

Critical Thinking About Social Media

Lesson plan for CTSM_3: Shared Intentions, Social Media, and Fake News

This lesson plan uses activities called *think-pair-share*, *spiraling conversation*, and *for-and-against*. In a think-pair-share activity, students first spend 1-2 minutes thinking to themselves about a question posed by the instructor. They then spend 1-2 minutes talking about the question with another student. Finally, they share the results of that conversation with the class.

In a spiraling conversation, intermediate steps are interposed between pairing and sharing. At each step, the students “spiral” outward (either clockwise or counter-clockwise) to pair with other students, before returning to their original pairs.

In a for-and-against activity, the class is divided into two groups, one of which is focused on finding good arguments in support of a position, and the other on finding good arguments against it.

Objective: Students will consider the centrality of shared mental states in the lives of human beings, and they will consider the importance of shared information in particular. In this context, they consider problems of social coordination and communication introduced by fake news.

1. Lecture (10 minutes): Summarize the material on shared intentionality in the ontogeny and phylogeny of human development. This could be accompanied by videos of young children cooperating, and comparison with non-human animal behavior.
2. Activity (20 minutes): Think-pair-share on likely impact of fake news on the scientific revolution, and comparison with the impact of fake news today.
 - Introduce *think-pair-share*.
 - Think about the period in which the early scientific societies were coming into existence, in Europe during the early modern period.
 1. What would have been the result if, rather than the output of a handful of dedicated laborers working at a common project, the channels of information during that time were carrying innumerable cleverly disguised crankpot theories?
 2. What would the scientific revolution have looked like if that had happened?

3. Would there have been a scientific revolution?
4. How might scientific societies have responded to prevent the spread of bad information?
 - Pair and discuss your answers.
 - Share with the group.
 - Think of a time you saw something online that fooled you into thinking it was true.
 1. How did you finally discover it was false?
 2. Who do you think was ultimately responsible for putting it online?
 3. Why do you think they did so?
 - Pair and discuss your answers.
 - Share with the group.
3. Activity (10 minutes): A think-pair-share and for-and-against on whether tech companies should suppress certain views by various means.
 - The members of each side are meant to come up with the best argument either “for” or “against” the proposal.
 - Have them discuss with their respective “for” and “against” groups before the whole class discusses.
4. Activity (10 minutes): Think-pair-share. Have them consider the ethics of algorithms, with respect to their use in attracting our attention.
 - Pair and discuss your answers.
 - Share with the group.