Combating Disinformation & Fake News

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Engaging, learning, succeeding together

Cooperative Approaches

"The only path offering humanity hope for a better future is one of cooperation and partnership".

Kofi Annan

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Cooperative Approaches, a quarterly journal (4 issues per year) has set itself the mission of promoting cooperative approaches in four key areas: youth and adult education, social action, organizational management, economics and citizen participation.

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ÉDITORIAL

Cold War & Fallout Shelters: When Myths Pose as Facts

By Larry Childs

When I was a kid in the US, during the 60's and early 70's, I learned that 'evil communist powers' perpetrated 'propaganda.' Their mission: to brainwash their own populace and ultimately take over the world, or destroy it. How I wondered, could their citizens be complicit and so gullible; so susceptible to the mere written word? Then, in time, I reasoned sympathetically that when one's entire worldly knowledge derives from a closed and closely monitored state media, perhaps distorted versions of reality would become normal. The mind just might not be exercised and supple enough to expand around other possible realities.

Learning about communism caused me to feel privileged and lucky. Our 'free society', grounded in free speech and other liberties, was not subject to state sponsored propaganda. Besides, we were forever awakened, educated and immune to that kind of mind control, or so I thought.

During this era of my childhood, 'Fallout Shelter' signs were a thing. They adorned most public school buildings across America (INSERT GRAPHIC FALLOUT SHELTER IMAGE). The notion was that vast concrete basements would shield us from nuclear radiation. As for the initial blast, 'duck and cover' drills suggested that desks may be enough protection. Looking back, I'm disturbed that teachers, administrators, students and parents - all of us - passed those absurd signs, many times a day, seemingly without a questioning thought. But why? How? The signs defied the actual mass destruction a nuclear World War III would rain upon us, should 'nuclear deterrence' and proxy wars not work.

Some in our communities must have understood the inconsistency with science. Though theoretically these shelters may

indeed diminish radiation impacts by a factor of 40, assuming people huddled there for 2 weeks and were just far enough away from the blast. Yet the notion of surviving a retaliatory nuclear war with both sides bombarding one another proved ridiculous. The Fallout Shelter was propaganda and our government posted these signs not for safety but for another purpose. Some suggest it was to comfort us in proclaiming the likelihood of survival. It amounted to 'Security theater'.

Another bigger and more consequential Fallout Shelter cover was declaring the war as 'cold' – as if there were neither fighting nor casualties. Yet proxy wars, fought over decades, cost millions of innocent civilians' and soldiers' lives. Were these not part of the temperature equation? Were their deaths acceptable since they were elsewhere, in developing countries, and eliminated by 'cold' conventional weapons? Was theirs really a necessary sacrifice for our defense? In whose conscience were sacrifices on that scale and by that rationale acceptable and so widely ignored?

'...Those letters, never written, are a missing page from my childhood. They became a false innocence for me and a whole generation – slumbering casualties of American propaganda from which we are still awakening'.

While a proportionally small fraction of the global cold war death toll did come home to America via the casualties sustained in the Vietnam War and later military adventures in Central America and the Middle East, most of it was unfelt and dismissed. Unlike WWII when children were out collecting scrap metal for the war effort, these cold wars were hidden from children. Never were we as third graders, for instance, asked to write condolence letters to families in Asia, Africa, or Latin America. We could have expressed acknowledgement to start, sympathy for their profound grief, and appreciation for their ultimate sacrifice intended to keep us safe. We could have invited them to the US as refugees and vouch for their asylum pleas. Those letters, never written, are a missing page from my childhood. They became a false innocence for me and a whole generation – *slumbering casualties of American propaganda from which we are still awakening*.

As I look back now, I wonder about the silence of those who knew better; and mostly those who were on the political inside and could have corrected the cover-up. Their silence was then, just as that of their contemporaries is today, perhaps the bigger danger and threat to our freedoms and still aspiring democracy.

Today, the US has many examples of silence as spineless and counter to democratic principles, as during that Cold War era. On the right there are Republicans in congress refusing to call out Trump's sham dismissal of presidential election results and his continued reign over their party. The MAGA theme seems to appeal in part as a nostalgic throwback to cold war 1960's slumber and denial! On the left Democrats and progressives promote anti-racism teachings often even when advanced by 'experts' who approach the topic through shame,

corrective language and simplistic binary thinking. Such rigid dogma counter principles of critical thinking and is reminiscent of Mao's reeducation camps. Increasing intolerance, right and left, appears to be gaining ground.

Though the voice of the political opposition is needed for calling out anti-democratic misbehavior, far more essential and impactful are the objections of those on the 'inside' or same side - those politically aligned with power. It takes far more courage, and arguably strong social skills and thick skin, to speak out from that place since one is so quickly branded a traitor. There is no pause for the trial of public opinion. Conviction is immediate and permanent. Traitors are hated far more than opponents or sworn enemies. The accompanying sense of betrayal is deeply emotional and often stings with resentment.

On a positive note, the power of such perceived betrayal is in how it often reveals inconsistencies and flaws on one's own side or within the logic of one's party; that the 'home team' message may very well not be as universally true or beneficial as claimed. Meanwhile, objections lobbed over the wall by opponents can be readily dismissed as politically motivated and fabrications. Simply stated, the objection of insiders is widely experienced as having more authenticity and weight. We need more of it!

For an exemplary case consider the 2020 US presidential election. Immediately after Trump's public dismissal of the results, his own director for Cyber & Infrastructure Security, Chris Krebs, the man with the most credible pulse on elections security, repudiated Trump's claims. Trump discounted Krebs' evaluation of the election and promptly fired him, though Krebs remained a Republican and had been a Trump appointee. While Trump, over the course of his 4 years in office, fended off attacks on his countless farcical assertions, this repudiation got under his skin more than any other. It was perhaps only rivaled by Mike Pence's when the vice president insisted on certifying the election results from the states on the fateful day of the attempted coup: January 6th, 2022.

My point is two-fold: Krebs had credibility across the board and, as a Republican insider, his speaking truth to power required courage and resolve greater than any speech by outsiders, such as those of progressives opposed to Trump.

In this issue of Cooperative Approaches, we take a deep dive into the threats posed by contemporary expressions of propaganda - 'Fake News'. We explore the psychology and approaches to education of young people required to counter this phenomenon over time. From the US there are summaries of the associated psychology and examples of critical thinking education among young people in France and Ireland. The importance of starting at an early age around these capacities is a point of emphasis. It is, furthermore, a proposition for better advancing cooperative approaches in civic life.

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DECIPHERING

Fake News as political weapon

Dominique Bénard

In the world of news it is essential to differentiate between inadvertently false information and intentionally misleading information. A media outlet publishing erroneous information and subsequently correcting itself is quite different from an activist creating or intentionally spreading information they know to be misleading. In the same sense, the publication of parodies or satire should not be confused with misleading 'fake news'. To the contrary, these forms of discourse and journalism are important as they often ridicule disinformation and generally serve a salutary, cautionary function.

Fake news, a close relative to older term 'propaganda', is information that is not only erroneous, but deliberately misleading and often quite damaging to society. The extent of social corrosion and divisions seems to have dramatically increased in recent years despite long held hopes that advances in education would have dampened its impacts by now.

Fake news occurs not only as isolated messages posted on social networks by individuals disturbed by feelings of hate, anger or frustration, but strategically produced and disseminated for ideological or political reasons. Thus, fake news is often developed by political parties, or more secretly, by agencies on behalf of their clients, specifically to influence legislative process, policies or election outcomes.

The documentary "*Propaganda, the new manipulators*", directed by Alexandra Jousset and Philippe Lagnier and broadcast by the French-German channel ARTE in October 2021 shows how people's anger and resentment are exploited for political purposes by populist leaders: "*In the shadow of demagogues, occult advisors act on their algorithms to manipulate consciences. They are computer scientists, opinion leaders, and experts in big data*".

Alexandra Jousset and Philippe Lagnier analyze how "*chaos engineers*" have intervened in four countries - Italy, Brazil, the United States, and India - to exploit all the pockets of anger inside society by infiltrating social networks, seizing personal data and influencing thought.

IN ITALY: A FEELINGS ANALYSIS

Mateo Salvini, leader of the Italian right wing has more than 4,500,000 followers on Facebook. He had only 18,000 before he met Luca Morisi, a doctor of philosophy and expert in social networks. Mateo Salvini made him his shadow advisor. Luca Morisi says he understood that it was no longer a time to be moderate, rather necessary to be radical and develop a strategy of polarization: '*Them on one side, us on the*

MATEO SALVINI, ITALIAN POPULIST LEADER

other...the enemy as a strategy always works very well.' proclaims Mateo Salvini. He also said, *'To capture the attention of all Italians it was necessary to identify a common enemy: The foreigner, the migrant, the negro'*.

