

Case Study: Rhiannon Cook, Librarian, St Aubyn's School, Essex

Year 5 Fake News Taught Lessons

Rhiannon Cook is the Librarian at St Aubyn's School, a co-educational, independent, prep school with around 500 pupils aged between 3 and 13 years. During her first year as Librarian, she was teaching Year 5 a research unit based on her predecessor's planning which was proving to be rather a challenge. For her second year at the school she was determined to create a unit herself, one that she knew inside and out, and on 24th June 2018, the National Literacy Trust tweeted that they had created a number of resources on the topic of fake news:

https://twitter.com/Literacy_Trust/status/1010839451843559426

Having previously been made aware of the pupils' inability to identify fake news and deal with the resulting emotional reactions, Rhiannon considered the positive impact that library lessons might have on this increasingly relevant issue. She spoke to her line manager (Deputy Head of Curriculum), the Head of Middle School and the Year 5 teachers who all agreed that the unit would be a valuable addition to the curriculum.

She adapted resources, mainly from the National Literacy Trust but supplemented by those available from the BBC and Childnet International. However, some elements were less appropriate for primary age, independent school pupils and, at the time, fake news was not as prominent an issue therefore some creativity was required on her part to create resources to fill the gaps.

The main aims of the project were as follows:

- Pupils can identify fake news
- Pupils can judge the trustworthiness of news
- Pupils can identify the effects of fake news on emotions and behaviours
- Pupils can identify and compare different viewpoints
- Pupils can analyse bias within news reports.

As Library lessons were restricted to 30

minutes per class and often classes did not arrive on time or time was lost during crossover periods, the main challenge was the shallow nature of each session. Pupils enjoyed the lessons but did not always fully understand the learning objective outlined in each lesson, as demonstrated by the – unfortunately rushed – plenary section at the end of the class.

Throughout the project, SEN pupils were supported by Rhiannon, the Library Assistant or a teacher, although some teachers were tempted to use the library session as a free period rather than engage with their class. More able pupils were sometimes challenged to take work further; however, often there was not enough time for this in the sessions.

Broadly speaking, this project supports the school's mission statement under the aims outlined below:

St Aubyn's School aim is that each child becomes:

- A self-confident, independent, inquiring learner
- A considerate, moral, versatile individual
- A sociable, responsible, tolerant citizen.

More specifically, the project addresses new safety guidance for schools published by the government:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-online-safety-in-schools

Whilst these documents are aimed at KS3 and KS4, Rhiannon's project acts as an introduction to some of the topics outlined.

More generally, the project has made pupils more aware of what they see (particularly online), the risks and their reactions, therefore improving their overall information literacy. As part of the project pupils were also required to discuss this with parents and guardians/carers and it was hoped that this would spread further awareness of fake news within pupils' families. However, it appeared that the majority of pupils did not take part in this activity, something Rhiannon wishes to address in future sessions.

This project was largely based on resources provided by the National Literacy Trust on Fake News and Critical Literacy:

- <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/fake-news-and-critical-literacy-resources/>

It also used resources provided by the BBC:

- www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/quizzes/real-or-fake-news-quiz
- www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/42185484

As well as Childnet International:

- www.childnet.com/resources/trust-me

The unit ran for the whole Lent term and at the end of the term, pupils were asked to fill in a self-assessment form thinking about the main aims of the project as outlined above. The majority were quite confident about each statement but less so when considering the effects of fake news on emotions and behaviours, and analysing bias. In some cases, this was because they had not made the link between previous activities and the terms/aims or had forgotten what terms such as bias meant. Once Rhiannon went through the meanings with the pupils, they generally felt more confident.

Feedback from teachers, management and other members of staff was all very positive although not formally recorded; however, one session was observed by the Deputy Head of Curriculum as part of the appraisal process and was noted as '*outstanding*'.

With more resources available as the topic becomes more visible, Rhiannon will continue to develop, adapt and ultimately improve the unit. As government guidelines increasingly address the issue of safety in information, working with teachers on the topic of fake news and misinformation will become ever more important and Rhiannon plans to discuss the unit with relevant staff and adapt it to further support issues being addressed in classes.

Advice:

1. Be prepared to adapt due to time constraints
2. Work with and engage teachers as much as possible, perhaps by assigning tasks. Sometimes it is less about resistance and more that the staff member in question does not want to step on your toes or isn't sure how to contribute.
3. It sounds obvious but really consider your learning objectives and outcomes. If you are unsure about what you are trying to teach your pupils, your pupils will be unclear on what they are learning.