

News media literacy challenges and opportunities for Australian school students and teachers in the age of platforms

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ABSTRACT

News media literacy competencies and motivation in teachers are critical to media education initiatives. This article draws on a survey of 97 primary and secondary school teachers conducted as part of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and University of Tasmania's national Media Literacy Project in 2018. The data reveals challenges in the implementation of media literacy in classrooms, highlighting a generational divide linked to Australians' rising consumption of news from digital sources and social media platforms. While teachers overwhelmingly say critical thinking about media is very important for students, nearly a quarter of these teachers are not engaging with news stories in the classroom. The data suggests responses require new resources, a review of teacher training, curriculum support, wider community collaboration and further research in the field.

Keywords: *News literacy, critical literacy, misinformation, education.*



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INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to understand more about how Australian teachers consume news media and view the importance of news media literacy education in their classrooms. How do they engage students in these contexts? What do educators need? Using data from a survey of 97 primary and secondary school teachers in the island state of Tasmania, the authors seek to identify what training, resources or educational media would assist teachers and students in advancing news media literacy education in Australia to empower young citizens to access the news, use the news and participate in the news in ways that meaningfully support their participation in society.

Implications of rising digital news consumption

Almost all Australian teenagers, two-thirds of primary school-aged children and one-third of preschoolers now own their own tablet or smartphone (RCH National Child Health Poll, 2017). At home, teenagers spend the most amount of time of any age group on a screen-based device: almost 44 hours on average a week (RCH National Child Health Poll, 2017). The pervasiveness of smartphones, tablets and other Internet-enabled devices impacts nearly all aspects of their social interaction (Common Sense Media, 2015). Despite this pervasiveness, situations can and do arise in which young people can lack the insight, judgement and experience to critically and safely engage with news media (Hobbs, 2017; Lieten & Smet, 2012; Notley et al., 2017; Powers, 2018; Wineburg et al., 2016). Gaps in knowledge about children's lives online make it more difficult to develop dynamic policies that get ahead of issues by addressing risks and making the most of opportunities (UNICEF, 2017). For people of all ages to contribute to and participate in today's media-saturated society, they need to be empowered with *media literacy*, defined by Potter as "the set of perspectives from which we expose ourselves to the media and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter" (2004, p. 58). While it is a contested premise (see boyd, 2018), the ubiquity of the term by policy makers and educators demand that we engage with it. The broad discourse surrounding media literacy is that if we learn about how websites, TV, newspapers, social media, radio shows, games and apps are constructed, we will develop critical perspectives about what is quality content and what is not. By adopting a more active role in media usage, some argue that we will be less

susceptible to propaganda or shallow sensationalism (Aufderheide, 1993). More contemporary research suggests knowledge about media industries, media content, the real world and the self are also essential elements of measuring an individual's news media literacy (Maksl et al., 2017). "Digital media literacy" is a term frequently used to describe the ability to access, understand and create content using digital media (ACMA, 2009; Buckingham, 2005), with "news literacy" regarded by some scholars as a subset of media literacy, with the functions of participation, appropriation, and storytelling (Mihailidis & Craft, 2016).

Engagement with the news is increasing, but people are encountering roadblocks in their quest for facts (Endelman, 2019). While digital and mobile news consumption in Australia is increasing, news literacy amongst its population is relatively low in comparison with other countries, which indicates low interest in the news, low access and the use of few sources (Park et al., 2018). These trends come at a time of debate about what constitutes news or journalism, and popular media platforms such Netflix do not include news as we have known it (Derakhshan, 2018). In this landscape, with social media identified as the leading source of news amongst those aged 18-25 (Park et al., 2018), how do young people and those who interact with them understand the contemporary news landscape?

Approaching media literacy in schools

There is growing evidence that greater support is needed with news media literacy both at home and at school (Nettlefold & Williams, 2018; Notley & Dezuanni, 2018; Notley et al., 2017; Wineburg, 2019; Wineburg et al., 2016). There are various approaches to media literacy designed to empower youth to use, evaluate and create digital media, and to also protect them from potential threats, such as targeted advertising, sexting, cyber-bullying – the latter often becoming the focus of media coverage of young peoples' use of media (Hobbs, 2004; 2017). Yet the abundance of opportunities to create, consume and communicate content through digital and traditional media brings exciting benefits including improving some cognitive skills such as literacy, visual attention and executive functioning (Blumberg et al., 2017; Heizer, 2018), and building skills identified as relevant for the future workforce (McPherson, 2017). Subsequent curriculum challenges and pedagogical innovations are the active focus of many researchers (e.g., Sefton-Green, 2017),

and there is increasing collaboration between educators, media and activists in the field (Hobbs, 2016; Nettlefold & Williams, 2018). Yet if teachers are to provide their learners with effective media education, they should be sufficiently media literate themselves and have competencies to promote media literacy among learners (Simons et al., 2017).

