




Suellen Timm



Classroom Media Literacy

Tools for Combating Disinformation and Fake News

The great increase in consumption and sharing of news on social networks without previous analysis made possible what McIntyre calls “fertile ground”¹ for fake news. What is fake news? Fake news is “fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent.”² It is news that is created without taking into consideration the journalistic and editorial processes that safeguard key concepts such as accuracy and credibility. Fake news can be information that is misleading, incorrect, or false (misinformation), and it can be false information that is purposefully disseminated (disinformation).³ Hunt points out that in the case of fake news, the user’s difficulty in analyzing the content occurs because fake news is often manipulated to look like credible content in order to maximize circulation.⁴

Most students are unaware of

these forms of manipulation of information. In a survey of more than 1,500 primary and secondary teachers conducted by the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers⁵ in the United Kingdom, 35 percent of teachers claimed that their students, either in homework submitted or during classes, had quoted fake news or misinformation they found online. Thus, there is an urgent need to build students’ literacy skills by teaching them not only how to read and write, but also how to think critically about how they interact with media.

In a report published by the *Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills* based on a survey of 388 primary students, 1,832 secondary students, and 414 teachers within the UK, 61 percent of teachers expressed concern that fake news affects student behavior. In addition, 54 percent of educators believed that the curriculum does not prepare students to identify misinformation.⁶ Among students, only two

percent of children had the necessary skills to detect fake news.⁷ According to Polizzi, this research points to the urgent need to teach media analysis not only to schoolchildren, but also to their teachers and families.⁸ This type of training should be part of teacher-education programs, and can also be done through professional-development training.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and several other NGOs and media companies have supported initiatives that study the use and critical analysis of media in the classroom.⁹ One key question guiding these initiatives is as follows: How can media education prevent the spread of false news?

Disinformation in Education

While in the past students previously used more books and encyclopedias to conduct their research and complete their schoolwork, most now used online search engines such as

Google. On this, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, emphasizes that “we are in the information age without reflection where our main obstacle is the excess of information.”¹⁰ Bauman says that we are flooded with information, but hungry for wisdom. “I learned from Google that I will never know what I should already know,”¹¹ he said. The sociologist mentions that the amount of information produced daily is a thousand times greater than the capacity of the human brain to assimilate.

Santaella warns that without the necessary support provided by formal education, the student may find it difficult to assess the reliability and relevance of a source. For the researcher: “The network universe is a dispersive and unsystematic space, constantly changing. What is positive about it, the overwhelming supply of information that can enhance learning, is counterbalanced, at the other extreme, by the lack of guidance, whose negative effects reach particularly immature learners. Finding content on networks is becoming more and more refined. However, localization does not dispense selective and evaluative capacity, and effective use of content.”¹²

In addition to Santaella, other scholars such as Hobbs and Mazzaro and Duarte have proposed that media literacy should be taught in schools since this is where teachers can best guide students in how to critically analyze news and online content to combat misinformation.¹³

An essential aspect of combating misinformation is knowing how to identify and distinguish the different types of fake news in order to properly evaluate the online content.¹⁴ One proposed approach for addressing this issue comes from Wardle and Derakhshan, who provide a means of classifying the idea of “information disorder.” The model classifies “information disorder” into three types (see Figure 1):

1. **Mis-information:** it presents false content, but is shared with no intention of harm;

2. **Dis-information:** false information disseminated with the intent to cause harm;

3. **Mal-information:** accurate content that is shared to cause harm to a person or institution.¹⁵

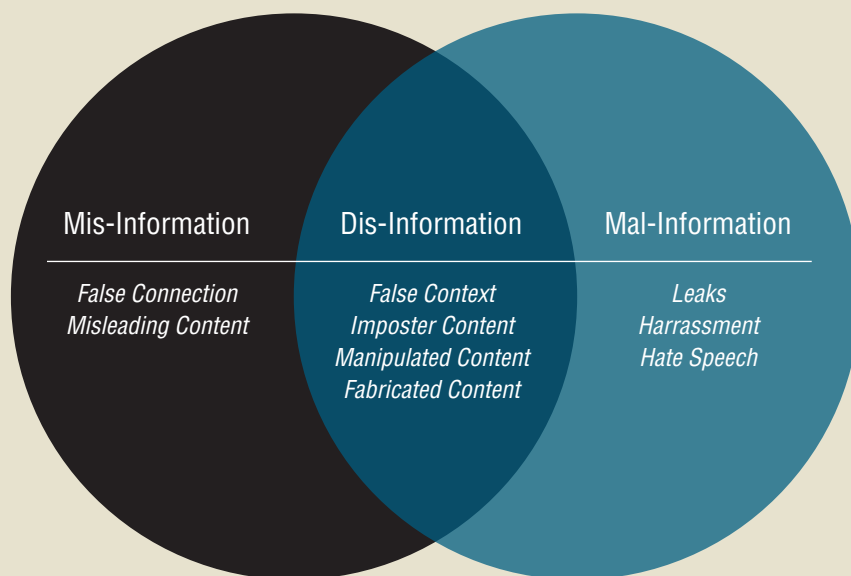
Tools for Media Literacy in the Fight Against Fake News