By exploring social networks, Morisi and Salvini used a technique well known to digital marketers - *feelings analysis*. This technique has really changed the game in political communication according to one computer expert. With polls, it takes several days to get a result. In politics, a delay of several days is too long. If we want to know how people in Italy feel about the issue of immigration for instance, we start by identifying key words in social network messages such as "foreigner", "immigrant", "refugee", "negro". With one million connected messages, we have a huge amount of information to play with. All you have to do is observe the content of people's discussions and respond to them by riding on their feelings.

IN BRAZIL: THE CABINET OF HATE

David Nemer, professor of communication at the University of Virginia, USA, analyzed how Jair Bolsonaro, the Brazilian president, used Whatsapp to win the presidential elections in 2018 and to consolidate his power since.

Whatsapp has 130 million users in Brazil: almost 2 out of 3 people in the country. Brazilians have formed Whatsapp groups of friends, families, and around hobbies.

Bolsonaro was almost unknown in 2018. The address this problem his advisors decided to infiltrate Whatsapp incognito to elevate his recognition while confusing voters. For example, a video showed a baby bottle with nipple replaced by a rubber phallus and commentary explaining how this type of bottle is being distributed in nurseries across the country to combat homophobia. The message was clear: "*Guys, you have to vote Bolsonaro!*"

David Nemer wanted to know where all these messages came from. He joined 4 pro-Bolsonaro Whatsapp groups and discovered a pyramidal organization. At the base, there are the average Brazilians in their family or friends groups while at the middle level there is an army of Bolsonaro's trolls who flood the Whatsapp groups with disinformation. At the top of the pyramid, there are the "influencers" who provide the trolls with original and unpublished disinformation. These "engineers of chaos" belong to Bolsonaro's very close entourage. David Nemer found, in the Whatsapp groups he was monitoring, the phone numbers of Bolsonaro's sons, Flavio and Eduardo. They were the administrators of these groups. The Brazilian press gave a name to this close guard: "*the hate cabinet*".

A veteran Brazilian journalist, Patricia Campos Mello, showed how Bolsonaro's Whatsapp groups had sent millions of political messages to voters through bots or automated software. She suffered frenzied

retaliation by the hate cabinet as pornographic messages with naked women wearing her face flooded the social networks. One can sue for insult or defamation by a few individuals, but how is one to react against false information propagated by 50 or 100 million people?

From Whatsapp, the Bolsonaro clan has developed a whole ecosystem including influencers active on Facebook, Youtube or Instagram as well as the classic right-wing media. In Brazil, where no law protects personal data, the engineers of chaos have imposed their "*alternative truths*".

IN THE UNITED STATES: WHERE THE 'ENGINEER OF CHAOS' WAS THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF

Donald Trump, after his election, led an all-out war against the 'mainstream' or 'traditional' media, which criticized him, by designating them as "fake news". For this task he relied primarily on Twitter. Very often, he exceeded a hundred tweets per day. Twitter is a social network that allows for 3 biases:

- *Simplicity bias*: the "Tweets" are limited to 180 characters so it is generally impossible to communicate something complex or sophisticated.
- *Impulsivity bias*: Twitter is a very emotional medium, an individual can tweet from anywhere at any time. Trump frequently used words related to emotion, even naming for his followers the exact emotion he wanted them to feel. Each of his tweets ended with a single word designating an emotion with exclamation point: "*Sad!*", "*Funny!*", "*Bad!*", "*Not good!*"...
- *An uncivil bias*: most of what Trump said on Twitter would never have passed the government censor filters which traditional media are obliged to comply with.

BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT JAIR BOLSONARO

Donald Trump also used Facebook, especially to get elected. Christopher Wylie, a repentant chaos engineer and whistleblower in the Cambridge Analytica scandal, says, "*My role was to identify people who might believe in conspiracy theories and lure them into Facebook groups. Imagine, you're a random guy in the US and you click on it. You have groups with slightly ambiguous names like 'Smith County Patriots' and you live in Smith County. It all sounds*

DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

natural, it all sounds random. But in fact you were selected for this group because your data profile suggests to the Cambridge Analytica algorithm that you are probably more inclined to conspiracy thinking or probably neurotic. It was about causing the birth of a political movement that became huge in the United States and helped Donald Trump's rise to the Presidency."

Grouping like-minded people together to make them believe as true the information they share, is the core principle of social network algorithms. One of Trump's followers says, "*I have my community on Twitter. These are people who basically agree with me and when I communicate with them, it's like I'm sitting in the same room.*" The homogeneous groups of FaceBook, Twitter or Whatsapp, are impervious to diversity of viewpoints and debate. It is the ideal channel for "*boiling ideas in a vacuum*" and spreading intoxication.

The pinnacle of Donald Trump's abuses was his denial of the 2020 presidential election results and his use of Twitter to call on supporters to march on Capitol Hill: "*And we're gonna go to Capitol Hill, and we're gonna fight like hell!*" One of his supporters said, "*I take my orders from President Trump and if he says it's time to take to the streets, then we will take to the streets.*" He drove 3,000 miles without stopping to reach Washington. Yet, he also firmly believes that it was the far-left who planned the attack on Capitol Hill! Though a much wider American public believes the mainstream media when they report on all evidence pointing to Trump supporters. The main point here is that high numbers falling for conspiracy claims demonstrates the real power of fake news.

IN INDIA: NARENDRA MODI CREATES HIS OWN SOCIAL NETWORK

In India, Narendra Modi, the head of state of the world's most populous democracy, devised a way to avoid being cut off from his followers. Just as Donald Trump behaved after being banned from Twitter, Modi created his own social network called NaMo.

Arvind Gupta, an IT expert, contributed directly to Narendra Modi's election. He said, "*I am happy to have changed the digital dimension of democracy in India... If you talk to any product manager, he will talk about "one-to-one marketing". It's a good concept if you can personalize the Prime Minister's message for each citizen. We adopted this method in 2014 and it's become really, really big since then.*"

Beneath his wise old man exterior, Narendra Modi hides a brutal nationalism in service of the Hindu majority. On Facebook, he is the most followed political leader in the world.

Shivam Singh, an Indian big data expert, analyzes the strategy followed by Gupta: "*If the NaMo application started, it's because Modi and Gupta realized that Facebook and Twitter might have to change their policies*

FEBRUARY 2020: VIOLENT INTERCOMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN NEW DELHI

one day and fight against misinformation. So they decided to create their own platform..."

NaMo has two stated goals:

- To allow people to get information about the Prime Minister or the Government's plans. This is the public interface.
- To provide a pre-selected list of Modi supporters in each region.

But according to Baptiste Robert, a French ethical hacker known in IT circles as Elliot Alderson, NaMo has another, much less avowed function:

"*When I looked at the NaMo application, I realized that a relatively strange domain name appeared many times.This domain name, called in.wzkrt.com belongs to an American IT company, Clevertop, which offers a so-called "analytics" solution. The NaMo application sends on from the Clevertop's servers personal data such as names, surnames, religion, caste, but also the time spent on each screen, the words and articles clicked on, the path followed in the application... With all this, I will be able to push in your news feed news that you will rather like and that are rather in my favor..."*

In India, there is still no law on the protection of personal digital data. Everything is accessible online. This carefree attitude has helped Narendra Modi's rise to power. Arvind Gupta says: "We have come to understand the consumer, the citizen, the voter, in every constituency, in every polling station. We understood what language they spoke, what they preferred, and we made sure that our messages were highly segmented and personalized."

To profile each individual, Modi's computer scientists used a technique called "*micro-targeting*." Giuliano Empoli, author of the book "*The Chaos Engineers*" explains:

"*In the world of traditional politics, if you wanted to gain a majority you would have to address avery large audience. In fact it was so large that it couldn't be segmented so you had to send a message that was general and consensual. In contrast, in techno-politics, micro-targeting allows you to make thousands of targeted messages for different audiences, tailor-made to inflame each micro-group, even if it has to be done with content that is contradictory to your other messaging. The contradictions don't matter! They've figured out how to capitalize on it, play on the chaos and push it as far as possible*."

The BJP, Narendra Modi's party built a big data server that Arvind Gupta said was already in 2010-2011 probably "*a better data center than most companies in the world*." Modi was elected in 2014 and re-elected in 2019 with even more votes. The BJP has gradually intensified and refined its targeting of citizens by crisscrossing the country with 1 million Whatsapp groups.

