



Online extremism

Three learning arrangements to foster critical media literacy when dealing with online propaganda in schools

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Online extremism

COLOPHON

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PREFACE

In recent years, the internet has become an integral part of our reality. Huge technological advances in particular mean that the internet has become pervasive in the everyday lives of many, mainly young, people.

Extremist actors also exploit the internet to promote specific ideologies and world views, as well as for agitation. In today's world, the internet appears to play a key role in the spread of propaganda material by Islamist organisations and extreme right-wing groups.

As well as hate-filled user comments, these days internet users are highly likely to encounter propaganda videos via various social media channels almost by accident - creating a more rapid and broader awareness of conflict issues among individuals who, up until that time, had no or at most peripheral contact with radical or even extremist circles. This raises the question as to how propaganda influences people, when contact with extremist online propaganda is becoming increasingly inevitable.

This reality and quality of online radicalisation poses a major challenge for the state and society: to scale up the prevention of online extremism, or to at least take into account the influence and specific characteristics

AWARENESS

FACE

of the internet when developing prevention measures. The primary objective is to protect people, particularly young people, from the risk of indoctrination.

The breadth and diversity of the internet make it particularly difficult to effectively target specific groups and to respond appropriately to the effects of problematic content. With this in mind, target group-oriented prevention strategies should focus on addressing online extremism in a school setting in order to specifically empower vulnerable target groups or make these groups less susceptible to an extremist world view.

Building on previous research activities on the topics of 'internet propaganda'¹ and 'counter-narrative'², jointly developed by the Terrorism/Extremism Research Unit of the Bundeskriminalamt and the University of Cologne, the CONTRA project aims to deliver practical prevention tools to enhance media critical thinking skills to combat online propaganda. By implementing the research results, taking into account the practical experience of those involved in prevention, educational experts and security experts, it has been possible to develop, test and evaluate the learning arrangements described in this document so that they can now be used in schools.

EMPOWERMENT

REFLECTION



More information on the project can be found at www.project-contra.org



¹Rieger, D., Frischlich, L. & Bente, G. (2013). *Propaganda 2.0: Psychological effects of right-wing and Islamic extremist internet videos*. Cologne: Wolters Kluwer.

²Frischlich, L., Rieger, D., Morten, A. & Bente, G. (Hrsg.) (2017). *Anti-extremism videos? Counter-Narrative auf dem Prüfstand*. Wiesbaden: Bundeskriminalamt.



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1. INTRODUCTION

For young people, the use of digital media is part of life. Alongside a wide range of entertaining and educational offerings and formats, the internet also provides access to a huge amount of problematic content such as extremist propaganda, hate speech, conspiracy theories and ‘fake news’. Right-wing extremist and Islamist actors in particular exploit the many and varied means of disseminating information offered by digital media to spread their hostile and malicious messages and to incite violence (see also Infobox Nr. 1). Young people can encounter this content at any time while browsing the internet, be it intentional or simply by chance. For young people who have an interest, such materials, in particular, videos can act as a gateway to a radical scene. Via automated recommendation algorithms, comments sections below YouTube clips and even personal messages they ultimately also reach internet users who are not actively seeking them.

How can this phenomenon be dealt with in an educational setting? Efforts to prevent young people from seeing extremist content by deleting or banning such content is not an effective solution from a media education, technical or practical perspective. In this respect the internet, with its global infrastructure, is proving difficult to regulate and control. For instance anti-democratic content and extremist actors’ social media user accounts can simply reappear in a slightly different form shortly after their removal. Moreover, extremist narrative can also be found in posts that are not published by obvious extremist actors. Such underlying or subtle content generally cannot be removed for legal reasons. Instead, it calls for a substantive dialogue.

The learning materials presented in this document have been developed in the context of the CONTRA research project. They are aimed at empowering youth against online manipulation attempts and emotional content-related discourse in the school setting by encouraging and facilitating,



from a teaching perspective, reflection on extremist content. The primary objective is to enhance *media critical thinking skills* with regard to extremist propaganda and hate speech on the web. In this context, we must also take into account what has recently been termed ‘fake news’. Particularly in this age of digital propaganda, focusing on *reflecting* on extremist content seems to be a key aspect of media skills. This reflection will be stimulated via a three-stage learning process: Awareness, Reflection and Empowerment.³

During the project term (2016–2018), three learning arrangements were developed and scientifically evaluated for use in schools.

The final programme is aimed at all youth, regardless of any previous exposure to extremist ideology. To this extent, the learning materials presented in this document have been created as an early or universal prevention offering. It aims to raise awareness and offers a structured teaching environment in which to discuss the issues of online extremist propaganda and hate speech (as well as ‘fake news’) from various radical environments and groups.

Teachers do not require any additional specific skills in relation to extremism prevention in order to implement this programme in class. When working with individuals who already show an affinity to radical ideas or are in a process of radicalisation, the materials should only be used by specialist teaching staff who are experienced in moderating potentially escalating substantive discussions where necessary. Individuals who are radicalised or in a process of radicalisation often have rigid thought patterns due to previous ideological indoctrination, and can prove immune to arguments during discussions. Where teachers encounter such cases, they are advised to make use of the services offered by the appropriate advice centres. Information about advice centres and support in suspected cases and evident radicalisation tendencies can be found on p. 25.



³Baacke, Dieter (1997). *Teaching the Media* (new unrevised edition 2007). Tübingen: Niemeyer.



Info box no. 1

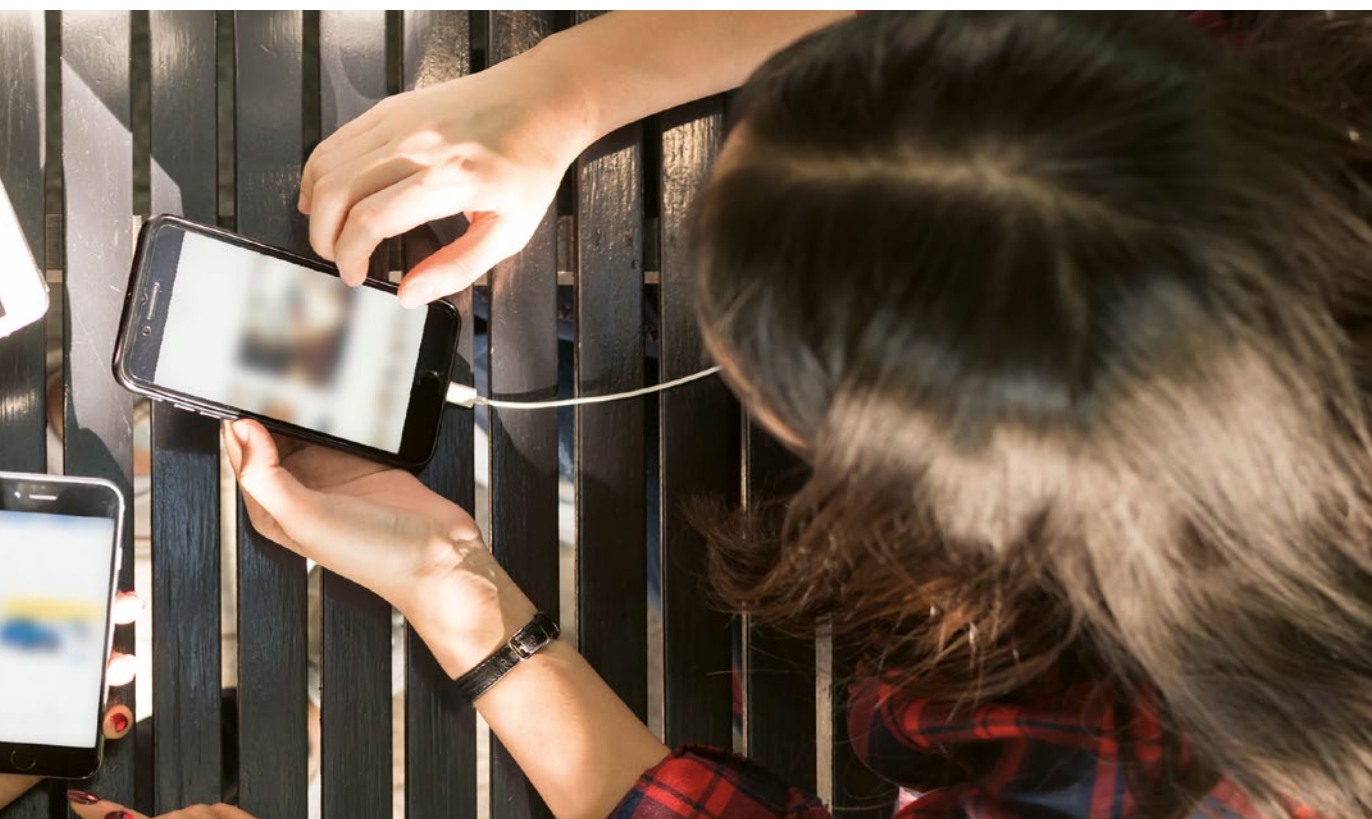
THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN SPREADING EXTREMIST PROPAGANDA, HATE SPEECH AND FAKE NEWS

As far back as in the 1990s, leading US neo-Nazis believed that the internet would facilitate a global resurgence of the ‘white’ race. They believed it would help the movement to reach their audience directly rather than via the ‘mainstream media’. They called on their activists to step up their use of the internet for agitation purposes. Islamic terrorism strategists too recognised the potential of the internet in the 2000s. Their operational writings call for the internet to be used as an infrastructure for their own media activities; on the one hand to present themselves in a better light, and on the other hand to undermine the positive image of the ‘West’ propagated by its own media.⁴

The internet has now become one of the relevant factors in the radicalisation of young people. Its importance has grown for terrorist organisations and extremist groups, particularly for the purpose of spreading propaganda material. Thanks to the internet this propaganda can now be accessed virtually without limits, anywhere and at any time. Propaganda now reaches a larger potential audience. It has also evolved since the introduction of the big social networks, and not just in terms of quantity. Video messages are increasingly produced in several languages and make reference to current political and social debate in Germany and other European countries.⁵

⁴ Meleagrou-Hitchens, A. & Kaderbhai, N. (2017). *Research perspectives on online radicalisation. A Literature Review, 2006–2016*. London: King’s College.

