

## Integrating Media Literacy in Social Studies Teacher Education

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Social studies teacher educators must confront the new realities of democratic citizenship education in an era dominated by misinformation and fake news. Using the Teacher Education Technology Competencies (TETCs) as a guide, the authors provide a five-part action plan for situating media literacy within social studies teacher education: connecting media literacy with the purposes of social studies education, exploring the history of fake news in United States history, tracing the history of the field of journalism and journalistic ethics, analyzing contemporary examples of fake news, and developing efficacy working with tools and heuristics for detecting fake news and misinformation. Research suggests that a comprehensive multifaceted approach to media literacy can help students develop civic online reasoning, navigate political bias, and participate in online civic activities. In order for preservice teachers to adopt media literacy as part of their teaching practice, social studies teacher educators must improve their own efficacy navigating social media, news media, and other sources of information, while integrating media literacy regularly into teacher education programs.

Since the 2016 election the impact of so-called “fake news” – “intentionally fabricated news articles” (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213) – on American political life has been well documented. According to a recent study (Guess, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2016), one in four Americans visited a fake news site in the month leading up to the presidential election. The Collins Dictionary named “fake news” the “word of the year” (Flood, 2017).

Facebook and Google, under increasing public and political pressure, instituted a series of measures to help users identify and slow the number of fake news stories that are shared and disseminated via their social media networks (Lyons, 2018; Schindler, 2018). Today concerns continue about the use of “fake news” as a tactic for disrupting American elections, the free press, and open access to information. Social studies teacher educators work within this complex and increasingly fraught political context. To prepare preservice and experienced teachers to meet the new realities of the Information Age, social studies teacher educators must integrate media literacy as an essential component of social studies teacher education (Knobel & Kalman, 2016).

### **Teacher Educator Technology Competencies and Media Literacy**

The Teacher Educator Technology Competencies (TETCs; Foulger, Graziano, Schmidt-Crawford, & Slykhuis, 2017; Foulger, Graziano, Slykhuis, Schmidt-Crawford, & Trust, 2016; see also <http://site.aace.org/tetc/>) provide social studies teacher educators with guidance for modeling the ethical and socially responsible use of technology. Media literacy within social studies education is clearly needed, and the TETCs offer guidance for integrating it within contemporary teacher education reform in the social studies. Media literacy seems to be most relevant to the following TETC competencies:

2. a. Model using technology for accessing, analyzing, creating, and evaluating information.
  
9. a. Model the legal, ethical, and socially-responsible use of technology for teaching and learning.
  
10. b. Engage in continuous professional development and networking activities promoting technology knowledge and skills

(See also <http://site.aace.org/tetc/>).

Being knowledgeable about the contemporary media or “transmedia” landscape (the range of social media and web-based information) requires a unique set of skills (Middaugh, 2018). Today, media literacy includes navigating, judging, and sharing information from a wide variety of sources of information (Common Sense Media, 2017) to evaluate bias and trustworthiness (Middaugh, 2018).

For preservice teachers to adopt media literacy as part of their teaching practice, social studies teacher educators must improve their own efficacy navigating social media, news media, and other sources of information, while integrating media literacy regularly into teacher education programs. Based on our analysis of the relevant research literature, we offer a five-part action plan for integrating media literacy into social studies teacher education.

### **The Need for Media Literacy in Social Studies Teacher Education**

Due to concerns about the increasing proliferation of fake news and misinformation, as well as growing awareness of a lack of media literacy among adults and adolescents, there has been a renewed focus on integrating media literacy (Hobbs, 2010; National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2013a), civic

media literacy (Middaugh, 2018; Mihailidis, 2018), news media literacy (Schmeichel et al., 2018), critical media literacy (Joanou, 2017; Kellner & Share, 2005), and civic online reasoning (Breakstone, McGrew, Smith, Ortega, & Wineburg, 2018) into social studies education.

Proponents of each of these approaches focus on helping students evaluate the credibility of online information in order to “use media with civic intentionality and attention to democratic principles” (Middaugh, 2018, p. 35). This literacy includes engaging in critical analysis of media content and examining latent discourse and bias communicated through multimodal texts (Hobbs, 2010, 2011; Weninger, Hu, & Choo, 2017).