As Devesh Kumar, a social network specialist, explains, the groups are created based on interests and include movie lovers, cricket enthusiasts, etc. It's all about baiting people into subscribing based on their interests. Then one starts sending them propaganda messages against this political party or that community, especially Muslims. These are fabricated fake news focused on cultivating hate like the story of a Hindu child murdered by Muslims or obscene drawings followed by calls for murder. All this is designed so that people never actually know they are being targeted by a political campaign. Everything is decentralized such that the small troll groups created to spread fake news are not connected to each other.

"Someone who receives a Whatsapp message," says Devesh Kumar, "thinks - *Oh, I've just been connected to a group that's going to send me authentic information and I'll be the first person in the village to know about it! He then achieves status and orally shares this information with many people*."

EUROPE AND FRANCE: THEY ARE NOT IMMUNE

Despite European laws that protect individual digital data they are also not immune to manipulation. Alexandra Jousset and Philippe Lagnier illustrate the impacts in their documentary on data miners.

In Brazil, to recover digital data, you can steal it. This is the work of "data miners" or data extractors. They plunder private information on the Internet on behalf of unscrupulous politicians anywhere

To reveal how data miners operate, Alexandra Jousset and Philippe Lagnier approached a well-known agency, posing as activists of a new French political party, *Women for France*. This is a right-wing, anti-abortion, very conservative party. They filmed the leaders of the agency with a hidden camera. From their first contact the film crew catch them next to Bolsonaro, so with the Brazilian head of state!

Next Alexandra Jousset and Philippe Lagnier claim to desire targetting French anti-abortion voters in the Paris region. Thanks to its software, in a few minutes, the data extractor recovers the name, phone number and date of birth of thousands of French Internet users who have posted the word "abortion" on Facebook. They go on to explain that it can extract data of five million people in the region. The price? For 1 million extracted records the price is 10 cents per individual. No danger of being detected. Everything is done from abroad. The data extractors are paid by Bitcoin so nothing links them to the pseudo political party in France.

Another Brazilian "consultant" suggested to Alexandra Jousset and Philippe Lagnier the use of an IMSI-catcher, an antenna that is outlawed in Brazil as in Europe. It can be carried hidden in a small backpack and allows one to discreetly suck up all the cell phone numbers around it..

"*It is extremely worrying*," concludes Baptiste Robert, "*If tomorrow, in a demonstration against the right to abortion, I put myself in the crowd in incognito mode with the antenna in a backpack, I can retrieve the phone numbers of everyone around me along with their personal information. I will then be able to file them in a very precise manner and send each person targeted information*."

Now let's consider the upcoming elections in France where it seems the first necessary ingredients for a Trump, Modi or Bolsonaro style scenario are already in place:

- A billionaire is running, Vincent Bolloré, who controls many media outlets including the TV channel Cnews;
- A new emerging populist leader, Eric Zeymour, is promoted by Cnews and builds his popularity on hateful messages against feminists, LGBT people, migrants and Muslims;
- Polls are already predicting Zeymour will make it to the second round of the presidential elections...

Given the narrow margins all it might take to turn the tide for Zeymour is for specialists of "big data" with their targeted messaging to manipulate the voters. Vigilance these days is required more than ever!

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TESTIMONIAL

Fake News and You

Karol Quinn

When we talk of Fake news these days we generally think of big headlines and big personalities. Fake news is something we associate with conspiracy theories and in essence as modern propaganda. Fake news is also usually perceived as primarily an adult related behaviour impacting adults, yet this has not been my experience. As a youth worker mainly within the Scouting movement, I find young people have also been seriously impacted by Fake news in ways that are not so well understood and worth exploring.

My work with young people and Fake News started with online safety instruction and what I learned derives from efforts at empowering young people to be as safe as possible when on line. Following is a summary of principles shared with young people.

WHAT IS NEWS?

Nearly all young people have had some negative experience online so what I have done, as part of a team safeguarding young people, is try to equip young people with some basic skills around online resilience. The process normally starts with where they are in in the moment and then works out from there. For instance, the first thing I do is ask them to look at what is News about them? To that end, the 'News' is based on

facts about them. So if someone says something about them they need to ask the question: "Is this factual?" This is a question that they can easily answer. The next thing is to ask about news related to their friends. For that they need to find out and essentially become budding journalists and follow some basics journalistic principles:

- **Truth and Accuracy** – Always look for the truth or as close to it as possible.
- **Independence** – If the story is about a friend, it is good to corroborate by checking with them or an independent source.
- **Fairness and Impartiality** – When a friend is involved, try to stay impartial and fair as this is the best way to be a true friend.
- **Humanity** – Always keep in mind that anytime you start asking questions you need to be aware of the possible emotional impact.

- **Accountability** – There are always consequences to actions so understand the possible impacts from of what you do or say. Be prepared to stand by/over your actions.

THE EVOLUTION OF ONLINE SAFETY SKILLS

In more recent years, the need to use this approach has widened to include what you hear on social media or even in the wider media. Again the tactic is to look at how the story links to them and explore how young people can take a journalistic approach. Some types of Fake News that we try to get young people to look at are:

- Confirmation Bias - We often ignore things that contradict what we believe. Your own bias is something to consider when reading the news. Particularly on topics you feel strongly about.
- The Echo Chamber - Today, there is a tendency to read a lot of news on social media. Friends are likely have the same beliefs and political leanings as you. Not exposing yourself to new ideas can lead you to become increasingly comfortable with what you hear and thereby more susceptible to Fake News.
- Website Spoofing - You might be surprised at the lengths some people will go to fool you and spread fake news. Basically they completely copy the design of a website, often news sites, so it looks almost identical to the sources with which you are familiar.

'MATISSE MOUTHFUL' FAKE NEWS: SPEECH OUT OF CONTROL

- URL Spoofing - URL spoofing is similar. There are different ways that this can be done. Sometimes the link on social media looks like a proper link from a website you trust, but after you have clicked it you should check the URL because it might not be what it seems. Double check you're in the right place, because the URL could actually look very similar to the real one.

CLOSING ARGUMENTS

The final step with young people is to let them explore how easy it is to create Fake news by applying the above characteristics, creating a news story in the style of a mainstream source or playing games with friends inn which they identify the difference between a truth and a lie. The key is to use the five steps above to discern between real and fake new

Lesson learnt from this approach that can be used in everyday life:

- Check the website or URL – is this a real website or pseudo site
- Verify the source – what can you find out about the source and the

- Look beyond the headline – often the headline is not what is in the body of the story so read the story to see how it differs
- Accept that images aren't proof - with new technology, images are far more easily doctored so it is important to not take them as true.
- Going viral doesn't mean it's true - popular stories don't make them right, which makes it difficult challenge
- Consider your biases – always check your own opinion and where you sit with the story
- Look for any errors or mistakes – Journalism is a profession that needs a lot of training so mistakes by amateurs are frequent
- Is it satire? – The written word can be misinterpreted and sometimes satirical stories pass as true
- Verify it with trusted sources - always check the story with a source that you know

It is worth noting that these are lessons learnt from my work with young people. Journalism is a profession requiring high levels of skill and there is a lot more to explore than what is covered in this short article.

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MOUSE TRAP – FAKE NEWS IS ABOUT SETTING TRAPS FOR UNSUSPECTING, GENERALLY WELL INTENTIONED LARGE GROUPS OF PEOPLE

ANALYSIS

Critical thinking: A vaccine for fake news resistance

by Dominique Benard

In 2010, the "Arab Spring" movement ousting dictators in Tunisia and Egypt was largely coordinated by social networks. Everyone was amazed. Social networks seemed a perfect medium for bringing cooperation and collective intelligence from small scale and the grassroots to the masses. Unfortunately, it also became apparent that these networks also provide ideal platforms for dissemination of misinformation and destabilizing fake news.

Without open channels and reliable information trusting relationships erode and cooperation is seriously compromised. Fake news represents an existential threat not only to democracies at large, but to the psychological and physical well being of young people who are major users of social networks.

Based on these concerns Cooperative Approaches has devoted this first issue of 2022 to this phenomenon. Our journalists have analyzed its various forms and origins and given voice to those who address it by various means including the place of critical thinking. Indeed, to identify fake news and resist falling into its traps, there is only one lasting defense, only one vaccine: the development of critical thinking skills.

It is a common belief that critical thinking is in our nature whereas most of our thoughts, left to their own devices, lean in the other direction. They are biased, distorted, incompletely informed or downright prejudiced. Yet the quality of our lives and the quality of what we produce, manufacture or build depends precisely on the quality of our thinking. Sloppy thinking is costly, both in monetary terms

Critical thinking is not about being suspicious of everything

and to the quality of life. Effective, quality thinking on the other hand must be cultivated systematically and over time.