Studies into how adolescents make sense of their environment suggest adolescents have considerable grasp of the complexity of online interactions yet appear to have simplistic technical descriptions of the internet (Haddon and Livingstone, 2018; Livingstone et al., 2011). Studies show they struggle to identify false news (Notley et al., 2017), and distinguish between advertising and news (Winberg et al., 2016). Some scholars suggest children and youth would benefit more from direct instruction on how the internet works and how misinformation can spread on social media, and why they need to evaluate information retrieved from various sources (Powers et al., 2018). Others make a case for refocusing teaching and learning across the curriculum on foundational questions about ethics in digital culture, and hence, for reframing classroom practice around critical digital literacies (Luke et al., 2017).

Outside of the home, schools bear a major responsibility to prepare students to use media appropriately, from regulating the use of devices like smartphones in the schoolyard to providing opportunities for pupils to creatively use media and expand their knowledge of current affairs (Khalil, 2018). Promoting the media literacy of students is seen by some scholars as part of the pedagogical mission of education, similar to learning traffic safety and awareness, sustainable education, social training and other aspects of global life (Simons et al., 2017). It is argued it is no longer sufficient to construct curriculum in preparation for later life; schooling needs to realize what children are experiencing in their present day realities (Luke et al., 2017). In more than 50 countries, stakeholders organise initiatives to promote the use of media in education (Claes & Quintelier, 2009). The acceptance and success rate of such initiatives particularly depend on the role of the teachers and their actions to promote media literacy in education, their competencies in the field and teachers' belief in the importance of the topic (Simons et al., 2017). UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy Curriculum provides a framework for educators worldwide to implement media literacy curricula in school contexts where it is possible, often within other curriculum frameworks such as arts,

English and social studies (UNESCO, 2011). Direct instruction in media literacy is not a required component of the curricula in many American schools, though support for media literacy education has grown significantly, with teachers and teacher educators alike advocating for its inclusion in programs and curricula (Meehan et al., 2015). In the U.K., media literacy training has been incorporated in secondary schools for more than 60 years.

Nationally, Australian schools typically service two age groups: primary schools (kindergarten to year 6), and high school (year 6 to 12), with years 11 and 12 voluntary though largely completed. In Tasmania, years 11 and 12 are delivered through colleges which are not mandatory. In terms of governance, most schools are categorized by their funding source: public (state-based), private (through private institutions) or religious. Australia has a framework for media literacy education through the Australian Curriculum, which complements and extends the rationale for the Arts learning area (ACARA, 2018). This curriculum constitutes one of the world's first attempts to mandate media literacy education for all students in pre-school to year 6 (12-13 years old), and to provide a scope and sequence beyond these mandatory years, up to year 10 (15-16 years old), providing teachers with support to ask critical questions about news accuracy, believability, bias, misrepresentation, and ethical practice, as well as opportunities for students to make their own news stories.

Through the complementary Digital Technologies Curriculum, the Australian Curriculum also focuses on information and communications technologies. Yet, in its current state, the curriculum is too vague about the way the news media literacy should and can be included (Notley & Dezuanni, 2018). Just one in five young Australians report that they have received lessons at school to help them work out if news stories are true and can be trusted (Notley et al., 2017). Several witnesses and authors of formal submissions to the 2017 Senate Select Committee inquiry on the Future of Public Interest Journalism suggested the Commonwealth should be more proactive in looking to strengthen digital media awareness and media literacy at all levels of the education system (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018), boosting activity from several not-for-profit organisations in the field. It is suggested teachers should assess the extent to which a critical understanding of media is present in their pupils and then based on this, teach their pupils to evaluate and analyze media content based on the media language and production

conventions used, the potential media effects on the individual and society, the way in which that media content was influenced by economic and political conditions, and how the message was directed to a specific audience (Meeus et al., 2014). Recent research suggests people with higher news literacy are likely to have higher trust in news generally and lower trust in news from social media (Park et al., 2018). Therefore, concepts of news literacy and trust in news are strongly correlated with news interest, frequency of use and the number of news sources used.