Social studies teachers who integrate media literacy into practice encourage critical thinking, including the consideration of the sociocultural contexts in which media is produced (Flores-Koulish, 2006; Schwarz, 2001). By teaching students essential media literacy skills, social studies teachers prepare students to navigate the demands of contemporary civic life. According to the NCSS position statement, media literacy is integrated into social studies education as a body of “essential skills for active citizenship in our democracy” (Hodgin & Kahne, 2016, p. 183). Despite continued calls for teachers to integrate media literacy into practice, the current research literature in the field provides little to indicate that social studies teacher education programs adequately prepare preservice or experienced teachers to address the challenges posed by fake news and misinformation today.

## **Research on Media Literacy and Teacher Education**

Recent research suggests that integrating carefully designed educational activities focused on media literacy can have positive impacts on preservice teachers (Robertson & Hughes, 2011; Schmeichel et al., 2018; Weninger et al., 2017). While these studies suggest potential benefits of incorporating media literacy into teacher education, others highlight limitations to teaching media literacy (Mason, Krutka, & Stoddard, 2018; Schmeichel et al., 2018; Stoddard, 2014). These obstacles are compounded by other issues found in the teacher education literature, in general, including poor or weak content knowledge, perceived lack of time, limits from the standardized curriculum, unsupportive colleagues or mentors, and low self-efficacy.

***Benefits of integrating media literacy into teacher education.*** Efforts in teaching media literacy to preservice teachers have revealed some success in positively impacting teaching practice when instruction includes prolonged and sustained approaches to teaching media literacy across the teacher education program and thoughtful attention to a range of concepts related to media literacy (Felini, 2014; Meehan, Ray, Walker, Wells, & Schwarz, 2015; Nagel, 2018; Schmeichel et al., 2018; Weninger et al., 2017).

For example, Schmeichel et al. (2018) presented findings from a design-based study in which they integrated media literacy tasks from the Center for News Literacy across multiple courses and experiences in their social studies teacher education program. The tasks given to preservice teachers included the consideration “of media credibility in relation to the creation of media texts, truth, fairness and bias in media and ethics in journalism,” and “the intersection of news media literacy and social studies” (p. 90). They found that teacher candidates

recognized “the value of news media literacy to social studies education and their students’ capacity to function as democratic citizens” (p. 96).

Teacher educators have also focused on measuring preservice teachers’ media literacy competencies and developing strategies to encourage preservice teachers to become more critical about social media and media-dominated society. Collectively, this research points to emerging understandings about best practices for integrating media literacy into teacher education (e.g., Felini, 2014; Meehan et al., 2015; Nagel, 2018). It also disrupts common assumptions about a lack of understanding on the part of teachers about youth and media culture (Burn, Buckingham, Parry, & Powell, 2010).

For example, Weninger et al. (2017) developed a survey instrument for evaluating the media literacy of preservice teachers. They found that teachers used social media as a main source of information and generally acknowledge the importance of helping students develop media literacy to evaluate information. Similarly, Simons, Meeus, and T’Sas (2017) found teachers and student teachers self-reported a high level of efficacy using and assessing the credibility of a variety of media, as well as regarding perceptions about their ability to help learners use media to evaluate information.

The research base also includes studies focused on engaging teachers in critical media literacy. Joanou’s (2017) action research study with practicing K-12 teachers enrolled in a graduate education course suggested that in a project incorporating media literacy the teachers were better able to understand theoretically dense concepts such as unconscious racism. Similarly, Nagle (2018) explored strategies for using Twitter as a pedagogical tool in teacher education courses to develop “critical social media literacy practices” (p. 86), particularly related to identifying misogyny and racial violence in contemporary culture.

Others, including Meehan et al. (2015), found that media literacy can be integrated across a preservice teacher education program to focus on critical multicultural issues and to prepare teachers for the diverse school settings in which they will work. Across the research base on media literacy and teacher education is evidence that an explicit focus on media literacy education can model strategies for preservice teachers to use in their own classrooms.

***Challenges of media literacy in teacher education.*** While preservice teachers express enthusiasm about integrating media literacy into instruction, they find it difficult to integrate media literacy into practice (Robertson & Hughes, 2011; Schmeichel et al., 2018; Weninger et al., 2017). For example, despite sustained and collaborative instructional planning in their teacher education program, Schmeichel et al. (2018) reported that student teachers expressed a marked lack of confidence in their ability to teach media literacy.

Teacher candidates also point to challenges aligning news media tasks with course content, especially given the absence of media literacy within the standardized curriculum (Stoddard, 2014) or school curriculum (Mason et al., 2018). At the same time, it appears that preservice teachers often lack background knowledge with media literacy, especially if it was not part of their own secondary education (Meehan et al., 2015).

