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# NEWS LITERACY AND AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS:

HOW NEWS MEDIA IS TAUGHT  
IN THE CLASSROOM

MICHAEL DEZUANNI, TANYA NOTLEY, KRISTY CORSER

The **Digital Media Research Centre (DMRC)** at Queensland University of Technology conducts world-leading research for a creative, inclusive and fair digital media environment. It is one of Australia's top organisations for media and communication research, areas in which QUT has achieved the highest possible rankings in ERA, the national research quality assessment exercise. Our research programs address the challenges of creativity and innovation, inclusion and diversity, and trust and fairness in the constantly changing digital media landscape.

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Museum of  
Australian Democracy  
Old Parliament House



## CREDITS

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**A/Prof Michael Dezuanni** undertakes research about digital media, literacies and learning in home, school and community contexts. He is the Associate Director of Queensland University of Technology's Digital Media Research Centre within the Creative Industries Faculty. He was the expert advisor for Media Arts to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority during the development of the Australian Curriculum and he is an honorary life member of Australian Teachers of Media, Queensland in recognition of his contributions to the field of Media Literacy.

**Dr Tanya Notley** investigates the social and cultural impact of communication technologies. She collaborates with a number of media literacy, human rights and social justice organisations to design communication initiatives. Her research has examined the ways government policy, schools, parents and libraries can enable young people to access and use digital technologies effectively. At Western Sydney University, Tanya is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts and an Associate Senior Researcher with the Institute for Culture and Society.

**Dr Kristy Corser** has been a primary school teacher, Head of Curriculum, Deputy Principal and ICT Coach over the past 13 years. She recently completed her PhD which investigated teaching and learning with cloud platforms in the primary school classroom. She has an interest in digital technologies, education policy and the digital ecosystems that education departments engage with.

# WHY WE UNDERTOOK THIS RESEARCH

The internet has changed the way young Australians participate in society. Digital platforms now rival traditional media, such as television, for young people's attention when it comes to accessing information and entertainment. News is now produced and circulated more rapidly, using an ever-growing number of social media platforms, while social media users encounter news from a range of sources, often while news events are still unfolding. The pace of news production and circulation makes verifying sources and claims more complicated and this has led to a number of flashpoints for claims and counter-claims of fake news at critical moments during elections, natural disasters, acts of terrorism and most recently, during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

At this critical juncture, it is essential that we understand efforts being made in schools to educate young Australians about the news media. Our investigations have illustrated that very little information has been collected on how news media is integrated into Australian schools, and very little is known about the extent to which teachers feel able and supported to teach students about the news. We undertook this research to investigate if teachers believe it is important to teach students about the news. We also wanted to understand how teachers utilise available curriculum documents to teach students about news media and how they access relevant support and resources to help them to do this.

This research is timely given that the 2019 Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) *Digital Platforms Inquiry* emphasises the importance of digital media

literacy education in schools. This formal inquiry recommends that the terms of reference for the scheduled 2020 review of the Australian Curriculum considers how digital media literacy education is approached<sup>1</sup>.

Given that almost every aspect of our lives is mediated, a coherent educational strategy for digital media literacy in Australia is required and not a quick-fix or one-off solution. News literacy is an important component of digital media literacy that we believe should address areas such as bias in the news, disinformation and misinformation, the inclusion and representation of different groups (including young people), news media ownership, technology affordances and more. This effort should be part of a wider project that aims to make media literacy a prerequisite for all citizens to ensure every Australian is capable of making decisions about media participation and engagement that are effective, right, safe and appropriate for them.

This research therefore represents an attempt to better understand teachers' current news media literacy practices as one aspect of their broader digital media literacy education programs. Our goal is to inform teachers, school leaders, educational systems and policy makers about the current state of play, from the perspective of teachers, to assist these stakeholders to make recommendations and decisions that will support the ongoing development of news media literacy education.

1. ACCC (2019) Digital Platforms Inquiry. Accessed April 15, 2020: <https://www.accc.gov.au/focus-areas/inquiries-ongoing/digital-platforms-inquiry>

# KEY FINDINGS

During the period November 2019 to February 2020, 295 Australian teachers responded to our news media education survey. In addition, we subsequently conducted 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews with survey respondents. The purpose of these interviews was to gain additional insights into teachers' thoughts and opinions about teaching news media literacy in their classrooms. Key findings from this research indicate:

## TEACHING NEWS MATTERS

- Almost all respondents (96%) believe it is very/extremely important for students to learn to critically read the news.
- Almost all respondents (94%) believe it is very/extremely important for students to learn fact checking and verification skills.
- Over 90% of respondents believe it is very/extremely important for students to learn about bias in the news.
- Over three quarters of respondents (77%) said they often or sometimes teach their students about news media.

## THERE ARE MANY BARRIERS THAT STAND IN THE WAY OF TEACHING STUDENTS ABOUT NEWS MEDIA

- Around a quarter (24%) of respondents said they feel extremely confident teaching about news, and an additional 44% say they are quite confident teaching students about news media.
- Respondents cite timetable constraints and curriculum structures (57%) and lack of time for planning (45%) to be major barriers to teaching students about news media. The challenge of discussing sensitive topics in the classroom was identified by 37% as a barrier.
- Only one quarter of respondents (27%) said they were very well supported by their school to teach students about news media, while an additional 38% felt moderately well supported.
- Only 18% of the respondents indicated they had access to professional development opportunities for assistance with teaching students about news media.

## CHANGES TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM MAY BE NECESSARY TO ADVANCE NEWS MEDIA LITERACY

- Some respondents (15%) say they are not well supported by the Australian Curriculum to teach about news, with an additional 22% saying they are unsure if they are supported by the curriculum.
- Only a small number of the respondents (3%) say the Australian Curriculum places no importance on teaching students about news media, but an additional 33% say the documents place only a little importance on this.
- Only 7% of the respondents believe their school places a lot of importance on teaching students about news media, while 39% say their school places some importance on this.

# WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY?

A total of 323 teachers from all over Australia began the survey, but 28 respondents were excluded because they only completed the first 8 questions, which asked for general demographic information. While 295 respondents answered up to 10, between 228 and 292 respondents<sup>2</sup> completed the remaining 15 questions.

The state-based geographical breakdown of teacher respondents was as follows:

NSW	QLD	WA	Vic	SA	ACT	Tas	NT
113	52	49	38	22	17	2	1

Of the 295 respondents, 79% were female, 19% were male and 2% stated 'other/prefer not to say'.

Most teachers (58%) indicated they taught in areas they would define as a middle-class socio-economic area; 13% said they taught in an upper class area; 26% said they taught in a low socio-economic status community; and 3% were unsure of their school's socioeconomic status.

More than half of the teachers taught in a major city (55%); 19% were from inner regional areas; 19% from outer regional, 7% from a remote or very remote area.

Teachers indicated their school classification, with 64% of teachers from the State/Government sector, 13% of teachers taught in the Catholic sector and 23% within the Independent sector.

One fifth (20%) of the teachers indicated they were generalist primary school teachers, teaching across multiple key learning areas.

Teachers were able to select multiple areas of specialisation, as it is common for teachers in Australia to teach across several disciplines. Almost a quarter of the respondents (24%) were secondary school English teachers, 17% were Humanities and Social Science (HASS) teachers; and 10% taught the Arts. A smaller number of respondents (but more than 10) indicated they taught across the fields of mathematics, science, technology, health and physical education.

Teacher librarians (18 respondents) made up most of the 'other' option available in areas of specialisation (4%).