Those generators of fake news or conspiracy theories often claim they possess critical thinking abilities which others cannot by having resisted the influence of "the system" or mainstream media. But critical thinking is not about being suspicious of everything, criticizing well researched data or ignoring news that contradicts one's own point of view. In fact critical thinking is the process of independently seeking out information, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating it in order to discern what to believe and then how to act on that information.

"*Critical thinkers*," explains Stephen D. Brookfield[1]), *are actively engaged in life to create and recreate aspects of their personal, professional and political lives. They value creativity; they are innovators. They see the future as open and malleable, not closed and fixed. They are confident in their potential to change the world through both personal and collective action. When we think critically, we become aware of the diversity of values, behaviors, social structures, and art forms in the world. Through this awareness, our commitments to our own values, actions, and social structures are imbued with a sense of humility. We become aware that others in the world also have certainties but about ideas, values, and actions that are quite contrary to our own*."

To ensure effective cooperation and strengthen our democracies, nothing is more urgent than training for critical thinking.

CERTITUDE : ANY MESSAGE PROFESSING CERTITUDE SHOULD BE EXAMINED CLOSELY AND CONSIDERED SUSPECT.

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[1] Developing Critical Thinkers. Jossey-Bass Publishers. San Francisco. 1987

What is critical thinking?

To identify fake news and refuse to fall into their tricksters trap, there is only one defense, only one vaccine: the development of critical thinking skills. But what is critical thinking?

CRITICAL THINKING, A PROCESS, NOT A RESULT

Everyone thinks; it's in our nature. But most of our thoughts, left to their own devices, can be biased, distorted, misinformed or downright prejudiced.

Critical thinking involves constantly questioning our thoughts, yet we can never achieve a state of 'complete critical development'. If one feels they have reached a fully realized state, they are going against one of the fundamental tenets of critical thinking: remain skeptical of any claim to universal truth or total certainty. By its very nature, critical thinking can never be achieved or complete in a definitive, static way.

Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thought in order to improve upon it so a critical thinker:

- raises critical questions and issues, articulating them clearly and precisely;
- gathers and evaluates relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively;

'COURAGE' – IT TAKES COURAGE TO THINK CRITICALLY AND STAND UP TO LIES

- arrives at well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards;
- thinks openly about other systems of thought, recognizing and evaluating their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences where appropriate; and
- communicates effectively with others to find solutions to complex problems.

HEADLINES CAN GENERATE AND MANIPULATE PEOPLE TO EXPERIENCE A WIDE RANGE OF EMOTIONS

WHAT ARE CRITICAL THINKERS?

Critical thinkers use their critical thinking skills to analyze information, determine which aspects of information to believe and which not to believe, and how to act on that information.

As such, all critical thinkers must:

- **Be open-minded**: As a critical thinker, you should not stick to what you know; instead, give yourself the opportunity to learn new things and new ways of doing things, remaining open-minded in all circumstances. This characteristic allows you to give proper attention to the ideas of others without being biased, so that you can better identify other options and possibilities.
- **Be knowledgeable**: critical thinking is about making informed decisions. You cannot make informed decisions based on little information or knowledge. As a critical thinker, you must prioritize information gathering. If your knowledge on a specific topic is insufficient, forgo making a decision and gather relevant information (be well-informed) on that topic before making a decision.
- **Use good judgment**: Critical thinking is not just about listening to the opinions of others; it is also about being discerning about whether or not the information you receive is credible. Critical thinkers judge the credibility of information sources, the quality of arguments, and any evidence supporting an argument or information in question.
- **Clarify the issue, or ask for clarification**: As a critical thinker (or critical thinking practitioner), you must be able to clarify your position or points. You can do this by explaining your views in a systematic way, and by answering any questions that may arise when you express your position on a topic. As such, you need to develop the ability to ask questions that prompt others to clarify their statements. When you don't understand what someone is saying, you can't come to a reasonable conclusion based on the information they are giving you.
- **Draw conclusions with caution**: Ultimately, most situations will warrant you coming to a specific conclusion. It is important that you draw conclusions, but that you exercise caution

- when drawing those conclusions. By being cautious, when new information becomes available, you will be able to analyze it, synthesize it, and make a more accurate assessment.

THE BENEFITS OF CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking plays a very important role in our individual and collective lives

Critical thinking develops creativity

Creativity and critical thinking are two sides of the same coin. To invent something new or improve something old, one must first do research to try to understand what functions the product should have to solve a problem or meet a certain need. Critical thinking helps to "think outside the box", ask the key questions and achieve the best outcome.

Critical thinking promotes self-reflection

In order to thrive and live a meaningful life, we need to bring to light what drives us, what is important to us as individuals, and how that relates to the world at large. Critical thinking allows us to reflect on the values that drive us and to successfully complete a self-assessment, which will help us determine the choices and decisions we will make in our lives.

Critical thinking enables effective cooperation

By thinking critically, we are able to defend our position when called upon. Critical thinking allows us to clearly and systematically present our ideas and

IT IS IMPORTANT TO DISCERN BETWEEN INTENTIONAL AND UNINTENTIONAL MISINFORMATION. SOMETIMES THINGS GET 'LOST IN TRANSLATION'

views to others, outlining the reasoning behind them and providing evidence for our position on specific topics. It also allows us to analyze, understand, and positively criticize the ideas of others in order to reach a consensus on which to base cooperation. Without critical thinking, there is no true cooperation, but conversely, cooperation with others, as we will see, allows us to refine and develop our critical thinking.

Critical thinking lays the foundation for science

Over the years, science has enabled us to better understand the laws of the universe and to invent new and more effective answers to the problems facing humanity. But without critical thinking, it would be impossible to question theories and seek answers to establish new ones. Science relies on critical thinkers to find new formulas and make progress.

Critical thinking allows democracy to flourish

True democracy flourishes when people can express their opinions, ask questions, hold their leaders accountable and seek answers. It cannot flourish in silence. Critical thinking allows people to express their opinions and listen to the opinions of others, weigh them and come to a peaceful solution. Often we fight not because we disagree, but because we feel our concerns are being overlooked or trivialized. Critical thinking allows people of all backgrounds to look at problems from different angles and come up with the best possible solution.

'WE ARE THE FUTURE' - YOUNG PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE LONGER TERM IMPLICATIONS OF ADULTS SUBVERTING SOCIETIES TODAY

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Managing our mental models

By Dominique Bénard

In order to think critically, we need to be aware of the *mental models* that determine how we see others, the world and events, and how we behave.

WHAT IS A MENTAL MODEL?

Mental models are chains of ideas made up of images, assumptions and narratives that we store in our brains, based on our experiences, about ourselves, others, institutions and all aspects of the world.

Our minds are continually creating these chains of ideas. This gives rise to a constant agitation. It is like having a radio station, tuned to a certain channel that is constantly broadcasting. Whenever we encounter an obstacle or a problem, we look for what mental model to use to find a solution.

Mental models can be traps

Mental models can also be compared to a pair of glasses that filter and distort in a subtle way what we see, or to a mental map that allows us to navigate through the complex environments of our world. But all maps give only a limited and often biased representation of reality.

But we can't do without them

However, mental models are necessary to understand situations and systems. By creating simplified internal representations of complex external systems and events, mental models improve our understanding of different phenomena and how they work.

Mental models influence the way we think:

- By organizing knowledge and information so that we can understand it;
- By creating reference points from past experiences;
- By linking related concepts to create "procedural knowledge" that helps us determine how to proceed in solving a problem;
- By allowing us to predict the possible outcomes of different scenarios through mental situations.

IDENTIFYING AND QUESTIONING OUR MENTAL MODELS

We cannot think or act without mental models. Each of us has different mental models. This explains why two people can describe the same event they witnessed in different ways. The problem is that you have to know them in order to change them if necessary.

Mental models are unconscious

Generally our mental models lead us to adopt assertions, implicit hypotheses, they are located at the unconscious level, we do not bother to examine them.

For each field of knowledge there are key ideas and mental models that we must have in our repertoire if we want to have as complete an understanding as possible of phenomena and problems. If our repertoire is limited to a small number of mental models, we also limit our options, our opportunities, and our ability to adapt to the diversity of situations and an ever-changing world. If we can't identify and change the mental models we use, it's like not having a button to control the volume of the radio station or change the station, we will remain locked in a box. We will always apply the same mental model, the same type of analysis whatever the problem is.