In addition to teacher agency and efficacy, relevant research points to external factors that might limit media literacy education. For example, student teachers may encounter uncooperative mentor teachers or uneven access to technology in schools during their student teaching internships (Robertson & Hughes, 2011).

Felini (2014) identified five criteria on which to evaluate the quality of media literacy activities – teaching methods, actors, organization, underlying media literacy education theories, and originality (with 35 indicators across the criteria, see p. 39). Within each criterion were factors often beyond the control of the teacher that limited the success of media literacy activities, including parental involvement, [lack of] participation of media professionals, and access to technology. Zhang, Zhu, & Sang (2014) also identified the significance of professional development and leadership support as factors mitigating teachers' "stages of concern" regarding the integration of media literacy.

Collectively, these studies point to an array of factors that might hinder teachers from integrating media literacy that are often beyond the control of individual teachers. Weninger et al. (2017) highlighted "the need for careful analyses of the complex interplay of factors, many beyond teachers' immediate control, that ultimately shape what happens in classrooms" (p. 430) and recommended that "investigations of teachers' role in media literacy education be couched within a critical examination of institutional culture and broader policy priorities" (p. 438).

In many ways the challenges of integrating media literacy for preservice teachers become further complicated by the issues they face in becoming teachers – learning to plan lessons, understanding content, developing technological pedagogical content knowledge, and navigating the complex sociocultural contexts of schools. In addition, perceptions about the controversial nature of contemporary media topics makes integrating media literacy into practice even more challenging for novice teachers (e.g., Damico, Baildon, & Panos, 2018; Robertson & Hughes, 2011). According to Schmeichel et al. (2018), social studies teachers face a particularly difficult situation:

Social studies education ought to teach evidence and argumentation. However, when what circulates from elected officials defies evidentiary and argumentative norms, many teachers are right to worry that pointing out falsehoods exposes them to the possibility of being labeled ideologically partial to a particular partisan position. Such is the reality of teaching social studies in current times. (p. 95)

For novice teachers, a fear of being ideologically partial may persuade them to put media literacy on the shelf in favor of safer topics. These concerns must be raised in teacher education programs so that teacher candidates can develop strategies for confronting them in practice.

### **The Place of Media Literacy in Social Studies Teacher Education**

The body of contemporary research suggests that social studies teacher educators face a variety of challenges in helping preservice and experienced teachers overcome classroom limitations to integrating media literacy into practice. Nonetheless media literacy must be a central component of preservice social studies teacher education (Stoddard, 2014). Schmeichel et al. (2018) maintained that the integration of media literacy is "one of the most critical issues for social

studies educators in the current era” (p. 99), especially given the current context of fake news and misinformation.

New media continues to challenge our traditional assumptions about the creation and dissemination of information in democratic society (Mihailidis, 2018; Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). Social studies teachers must understand the implications of the new media landscape on concepts central to social studies education.

While current research emphasizes the importance of media literacy in teacher education programs (Knobel & Kalman, 2016), additional attention must be given to the media literacy competencies of teacher educators themselves. Teacher educators serve as models for their students regarding media literacy (Schwarz, 2001) yet are prone to the same pitfalls of social media and misinformation as their students.

For example, whereas previous work emphasized the need for integrating Web 2.0 technologies to transform schooling, educators now must be more cautious. Social media networks such as Twitter can provide a space for “participatory online communities of practice” (Nagle, 2018, p. 87), yet also may expose students to cyber bullying, misogyny, racism, and misinformation.

### **Action Plan: Integrating Media Literacy into Social Studies Education**

Following is an outline of an action plan for integrating media literacy in social studies teacher education. Referring to the TETCs, the plan is based on our analysis of the current literature regarding media literacy. Specifically, social studies teacher educators can integrate media literacy through five interrelated steps:

1. Connect media literacy with the purposes of social studies education (TETC 2.a).
2. Explore the history of fake news in United States history (TETC 2.a).
3. Trace the history of the field of journalism and journalistic ethics (TETC 2.a, 9.a).
4. Analyze contemporary examples of fake news (TETC 2.a, 9.).
5. Develop efficacy working with tools and heuristics for detecting fake news and misinformation (TETCs 2.a, 9.a).

Although the steps of our action plan are described independently, they overlap and work in concert. Teacher educators who integrate this plan must also “engage in continuous professional development and networking activities promoting technology knowledge and skills” (TETC 10.b) in order to remain abreast of the changing nature of contemporary media and technology.

