

Disinformation and Genocide

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Lesson scenario

Introduction

1. Explain to the students that the aim of this unit is to explore the tragic consequences of the mechanisms of history manipulation through selected examples.
2. Suggest a simple exercise – a game of Chinese whispers. Make up a simple sentence, give it to the first student on a piece of paper and ask them to repeat it quietly to the next person (it is important not to overhear or repeat the sentence). The last student should repeat the sentence. It is very likely that the sentence will not sound the same as the one written down at the start. This is similar to the circulation of information. Repeated many times, it often takes the form of a rumour, a piece of information that receives additional elements with each successive recipient. What if someone deliberately changes the information or uses it to create a false image? Cite an example from the history of the 19th century: the Ems Telegram edited by Bismarck, which was instrumental in unifying Germany (it was only one of the reasons).¹
3. Disinformation and manipulation of history can lead to genocide or give impetus to the creation of ideologies that play a role in mass killings and murders because of origin, race and language.

Development

1. Tell the students that in class they will explore three stories. Two of them are based on manipulation, misrepresentation and falsification, which together with other factors have led to genocide. However, their power of influence did not end after the crimes had been committed and continues to this day. Another, concerning

¹ Recommended reading: [Ems Telegram](#) [accessed 24.11.2021].

the Armenians, is a perfect example of the denial of obvious historical facts, which are subject to constant manipulation despite the passage of over 100 years.

2. Divide the students into three teams. Each team should receive a set of worksheets and source material: Team 1 – Material A, Team 2 – B and Team 3 – C and D. Tell the students that their objective will be a case study, i.e. an attempt to answer the question: *why can manipulation be dangerous?* Define the rules of the task, indicating on the board/flipchart the basic questions needed to solve the exercises as a key to reflection: what happened? What were the causes of the event? What problem arose in connection with this event? Who benefits from disinformation leading to genocide? Your role during the group work could be to moderate the discussion and involve reluctant students.²
3. One of the best ways to summarise the conclusions of your work on a difficult topic is through a Socratic debate. Ask the students to sit in a circle (preferably on the floor).³ It is worth asking them at the very beginning how they felt as they were reading the materials. Advise them that the most important thing in a debate is to think critically and to formulate questions in order to have an open and multifaceted discussion, so going astray and venturing into history's blind alleys is allowed. It is important that the discussants feel free to express their thoughts, even if they are emotionally charged.
4. During the discussion, you are the moderator, as well as acting as a guardian of the debate, making sure that it does not stray too far from the subject under discussion. During the exchange, the students use the conclusions and insights from the case study (the exercises they did on the worksheets are helpful here). The aim is not to reach a consensus, but to clarify issues and to develop (even) a few reasoned points. During the discussion, the moderator writes the emerging conclusions on the board/flipchart.

² Elaborated on the basis of: Elżbieta Królikowska, 'Najlepiej widać na przykładzie, czyli studium przypadku jako metoda nauczania' [Best seen by example, or the case study as a teaching method] [accessed 7.12.2020]. Available from KOSS: <https://koss.ceo.org.pl/dla-nauczycieli/uczyc-inaczej/artykuly/najlepiej-widac-na-przykladzie-czyli-studium-przypadku-jako>.

³ During lessons conducted online, it will be sufficient to make sure an appropriate order is maintained for the students taking the floor, e.g. using tools that indicate their willingness to speak.

The discussion topic is the same as the case studies. Your students will have the opportunity to share their findings, which they have previously developed in groups: why can disinformation/manipulation of history be dangerous?

Summary

At the end of the discussion, ask the students to write down the most important points that have emerged from the exchange of ideas and opinions. This will form the basis of an essay for homework.

Homework

'Sometimes lies, especially the worst ones, are like flares shot into the darkness. They warn of impending disaster' (Deb Caletti).

Is Deb Caletti right? Formulate your answer; do not forget to justify it, possibly using the material used in class and your own knowledge.

Keywords

genocide, history manipulation, history falsification, propaganda, anti-Semitism, racism