

HELPING TO PROTECT STUDENTS FROM SHODDY REPORTING AND PROMOTIONAL SPIN

By Sue McKerracher,

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At dinner, the night after the news of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's death in September, I asked my 18-year-old son if he had heard about this truly amazing woman, who had packed the achievements of three lifetimes into one.

'Yeah, she's pretty cool.'

I was surprised. He doesn't watch the news on TV and he doesn't have the ABC app on his phone. He is the Netflix, Stan and Spotify generation. How does he know about someone who isn't a musician, actor or film star? The answer, of course, is social media.

'So, what do you know about her?'

'Judge, women's rights, stands up to Trump.'

I was impressed. But he qualified this by saying 'Not sure it's all true, though — it's from Insta'.

And there we have it — the good side and the dark side of social media. Universal access to information, the democratisation of knowledge, but the uncertainty that comes with a medium where the truth is often buried amongst misinformation and downright lies.

The fact that my son understood the potential dangers of believing everything you see on Instagram, or YouTube, or Facebook, is thanks to the diligence of the teachers and teacher librarians at his senior school, where there is an active approach to media literacy. Students in other schools, especially where there is not such a strong library, may not be so fortunate.

For library and information professionals, access to authentic, current, accurate information is our stock in trade. (I say 'our' because I am not a qualified librarian, but I am a qualified journalist, and bias or inaccuracy holds no sway for either profession.) A curious and questioning approach to information, as well as an understanding of the value of original sources, protects us from the worst excesses of shoddy reporting and promotional 'spin'.

The general public is less well educated about the dangers of media manipulation. For the generations brought up on a diet of print books and serious newspapers, the written word has an authority which cannot be transferred in its entirety to broadcast, online and social media — and yet so many people still believe everything they see and read, in print and on screen.

This is why ABC Education, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), Museum of Australian Democracy, National Film and Sound Archive, National and State Libraries Australia, Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Digital Media Research Centre and Western Sydney University (WSU) joined together earlier in 2020 to become the founder members of the Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA).

AMLA's approach to media literacy is underpinned by research and promotes evidence-based practice. Michael Dezuanni (QUT) and Dr Tanya Notley (WSU) are academics working in this field and they have undertaken a number of related research projects, in partnership with AMLA members, Google and the National Association for Media Literacy Education in the US¹. Of greatest interest to ACCESS readers will be their project 'Advancing the Media Literacy of Young Australians'², which offers insights into students' consumption of news.

A key AMLA resource for teachers and information professionals working in school libraries is the Media Literacy Framework³. This framework was created by our academic partners and it sets out this definition 'Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life. It is a form of lifelong literacy that is essential for full participation in society.'

It goes on to describe the 10 Media Literacy Learning Outcomes, based on reflection, understanding, use and achievement. And it is particularly worth noting the key concepts, which frame the scope of learning.

Media technologies are used to access, create and circulate media.

A media literate citizen:

Uses a variety of technologies for media consumption and production, with awareness of the personal, social and ethical impacts of their choices.

Media representations portray people, places and ideas.

A media literate citizen:

Engages with media representations with an understanding of how processes of selection and construction have been used to create stories according to particular points of view.

Media audiences are the people who use and respond to media.

A media literate citizen:

Recognises their own role as an audience member across multiple media forms, and the processes used by media producers to invite particular consumption practices.

Media institutions organisations that produce, distribute, regulate and educate about media.

A media literate citizen:

Understands that economic, social and ethical processes inform the production, distribution and regulation of media content.

Media languages create meaning, communicated through images, sound and text.

A media literate citizen:

Uses and critiques media languages in images, sounds and text to communicate and analyse how meaning is constructed across multiple media forms.

Media relationships provide a key motivation for the production, use and circulation of media.

A media literate citizen:

Is aware and critiques the various kinds of relationships that can be formed within and with various media forms.

Our ambitious goal for AMLA is to champion and lead media literacy education for all Australians. We are supported in this by the Australian Curriculum — one of the few education policies internationally to include media literacy as a goal.

In 2020, ALIA ran our first media literacy conference, *True or False? Media literacy for capable, confident, critical-thinkers* on 3 September, with over 100 participants from school and public libraries. It certainly won't be our last virtual conference, given the high level of interest in our sector. We followed this up with *Media Literacy 101 for Librarians* on 28 October, an-hour long event in partnership with ABC Education, as part of Media Literacy Week⁴.

Many people reading this magazine will already be aware of Media Literacy Week. If not, please consider participating in 2021. There are some terrific resources available on the website⁵, which make it fun and engaging for students from Years 7 to 10.

For more information about AMLA initiatives all year round, join us on Twitter @aus_media_lit — you can be sure that whatever you see posted by AMLA members on our social media feeds will be fact-checked.

REFERENCES

- 1) https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/newscentre/news_centre/more_news_stories/new_international_research_partnership_to_assess_the_state_of_media_literacy_in_australia_and_the_usa
- 2) <https://westernsydney.edu.au/medialiteracy>
- 3) <https://medialiteracy.org.au/index.php/framework/>
- 4) <https://www.abc.net.au/education/media-literacy/>
- 5) *ibid.*

A Media Literacy Framework for Australia

Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life. It is a form of lifelong literacy that is essential for full participation in society.

Media literacy is required to:

- Receive, verify and share information
- Get help and advice when it is needed
- Conduct business and find work
- Learn and study
- Participate in communities
- Engage with our democracy
- Meet people, relax and be entertained
- Share ideas, knowledge, experiences and opinions
- Create engaging and effective media

10 Media Literacy Learning Outcomes

A media literate citizen:

REFLECTS

- 1 Reflects on their own media use.
- 2 Is curious about how media are made.

UNDERSTANDS

- 3 Knows that media influence and impact people and society.
- 4 Knows that a range of institutions impact media participation
- 5 Understands that media construct versions of reality.

USES

- 6 Uses technologies to consume and produce media
- 7 Can use and critique a variety of media formats
- 8 Communicates using the language conventions of a variety of media forms.

ACHIEVES

- 9 Successfully manages personal, social and public relationships using media
- 10 Confidently achieves personal objectives and goals through media

The Key Concepts

Frame the scope of learning



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