



# RFCDC – LEARNING ACTIVITIES BASED ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## Deconstructing conspiracy theories related to Covid-19

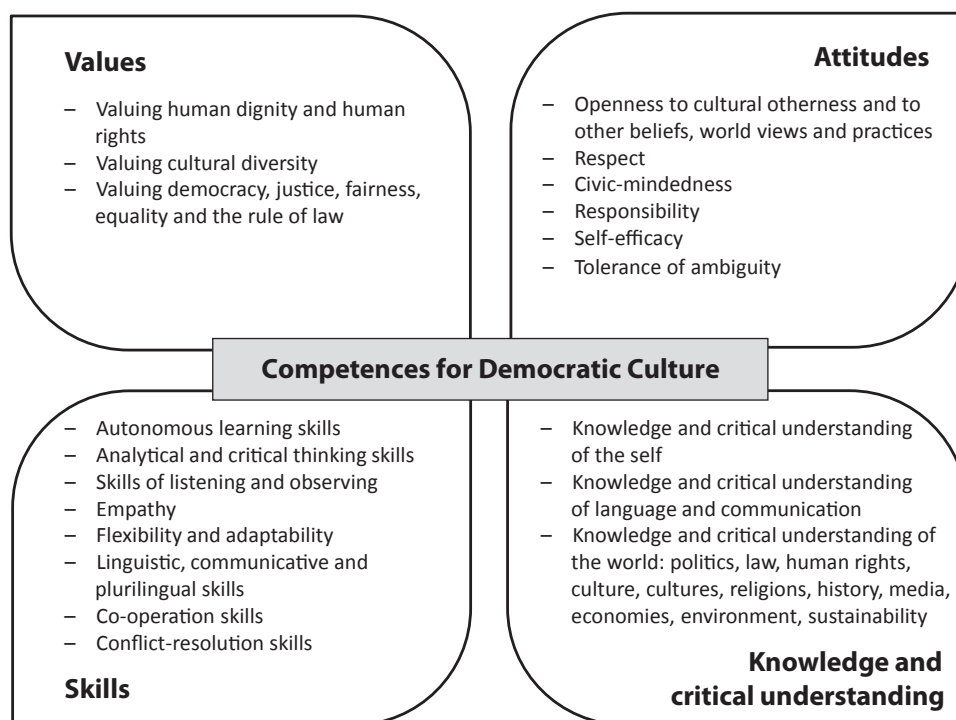
### Target group

■ Learners in upper primary and secondary schools

### Rationale

■ During the Covid-19 pandemic, a variety of conspiracy theories have emerged, some of them building on long-lasting historical prejudice (antisemitism), others focusing on contemporary phenomena (5G). Like conspiracy theories (CTs) in general, Covid-19-related CTs create a general climate of mistrust and are a threat to democratic debate and decision-making. This learning activity supports learners in understanding general traits of conspiracy thinking and CTs, and in critically reflecting on and deconstructing CTs related to Covid-19.

### The RFCDC Competences



### Competences promoted by the activity

■ Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law; Civic mindedness; Tolerance of ambiguity; Critical and analytical thinking; Knowledge and critical understanding of the world.

## Learning outcomes

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■ Completing this activity will help learners to:

- ▶ Understand the general traits and functions of conspiracy theories
- ▶ Understand the problematic consequences of conspiracy theories/mentality
- ▶ Understand and critically evaluate Covid-19-related conspiracy theories
- ▶ Deconstruct and debunk conspiracy theories

## Description of activity

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1. Explain to learners, using age-appropriate language, that scepticism against political conspiracies is a legitimate part of political discourse and even necessary in order to prevent the abuse of power. All-embracing CTs and a general conspiracy mentality are potentially dangerous, especially in times of crisis. Then show the introductory video available here:

- ▶ <https://www.dw.com/en/understanding-conspiracy-theories/av-53618241>

2. Ask learners to work individually and go through a list of traits of CTs derived from:

- ▶ <https://www.climatechangecommunication.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/How-to-Spot-COVID-19-Conspiracy-Theories.pdf>

These traits include:

- ▶ General suspicion (something is hidden from us)
- ▶ Powerful agents controlling behind the scenes
- ▶ Rejection of “official” interpretations (also scientific explanations)
- ▶ Connecting the unconnected (everything is part of the hidden master plan)
- ▶ Coincidence as causality (things happening at the same time are interpreted as cause and effect)

3. Ask learners to work in pairs, sharing examples of CTs related to Covid-19 that they are aware of and exploring the examples. They should use the following questions to guide their discussion:

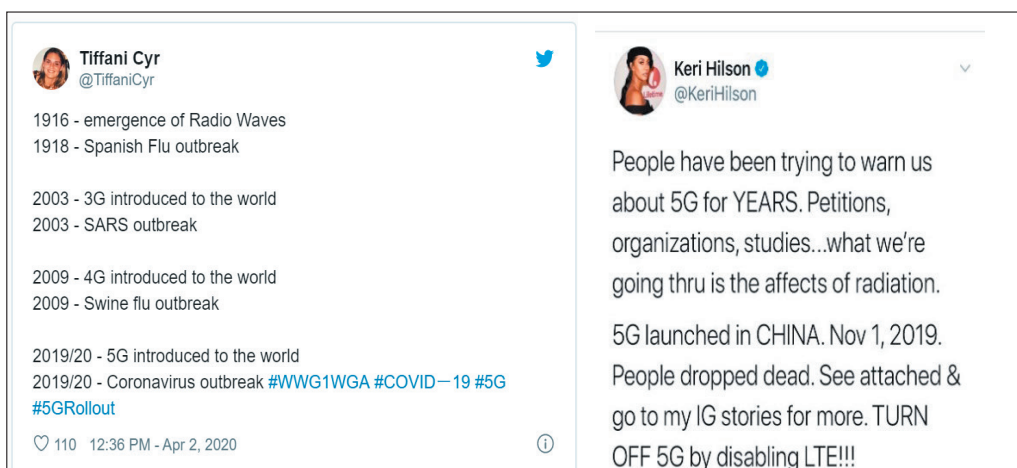
- ▶ In which ways do these examples qualify as conspiracy theories, based on the criteria from the list?
- ▶ Who is the assumed powerful agent and what are the assumed intentions?
- ▶ Why are these conspiracy theories attractive to people?
- ▶ What are the potentially dangerous consequences of these conspiracy theories?

In a plenary session, collect the examples of CTs in a padlet or online whiteboard, and discuss their function and potential consequences.

4. Introduce the CT about Covid-19 and 5G which emerged immediately after the outbreak of Covid-19, which was related to existing conspiracy theories claiming 5G is part of a plan to gain full control over populations. Variants include: 5G causes Covid-19, 5G is used to spread Covid-19, enforcing mass vaccination.

5. Ask learners to analyse the following two tweets that have proposed a connection between Covid-19 and 5G, identifying what these tweets are claiming, and identifying the traits of CTs that the tweets display:

(Source of the tweets: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2020/04/09/5g-networks-and-covid-19-coronavirus-here-are-the-latest-conspiracy-theories/>)



6. In order to debunk the CT, learners watch/read and discuss the following video/document:

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f279f-Y-O-w>

▶ <https://allianceforscience.cornell.edu/blog/2020/04/5g-whats-behind-the-latest-covid-conspiracy-theory/>

On the basis of the video/document, ask learners to identify the most important actions that can be used to identify harmful conspiracy theories and to prevent them from spreading.

## **Materials or resources required**

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Sources and videos presented in the hyperlinks in the DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

## **Reflection on the activity and the learning outcomes that have been achieved**

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■ Questions for reflection may include:

- ▶ What have you learned about conspiracy theories?
- ▶ Why are conspiracy theories attractive for people in a crisis, and what makes them dangerous?
- ▶ Are the principles of debunking conspiracy theories a useful tool in everyday life?

■ A potential follow-up activity can involve learners being asked to find another Covid-19 related CT and analyse it using the same criteria. A list of these CTs is available here: <https://allianceforscience.cornell.edu/blog/2020/04/covid-top-10-current-conspiracy-theories/>

[www.coe.int/education](http://www.coe.int/education)  
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