⁵ Ben Slama, B. & Kemmesies, U. (2017). *Extremismusprävention im Internet: Praxisbedarf für eine orientierungstiftende Forschung [Preventing online extremism: a practical need for orienting research]*. In: L. Frischlich, D. Rieger, A. Morten & G. Bente (Ed.) (2017), *Videos gegen Extremismus? Counter-Narrative auf dem Prüfstand [Anti-extremism videos? Putting counter-narratives to the test]* (p. 35–46). Wiesbaden: Bundeskriminalamt.



TYPES OF EXTREMIST ONLINE DISCOURSE

There are different types of problematic online discourse. Three key types are identified below, accompanied by examples:

- **Propaganda videos** are a core element of Islamist and right-extremist propaganda. They appeal to youth and young adults in particular due to their modern character, are easily disseminated, and therefore tie in with the lifestyle and user habits of the young generation. Disseminated via social media such as Instagram (via Instagram stories), but also messenger services such as Telegram or the video platform YouTube, they are a powerful propaganda tool.
- The term **'fake news'** refers to deliberate, internet-based political disinformation, and the targeted distribution of fake reports. Fake news can spread very quickly on the internet and reach a large number of people. It is used to influence political opinion through targeted manipulation.

Users for whom the falsified information confirms an existing world view are particularly vulnerable to this type of manipulation. **Ways in which fake news is disseminated include using 'social bots'** and trolls via huge numbers of fake social media profiles. The distribution of fake news on certain groups of people such as refugees can encourage the acceptance of an extreme-right ideology.

- **'Hate Speech'** refers to communicative attacks on members of certain social groups, motivated for instance by racist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic or sexist prejudices.
- **Echo chambers** are virtual spaces in which certain views are exchanged without taking into account other points of view. For example, those with certain political leanings mainly interact with like-minded people on Facebook or Twitter and rarely exchange views with people who have different beliefs. This means that, in the long term, the individual comes to see his or her own views as true and held by a majority.



2. MEDIA LITERACY: AWARENESS, REFLECTION, EMPOWERMENT

Media critical thinking skills are understood to mean *‘the analytical, reflective and ethical classification or evaluation of media content’*⁶ – with a focus in this material on extremist propaganda. Students should be empowered to recognise any connections between videos and dubious channels, and to critically examine links. This requires specific knowledge as well as special skills and approaches, which are conveyed at the following three levels:



1

Awareness
attentiveness and
sensitisation

2

Reflection
analytical
and critical
reflection

3

Empowerment
reinforcement and
representation of
own views

⁶ Ganguin, S. & Sander, U. (2015). Zur Entwicklung von Medienkritik [On the development of media criticism]. In: F. v. Gross, D. M. Meister & U. Sander (Ed.), *Medienpädagogik – ein Überblick* [Teaching the Media – an overview] (p. 229–246). Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, p. 234.

(1) The dimension of *Awareness* describes basic attention to extremist discourse on the web: awareness of the availability of different types of propaganda content on YouTube and other online portals. Activities at the Awareness level also include the transfer of knowledge about the manipulation attempts and mechanisms of propaganda (e.g.: what rhetorical and visual devices are employed?) and about how media content works (including how automated algorithms work). The activities at this level therefore involve sensitisation, the provision of information and the development of an awareness of the problems associated with specific content on the web.

(2) *Reflection* (critical reflection) goes a step further and aims to familiarise students with certain criteria that can be applied to online content (e.g. videos). The key question: is the content internet propaganda? The activities at Reflection level include empowering students to understand media content and its properties, as well as transferring the skills to analyse and assess the substantive quality and credibility of media content and its transmitters.

(3) As the third activity level, *Empowerment* relates to action and activating, in other words the reinforcement and representation of the individual's own views. The focus here is on skills that go beyond identifying, analysing and evaluating propaganda. Possible themes

for activities at this level include the ability to counter the propaganda videos or hate comments presented, and to embrace and use the individual's own voice and views as effective and powerful. This appears to be an important lesson for students to learn, also in terms of courage to take action online. Empowerment can be viewed as a consequence of knowledge and critical thinking about media and media content.

The breakdown provided is intended to support planning of the learning arrangement, rather than as a strict order that must be adhered to. Awareness, Reflection and Empowerment are always interconnected: growing Awareness of propaganda increases the students' potential for critical Reflection, while critical Reflection on radical content requires knowledge of the presence of this content on the web. Reflection on extremist content and its mechanisms of action provides a basis for active Positioning and can boost Awareness of positioning in the context of propaganda on the web, thus it makes it easier to identify arguments for creative counter narratives.

In order to utilise these three levels when planning teaching activities, Awareness (1), Reflection (2) and Empowerment (3) can also be broken down into sub-goals (see table 1). These sub-goals are addressed by the three learning arrangements that have been developed.

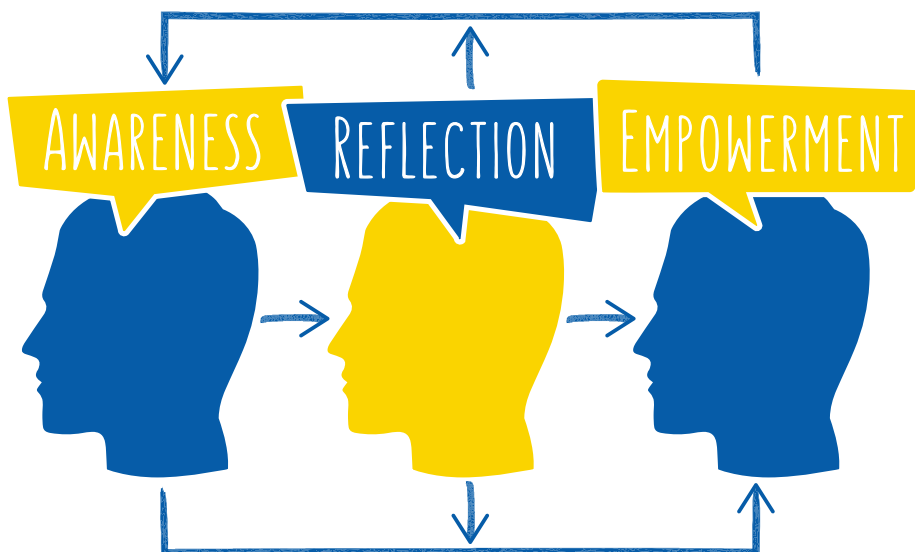


Figure 1: Interaction between the three prevention levels of media critical thinking skills

TABLE 1: SUB-GOALS OF THE THREE ACTIVITY LEVELS OF MEDIA CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

<p>1. Awareness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Raising awareness of manipulative strategies and different types of extremism (right-wing extremism and Islamic extremism).</i> • <i>Questioning the intention of manipulative and propagandistic media messages.</i> • <i>Sensitising students to the differences between extremist propaganda messages and positive messages.</i>
<p>2. Reflection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Acquiring knowledge about methods of manipulation and radical propaganda content (see info boxes 2 and 3)</i> • <i>Improving students' ability to critically reflect on media content in general and propaganda in particular.</i> • <i>Improving students' ability to deal with their own emotional response to propaganda, e.g. to refrain from impulsive reactions.</i> • <i>Enabling students to understand the impact of manipulative media content and messages.</i> • <i>Clarifying the political relevance of attitudes and opinions in virtual forums.</i>
<p>3. Empowerment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Promoting democratic values and capacity for political judgement.</i> • <i>Empowering students to take part in a responsible manner in social discourse on extremism in general, and radical media content in particular.</i> • <i>Empowering students to position themselves against extremism and hate.</i>



ORIENTATION

3. FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS AND TEACHING PRINCIPLES

This learning programme follows an educational approach based on the fundamental assumptions of constructivist teaching⁷. The approach takes into account the importance of communication to young people in constructing reality both during class discussions and in small groups.

This learning programme provides a flexible framework that allows students some freedom of choice and design when selecting topics and subjects for the elaboration of their own projects. Teachers can set the stage for self-directed learning processes, thereby initiating educational processes. The class is therefore viewed as a learning arrangement.

As a consequence, the learning arrangements set out in this programme adhere to four teaching principles: (1) *Lifeworld orientation*, (2) *action orientation*, (3) *subject orientation* and (4) *critical reflection*.

3.1 LIFEWORLD ORIENTATION, OR: WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES

'Lifeworld orientation' means taking into account the everyday lives of students, whose everyday experiences are shaped by certain youth-specific realities and a collective wisdom, to which adults do not always

have access.⁸ However, due to their common sense of belonging to a generation young people have considerable overlap in their views of the world. They have a shared experience of the world, which differs from the experience of adults or children. For them, the internet and access to it is part of their normal routine as a world of collective experience.

For example, the *JIM Study 2017*⁹ provides insight into young people's media consumption habits based on a representative sample for the Federal Republic of Germany. YouTube is the most popular online offering for around 58% of girls and 69% of boys aged 12 to 16. Approximately 86% of the young people surveyed use YouTube several times a week, while 56% visit YouTube every day. These figures clearly show that the internet and access to it is part of young people's normal routine. The 'lifeworld orientation' principle incorporates these specific media consumption habits. The emphasis on video platform YouTube is a major consequence of this principle. In addition, various issues and problems can prove relevant to the lives of young people depending on whether, for instance, they live in a major city or in the countryside, in the suburbs or an inner city area. Issues can also gain relevance over time or be superseded by new issues. This programme provides tools for addressing issues that are relevant to students.