The real danger of fake news

This is the real danger of fake news: they give us a mental model that we adopt and apply to various situations without much thought. Conspiracy theories claim to explain almost all current problems by the planned and hidden action of a group of hidden actors. It focuses the reasoning of their followers on a single delusional mental model. Thus QAnon is an extreme right-wing conspiracy movement from the United States, grouping together promoters of conspiracy theories according to which a secret war was taking place between Donald Trump and elites implanted in the government, financial circles and the media, who would commit pedophilic, cannibal and satanic crimes.

Critical thinking gives us precisely the buttons to control the volume or change the station.

THE LADDER OF INFERENCE

An interesting tool to identify our mental models is the ladder of inference.

Inference is a logical operation by which we accept a proposition by virtue of its connection with other propositions already held to be true (a chain of mental ideas).

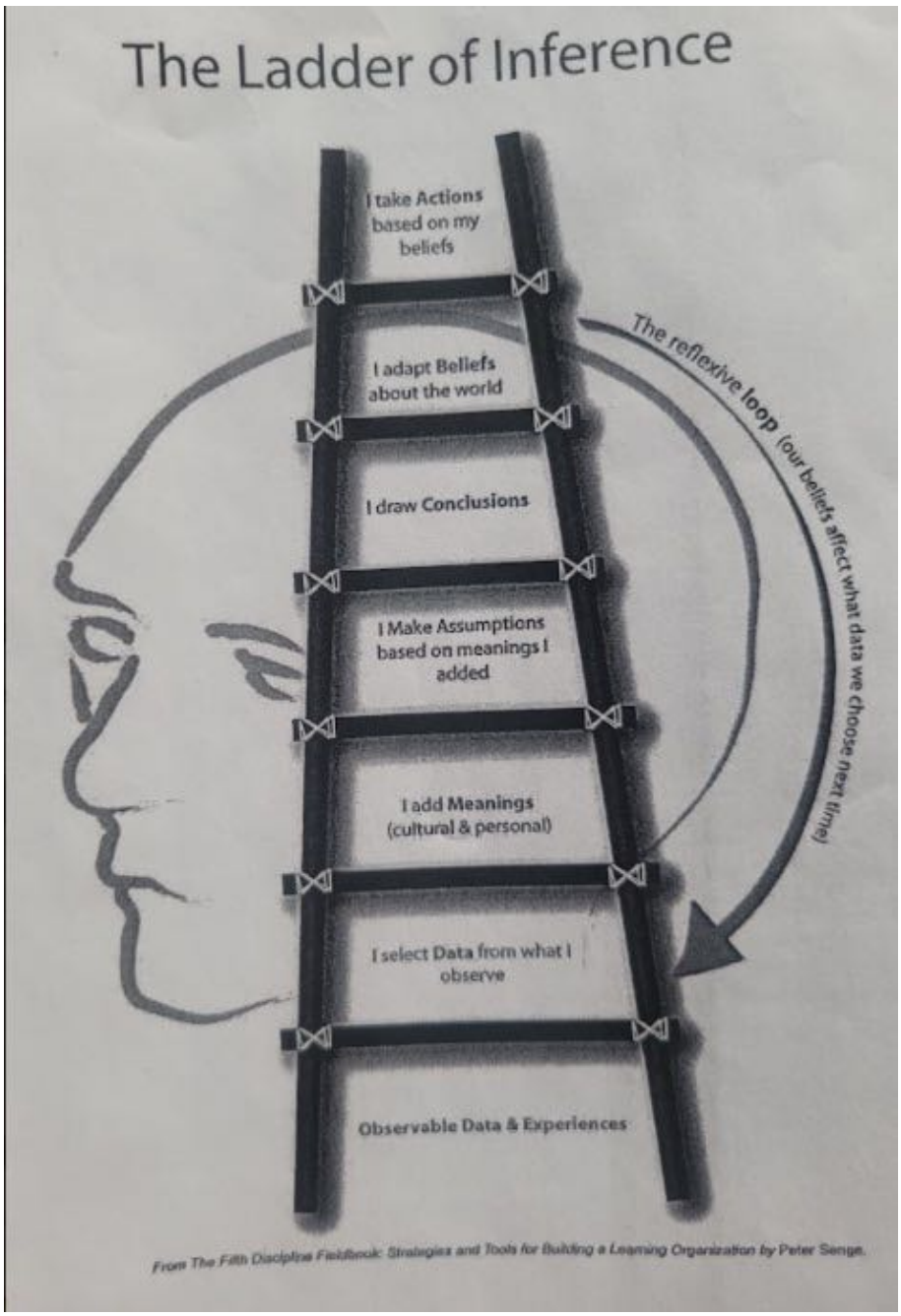
In everyday life, we often begin to believe things based on conclusions drawn from our observations and past experience. Our ability to achieve the results we really want is eroded by our belief that :

- The information we gather is true information;
- What we believe is based on true information;
- What we believe is true;
- The truth is obvious, no need to dig deeper.

Let's take an example: I give a presentation to the entire management team of my organization. Everyone seems interested and attentive, except Henry, at the end of the table, who gives the impression of being extremely bored. He doesn't ask any questions throughout my presentation and as I conclude, he says, "*I think we need a more complete report to make a decision.*" Which means, "*Let's move on...*" Everyone starts gathering their papers to leave the room.

Then I start to build a chain of thoughts:

- "It's obvious that Henry thinks I'm incompetent. Which is a shame because my proposals are exactly what the department needs."
- "Now that I think about it, Henri never liked my ideas... Clearly, he's a power-hungry ambitious..."
- "I've made my decision: I'm not going to put anything in my report that Henri could use... I'm sure he'd use it against me..."
- "It's really ugly to have such an influential enemy in the organization..."



In a matter of seconds, I climbed the "*ladder of inference*," a very common mental pathway, which often leads to erroneous beliefs. In fact, one can interpret Henry's attitude in many different ways:

- Maybe he was bored by my presentation... Or maybe he was in a hurry to read and study the report on paper... Maybe he thought I was incompetent...
- But maybe he was shy and afraid to embarrass me by asking questions...

It must be admitted that I selected some facts from among others and made assumptions without verification...

On the ladder of inference, one passes from one rung to another with incredible ease... The worst thing is that the convictions that it has allowed us to forge will influence the selection of data that we will make the next time. Thus, the more I think Henry is a "bad

guy" the more I will interpret his behavior as malicious. This is called the reflexive loop: our beliefs influence the unconscious selection of data that we pay attention to. This is what we also do in social networks when we take fake news seriously.

TWO TOOLS FOR LEARNING TO THINK CRITICALLY

We need to learn to bring our mental models to the surface at a conscious level, to identify and explore them, so that we can "change our glasses" and become able to better perceive and analyze the reality around us.

To identify and challenge our mental models, we can use two tools that constitute a cooperative approach to developing critical thinking skills:

1. "*Advocacy*": a tool to make our thinking and reasoning patterns more visible to others.

2. "*Inquiry*": a tool for learning to discover the ways in which others think and reason.

Advocacy

Managers or team leaders have generally learned to "sell" their ideas and to persuade their collaborators of the excellence of the solutions they propose. But more and more often we encounter situations where no one knows the right answer. The only viable option is to think together to come up with new ideas.

So the role of the leader is to expose his or her reasoning, his or her way of thinking about the problem and to encourage others to put them to the test... For this, we can use advocacy, a tool that allows us to make our thought process visible and to identify our mental models.

Here is a protocol to help develop advocacy.

1. Present your assumptions and describe the data that led you to formulate them: "*Here's what I think and here's how I got there*..."

2. Explain your assumptions: "I made the following assumption..."

3. Make your reasoning explicit: "*I came to this conclusion because*..."

4. Explain the context of your point of view: who will be affected by what you propose, how, and why?

5. Illustrate what you are proposing with examples: "To get a clear picture of what I am saying, imagine that you are the client (beneficiary, partner) who will be affected..."

6. As you speak, try to picture how others perceive your words.

7. Encourage others to explore your model, your assumptions, and the data you are putting forward: "*What do you think about what I just said? Do you see a flaw in my reasoning? What could you add?*"

8. Don't defend yourself when your ideas are questioned. If your ideas are good they will gain even more strength after being tested.

9. Reveal the points that are less clear in your reasoning. Rather than making you appear vulnerable to others, this will encourage them to suggest improvements: "*Here's something you could help me think about*..."

10. As you speak, try to imagine how others perceive what you are saying, "*Do you see things differently?*"

Inquiry

Inquiry is sort of the opposite of advocacy. It involves asking others to make their thought processes visible to bring their mental models to light.

Balancing advocacy with inquiry is a way to facilitate change for yourself and within the organizations where you work. At the individual level, you will be rewarded with better relationships and a reputation for integrity. As a team, you will open up new opportunities to learn together.