Most Australian schools are technologically rich environments in the wake of the Federal Government's "Digital Education Revolution" (DER) program (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012). Teachers have access to a multitude of digital resources to mediate their student's learning experiences, including content from the GLAM sector (galleries, libraries, art galleries and museums) and entertainment-orientated content. An Australian research study, led by Michael Dezuanni, interviewed 150 teachers about how they curate contemporary screen content to promote learning across the curricula and found the success of experiences relies on the knowledge teachers have of the interrelations between digital technologies, content and pedagogy (Dezuanni et al., 2017).

This poses questions about teacher motivation and competencies. The researchers found teachers respond well to easily discovered and well-made materials that provide a student-centred connection to curriculum content – what are the opportunities here for media literacy resources? Social media, along with the rise of video games and immersive virtual reality (IVR) in school settings, seems set to play an increasing role in how teachers and students access screen content for learning. These promise new learning opportunities for both teachers and students (Bailey & Bailenson, 2017). However, the way students and teachers may learn from social media sites is often restricted in the public (state-funded) schools by statewide school filtering systems that block social media access (Notley & Dezuanni, 2018).

ASSESSING TEACHERS AND NEWS MEDIA LITERACY

Australia's island state of Tasmania, with its relatively small population and some clear urban and regional differences, was the location of this research. The role of education, and the place of children and young people, in Tasmania's economy and society are

crucial issues influencing the state's future trajectory, as its economy adjusts to changing global pressure (Bentley, 2017).

Methods

An online survey was designed to understand more about teachers' own news media usage, the importance of news and media literacy to their students and the teachers' approach to media literacy in the classroom. Teachers were asked to identify whether they were from metropolitan or regional Tasmania, and if they taught at primary or secondary levels or held a specialist teaching position. Questions were also asked about age, gender and number of years' experience in the teaching profession. The survey was divided into two key parts. The first section asked 8 questions about the teachers' media usage, trust and accuracy. Included in this section were questions about which sources the teachers personally use for news, which sources they had used in the past 24 hours and how they rated media institutions and information providers in terms of trust. The second section of the survey had 16 questions about news in the classroom. Among these questions, teachers were asked about their perceptions of the importance of students thinking critically about media, and how often the teachers explore critical engagement using news stories in the classroom.

Throughout the following section, we draw on anonymized quotes from the teachers. We sought ethics approval from the University of Tasmania before all school sectors were approached to participate; the sectors were the Tasmanian Department of Education (DoE), the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office (TCEO) and the Independent Schools Tasmania (IST). Separate research applications were also lodged and approved by DoE's Educational Performance and Review unit and the Director of the TCEO. The educational bodies issued a request to respective school principals to circulate the survey link to teachers. It is not known how many complied. The survey was open for six weeks from February 2, 2018. While 172 teachers started the survey, 97 completed it in full and took an average of 13 minutes to complete the questions.

SURVEY RESULTS

Demographics

While 97 is not a large number of respondents, the demographics of this sample are comparative to

Tasmania's population. The participants reflected a mix of both city and rural areas, with just over half (51%) from Hobart (Tasmania's capital city), and the remaining 49% located in regional parts of the state. Teachers in the Catholic system accounted for more than half the respondents (57%), with the remaining split between state education (23%) and independent sectors (21%). Most of the teachers (38%) had more than 20 years' experience in the profession. The majority (61%) of respondents taught at the secondary level, 31% were primary school teachers and 8% were dedicated specialist teachers in the areas of digital technology, alternative education, senior leadership, and food, hospitality and textiles. Three quarters of the teachers were older than 35 years of age, mostly aged between 35-49 (47%), while 30% were older than fifty. A large majority of the respondents self-identified as women (71%).

Media literacy and the importance of news

The open-ended questions in the survey provided rich data on the relationship between teachers and the public when it comes to what media literacy is, and its importance. The data consistently revealed frustration about public expectations that media literacy education for children and adolescents should be the responsibility of teachers and schools, as expressed by this secondary school teacher:

Schools are only part of the picture. Could someone please research how many times "they should teach this in schools" is in the news? I would, but I'm too busy trying to keep up! We need to go beyond what happens in schools and equip families to serve up critical thinking and media literacy as part of their daily diet :)

Indeed, a recent report prepared for the New South Wales Department of Education highlights that education, like most social domains, is structured by an array of stakeholders contributing in different ways. It suggests Australia's education effort would benefit immensely from closer engagement with employers in the private and public sectors, as well as community organizations (Buchanan et al., 2018). The following are the key themes drawn from these surveys.