⁷ Reich, K. (2006). *Konstruktivistische Didaktik. Lehr- und Studienbuch mit Methodenpool* [Constructivist teaching. Teaching and study book with pool of methods] (3rd, completely revised edition). Weinheim and Basel: Beltz; Reich, K. (2005). *Systemisch-konstruktivistische Pädagogik. Einführung in Grundlagen einer interaktionistisch-konstruktivistischen Pädagogik* [Systemic constructivist education. An introduction to the basic principles of interactionist and constructivist education] (5th Edition). Weinheim and Basel: Beltz.

⁸ Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (2016). *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit* [The social construction of reality] (26th Edition). Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.

⁹ Feierabend, S., Plankenhorn, T. & Rathgeb, T. (2017). *JIM-Studie: Jugend, Information, (Multi-)Media. Basisstudie zum Medienumgang 12- bis 19-Jähriger in Deutschland* [JIM Study: Youth, information and multimedia. A baseline study on media habits in 12 to 19-year-olds in Germany]. Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest [Pedagogical Media Research Centre Southwest].

LEARNING BY DOING



3.2 ACTION ORIENTATION, OR: LEARNING BY DOING

Action-oriented learning is defined as 'Learning by Doing'. Learning and educational processes are particularly successful provided that opportunities for interactive engagement are encouraged, for instance through the production of self-made materials such as a poster, group presentation or video clip.¹⁰ Alongside productive and creative processes as a direct activity, the action orientation principle also targets the level of social interaction such as the possibilities of simulation in peer interactions or communicative claims to authority on the subjects of politics and lifestyle.

3.3 SUBJECT ORIENTATION, OR: PROPAGANDA AS A SUBJECT

While closer examination of social discourse can be unproblematic within many teaching subjects, this is not always the case for the subject of *online extremist propaganda*. Discussions can easily progress onto associated, conflictladen topics such as *right-wing violence, radicalisation, Salafism and Islam in Europe*. Dealing with controversial public issues such as these during class runs the risk of unintended side effects. For instance they can override the primary object, relegating *online propaganda* as a form of media articulation and specific communication strategy. As public debate cannot fail to escape students' notice, there is a risk of becoming caught up in politically and emotionally charged contextual issues. The principle of *subject orientation* takes this potential problem area into account and focuses on the subject. The emphasis must not be placed on contextual factors such as discourses and attitudes. The subject is therefore extricated from its links to and ties with associated discourses, without suppressing the discourse itself. This process is referred to as *extraction* in photography, whereby a subject is made to stand out by reducing

the depth of field while the background is faded out but still recognisable. This method of focusing on propaganda as the subject should create a protected environment in class, which is particularly relevant when dealing with conflict-laden issues in order to allow effective learning.



3.4 CRITICAL REFLECTION, OR: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

Critical reflection as a didactic principle refers to encouraging changes in perspective: on the one hand adopting an *own* perspective – the students' own thoughts and feelings about a subject, such as a video, its effect or the situation in which it is viewed. On the other hand, the adoption of a *different* perspective to the students' own should also be encouraged, allowing access to the 'relativity of perspective' in the sense of a plural point of view.¹¹ Critical reflection does not mean criticism in the sense of validating or denigrating, but instead aims at an analytical perspective on the subject and a problem-oriented approach towards its social discourses and contexts. Critical reflection is a precondition for making decisions about how to position oneself in political contexts, where there are no absolute truths and each individual situation must be negotiated in an interactive way.

¹⁰ Reinhardt, S. (2014). Handlungsorientierung [Action orientation]. In: W. Sander & B. Asbrand (Ed.), Reihe Politik und Bildung [Series on politics and education], Volume 69: Handbuch politische Bildung [Guide to political education] (4th Edition, p. 275–283). Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau-Verlag.

¹¹ Reich, K. (2005). Systemisch-konstruktivistische Pädagogik. Einführung in Grundlagen einer interaktionistisch-konstruktivistischen Pädagogik [Systemic constructivist education. An introduction to the basic principles of interactionist and constructivist education] (5th Edition). Weinheim and Basel: Beltz.



4. TEACHING TECHNIQUES: TIPS

This handout sets out three sequential learning arrangements (LA) for the targeted enhancement of media critical thinking skills with regard to extremist propaganda on the web, specifically developed for use in the classroom. Each of the three learning arrangements lasts *90 minutes*, although this is merely a suggested time. The learning arrangements can be implemented with students aged 13-14 and above. The units build on one another and could be covered in three double lessons or as a project as part of a project day.

4.1 THE LEARNING ARRANGEMENTS AS A UNIVERSAL AND EARLY PREVENTION TOOL

The learning arrangements follow a universal and primary prevention approach, in other words they are essentially aimed at a broad target group that can encompass *all* students. They reinforce resources or desired behaviours (media critical thinking skills), instead of focusing on potential deficiencies. The aim is to equip students with knowledge and skills to help them to recognise the structure and effect of extremist propaganda, regardless of ideology (e.g. right-wing extremism, Islamism). Activating students' knowledge and skills should mean that ideological standpoints such as anti-Semitism or conspiracy theories are exposed and reflected on, and extremist messages are ultimately debunked and refuted.

Due to this universal or early prevention focus, the programme is only suitable to a limited extent for activities in a school context with individuals who have pre-existing risk indicators (such as known contacts in extremist circles, active dissemination of propaganda via online social networks). There is a greater need for selective/secondary or indicated/tertiary prevention services when working with young people who are suspected to be undergoing a process of radicalisation or who have already been radicalised. If required, this programme can in such cases be implemented by skilled and experienced prevention specialists in an appropriate form.

However, it is left to the teacher's discretion to include students who have shown signs of radicalisation when implementing this learning arrangement or to refer them to other advisory services.



RECOMMENDATION:

carry out the first two learning arrangements in two double lessons and follow up with the third learning arrangement as a project!

4.2 AWARENESS OF THE LEARNING GROUP: INTRODUCING THE THEME

As already suggested, due to its associations with specific social issues, the theme of *extremist internet propaganda* is highly complex. Since these themes are regularly the subject of public discussion, young people will already have some experience of them. It is likely that some have an affinity with such issues or even actively participate in these discussions, whether through personal conversations with peers or via chats in online social networks.

Addressing the issue of extremism in class can trigger reactance, particularly where it is not done with due care. When questions about religion are inadvertently associated with extremism or stereotypes about minorities are reinforced, for some students this may not just lead to misunderstandings, but even produce provocative behaviour.

To avoid unintentional side effects, an approach that is not specific to a particular situation is recommended. If the subject of the programme was specific extremist propaganda, the discussions would need to constantly focus on different situations (such as right-wing extremism and Islamic extremism). It is therefore also taken into account that extremism is an issue that affects a wide range of societies, groups and/or religions.

However, if reactance and provocative behaviour occur during the implementation of the learning arrangements and are too difficult to address through constructive dialogue, teachers are advised against continuing with the programme in the classroom setting. A better approach would be to continue the dialogue individually with students who are potentially in a process of radicalisation and, where necessary, seek the help of expert advisers. Teachers may contact their government institutions for information about advice centres and support in case of suspected and evident radicalisation tendencies. Further information is available below:

4.3 OPPORTUNITIES TO TIE IN WITH THE CURRICULUM

Due to the focus on media education and links to themes such as democracy and fundamental rights, there are a number of opportunities to tie in with teaching subjects. The subjects of *Politics* and *History* or *Social Studies*, *Practical Philosophy*, *Islamic Religious Education* and *language* are ideally suited to this purpose.

- Within the subject of *Politics*, the learning arrangement can be implemented in the context of the topics 'political participation' and 'new media'.
- Within the subject of *History* it could be used to complement activities on National Socialist propaganda.
- The learning arrangement could be tied in with media philosophy or discussions on the concept of truth within the subject of *Practical Philosophy*.
- Within *Islamic Religious Education*, the learning arrangement could be tied in with addressing Islamist radicalisation on the one hand and anti-Muslim racism on the other hand, for instance within the spectrum of right-wing extremism.
- The topic of Public Relations arises within the subject of *language*, providing an opportunity to discuss this topic in greater detail based on extremist propaganda.





SUPPORT IN THE EVENT OF SUSPECTED CASES AND RADICALISATION TENDENCIES

Germany

There are various organisations and initiatives that offer support in cases of radicalisation or suspected radicalisation.

Information with regard to Islamist radicalisation can be obtained from the Advice Centre on Radicalisation (Beratungsstelle Radikalisierung) of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees: <http://www.bamf.de/EN/DasBAMF/Beratung/beratung-node.html>.



Further information and points of contact in Germany can also be found here: <http://www.violence-prevention-network.de/en/projects>



Europe

If you need country specific information about advice centre and support, you may contact one of the working groups of the Radicalisation Awareness Network: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran_en



For more general information regarding radicalisation, deradicalisation and extremism, refer for instance to UNESCO's A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002446/244676e.pdf>



or a report by Peter Neumann (2017), published by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE): <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/346841>



5. OVERVIEW OF THE LEARNING ARRANGEMENTS

5.1 LEARNING ARRANGEMENT I: DEFINING PROPAGANDA



ORGANISATIONAL TIPS

Duration: 90 minutes

Materials: propaganda videos or computers with internet access, question cards, flip chart/table, pens/chalk, presentation cards for mind map visualisation (if necessary), projector/screen, speakers, laptop

Classroom formats: teacher input (TI), class discussion (CD), group work (GW), partner work (PW), presentation (P)



5.1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

The learning arrangement focuses on the interactive construction of an initial working definition of *propaganda* as a basis for the two subsequent learning arrangements (for a definition of propaganda see info box no. 2) A shared understanding of the subject within a

learning group is a precondition for successfully exploring the topic in greater detail. The learning arrangement centres on the development of group-focused devaluation (ingroup/outgroup reference) as a central characteristic of propaganda.





