partners from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Germany, Serbia and Sweden. We hope that every educator, youth worker, trainer or teacher will be able to find something among these materials that will be of interest to their students and that the lessons and workshops inspired by these materials will be an engaging and interactive learning experience for all.

## "DARE to CARE" - short videos and lesson plans

"DARE to care" educational videos feature inspiring young individuals who are civically active in different fields, addressing different societal problems and challenges in their respective communities. In these short feature interviews, they tell us about their lives, interests, and what inspired them to care about their topic of activism and volunteering. Through these authentic youth voices and stories, we wish to inspire volunteering, community service and other forms of (youth) civic engagement.

### "DARE to Care" - Shelter Volunteer & Animal Welfare Advocate
This short interview video features the work of a young dog shelter volunteer and animal welfare advocate from Osijek, Croatia. In the video, we visit the shelter managed by the animal welfare association 'Pobjede' ('Victories'), and hear Dunja talk about why she began volunteering and helping abandoned dogs in her city.

Country:          Croatia
Video and lesson plan:          depolarisation.eu/animalwelfare

### "DARE to Care" - LGBTQIA Rights Activist
This short interview video features a young LGBTQIA rights activist from Belgrade, Serbia who works in an organisation that offers legal and psychological support for LGBTQIA people.

Country:          Serbia
Video and lesson plan:          depolarisation.eu/lgbtrights

53

**"DARE to Care" - Young Entrepreneur and Self-Employment Advocate**

This short interview video features a young woman from Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina who, together with a couple of friends, decided to challenge unemployment and unfavourable position of youth in the job market - by starting her own business.

Country:        Bosnia-Herzegovina
Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/selfemployment

**"DARE to Care" - International Youth Exchanges**

This short interview video features Kerim from Berlin, Germany who tells us about his youth experiences in international exchanges, which inspired him to first volunteer, and then work as organiser of such youth encounters on an international level.

Country:        Germany
Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/youthexchanges

**"DARE to Care" - Appreciation of Diversity and Dialogue in Multireligious Communities**

This short interview video features Liam from Stockholm, Sweden, who organises workshops and camps for young people of different religions to discuss identity, faith, and religion and to get to know each other and each others' beliefs better.

Country:        Sweden
Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/diversity

**"DARE to Care" - Historical Human Rights Education Trainers**

This short interview video features young trainers active in the field of historical human rights education, from Rijeka and Zadar in Croatia, Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Belgrade, Serbia. We listen to Jan, Janet, Amina and Jana talk about their experiences as peer guide trainers in the exhibition "Anne Frank - History for Today".

Country:        Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia
Video and lesson plan:                depolarisation.eu/rights

### "DARE to Care" - Debate Education Trainer

This short interview video features Katarina from Belgrade, Serbia. In the video, we learn about her volunteering as a debate instructor and coach and her passion for argumentation, public speaking, and teaching critical thinking.

Country:        Serbia
Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/debate

### "DARE to Care" - Peacebuilding & Active Citizenship

This short interview video features Ivan from Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina who initiated 'chocolate riots' in his town in order to challenge the public perception and media narratives depicting his town as problematic. This initiative had a very positive response from citizens and even traveled beyond the borders of his city and country, spreading positive vibes.

Country:        Bosnia-Herzegovina
Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/activecitizenship

### "DARE to Care" - Anti-Cyberbullying Activist

This short interview video features Charlotte from Berlin, Germany who volunteers with an organisation that raises awareness about the dangers of cyberbullying and provides support to young people affected by it.

Country:        Germany
Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/cyberbullying

### "DARE to Care" - Social Cohesion in Multicultural Communities

This short interview video features Ilham from Sweden. She works as a nurse, and in her free time, she volunteers for an organisation that helps Somali children and adults integrate into Swedish society.

Country:        Sweden
Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/socialcohesion

## MODERN CHALLENGES - short animations and lesson plans

"Modern Challenges" animated educational videos deconstruct complex phenomena, providing an explainer-introduction about contemporary social issues. Accompanying lesson plans are designed to assist teachers in facilitating classroom conversations and discussions about these topics, seeking to deepen everyone's understanding and critical thinking.