There was a broad range of years in teaching experience amongst the respondents:

1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21-25 years	25+ years
69	51	58	46	25	46

While the survey is not representative of all teachers in Australia and the self-selection process means the respondents are more likely to be motivated to teach news media, we believe there was significant diversity among the respondents in terms of geography, subject areas, socio-economic status of their school and in their years of teaching experience.

2. We have indicated the number of respondents for each corresponding question throughout this report.



# Media Literacy

## IMPORTANT

Media Literacy - Mass Media  
Why is the article important now?  
(is it newsworthy?)

Who are the people who you intend to  
talk to (if anyone) (Expert opinions) (Contrasting views)

What are your talking points?  
What are the main ideas you will explain  
about this issue.

Presenting arguments  
Sources to make them look  
solid and thoughtful  
they aren't!

ABC EDUCATION

OUR OPINIONS

Australian News Media Champions Forum event, Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD), Canberra Oct 20-22nd 2019.

# SURVEY FINDINGS IN DETAIL

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING NEWS LITERACY TOPICS

Teachers were asked how important it is for students to be taught about the following news media topics (see figure 1):

- Stories that feature on mainstream news
- Issues relating to fake news
- Social media and news
- Bias in the news
- Citizenship and the news
- Emotive responses to news

According to the respondents the most important news topic to introduce students to is **bias in the news**, with 91% indicating it is very/extremely important (61% stating it is extremely important).

This was followed by concerns about **fake news**: 81% believe it is very/extremely important to teach students this issue.

The majority of teachers (69%) said it was very/extremely important for students to learn about **social media and news**; and 62% said it was very/extremely important for students to learn about **stories that feature on mainstream news**.

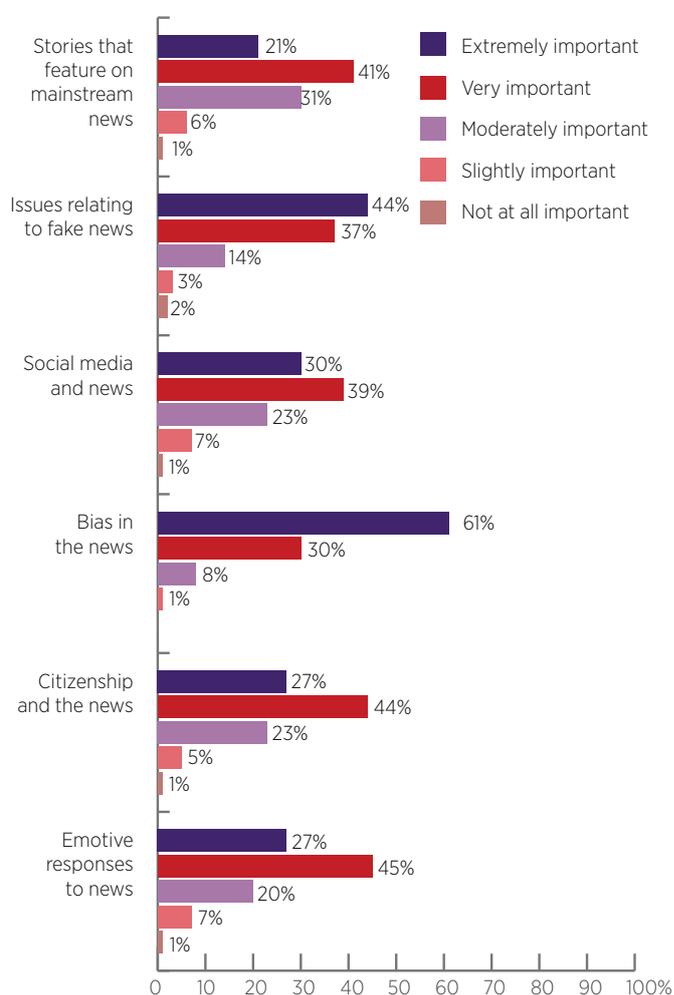
Most respondents (61%) said it was very/extremely important for students to learn about **emotive responses to news**, while 71% said it was very/extremely important for students to learn about **citizenship and the news**.

These findings suggest that teachers place a high degree of importance on teaching students about news media, especially those aspects that are about media manipulation (bias) and misinformation/disinformation (fake news).

They also indicate a very high level of support for teaching students about news media as it relates to the individual wellbeing (emotional impact) and to citizenship.

While the significance placed on teaching students about specific news distribution channels and companies (mainstream news and social media) was slightly lower than for the other categories, there was still a high level of support for teaching these aspects.

**FIGURE 1:** How important is it that students are taught about the following in the classroom? (n=295)



## THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING SPECIFIC SKILLS

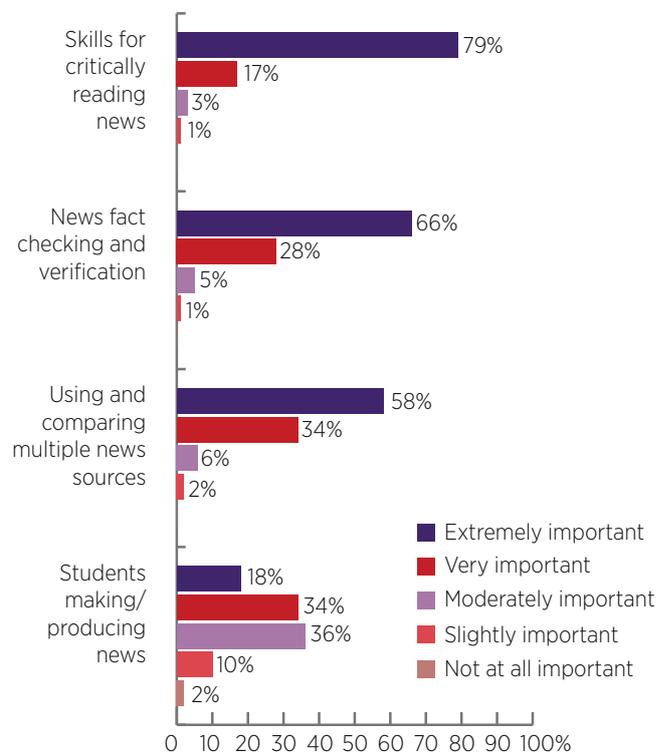
Teachers were asked to rank the importance of teaching students the following skills (see Figure 2).

- Critically reading the news
- Fact checking and verification
- Using and comparing multiple news sources
- Making/producing news

Overwhelmingly, the teachers indicated that students need to learn **skills for critically reading the news**, with 96% rating this as very/extremely important (79% saying it is extremely important). The ability to **check and verify news** was also considered very/extremely important for nearly all respondents (94%); and the ability to **use and compare multiple news sources** was seen to be very/extremely important (92%) (see Figure 2). Interestingly, teachers were divided over their opinion about the need for students to **produce their own news**, with nearly half (46%) rating this moderately or slightly important.

Critical news literacy knowledge skills are therefore seen to be more important to the survey respondents than journalistic skills.

**FIGURE 2:** How important is it for students to learn the following? (n=295)



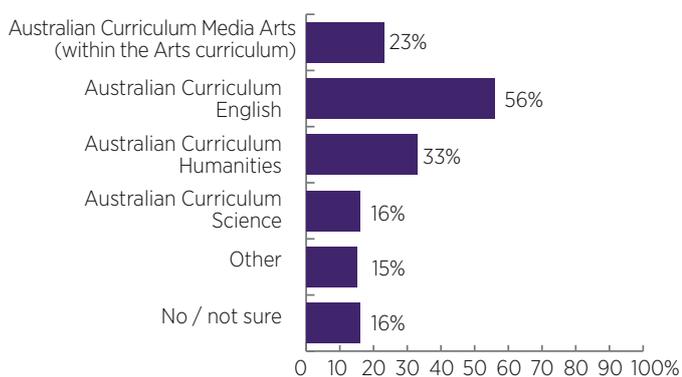
## AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM LINKS

Teachers were asked to identify which Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) documents they use to teach News Media Literacy (see Figure 3). By far the most popular was the **English Curriculum**, which was used by over half of the teachers (56%) followed by the **Humanities Curriculum** (33%). One quarter of the respondents (23%) indicated they use the **Media Arts Curriculum**; and 16% used the **Science Curriculum**. In broad terms, these figures reflect the teachers' areas of specialisation.

