



DARE

Depolarisation Activism for
Resilient Europe

Modern Challenges: DISINFORMATION

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Modern Challenges: Disinformation

Background (about the DARE project)

The 'DARE - Depolarization Activism for Resilient Europe' initiative 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

Lesson Themes

- 'Modern Challenges' theme - exploring complex, contemporary issues that are not always addressed in the classroom;
- The issue of disinformation society is facing, its consequences, and what an individual can do recognise disinformation and minimise its harms.

Context

Sensationalism and false stories are not a new phenomenon. However, today, when most people access their news and information from the internet and through social media channels, the dangers of disinformation loom large. Disinformation is spread intentionally to influence and manipulate opinions; it can create prejudice, sow division, spread hatred, and incite violence; it can even affect the results of elections. In recent years, disinformation has become very dangerous for democracy. When disinformation is spread, it does not just remain in the virtual world but has real-world consequences.

This lesson plan opens the conversation about the dangers of disinformation and its consequences and gives guidelines on how each person can protect themselves and others.

Goals

- To raise awareness about the dangers of disinformation;
- To build understanding about the consequences of disinformation in society;
- To increase students' ability to build their resilience against disinformation.

Learning Outcomes

It is expected that as a result of the class, the students will be able to:

- Define and explain what is disinformation;
- Analyse and articulate the consequences of disinformation in society;
- Verify sources and identify examples of disinformation.

Material and Equipment Needed

Laptop; beamer/projector; speakers; internet/wi-fi

Duration

45 minutes (one standard lesson)

Overview of Lesson Activities (Process)

Introduction (10 minutes)

In the beginning, it is good to assess students' familiarity with this topic. Do a short introductory discussion with the following questions:

- Who has heard the term 'disinformation' before?
- Do you regularly read, listen to or watch the news? If so, where do you get the information from?
- Have you ever come across disinformation? Could you give us an example?

Briefly engage with students' answers, and then proceed to watch the short animation.

Short Modern Challenge video clip viewing (5 minutes)

Play the video clip for the students: depolarisation.eu/disinformation

A brief discussion about the video clip (15 minutes)

Useful exploratory and follow-up reflection questions:

- Was any information from the short animation new to you? Did anything surprise you?
- Why is disinformation particularly dangerous in today's world?
- Who are all the relevant (f)actors in countering disinformation in today's society?
(Note: media regulatory agencies, government, media outlets, journalists, fact-checking organisations, individuals - every citizen needs to be mindful of their own 'media diet'.)

"Recognising Disinformation" - Whole Class Activity (15 minutes)

Using the steps given in the animation, analyse one current news story (present either in the social media or on a website known for spreading disinformation). For choosing a story to work with, check a fact-checking website - but make sure that when analysing the story with the students, you show the original article, not the fact-checked one. Here are some websites where you can collect most current examples of false news:

- <https://www.tagesschau.de/faktenfinder/> (Germany)
- <https://www.bliintelurad.se/> (Sweden)
- <https://faktograf.hr/> (Croatia)
- <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/> (Bosnia-Herzegovina)
- <https://fakenews.rs/> or <https://www.istinomer.rs/> (Serbia)

You will have approximately 2 minutes for each of the steps. Ask the students to help you analyse the story that you have displayed on the screen/wall in front of them.

"Recognising Disinformation" - Whole Class Activity (15 minutes)

Step 1: Be suspicious!

Look closely and critically at the message. Do the claims make sense or are there contradictions? Is there a conspicuous number of exclamation marks or capital letters? A dramatic image can be the first clue that you are absorbing false information.

Step 2: Check the source!

Are there any source citations and do the sources cited actually exist? For a website, look for information about the owners of the website - can you find the name, address, and contact details of the person responsible for the messages on the page?

Step 3: Question the purpose!

What is the purpose of the content? Is it information, an opinion or possibly advertising? Is the contribution very one-sided and is only one opinion represented or are other views also expressed?

Step 4: Do a fact-check!

Ask students to use their smartphones to research the claims on independent sites. If other media do not spread this news, you should doubt the accuracy of the news. Be careful even with serious-looking data or statistics if no sources are given.

Step 5: Check pictures and videos!

Photos and videos can be easily manipulated. With the reverse image/video search function, you can check where and when pictures and videos appeared for the first time and in what context they were originally used.

After you have carried out the analysis of the chosen disinformation-based article, the instructor closes the class by explaining the homework assignment.

Sources

- DARE project, documentation and videos can be found on the project website: www.depolarisation.eu or www.resilienteurope.eu
- "Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training, UNESCO, downloadable at: <https://en.unesco.org/fightfakenews> (note: available in many languages)

Activity Adaption for Online Implementation

This lesson easily transfers to online education, as much of it focuses on student reflection and conversation.

Assessment and Evaluation Options

The assessment for this lesson could revolve around evaluating students' ability to identify disinformation or analyse its harms to society and democratic political processes. In addition, the students' completed homework assignments can also be assessed for innovation, engagement and accuracy.

Homework Ideas

- Homework idea 1: whether individually or in a group, students/participants can do research on the following terms:
 - Backfire Effect
 - Filter bubble
 - Confirmation Bias

Each student or small group should create a presentation defining and explaining the term and how it relates to disinformation; providing two examples of it in practice; offering possible solutions to addressing these phenomena.

- Homework idea 2: Meme creation against disinformation

Either individually or in small teams, students should think about how they can create some awareness-raising memes to combat disinformation and build people's resilience. They should agree on an effective, short message or slogan that they will include in their meme. This meme generator is suitable for the purpose of this homework activity:
<https://imgflip.com/memegenerator>

The created memes should then be evaluated by the whole class, with everyone together discussing each meme and key message for persuasion and effectiveness.