In designing this survey, we wanted to understand the relationship between teachers and the news media, and their perception of the relationship between students and news media. We wanted to increase the focus on how teachers understand the media landscape through their own consumption of texts, and what they

personally perceive to be important, as this has the capacity to draw out disconnections between the two dominant roles of student/teacher in the classroom. The teachers mostly rated the importance of news to them personally as *very important* (70%) and *somewhat important* (29%). On how important news is for their students, nearly half (45%) think that news is *not very important* for their students. However, 10% consider news to be *very important* to students and 34% consider it *somewhat important*. This is consistent with student insights from a 2017 survey in which 44% of students said that following the news *is* important to them; they consume a lot of news regularly from many different sources and engaging with news stories makes young people feel happy, motivated and knowledgeable (Notley et al., 2017). More needs to be understood about these social aspects of news curation. While the *Digital News Report: Australia 2018* lacked data from those aged under 18, it does show those under 35 treat news as social content with news consumption embedded in other social media and online activities. They are more aware of social cues, such as likes and shares, in the online environment than older news users (Park et al., 2018).

Teachers' frequency of news access. In terms of their own media consumption, the teachers use multiple sources for news, on average using 3.6 different news platforms – mostly a combination of newspapers (62%), news websites (62%), social media (49%) and search engines (53%). As there is positive correlation between news literacy, frequency of news use, and interest in news (Park et al., 2018), this frequency indicates the likelihood of high news literacy. Nearly a third of teachers use fact-checking services to ascertain the accuracy of news, with several nominating the *Washington Post's Factchecker* and *RMIT-ABC Fact Check*. Cross-checking of sources is the teachers' favoured way to check the accuracy of news, with one teacher stressing the importance of checking "various" sources and applying a "dollop of common sense and healthy skepticism" to the content and the agenda. This common sense may take the form of thinking about who is a source in a media story. Four teachers said when searching for relevant sources, they rely upon knowing the previous work of a particular speaker/writer. Judgements about the integrity of media organisations is also key:

what I know about the news already - its context, what I know about the news organisation, [...] what I know about the speaker/writer, [...] expectations I bring about how it is

presented, [...] accessing different sources of the “same” and conversations with others gives extra points of comparison and discernment.

A few teachers admitted they weren’t doing their homework with checking sources: “I trust the provider is adhering to the media codes re authenticity,” one said. Another suggested: “I wouldn’t really check the accuracy of news unless it affects me personally.”

Given the demographics of the survey cohort, the Tasmanian teachers’ reliance on offline resources appears consistent with contemporary research showing local or regional newspapers remaining important as traditional news brands, particularly among women and older audiences (Blood, 2018). The results again highlight a strong generational divide in consumption habits, as younger news consumers (aged under 35) are more likely to access online news via social media, search engines or apps (Park et al., 2018). However, as 76% of people who rely on social media for news have low or very low news literacy (Park et al., 2018), this raises some questions about the capacity of some younger teachers, or trainee teachers, to verify the news. The survey data showed that amongst teachers of less than 10 years’ experience, 28% trust social media compared to only 5% from teachers who had been in the workforce for more than 20 years.

Commercial TV was cited by as a frequent source of news for 44% of regional teachers, as opposed to 20% of those living in Hobart, consistent with trends showing news consumers in regional areas rely more on offline platforms, particularly television news, and that they

also rely heavily on local and regional newspapers for news, almost twice as much as urban consumers (Park et al., 2018). The topics of most interest to the teachers were breaking news (86%), followed by news on education (84%), current affairs and local community issues.

Trust in news. Strong predictors of trust are the number of news sources a consumer uses and a reliance on traditional brands, with Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) News (online and offline) ranked the most trusted news brand overall (Park et al., 2018). Relying on established media brands to provide accurate news is frequently mentioned by respondents. When asked which specific media institutions or information providers/platforms the teachers *trust*, 27% said they *tended* to trust the ABC with 65% reporting they trusted the ABC *greatly* (Table 1). Accessing trusted sources directly via brand websites and apps is seen as a strategy to reduce exposure to misinformation, with research showing the ABC and Guardian Australia audiences have higher levels of news literacy than other brand consumers (Jericho, 2018). The survey respondents also reported strong level of trust in local newspapers, with 64 % reporting they tended to trust them, with 10% reporting they trusted them *greatly*. In relation to social media, there were low levels of trust from the teachers surveyed: 27% said they distrusted sources like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter *greatly*. More than half (52%) said they *tended* to distrust social media.

