

# A Mobile Website To Support Teachers In Discussing Terrorism In The Classroom

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## 1. Introduction

In the TerInfo project, students and experts from Pedagogy, Religious Studies, Psychology, History and Information Science (Utrecht University) collaboratively aim to increase the societal resilience against terrorism in Dutch primary and secondary education. The project formally started in July 2017 and is supported by the city of Utrecht. Project leader is Beatrice de Graaf, professor of History of International Relations & Global Governance.

Utrecht's population has a very diverse background, which is reflected in the classrooms. Especially when terrorist incidents occur, fragmented and unverified information reaches the pupils very quickly through different channels (with an ever-increasing role for the social media). Such information may have immediate negative consequences, for example it may increase anxiety with children or create tensions between them. Teachers who consequently feel an urge to comfort, provide perspective or de-escalate, often experience a 'reluctance to act' (de Graaf, 2018). Therefore, TerInfo aims to support teachers by providing them with:

- reliable and compact information about terrorism and radicalisation
- practical ideas and assignments for discussing these issues in class in an inclusive manner
- quick and helpful interpretation of recent developments
- expert support tailored to the school's specific needs.

The project is supported by a mobile website (<https://ter-info.nl/>) containing a growing collection of carefully prepared materials. This paper describes the creation of this site and the design philosophy behind it. Much effort has gone into designing it to optimally match the requirements of the teachers and to empower them in their work. The website was developed, in several iterations, by a team of seven bachelor students of Information Science, six following the honours programme. This programme offers students a range of learning opportunities beyond the standard programme, which they can tailor to their own interests. All six honours students decided to spend a significant part of their programme working on the Ter Info website.

## 2. Prototype

The first iteration of website development took place in April-June 2017 during the 'introduction project', a group project that completes the first year of the programme. The assignment for the introduction project is to design and prototype an innovative interactive system that answers a societal need. Students are expected to apply all relevant knowledge and skills they have acquired so far, but are otherwise given considerable freedom in the choice of topic, methods and organisation. All projects, prototypes in particular, are publicly presented during a symposium.

When this student team embarked on this project, the general problem outlined above was available to them, but beyond this they had very little information to go on. Taking a human-centred design approach (Benyon, 2014) they decided to first investigate the teachers' experiences and needs, and to familiarise themselves thoroughly with the topics of terrorism and radicalisation. Next, they created a set of draft articles, providing information on various terrorist attacks and organisations as well as interpretation (e.g. an article 'Terrorism comes and goes'), and supporting materials for use in class. The design of the website started from a set of personas and scenarios based on the interviews with the teachers and went through several iterations of lo-fi and hi-fi prototypes. The final prototype holding the created materials was realised in PHP using the Laravel framework (Laravel, 2018) and includes a backend for the creation of new content, based on AsgardCMS (AsgardCMS, 2018). The prototype was evaluated both by school teachers and through heuristic evaluation by team members.

## 3. Pilot

Once the project formally started in summer 2017, the platform was further developed by the Information Science students, with domain experts and students in Pedagogy and History taking responsibility for the content of the site. The content is structured in five levels:

1. About Ter Info
2. Terrorist attacks
3. Terrorism in a nutshell
4. Terrorists
5. Discussing terrorism in class

Articles typically take 2-4 minutes to read, contain a FAQ section, and provide links to further materials on the Internet

and to academic sources. There are also links to the relevant articles on the site itself: for example, the article “What is terrorism” links to “What terrorists want to achieve” and “How scared should we be of terrorism” (with some sobering statistics).

In March-June 2018, a pilot study was done with five schools from the city of Utrecht participating. These schools display a large diversity both in level (primary, secondary) and ethnic background. At the beginning and end, seminars were organised with expert presentations and discussion sessions. Between seminars, workshops were held at each school in order to fine-tune the pilot to the specific circumstances. Overall, participants were quite satisfied with the project, yet they had a great deal of feedback on all aspects of the project. It was observed for example that article length was good and the FAQs were often used, but that academic sources were never consulted. Many suggestions were made for adding pages (including some open pages to inform the general public, as the entire site is now password-protected). There is a clear wish for personalisation based on type of school and for a push notification system to announce new materials and developments.

## 4. Next steps

Phase 2 of TerInfo is currently in full swing, with 19 schools participating. In parallel, a next version of the site is being developed by a new team of students, from the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht. In my presentation I will discuss the evaluations and experiences on which this next version will be based. I will also present a long-term vision of the website, with particular attention to the issue of scale. Currently the university experts provide intense individual support to the schools. In the long run this is not sustainable. A likely avenue thus seems to be to reshape the site as an online community, where participants gradually develop expertise themselves and share their experiences with their peers.

## 5. Acknowledgement

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## Appendix A

### Bibliography

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