Some teachers (16%) stated that they did not use any Australian Curriculum documents for teaching news literacy, or that they were not sure which documents they used.

Teachers who chose 'other' as an option (15% of respondents) indicated they used the ACARA General Capabilities, and state curriculum documents including Western Australia (8 respondents), Victoria (7 respondents), New South Wales (3 respondents), and South Australia (2 respondents).

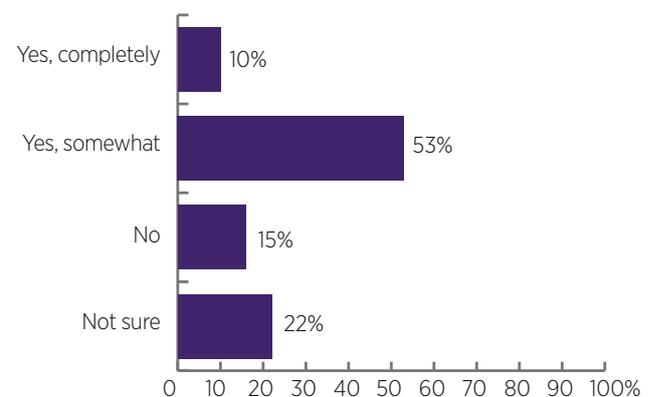
**FIGURE 3:** Do you use any of the following curriculum documents to plan for teaching about the media in your classroom? (n=292)



When asked whether the ACARA documents support them to teach students about news media (Figure 4), close to two thirds (63%) indicated that they were supported. More than one third of the respondents (37%) stated that they did not feel supported (15%), or that they were 'not sure' if they were supported (22%).

While it is encouraging that so many of the teachers turn to the ACARA documents to support their teaching about news, it is concerning that such a significant number do not believe or are unsure if the Australian Curriculum supports them to teach students about news media.

**FIGURE 4:** Does the Australian Curriculum support you to teach students about news media? (n=237)



### THE IMPORTANCE PLACED ON TEACHING NEWS LITERACY BY THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

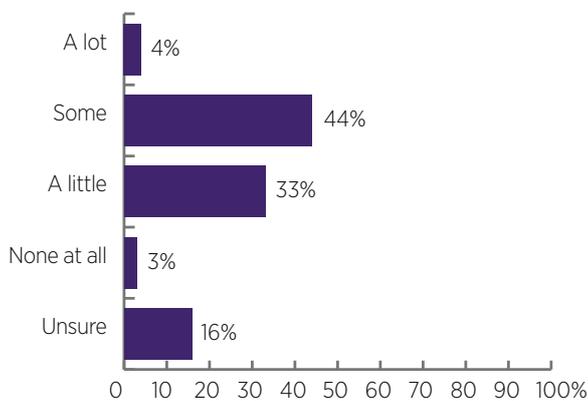
Teachers were asked to indicate how much importance they believe ACARA places on teaching about the news. We asked this question to consider if teachers believe news is positioned by educational authorities as an important part of the curriculum.

Figure 5 shows only 4% of respondents think ACARA places **a lot of importance** on teaching news; however, an additional 44% of respondents think ACARA places **some importance** on teaching news. A significant number of respondents believe ACARA only places **a little importance** (33%), or **no importance** (3%) on teaching news, and 16% of teachers were unsure about this question.

While teachers believe they are supported to teach students about news media, a significant number simultaneously believe ACARA does not place a lot of importance on teaching news. That is, a greater number of teachers believe the curriculum allows them to teach about news media, than those who believe the curriculum encourages them to teach this.

This may simply reflect that the Australian Curriculum provides teachers with a choice about the specific content or topics they teach, as opposed to being prescriptive.

**FIGURE 5:** How much importance does ACARA place on teaching news in the curriculum? (n=241)

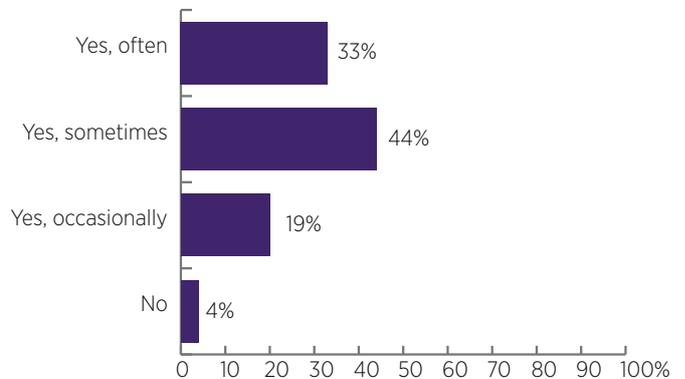


### NEWS MEDIA IN THE CLASSROOM

A third of teachers (33%) indicated that they teach news media to their students often and a further 44% said they teach news media sometimes. Therefore, more than three quarters of the teachers surveyed (77%) include news media in their classrooms at least on a semi-regular basis. Only 4% said they never teach news media, while 19% said they occasionally teach news media.

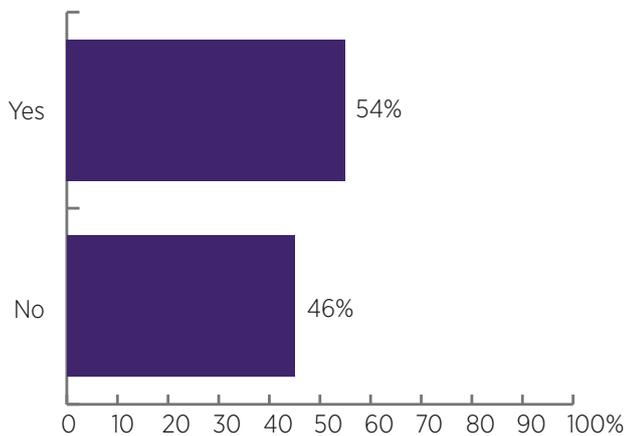
Encouragingly, of the 12 teachers who said they do not teach news media, seven of these said they would like to, presumably indicating they do not know how to do this, or they believe they do not have time to include it. Only two of the respondents indicated that they would not like to teach students about news media.

**FIGURE 6:** Do you ever teach your students about news media in the classroom? (n=289)



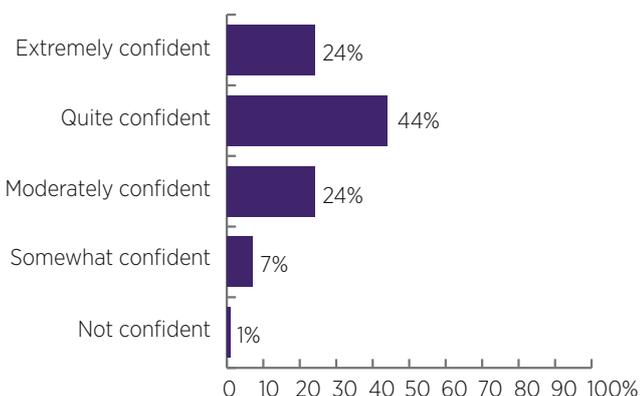
Just over half of the teachers had created or taught a specific unit of work about the news (54%), indicating that their engagement with news literacy went beyond just a brief lesson or two (Figure 7).