Media education, media literacy, education for media, or “educommunication” are processes of critically analyzing media production in an educational way. Although the theory became pop-

educational purposes.¹⁶ In 2013, UNESCO launched the Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy (GAPMIL) to articulate partnerships, unify the speech of the MIL community and further develop strategies, providing a common global platform. Since the launch, nearly 500 organizations have joined GAPMIL.¹⁷

The 2018 Media Literacy Index survey, produced by the Open Society Institute, listed and evaluated the most successful countries’ methods in

Figure 1. Wardle and Derakhshan’s Information Disorder Diagram*



*Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making* (Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe, 2017), 5.

ular in the 1980s, more recent initiatives of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) have included a specific attempt to help students to verify the legitimacy of the news and, thus, to understand how misinformation is used to shape attitudes and opinions.

According to UNESCO, by 2016, more than 70 countries were implementing media analysis activities for

preparing students to detect fake news. Finland ranked first, followed by other northern European countries.¹⁸ One of the reasons mentioned by experts for this result is that in these nations, media studies and combating disinformation are taught to school-age children, regardless of the discipline. For Timsit, this is one of the secrets to success in the work of literacy and combating disinformation. It is necessary to help each student develop the necessary skills to

detect and combat misinformation in any subject, since fake news affects all areas of knowledge.¹⁹

Currently, there are several support initiatives for teachers to conduct Media and Information Literacy campaigns in the classroom, with an emphasis on combating disinformation. Here are some useful tools:

Resources from the Better Internet Conference – In 2019, at the Better Internet Conference held in Singapore, several resources were launched to help teach students how to analyze online sources. The *News and Media Literacy Toolkit*²⁰ is a handout available online in which experts teach high school students how to detect fake news, in addition to distinguishing what is fact and what is opinion. Another tool announced was the fact-checking kit called *Get Smart With Sherlock*.²¹ Based on the well-known fictional character Sherlock Holmes, the kit shows a detective trying to “unravel the crime” from fake news, which includes questions about the potential consequences and how to identify misinformation.

BBC – This media company has invested in many initiatives such as the *iReporter* game. The *BBC Academy* through the *BBC Young Reporter* also runs an initiative to help students filter media content and identify fake news. The proposal targets secondary schools and includes materials to be used in the classroom, tutorial videos, and interactive games. *BBC News Brasil* has the project *Critical News Reading Workshop*, which, through video lessons and exercises available on the official channel, aims to develop students’ curiosity and suspicion about the content they find as they conduct research in the digital environment.²²

Google – Google’s *Be Internet Awesome* project offers a variety of resources to help build media literacy. The *Smart, Alert, Strong, Kind, Brave Digital Safety and Citizenship Curricu-*

lum is one of several media literacy curricula that include activities on how to fight fake news.²³ The resource helps teachers develop activities and also includes a letter of introduction to be sent to parents. The *Be Internet Awesome* project for children (in Portuguese, *Seja Incrível na Internet*) explains what bots are, how to analyze a URL, how to select a source, how to detect false information online, and how to check the credibility of information vehicles, among other skills. The tool includes

gamification techniques (with the online game *Interland*)²⁴ that help users develop skills and share what they learn online with friends.

National Literacy Trust – In 2018, a series of resources for parents and teachers on the subject was launched by the Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills in Schools.²⁵ The content was prepared specifically for K-12 teachers as a way to enable students to survive

HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS



CONSIDER THE SOURCE

Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.



READ BEYOND

Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What’s the whole story?



CHECK THE AUTHOR

Do a quick search on the authors. Are they credible? Are they real?



SUPPORTING SOURCES?

Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.



CHECK THE DATE

Reposting old news stories doesn’t mean they’re relevant to current events.



IS IT A JOKE?

If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the sight and author to be sure.



