

Case Study: Lucas Maxwell, Librarian, Glenthorne High School, London

A Library Lesson aimed at combating fake news for KS3

Lucas Maxwell is the librarian at Glenthorne High School, a mixed comprehensive with 1600 pupils aged 11 – 18 years. He decided to introduce a fake news library lesson in the shadow of disinformation that permeates the current media landscape; a recent survey in the United States found that 96% of high school students surveyed failed to identify why web sites selected for them should have their credibility questioned while over half of them believed a Facebook video that claimed to show voting laws being broken when in fact it was a video taken in another country (source below).

Lucas decided to create a lesson that educated students on what fake news is, who creates it and why, the impact it has on us as a society and to provide them with tools to combat it. He wanted to improve their digital literacy and make them responsible online citizens. This lesson augments another lesson he created to combat fake news surrounding the refugee crisis in the UK and to promote the novel *The Boy at the Back of the Class* by Onjali Q. Rauf. Lucas used the free aspects of a program called Nearpod; although this program was not required to deliver the lesson, he enjoyed using it as it allowed him to keep everyone moving at the same pace. He was unsure how the lesson would be received by all of the students, whether it would be too hard for some and too easy for others. He has since delivered it to close to three hundred students and is very happy with how the students have reacted to it.

Lucas' biggest hurdle was time. Originally the lesson lasted 55 minutes; however, once discussions started it tended to go over this so he had to cut some aspects of it. His main goals with this lesson were to give students the tools to discriminate between real and fake news, realise that they should verify sources before they share images or news stories, and understand the impact that fake news can have.

Students began the lesson by being asked what fake news was and who created it.

Lucas always received a variety of answers but the majority said "*hackers*", "*big companies*" or "*politicians*." As for the reasons why they created fake news, without fail the top answers were "*money*", "*to create drama*" and "*for attention*." He then showed students different reasons that he had gathered from other websites, including spreading fear, to shame or embarrass another person, or to promote a specific idea. The class then moved on to another question: "*Why do we share fake news?*" Students always said "*because it is funny*" or "*because I thought it was real*." Discussion about the other reasons why people share these types of stories included the fact that we trust online celebrities and believe what they say sometimes, and that fake news plays on our emotions, namely fear or surprise. When Lucas asked the students in the lesson what they thought the impact of fake news was, several said that they had lost trust in the news, or that they felt scared. These were honest emotions at a time when students are inundated with fake stories about the Third World War and other calamities.

The lesson then focused on fake news stories that gathered attention and were pulled by governing bodies that look at misleading stories. The Daily Express has had to retract several news stories based around immigration to the UK. Lucas asked students why they thought these stories were published when people knew they were false. Students often responded with "*to make people angry*" and "*to sell papers*" which were the two reasons he was looking for. At the end of the lesson a game of Real or Fake was played where he showed students various images and they had to vote on which ones were real and which ones were fake.

This lesson, hopefully, eased some of the fears about fake news and gave students confidence to filter the barrage of information that is dumped upon them on a daily basis.

Working with the ICT lead in Senior Leadership, Lucas identified a need for students to be fluent in digital literacy three years ago. He presented his findings during a whole staff CPD session in which he highlighted several ways

fake news had infiltrated the mainstream media and the urgency in which students needed to be prepared. Since then the school has had a focus on responsible researching and digital literacy. Lucas has also presented to Subject and Middle Leaders on this topic, worked with various subjects such as Dance, Music, History, English and Drama to ensure all students in the school are aware of the risks of fake news. He has also used the school's Virtual Learning Environment to ensure digital literacy tools are front and centre when they access their online homework page.

References

- <https://news.stanford.edu/2019/11/18/high-school-students-unequipped-spot-fake-news/>
- www.summer.harvard.edu/inside-summer/4-tips-spotting-fake-news-story
- www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/social-media-hosted-lot-fake-health-news-year-here-s-n1107466
- <https://30secondes.org/en/>

As part of this lesson Lucas has created an exit ticket for students in Years 7 & 8 asking them what they learned from the lesson; below are some of their answers:

"I have learned that fake news is something that can have an impact on your daily life and can change your emotional state. Before you visit a site make sure that you check for any exaggerations or spelling mistakes."

"I have learned that you should always do your research and check other reliable sites to see if they have also written about the article. If they haven't, and nobody else has, it normally means that it was made up."

"Always be on the lookout for facts that may not be true when reading your daily newspaper. Unreliable news sources are always on the lookout for your attention to get revenue and will do anything to do so, so don't give that to them."

"Make sure to check where the information has come from, if it is written very dramatically it has obviously been made to attract attention to get money. If the information is from someone know to make fake news then avoid it."

Feedback from teachers has been very positive, they have all reinforced how much students need this type of lesson in order to be well informed and responsible digital citizens.

This lesson is one of an ongoing series of lessons that Lucas runs on digital literacy, responsible researching skills and fake news, teaching students how to stay safe online. The researching aspect of the lesson has been incorporated into the students' VLE and he has adapted it for Year 6 classes in the area; they will be visiting the school in the coming months to take part.

Advice

- Allow for 55 minutes for this lesson. Check the timing of the lesson to ensure you don't run over or have a large amount of time ready.
- Be flexible with the lesson, jump around if need be, allow the students to discuss the impact of fake news in detail.
- Ensure the tech is working before the class takes part.