**FIGURE 7:** Have you created and/or taught a specific unit of work to teach students about news? (n=287)



In addition to this, more than two thirds of the teachers who completed the survey (68%) feel **extremely confident** (24%) or **quite confident** (44%) teaching students about news media. Only 8% of teachers felt **somewhat confident** or **not at all confident**.

**FIGURE 8:** Do you feel confident in teaching about news? (n=237)

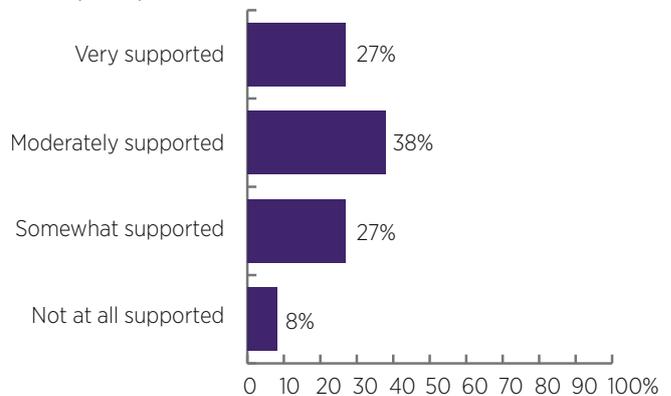


## SUPPORT FOR TEACHING NEWS MEDIA LITERACY

The sections above suggest that teachers believe it is very important to teach critical news media literacy skills, and many make efforts to include a focus on news media in their classrooms. But do teachers feel supported to teach students about news media?

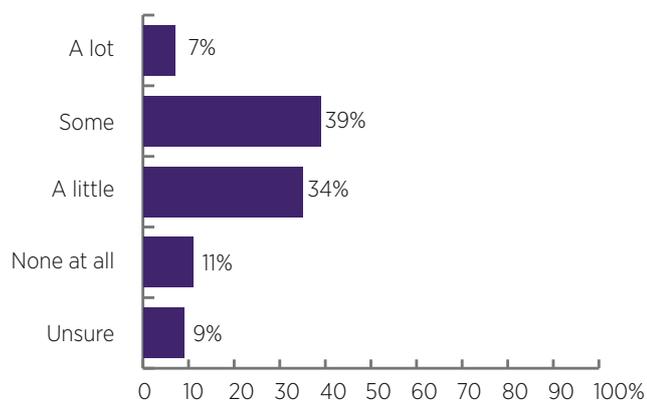
Only one quarter teachers (27%) said they were very supported to teach news media by their school, while an additional 38% felt moderately supported (Figure 9). Despite this, more than one third (35%) felt only somewhat supported, or not at all supported. This indicates that improvements can be made by schools to support teachers to include news media literacy in their classrooms.

**FIGURE 9:** Do you feel supported by your school in teaching about news? (n=237)



Indeed, 34% of teachers indicated that their school places only a little importance on teaching students about news media (Figure 10). A further 11% said their school placed no importance on it and 9% indicated they were unsure. This suggests news media literacy is not a high priority for many schools. Only 7% of respondents said their school places a lot of importance on news media, while 39% placed some importance on it. Therefore, there is a disconnect between the importance teachers place on critical thinking about the news and what teachers believe is emphasised and supported by school leadership.

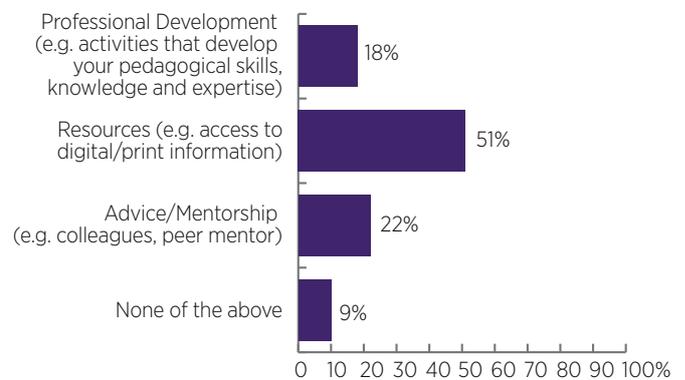
**FIGURE 10:** How much importance does your school place on teaching about news in the classroom? (n=240)



Beyond direct school support, the respondents indicated they have access to a range of opportunities that assist them to teach about the news (Figure 11). Just over half (51%) access **digital and print resources** for help with teaching students about news media. Nearly one quarter (22%) of the teachers access **advice or mentorship** from peers or colleagues. However, 9% of teachers said they do not have access to any of these forms of support to teach news media.

Surprisingly, only 18% of the teachers surveyed have access to **professional development** opportunities in relation to teaching students about news media. Teachers typically identify professional development as specially designed workshops, seminars and information sessions. This low percentage suggests few of these dedicated opportunities exist, and if they do, they are not widely available or accessed by teachers. Given that teachers in most states and territories are required to access professional development to retain their teacher registration, there is an opportunity to increase the number of dedicated and high profile professional development workshops about news media literacy offered to teachers.

**FIGURE 11:** Do you have access to the following to help you teach about the news? (n=236)



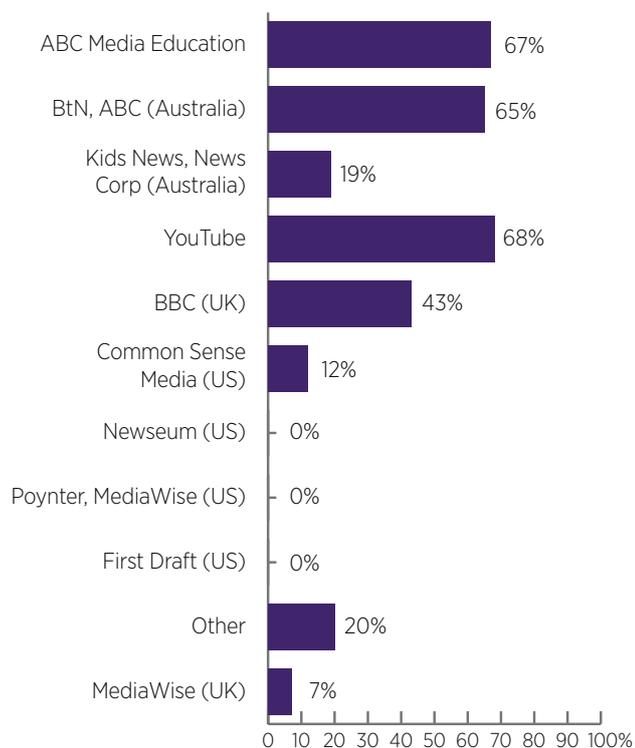
Teachers were asked which resources they access for teaching students about news media (Figure 12). **YouTube** emerged as the most popular source of news literacy resources (68%), reflecting a finding from the Screen Content project, a national research project looking at the use of screen content in the classroom<sup>3</sup>. In that project, teachers praised YouTube as a vast, highly searchable and up to date archive that they use to access, curate and share brief video clips in all areas of teaching.

**ABC Education** (67%), and **Behind the News** (65%) were also widely used by teachers as news literacy resources. Other reasonably high-profile sites accessed by teachers in search of resources, include the **BBC** (43%), **News Corps' Kids News** (19%) and the United States' **Common Sense Media** (12%). Surprisingly, other high profile US-based news literacy projects and entities such as the Newseum, Poynter's MediaWise, and the First Draft News project were not used by teachers at all. It is unclear if these US-specific resources make them less relevant to teachers or if teachers are simply not familiar with them.

