



**Lie Detectors**  
CRITICAL THINKING



Tackling Disinformation Face to Face:

# Journalists' Findings From the Classroom

*With an external contribution by  
Andreas Schleicher, Director of  
Education and Skills, OECD*

Data analysis 2018 – 2019



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1. Foreword	02 — 03
2. Navigating ambiguity: a key to learning in the 21st century External Contribution by Andreas Schleicher	04 — 05
3. Methodology	06 — 07
4. Key findings	08 — 11
4.1 Media use – visual literacy vs. textual literacy	
4.2 Media and news literacy in the educational system	
5. Media literacy among schoolchildren	12 — 13
5.1 Differences between teens and pre-teens	
5.2 Inside the classroom	
6. What our journalists found in the classroom	14
7. In the media and public eye	15 — 16

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# 1. Foreword

The proliferation of online information has brought about an unravelling of traditional assumptions and a dramatic refocusing of priorities. How do journalists and teachers ensure that facts remain compelling? How do we engage the next generation of citizens whose information often comes from private online chats and gaming platforms?

Clutching a sheaf of beta speaking points and games to be tested, the first Lie Detectors journalist set a nervous foot inside a Brussels classroom in February 2017. Since then, professional journalists from print, radio, TV and online media have visited more than 400 classrooms in three countries. They have delivered a polished and practiced session that still delivers the original messages: facts matter, uncovering lies can be easy and fun, and creating quality journalism is not as easy as it looks. They have been invited to visit classrooms as diverse as primary schools in Brussels' largely disadvantaged Molenbeek district, rural north-eastern Germany and crowded schools skirting Vienna's city boundaries.

Despite the great diversity of schools we visit, distinct patterns are emerging about social media use and news literacy among the young people we meet. Falsehoods dupe children regardless of language or level of privilege. Facebook and Twitter are a thing of the past. Video is king. A majority assemble their world views in private online fora, far from teachers, content moderators, fact-checkers or researchers seeking policy solutions to disinformation.

Teachers and schoolchildren agree that news and media literacy is not being taught adequately. Lie Detectors' goal of creating resilience to false and manipulative content helps fill this gap.

The job of a journalist is always to gather facts and present a reliable picture of complex reality. The journalists who work with Lie Detectors also encourage schoolchildren to carefully weigh facts, falsehoods and what lies between, regardless of background or politics.



*Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck*  
Founder & CEO

At this year's OECD Forum in Paris, Andreas Schleicher, architect of PISA, the world's most widely recognised educational rankings system, said the gauge of effective learning was no longer the successful vertical transmission of facts but the ability of young people to navigate ambiguity. Lie Detectors is advocating for the universal teaching of such ability and literacy. In the meantime, we will be proud to continue sending our journalists into a growing number of classrooms and countries to raise question marks in the minds of children and their teachers.

The conclusions of this report would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of our participating journalists, the open honest minds of teachers and children, the generosity of our funders and the dedication of the Lie Detectors team. To all, we are deeply grateful.

*Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck*

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck

September 2019



*OECD's Andreas Schleicher and Lie Detectors' Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck discuss educational solutions to disinformation at the OECD Forum, 2019.*

## 2. Navigating ambiguity: a key to learning in the 21st century

External Contribution by Andreas Schleicher,  
Director of Education and Skills, OECD

These days, education is no longer just about teaching students something, but about helping them develop a reliable compass and the tools to navigate with confidence through an increasingly complex, volatile and uncertain world. Success in education today is about identity, it's about agency and it's about purpose. It's about building curiosity – opening minds; it's about compassion – opening hearts, and it's about courage, mobilising our cognitive, social and emotional resources to take action. And that's also going to be our best weapon against the biggest threats of our times: ignorance – the closed mind; hate – the closed heart, and fear – the enemy of agency.

We live in a world in which the kind of things that are easy to teach and test have also become easy to digitise and automate. Algorithms behind social media are sorting us into groups of like-minded individuals. They create virtual bubbles that often amplify our views but leave us insulated from divergent perspectives; they homogenise opinions and polarise our societies. In this “post-truth” climate, assertions that “feel right” but have no basis in fact become accepted as fact.

To what extent should we approach this from a consumer-protection angle – that is, restricting providers of information – or from a skills angle, that is, strengthening the capacity of people to better navigate through a tidal wave of information? It is interesting that we haven't touched knowledge products in the same way that we address consumer-protection issues with physical products. People have sued Starbucks when they burned themselves with hot coffee, but it seems very hard to fight against fake news, because tinkering with free speech tends to be regarded as an assault on democratic principles.

