

Matching video (in Dutch, with English subtitles):

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qT1J9pnL_oqIUMINz9NTMh1mTyhres2t/view?usp=sharing

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Teaching about disinformation - 6 tips

How can you teach (young) people about propaganda, conspiracy theories and misleading information on the internet? Discover 6 tips on how to do this in the classroom.

1. The time is now

Don't wait until a student confidently tells a conspiracy theory in class. Or until a few propaganda images shake up the school. After all, you want your students to interact critically with different media and not just be misled.

By paying attention to it at a "quiet" time, you have control over the examples you want to discuss in class. And you should not be led by current events. Prevention is better than cure.

2. Emotions need attention

Your first reflex as a teacher is probably to look at everything objectively: to argue with facts. But... propaganda and conspiracy theories play on existing emotions or stir up new ones. Especially when it comes to topics that students find important (religion, favorite sports club, love of animals, the climate, health, ...).

So don't ask to look at everything rationally, because then you are likely to get "socially desirable answers" or students may withdraw. Go deeper into what students are feeling: let them listen to others and show appreciation for their involvement.

3. Focus on questions

Try not to ask directly for analysis or opinions when discussing propaganda or conspiracy theories with your students. Rather, invite them to ask as many questions as possible about videos, posters or texts. Each new question stimulates curiosity, but also encourages them to look for answers themselves. Do not label the students' answers as 'wrong' or 'right', but continue to ask questions and stimulate reflection.

4. Focus on diversity

Disinformation flourishes mainly among like-minded people. Try to open up groups by providing a wide range of insights. A different opinion invites one to defend, argue and perhaps adjust one's own position. Listening to different opinions can bring understanding to others.

5. Don't just call it "crap" or "stupid".

Maybe you really don't understand how someone has been so fooled by propaganda or a conspiracy theory. But realize that these forms of communication perfectly play on frustrations, fears or other feelings. Science, government or media sometimes do not provide sufficient answers. Propagandists and conspiracy thinkers often do offer that answer (even if it is not completely correct).

A wrong answer can sometimes be more reassuring than no answer at all. This does not mean the student is stupid, but may be worried or frustrated. Look for reasons why someone believes something, rather than immediately refuting it.

6. Correct mistakes

Refuting misleading communication is not always easy. You don't possess the necessary expertise on every subject. Moreover, sometimes someone is so convinced of his or her rightness that any counterargument vanishes into thin air.

Conspiracy thinkers believe that lack of evidence for the conspiracy is the result of a cover-up. "The elite" allegedly destroyed all evidence. Yet it is important to name misinformation. Not to convince conspiracy thinkers or propagandists, but rather to give (other) students a wide range of perspectives.