

CoMMiTTed – A pedagogical observatory of Fake News

Sílvia Melo-Pfeifer², Maria HA Sá¹, Susana Ambrósio¹, Manuela Gonçalves¹, Margarida Lucas¹, Filomena Martins¹, Lucas Oliveira¹, Ana R Simões¹, Madalena Teixeira¹, Ricardo Torres¹

Fake News (FN) is not a recent phenomenon, nor a phenomenon to which only people with lower levels of formal education are more susceptible. The rapid online circulation of FN and the reach that the internet affords it have made FN a recurring phenomenon today. The pandemic caused by COVID-19 was the trigger for the CoMMiTTed project: “Covid, Migrants and Minorities in Teacher Education: A FN Observatory to promote Critical Thinking and Digital Literacy in Times of Crisis” (<https://committedobservatory.eu/en/home/>). The project team (with scholars from Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain) uncovered a problematic issue, circulating in the press and social media, that linked the origins and spread of the virus to migrants and minorities. This phenomenon was not country-specific, but rather fitted into the more or less biased narratives that were already in circulation in each country.

The CoMMiTTed project engaged with the professional needs of teachers in this domain, by developing resources to help them deal with FN. This involved delving into the insidious world of FN, designing in-depth case studies, conducting research with students and teachers in the four partner countries, and deconstructing the verbal and non-verbal means used in FN. The team created an

observatory of FN, including the in-depth multimodal analysis of five cases per country, classifying them as malinformation, disinformation, or misinformation, according to their level of maleficence and intention to create harm (Figure 1). This observatory is accompanied by suggestions for pedagogical use across the curriculum and a glossary. Based on the data collected at schools and universities, with students and teachers, the consortium conceptualised, implemented, and assessed two e-modules for teacher education programs, to address professional needs, such as the deconstruction of othering mechanisms present in FN involving migrants and minorities, in the classroom. Finally, as a sort of metaresource of the project, the team compiled the suggestions for using the observatory and the modules in a document conceived as an E-handbook for teachers and teacher educators. This metaresource includes a theoretical background, which overviews the different literacies involved in debunking FN (Figure 2), as well as a pedagogical reflection on the need to develop them, both in specific school subjects and across the curriculum. The overall lesson of the project is that school has an important role in the development of resilience against FN.

1 – Department of Education and Psychology & CIDTFF, University of Aveiro.

2 – Fakultät für Erziehungswissenschaft & CIDTFF, Universität Hamburg, Deutschland.

FIGURE 1

Structuration of the Observatory of FN.

FIGURE 2

Principles underlying the pedagogical work with FN at school.