### **Media Literacy and the Purposes of Social Studies Education**

Media literacy and civic engagement are essential skills for democratic citizens. “Democracies rely on informed citizens,” who in turn, rely on various forms of media to gather knowledge and make reasoned decisions (Mason et al., 2018, p. 1). Maintenance of a healthy democracy requires young people to be civically engaged (Middaugh, 2018), and the need for media literacy is perhaps even more critical for the health of democracy in the current sociopolitical climate. Not only

has social and political polarization increased (see Bishop, 2009), but trust in formerly respected sources of information, including from academic and scientific sources, has declined (Damico et al., 2018).

Technology seems actually to narrow individuals' perspectives and closes them to a variety of viewpoints (e.g., "the filter bubble"), which may contribute to increasing political partisanship (Mason, 2015; Stoddard, 2014). Simultaneously, evidence reveals an increasing industrialization and distribution of misinformation online by special interest groups (Hochschild & Einstein, 2015; Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz, & Cook, 2012). Most democratic theorists agree that access to credible information is an important aspect of democratic deliberation and that "democracy works better when participants care about the accuracy of truth claims" (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017, p 3).

Since democratic education frames the purposes of social studies education, social studies teachers and teacher educators must teach media literacy skills. According to Hobbs (2010), comprehensive and systematic media literacy education provides "life skills that are necessary for full participation in our media-saturated, information-rich society" (p. vii). A comprehensive media literacy education will support students as they develop online reasoning, navigate political bias, and, perhaps engage in participatory online politics.

Recent research about civic online reasoning and political bias suggests social studies teachers can provide students with the requisite skills to navigate the contemporary information landscape. According to Kahne, Middaugh, Lee, and Feezell (2011), "it seems quite possible that when youth are given structured opportunities to develop online skills and enact desired practices (like finding multiple perspectives on an issue), they may become more likely to do these things on their own" (p. 497). Notably, students are increasingly engaged in participatory politics online, which social studies teachers may be able to leverage for democratic education.

**Supporting civic online reasoning.** Students are ill-equipped to navigate the credibility of online sources or to engage in civic online reasoning (Breakstone et al., 2018; McGrew, Breakstone, Ortega, Smith, & Wineburg, 2018; Wineburg, McGrew, Breakstone, & Ortega, 2016). According to Kahne and Middaugh (2012), "47% of teachers reported having observed arguments within lessons or schoolwork that contained inaccurate Internet-based content they regard as deliberately packaged by the producers to be misleading or deceitful" (p. 55).

The most striking examples include students citing evidence posted by Holocaust deniers in research reports (Bartlett & Miller, 2011). According to the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG; Breakstone et al., 2018) students have difficulty identifying inaccurate information and bias in sources they find online. They found that students tend to rely on "surface features" of websites to judge the authenticity of the site's content and rely on the mere presence of evidence on a site (graphs, photographs, videos, testimonials, etc.) as markers for trustworthiness. For example, "Sixty percent of high school students accepted the video without raising questions about its source. For them, seeing was believing: The 'evidence' was so compelling that students could see nothing else" (Breakstone et al., 2018, p. 220).

**Student political bias.** An inability to engage in civic online reasoning is exacerbated by student political bias. Political scientists and civic educators have long pointed to important differences between "directional motivation" and

“accuracy motivation” (Druckman, 2012; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; Kunda, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006) in evaluating for bias and credibility. Whereas directional motivation refers to “the desire to justify conclusions that align with prior beliefs” (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017, p. 6), accuracy motivation leads students to “expend more cognitive effort on issue-related reasoning, attend to relevant information more carefully, and process it more deeply, often using more complex rules” (Kunda, 1990, p. 481).

According to Lodge and Taber (2005), directional motivation can lead individuals to seek out information that aligns with their views, referred to as “confirmation bias,” and to dismiss arguments that conflict with prior beliefs (“disconfirmation bias”). For example, Kahne and Bowyer’s (2017) analysis of survey results revealed,

Even when presented with a grossly inaccurate statement, a clear majority of youth (58%) in the nationally representative Youth Participatory Politics Survey (YPP) survey agreed that the statement was accurate when those claims were used to support perspectives that aligned with their ideological perspective. (p. 26).

Research has demonstrated that directional motivation is difficult to overcome, since most political topics elicit strong positive or negative emotional responses, or “hot cognition” (Lodge & Taber, 2005). Apparently, prior political knowledge does little to mitigate against directional motivation (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). However, systematic media literacy education can help promote accuracy motivation among students and, perhaps, lead to “critical loyalty” – the ability to adopt a critical stance towards political content, even when it aligns with partisan ideas (Lavine, Johnston, & Steenbergen, 2012).