Again, context is relevant here; the survey group is dominated by teachers older than 35 years of age who are also heavy users of offline news.

Table 1. *Trust in major media outlets and services*

	Distrust greatly	Tend to distrust	Tend to trust	Trust greatly	Not sure/don’t know
The ABC	2%	3%	27%	65%	3%
Internet search engines like Google	1%	34%	52%	6%	7%
Commercial TV stations	9%	29%	53%	7%	2%
Commercial radio stations	10%	32%	49%	6%	2%
Newspapers	1%	20%	64%	10%	5%
News websites	0%	21%	63%	9%	7%
Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)	27%	52%	16%	1%	4%

Critically, this points to a disconnect in which social media is rarely a resource for teachers, but is the resource students are more likely to engage with. This context is crucial not only in the development of

resources for students, but in broader discourse around media literacy.

These results therefore need to be assessed against contemporary trends. For the first time in 2018

Australians' use of online news (82%) surpassed traditional offline news sources (79%) and indeed, social media is now the main source of news for those aged 18 to 24 years old (Park et al., 2018). This raises two questions. Firstly, if more news is being consumed via social and online media, how equipped are teachers to verify it and guide students? And what does it mean if teachers consume and understand news differently to students, younger teachers or trainee teachers who increasingly treat it as social content and rely on self-curation practices of filtering news, alerts and notifications? Younger Australian news consumers are also likely to share more news online compared to older consumers (Park et al., 2018), suggesting a need for a review on what is meant by sources of news in the classroom and how they are approached. This shift in practices and potential generational disconnect also raises important questions about the levels of knowledge and understanding about social cues associated with news consumption and interaction, such as likes and shares, as well as ethical behaviour in the online environment (Luke et al., 2018).

Critical thinking about media in the classroom.

Overwhelmingly, primary and secondary school teachers view critical thinking about media as important: 52% rated it as *very* important, while 29% viewed it as *somewhat* important. Several primary school teachers, however, think it is not as relevant to their students. One high school teacher described how they playfully address misinformation in the classroom:

I have found that students in year 8 are increasingly uninformed about what is happening around the world and only focus on their own interests or social media. They are coming to high school each year less able to think critically as they believe whatever they are told "online". They don't know how to find reliable sites or check facts. I will say outrageous things expecting to be challenged but it does not come!

The notion that students care or know less as a result of the internet and social media was found throughout many of the teachers' reflections. One Hobart secondary school teacher finds the complexity of the media environment is making it more difficult for students to locate factual, reliable information:

The pace of information exchange is so rapid, and the cult of celebrity so pervasive, that it is becoming very difficult for reliable news organisations to cut through. The way content is consumed has changed dramatically, and many of us operate in an echo chamber where our views, perspectives and values are shaped and reinforced by social media and the power of persuasive texts. Asking the key critical thinking questions (Who wrote this? How reliable a source is this? Who's the intended

audience? Who and what is included? excluded? what techniques are being used here? Whose voice is being privileged or silenced?) is becoming more and more important, and more difficult to teach, at a time when we are being bombarded with information, messages and fake news.

Many teachers, particularly those at the secondary level, are concerned about their students' reliance on digital and mobile media for news and the potential impact they see it having on students' participation in democracy. One teacher reflected that "critical thinking" would "[break] this cycle" of manipulation through media messaging. For this teacher, critical thinking would help equip students to become "informed adults."

Several secondary school teachers highlighting the pervasiveness of social media in students' lives, where their students "would appear to rely only on social media for their news sources and would also appear to take whatever they see as fact." Most say students are heavily exposed to multiple sources of information and yet ill equipped to distinguish accuracy, bias, and fakery in text and images on the internet or social media platforms. One notes that students have started to fear fake news.

There is so much misinformation and personal opinion/personal agendas flooding the web, everyone wants the money or participation or loyalty of young people. There are also so many scams and attacks on their privacy and personal information that they need to be much more savvy. Most have grown up with social media and so they see almost everything as "normal" and need educating about what is safe, accurate and protective of them now and in the future.