Info box no. 2

DEFINITION OF 'EXTREMIST PROPAGANDA'

Extremist propaganda can be defined as a systematic attempt to shape perceptions, to influence thoughts and emotions, and to steer behaviour in such a way as to make the public more receptive to a radical – and if necessary violent – change in social conditions in line with a totalitarian ideology with a claim to exclusivity. In detail, extremist propaganda is characterised by:¹²

- **An ingroup/outgroup construction:** there is a 'natural' inequality between different groups of people (e.g. unequal value and distinction between different religious groups and/or genders or unequal 'naturalness' between various sexual orientations, national or ethnic distinctions). The ingroup is fundamentally superior to the outgroup and offers a strong sense of belonging.
- **Consequences and sanctions**
Consequences are defined or sanctions derived for the outgroup, e.g. a call for a much-needed 'cleansing' of neighbourhoods with a majority Muslim population, of 'unbelievers', or a distinction between 'superior' and 'inferior' races.
- **Perception and pronouncement of a threat to the imagined ingroup.** The ingroup is under threat (by the presence or actions of the outgroup), e.g. of loss of social status, social exclusion, 'Islamisation', from 'others'.
- **Exclusive behavioural rules**
There is only one correct approach to behavioural rules, structures and regulations. This must be adhered to. Other approaches to rules, structures and regulations are opposed, deviating behaviour is punished – including the use of violence.
- **Intent to persuade**
The ingroup approach is the only correct approach. Others should also be persuaded of this 'truth' and adhere to the only correct approach to certain behavioural rules, structures and regulations.
- **Assertions and lies**
Any means may be employed to persuade others of the only correct approach: lies, assertions and selective arguments are legitimate means of preserving the 'exclusivity' of the ingroup approach.

¹² Merten, K. (2000). Struktur und Funktion von Propaganda [Structure and function of propaganda]. *Publizistik*, 45, 143–162.

5.1.2 LEARNING ARRANGEMENT I SCHEDULING

Phase	Description	Classroom format	Work assignment	Duration
Introduction to the teaching unit	Getting started with the programme on the theme of 'online propaganda'	TI		5-10 minutes
Getting started with the presentation of a propaganda video	Presentation of selected propaganda video on a projector, option to set an observation assignment	P	Optional observation assignment: 'Watch the following video and note which groups are being talked about!'	10 minutes
Opportunity for initial opinions and responses to propaganda video	Collect initial opinions and responses to propaganda video; first aspect is to compile a definition of 'propaganda'	CD	Opening question for the class discussion: 'What impressions do you have after watching the video?'	15 minutes
Questions about the propaganda video	Use of question cards in partners or small groups, including with circular questions	PW or GW	'Discuss the video using the question cards!'	20 minutes
Listing the characteristics of propaganda	Creation of a mind map showing the characteristics of propaganda	CD	'List and describe the characteristics of propaganda!'	20 minutes
Conclusion: a definition of propaganda	The teacher consolidates the mind map to formulate a working definition of propaganda	TI		15 minutes

5.1.3 GETTING STARTED

The students are presented with one or more propaganda videos. If internet access is available and the learning group has already discussed propaganda as a topic, another option is an open introduction, in other words to allow the students to search freely for corresponding videos. Allow for an extra hour in order to do this.

However, as this is rarely an option and there is a high risk that students will encounter problematic material during an undirected search, it is recommended to start with videos prepared by the teacher.



CONTRA provides access to a large number of videos via the website <https://project-contra-archive.org>. Info box 3 below lists the criteria for selecting suitable videos.



Teachers are advised to use at least two videos, for example one video from the right-wing extremist and one from the Islamist spectrum. A one-sided focus on Islamist videos could be seen as stigmatising by Muslim students in the class and

contribute towards polarisation of the learning group. When choosing videos it is essential to avoid content that is harmful to young people such as violent scenes, sedition or calls for violence. The focus should be on videos containing subtle propaganda. Aside from ideological orientation, additional criteria should be taken into account when selecting videos. These criteria are listed in info box no. 3.



Info box no. 3

PROPAGANDA CHECKLIST

There are many types of propaganda videos, not just in terms of ideological orientation, but also in terms of the subtlety of the means and messages used and the violence portrayed. Not all are equally suited to use in the classroom. The following checklist of key features of suitable propaganda videos can be used for guidance:

Propaganda videos that may be considered for use in the classroom

- are from a clearly recognisable source as evident from things such as logos, insignia, flags etc.
- relate to conflict issues such as ingroup/outgroup constructions, which can constitute reference points for both Islamic and extreme-right propaganda
- feature conspiracy theories
- have the lowest possible potential for identification with the construed in-group: broadcasters with whom young people are only able to identify to a limited extent are preferable
- give as little information as possible about individual fates and contain few personal statements
- must not show any content that could be harmful to minors or that is illegal (violent images, victims of violence, calls for violence, sedition).



What do you think the German Chancellor would say about this video?

Which linguistic devices are used to describe the ingroup? Which are used for the outgroup?

↑ Figure 2: Example of questions cards from the appendix

5.1.4 FOLLOW-UP

Once the selected videos have been shown they are first discussed in an open Q&A session, followed by a focused discussion. This discussion is guided by pre-prepared and selected question cards (see the appendix for examples of appropriate questions), which can be drawn by the students or distributed by the teacher. The question cards feature circular questions and detailed questions on topics such as the use of derogatory language in the video (see also info box no. 4).



Info box no. 4

CIRCULAR QUESTIONING

Circular questioning is a questioning technique used in systemic therapy and counselling. The questions are *triadic*; in other words they always focus on one person's thoughts about another person or a particular issue.

For example: *How do you think X feels about what Y has said? Or more specifically: What do you think the German Chancellor would say about this video?*

Circular questions never ask for one person's direct views on another person. Instead, the respondent is asked to view the question from an external perspective. This method of questioning aims to encourage a shift in perspective, indirectly prompting the respondent to reflect on his or her own views.







SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND

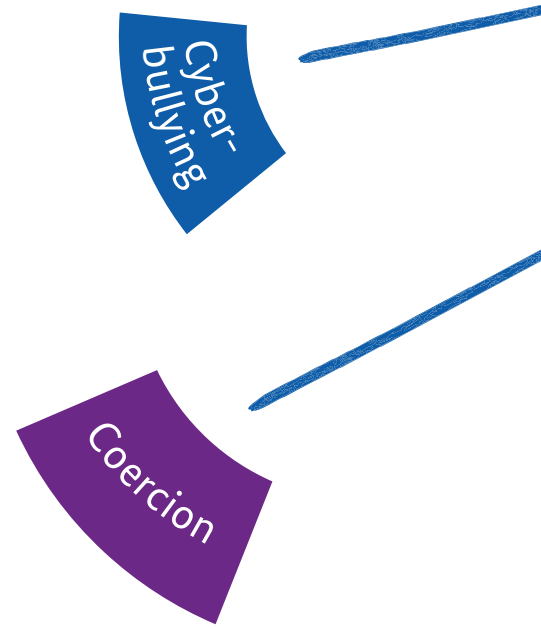
Why is the procedure described recommended? Media psychology studies indicate that young people in particular are uncomfortable with propaganda, but are unable to put this into words.¹³ At the same time, youth research has shown that, in this stage of life, peers are the primary point of contact for exchanging information about media content and are an important factor when it comes to learning and educational processes in the context of media.¹⁵ Addressing the theme of propaganda therefore requires a learning arrangement that gives young students opportunities to discuss propaganda together with their peers, so that they can develop a definition of propaganda and an awareness of propagandistic formats.

The format focuses in particular on the levels of Awareness and Reflection. Addressing propaganda as a specific form of communication with specific characteristics, such as the devaluation of outgroups and taking sanctions against undesirable behaviour,¹⁵ raises awareness, thereby following a universal or primary prevention approach. The characteristics of propaganda identified in the definition also make it possible to highlight certain aspects and provide scope for comparisons – and therefore potential for reflection.

I

5.1.5 CONSOLIDATING RESULTS

Following the group discussion using question cards, a joint mind map is produced identifying the characteristics of propaganda. Where internet access is available, an online tool such as MindMup (siehe <https://www.mindmup.com>), can be used. Finally, the teacher consolidates the characteristics identified to formulate a working definition of extremist propaganda.



¹³ Rieger, D., Frischlich, L. & Bente, G. (2013). *Propaganda 2.0: Psychological effects of right-wing and Islamic extremist internet videos*. Cologne: Wolters Kluwer.

¹⁴ Weber, M. (2015). *Der soziale Rezipient. Medienrezeption als gemeinschaftliche Identitätsarbeit in Freundeskreisen Jugendlicher* [The social receiver. Media reception as collective identity development in young people's friendship circles]. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien; Friemel, T. N. (2013). *Sozialpsychologie der Mediennutzung. Motive, Charakteristiken und Wirkungen interpersonaler Kommunikation über massenmediale Inhalte*. [The social psychology of media use. Motives, characteristics and effects of interpersonal communication about mass media content]. Konstanz and Munich: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft.

¹⁵ Merten, K. (2000). *Struktur und Funktion von Propaganda* [Structure and function of propaganda]. *Publizistik*, 45, 143–162.



I

↑ Example for a MindMap

5.2 LEARNING ARRANGEMENT II: REFLECTING ON EVERYDAY MEDIA USE

ORGANISATIONAL TIPS

Duration: 90 minutes

Materials: 'clickstreams' worksheet, notice board/table + magnets/pins, computer workstations/laptops/tablets, headphones, cards for visualisation, projector/screen

Classroom formats: class discussion (CD), partner work (PW), presentation (P), plenary discussion (PD), teacher input (TI)



5.2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

The learning arrangement is designed to encourage students to reflect on everyday media content and specifically on the function of YouTube: a platform frequently used by young people. The learning

arrangement focuses on YouTube recommendation algorithms (see Infobox Nr. 5), which can facilitate access to extremist content.



Info box no. 5

RECOMMENDATION ALGORITHMS

The use of *recommendation algorithms* by YouTube means that we are automatically presented with suggestions for supposedly relevant videos that we may be interested in. Algorithms analyse user behaviour (both our own and that of other users), taking into account keywords attached to videos in order to categorise them by content and make them traceable. For instance, a search for videos that provide information about Islam in simple terms will prompt YouTube to suggest numerous other videos dealing with similar topics. We can find ourselves in a filter bubble; an individual cosmos of information that takes into account our (supposed) needs.