Here's an investigation protocol:

1. Gently help others move down the ladder of inference and describe the data they rely on to arrive at the position they hold: "*What led you to this conclusion? What data are you basing it on?*"
2. Use non-aggressive language, especially with people who are not familiar with this type of method. Question them in a way that doesn't put them on the defensive: Instead of saying, "*What do you mean?*" or "*What evidence do you have?*" instead say, "*Can you help me understand your reasoning on this point?*"
3. Highlight their reasoning. Try to find out why they are saying what they are saying, "How is this significant?" - "*How does this relate to your other concerns?*" - "*What is the next step in your reasoning*?"
4. Explain the reasons for your inquiry and how this questioning relates to your own concerns, hopes, needs: "*I'm asking about your assumptions about this because...*
5. Test what people say by asking for examples in a broader context: "*How will your proposal affect...*" - "*How will it affect...*" - "*Do you consider data that I have missed?*"
6. Make sure you understand what they are saying: "*If I understand correctly, you are saying that...*"
7. Strive to listen carefully and grasp the new understanding that may emerge. Don't focus on preparing to destroy other people's arguments or on defending your own arguments.

Here are some sample phrases you can use in your inquiry:

- When people express very assertive views without justifying or illustrating their reasoning, you can say, "Y*ou may be right, but I would like to understand you better. What leads you to believe?*"
- When the discussion goes off topic, you can say, "I'm not sure how this relates to what you said. Can you tell me how you think this is relevant?"
- When you doubt the relevance of your reasoning, you can say, "*This may not be relevant now. If it is, tell me, I'm listening.*"

- When two members are continuing a debate while the others are just observing, you can say, "I'd like to give you my reaction to what you've said so far, and then see what you and the others think..."
- When several points of view are put forward at once, you can say, "Now we have several ideas on the table (explain which ones), I suggest we discuss them one after another..."
- When you perceive a negative feeling in others, you can say, "When you said... (give an example), I got the impression that your feeling was...(explain the feeling). If so, I would like to understand why you feel that way. Is it because of something I did or said?"

When you perceive a negative feeling in yourself, you can say, "*It may be more my problem than yours, but when you said* (quote the phrase), *I felt... Did I misinterpret what you said or thought?* »

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AN INNOVATIVE PROGRAM

‘The Net Walkers’

Valérie BOUSILA-GUERY

Coordinator for the Adolescents Unit on Parenting, Social Life and ‘Les Promeneurs du net’ (the “Net Walkers”) at the Caisse d’Allocations Familiales des Vosges (Vosges Family Fund)

Les Promeneurs du Net or ‘Net Walkers’ https://www.promeneursdunet.fr is a web and social networks based program and methodology involving youth services professionals who engage and educate young people as well as parents around issues of social skills, risk assessment and prevention, and social policies.It is supported by the Caisse Nationale d'Allocations Familiales (CNAF).

WEB-BASED EDUCATIONAL PRESENCE

The notion of "educational presence on the Internet" refers to the on-line extension of in-person educational processes undertaken by various youth services organizations. A Net Walker is a professional who provides

professional services on the web and often on social media platforms. This program, initiated in Sweden, was initially implemented in four regions of France in 2012 and has since expanded nationally.

IMPACT STUDY

In 2019, a qualitative evaluation of the program with subsequent report was commissioned by the Caisse Nationale d'Allocations Familiales. This evaluation posed one key question: How does the Net Walkers program transform and renew the nature and quality of the social connections and the relationships between youth services professionals and young people?

4 lines of associated inquiry were pursued:

1. What actions are carried out by the Net Walkers?
2. What are the impacts of the platform on the professionals and their practices
3. How do young people access the platform? What are the impacts on them?
4. What are the program impacts on broader society in the respective regions?

This study, focusing on the four different regional experiences, comprised the collection and analysis of documents, interviews with the service providers (Net Walkers themselves), interviews with program managers and administration, and interviews with local actors associated with the program.

NATION-WIDE EXPANSION

On the basis of these experiences, and in view of the outcomes achieved, the system was deployed throughout France by all the Caisses d'Allocations Familiales in partnership with several ministries (Cities, Youth and Sports, Families, Children and Women's Rights). The Promeneurs du Net approach is now steered by a political body (steering committee) and implemented by an operational body. These entities mobilize the institutional partners associated with territorial educational and youth policies, as well as the territorial authorities responsible for the program itself. From the outset the initiative was embedded within the territorial contractual framework for youth policies and programs.

THE NET WALKERS MISSION

The Internet and social networks are now part of everyone's daily life, especially young people. Therefore the educational presence of Net Walkers on the web is essential to help minimize the inherent risks to young people while amplifying the many benefits.

Traditionally youth professionals have been active for the most part within and around their physical service buildings such as youth and cultural centers, social centers, neighborhood centers, popular education associations, and other local community organizations. Until recently they have not often been present on the web where young people are generating and following enormous amounts of digital content.

The Net Walkers engage with new technologies to better address the needs of young people and adapt their interventions. Their online presence allows them to enrich intervention modalities and pursue the educational activities on the many platforms where the young people are present. The Net Walker must change their professional posture as a strategy to get closer to young people on the net. Working on their relationship with young people on social networks is not a common practice yet one that requires advanced skills to effectively exchange and interpret emotions or catch non-verbal communication cues. This evolution of professional practice has been applied in the following areas:

- Social bonding: Strengthening the social link with young people; Maintaining the link with young people who do not come or no longer come to the physical centers; Reaching out to young people who are less mobil.
- Digital education: Raising awareness about the use of the Internet and screens; Developing critical thinking skills for assessing the information and images presented.
- Educational presence in online spaces frequented by youth: Organizing educational interventions/forums for discussion and exchange on the Internet; Creating a relationship of trust to improve interventions with youth; Fostering exchanges with young people; Increasing youth participation in the youth structures of the territory; Fostering commitment of young people to the various activities.

- Emergence of initiatives : Supporting individual or collective projects via social networks; Adapting the educational activities to the young people's needs and the projects they have already initiated..
- New collaborative practices: Developing collaborative projects between young people; Encouraging collaborative projects among professionals; Improving the professional networks through more interdisciplinary and face-to-face collaboration.
- Prevention of risk behaviors and malaise: Transmitting informative content adapted to the uses of young people and their concerns of which professionals are aware by being present on social networks; Ensuring the monitoring, detecting difficulties and making contact with young people

who seem to be in difficulty; Offering a psychosocial listening service, responding to situations of psychological distress, and providing guidance; Detecting signals of negative influence (behavioral changes, acts of proselytizing); Reporting worrying situations to the competent institutions.

Each Net Walker surfs social networks and establishes a relationship of trust with young people. They are clearly identified on a dedicated national website (www.promeneursdunet.fr) with at least their first name, their profession and the agency they work for. This site is secure and ensures that a person who claims to be a Net Walker is indeed carrying out the mission. Each Net Walker is signatory of a charter which publishes the project origins and purpose to any young person who may like to connect with a Net Walker. It also specifies the mission, values, principles and operating guidelines of the approach.

A system that has also evolved to meet the needs of parents

Based on Net Walkers evaluation results from recent years it became evident that many parents also need to engage with professionals on social networks. Since 2020, in some counties, the system has been supplemented by "Promeneurs du Net-Parentalité" (Net Walkers and Parents). These net walkers surf the web and listen to parents to inform, exchange, guide and often calm situations. They also often help sharpen critical thinking skills for better assessing the social media content and context surrounding young people. The mission, the function, coordination and facilitation of the Parent Net Walkers are identical to those of the Youth Net Walkers.

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AN ASSOCIATION, A PROJECT

The "Francas": A participatory approach to critical thinking education

By Dante Monferrer

At the beginning of January I was received by Lise Batailler at the "Francas" headquarters. Lise has been employed by the Francas of Tarn-et-Garonne, a prefecture of Montauban, for three years. Previously she served many other organizations dedicated to youth services, popular education and social action. The questions I explored with her were focused on national level research conducted by the Francas on young people and development of their critical thinking skills.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EDUCATION FOR CRITICAL THINKING

Today we live in a time of major challenges and mounting inequalities made more acute by blurring of reference points around many dimensions of society from health and education to the environment, technology, and media. For young people in particular the blurring impacts their developing abilities around autonomy, confidence, empowerment, citizenship, commitment, and sense of place in society. Given this context a number of questions arise for all ages:

- How to make informed choices?

- How to appeal to reason and logic?
- How to discern between reliable information from unreliable information?
- How to detect attempted manipulation and being aware of one's own limits?
- How to reinforce trust and get away from systematic mistrust?
- How to develop critical thinking skills?