The systematic and intentional integration of media literacy into social studies education provides promise for engaging students in civic online reasoning, healthy political identity development, and democratic citizenship education, which are central to the social studies curriculum. For example, according to Kahne et al. (2011), “Those [students] who reported taking part in digital media literacy activities in school more frequently reported exposure to diverse perspectives” (p. 504).

Drawing upon analysis of the YPP Survey, administered to a nationally representative sample of youth ages 15 to 27 between 2011 and 2015, Kahne & Bowyer (2017) explored the impact of prior beliefs, media literacy education, and political knowledge on judgments of accuracy and truth. Data suggested a positive relationship between media literacy education and students’ judgments of credibility and accuracy of political content, compared to only having prior background knowledge. In a related study, youth who received civic media literacy learning opportunities were 26% more likely to correctly identify an evidence-based post as “accurate” than they were to judge an inaccurate post as accurate, “even when both posts aligned with their perspective on an issue” (Hodgin & Kahne, 2018, p. 209).

**Youth participatory politics.** Within the contemporary context of new media, educators are also witnessing the emergence of online youth participatory politics (Kahne & Middaugh, 2012). According to the Pew Research Center, young people are avid social media users and early adopters of new technology, and they tend to

gain most of their information about political and social issues from social media (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Through their use of social media, youth have been able to create new spaces for political and civic engagement, providing them with voice and agency outside traditional power structures. According to Kahne and Middaugh (2012), online participatory politics appears to "supplement rather than supplant traditional [political] activity" (p. 54). For example, "those who engaged in at least one act of participatory politics were actually twice as likely to report voting as those who did not" (p. 54).

Further research suggests that participation in both political and nonpolitical activity online provides students with exposure to diverse perspectives (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). The research seems to point to the potential for educators to leverage student social media use at a time when youth are primed developmentally to form their political identities (Kahne et al., 2011).

To help teacher candidates leverage trends related to youth participatory politics, social studies teacher educators can model strategies for integrating media literacy across the social studies curriculum. These strategies include identifying areas of connection with the standardized curriculum, while also focusing on lesson planning that integrates the concepts and skills associated with media literacy. As preservice teachers learn about the history and purposes of the field of social studies education, they should be encouraged to connect media literacy back to these purposes, especially the democratic and civic aims of the social studies and the centrality of reflective inquiry in our field (Parker, 2003).

In the next section we describe specific examples for social studies teachers to make curricular connections appropriate for integrating media literacy into the social studies. We begin by describing the long history of fake news in the United States. Related to this topic is the history of news journalism, including ethical guidelines for news reporters. Finally, we suggest strategies for students to critically analyze contemporary examples of fake news, while building a repertoire of skills for navigating misinformation online using heuristics and other tools. These examples are meant to provide teacher educators with tangible approaches to integrating media literacy into social studies teacher education.

### **Explore the History of Fake News**

Fake news is not a new phenomenon. Historical examples can be found showing evidence of fake news and misinformation along the continuum between outright hoaxes and deliberately misleading distortions (Manfra, 2019). Across these examples, media should be placed within its proper historical context to understand the sociocultural and political significance, as well as to avoid "presentism" in the historical investigation (Hunt, 2002). Evaluating historic examples of fake news and news media, in general, provide evidence of the complex interplay between media and popular opinion, bringing up questions related to the extent to which media drives public opinion or reflects public opinion.

Hoaxes that appeared in newspapers from the past provide contemporary students with opportunities to explore media as a cultural construction. For example, the "Great Moon Hoax" story appeared in the *New York Sun* (1835) claiming that life

had been discovered on the moon (Smithsonian Libraries, 2015). Later, during the Civil War, President Lincoln had to contend with the “Gold Hoax” (1864), in which a fake report claiming that the president was planning to expand the draft to an additional 400,000 troops appeared in New York newspapers (Blondheim, 2002). While the perpetrator had intended to manipulate the gold market by creating panic, the event caused a crisis for the Lincoln administration that was already dealing with a protracted war and draft riots. By applying discourse analysis to the news articles surrounding the moon hoax and the gold hoax, teachers and students can develop an appreciation for the concerns of the time and how media reflected and shaped those concerns.

