The Real Story with Fake News

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The Real Story with Fake News

Outcomes of Post Foundations Students’ Written Reflections

Kim Mullins
Instructional Design Librarian
Overview

- **PURPOSE:** teach the perils of “fake news” within the context of the common read *Look me in the eye: My life with Asperger’s.*

- **GOALS:** support student critical thinking and information literacy skills and provide a foundation for all incoming freshmen.

- **IMPLEMENTATION:** embed within all Post Foundation courses for first semester freshmen.
Instructional Design: Flipped Class

- Designed using a flipped class model that encompasses a blended-learning approach that:
  - Reverses the traditional learning environment by delivering instructional content outside of the classroom.
  - Moves learning activities that may have traditionally been considered homework, into the classroom.
- The activities, content, and assessments were embedded into each Post Foundations BlackBoard course (n=45).
**Instructional Design: Flipped-Class Structure**

- **Prior to class:**
  1. Students watch online videos, read information, and review other related material.
  2. Students complete a pre-class quiz to “level the playing field”.

- **During the class:**
  1. Students actively engage in authentic tasks, collaboratively in small groups to evaluate the credibility of online newsworthy information related to the common read.
  2. The class culminates with a group discussion.

- **After the class,** students submitted three short reflective writing assignments via blackboard.
Reflective Assignment: Emerging Themes

○ Due to time constraints, one writing reflection was analyzed. The following question was chosen because it most closely reflects the module objectives:

Based on what you learned, what best practices and media literacy tools do you plan to use when you consume news (and other) Internet and media information?

○ 272 writing assignments were analyzed for important concepts and emerging themes.
○ The analysis yielded a codebook of three emerging themes (best practices, skills used to evaluate sources, and information literacy tools) and 64 subthemes.
# Codebook Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluating Skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>Corroborate information with multiple sources, cross reference with</td>
<td>CORROB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>reliable sources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>Check the URL</td>
<td>URL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>Verify the author(s)’ credentials</td>
<td>AUTHCRED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>Verify authenticity of photo/image used on site</td>
<td>IMAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>Verify authenticity of video used on site</td>
<td>VIDEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>Identify and avoid bias</td>
<td>BIAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>Use the “sniff test” (common sense, if it sounds to good to be true…)</td>
<td>SNIFF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>Validate the site source itself</td>
<td>SOURCING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practices Used</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESTPRAC</td>
<td>BESTPRAC</td>
<td>Question everything, be sceptical</td>
<td>QUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESTPRAC</td>
<td>BESTPRAC</td>
<td>Keep an open mind and exclude personal bias, investigates multiple</td>
<td>OPENMIND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BESTPRAC</td>
<td>sides of a story</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESTPRAC</td>
<td>BESTPRAC</td>
<td>Avoid or be wary of information from social media</td>
<td>NOSOCMED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESTPRAC</td>
<td>BESTPRAC</td>
<td>Ethical use of information</td>
<td>ETHICS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESTPRAC</td>
<td>BESTPRAC</td>
<td>Rely on personal experiences with subject matter</td>
<td>PERSONALEXP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“In order to understand a controversial topic, such as autism, it is important to find out if the information one is acquiring is trustworthy. When I consume new information that is controversial, I plan on using fact checker cites such as snopes.com and tineye.com because they can help determine the truthfulness of the information on a specific cite. By doing this I can ensure the information I am receiving is correct so I do not, consequently, make a biased opinion on a certain topic myself. In addition to these cites, I also plan on researching the author and the different names related to topic of the article in order to decide if the author and the people the author is talking about are credible people. This is because sometimes the authors writing the articles are not trustworthy themselves (trustworthy meaning they are professors or have their doctorates) and by researching their background I can learn more about why they writing about a specific topic.”
Emerging Theme One: Best Practices

The general approaches used to critically evaluating news and information:

1. Refer to known reliable sources for news and information (i.e., Washington Post, WebMD) (n=77)
2. Fact check the information (n=54)
3. Rely on scholarly resources for information (journals, databases) (n=27)
4. Approach all news with skepticism and question everything (n=20)
5. Perform a reverse image searches to confirm validity (n=20)
Emerging Theme Two: Specific Skills for Evaluating Sources

The specific skills students apply to evaluate news and information:

1. Corroborate the information with multiple sources (n=112)
2. Verify the credibility of the news source (n=103)
3. Validate the author(s)’ credibility (n=76)
4. Analyze the URL (n=60)
5. Be aware of ads/clickbait (n=50)
6. Check for Bias (38)
7. Refer to the Date (n=27)
8. Rely on the “Sniff Test”- “If it sounds incredulous it probably is” (n=26)
9. Identify the purpose of the source (i.e., to sell, persuade, inform, entertain) (n=42)
10. Validate the sources & links (n=40)
Emerging Theme Three: Information Literacy Tools

Internet and other tools students find helpful in evaluating news and information:

1. Snopes.com (50)
2. Factcheck.com (33)
3. 10 Question Fake News Checklist (25)
4. Hoaxy.com (24)
5. Google.com (17)
6. Tineye Reverse Image Search (17)
7. Politifact (9)
8. Hoax-slayer (4)
9. Google Images, Web of Trust (WOT), Washington Post Check (1)
“It is important to use more than just one type of outlet for getting information from social media. I usually see news on Twitter, Facebook, or Snapchat but I then sometimes will google the piece of information I see and try to find another article online about the specific topic. Too many times we stay in our “bubble” that we don’t even realize it is there. This bubble is created on our social media networks based on the links we interact with and what we “like” and share. Because of this our information stream can become very one sided without us even knowing it, which can cause us to think we are still getting all viewpoints even though we are not.”

“When consuming media will I try to practice the safe tactic of taking in every side of the subject that’s out there. I will do this before making judgments because often the first thing you see about a subject is false or from a skewed perspective.”

“Through the library exercise related to determining if the articles related to Look Me In The Eye were accurate or not, I realized just how prominent fake news is, and how there can be a false article related to just about anything out there in the real world. It is a scary thought, but it just means that news consumers need to be cautious, alert, and wary when it comes to determining if what they are reading is true or not.”

“I don’t want to wind up believing things that aren’t true and then spreading this false information to others, or be told that I am providing false information. This could hurt my credibility, and others’ as well if they spread this information too.”

“When I consume news about autism or other topics, I make sure the information I am getting is from a credible source, such as a well-known research website or other unbiased databases. I also make sure to look at several sources of information to check for inconsistencies. If I am researching something more subjective, I try to gain as many perspectives on the issue as possible, and make sure that the opinions are backed by reason and not ignorance.”
Conclusions

• In general, the reflective assignment indicates that students understand how to apply critical thinking and information literacy skills needed to question, analyze, and verify fake news and online information.

• The module provides a foundation and conversation starter for future instruction on critically evaluating news information with which students engage ubiquitously.

• The module could easily be adapted to incorporate themes from common read for 2018, *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson, having to do with civil rights and the justice system.