But there is a lot we can do to strengthen people's capacity to sort through the information they receive. Lie Detectors is an example for how we can teach children to distinguish between credible and untrustworthy sources of information, between fact and fiction, and how we can enable them to question or seek to improve the accepted knowledge and practices of our times.



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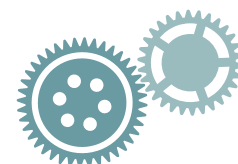
*Andreas Schleicher is Director of the Directorate for Education and Skills at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and head of the organisation's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).*

*“Lie Detectors is an example for how we can teach children to distinguish between credible and untrustworthy sources of information.”*

*Andreas Schleicher*

Literacy in the 20th century was about extracting and processing pre-coded information. In the 21st century, it is about constructing and validating knowledge. In the past, teachers could tell students to look up information in an encyclopaedia, and to rely on that information as accurate and true. Nowadays, Google, Baidu or Yandex present us with millions of answers to any question, and the task of readers is to triangulate, evaluate and build knowledge.

Tomorrow's learners need to be able to think for themselves and join others, with empathy, in work and citizenship. They need to develop a strong sense of right and wrong; a sensitivity to the claims that others make on us, and a grasp of the limits on individual and collective action. The growing complexity of modern living, for individuals, communities and societies, means that the solutions to our problems will also be complex: in a structurally imbalanced world, the imperative of reconciling diverse perspectives and interests, in local settings but with often global implications, means we need to become good at handling tensions and dilemmas. Striking a balance between competing demands – equity and freedom, autonomy and community, innovation and continuity, efficiency and democratic process – will rarely lead to an either/or choice or even a single solution. Our capacity to navigate ambiguity with a reliable compass has become the key.



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*“Literacy in the 20th century was about extracting and processing pre-coded information. In the 21st century, it is about constructing and validating knowledge.”*







*Andreas Schleicher*

## 3. Methodology

The following report is based on data that underlines the exponential growth of Lie Detectors. Launched in 2017 by one motivated journalist, we have developed into a major European project. In the past two and a half years – and at rising speed – more than 120 journalists have visited 400 classrooms across 33 cities and three European countries, delivering sessions in English, German and French. As a result, more than 8500 schoolchildren have been able to learn about journalism and the challenges of disinformation from experienced journalists.

Feedback sheets were distributed to schoolchildren, teachers and the visiting journalists after each classroom visit. Between June 2018 and July 2019 we surveyed 6858 schoolchildren aged 10–11 and 14–15, 89 journalists and about 260 teachers to get qualitative as well as quantitative insights.

### Summary of activity:

 <b>120+</b> Journalists trained & deployed		
 <b>3</b> Countries	 <b>3</b> Languages	 <b>33</b> Cities
 <b>400+</b> Classrooms visited		 <b>8500+</b> Schoolchildren

*\*based on existing data set*

Lie Detectors map of activity:



**Classroom visits\***

Germany: 262

Austria: 71

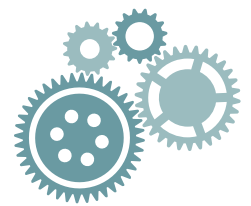
Belgium: 75

**Total: 408**

*\*based on existing dataset*

## 4. Key findings

This study has been commissioned by Lie Detectors to understand more about schoolchildrens media consumption and how news and media literacy is and can be taught in classrooms in Europe. In the beginning it is very interesting to say, that all our results were very similar across our surveyed countries. In the following sections we present the main results of our findings from the classrooms that are valid for Austria, Belgium and Germany.



### 4.1 Media use – visual literacy vs. textual literacy

One central concern of this study was finding out what social media channels schoolchildren use and how this might differ from their teachers. The data showed that schoolchildren and teachers are similarly active on social media and use a variety of platforms. But they often prioritise different channels. Schoolchildren are more likely to use platforms with visual content than their teachers and to venture onto new platforms such as TikTok (see also page 10–11).

Visually-based platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are much more popular among schoolchildren. For example, only 26.8% of the teachers use Instagram compared with 60.4% of schoolchildren. Even more striking is the difference regarding Snapchat. The platform is used by almost half of schoolchildren (48.6%), while teachers barely use it (3.8%). YouTube, the market leader of the video platforms, is meanwhile very popular among both groups surveyed, though schoolchildren's usage is nearly 15 percentage points higher than that of teachers.