3. Cunningham, S., Dezuanni, M., Goldsmith, B., Burns, M., Miles, P., Henkel, C. & Murphy, K. (2016). Screen content in Australian education: Digital promise and pitfalls.

The 43 written responses to 'other' for this question included 46 different types of resources ranging from local and national newspapers such as The Gold Coast Bulletin and the Sydney Morning Herald to television programs such as *Media Watch* and ABC News. Subscription based websites such as New York Times Learning Network and Newsela.com were also mentioned by teachers. These were widely dispersed responses, with none of these resources being mentioned by more than three teachers. This suggests teachers find support for their teaching from a wide variety of websites.

**FIGURE 12:** Do you ever access resources for teaching about news on any of the following sites? (n=228)



We asked teachers what kinds of resources or support they would like access to in order to help them teach students about news media. This was an open-ended response question that allowed the teachers to provide a wide range of ideas and suggestions in their answers.

Of the 221 teachers who provided a response to this question, 57 (26%) indicated they would like access to online resources. For instance, one teacher said “online resources are helpful as I can access them when and if I need” and another suggested “online resources developed by The Australian and other newspapers would be great.” Furthermore, one teacher explained “resources developed by the ABC about changes to news delivery that are brought about by changes in technology would be great. Access to online news websites for educational purposes would also be great but is not always readily available because of payment requirements.”

A significant number of teachers (36, 16%) proposed they would like units of work or lesson plans. One teacher indicated “unit and lesson plans would be very useful”, another suggested “sample units of work to create a starting point for teaching and learning” and a third teacher suggested “more lesson plans or ideas specific to different levels including reading levels and links to the curriculum.”

Teachers were also specific about wanting to access resources that are of high quality (26, 12%) and age appropriate (17, 7%). Some teachers acknowledged the existence of quality resources that could be used as a model for news media literacy learning materials, with one teacher stating, “Reading Australia has been such an awesome resource for literacy learning based on quality literature. Something similar would be awesome [for news media].”

Nineteen teachers (6%) also noted that they would like greater access to subscription-based newspapers, including free access to digital and/or print newspapers. One teacher suggested, “free access to hard copy newspapers, more reliable and student user friendly online news sources, other than *BtN* [*Behind the News*]” and was not “aware of others.”

Teachers mentioned their appreciation for being able to connect with news media professionals with one teacher stating, “last year we took students on a tour of ABC Headquarters. It was fascinating to see a behind the scene perspective. Having journalists in residence programs at schools might also be

fabulous!” Another teacher stated, “it would be great if more broadcasters offered free tours or workshops for school students to see how the news is made. While ACMI [Australian Centre for Moving Image, Melbourne] has excellent educational workshops, getting exposure to these industries in a real environment would be a great opportunity to promote engagement and student voice.”

Seventeen teachers (8%) noted that they are very passionate about wanting professional development (PD) to extend their skills in teaching news media. One teacher stated, “more PD to improve teacher’s media literacy – explicit samples” and another said, “either online or face to face PD” and another, “I would love some local news outlets to run some professional development, to link in with schools and run incursions.”

Twelve teachers (5%) also mentioned that further school support would help them, such as “school wide professional development” and “support from my school Executive to embed Information Literacy within classroom curriculum.”

Not surprisingly, eight teachers (3%) also voiced their concerns about the lack of time they have to teach, with one teacher stating, “there are many resources on this topic but a shared scope and sequence with Australian-focused resources would save time. I think most teachers see the value of this however they have so much else to teach.” Another teacher similarly stated she would like, “more planning time to allow current and recent news to be presented along with the topics being taught in classes. That helps contextualise the course material. Not all students have regular or reliable access to news media, so time in class to present media reports would be useful as well.”

Finally, five teachers (2%) highlighted the importance of students learning critical thinking skills. Some teachers said they specifically need more support to develop “critical thinking skills to explicitly teach these to students” and “resources to help teach critical thinking and evaluation of the news.” One teacher said they would like a “unit of work with a focus on how to read critically, compare sources, find information and make an informed decision/opinion.”

## BARRIERS TO TEACHING NEWS MEDIA LITERACY

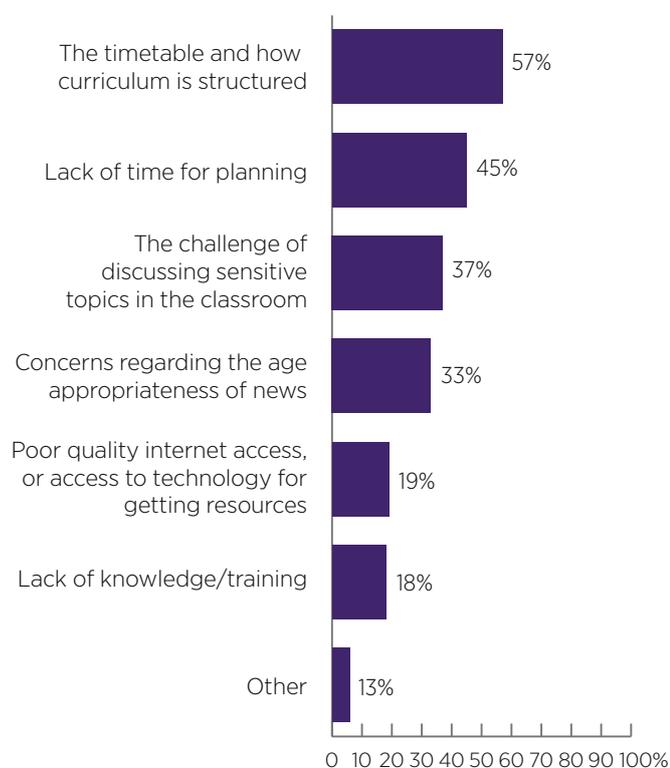
Teachers identified some specific barriers that prevent them from teaching students about news media (Figure 13). The most significant barrier identified was the timetable and how curriculum is structured (57%), which was followed by a lack of time for planning (45%). The challenge of discussing sensitive topics in the classroom was identified by 37% of teachers as a barrier, and 33% identified concerns regarding the age appropriateness of news. Almost one in five of the respondents (19%) identified poor quality internet access, or access to technology for getting resources as a barrier, and 18% identified lack of knowledge and training. For the ‘other’ category, a range of responses were provided, but the two most frequently cited barriers were a ‘crowded curriculum’ (six teachers) and ‘no barriers’ (eight teachers).

It is unsurprising that the timetable and curriculum structures or the ‘crowded curriculum’ are seen to be significant issues for teachers, given that it is widely accepted that Australian teachers believe they have too much content to cover, as identified in various reviews of the Australian Curriculum<sup>4</sup>. Being ‘time poor’ is also well established as a significant challenge for teachers who are unable to be more creative with learning experience development.

The challenge of discussing sensitive topics in the classroom may relate to the way media deals with complex issues around values and belief systems, political allegiances and perspectives. Given that politicians often accuse mainstream media of bias and of promoting ‘fake news’, it may not be possible to discuss news media bias in the classroom without also discussing political belief systems. Likewise, discussing how various groups in society are represented in the media, including young people and those from different cultural backgrounds, may raise sensitive topics, or promote discussions that are potentially confronting for students or teachers. Teachers identifying this barrier confirm the need for teacher training to establish appropriate rules and protocols for classroom discussions around sensitive topics.

