

# ARE ONLINE SOURCES CREDIBLE? PERSPECTIVES FROM PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Media literacy empowers students with the ability to think critically about the online tools they use on a daily basis. It supports informed decisions about how they access and evaluate information located online. Media literacy aims to achieve the challenge of stimulating the desire to explore, to equalize learning, and develop critical thinking skills. In other words, it is possible to demonstrate how media literacy can be a fundamental strategic instrument in classrooms, now more than ever.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Digital Literacy, Pre-Service Teachers, Media in Classrooms*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Growing up as a digital native does not automatically go hand in hand with competent, safe, and critically reflected media use and this skill must be actively acquired. When used effectively, digital learning supports conventional methods of teaching (Nokelainen, 2006). Schools have taken on the charge of instructing young learners to use the media responsibly and sensibly. Media literacy is a key qualification that should be learned and taught in primary school. It is important to learn self-determined and critical media usage, even before the media becomes a constant companion. At the same time, it would be in the hands of educators to show ways to be productive and creative (Herrington & Parker, 2013).

Involvement of media and transferring skills of media literacy enable teachers to increase the student's interest in content areas. Comparing different literature and providing a clear view builds up the level of interest and enhances critical thinking skills. Discussion with peers on the views the students hold builds communication and aids in reflection and analysis (Hobbs, 2004). According to studies, more than half of primary school aged children are active computer users. They use various search engines for educational purposes on a regular basis (Valcke, 2020). Another study concludes that the use of digital media can convey content more attractively if it is prepared in a multimedia format and teaches student in an interactive way. This enables learners to engage more intensively with the learning material. At the same time, processing and storage of information as well as self-directed and problem-oriented learning are supported (Hafner, 2014).

A 2017 meta-analysis evaluated 79 studies that had been published worldwide since the year 2000, found that learners are more motivated and achieve better results when they work with digital media (Martens, 2004). However, the students benefited more from the use of digital media if they could use it with a partner or as group work and at the same time also use classic

teaching materials. An increase in performance is dependent on professional support in the media use by teachers.

## **2. THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA LITERACY IN EDUCATION**

When we think about the importance of media in education, we believe that the use of media should stimulate the desire to discover, to equalize the learning, and improve the development of critical thinking.

Media literacy becomes a tool of great value for the development of human intelligence, which enhances critical thinking and favors the achievement of cognitive field independence. Media literacy is desirable from the perspective of comprehension of a child and how they assess what they should be reading.

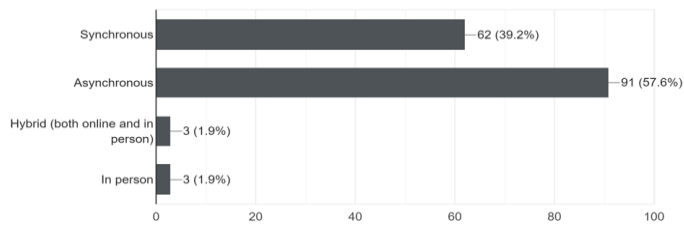
With media literacy, the aim is to increase the ability of perception and visual selection, to reduce, as much as possible, the effects of unconscious (subliminal) reception, maximizing its capacity of analytically and critically perceiving visual messages, understanding better their meanings and enjoying more intensely with their knowledge.

Through media literacy, you will also develop your ability to be objective and perform critical selection, stimulating the desire of the students to discover content and knowledge through other media and channels, as well as facilitate communication of the same to other students, because we will be applying a communicative and dialogical learning supported by committed practices that stimulate your desire to discover and communicate, and at the same time develop other values such as equality, respect, diversity and participation.

Teachers instill in students the skill of rechecking information found on the Internet, as well as using only verified sources. It is important what setting teachers give in the educational process. It is necessary to show that in order to work with information; you need to have a certain amount of knowledge about checking the credibility of the information as well (Galvin, 2006). This is an important point in terms of motivation. Students can find a lot on the Internet, but still they need to have basic knowledge in order to be able to evaluate its reliability. If the teacher does not show the children that not all the information is correct, then they will create problems associated with the assimilation of false information.

Today, children come to school with the feeling that you don't need to know anything anymore, since everything can be found on the Internet with a few keystrokes, but working with information requires well-developed thinking, because the Internet is a vast expanse of information. There is massive amount of unverified, unconfirmed information out there. (Knight & Burn, 2015). This is easy for adults to verify when they see the result of the search and understand that there is a mistake then they won't go to the site anymore. But the child perceives everything from scratch and as valid.

In a survey presented to pre-service teachers taking education program courses, fifty-nine participants indicated their overall preferences for the modality in which they prefer classes to be held. Educators formulate lessons and teach in ways in which they perceive as comfortable. With the majority of survey participants preferring a form of online learning, it is important that they are modeling the skills and strategies used to identify credible online sources that can be carried into their classrooms.