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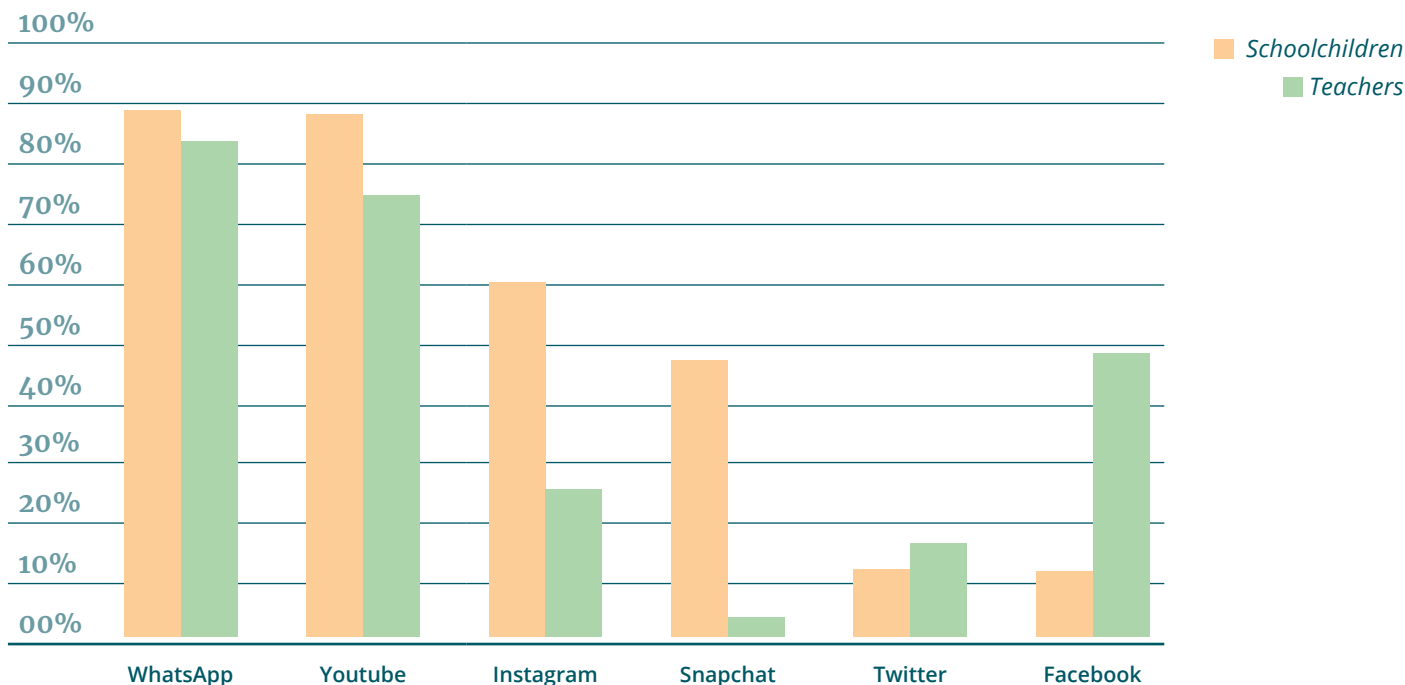
*Schoolchildren are more likely to use platforms with visual content than their teachers.*



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*Suprisingly, our results show no significant difference between Germany, Austria and Belgium.*

## Media use: schoolchildren vs their teachers: (Graph 01)



Data on Facebook, a more text-based platform, confirms that schoolchildren increasingly opt for visual platforms. While almost half the teachers (49.6%) use Facebook, it is the least-used platform among schoolchildren (11.9%).

The classroom sessions also showed schoolchildren's preference for visuals. In Feedback from the sessions, 45,1% of the schoolchildren said that a video shown during the visit was one of the best parts of the session, even more popular than hearing insights from a journalist.

Journalists themselves noticed this trend, with one reporter based in Leipzig, Germany, noting that "Video is King" among classroom audiences.

Numerous journalists left classroom visits with the sense that schoolchildren appeared better able to gauge the veracity of visual content than text-based sources.