Identifying and understanding authentic, valid sources of knowledge in the realms of science, history, sociology, economics etc. is one crucial way that critical thinking skills are applied. Another is discerning between these sources and opinions or other forms of judgment. Similarly, in a society where digital technology and social networks are becoming more and more important, it is essential to promote a better understanding of how and why information is produced, circulated, transmitted and shared.

But critical thinking education cannot be limited to specific media, digital information campaigns, or one-off interventions. Rather it must be applied consistently in a multidisciplinary and transversal manner over the long term. It must operate throughout all program activities and be integrated across all the educational practices conducted for and with young people.

The overarching goal is to contribute to the empowerment of children and young people so that they become well informed and involved citizens. This presumes a clear vision of the place and role that young people can assume, not only in learning activities and the educational processes but later in life out in the world.

For the Francas, any programming concerning young people must be developed with them and based on their realities. This implies first to consider them as possessing a wealth of insights and "capable" as partners, as actors and authors of their own future.

COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES

Two complementary approaches developed in the field by the Francas contribute to their critical thinking methodology.

Multiple actions and projects emerging on a daily basis

Within a consistent framework of education for critical thinking, multiple activities and projects develop and apply innovative pedagogies in public settings. They are constantly revised and updated day after day to connecting people, encouraging exchange, empowering young people, and cultivating a better understanding of oneself, others, and an ever evolving world. Here are some examples from the regions of Tarn-et-Garonne and Lot.

Nomadic leisure activities/ 'Les loisirs nomades'

This is a free and mobile project situated in public spaces encouraging participation and exchange through a range of fun games and activities. The space is open to all; children, young people, families, elderly, inhabitants, passers-by... and encourages disconnection from all technology (ie. phones). The activities content varies according to the desires and the needs perceived by Francas facilitators, but over the course of days social

relationships are built and each participant's empathic and critical spirit is further developed.

Summer vacation stays

Vacation stays for young people in their teens creates an important educational space for a collective experience outside the familiar settings with families and schools. Whether the initial idea to venture out derives from a single young person or a broader collective, the result is a group of young people and families convening for several months around formalized projects. They become actors in their own co-created adventure. From the preparation stage to the stay they enjoy the support of Francas organizers who are guarantors of the framework which they collectively define. Through the initial planning process they must make realistic design choices, and therefore debate, exchange, analyze, argue, listen, and ultimately decide on features agreed upon by everyone. Finally once the stay begins everyone participates taking responsibilities according to their abilities and desires. They create committees for the physical accommodations,communications, contact with service providers (camping, catering, etc.), setting and maintaining norms of behavior and activity-based programs.

NOMAD LEISURE ACTIVITIES IN MONTAUBAN

Ultimately, the experience is an opportunity for teens to commit, become actors of their own designs in collective living, and develop consciousness around responsible citizenship.

The cyber r@llye

Engaging in science-based activities, learning about the scientific method, understanding the effects of one action upon another, raising questions, making hypotheses, establishing one's moral grounding... These are all elements of the Francas approach to education which prepare young people for the wider world and its complexities. With this end in mind each year they organize the "cyber r@llye", a great internet-based game.. In 2018 more than 130 teams participated composed of young people from 8 to 18 years old and physically distant from each other by hundreds, even thousands of kilometers.

The teams create puzzle-like challenges, neither too simple nor too complex, in the form of enigmas expressed as text, photos, video, etc The aim is to discover the richness and particularities of the diverse geographic territories where participants live. It causes them to take another look at their own environment, those of others and to put themselves in a position to help others discover the various and diverse features. Each challenge is posted online, then, the participants exchange and cooperate around clues to solve them.

In the process they have to sort through the different information, learn to better use search engines discovering not all information is relevant and that it often has to be categorized, sorted and cross-referenced. They must also engage with other people, express themselves in front of strangers, and explain or argue their findings. In the end, this is an opportunity to exercise critical thinking skills.

Media-based activities for critical thinking education

Other types of actions implemented by Francas' team approach education for critical thinking are advanced through their Media Information Education (MIE) and Philosophy workshops.

Media Information Education (MIE)

The proliferation of sources and modes of information generates disinformation and confusion. The news, with its drifts, its dramas, its attacks on freedom of expression and its manipulations, is impacted by the rapid evolution of communication modalities.

All of this reminds us why MIE is essential and keep in line with democratic principles.

It is thus necessary to adapt the approach for a younger generation who they have become not only consumers of information available in abundance, but also producers and distributors of content.

In MIE Children must assess the impact of their words and assume responsibility of their actions in order to produce and disseminate reliable and well analyzed information. It is a matter of encouraging citizen media practice. Other characteristics are the critical and distanced reading of contents, familiarity with media languages, and free and conscious self-expression.

MIE is a space for rigorous learning as well as an opportunity to take pleasure in expressing oneself, in being heard, listened to and understood all while seeking information and analyzing content. It also involves sensitizing oneself to images, text and sound; in receiving and disseminating information through the press, radio, cinema; and in mobilizing educators on social networks. It is about being trained and training with others for so many conditions. Following are some concrete examples:

Prevention workshops

The Francas of Val-d'Oise and the city of Sarcelles offered prevention workshops for 260 sixth graders which led them to take a critical look at their use of the Internet and social networks. Questions explored included: Why do you go on the internet? Which social networks do you use? What are the impacts from benefits to problems?

The aim is to help participants better understand and popularize the Fancas approach to dissemination and appropriation of information and advance a more positive digital culture. It is also about developing deeper aware of the laws around cyber-bullying, data protection, digital image sharing and to have the correct reflexes' when using social networks.

The association "Du cinéma plein mon cartable",

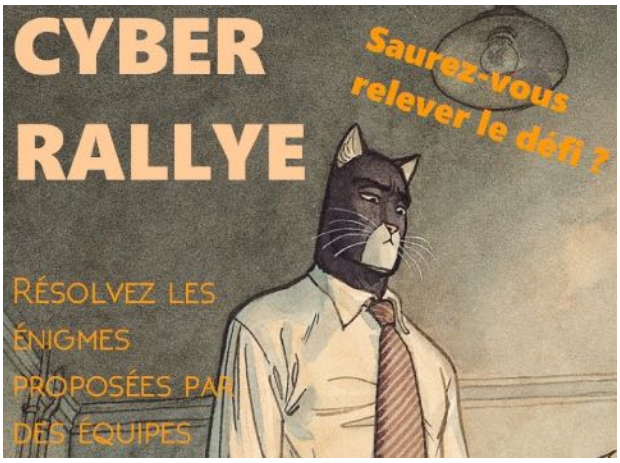
The association Francas of Landes is an early leader in the fields of cinema education with the formation of a critical spirit in young people as the "beating heart" of their activitý. It intervenes around the coordination of devices of education to the cinema.

Via a diversitý of actions, it is a real cinema journey that is proposed: presentation and projection of films (that otherwise young people would not go to see), production of films by the children, each one occupying in turn one of the professions (operator, editor, director, actor...).

It is a learning of listening, cooperation, responsibilitý, image culture. The association also works on media education, ("We seek to show how images manipulate"), and to demonstrate it from simple, and concrete experiences to allow the young viewer to acquire a critical mind.

The teenagers are not devoid of culture of the image. "They have their own knowledge, which for some, can be very specialized. With the explosion of the offer via different platforms, they can become very knowledgeable. So we feed each other".

SEEDS OF PHILOSOPHY



Web radio

Web radio, a widespread program in France reported on in an earlier edition of Cooperative Approaches, is fully aligned with the Francas and there is collaboration around some projects. It aims at ensuring the participation, expression and valorizing young people through the practice of radio broadcasting.

Requiring only relatively simple equipment (microphone, mixing equipment, server, PC), it develops in diverse places from schools to recreation centers. With motivation and appropriate professional support, it allows participants to collect, process and broadly disseminate information.

In terms of impacts it leads young people to open up, familiarize with various institutions, associations, cultural actors, other children, and professionals. They engage in dialogue,

WEB RADIO

exchange ideas, confront divergent points of view, and understand more about the diversity and the richness of the French territories and the sources of these news events.

Radio production (reports, interviews, etc.) is not an end in itself. Rather it serves as a support to the learning that occurs through participation and expression. Encouraging young people to speak out, produce a program, organize a debate, etc. requires investment and preparation. They gather information, process it, understand it, and then practice the delivery so it is not just "read".