CHECK YOUR BIASES

Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.



ASK THE EXPERTS

Ask a librarian or consult a fact-checking site.

Used with permission from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). For more information, see <https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11174> and <https://www.fastcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/>.

the digital world and help them to use available content in a positive way. Additional free resources are available on the National Literacy Trust Website.²⁶

Steps to Use in Identifying Disinformation Online

Social networks make it difficult for users to judge the credibility of a message because mainstream publications such as the *New York Times* and fake news sites use platforms that look virtually identical.²⁷ Another factor to consider is that some publications purposefully use satirical humor to convey specific perspectives on current events. A reader unfamiliar with such styles of writing might share it as actual news. Social media users are often guided to these sites by friends and family who may unwittingly share posts and or tag the user when an interesting article pops up on their social media pages.

Thus, it is important to teach the student to evaluate content online before sharing it or even using it for information. To do so, it is important to remember seven ways to help identify disinformation or fake news:

1. **Analyze the Website URL** – Many fake news Websites have names very similar to those of traditional communication vehicles. Enter the official Website of the media channel and compare the URLs.
2. **Analyze the text** – Fake news often contains a variety of grammatical errors, uses manipulative adjectives, alarmist texts, or exaggerated punctuation (especially excessive use of exclamation marks).
3. **Title** – Check if the title and the content discuss the same subject. Some news may have an alarming headline, whereas the article has only a vague connection to the headline.
4. **Author** – Check if the report has a byline (indicating that it was authored by a specific journalist or a group of reporters) or is credited to a news agency.

5. **Other content Websites** – Search other Websites and sources for news on the same topic.

6. **Compare truthful news, too** – This is important to have a balance of opinions on the same subject. For this, it can be used applications from a news aggregator such as AP News (from the Associated Press), Reuters, Smart News, and Google News.

7. **Check sites** – Check information before sharing it. For this, information checking sites can be used. Usually, government institutions and media companies make these services available for free.

Conclusion

In recent years, media literacy has received attention from government initiatives, private companies, and educational institutions. There are several resources available online to support teachers to include media study in the classroom, regardless of the subject.

Experts like Mazzaro and Duarte, Rubin, Chen and Conroy, Timsit, and Wardle and Derakhshan are unanimous in stating that these resources are power tools against disinformation, and that work in the school environment is the most effective for the prevention and development of students' critical thinking skills. Experts also highlight the importance of the teacher being the center of the process and that MIL activities should involve the entire teaching-learning process and not be restricted to a specific subject. ✍

This article has been peer reviewed.

Suellen Timm, BA, is Managing Editor for Adventist Educators Blog. Ms. Timm earned her undergraduate degree in Journalism, English, and Portuguese Letters, and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Information Science at the Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita

Filho (Unesp) in Marília, Brazil. She has worked for more than 10 years as a journalist and communication advisor at the Seventh-day Adventist headquarters in São Paulo, Brazil.

Recommended citation:

Suellen Timm, "Classroom Media Literacy Tools for Combatting Disinformation and Fake News," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 82:2 (April-June 2020): 36-40.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Lee C. McIntyre, *Post-truth* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2018).
2. David M. J. Lazer, et al., "The Science of Fake News," *Science* 359:6380 (March 9, 2018): 1,094-1,096.
3. Ibid.
4. Elle Hunt, "What Is Fake News? How to Spot It and What You Can Do to Stop It," *The Guardian* (December 17, 2016): <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/dec/18/what-is-fake-news-pizzagate>.
5. The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) Report (2017): <https://www.nasuw.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/c69c65df-ce7c-403b-8414d8e93af2f72c.pdf>, 157.
6. National Literacy Trust, "Fake News and Critical Literacy: The Final Report of the Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy in Schools" (June 2018): https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Fake_news_and_critical_literacy-final_report.pdf, 4.
7. National Literacy Trust, "Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills in Schools" (June 11, 2018): <https://literacytrust.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/all-party-parliamentary-group-literacy/fakenews/>. See also "Fake News and Critical Literacy Resources" (June 2018): <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/fake-news-and-critical-literacy-resources>.
8. Gianfranco Polizzi, "Fake News and Critical Literacy: New Findings, New Questions" (July 2018): <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2018/07/09/fake-news-and-critical-literacy-new-findings-new-questions/>.
9. UNESCO, *Challenge of Media Education (The Grunwald Document)*. Paper presented on the International Symposium on Media Education, Grunwald, Germany, 1982: <https://www.medialit.org/reading-room/challenge-media-education-grunwald-document>.