*"It was remarkable how easily the children were able to spot visual proof of a fake in a photo, but barely engaged with the accompanying text," wrote one.*

In general, our journalists found that the majority of students have problems distinguishing between junk and real news. During an exercise to check the schoolchildren's ability to spot disinformation, 95% of journalists reported at least one child in every classroom fell for a fake. This was valid for every region where Lie Detectors is active.

*While almost half the teachers (49.6%) use Facebook, it is the least-used platform among schoolchildren (11.9%).*

*"It was remarkable how easily the children were able to spot visual proof of a fake in a photo, but barely engaged with the accompanying text."*

*– journalist, Cologne*

## 4.2 Media and news literacy in the educational system

Media Literacy is widely recognised by educational authorities across Europe as an important subject. But our study found a large discrepancy between teachers acknowledging the importance of the topic and teaching it in their own classrooms.

Nearly 80% of the teachers said it was an important subject, but fewer than half (45%) had spoken with their class about it before a Lie Detectors visit.

Moreover, many teachers who had already talked about media literacy in class said they were mainly dealing with specific elements of media education such as internet safety, internet bullying and hate speech, with news literacy featuring as a peripheral topic.

Teachers gave several reasons for the lack of media and news literacy classes. Many said they did not have enough time within their school curriculum to deal with an additional topic or were not adequately qualified to address the issue. A fifth-grade teacher from Cologne, asked if she had been told by the education authorities to teach media literacy, said: *"Of course, but we're not given the necessary time or space, nor are we taught how to go about it (this question really made me laugh)."*

There was also often a feeling that authorities were not enthusiastic or supportive. A teacher from Vienna said: *"I hear about a lot of indispensable things, but whether the authorities implement or facilitate this – that's a different question."*

*While 80% of teachers recognised media literacy as an important subject, fewer than half had addressed it with their class.*

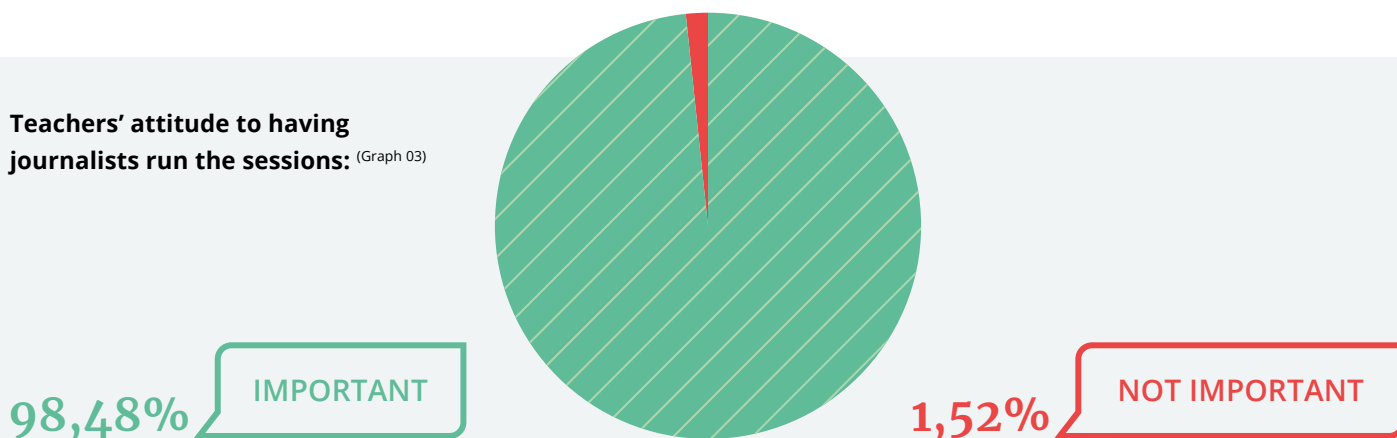
*"They tell us to teach media literacy – but they don't give us the time and space. Nor are we taught how to go about it."*  
– teacher, Cologne

Teacher attitude to media literacy: (Graph 02)



As a result, almost every teacher found it particularly useful that a journalist rather than a teacher ran sessions on news literacy.

### Teachers' attitude to having journalists run the sessions: (Graph 03)



They said journalists had more background information and were more believable. A Cologne-based teacher said: *"Experts are more credible than we teachers are."*

Until resources are better allocated, these anecdotes underline the importance of external educational organisations such as Lie Detectors bringing news literacy into the classrooms.