However, several teachers fear that focusing on negative issues in media literacy education can have adverse impacts: "Deconstruction must be balanced with solutions, otherwise students are left with nothing but doubt." Overall, respondents stress the importance of critical thinking to avoid manipulation by vested interests – political, commercial and media agendas.

The data shows teacher awareness that learning environments must be kept up-to-date and relevant: "Students need to be aware of the events in their environment and how they may impact them. We cannot assume they are not interested." Several comments raise concern about how students verify information about science, while a secondary teacher who teaches English, writes:

Critical thinking about media is more or less the heart of that subject these days. Also, it's a fundamental citizenship skill - all the more so given social media explosion and the bluster, bias and partisanship which pervades so many news sources.

The skills being taught in these classrooms are ones that are seen to last a student a lifetime, and directly contribute to society more broadly. This is a dominant theme in the commentary – the importance of students critically consuming news and media to make informed decisions is brought up in terms of future employability, citizenship and potential behaviours. As one teacher puts it, critical thinking “about media allows students to question issues that affect their lives and others,” by increasing “empathy” and “challeng[ing] ignorance.” Interestingly, more teachers in Hobart (63%) rated the importance of critical thinking about media as *very* important than those in regional Tasmania (40%). This may be linked to trends indicating that news consumers in regional and remote parts of Australia are more likely to have lower news literacy than those in major cities (Park et al., 2018).

While the majority of teachers (77%) feel equipped to guide students on deciding whether news stories are true and can be trusted, nearly a quarter of the teachers (23%) report they are not able to, which highlights a need for further professional development in the field and incorporation into teacher education. When asked about the frequency of students talking to them about distressing or upsetting news, 6% said it happens often and more than half of teachers surveyed (57%) said they are approached occasionally by students grappling with these issues. At the secondary school level, teachers report that once duty of care has been observed, such incidents are often approached as an opportunity to establish the broader context of media reports, including how news is funded and circulated:

...try to put things in perspective, talk about the media’s need to “feed the beast” – the insatiable desire for 24 hour news coverage and how this constant bombardment is not healthy. We discuss how this can lead to anxiety -we might look at research on this. We might look at strategies to cope when feeling overwhelmed with what’s going on in the world.

The complexity of providing student support with identifying sources, understanding and supporting emotional responses to news and deconstructing content in the classroom is challenging to teachers. It supports research showing that contemporary media literacy efforts need to involve the multidisciplinary new media environment and the way in which participants are engaged in it (boyd, 2018; Buckingham, 2018; Fry, 2016; Hobbs, 2018), including the technical and social complexity of the Internet (Bordoff & Yan, 2017).

Engaging with news in the classroom. Despite strong and often passionate support on the importance of

critical thinking about news and the media, when asked how often they *explore critical engagement with news stories*, nearly a quarter of the teachers surveyed (24%) said they rarely turned it into a classroom activity (see Figure 1). This trend is broadly consistent with previous research showing one in five Australian students report they had received lessons in the past year to work out if news stories are true and can be trusted (Notley et al., 2017).

More than half of the teachers, however, report they did sometimes engage with news stories in the classroom and 19% said it was a frequent activity. Of those, 37% would explore critical engagement with news stories once or twice a term, while 32% would do so five or more times.

The data raises several questions. The first is about the implementation of teaching about media literacy in the Australian Curriculum, which is dependent on school authorities and State or Territory curriculum. Secondly, the survey data shows teacher motivation and time restraints are also influential reasons why media literacy may not be happening in many instances.

In classroom activities, how often do you explore critical engagement with news stories?

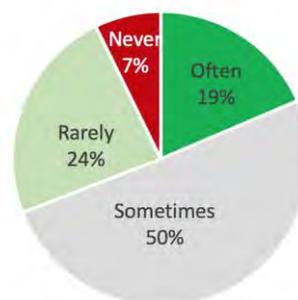


Figure 1. *News engagement*

At the primary level, teachers report they led class discussions, relying on educational websites and screen resources like the ABC’s *Behind the News* (BTN), which is a high-energy news and current affairs show aimed at upper primary school students. Secondary school teachers say engagement with news stories fits with activities in English, humanities, technology and the sciences; these activities include class discussions, analysis of news articles, quizzes, analysis of images and political cartoons, focusing on breaking news and local issues and using news stories to introduce larger topics. One teacher characterised this as a contextual and

critical exercise, “as a means to capture attention and show relevance of theoretical concepts to everyday life.”

