



We need to teach media literacy as explicitly as we teach decoding so that our learners understand how to filter the disinformation and cite their sources. And it should be taught across all content areas.

Weaving Media Literacy into Content-Area Instruction

Jennisen Lucas, 2021–2022 AASL President | jennisenlucas@park6.org

I was at a doctor’s appointment when the nurse asked me what I did for a living. I said, proudly, “I am a school librarian.” Her response was predictable. “Oh. How nice. It must be great to read to kids all day.” Inwardly I did a face-palm and allowed myself to think up a snarky response. Outwardly I kept my composure and answered, “That is an amazing part of the job, but it is way more challenging to teach them how to identify reliable websites.” This exchange began a decade-long conversation about the importance of school librarians. Now the questions when I go in are, “Are you really still the only librarian in the school district? When are they going to fix that?”

We all have stories to share relating to media literacy. Some are cringe-worthy, like the person on Twitter who argued with me that we don’t need school librarians because “anyone can teach what you do.” Others make you wonder, like the teacher who commented, “Better you than me” when I shared a media bias chart (<www.adfontesmedia.com>) with his middle school class.

Media literacy is a challenging topic that delves into political topics and discussions that many would rather not touch with a ten-foot pole. It also comes with many assumptions about who knows what. Adults assume others are media literate because we have been consuming and deciphering media for

years. There is an assumption that children born in the Internet Era have an innate knowledge of all things digital, including media literacy, which can make us reticent to teach them media literacy. However, we need to teach media literacy as explicitly as we teach decoding so that our learners understand how to filter the disinformation and cite their sources. And it should be taught across all content areas.

Today’s media landscape is harder than when I was a kid. I vaguely remember teachers (I didn’t have school librarians) occasionally sharing *Weekly Reader* articles about how we can’t trust everything we see on TV, especially commercials: that sugary cereal really isn’t good for you and can only be part of a well-balanced breakfast if you also have everything else shown on the screen: eggs, fruit, toast, and milk. It was up to us to sort out the subtle (or not so subtle) media messages; for example, we were left on our own to contemplate how buying a certain kind of jeans will make you cool or how a toy is for boys because there are no girls in the commercial.

Moving beyond the obviously targeted commercials from my youth, media literacy is so much more vitally important now because these subliminal messages are hidden in everything we read or hear, including the news. Anchors on the nightly news used to embody the high ideals of journalistic ethics and did their

School librarians are experts in how to work media literacy skills (weft) into the pattern of the content area (warp) to help learners create their own educational weaving. Through this focus of weaving media literacy into content areas, we teach the skills our youth need to become truly media-literate, life-long learners.

best to tell us the who, what, when, where, and how of the events without indulging in speculation. Today's twenty-four-hour news cycle often relies on interpretations of "why," causing viewer confusion about the who, what, when, where, and how. "Experts" are called upon, but they give opinions cleverly disguised as facts. Different news stations share different interpretations of events, often based on viewer rating data. Fact blurs into opinion, which is blurred into fact.

And then there are memes. I love a good meme. I laugh at them and share them with friends, just like anyone. My favorites are the ones that poke fun at everyday life. However, in the past week on Facebook, I saw a meme that said, "Imagine if you will...a world where every tweet and meme must be fact-checked, but not a ballot." The picture in the background was a black-and-white photo of a serious-looking man in a suit with an air of the old-time anchors you could trust.

Ballot-checking has become a serious issue in our country, but the truth is that ballots have always been checked. The irony of having this addressed in a meme about fact-checking memes did elicit a wry smile, but it also caused me a bit of anxiety regarding how many people would read the meme as a comment on how we are asked to fact-check everything except ballots. It sends a clear message about the importance of teaching media literacy. If a teacher or school librarian uses this meme to teach fact-checking, we run the risk of sharing our own political opinions, whether in the very sharing of the meme or the explanation of it.

During the summer I presented at both the International Association of School Librarianship

Conference and the National Association for Media Literacy Education Conference on weaving media literacy into content-area instruction by using the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. When weaving a rug on a loom, the first step is to warp the loom. The warp becomes the basic start of the rug, the part that will contain the weft. The warp is wound on in sections, which I think of as the general content areas: algebra, Earth science, British literature, health, art, etc. The individual strands would represent the content-area standards. The strands are hugely important, but they each follow their own path in a continuum. We need to be able to link them together, and to do that we use the weft of information, or media, literacy.

Teaching the AASL Standards embeds the process of making sense of information and allows learners to connect all content areas so that they can think about the economics of art or the governmental influence in British literature. School librarians are experts in how to work media literacy skills (weft) into the pattern of the content area (warp) to help learners create their own educational weaving. Through this focus of weaving media literacy into content areas, we teach the skills our youth need to become truly media-literate, life-long learners.

Works Cited:

- AASL. 2018. *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. Chicago: ALA.
- Ad Fontes Media. 2021. "The Media Bias Chart." <www.adfontesmedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Media-Bias-Chart-7.0_January-2021-Licensed-Copy.pdf> (accessed Aug. 3, 2021).

Jennisen Lucas (*she/her/hers*) is the 2021–2022 AASL President. She is the district librarian for Park County School District #6 in Cody, Wyoming. She earned her MLS from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2003, and earned National Board Certification for 2006–2026. She has been chair of the Wyoming School Library Interest Group and has been a member of and chaired multiple AASL committees.