Other examples of 19th and early 20th century newspaper accounts point to the role of news journalism in shaping public opinion about political events. While not outright hoaxes or misinformation, these accounts must be read with an eye toward identifying latent bias, especially regarding what is emphasized or omitted in the accounts.

For example, the Boston Massacre was widely documented in colonial newspapers as an example of the unjust nature of British rule. Students must dig deeply into the archive to find contradictory evidence about the cause of the violence.

Later in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Frank Leslie’s *Illustrated Newspaper* grew its readership by covering John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry. He found that activism and sensationalism sold newspapers.

Abraham Lincoln is known by biographers as “the first president to use photography actively to present a favorable public image of his administration” (Borchard & Bulla, 2015, p. xii). Lincoln’s secretary, John Hay, sent material to several newspapers during the time, and some believed that Lincoln may have been involved in the political correspondence. After the *Emancipation Proclamation* (1862), Lincoln and his administration mounted a direct campaign to positively impact public opinion in the face of widespread criticism.

Much later during McKinley’s administration “yellow journalism” was blamed for inflaming tensions leading up to the Spanish-American War (1898), referred to as the first media war. Rather than lead students to cynicism about news journalism, these examples and others can provide a rich study of the important history of American newspapers.

As newspapers became increasingly popular and ubiquitous at the end of the 19th century, news publishers ushered in a new information age (Kaplan, 2002). By studying the discourse of news media across time, students can begin to grapple with questions related to the relationship between media and public opinion, as well as come to understand media as a cultural construction, reflecting concerns of the time in which it is produced.

### **Understand the Field of News Journalism**

Despite its history, the term fake news did not achieve mainstream usage in the United States until the 2016 presidential campaign. Since the election, fake news has seemed to shape the social and political fabric of the country.

In addition to referring to deliberately misleading or false accounts, the term fake news has been used to discredit mainstream news sources, especially when it seems to be politically expedient. To adequately grasp the significance of this tactic, teachers and students need to study the evolving history of news journalism and understand that contemporary journalists operate according to ethics rules and procedures developed by their field over time (Kaplan, 2002; Lang & Lang, 2002).

A variety of resources can be integrated into methods courses to teach students about contemporary journalist ethics. For example, *Facing History and Ourselves* (<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/facing-ferguson-news-literacy-digital-age>) provides resources on the topic of how journalists minimize bias as part of their News Literacy Project. Here students examine contemporary events from the perspective of news journalists, as well as evaluate the credibility and bias of accounts. *The New York Times* (2018) makes available its *Handbook of Values and Practices for the News and Editorial Departments* on its website.

As students learn about the professional code of ethics for journalists, they may begin to develop a better understanding of the way news stories are (or should be) developed. They can then compare the news articles subject to editorial intervention to those that are produced through other (often web-based) outlets. By merging this study with a historical study of newspapers, preservice teachers will develop the requisite content knowledge to engage their future K-12 students in a critical study of news media.

### **Analyze Contemporary Examples of Fake News**

While historic examples exist, the rise of fake news and misinformation in the contemporary media landscape is unprecedented. Today, media users have access to information through portable devices and ever-increasing channels of information. Whereas previous generations may have relied on FCC-regulated news networks or a select group of newspaper publishers for information, with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies, anyone can produce and share the news.

Because producers of fake news are becoming increasingly sophisticated, traditional strategies that citizens once relied on to evaluate credible sources of information are often no longer reliable (National Public Radio, 2015). In terms of helping preservice teachers confront contemporary examples of fake news, teacher educators can take a two-pronged approach: engaging preservice teachers in exploring the unique features of information/media today and analyzing relevant examples.

***The contemporary information age.*** Increasingly, a generational divide exists in the consumption and use of contemporary media. According to a recent survey conducted by Pew, “95% of teens have access to a smartphone, and 45% say they are online ‘almost constantly’” (Anderson & Jiang, 2018, tagline).

The most popular media platforms among teens are YouTube (85%), Instagram (72%), Snapchat (69%), Facebook (51%), and Twitter (32%). These findings are significant, since these platforms rely on participatory culture and user-generated content (Arthurs, Drakopoulou, & Gandini, 2018). The positive benefits of this participatory, user-involved media culture include the rise of “citizen journalism”

(Thorsen, 2014) and documenting humanitarian disasters and political uprisings, for example, the so-called Arab Spring (Tufekci, 2017).