However, teachers report that they decide what media sources to include in the classroom based on several factors: relevance to the curriculum and learning outcomes, reliability, accessibility, school and peer endorsement, and how engaging, entertaining and relevant they are to students. Motivation is important here as many teachers report they curate content from their personal consumption and what they viewed as “trusted brands.”

The variety of sources and extension of effort by teachers to curate content to promote learning across the curricula appears to rely on the knowledge teachers have of the interrelations between digital technologies, content and pedagogy (Dezuanni et al., 2017).

Half of the teachers surveyed provide opportunities for their students to create their own news stories, *often* (4%) or *sometimes* (46%). A fifth reported that they

never do it, despite mounting evidence about the importance of participation and creating/expressing oneself using the media (Buckingham et al., 2005; Livingstone et al., 2005; Luke et al., 2017; Mihailidis & Craft, 2016).

WHAT RESOURCES AND SUPPORT TEACHERS NEED

The survey asked teachers to identify the resources and support that would make it easier for them and their students to critically engage with news stories. Options included technical support, new equipment, online resources, specialist staff, and curriculum-aligned plans, and there was also an open field for suggestions. Teachers were asked to select all that apply, and how they would use them in the classroom to critically engage with news stories (Figure 2).

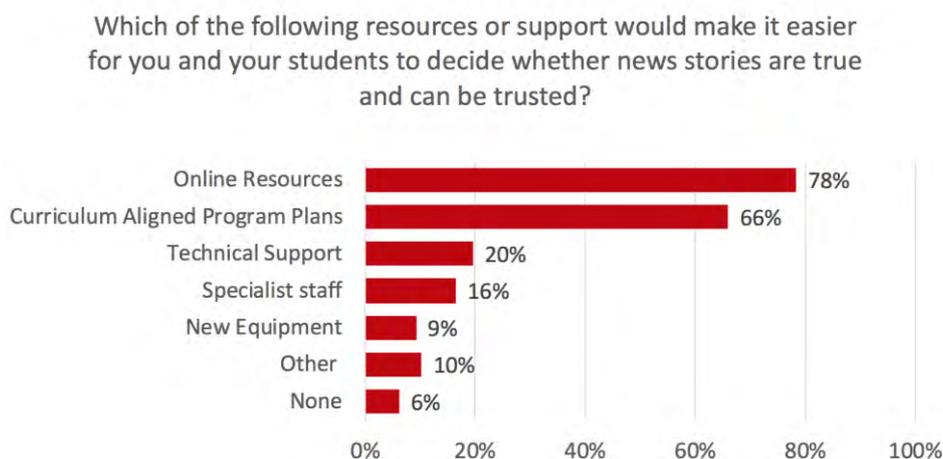


Figure 2. Teacher’s resources

The data shows that, overwhelmingly, teachers need more support and resources. Support for more online resources was high (78%) with several teachers suggesting specific media literacy content to “to guide staff/students through the process, resources, weblinks, photocopyable sheets of on-line program” and “age appropriate resources would help scaffold the steps to students being able to access material.” Several teachers said contemporary content would save them doing extensive, time intensive research to curate videos and examples.

There were, however, a few concerns about implementation and hard copies being more failsafe – showing a gap between what might appeal to teachers and

what appeals to students. However, most teachers surveyed felt age-specific news (64%) should be specifically made for their students, particularly teenage-orientated content. These comments reinforce research that the ongoing digital disruption of the school sector presents both challenges and opportunities for Australian media organizations and non-for-profit organisations (Dezuanni et al., 2017).

Curriculum-aligned plans

Most teachers (66%) indicate curriculum-aligned plans would be of assistance. There were frequent comments about specialised news media literacy units

needing to be incorporated into the Australian Curriculum and for this to be clearly communicated to staff, including how and why it is there:

Sometimes it's difficult to regularly embed this within the current curriculum, as we are so pressured to make sure that the content is covered.

Most teachers are aware that students need to develop greater understanding about the technical and social complexity of the Internet, supportive of recent research into cognitive developmental differences in digital contexts (Bordoff & Yan, 2017). The data reinforces scholarship that children and youth would benefit from more direct instruction on why they need to evaluate information retrieved from various websites, how the Internet works and how misinformation can be spread by social media (Powers et al., 2018).

Other teacher recommendations

When asked to contribute general comments, teachers raised issues of time restraints and training, specifically professional development and improvements to how teachers are trained to approach media education:

[...] all teachers must be educated about critical literacy and have tools to deconstruct messages within the media. More support needed for non-Humanities/English trained staff.