As the criteria on which the filter is based are not usually visible to the user, the information and content presented appears at the same time to be a genuine and objective representation of the content or reality. Due to the intensive use of YouTube by people who, for instance, preach extreme interpretations of Islam, recommendation algorithms mean that, alongside generally harmless content, interested users are soon presented with content that can be considered problematic.

Younger, inexperienced media users in particular may interpret these video recommendations as social prompts and be more likely to pay attention to them, facilitating access to extremist ideologies.¹⁶

¹⁶ Schmitt, J. B., Ernst, J., Frischlich, L. & Rieger, D. (2017). Rechtsextreme und islamistische Propaganda im Internet: Methoden, Auswirkungen und Präventionsmöglichkeiten [Right-wing extremist and Islamist propaganda on the internet: methods, impacts and prevention methods]. In: R. Altenhof, S. Bunk & M. Piepen-schneider (Ed.), Politischer Extremismus im Vergleich [Comparing political extremism] (p. 171–208). Münster i.a.: LIT Verlag.

These recommendation algorithms 'recommend' other 'related' videos to users based on (1) relationships and links between videos/video producers/channels, (2) similar keywords, (3) other people's and (4) personal user activities on YouTube.

In this learning arrangement, the process of reflection does not specifically concern the algorithms themselves, but rather the resulting potential

effects of a filter bubble (see Infobox Nr. 6) and the linking of videos based on theme as a result of search recommendations. This phenomenon can be considered particularly relevant when addressing propaganda in the classroom, as the clever use of key words by extremist actors can potentially increase hits on their extremist content, including by internet users who are not specifically searching for it. This learning unit recreates and reflects on this aspect.



Info box no. 6

FILTER BUBBLE



The **filter bubble** is a situation whereby providers on the internet use algorithms to produce an individual profile for every single internet user and, based on this profile, only show users information that matches their profile or supposed views. Data such as user location information, device information, websites visited and adverts clicked is used in order to present this user-specific content. The result is that the user is figuratively isolated in a bubble that excludes any information that conflicts with his or her user behaviour up until that time and supposed views derived from this behaviour. The term **echo chamber** refers to a situation in which opinions may be confirmed or even amplified when they go unchallenged within a digital forum.

5.2.2 LEARNING ARRANGEMENT II SCHEDULING

Phase	Description	Class-room format	Work assignment	Duration
Brief recap of and tie in with the content from learning arrangement I	The formulated definition of propaganda is briefly reviewed.	TI		5 minutes
Free search on YouTube	SuS suchen auf YouTube nach Inhalten, die sie auch in ihrer Freizeit abrufen würden, und „füttern“ damit den Algorithmus. <i>Optional:</i> SuS suchen gezielt nach Propaganda.	PW	‘You now have 15 minutes: look up videos on YouTube that you would watch at home!’ Optional: ‘You now have 15 minutes: search specifically for propaganda on YouTube. Think about the keywords you have used and any that may have made it particularly easy to find propaganda!’	15 minutes
Group initial video	A group initial video is identified together with the students.	CD	‘We will now click through together from the same video. Which video do you suggest?’	5 minutes
Clicking through together and documenting clickstreams	Taking this initial video as a starting point, click through via the recommendation column on the right and log the resulting clickstream.	PW	‘You now have 15 minutes to click through from our group video. We will all follow the same process: first we click on the first recommended video in the right-hand column. From this video we click on the second recommended video and so on. Give each video accessed a title and note it down in the corresponding order on the worksheet! Only watch the videos for as long as you need to gain an initial impression!’	15 minutes



Info box no. 7

BREAKING OUT OF THE FILTER BUBBLE

An active awareness on the part of the user of the existence and possible consequences of the filter bubble is essential in order to break out of the bubble. This awareness is vital in order for the user to reflect on his or her media activity. There are measures that we can easily integrate into our everyday lives to counteract the filter bubble. The methods presented here cannot guarantee total freedom from the bubble, however, as a large number of providers use algorithms that cannot be avoided when using their online services (e.g. YouTube, Facebook).

Possible strategies include:

- *Developing an understanding of personalisation and recommendation algorithms:* users should be aware of the filter bubble and its impact.
- *Browser privacy settings:* regularly deleting cookies and therefore your browsing history clears the browser of information on sites visited and downloads, eliminating personalisation to a certain degree. However, you can also use your browser's incognito mode from the outset to ensure that no data is stored (though this also means that certain websites can no longer be accessed).
- *Using an alternative search engine:* search engines other than *Google*, e.g. *Ixquick*, *DuckDuckGo* or *Unbubble*, offer extensive data protection guarantees and deliver 'unpersonalised' results. Specialist databases are also recommended for specific research. Schools and libraries often offer free access to various professional and otherwise fee-based databases. There is also the option to



read printed journals, newspapers or books on a specific theme and also to use other offline media as sources.

- *Remaining open to information online:* users should be encouraged to remain open to new information and to also consider and include the other side, therefore controversial opinions, when researching a specific theme on the internet. For instance if you are searching for information on an upcoming political vote, you should look not just at the opinion of one party, but also that of the opposition.
- *Remaining open to information offline:* users should be encouraged to exchange views with as many people as possible and, most importantly, with those who do not share their own beliefs, outlook and background.



5.2.3 GETTING STARTED

The learning unit starts by covering the content of the previous session (see learning arrangement I). The teacher provides a recap of the content of the previous session on the topic, with particular reference to the characteristics of propaganda identified, and explains how they have been consolidated to formulate a definition of extremist propaganda.

'Feeding the algorithm'

The session begins with an activity or search phase on YouTube. The students are invited to freely search for and access content on YouTube as they would in their free time (version 1). Alternatively (version 2) they can be invited to search specifically for propaganda by entering search terms relating to relevant propaganda themes (conflict-laden issues that cause public controversy). Version 2 is best suited to advanced classes already familiar with propaganda themes.

In both cases – however the students are not informed as such at this point – they 'feed' the recommendation algorithm on YouTube with information that has an influence on the next step (analysing different clickstreams).

Tip:

It should be noted that the browsing history already saved on the PC or internet browser can also affect the recommendations generated. It may therefore be a good idea to clear the browsing history and cookies before implementing the learning arrangement (for instructions see Infobox Nr. 7 on breaking out of the filter bubble).



GENERATING CLICKSTREAMS



5.2.4 FOLLOW-UP

Generating clickstreams

The next step is to assign students a specific search task: Starting from video selected in advance, e.g. from the pool of propaganda videos identified by the students, they should all click through according to the same specific process.

Starting from the group video (1), first click on the first recommended video in the right-hand column, (2) from the next video then click on the second recommended video in the right-hand column and (3) from this next video click on the third recommended video in the right-hand column and so on. This task is carried out for 15 minutes or as long as it takes to complete the worksheet (there is space for ten video titles).

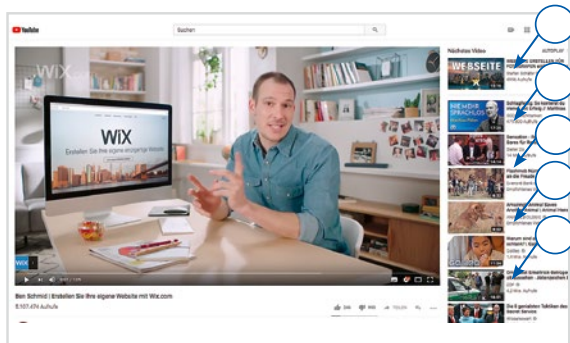


Figure 3: Example of the 'clickstream' process
(source: www.youtube.de, accessed: 24.04.2018)

The 'clickstreams' generated by this process are noted on the worksheet in the form of the video title. During this learning step students should not watch the videos in full, in order to keep to the schedule. They only need to gain an initial impression of the video so that they can identify the theme.

Video number	Video title
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

Figure 4: 'Clickstreams' worksheet from the appendix

Organisational tips

For higher-performing learning groups there is an opportunity to make and note down a brief assessment of the videos based on the definition of propaganda formulated in learning arrangement I: is the video likely to be propaganda (**write 'yes' after the video**) or not (**write 'no'**)?

Once they have documented the clickstreams, the students transfer the video titles onto cards. Make sure you hand out enough cards! Namely: one card per video. The different clickstreams are then arranged in chronological order on the table or on a notice board. Three teams can be selected by way of example so that not all students need to set out their cards.

5.2.5 CONSOLIDATING RESULTS

The visualisations of the clickstreams and their differences and similarities are interpreted and discussed by the class. The following guiding questions may be helpful:

- ‘I’d like to discuss with you: why do some clickstreams look so different when we all started clicking through from the same video and followed the same pattern?’ (for information on ‘recommendation algorithms’ see info box no. 5 and filter bubbles info box no. 6)
- ‘Why can it be problematic if videos are suggested in the right-hand column on YouTube, particularly in the case of extremist content?’
- ‘How can we break out of the filter bubble?’ (for information on ‘breaking out of the filter bubble’ see info box no. 7)

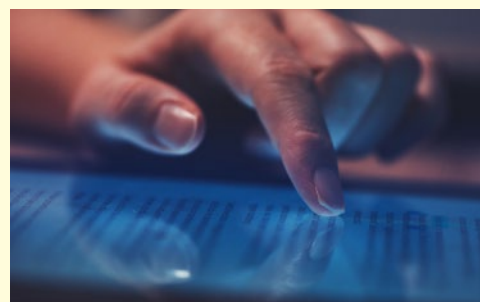
Alternatively, the teacher can filter introduce the bubble effect as a possible explanation for the clickstreams and their specific features.