10. Carlos Castilho, "Zygmunt Bauman Talks About Google and the Avalanche of Information," *Observatório da Imprensa* 872 (October 10, 2015): <http://observatoriodaimprensa.com.br/programa-do-oi-na-televisao/zygmunt-bauman-fala-sobre-o-google-e-a-avalanche-informativa/>; Alberto Dines interviews Zygmunt Bauman: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=81&v=CFdqE3fjAo&feature=emb_title.

11. Ibid.

12. Lucia Santaella, "Ubiquitous Challenges in Education," *Higher Education Magazine (Special: New Media and Higher Education)*, (2013), 27: https://www.revis.taensinosuperior.gr.unicamp.br/edicoes/edicoes/ed09_abril2013/NMES_1.pdf.

13. Renée Hobbs, "The Seven Great Debates in the Media Literacy Movement," *Journal of Communication* 48:1 (Winter 1998): 16-32; Hingryd Mazzaro and Diogo Duarte, "The Role of Media and Information Literacy in Education" (2018). Paper presented at the Brazilian Congress of Communication Sciences, Joinville, SC, Brazil.

14. Victoria L. Rubin, Yimin Chen, and Naill J. Conroy, "Deception Detection for News: Three Types of Fakes." Paper presented in Association for Information Science and Technology, 2015, St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.

15. Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making* (Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe, 2017), 5: <https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/7495-information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research-and-policy-making.html>.

16. Alton Grizzle and Maria Carme Torras Calvo, eds., *Media and Information Literacy: Guidelines for Formulating Policies and Strategies* (Paris: UNESCO, 2013): <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000225606>.

17. Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/media-and-information-literacy/gapmil/about>.

18. Marin Lessenski, *Common Sense Wanted: Resilience to 'Post-Truth' and Its Predicators in the New Media Literacy Index* (March 2018): https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/MediaLiteracyIndex2018_publishENG.pdf.

19. Annabelle Timsit, "In the Age of Fake News, Here's How Schools Are Teaching Kids to Think Like Fact-checkers," *Quartz* (February 12, 2019): <https://qz.com/1533747/in-the-age-of-fake-news-heres-how-schools-are-teaching-kids-to-think-like-fact-checkers/>.

20. Common Sense Education and Media Literacy Council, *News and Media Literacy Toolkit* (2019): <https://www.betterinternet.org>.

[sg/2019BIC/Resources/media/F3151EB87FF9497AA81459D14EFB4ADA.ashx](https://www.betterinternet.org/sg/2019BIC/Resources/media/F3151EB87FF9497AA81459D14EFB4ADA.ashx).

21. *Get Smart with Sherlock* (2019): <https://www.betterinternet.org/2019-BIC/CommunityProjects//media/15BEC8CCC36442F9BE5159076DFD388E.ashx>.

22. British Broadcasting Company (BBC) Young Reporter (2017): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/en/collections/youngreporter>; BBC iReporter (2018): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-8760dd58-84f9-4c98-ade2-590562670096>.

23. *Be Internet Awesome Curriculum* (June 2019): https://storage.googleapis.com/gweb-interland.appspot.com/en-us/hub/pdfs/Google_BeInternetAwesome_DigitalCitizenshipSafety_2019Curriculum.pdf.

24. *Be Internet Awesome Resources* (2019): https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us/.

25. Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy in Schools.

26. National Literacy Trust, "Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills in Schools."

27. Wardle and Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*.

THE ADVENTIST EDUCATORS BLOG

Read, Connect, Share!



The Adventist Educators Blog serves as a globally inclusive online community with practical professional-development and personal-growth articles representing the diversity of Adventist education contexts. Posts are shared three times a week, and a translation tool makes all posts accessible in the language of your choice. Articles are invited from Adventist educators working in Adventist and other schools, at any level. See *Writer's Guidelines* at <https://educators.adventist.org/submission-guidelines/>.

Visit us on the Web at <https://educators.adventist.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/educationdialogue/>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/advcircle>

To receive our monthly e-newsletter, simply subscribe:

<https://educators.adventist.org/subscribe/>

LOOK FOR ADVENTIST EDUCATION DIALOGUE ON FACEBOOK



**STAY
CONNECTED**



COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY
DIALOGUE

**Other ways of accessing issues of
College and University Dialogue**

in English, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish!



**Search for Adventist Dialogue
to download the App**



Visit dialogue.adventist.org



**Write to: dialogue@gc.adventist.org
for a printed version**