Through this tool and the steps that accompany it, the Francas put the young radio reporters in situations to act and express themselves on their 'territory of life' which becomes a way of training themselves in the functioning of the media and in the end developing aptitudes and attitudes necessary for the exercise of their citizenship.

Seeds of philosophy/ 'Graines de philo' workshops

Set up by the Francas, these workshops have widely spread as spaces for exchange and debate. They allow young people to think for themselves, to develop their critical thinking and to deepen their values.

Edwige Chirouter clearly states the stakes of graines de philo take philosophy out of the classroom so as to democratize its access. Many children from the working classes never otherwise gain access to philosophy as a subject yet it contributes directly to the formation of an enlightened citizenship. Philosophical discussions allow us to learn to think in a rigorous way and to sharpen the critical spirit. They develop democratic skills such as learning to debate in a peaceful yet confrontational manner while listening to each other, respecting different points of view and different visions of the world. These are essential skills for addressing a critical issue; that of societies confronted with multiple crises and the rise of political and

religious fundamentalism. The philosophy workshops respond to this crisis through a basic political imperative. That is preventing our young people from succumbing to dogmatism and rather helping them acquire a critical mind, a rigor of thought and keys to healthy culture whereby they are capable of analyzing and understanding the world. All aspects of the philosophy workshops aim at developing free and autonomous thought.

The "graines de philo" workshops take place in several stages. The rules put in place encourage debate: expressing one's point of view, listening, reflecting, arguing, measuring the coherence of one's discourse, reexamining one's point of view and confronting it with that of others in order to further advance one's thinking. It is also about exchanging philosophical questions, avoiding ready-made ideas, and listening to different points of view so as to build new competences and "thinking skills" that will be used throughout one's life.

Reflecting on major issues from one's own experiences helps to build one's relationship to oneself, to others, to the world and to feel more connected with major societal issues of our times. The strength of philosophical questioning is that there is often no "right answer" and that these questions have been asked before. One is thereby prompted to wonder about oneself, about one's relationship to others, to the wider world and in that context about what is just, true, beautiful... Reflecting in this manner while confronting the coherence of one's argument in the exchange, builds one's sense of self and one's world views.

Philosophical moments emerge: citizenship skills (daring to say what one thinks, listening to others, arguing, questioning oneself, extracting oneself from the ready-made thinking) and thinking skills (learning to think by oneself and with others in order to express, with words, agreements or disagreements. Knowing how to transform one's assertions into open questions that can be shared; knowing how to search together, to progress together, including in disagreement; knowing how to argue and say what one is basing oneself on; knowing how to question the meaning of words, and understanding that one does not necessarily have the same representations...).

The posture of the facilitator is not always simple because it is necessary to train oneself, to involve the children. More than ever, this requires setting up a warm and non-judgmental climate, with rules allowing the expression of diverse opinions and the valuing of everyone's speech.

Integrating a philosophical approach into all educational practices means taking the time to analyze the lived experience in order to act on the world and live together in an intelligent and peaceful manner. It is fundamental to set up regular practice times to learn to "think for oneself", to analyze one's experience, to acquire social skills, to reflect and re-interrogate oneself, to meet others and listen to them positively, to consolidate one's thinking and make it progress.

AND TO CONCLUDE: ARE YOU A CRITICAL THINKER?

Before closing this overview, we engaged in an exchange with Lise from the Francas on two or three thoughts about some of the

conditions that impact their work in general and critical thinking education in particular.

Training of their facilitators

The first subject concerns the role of facilitators responsible for preparing the programs. This involves much more than technical background work. To train young people so that they develop their capacity to question, their judgment, their critical look, all pre-supposes that as facilitators we can do it ourselves and within our own self-practice. The posture of the facilitators must be highly developed in this sense so that they are able to question and evolve in one's own thinking, one's way of working and to get out of their routines and the ready-made methodological approach. They must also be able to take a deeper critical look at oneself, one's working methods, and one's assumptions and beliefs.

Yet taking true critical look is a daily challenge. It certainly depends on the will of each individual, but also on the capacity of the teams to support one another as they collectively review the work, the practices and assess their results.

Partnerships

In a context where educational practices are constantly evolving and projects built one upon the next, taking the long term view and doing that with partners is essential. Other factors favoring a partnering approach is the role of innovation, professional practice, regular training, and investment in human capital.These all require resources and can be achieved with more efficiency when community agencies are aligned in purpose and approach.

To do this, cooperation within and across the youth serving organizational structures and authorities is needed.

An example of this collaboration and resulting synergy is the "Emoi et moi et nous" program run by a group of partners in Tarn-et-Garonn. It aims to support teams during school and extracurricular time addressing psychosocial skills and developing them within structures which ‘promote a calm climate within groups conducive to the acquisition of knowledge’. This collaboration advances really well with other actors such as local authorities and the Net Walkers /’Promeneurs du Net’ (covered in the previous Cooperative Approaches edition.

The means to expand

The inevitable question of resources has also been raised. Existing human and financial resources do not allow us to go beyond what is currently being done. However with more means, the Francas nomadic leisure activities could, for example, be set up in many more communes within the department or other spaces of the wider Montauban region. Yet in order for more partners to get involved, it would be necessary to explore the energy and convictions of civic leaders

At this time, the associative movements and non-profit sectors are struggling to not only find funding but deeper purpose. As they are struggling to renew their economic model they most not simply stay security-oriented but take risks to try innovative approaches to building informed and conscious citizens. It is more than urgent than ever that we focus on building these essentially human social

THE FRANCAS

A little history

Since 1944, the Francas have brought together people concerned with social empowerment for children and young people. Forerunners of new educational fields, a number of concepts, born from the reflection and action of Francas, have been developed by the public authorities, and even the commercial sector: secular patronages, extracurricular activities, leisure centers, local educational projects, etc.

A real identity

Les Francas, a national lay federation, has an inseparable educational, social and cultural vocation. It acts for the access of all children and teenagers to quality leisure activities through local educational action, in complete independence and according to the founding principle of secularism. As a popular education movement, it is complementary to the school. It is recognized as a public utility and approved by various ministries (National Education, Youth...). The Francas movement works internationally with 77 non-governmental organizations present in 45 countries.

A federation that counts

- 3,000 local authorities as partners throughout France.
- 5000 affiliated activity centers.
- Nearly 1200 member associations.
- 50,000 volunteers in 81 departmental associations.

A movement based on humanist values, driven by an educational ambition

The Francas are gathered around values - humanism, freedom, equality, solidarity, secularism, peace -, real reference points for action in society, which they "bring to life" every day, with the objective of helping children and young people to become active citizens.

Education must promote academic success and integration into society. This implies guaranteeing the diversity and quality of educational leisure activities and developing a local public service: day care centers, leisure centers, multi-care centers, youth clubs, projects and networks for children, child and youth agencies.

The Francas of Tarn et Garonne

The movement, at the local level, works through various projects that aim to facilitate access to leisure activities and to support the children and youth policies of associations and communities that wish to improve the quality of educational services, train or qualify their staff, etc.

The Francas offer tailor-made actions:

- Designing a communal or inter-communal children/youth project
- Organize leisure activities for children and young people
- Set up projects around educational reception and the parent-child relationship
- Involve children and young people in their leisure activities
- Develop cultural, scientific and technical activity projects.

The Francas of Tarn-et-Garonne organize their movement through meetings of volunteers and professionals: disability network, network of animators, network of directors, "Promeneurs du Net", reception of volunteers in civic service, etc.

competencies.

Back to the field

Finally, and to conclude, in our time when everything is measured, gauged, and compared, discerning how to appreciate the effects of this often invisible background work is a challenge.How do you assess the development of critical thinking in a teenager. It is difficult to have a clear answer as the subject is so delicate and difficult to evaluate and especially difficult to discern which variables make the difference. Of course this is even more challenging when funding for the necessary university level research is not available.

So, in questioning moments like this there is nothing like going back to the field to help clarify one's ideas and impacts. In the working-class neighborhood of Villenouvelle, which has tensions and problems, and which the Francas of Tarn-et-Garonne regularly address, a logbook has been set up which attests to the changes that have occurred over time.

What does the logbook reveal? Little by little, the different activities allow for creating of interpersonal links, the attendance develops, people come, the young people appropriate the place, the group life improves, the behaviors evolve, a link of trust is built with the young people and the other older people in the community, the exchanges favor a more peaceful climate, the needs are expressed and all this creates demand for more.

Thursday after Thursday, on the square in front of the church of Saint Jean, when the animators of the Francas install the playful and educational tools of the "Loisirs nomades", it is the families and the young people of the district who, more and more numerous as time goes by, come to play, to dialogue, to exchange, to propose, to get involved, to build themselves and the world around them.

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