Scientific background

Why this procedure? Young people can encounter propaganda on the web time and again in their everyday lives¹⁷ – they should therefore be encouraged to be actively aware of and reflect on their everyday media activity. In this context it is important to ensure that class-room learning arrangements simulate situations that could occur outside school as closely as possible, as digital media and YouTube in particular play an important role in how students spend their free time when not in school.¹⁸

The format is designed to address the three objectives of Awareness, Reflection and Empowerment. This second learning arrangement focuses on reflection. The aim is for students to learn how quickly, in other words in just a few clicks, propaganda can be encountered merely by chance. Students are also made aware of the risks of ‘filter bubbles’ and of how automated algorithms work within social networks, and in particular YouTube. The second learning arrangement therefore also addresses the dimension of Awareness. If discussions about the charted clickstreams and about how to break out of the filter bubble prompt students to reflect on their own media activity and changes and increases in this activity, this is a major step towards empowering students to take positive action themselves (Empowerment).



¹⁷ Rieger, D., Frischlich, L., Morten, A. & Bente, G. (2017). Videos gegen Extremismus: Ein Prüfbericht [Anti-extremism videos: a test report]. In: L. Frischlich, D. Rieger, A. Morten & G. Bente (Ed.), Videos gegen Extremismus? Counter-Narrative auf dem Prüfstand [Anti-extremism videos? Putting counter-narratives to the test] (p. 81-140). Wiesbaden: Bundeskriminalamt.

¹⁸ Feierabend, S., Plankenhorn, T. & Rathgeb, T. (2017). JIM-Studie: Jugend, Information, (Multi-)Media. Basisstudie zum Medienumgang 12- bis 19-Jähriger in Deutschland [JIM Study: Youth, information and multimedia. A baseline study on media habits in 12 to 19-year-olds in Germany]. Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest [Pedagogical Media Research Centre Southwest].



5.3 LEARNING ARRANGEMENT III: RESPONDING TO PROPAGANDA

ORGANISATIONAL TIPS



Duration: 90 minutes (180 minutes if the aim is to implement the concept developed in practice)

Materials: projector (plus laptop/tablet/cameras, smartphones if the plan is to implement the concept in practice), flip chart/table, pens/chalk, presentation cards for visualisation (if necessary), posters

Classroom formats: class discussion (CD), small group work (four to five students per group) (GW), presentation (P), teacher input (TI)

**The concept can be implemented in class or if necessary also as group homework or project work, if the students demonstrate more commitment (recording footage, conducting interviews etc.). In this case the implementation results can be presented and discussed at a later time.*

III

5.3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

The aim of the learning arrangement is to test reactions to online propaganda. Positive narratives and counter-narratives that take a critical look at extremist propaganda are used for this purpose. The specific aim is for students to formulate a counter-narrative to propaganda that either advocates something positive

(tolerance, peace, democracy, universal human rights) or that debunks and qualifies the biased ideological views in the propaganda. The working definition of propaganda formulated in learning arrangement I and tested in learning arrangement II can be used and refined for this purpose.



5.3.2 LEARNING ARRANGEMENT III SCHEDULING





Phase	Description	Classroom format	Work assignment	Duration
Introduction	Tie-in with learning arrangements I and II, showing the selected videos of a positive narrative or a counter-narrative.	TI	'What could be the background to the video? What is its intention?'	10 minutes
Explanation of a positive narrative/counter-narrative	Definition of the positive narrative or counter-narrative (present info box no. 8).	TI	'Can you explain what a positive narrative or counter-narrative is and why we need them?'	10 minutes
Presentation of a positive narrative/counter-narrative	A positive narrative or counter-narrative is presented.	P	Opening question for the class discussion: 'What are your impressions of the positive narrative or counter-narrative?'	5 minutes
Development of a concept for a positive narrative/counter-narrative	Each small group (4–6 students) develops a concept for a positive narrative or for a counter-narrative focusing on a characteristic of propa-ganda. More than one group can choose the same characteristics, but make sure that each characteristic is addressed by at least one group. The characteristics are based on the definition of propaganda formulated so far.	GW	'In the next 25 minutes you need to produce your own positive narrative or a counter-narrative in response to a propaganda video. Bear in mind how the positive narrative/counter-narrative should be structured in terms of language and visual content, what it is about, and how you would spread this type of narrative on the web.'	25 minutes
Presentation of the concepts	Presentation of the concepts and final feedback from the students.	P	'Present your narrative concepts to your fellow students!'	15 minutes
Summary of all the learning arrangements: online extremist propaganda	The teacher provides a recap of the results of all the implemented learning arrangements and establishes links between the content of each arrangement. Alternatively: the students summarise the results.	TI		15 minutes

5.3.3 GETTING STARTED






To start off show a video that presents a positive narrative or counter-narrative and talk to the learning group about the intentions behind and background to the video. The use of this type of video carries a low risk of polarisation as they advocate openness, tolerance and respect. They are an ideal introduction to the topic.

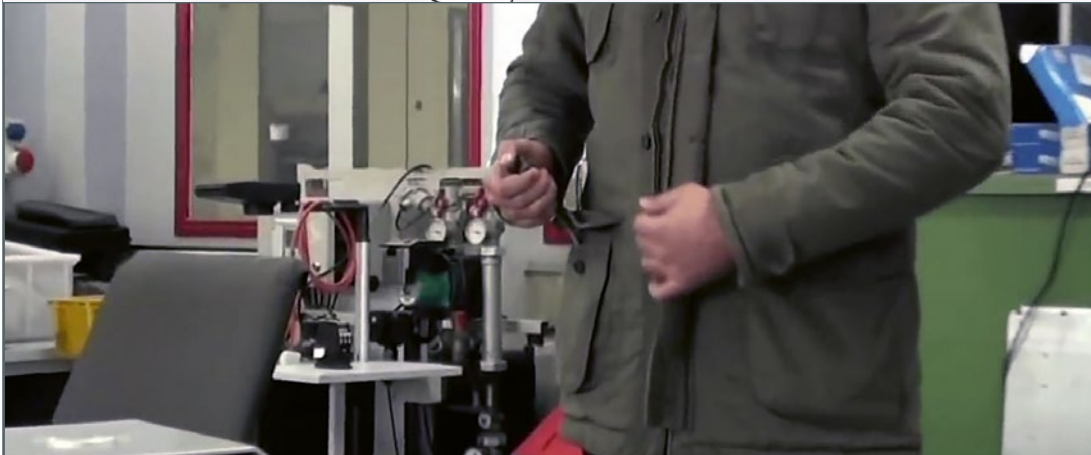
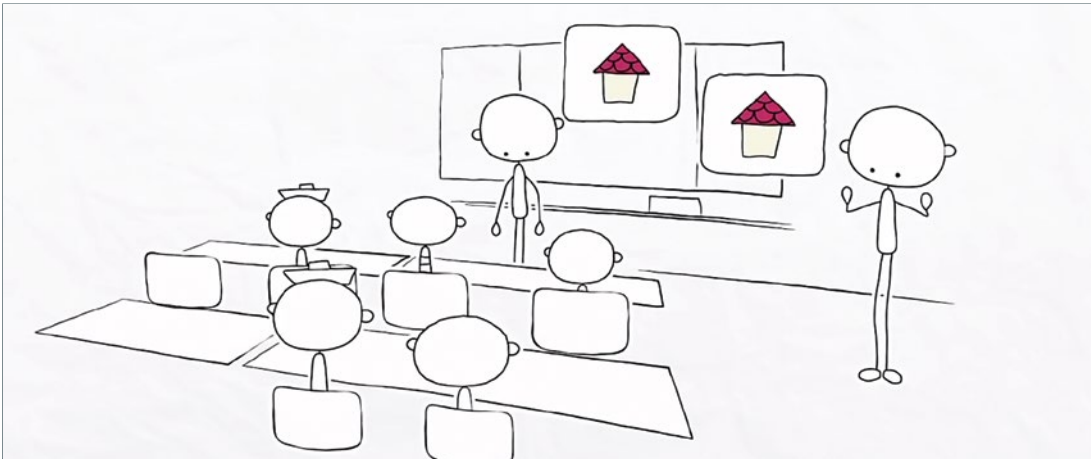
The following videos can be used as examples of a positive narrative:

- **‘Human rights explained in three minutes’** by Amnesty International – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1VXkO3RrBs>. The video gives a brief account of the evolution of human rights and offers explanations as to why they are important for peaceful coexistence. 
- **‘What is inclusion? (explained in 80 seconds)’** by **Aktion Mensch** – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COJyb3D_JjA. This positive narrative summarises the characteristics of an inclusive society. 
- **‘Mission future’, also by Aktion Mensch** – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywZhnuXOgpE>. The video shows a lived, inclusive society in the future. 
- **‘We are diversity’ des Deutschen Fußballbunds, diversity’** by the German Football Association, released in response to racist remarks made by a right-wing populist in 2016 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eF7z7YmDAKU>. The remark in question stated that the majority of Germans think that Jérôme Boateng is a good footballer but would not want to have him as a neighbour. The video’s message ‘we are diversity’ is directed against racism. It does not address current, salient conflicts that are a source of public controversy and relate to terrorism and political extremism. 