### Modern Challenge - Polarisation

This short animation introduces the phenomenon of polarisation in society, a sharp division into groups holding opposing values or opinions on politics, ideology, various policies, international affairs, religion, culture - you name it. Why is polarisation a problem and how can we contribute to depolarising our societies?

Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/polarisation

### Modern Challenge - Disinformation

This short animation introduces the phenomenon of disinformation, as an example of harmful information disorders that are on the rise. In what way does disinformation cause harm and how can we protect ourselves from it?

Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/disinformation

### Modern Challenge - Extremism

This short animation builds on the topic of radicalisation, introducing the phenomenon of extremism - active opposition to (European) values such as democracy, rule of law, human rights, to the point of accepting violence as an acceptable means of promoting and fighting for one's views. What is extremism and how can we be more resilient against it?

Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/extremism

### Modern Challenge - Radicalisation

This short animation introduces the phenomenon of radicalisation, the process of someone gradually coming to hold radical, fundamentalist or extremist views. How does an individual become radicalised, and how can we prevent or reverse this process?

Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/radicalisation

### Modern Challenge - Emigration

This short animation introduces the phenomenon of emigration, the act of leaving one's country to settle, often permanently, in another. Why do people choose to emigrate, and in what way does emigration impact countries?

Video and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/emigration

### Modern Challenge - Mental Health
This short animation broadly introduces the topic of mental health and the importance of destigmatizing the act of seeking help. What are some commonly occurring mental health problems and how can we nurture our mental health?

Video and lesson plan:    depolarisation.eu/mentalhealth

### Modern Challenge - Individual Pollution
This short animation introduces the challenge of individual pollution - all the different ways in which we, individuals, make choices, decisions and perform acts that directly and negatively affect our environment. In what way can we curb and minimize individual pollution?

Video and lesson plan:    depolarisation.eu/individualpollution

### Modern Challenge - Civic Engagement
This short animation explores the challenge of civic engagement, an individual or group activity that seeks to positively address issues of public concern. Why is civic engagement important and how can we become active citizens who contribute to their communities?

Video and lesson plan:    depolarisation.eu/civicengagement

### Modern Challenge - Where Are You (really) From?
This short animation explores the seemingly innocent question that many immigrants are asked on regular basis. In what way can this question reduce someone's identity to a social group, race, nationality or culture, and why does it foster a sense of alienation?

Video and lesson plan:    depolarisation.eu/whereareyoufrom

### Modern Challenge - Nationalism
This short animation introduces the phenomenon of nationalism, an identification with, support for and love of one's nation that is coupled with exclusion, rejection, or hatred of other nations. Why is nationalism a problem and how can we move toward patriotism instead?

Video and lesson plan:    depolarisation.eu/nationalism

## EUROPEAN VALUES - cards set

This card set is a mix of European Union history, philosophy, human rights, democratic values and principles, and contemporary dilemmas and questions about the role and importance of European values in our societies.

Educational cards are an educational tool that helps students organise and process information in an engaging and innovative way. The cards are flexible as teachers and educators can choose to focus on certain topics/themes, or cluster them in different ways for a variety of classroom modules. Using engaging images means that the cards are attractive to students who are visual learners as pictures/images help memorise and retain information better. Finally, using dilemmas and questions means that educational cards can help teachers facilitate reflection with students around philosophical topics related to European values.

The cards are in a downloadable/printable pdf format, with an image on the cover (symbolic or historical) and with text on the back explaining the image/concept through a definition; posing key discussion questions or dilemmas.

Cards and lesson plan:        depolarisation.eu/europeanvalues

## RADICALISATION AWARENESS TRAINING

The radicalisation awareness training plan and accompanying materials are designed to build teachers', educators' and youth workers' understanding of the process of radicalisation and to inform about inspiring practices in prevention and intervention. The other important focus of the training plan is to develop skills that help practitioners identify and work with vulnerable youth.

The training includes short lectures and group discussions and is based on a review of relevant academic material, research evidence and inspiring practices. It raises awareness about the problem of radicalisation and violent extremism, its universality and the danger it poses for Europe, and for European values.

Training plan:        depolarisation.eu/rate