4. Department of Education (2014). Review of the Australian Curriculum: Initial Australian Government Response). Accessed April 1, 2020: [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/initial\\_australian\\_government\\_response\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/initial_australian_government_response_final_0.pdf)

**FIGURE 13:** What are the key barriers that prevent you from teaching about news? (n=237)



Some teachers may also find it confronting to teach about news media where students may be exposed to emotionally upsetting topics. This barrier highlights the value of news programs made specifically for young people to be age appropriate. For instance, it may be difficult to analyse a 'typical' nightly news broadcast that includes stories about child sexual abuse, domestic violence or similarly distressing topics, requiring teachers to carefully curate their students' classroom experience. Age appropriate news could be curated to address sensitivities, with careful consideration on the potential impact of news on children and young people.



Australian News Media Champions Forum event, Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD), Canberra Oct 20-22nd 2019.

# CONVERSATIONS WITH TEACHERS

We invited teachers completing the survey to have a more in-depth 30-minute online or phone conversation with us about their hopes, expectations and experiences for teaching news literacy in the classroom. From the 86 respondents who agreed to an interview, we selected 20 teachers to provide diversity in terms of geographic location and subject area expertise as well as a mix of primary/secondary school teachers (see Appendix B for a list of the teachers). We have also included some of the qualitative responses from the survey in this section to further illustrate the teachers' experiences and perspectives in more detail.

The teachers we interviewed offered passionate and considered insights into the importance of teaching critical news literacy skills. For instance, a primary school teacher from New South Wales (NSW) pointed to the importance of teaching critical thinking when teaching about news media:

It's a really important part, you hear about fake news, all of those things... for kids to be able to have that basis and understanding that things are not always what they may seem, being able to question, being critical of whatever they are getting in their media.

TEACHER 12, PREP TO YEAR 12 QUEENSLAND INFORMATION LITERACY

A secondary school teacher agreed, arguing for the necessity of students "being able to understand the message but also to analyse what was being said, how it's being said, being able to identify potential bias, and displacement." (Teacher 15, New South Wales secondary English)

Another teacher argued that teachers should connect with their students' tendency to question the world around them as an important news literacy attribute;

Teenagers are predisposed to challenge authority, so to have a teacher who says 'yes, not only do you need to challenge authority, I want you to do it and I think it's really important and here are some skills to help you do it better', it's a hook. Very rarely do I have trouble trying to teach information fluency.

TEACHER 8, NEW SOUTH WALES PREP TO YEAR 12

Teachers were passionate about ensuring their students were developing skills to navigate the world around them. One suggested;

I think we have an increasingly polarised set of opinions online and one of the things I say to my older students a lot is we invented this platform but we haven't quite worked out how to use it appropriately yet: that's going to be your job, it's going to be the job of the next generation to come up with the ethics. What do we do online? How do we manage the way people end up in these insular groups? How do we deal with the filter bubble? So making them aware of what those things are and how they exist, making them aware that they will react emotionally to news stories that are presented a certain way and that they have to stop and think and check and double check sources of information, make sure it's been said by more than one person... and these are all skills that apply to them for their research processes, for their assignments, so it's a transference of those skills, the same skills basically; critical literacy, information literacy.

TEACHER 6, QUEENSLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

A Western Australian secondary teacher agreed;

It's the world that they live in, these are real issues for the kids. I think media plays ...a big role in shaping the consciousness of society and I think kids need to be taught to think and not just blindly follow, doesn't matter what it is, whether we are reading a book, whatever it is, we should be analysing it and thinking it through. Analysing skills are important and I think because media, flicking on the TV or scrolling through the Internet is such an easy thing to do, it's very easy for the kids and adults too for that matter to take it all in and not actually think about what they are taking in. We can equip students as they grow up to realise that we have to think things through not just blindly accept.

TEACHER 18, WESTERN AUSTRALIA PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHER

Discussions about the Australian Curriculum and its support for news media literacy promoted thoughtful responses from the teachers, with most suggesting clear areas and opportunities for improvement. For instance, one teacher explained;

We use the WA curriculum – journalism and power and persuasion and media bias are mentioned but there are no support guidelines on how to teach this. No resources are provided as support.

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SECONDARY ENGLISH/ARTS TEACHER - SURVEY RESPONSE

A Western Australian senior secondary teacher explained;

Our curriculum is so packed, it's probably a complaint of lots of teachers, there is just so much to get them through and I don't think media studies is compulsory, maybe that needs to be considered. I like doing it in the context of English, it really fits when you're looking at rhetorical devices, but I'm always conscious of the constraints of the curriculum.

TEACHER 18, WESTERN AUSTRALIA PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHER

A primary school teacher from Queensland agreed;

The Australian curriculum does not provide enough time to properly attend to this topic. It also doesn't allow for flexibility of varying units to suit current news events or topics.

QUEENSLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER - SURVEY RESPONSE

A teacher from Victoria argued that the generalised nature of the Australian Curriculum, without specific reference to news, may be confusing for teachers, allowing media literacy to be overlooked:

Realising the intent of curriculum documents is not to be specific, I fear there are way too [many] curriculums to ensure the basics are covered. The capabilities indicate that media literacy should be incorporated across all curriculum areas but can also allow for it to slip through the system and only be touched upon rather than taught.

VICTORIAN JUNIOR SECONDARY TEACHER - SURVEY RESPONSE

Some teachers were particularly supportive of the Media Arts Curriculum, which they said provides opportunities to teach about news with one arguing, "The Media Arts curriculum easily allows for the teaching of news." (Queensland senior secondary Arts teacher - qualitative survey response)

Other teachers drew attention to the need to implement the curriculum appropriately in lesson planning to ensure it remains relevant. For instance, a secondary teacher from New South Wales said that teachers are required to interpret and supplement the curriculum to ensure it remains relevant to contemporary media:

The curriculum outlines the requirements of a media study, but because of the ever-changing nature of it, resources do not stay current, and so we must constantly update our programs with mixed success. The Australian Curriculum cannot be used as an up to date resource; by the time a review/change is made, it is already inaccurate. Therefore, as teachers use it as a guideline, we have the ability to be flexible with content, but there are not necessarily prescriptive components.

NEW SOUTH WALES SECONDARY ENGLISH/HASS TEACHER - SURVEY RESPONSE

In general, the teachers we surveyed and interviewed said they felt well supported by their schools to teach about the news, as long as it was in line with broader policies and priorities. A secondary school Maths and Science teacher from New South Wales suggested: "I know that this support would be available if I approached leadership about it and accessed the resources myself." (New South Wales secondary Maths/Science teacher - qualitative survey response)

A Queensland teacher suggested, "School is generally supportive as long as there is budget money and links to whole-school priorities." (Queensland senior secondary Arts teacher - qualitative survey response)

Another teacher discussed how schools could be supported with the development of a framework, suggesting;

**I think a lot of people are doing their own thing based on their own personal experiences and interests. If a framework was provided, then it could encourage people to look at specific things and I think it may also help to support schools to open up and unblock some things, to allow kids to access things in an appropriate time and an appropriate place.**

TEACHER 19, WESTERN AUSTRALIA SECONDARY ENGLISH/ARTS TEACHER

Some of the interviewees praised their school for the support they receive. However, one interviewee from a rural area felt less supported by their school: "Being at a small school I am really on my own in developing resources. Accessing PD [professional development] is difficult for teachers in rural areas." (New South Wales secondary English teacher - qualitative survey response)

One teacher acknowledged the work current teachers are doing around news media in the classroom, but also felt that there is more work to be done:

**It [news media] is clearly being taught at some level at some schools, but I'm not confident that every teacher is teaching it in every school and there's an old saying among English teachers that every teacher is a teacher of literacy. I believe strongly that every teacher of literacy, and yes every teacher, needs to be a teacher of information literacy because otherwise our students are at risk in this mad, crazy world that we're all living in... They are at risk of being ignorant, they're at risk of being exploited, they're at risk of being ripped off, and they are at risk of not being able to achieve a life to their full potential because they don't know how to operate in an information dense world.**

TEACHER 8, NEW SOUTH WALES PREP TO YEAR 12 GENERALIST TEACHER

The teachers elaborated on a number of ways in which they seek support for teaching news literacy beyond their schools. "Networks like ATOM (Australian Teachers of Media) are outstanding, and slowly people are developing more and more interactive resources for exploring media literacy." (Queensland secondary school English/Arts teacher - qualitative survey response)

Another teacher also pointed to the importance of colleagues and professional networks for support, stating that her school has a "very collaborative faculty" where ideas for teaching are routinely discussed among teaching staff. (Teacher 15, New South Wales secondary English teacher) "Most professional development occurs in conjunction with collegial discussions." (New South Wales secondary school HASS teacher - qualitative survey response)

Other teachers identified a range of other ways they seek support. One teacher said, "I subscribe personally to digital media so I can use it in my classrooms." (Queensland secondary school HASS/Religious Education teacher - qualitative survey response)

While another indicated that they “have digital access to resources that support teaching about the media.” (New South Wales secondary school English/HASS teacher - qualitative survey response)

Local news outlets were also seen to be a source of support, “I have had wonderful support from local newspapers.” (Queensland junior secondary Technologies teacher - qualitative survey response) One teacher very much liked the long running ABC program Behind the News, but believed another version for younger students would be appropriate: “BtN is a great resource but not always appropriate for Year 3, which is what I’m teaching. Another version or edit for younger students would be great.” (New South Wales primary HASS/English teacher - qualitative survey response)

Barriers to implementing news lessons were also discussed at length by the teachers. One of the most consistent responses was finding the time in the curriculum to teach students about news media: “Probably the only reason we don’t spend more time on teaching them about the news is a very crowded curriculum.” (Victorian secondary school English teacher - qualitative survey response)

Another teacher agreed, suggesting the demands of the existing curriculum left little room for teaching students about news media, arguing that the “content level and quantity is so demanding that the discussion and debate necessary for addressing the news in a classroom environment is not possible.” (Queensland junior secondary Gifted Education Specialist teacher - qualitative survey response)

Some teachers provided more information about the challenges of accessing resources online:

A lot of the social networking sites are blocked at school so the kids can’t access Facebook, Twitter and Instagram because they are all blocked, so trying to get them to actually undertake relevant research and exploration of these things can actually be really tricky and some of our kids also don’t have social media.

TEACHER 19, WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SECONDARY ENGLISH/ARTS TEACHER

Several teachers also mentioned the technological challenges involved with teaching about news. One teacher from a low socio-economic community explained that due to their low socio-economic household status, many students do not have computers at home and their only access is via one computer lab at school. This was compounded by the school internet filtering system which meant “many news websites are often blocked in the school network.” They also often need to deal with a “lack of reliable internet.” (Queensland secondary school English/Arts teacher - qualitative survey response) This highlights the relationships between digital exclusion and inequality and the need to carefully consider supporting news media literacy in low socio-economic areas with adequate and appropriate resources.



NEWS

CHAMPIONS

Media Literacy is

IMPORTANT

Media Literacy is

TO

Media Literacy is

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WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

MoAD

Digital Media Research Centre

Education

Australian News Media Champions Forum event, Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD), Canberra Oct 20-22nd 2019.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the role and importance of news media literacy in Australia. At critical junctures in the development of the outbreak both misinformation (false information not designed to create harm) and disinformation (false information designed to create harm) has been spread throughout Australia, by local, international and sometimes unknown sources. The reasons people fall for false claims are many and complicated. In many cases those who create disinformation are very sophisticated in their ability to manipulate and mislead<sup>5</sup>.

While the internet is awash with articles providing tips on how to avoid false claims about Covid-19, it is unlikely they have received much attention from students. School remains the most important way to ensure students have the capacity and understanding of how to distinguish real news from misinformation and disinformation. This report contributes to discussions on misinformation and disinformation in news media by investigating if and how Australian schools teach news media literacy in the classroom.

During the period November 2019 to February 2020, 295 Australian primary and secondary school teachers responded to our survey. In addition, we conducted 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews with survey respondents.

While the survey cannot be seen to represent all teachers, we believe the 295 responses make this the largest survey to examine teaching about news media in Australia and our analysis shows that the respondents are diverse in terms of geography, subject areas and teaching experience.

Our survey findings show that the respondents believe that teaching students about news media is very important and many are already doing this regularly. However, despite almost all teachers wanting to teach students about news media, one third of teachers are not very confident about doing so. The findings also demonstrate the many barriers that stand in the way of news media literacy education that will need to be addressed if news media literacy education is to be further developed. To address these issues we propose three recommendations, outlined below.

We hope that this report will be useful to the Federal and State governments as they develop strategies for advancing news media literacy education.

In addition, we believe the findings will be relevant to school teachers and principals as they continue to plan news media literacy education in their schools. We also believe the research is relevant to organisations that produce news media literacy support materials as well as to news media organisations that want to increase their engagement with teachers and young Australians.

5. See <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200406-why-smart-people-believe-coronavirus-myths>

## **RECOMMENDATION 1: ADDRESS THE KEY BARRIERS THAT PREVENT TEACHERS FROM TEACHING AND USING NEWS IN THE CLASSROOM**

Teachers cited a number of common barriers that prevent them from teaching news media in the classroom including timetable constraints and curriculum structures (57%) and a lack of time for planning (45%). These barriers must be addressed by schools, education departments and school systems if news media literacy education is to be advanced.

Our research shows that for a small number of schools, digital exclusion and lack of resources remains a major impediment. Therefore, any media literacy efforts must also work to ensure lower socio-economic schools have adequate funding for computers and appropriate high-quality internet connectivity as well as news and resource subscriptions where required.

Most teachers who responded to our survey stated that they do not have access to any professional development or to advice or mentorship that would support them to teach news media in the classroom. This issue should be addressed if we are to build on teacher's capacity and confidence to teach students about news media. This could be supported by major news media producers who have a vested interest in engaging with young and future audiences.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2: REVIEW THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCING NEWS MEDIA LITERACY IN THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM**

Of concern, one third of the survey respondents (33%) stated that the Australian Curriculum places only a little importance on teaching students about news media. In addition, a significant number of teachers (15%) say they are not well supported by the Australian Curriculum to teach about news media, or they are unsure if they are (22%).

We agree with the ACCC recommendation that a review of the Australian Curriculum provides an important opportunity to evaluate how media literacy is being delivered in Australian schools. As noted elsewhere<sup>6</sup>, the Media Arts subject is one of the few international examples of an existing, mandated media literacy course for Pre-school to Year six students, accompanied by an additional scope and sequence of learning that continues from Years seven to ten<sup>7</sup>. While Media Arts places emphasis on making media, the 'responding' component, which requires students to reflect on their engagement with various media, is being used by teachers to develop students' critical thinking about the media.

We suggest that any review of the Australian Curriculum should focus on finding ways for Media Arts to be taken up in a greater number of primary and lower secondary schools. We also suggest the subject's 'critical' component be enhanced to provide teachers with clear, more detailed advice. The Australian Curriculum should also be clearer in how it directs teachers to develop student learning experiences across the curriculum. This will enable teachers to pair the creative and critical components of Media Arts with other subject areas like English, Humanities, Health, and Science, when and where appropriate.