Modality preferences of Pre-service Teachers enrolled in education program courses

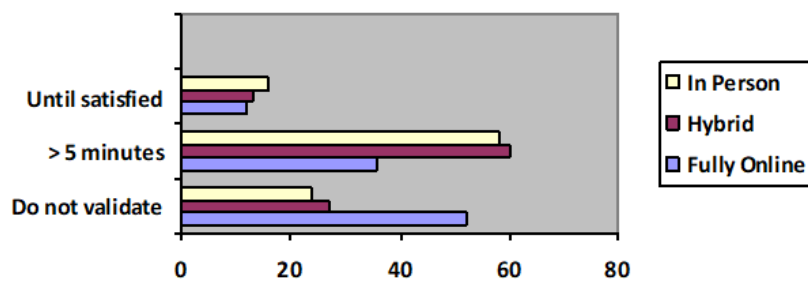
Both pre-service teachers and their students must understand which information is safe and suitable to use. They must develop the habit of research and it's the experience of using reliable information that will help in the future.

### 2.1. Information Literacy

In the modern world it is necessary to form the student's information literacy. The information they receive must be properly organized and suitable so that the students may be able to comprehend it properly. We are increasingly seeing how text information is being replaced by info graphics, and this is only going to increase.

Current day students have little knowledge of a world without the internet, but this does not mean that they critically evaluate what they see in a virtual environment (Geladze, 2015). The average student is inclined to pay attention to relevance rather than credibility. The author and type of publication are of limited value to most students, and if they study these elements, they cannot explain why they chose certain websites. There is a similar situation among high school students and college students as well.

The need to prepare pre-service teachers becomes more and more relevant as they themselves do not take the time needed to validate the credibility of the sources they are relying on. Pre-service teachers need to enhance their information literacy skills so they then become habitual and can model for those they will be teaching.



Time spent by pre-service teachers validating the credibility of Online sources used

Critical consumption of online material means more than just browsing a website. It is necessary to determine how quality content qualifies and what good material is and what is not.

## 2.2. Explicitly Share Trusted Teaching Resources

Students may not understand the differences between sites in quality. By showing students different sites, teachers help them understand how they should use each type of site in accordance with their purpose. Sites may contain personal, professional, news, and commercial content. The definition of these differences is the basis in determining the bias of the author.

Domain names are also a key sign of a site's credibility. We cannot assume that students know that sites with .edu, .gov, and .org domains are considered reliable, and .com and .net domains require additional attention. Looking at all the elements of a web address can help students evaluate the reliability of the source.

Special web search engines help students identify good online content. Introduce students to scientific search engines such as *Google Scholar* and others that contain reliable and peer-reviewed information. Even a *Google* search can be refined, so that the selection of information is manageable and trustworthy like the advanced search options. *Google* also offers *Books Search* and *Scholar Search*, which searches only for trusted articles and information. Students can effectively use search operators and logical conditions to maximize the search for a specific topic.

## 2.3. Creating Web Content Lessons

Developing a game, course, or research project for students of developmentally appropriate grades that include exercises to determine authoritative internet information, as well as classes on a specific research topic of students, is a great way to introduce and teach important web navigation and critical analysis skills.

It is important to learn how students use media and how they present information. If students do not read articles carefully, they cannot notice certain nuances that indicate the unreliability of the site. Showing credible and hoax sites help reinforce this thought.

## 3. UTILIZE A FAMILIAR TEACHING STRATEGY

Often, comfort can be found in what we already know and the use of an adjusted KWL+H (know, want-to-know, learned, and how-to-learn-more) model can support the work of identifying credible media. Students can learn to identify credible sites by responding to, *what do we KNOW about WHO is providing this information for us to LEARN from and HOW can we benefit from this knowledge?*

Another well known teaching strategy is having students identify the 5 W's which we commonly know as *who, what, where, when, and why*. For the purpose of supporting the identification of credible sources, student can use the 5 W's to ask:

*Who* created the page? Can we contact them?

*What* information is being shared? Is it bias or does it come from multiple perspectives?

*Where* is the webpage? .com, .gov, .edu?

*When* was the information posted? Is it up to date and current?

*Why* was this shared? To entertain, persuade, or inform?

By incorporating one or both of the suggested strategies, teachers can enhance active engagement in their students' learning. Both can be done independently or in small groups to encourage a collaborative learning environment.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The internet is an amazing source of information for students; unfortunately, not all of the information that is found online can be trusted. Teaching students to evaluate online sources for credibility is an absolute obligation, but it is a challenging task to educate students about all the strategies that can be used for source credibility that adapt alongside continuously developing media. When teaching students of all ages to evaluate the reliability of an online source, teachers should develop easy to remember criteria and offer students opportunities to practice the skill.

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