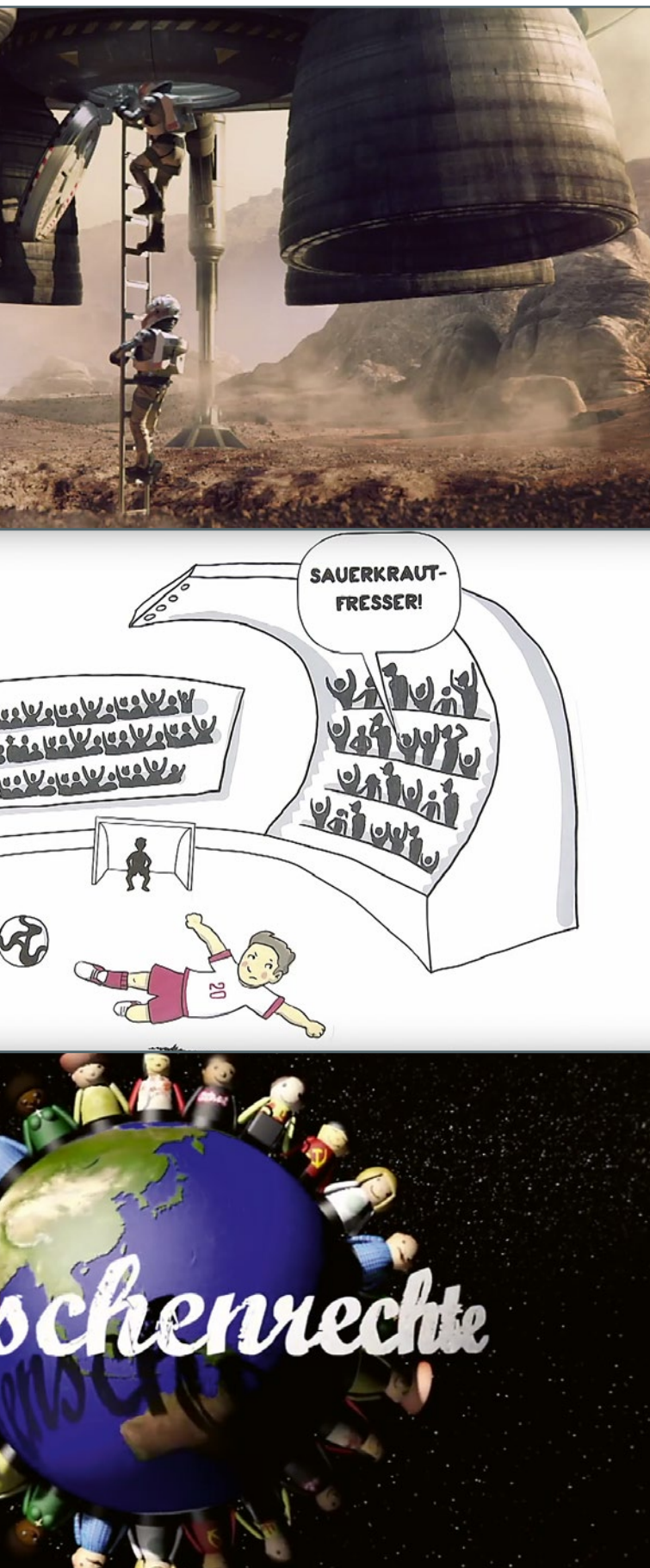
Counter-narratives explicitly take a critical approach to social conflict themes, leading directly to the subject of extremist propaganda. They may be more likely to provoke polarising discussions and differing views within the learning group. You must therefore decide based on your knowledge of your learning group whether to choose a gentle introduction using positive narratives or a challenging introduction using counter-narratives. Examples of counter-narratives include

- **The video ‘MAGIC RAMADAN 2016 - The flying carpet’** from the German YouTube channel *datteltäter* is suggested as an example of a counter-narrative. The satirical video responds to a narrative from an extreme right-wing party directed against the Muslim population – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IleHUx3e-yU>. The video also uses stereotypes about this population group for artistic purposes. The messages in the video can be perceived and interpreted in different ways. When using this video remember that satire aims to be provocative and comes across accordingly. The use of this video requires teacher facilitation to convert controversial discussions within the learning group into educational processes. 
- **The video ‘The yellow hand against racism’** from the association **‘Mach meinen Kumpel nicht an!’** responds to typical national stereotypes – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oJb-wYF3go>. The association has been producing educational campaigns against racism and xenophobia since the 1980s. This video was designed and recorded by trainees at Stadtwerke Düsseldorf and can therefore act as a model if a concept implementation phase is planned. 
- **The video ‘Combating racism’** from the **Federal Agency for Civic Education** specifically addresses racism in everyday life in Germany, raises awareness of prejudices and racist acts and as well as knowledge, also conveys the perspectives of victims of racism – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JkHGBJqDqwU> 





III



< Figure 5. Stills from the suggested positive narratives and counter-narratives on YouTube.

The checklist in Infobox 9 also provides guidance when searching for other positive narratives and counter-narratives. When searching for appropriate example videos it is advisable to take into account the political and social issues that are relevant to the students in the particular class/school.

Following a discussion of the example videos shown the students are asked to suggest ideas for good, positive narratives or counter-narratives and to formulate a definition. *Compiling characteristics: what makes a good positive narrative/counter-narrative?* (See info boxes no. 8 and no. 9).

A selection of videos featuring counter-narratives and positive narratives can be found on the Contra Project website: <https://project-contra-archive.org>. Teachers can download the videos from this website. Such videos can also be obtained from the Federal Agency for Civic Education or are freely available on video platforms such as YouTube.



The checklist in info box no. 9 provides guidance when searching for other videos featuring positive narratives.



Info box no. 8

DEFINING AND DEALING WITH COUNTER-NARRATIVES AND POSITIVE NARRATIVES



The term **counter-narrative**, frequently used in relation to preventing extremism, refers in this programme to engagement with situations of social conflict. For example, the term can be used to describe videos that directly address, expose and to some extent counter the narratives of extremist propaganda. Though very relevant, this concept should be considered carefully. Here, the concept is not meant as 'protest' – that is, counter-

narratives are not used to contradict dominant social narratives by allowing radical minorities to impose certain discourses. If it were so, this would implicitly relegate the *majority* of society to a position of weakness, compared to the extreme fringes. Instead the programme simply aims at countering extremist narratives and, whenever possible, advocating the master *narrative* of a liberal, democratic society founded on the rule of law.



HUMAN RIGHTS

The concept of the ‘counter-narrative’ is therefore extended to the concept of *positive narratives*. This term refers to positive narratives that in most cases specifically advocate a free society based on a free, democratically constituted social order, and that implicitly counter extremist propaganda. In the context of a prevention strategy, positive narratives aim to expose propaganda and to de-legitimise

extremism, particularly also in the perception of individuals or groups who are receptive and vulnerable to propaganda.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ben Slama, B., Kemmesies, U. (2017). Extremismusprävention im Internet: Praxisbedarf für eine orientierungsstiftende Forschung. In: L. Frischlich, D. Rieger, A. Morten & G. Bente (Hrsg.) (2017), *Videos gegen Extremismus? Counter-Narrative auf dem Prüfstand* (S. 35–46). Wiesbaden: Bundeskriminalamt.



Info box no. 9

POSITIVE NARRATIVE CHECKLIST



Audio-visual positive narratives that are suitable for use in schools

- campaign for something rather than against something (for universal human rights, tolerance, democracy etc.)
- tell authentic and personal stories, for instance of those personally affected or former members of an extremist group
- are reliable
- offer young people something they can identify with
- are geared towards the everyday lives of young people (e.g. through the use of music or by addressing topics relevant to young people)



PARTICIPATION

5.3.4 FOLLOW-UP

Following the definition exercise for positive narratives the students are set the task of producing their own positive narrative or a counter-narrative. Depending on the situation within the learning group you can let the students themselves decide whether they want to produce a positive narrative or a counter-narrative. This is done in small groups of four to six students. Each small group places an emphasis on a key characteristic of propaganda in their positive narrative, e.g. the characteristic of the ingroup/outgroup construction (see info box no. 2: Definition of 'extremist propaganda'). The small groups are given specific instructions: as well as producing a concept for the *content of their narrative*, they should explicitly plan their *use of visual and linguistic devices* and devise a *(media) dissemination strategy for the narrative within their circle of friends*. The goal can be to come up with a presentation, a poster or a video, or perhaps a meme, comic or a play. There are no creative boundaries. The learning arrangement III worksheet (see appendix) is also handed out.

- preferably reflect various interpretations, in other words they deal with and present not only values that are seen as positive by mainstream society (e.g. tolerance) but also controversies, disagreements and dissent within society or at the fringes of society
- are not counter-narratives in the sense of counterpropaganda (see definition of propaganda)
- do not feature derogatory or stigmatising narratives.

5.3.5 CONSOLIDATING RESULTS

The next step is for the teams to present their results. Sufficient time should be allowed for this. In a class discussion following the concept phase, the students provide each other with feedback on the individual concepts. Teacher facilitation should focus in particular on summarising the different strengths of positive narratives and counter-narratives, provided the teams have not all chosen one type of concept.

If the plan is to follow up by implementing the concepts in practice, the students should add a list of technical requirements and materials as well as an approximate time schedule to their concept. If the learning group has no previous experience in this area, it is advisable for the teacher to discuss these aspects with all groups in the group work phase.

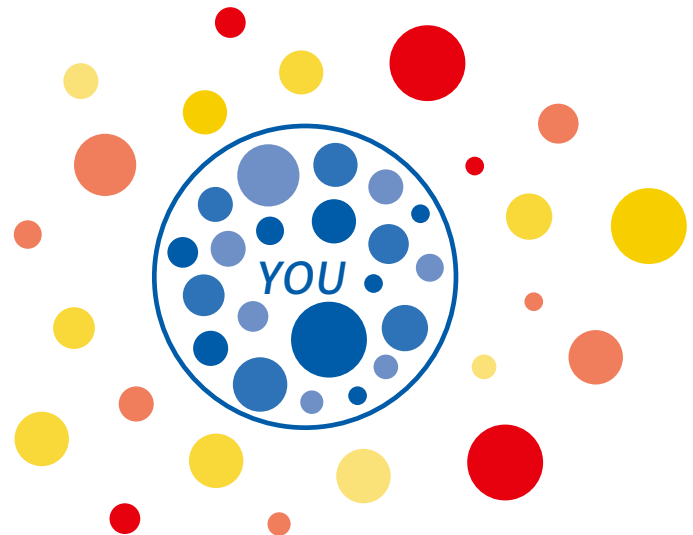
The teacher ends the unit with a final input in which the learning outcomes of all learning arrangements are once again related to each other and presented as a whole. Sufficient time should be scheduled in advance for this conclusion to ensure that any questions raised by the students can be adequately addressed. If time has been set aside for the practical implementation of the concepts, whether in the next lesson or in a project phase, the next steps and the remainder of the procedure should be condensed.