At the same time, across contemporary social media, content is “presented from an ‘insider’ perspective and circulated globally without editorial intervention” (Arthurs et al., 2018, p. 5). This approach has led to increasing concerns about the extent to which these platforms provide a forum for extremist hate speech and the creation of “filter bubbles,” effectively restricting the range and scope of information users access. Google, the parent company of YouTube, for example, has thus begun to focus on developing strategies for removing “extremist” content (Gibbs, 2017) and to invest in adding media literacy resources, including links to news articles and third-party sources (Castillo, 2018).

In addition to growing concern about the relative quality of web-based information, current research has highlighted a notable lack of online civic reasoning among teens (e.g., Cohen, Kahne, Bowyer, Middaugh, & Rogowski, 2012; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). According to researchers at the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) adolescents and young adults are unable to locate and confront partisanship, bias, and flat-out lies in online content (Wineburg et al., 2016). The authors warned that this inability harms civic knowledge and participation, noting their worry that “democracy is threatened by the ease at which disinformation about civic issues is allowed to spread and flourish” (p. 5).

**Identifying relevant examples of fake news.** As awareness has grown about the industrialization of fake news, as well as concern about the role of fake news in shaping contemporary politics, news organizations and other content providers have created a wide range of resources for teachers and students to assist them in identifying and analyzing contemporary fake news. Teacher educators can integrate the resources of content providers including the News Literacy Project (<https://newslit.org>) and the Newseum’s ESCAPE Junk News (<https://newseumed.org/tools/lesson-plan/escape-junk-news>).

They can also use lesson plans and articles from news outlets such as the *New York Times* (Maheshwari, 2016; Schulten & Brown, 2017; Shane, 2017), the Public Broadcasting Service (Pasquantonio, 2017), and *Business Insider* (Bertrand, 2017; Roberts, 2016) which detail examples of rumors, hoaxes, and misinformation proliferating online before, during, and after the 2016 presidential election.

Researchers recommend that the study of fake news, as well as media literacy in general, be integrated as part of a larger study of civic and democratic issues. Kahne and Bowyer (2017) argued, “In short, the general concern for preparing youth to judge the accuracy of truth claims, like the broader concern for the democratic purposes of schooling, should not be confined to a single priority such as media literacy” (p. 28).

Suggestions include connecting media literacy with discussion strategies, including discussions of controversial public issues (Hess & McAvoy, 2015), structured academic controversies, and dialogue about social issues (Kuhn & Crowell, 2011). Hodgin and Kahne (2018) provided a list of classroom examples for helping students “navigate misinformation in the information age” that includes think alouds, formal research projects, and ongoing student reflection (see Table 1, p. 211).

Teachers can use the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework* (NCSS, 2013b) as an instructional framework for teaching about fake news and media literacy. Central to the *C3 Framework* is the Inquiry Design Model, in which students answer “compelling questions” through carefully scaffolded learning experiences, framed around “supporting questions” and “featured sources.” Each supporting question results in a formative performance task. At the end of the inquiry students complete a summative performance task and “take informed action.”

Questions relevant to media literacy, such as evaluating truth claims, examining multiple perspectives, and adopting a critical stance can inspire compelling questions. Students can evaluate news media as part of the performance tasks. An important component of C3 inquiries is providing students with the necessary scaffolding to accurately evaluate sources and develop arguments. Analysis tools and heuristics relevant to teaching about media literacy can be integrated seamlessly into C3 inquiries.

### **Develop Efficacy with Tools and Heuristics**

Beyond being aware of the changing information and media landscape, including the proliferation of fake news, preservice social studies teachers must be able to help their students develop the skills necessary to identify fake news across a variety of information sources (McGrew et al., 2017). As a starting point, social studies preservice teachers can learn to facilitate student analysis of online media content by integrating heuristics into instruction (Johnson & Ewbank, 2018). For example, the Newseum’s ESCAPE acronym refers to a six-part process of evaluating information:

- Evidence - “Do the facts hold up?”
- Source - “Who made this and can I trust them?”
- Context - “What’s the big picture?”
- Audience - “Who is the intended audience?”
- Purpose - “Why was this made?”
- Execution - “How is this information presented?”

Similarly, the National Association for Media Literacy (2007) outlined “Key Questions to Ask When Analyzing Media Messages.” Teaching students to pose critical questions about sources leads them to evaluate biases, claims, and evidence. Teachers help make visible the metacognitive processes that result in “the productive analysis of online information” (Hodgin & Kahne, 2018, p. 210).