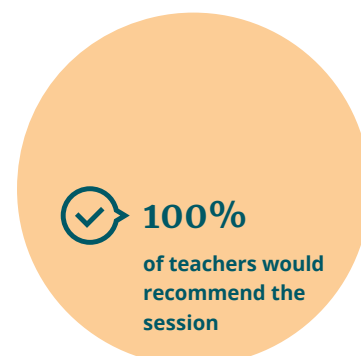
*"People with new backgrounds are always enriching to the pupils – and for this specific topic, journalists are particularly authentic and credible," said a Vienna-based teacher.*

On the other hand, after a Lie Detectors session 97,84% of the teachers were interested in a selection of follow-up material from credible sources such as OECD, UNESCO, educational authorities and news organisations.

*„For this specific topic, journalists are particularly authentic and credible."*

– teacher, Vienna

### How teachers rated it: (Graph 04)



Graph 03: Q.: In your opinion, is it crucial that a journalist gave this lesson, rather than a teacher or coach?

Base: Teacher = 264. Base: Teacher = 242. Note: Multiple response was possible

Graph 04: Q.: Would you recommend the visit of Lie Detectors to other teachers?

Base: Teacher = 268 Note: Multiple response was possible.

## 5. Media literacy among schoolchildren

Over the past two years, Lie Detectors has engaged with about 8500 schoolchildren. Lie Detectors offers two workshops for two different age groups: 10-11 year-old pre-teenagers and 14-15 year-old teenagers. We have gained valuable insights into the differences between these two age groups.

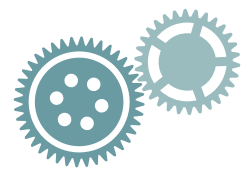
### 5.1 Differences between teens and pre-teens

More than half of the 10-11 year-olds surveyed use more than three social media platforms. On average they use three of the following seven platforms: YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter (in order of usage). By comparison, their teachers use on average just 2.74 platforms. 14-15 year-olds use even more platforms: an average of 3.7.

There are some interesting differences in platform usage between the age groups. Among 14-15 year-olds, the usage share of each platform is higher than among 10-11 year-olds. One notable exception is the Chinese video app TikTok, which for pre-teens is the third most popular channel, behind WhatsApp and YouTube.

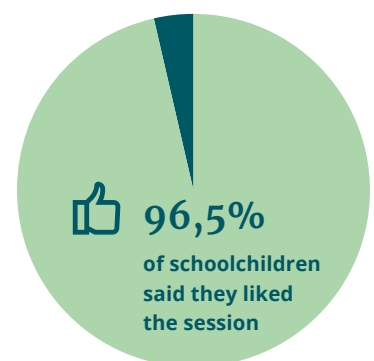
By contrast, Instagram is a particularly important platform for teenagers, of whom more than three quarters are users, twice as high a proportion as 10-11 year-olds. Facebook and Twitter are the least used platforms among both age groups.

Nearly 1 in 5 schoolchildren (19%) report that they had an argument with friends in the last few months because of a post on social media. The percentage was higher among those schoolchildren who use more platforms.