At the same time, we believe it is important to ensure the English and Humanities Curriculum continue to support news media literacy education (as was demonstrated by the survey findings) and a review of the Australian Curriculum should also consider how to strengthen these opportunities.

6. Notley, T & Dezuanni, M 2019, 'Advancing children's news media literacy: learning from the practices and experiences of young Australians', *Media, Culture & Society*, 41(5): 689-707.

7. Notley, T. & Dezuanni, M. (2019) Advancing children's news media literacy: learning from the practices and experiences of young Australians. *Media, Culture and Society*, 41(5), pp. 689-707.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3: SUPPORT THE CONTINUITY AND CURATION OF HIGH-QUALITY AUSTRALIAN MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES AND TEACHER TRAINING**

It is clear from our research that current news media teaching support resources are being widely used by teachers and are highly valued; in particular from ABC Education, *Behind the News (BtN)*, BBC and Kids News (News Corp). There was also a 'long tail' of resources being used by teachers who included local news media materials.

The teachers' responses to the survey highlighted that they would like additional resources and support to teach students about news media including online resources, units of work, lesson plans and access to newspapers/subscriptions.

This suggests there may be an opportunity to fund the curation of existing resources and to support discussions among teachers on best practices when using these resources. It is worth investing in the continuity and growth of high-quality Australian resources and both State and Federal governments should consider this.

In addition, we believe it is important that more work is carried out to understand what kinds of resources and lessons best support effective news media literacy education in the classroom. While there has been some work on this internationally, we have been unable to locate any Australian research that establishes key news media literacy indicators alongside appropriate evaluation processes.

# METHODOLOGY

## **SURVEY PROCESS**

Our online survey was conducted between November 2019 and February 2020. Qualtrics Core XM Survey Tool was used to develop an online survey that was promoted via email to teachers who have subscribed to the ABC Education and Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) email lists. The survey was also promoted on social media by the researchers and by ABC Education and MoAD. The survey respondents do not comprise a representative sample of Australian teachers as the survey was self-selective; however, a broad cross section of teachers from a diverse range of schools, subject areas and year levels completed it.

## **SURVEY DESIGN**

The questions for the survey were designed with the participants in mind, including Australian teachers across the different sectors of schooling including government, independent and catholic, secondary and primary school, and any area of subject specialisation. The survey consisted of 25 questions including multiple choice, open responses and likert scale questions (Appendix A). Adaptions were made to the survey questions and design based on preliminary testing which took place after a select few teachers completed the survey. The survey took an average of 10 minutes for teachers to complete, with the option to participate in a follow up interview.

## **INTERVIEW PROCESS**

All respondents were invited to participate in a follow-up interview with 86 noting they were available for an interview. Of these, 20 participants were selected to reflect diversity in terms of years of teaching experience, location of school and area of specialisation (Appendix B). The interviews were carried out online using video conference software. The interviews were recorded as a video or audio file and were approximately 25 to 35 minutes each in length. Notes were taken during the interviews, and this was followed up with in-depth note taking and a transcription of key quotes after each interview. Some key themes were manually identified based on the notes and quotations.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: ABOUT THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

### Q1. What is your gender?

Answer	%	Count
Male	19%	57
Female	79%	233
Other	1%	1
Prefer not to say	1%	4
Total	100%	295

### Q2. How many years have you been teaching primary or secondary students?

Answer	%	Count
1_5	23%	69
6_10	17%	51
11_15	20%	58
16-20	16%	46
21-25	8%	25
25 +	16%	46
Total	100%	295

### Q3. What year level/s do you currently teach?

Answer	%	Count
Primary (Years P/K-6)	20%	90
Junior Secondary (Years 7-9)	39%	174
Senior Secondary (Years 10-12)	41%	185
Total	100%	449

### Q4. What is your subject area specialisation? (select all that apply)

Answer	%	Count
English	24%	108
Mathematics	4%	18
Science	6%	27
Humanities and Social Sciences	17%	73
The Arts	10%	46
Technologies	6%	26
Health and Physical Education	3%	13
Languages	2%	7
Other, please specify	12%	51
Generalist Primary Teacher	16%	72
Total	100%	441

### Q5. What is your school's postcode?

Answer	%	Count
NT	0%	1
NSW	38%	113
ACT	6%	17
VIC	13%	38
QLD	18%	52
SA	7%	22
WA	17%	49
TAS	1%	2
Total	100%	294

**Q6. What is the location of your school?**

Answer	%	Count
Major city	55%	164
Inner regional	19%	55
Outer regional	19%	55
Remote	7%	20
Very remote	0%	1
Total	100%	295

**Q7. Which socio-economic status does your school primarily service?**

Answer	%	Count
Low	26%	76
Middle	58%	172
Upper	13%	39
Not Sure	3%	8
Total	100%	295

**Q8. What is your school classification?**

Answer	%	Count
State / Government	64%	188
Catholic	13%	39
Independent	23%	68
Total	100%	295

## APPENDIX B ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEES

We interviewed 20 teachers in total.

**TEACHER 1:** Junior secondary Arts teacher from a middle class government school in a major city of Victoria with more than 25 years' experience.

**TEACHER 2:** Senior secondary English / EALD teacher from an upper middle class independent school in a major city of New South Wales with 21 – 25 years of experience.

**TEACHER 3:** Secondary HASS teacher from a middle class government school in a major city of the Australian Capital Territory with 16-20 years' experience.

**TEACHER 4:** Primary teacher librarian from a low socio-economic status government school in a major city of New South Wales with 11-15 years' experience.

**TEACHER 5:** Secondary English teacher from an upper middle class government school in a major city of Western Australia with 11-15 years' experience.

**TEACHER 6:** Teacher librarian from a middle class independent school in the inner regional area of Queensland with 16-20 years' experience.

**TEACHER 7:** Junior English teacher from a low socio-economic status government school in the inner regional area of New South Wales with 6-10 years' experience.

**TEACHER 8:** Prep to Year 12 generalist teacher from a government school in a major city of New South Wales with 11-15 years' experience.

**TEACHER 9:** Primary and junior secondary English, Science and HASS teacher from a government school in a remote area of Western Australia with more than 25 years' experience.

**TEACHER 10:** Secondary English and HASS teacher from a middle class government school in a major city of South Australia with 6-10 years' experience.

**TEACHER 11:** Prep to Year 12 teacher of Information Literacy from a middle class independent school in a major city of Queensland with more than 25 years' experience.

**TEACHER 12:** Primary school teacher from a middle class government school in a major city of New South Wales with 11-15 years' experience.

**TEACHER 13:** Secondary English teacher from an upper class government school in a major city of Western Australia with 11-15 years' experience.

**TEACHER 14:** Secondary English teacher from a middle class government school in the inner regional area of Queensland.

**TEACHER 15:** Secondary English teacher from a middle class independent school in a major city of New South Wales with 6-10 years' experience.

**TEACHER 16:** Primary school teacher from a middle class independent school in the outer regional area of Western Australia with 1-5 years' experience.

**TEACHER 17:** Primary school teacher from a middle class Catholic school in a major city of New South Wales with 11-15 years' experience.

**TEACHER 18:** Senior English teacher from a middle class independent school in the outer regional area of Western Australia with 6-10 years' experience.

**TEACHER 19:** Secondary English and Arts teacher from a middle class government school in a major city of Western Australia with 16-20 years' experience.

**TEACHER 20:** Secondary teacher librarian from a low socio-economic status government school in a remote area of New South Wales with 21-25 years' experience.





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