Learning objectives test for high-performing learning groups: alternatively, the students can summarise what they have learned during units I-III, which can serve to verify the clarity of the assignments or learning objectives set. They can also be asked the following questions: *What do you know now that you didn't know before? What will you take with you from the three units?*

To ensure that the formulation (or conception) of a positive narrative by the students themselves also enhances their practical skills (Empowerment), the relevance of this exercise to the students' online and offline everyday life should be highlighted. The following questions can also be asked in closing: *How can I position myself in social debates on similar conflict issues, e.g. at school and in the school yard, and make my own views heard? How can I do this on the internet? And when should I exercise caution?*

If the plan is to implement the concepts in practice, or the teacher wants to set the implementation as homework, the presentation should take place at a later time.





SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND

Why this procedure? Media psychology studies have established that positive narratives are effective if they tell authentic, personal stories and are professionally and attractively designed. It was also evident that people were most likely to forward or post the content if it was thought provoking. Overall, existing research on counter-narratives shows that this content is most likely to achieve the desired effect if it promotes a tolerant, democratic society, in other words is designed along the lines of a positive narrative.²⁰

Counter-narratives can also indirectly boost their approval rating in direct comparison with propaganda: those who have previously watched an extremist video take a more positive view of counter-narratives (Morten, Frischlich, Rieger, & Bente, 2017). Overall, however, existing research on counter-narratives shows that they are more likely to have an indirect effect by promoting a tolerant, democratic society and making these

types of counter-movements more attractive. Conversely, they do not lead directly to the rejection of extremist videos (Rieger, Frischlich, Morten & Bente, 2017).

The construction of a positive narrative represents a practice-oriented approach to the nature of propaganda in line with the learning-by-doing principle. This approach can ensure a particularly profound learning experience for students. It also allows young people to process and take into account relevance and features relating to media and issues that are specific to their stage of life.²¹

The learning arrangement specifically addresses the objective of Empowerment. Students are given the opportunity to actively discuss, evaluate and shape the possibilities for action against propaganda.

²⁰ Rieger, D., Frischlich, L., Morten, A. & Bente, G. (2017). Videos gegen Extremismus: Ein Prüfbericht [Anti-extremism videos: a test report]. In: L. Frischlich, D. Rieger, A. Morten & G. Bente (Ed.), Videos gegen Extremismus? Counter-Narrative auf dem Prüfstand [Anti-extremism videos? Putting counter-narratives to the test] (p. 81-140). Wiesbaden: Bundeskriminalamt.

²¹ Hurrelmann, K. & Quenzel, G. (2013). Lebensphase Jugend: Eine Einführung in die sozialwissenschaftliche Jugendforschung [Life phase adolescence: An introduction to social youth research] (12th, corrected edition). Grundlagentexte Soziologie. Weinheim: Beltz Juventa.





NOTES

A large rectangular area with horizontal lines for writing, containing several faint circular icons: a globe, an envelope, a shopping cart, a cloud, and a location pin.

NOTES

A large rectangular area with horizontal lines for writing notes. It contains five faint, circular icons: a speech bubble, a picture, a play button, a group of people, and a thumbs up.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR LEARNING ARRANGEMENT I

Circular questions



What do you think the German Chancellor would say about this video?	What do you think the Pope would say about this video?	What do you think Donald Trump would say about this video?
What do you think your parents would say about this video?	What could the person writing the commentary be hoping to get from publicly sharing this type of commentary?	What fundamental changes would the writer like to see in society? Who would these changes affect?
What could the person making the video be hoping to get from publicly sharing this type of video?	How do you think the devalued group might feel on watching this video?	What is the person making the video afraid of?

Detailed questions



What phrases are used in the commentary to devalue a group of people? Which words are offensive?	Which themes are particularly emphasised in the video?	What arguments do the people making the video put forward to support their views? How can these arguments be judged?
Which linguistic devices are used to describe the in-group? Which are used for the outgroup?	What does the speaker look like? What facial expressions and gestures does he/she use?	Which symbols or signs can you see in the video? What do they suggest?



DOCUMENTATION SHEET FOR LEARNING ARRANGEMENT II

Video number	Video title
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

WORKSHEET FOR LEARNING ARRANGEMENT III

‘POSITIVE NARRATIVE’

What do you need to bear in mind when formulating or producing positive narratives?

What makes a good positive narrative?

Gather as a class and note down your ideas here:

Exercise 1: devise a positive narrative in groups of four to six people!

(a) Create a concept for your positive narrative (video, meme, comic or play)! Draw up a sketch!

(b) Use of visual and linguistic devices: what music should be playing in the background? Which images work well? What slogan fits in well with your positive narrative!

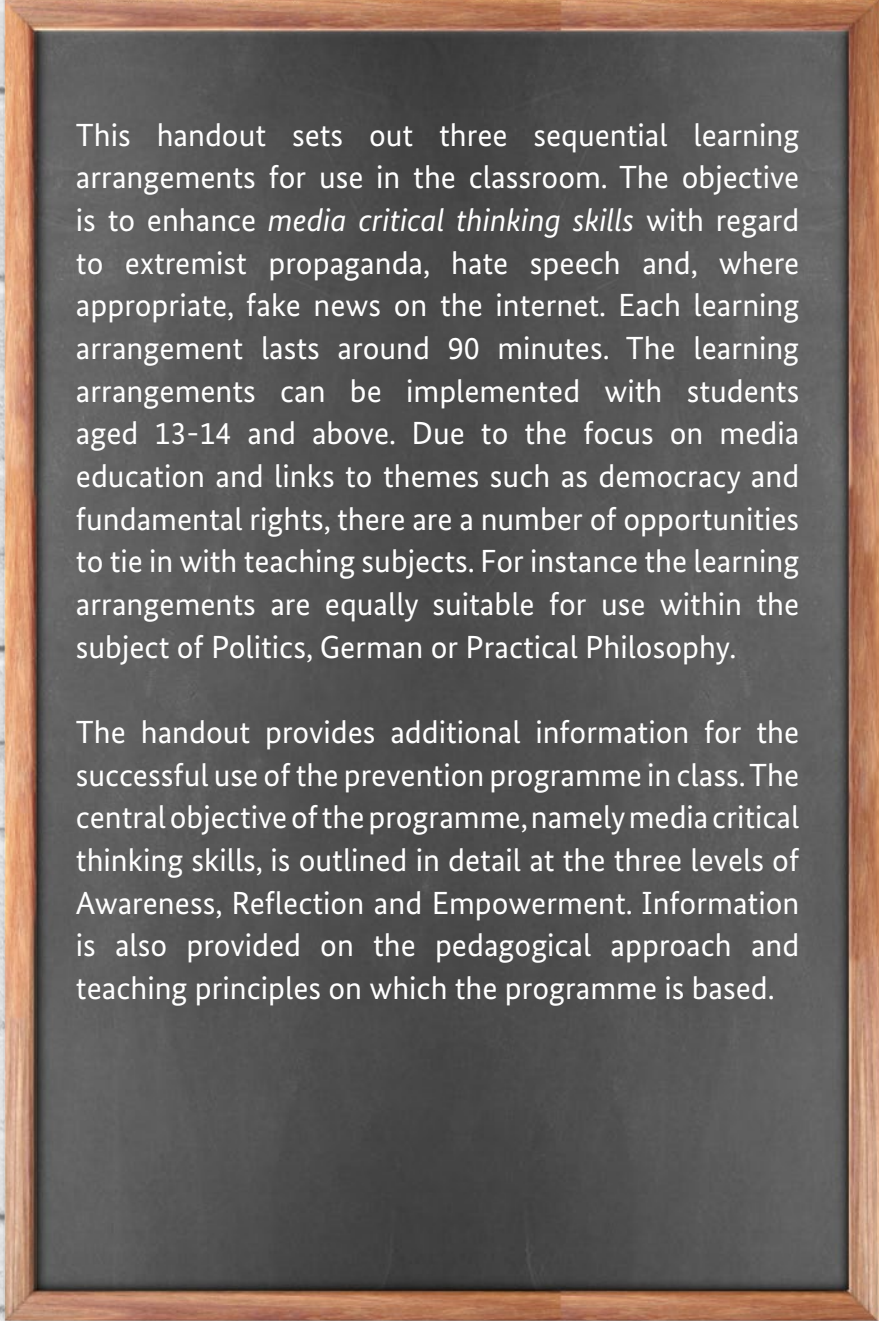
(c) (Media) dissemination strategy for the awareness narrative, e.g. within your friendship circle: draw up a plan stating how, where and for which target group you could disseminate your positive narrative!

Note down or sketch out your ideas here, using additional sheets if necessary:



TIME LEFT OVER?

Exercise 2: put your plan for a positive narrative into practice, taking into account the characteristics mentioned above!

A rectangular sign with a dark grey background and a light brown wooden frame is mounted on a white brick wall. The sign contains two paragraphs of text in a white, sans-serif font. The text describes a program for enhancing media critical thinking skills, including details about the duration of learning arrangements, the target age group, and the subjects it can be integrated into.

This handout sets out three sequential learning arrangements for use in the classroom. The objective is to enhance *media critical thinking skills* with regard to extremist propaganda, hate speech and, where appropriate, fake news on the internet. Each learning arrangement lasts around 90 minutes. The learning arrangements can be implemented with students aged 13-14 and above. Due to the focus on media education and links to themes such as democracy and fundamental rights, there are a number of opportunities to tie in with teaching subjects. For instance the learning arrangements are equally suitable for use within the subject of Politics, German or Practical Philosophy.

The handout provides additional information for the successful use of the prevention programme in class. The central objective of the programme, namely media critical thinking skills, is outlined in detail at the three levels of Awareness, Reflection and Empowerment. Information is also provided on the pedagogical approach and teaching principles on which the programme is based.