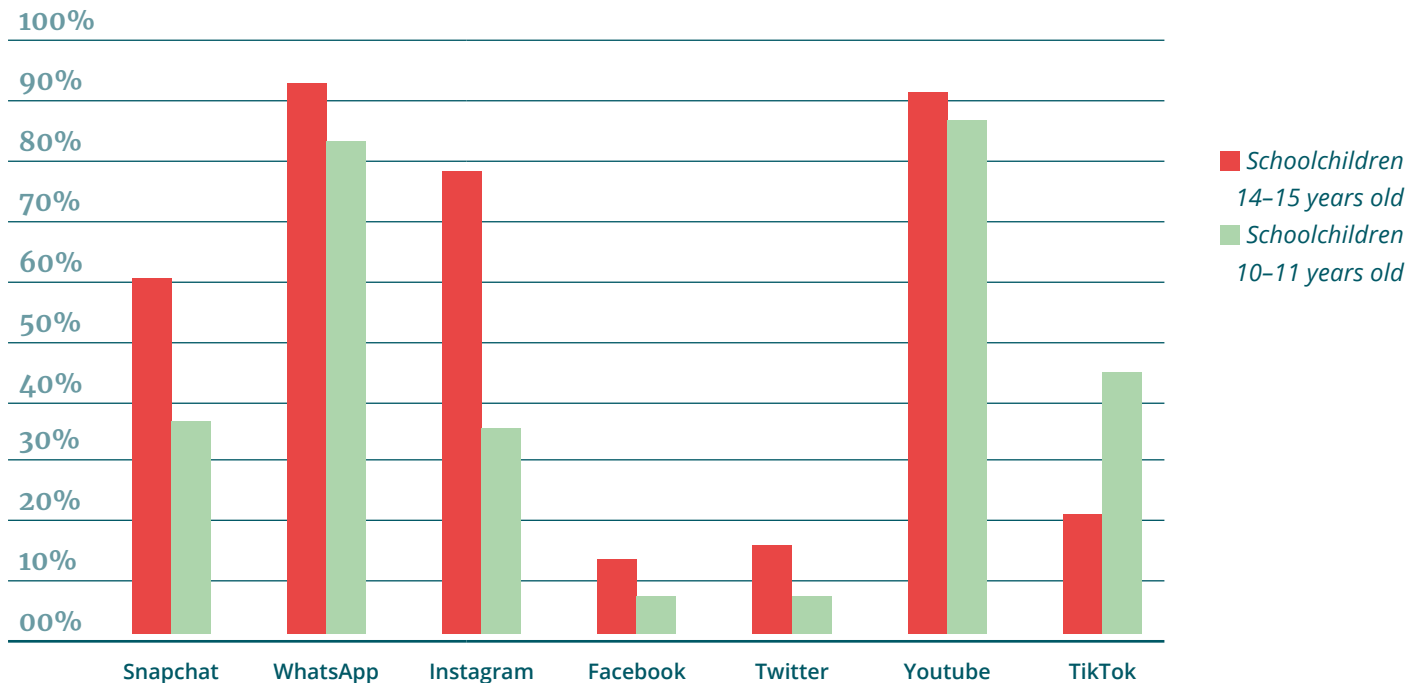


*Pre-teens' use of TikTok is notably higher than teenagers, while older schoolchildren are twice as likely to be on Instagram as pre-teens.*

**How schoolchildren rated it:** (Graph 05)



## Media Use: Teens vs Pre-Teens: (Graph 06)

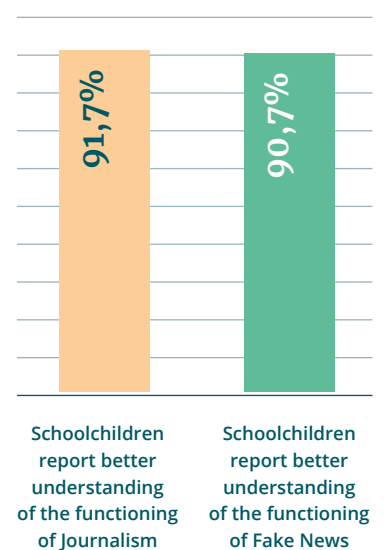


## 5.2 Inside the classroom

Almost all (96.5%) the schoolchildren enjoyed the classroom sessions, especially the 10–11 year-olds. Journalists reported that it was more difficult to enthuse older schoolchildren, though more than 95% of 14–15 year-olds liked the sessions.

Classroom sessions by Lie Detectors address not only disinformation but also the standards and aims of ethical journalism. Many schoolchildren were surprised how easy it is to create and spread fake news and the difficulties for a journalist in presenting all sides of a story. They were asked anonymously whether the visit helped them to understand the functioning of journalism and fake news. More than 90% said it did. Moreover, almost two-thirds of schoolchildren said they were now not afraid to distinguish between true and false statements online. Only 22,4% said the workshop made no difference. One 11 year-old said afterwards: *“Now I know how to debunk lies online and that’s good”*. 85 percent reported that they want to learn more often about media literacy in school.

## Effect of the session: (Graph 07)



## 6. What our journalists found in the classrooms

Over the past two years, more than 120 journalists visited classrooms to engage with schoolchildren. All were trained to use a script conceived by Lie Detectors' founder and developed over a six-month trial period with psychologists, schoolchildren and teachers. All journalists visited between 1 and 13 classrooms.

Journalists enjoyed their classroom visits. 98,2% of the journalists said they had fun during the classroom visits. They liked being part of the project and the logistical support provided by Lie Detectors, which equips journalists with materials and matches journalists with nearby schools.