One teacher observes that the habits of younger teachers and news consumers (aged under 35), who are more likely to access online news via social media or search engines or apps, needs to be understood further:

Level of media literacy among younger teachers and those who no longer read newspapers and magazines tends to be low. My observation is that online news readers read shorter articles and fewer word counts, this would be interesting to research.

This comment from a secondary teacher reinforces research that those who mainly access news via social media are less likely to be news literate than those who rely on traditional media or news websites/apps (Park et al., 2018).

Trying to incorporate contemporary media literacy content into their teaching while juggling priorities amid a busy curriculum also emerged as a significant challenge:

Huge amounts of teacher time is used searching for and collating a variety of media sources, more than in other curriculum areas

as there's a need to use current news rather than last year's texts. I'd use additional resources to free up time for focusing on students.

Simplifying access to a variety of contemporary media resources presents opportunities previously identified by other researchers (see Dezuanni et al., 2017). There is potential for expanding media industry-supported initiatives for media literacy education both in and out of schools, through increased collaboration between educators, media and activists, as occurs in Europe and the United States (Hobbs, 2016; NAMLE, 2010).

CONCLUSION

This article sought to understand how Australian teachers use news media, how they view the importance of media literacy education in their classrooms and how they are helping their students navigate the news and information landscape. Many children and adolescents live thoroughly mediated lives. While teachers are only part of the multi-stakeholder response to navigating the complex news and information environment, they shoulder a heavy responsibility for building young citizens' knowledge and skills. Their motivation and competencies are therefore critical influences. This article found evidence of a disconnect: primary and secondary school teachers overwhelmingly view critical thinking about media as important, yet nearly a quarter of them rarely engage with news stories in the classroom and only rarely provide opportunities for their students to create their own news content.

Time and motivation emerged as key influences, particularly when it comes to sourcing contemporary and relevant news literacy content to use in the classroom. A lack of resources to support media creation was also identified. Despite Australia's educational framework being equipped to support media literacy education, the data raises questions about inconsistencies with implementation and resourcing. Future researchers, policy makers, media organisations and educators also need to focus more on standards of teacher training in media literacy and further development of engaging contemporary educational resources and media to equip young people with digital fluency. As well, more needs to be understood about regional differences that emerged in the data regarding critical thinking about media and media usage, as previous research highlights a student's upbringing plays a key role in building media literacy skills. The

data showed more regional teachers tend to rely on commercial TV and offline platforms, reinforcing recent research that news consumers in regional and remote Australia are more likely to have lower news literacy.

Most teachers think they are equipped to guide students on what news stories are true and can be trusted; however, a quarter report they are unable to, highlighting deficiencies in professional teacher training and levels of support. As digital consumption of online news continues to grow, with social media a key source of news for young adults, knowledge about these trends needs to be incorporated into professional development and teacher education.

Most teachers surveyed want more online news literacy resources, with specific guidance in the field. The literature and survey data highlight that success relies on teachers' expert knowledge linking technology, content and pedagogy, and their preparedness to invest significant amounts of time and effort sourcing contemporary and relevant news literacy content. Despite the availability of curriculum-mapped resources, most survey respondents say they need improved resources and support, with a strong preference for specialised units to be incorporated into the Australian Curriculum.

Based on the review of literature, and teacher data in this survey, enhanced offerings should incorporate insights into the contemporary media environment and the way in which participants are engaged in it, including the social aspects of interaction with news and ethical consideration. Further collaboration between media organisations, educators and activists presents opportunities. Access to age-specific news is identified as extremely valuable in media literacy education. Therefore, suggestions of more teenage-orientated, entertaining content to help students understand and engage with the news are worthy of further consideration by media organisations like the ABC, SBS and Australian Children's Television Foundation.

Given Australians' rising reliance on digital sources of news, there is a dramatic generational shift with news consumption underway. As Buchanan et al. (2018) note, the challenges associated with machine learning require more than marginal adjustments to established arrangements. With social media the dominant source of news for Australians aged 18-25, these findings suggest families and educators need to learn, and teach, more about the contemporary media environment and the way we all participate in it. More collaboration between employers, community organisations, researchers and the media itself would assist educators to develop valid

assessments of media literacy and more targeted training and resources to build teacher confidence and competence in cultivating news media literacy knowledge and skills in the classroom.

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