Heuristics such as ESCAPE provide “hard scaffolds” (Saye & Brush, 2002, 2007) that help to mitigate the cognitive load placed on students to read and analyze complex multimodal texts. Teachers engage students in “cognitive apprenticeship” (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989) – modeling authentic problem solving through coaching and scaffolding.

According to Saye (2017), “At least three types of scaffolding may support novices in thinking more expertly about problems under investigation,” including conceptual, procedural/strategic, and metacognitive (p. 341). The heuristics provided by groups such as the Newseum and the News Literacy Project combine all three types of scaffolding by providing guidance regarding larger conceptual frameworks (e.g., how news media is produced and consumed), procedural (e.g.,

steps for evaluating news media), and metacognitive (e.g., ways to probe for connections with what is already known about the topic).

The *C3 Framework* (NCSS, 2013b) provides teachers and their students with hard scaffolds for integrating media literacy into the classroom:

Through the decoding of content-rich media texts in the social studies classroom, students learn and practice the habits of asking key questions, applying historical analysis, identifying perspectives, assessing credibility, providing text based evidence, drawing conclusions, and reflecting on their own process of reasoning – key abilities emphasized in the four dimensions of C3. (Sperry & Baker, 2016, p. 183)

Using the Inquiry Design Model, teachers can guide students through carefully constructed learning activities that contribute to a deeper understanding of the topic under study. Media literacy could be the topic of the inquiry, and media literacy skills could be taught as part of a C3 inquiry. For example, teachers should provide scaffolding for students to critically analyze the “featured sources” that frame the key content of an inquiry.

In addition to preplanned “hard scaffolds,” Saye and Brush (2002) referred to “soft scaffolds” that unfold over the course of an instructional unit. These might include open-ended discussion, peer-to-peer sharing, and other dynamic or teachable moments that occur in the classroom. For students, critically discussing news media with peers as well as examining how their beliefs, existing knowledge, and values affect their interpretation of new information are all key components of both media literacy education and democratic education (Manfra & Holmes, 2018; Mihailidis, 2018).

The aim is eventually to make the thought processes and concepts associated with media literacy so automatic that the scaffolds can be removed. According to Hodgin and Kahne (2018), “ongoing and varied practice can help students to integrate skills and strategies as well as these ways of thinking into their habits and to apply these approaches across settings and contexts” (p. 211). Teacher educators can model the use of hard and soft scaffolds in methods courses, as well as explicitly instruct preservice teachers about the relevant cognitive research that inform teaching practices (e.g., Brown et al., 1989; National Research Council, 2000) and media literacy education.

### **Scholarly Significance: Media Literacy in Social Studies Education**

By integrating the five-part action plan outlined here, social studies teacher educators can empower preservice teachers to develop their own media literacy as well that of their students. Although media literacy connects with the purposes and content of social studies education, it has not been intentionally integrated into social studies teacher education. The action plan outlined here provides a first step toward developing a coherent approach to integrating media literacy into social studies teacher education. It includes integrating media literacy as essential content in the social studies curriculum, analyzing historic and contemporary examples of fake news, advancing knowledge about journalist ethics, and providing step-by-step strategies for analyzing transmedia.

By explicitly connecting media literacy with the TETCs, especially those focused on accessing and evaluating information (2.a.) and modeling the ethical and socially responsible use of technology (9.a), we address continued concerns about a lack of preparation among teachers and students to confront the contemporary media landscape. As technology becomes increasingly ubiquitous in schools and in the daily lives of youth, media literacy skills are essential in helping students navigate the veracity of information that they access, create, and share.

Every indication is that fake news and misinformation will continue to challenge American political systems. Since the aim of the social studies is to educate civically competent democratic citizens, social studies teacher educators must lead the next generation of teachers and students in developing media literacy.

Future research in this area should investigate the media literacy of social studies teacher educators as well as that of novice and experienced social studies teachers. By understanding the range of experiences of social studies teachers, we can fine-tune the action plan to meet their needs.

A good starting point may be to further refine the survey instruments that have been developed to assess teacher media literacy (e.g., Felini, 2014; Weninger et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). At the same time, research needs to continue identifying strategies for teaching media literacy that work. This work may go beyond raising awareness about fake news and developing heuristics for analyzing contemporary media toward developing a more sophisticated understanding of media as a cultural construction – both shaped by and shaping public opinion.

In addition, teacher educators and educational researchers will need to critically explore structural and contextual factors that limit the work of teachers. Across the topics of concern, this research will challenge us to critically consider our positions as consumers and producers of information in the Web 2.0 age.

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