*"It is a huge pleasure to participate in this project, thank you for the possibility", said one journalist. Another reported: "It was definitely fun – especially their high level of interest and the clever and often surprising questions and comments."*

The journalists said they got valuable insights into schoolchildren's media behaviour and the education system during their classroom visit. One Austrian journalist said: *"There is a world that I as a journalist – but mostly everyone above 18 years – doesn't know at all ... YouTubers, Gamers, etc."*

Many journalists reported they were surprised at the declining use of Facebook. "Facebook is out" reports one journalist. Others said they gained insights into popular YouTube influencers and the platform TikTok. They noted the huge importance of chain letters on WhatsApp.

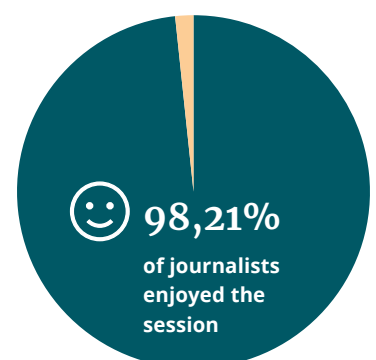
One journalist reported: *"Everyone, indeed every child, has received threatening, scary chain letters via WhatsApp."*

A lot of schoolchildren got WhatsApp messages from Momo, a supposed ghost who threatens to show up in their room in the middle of the night if they do not forward the message to others. Some journalists were surprised at how little traditional news outlets feature in some classes. *"There are children who've had no exposure to real journalism during their entire life,"* reported one Austrian journalist.

*"It was definitely fun – especially their high level of interest and the clever and often surprising questions and comments."*  
– journalist, Cologne

*"There is a world that I as a journalist – but mostly everyone above 18 years – doesn't know at all ... YouTubers, Gamers, etc."*  
– journalist, Austria

**How journalists rated it:** (Graph 08)



## 7. In the media and public eye

In the two years since it was founded, Lie Detectors' work has been documented in radio interviews, magazine and news articles and online and TV broadcasts. Among these are the *Financial Times*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Deutsche Welle*, Germany's public broadcasters *ARD* and *ZDF*, Agence France Presse's *The Europeans podcast*. It has also inspired coverage at the local level, by *educational authorities*, *local newspapers* and school blogs. A strict media policy is in place to protect the privacy of the classroom setting. Lie Detectors is a regular contributor to *conferences* and *academic seminars* on media freedom in an age of disinformation.

Within policy debates Lie Detectors has held advisory roles, including as a member of the European Commission's *High Level Expert Group on Disinformation and Fake News* and its *Media Literacy Expert Group*. It has advised *European* and international lawmakers; spoken before *UNESCO* and the *OECD* and designed *workshops for teachers* wishing to integrate news literacy into their lesson plans. Lie Detectors' contribution to education and democratic society has been recognised with a EU *Digital Skills Award*, participation in the pro-democracy *Leipzig Festival of Light* and citations as best practice by numerous *European governments* and educational authorities. Its founder has been named a European Union "*Local Hero*" for having put aside her journalism career to create the project.



Feedbacks to Lie Detectors' Workshops

AUTRES REMARQUES

J'ai trop bien aimé c'était la chance de  
ma vie de rencontrer un journaliste c'est  
un de mes rêves.

Grd thanks!

REMARQUES

C'était super intéressant. Je crois  
que je voudrais être journaliste, plus  
tard.

ADVICE

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

It was very interesting and useful I even talked  
to my family about what I had learned and  
Thank you very much. asked if they believed the examples  
of fake news

i. "Get the whole picture" video ad

1 2 3 4 5  
It made me think and make connections  
about why we need to use our common sense when we



5. Was hat Dich überrascht?

Das man so leicht raus finden  
kann ~~ob~~ es was fake news sind

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

You were AMAZING! You're GREAT! Try and come back! WELL  
Other classes will love you! DONE!!!

7. Est-ce que notre visite a contribué à ta compréhension et ton intérêt dans les fake  
news et le fonctionnement des médias?

Oui ça m'aidera sûrement à en faire en lisant j'en parle l'aider.

6. Wieviel wussten Sie vor unserem Besuch über die digitale Aktivität/den Online-  
Medienkonsum Ihrer Schüler? Inwiefern waren Sie davon überrascht?

über den Medienkonsum ja, aber  
nicht über ihr "defektives" Wissen.  
Da war ich überrascht

11. Weitere Kommentare:

Mir hat diese Stunde sehr gut gefallen.  
Ich hoffe dass sie nochmal kommen.

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*Contact us:*  
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*In cooperation with:*  
[www.digitalerkompass.at](http://www.digitalerkompass.at)



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