Free Online News Literacy Resources

By Sara Shiver McBride
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Lately it seems that the topic of news literacy is at the forefront of everyone’s mind when we talk about information literacy. At every level from K-12 educators through adult services librarians, we’ve been discussing our concerns about whether children and adults can distinguish editorial content from advertising, discover the authorship of articles and websites, verify claims for themselves, and distinguish between credible and false information. Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning is a 2015 study from the Stanford History Education Group where middle school, high school, and college students were given 56 news literacy tasks like identifying advertisements on a website, determining the reliability of a partisan site, and distinguishing between a news article and an opinion column. Their performance was, unsurprisingly to many teachers and librarians, poor.

Fortunately, many institutions have assembled free in-depth news literacy courses for both young people and adult learners to improve their abilities to evaluate the veracity and viewpoint of the media they consume. The Center for News Literacy of the Stony Brook University School of Journalism offers a variety of resources for educators and citizens to improve news literacy. They have partnered with the University of Hong Kong for a Coursera MOOC, Making Sense of the News. This six week course is directed at college students and adult learners.

Schooljournalism.org is administered by the Youth Journalism Initiative of the American Society of News Editors. The site features a wealth of information for student journalists as well as an extensive section on news and media literacy, including a Model News Literacy Curriculum offering lesson plans for secondary school language arts, math, science, and social studies classrooms. A Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 License allows teachers to adapt the lessons to fit the needs of their students.

Newseum’s educational outreach arm, NewseumED, offers free primary sources, standards-aligned lesson plans, and learning materials on history, news literacy, and civics. There are materials here for all levels from elementary students through adult learners.

As librarians, we have a unique opportunity to take a leadership role in teaching, promoting, and modeling news literacy skills ...
There is something about the end of the academic year that makes me think back and reflect. What worked? What didn’t? What could be integrated into next year’s sessions? Reflection can be the driving force for change in the instructional classroom. Reflection is an evolving process (Oakleaf, 2011) which can occur before, during, or following an instructional session. There are several strategies to jumpstart the reflective process. Here are just a few:

**Reflective Journaling**

Following a class, record your thoughts. As Forrest (2008) noted, “the process of writing helps us to reflect” (p. 231). Reflections can be kept digitally or handwritten. If you keep outlines of your workshops, try adding a space for reflections. Did the student’s struggle with any component of the session? Any informative questions? Was the pacing on track?

**Observe**

Observing others teach and watching students present can provide opportunities to reflect and learn. As Char Booth (2011) reported, you can learn both from effective and not so effective teachers (p. 27). Even the less effective instructors have strengths in their teaching. Build upon your reflections. When watching student presentations, look for indications of their understanding of information literacy skills. Are there areas of weakness that can be addressed in future information literacy sessions?

**Talk**

Whether informal or scheduled, conversations with peers can lead to new insights. Check out the essay by Meredith Farkas (2016). She outlined the continuum of peer learning experiences from peer observation and meetings, to peer coaching, and peer workshoppping.

**Video Reflection**

Lessons don’t always appear as they seem. The Harvard Graduate School of Education (Tamer, 2014) has posted some videos of their education students documenting their thoughts on being recorded during an instructional session. Although this approach might be intimidating for many, there can be meaningful rewards.

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**Internet Safety and our Patrons**

I have been thinking lately about information practices and the internet. In this new digital age, we are presented with learners that share a great deal of their lives online and are unaware of the privacy implications of doing this. Further, some patrons do not understand how this lack of privacy plays in to their searching habits (i.e. Google filter bubbles, ads, etc.). We often focus on helping patrons learn how to search and evaluate information but we do not always focus on the importance of information safety. I think we often think that these information literacy sessions?

The Privacy Paradox is a series that ran through the public radio podcast, Note to Self. This series focuses on educating individuals on how they can better protect their private information. This series is a great one to share with 21st century learners that will challenge them to think about their information sharing habits. You can participate in a “5 day plan to take back digital identity” or just enjoy the podcast episodes.

Who owns your data? (Hint: It’s not you) this video breaks down big data in a simple way and shares the implications of our digital footprint. This would make for a great vide to show at the beginning of a session to start a conversation about your digital footprint.

Teaching Patrons from Web Junction has collected resources from various libraries on how to teach internet privacy to your patrons. These resources would be great to use at your home library.

Participate in Choose Privacy Week that takes place May 1-7. This subset of ALA has great resources and suggestions for helping promote privacy to your patrons.

I hope that these give you a starting point to help your patrons be more aware of the importance of online privacy.
Information literacy

It’s a time for thinking about transitions

By Joe Askins
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It’s a time for thinking about transitions here at ILRT. As you may already know, our iTeach 4 workshop, scheduled for June 14, will include presentations about the ways librarians working in secondary schools and higher-ed can ease our students’ transitions from one level to the next. Here at Thomas Cooper Library, I’ll be offering a live section of our half-semester, one-credit Information Literacy course, LIBR 101, and I’ve decided to limit this section to first- and second-year students who are still in the midst of that school-to-university transition.

As I begin to design my syllabus, I keep referring back to work that has emerged from two information literacy initiatives over the past decade, Dr. Alison Head’s Project Information Literacy and Dr. Jane Secker & Dr. Emma Coonan’s A New Curriculum for Information Literacy (or ANCIL), both of which offer excellent insight into the information literacy needs of the student in the high-school-to-higher-ed transition phase.

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**Project Information Literacy**

Head’s 2013 study into the thoughts and habits of the college freshman, “Learning the Ropes: How Freshmen Conduct Course Research Once They Enter College,” confirms much of what seasoned instructional librarians already know: that freshmen often have trouble formulating efficient searches, sifting through the results of those searches, and understanding and synthesizing information from the sources they eventually choose. A thread running through all of “Learning the Ropes” is the confusion, frustration, and anxiety that many of these students experience as they begin to conduct research; words like “struggled,” “stymied,” “inadequate,” “overwhelmed,” “guarded,” and “embarrassed” pepper the report’s findings. Adjusting to the library itself can be an intimidating process – according to Head, the average college library involved in her study “had 19 times as many online library databases and 9 times as many books and journals as the average high school library.”

While Head doesn’t attempt to offer any “quick fixes” for these problems, it’s clear that librarians working with these new students must be ready to engage with the affective domain of learning. The adaptation to a new academic environ-