**Case Study #5: Information and Misinformation**

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**Group Work: Decide, "What do you tell Julia?"**

Julia, I am so glad you felt comfortable asking about this. In our current climate, this topic rings so true to so many of us in the education system. Wikipedia adds that fake news is generally meant to "mislead in order to damage an agency, entity, or person, and/or gain financially or politically, often using sensationalist, dishonest, or outright fabricated headlines to increase readership" (Fake news, 2020).

We have a few questions regarding your students' and even their families' levels of understanding about the various kinds of information available on social media.

1. Do your students have any information about how to identify misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information?
2. Have you asked what specific information the children know, or think they know and where they are getting their information from?
3. Have your students ever learned about "Fake News"?

These are important questions for you to consider, as it is essential that your students are able to distinguish between and identify these types of information when they are utilizing social media to learn about newsworthy events. Without knowledge of these kinds of information, it would be difficult for your students to identify truly honest and factual information.  This kind of critical thinking is key for all users of social media for the following reason:

"At present, Canada doesn't have any laws that prevent the dissemination of fake news. However, the federal government did establish a panel to investigate and inform Canadians about threats to the integrity of the election due to misinformation campaigns from foreign states" (CIRA, 2020).

While there is a journalistic code of ethics, posts on social media are not necessarily subject to this code, so individuals really need to know about critical consideration of information.  Not only that, but information on social media has often been referred to as a "filter bubble".  People are not being exposed to a variety of information or various viewpoints. It is essential that social media users understand "filter bubbles" as they are based on our previous searches, location, likes, etc. that are being monitored through algorithms. This can be challenging, as they don't share all sides of a story and our students often receive reinforcing content as they scroll. Wardle, et al (2017) states that "information disorder is also caused by the rise of 'filter bubbles' that feed people more of what they appear to be interested in and 'echo chambers' where individuals inhabit only the realms of the "like-minded" and their views and opinions are rarely if ever challenged."

Let me explain the various types of information:

Mis-information is information that is incorrect and is shared with others without intending any harm.  Most people who share misinformation see themselves as helping others without realizing the information they are sharing is factually incorrect. Unfortunately, this information spreads faster than factual information.

Dis-information is information that is false and is spread with the intention to do harm. This happened during the Covid 19 pandemic when Russian propaganda shared information indicating that the vaccine was harmful and ineffective.  Not only did this cause many people to avoid the vaccine creating illness and death that could have been avoided but it also caused a divide between the vaccinated and unvaccinated populations.

Now mal-information is different again. This is information that is factually correct but is spread to cause harm to others.  Looking again at the Covid 19 pandemic, this is where spreading information that originated in China may be true but spreading that information intensifies racism issues.

These types of mis, dis, and mal-information can be intentionally or unintentionally harmful, especially for people who are already marginalized by society.  "More concerning, however, are the long term implications of dis-information campaigns designed specifically to sow mistrust and confusion and to sharpen existing socio-cultural divisions using nationalistic, ethnic, racial and religious tensions" (Wardle et al., 2017, Executive Summary).

It is important to discuss with your students that fear, and playing on people's emotions is managing to increase the speed at which misinformation is spread. The 2017 report by Wardle, et al. similarly concluded that the most 'successful' of

problematic content is that which plays on people's emotions, encouraging feelings of superiority, anger, or fear. That's because these factors drive re-sharing and the amount of people who want to connect with their online communities. When most social platforms are engineered for people to publicly 'perform' through likes, comments or shares, it's easy to understand why emotional content travels so quickly and widely, even as we see an explosion in fact-checking and debunking organizations. (p.7)

Julia, there are actually six types of "Fake News" that lead to the spreading of false information.  These include: (1) Fabricated content, which is content that is 100% false. (2) Manipulated content is true information that is distorted or manipulated to deceive. (3) Imposter content is genuine sources that are impersonated. (4) Misleading content is information that is presented in a misleading way, or to frame an issue or individual in a particular manner. (5) False Context, which is content that is factually correct but the context in which it is presented is false (6) False Connection which is when headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content, and (7) Satire and Parody are false stories that may not have been generated with a intent to harm, but has the potential to fool others and are presented in a humorous way, as fact.

Perhaps you might consider teaching your students a unit on "Fake News", information, and social med=ia? We also recommend that you read this news article by CBC writer, Andrea Bellemare.

CIRA (2020) made the following recommendations to prevent the spread of misinformation:

- Canadians need the skills required to spot misinformation and fake news content. Investment in digital and media literacy for all Canadians is more important than ever. [This is where educators can have a powerful influence].

- Social media platforms must continue taking proactive steps to curb the spread of misinformation and disinformation online.

- As tactics for spreading disinformation during elections evolve, so too must the response. Elections Canada should formalize the critical election incident public protocol and monitoring with the intelligence and security communities, alongside other election stakeholders.

Also, you may find the following videos helpful as you teach your students about some of these concepts. They are great resources to share with your students.

1. https://youtu.be/VnFTsI-6--U
2. https://youtu.be/D0Cd9-eJ-No

It is clear, there is much digital literacy work to be done with the public about producing, consuming, and disseminating misinformation, and it starts in K-12 education.

**Resources:**

Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA). (2020). Canadians deserve a better Internet. https://www.cira.ca/resources/state-internet/report/canadians-deserve-a-better-internet-0

Fake news. (2020). Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fake_news#History

Wardle, C., Derakhshan, H., Burns, A., & Dias, N. (2017). Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making. Council of Europe Report DGI (2017)09. https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-researc/168076277c

CBC Kids News. (2021). *Can you trust the news? How to tell the difference between real and fake news* [Image]. Retrieved 24 March 2022, from https://youtu.be/VnFTsI-6--U.

Parole Stili. (2020). *What is fake news? Tips For Spotting Them - Fake News for Kids* [Image]. Retrieved 24 March 2022, from https://youtu.be/D0Cd9-eJ-No.