Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

12-18-2019

What Intellectual Empathy Can Offer Information Literacy Education

Andrea Baer
Rowan University, baera@rowan.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://rdw.rowan.edu/lib_scholarship

Part of the Cognitive Psychology Commons, Education Commons, Information Literacy Commons, and the Sociology Commons

INFORMED SOCIETIES
WHY INFORMATION LITERACY MATTERS FOR CITIZENSHIP, PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY

Edited by Stéphane Goldstein

Chapter 3 – PREPRINT VERSION

What intellectual empathy can offer information literacy education

Andrea Baer, Rowan University, New Jersey

This chapter explores the roles that affect, social identity and beliefs play in how people engage with information about politically- and emotionally-charged issues and the implications for information literacy education, particularly in politically polarised times. Considering research from cognitive psychology and education, I also suggest ways to move beyond traditional approaches to information literacy that tend to focus on logic and "objectivity" while neglecting the significance of personal beliefs and social identity to information behaviors. I give particular focus to philosopher Maureen Linker's concept of "intellectual empathy" – "the cognitive-affective elements of thinking about identity and social difference" (Linker, 2014, 12). Intellectual empathy, I argue, is crucial for the kind of critically reflective information literacy that is especially needed in order to foster democratic dialogue and civic engagement in an increasingly diverse and global world.

Introduction and background

On the morning of 9 November, 2016, I walked into my information literacy classroom at the University of West Georgia disoriented and disillusioned, unsure how to begin talking about a final research project and unsure how much that assignment really mattered now. Along with many other U.S. citizens and residents, I had woken up to news that Donald Trump would be the 45th President of the United States, after he had run a highly divisive campaign that

repeatedly played on fears that a more ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse society was a threat to the country's prosperity and "values."

That morning I asked myself how I would start class. My lesson plan seemed ridiculous now, dismissive of the elephant in the room. The previous evening students at an election viewing event had sat one two opposite sides of the room: they had self-segregated themselves by race and political alliances. I had also heard of white students heckling black students about the final outcome of the election. These were signs of the racial and political tension on my campus about which I had heard, but had not witnessed directly. While this wasn't too surprising given my geographic location (a small town in a conservative state) and the student population (racially diverse and primarily first-generation students from the state of Georgia), I hadn't had to confront this reality in the same way before. This was new territory, and I wasn't sure where or how to step.

Reconsidering my approach to the day's class, I discovered the resource Returning to the Classroom after the Election from the University of Michigan's Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan, 2016). I decided to follow some of its recommendations, which were intended to acknowledge students' current mental and emotional states and to better enable a more connected and engaged classroom. Later that morning I began the class with an acknowledgement of the mix of emotions and thoughts that students might be having at this moment, and I allowed time for students to share their reactions in a respectful manner. Many of my students, like me, were dazed and unsure if they were in a dream. Most stared into the distance as if in disbelief; some smiled with quiet reserve. Most remained silent, but a few chose to speak about the vitriol expressed on both sides of the political divide and the undeniable divisions in the country. People listened; people felt uncomfortable. There were no resolutions, except that I would strive to foster an inclusive classroom environment founded on mutual respect and a shared goal for learning together.

Looking back almost two years later, I see that this was a pivotal point in my teaching. Not because of a sudden radical change in my teaching approaches, but because of a gradual process of rethinking my conceptions of information literacy and my pedagogical priorities and approaches. Though throughout my librarian career I have believed that the affective, social and political are crucial (and too often neglected) dimensions of information literacy, my teaching often did not adequately reflect their importance. The current sociopolitical moment in the United States, and more specifically my experience of teaching on a racially and politically diverse campus in the conservative state of Georgia, has pushed me – along with many other educators – to reconsider what I most want students to carry with them when they leave my classroom. Gradually my classes are coming to better reflect that, even if there will always be some tension between my hopes and the realities.

A broader approach to information literacy

The charged rhetoric that has come into sharp relief in the United States since 2016 asks educators and citizens to pose deeper questions about our social structures, discursive practices and interpersonal relationships. We need new ways of engaging in civic life, and new ways of engaging with our students, regardless of their political views or their backgrounds. In light of research on political polarisation and motivated reasoning, simply teaching students to be well informed, how to spot "fake news" or how to search a database for empirical research may be

helpful, but these alone are not enough. And they are probably not the most important things to teach. We need new approaches to and new conceptions of information literacy and information literacy education. As danah boyd wrote (boyd, 2017), "[w]e need to get creative and build the social infrastructure necessary for people to meaningfully and substantively engage across existing structural lines. … [W]e need to focus on the underlying issues at play. No simple band-aid will work."

Recently other information literacy educators and scholars have similarly called for new conceptions of information literacy and new pedagogical approaches that foreground the powerful role that beliefs and cognitive biases play in information behaviors. Geoff Walton (Walton 2017) and Mark Lenker (Lenker 2016), for example, have convincingly argued for expanding conceptions of information literacy and information literacy education in order to better address the roles of affect, beliefs and cognitive biases in information literacy. As Walton argues, we need to develop understandings of information literacy that acknowledge the significance of "psychological notions of worldview, misinformation, confirmation bias, motivated reasoning and epistemic beliefs" in how people engage with and evaluate information (Walton, 2017, p. 137). Similarly, Lenker asserts that we can broaden the scope of information literacy education "to include more than just knowledge of information and its sources" but also "knowledge of how people interact with information, particularly the ways that motivated reasoning can influence citizens' interactions with political information" (2016, p. 511). As Walton and Lenker illustrate, educators need to address the deeper roots of what influences human thinking and information behaviors, often in unconscious ways.

These deeper roots include the role of beliefs and social identity in how people seek, evaluate, share and use information. The self-reflective approaches to information literacy education that I consider in this chapter invite students to become more self-aware learners who are better positioned to engage critically and responsibly with their local and global communities. More specifically, "intellectual empathy," an ability to consider the viewpoints, experiences and reasoning of others and to appreciate how social identity and social difference may influence our beliefs, can enable the self-reflective and socially engaged qualities needed when engaging with information.

In this chapter I focus in particular on Maureen Linker's conception of intellectual empathy. It offers a lens through which to engage with issues social identity and social difference that can be sources of human connection, as well as sources of divisiveness. Linker's work on teaching critical thinking and fostering intellectual empathy offers a great deal to information literacy educators who explore with students the affective, cognitive, social and political dimensions of information literacy that are often unrecognized but nonetheless powerfully influence individual and collective thought and discourse. The concept of intellectual empathy can be a powerful means through which to encourage in students the curiosity, openness and criticality that are essential to reflective inquiry and civic engagement.

Linker's pedagogical approaches are alternatives to the often combative nature of political and academic discourse, which she relates to a tradition of adversarial argument in Western culture. Linker instead models ways to encourage self-reflection, open inquiry and appreciation of social difference. Such abilities better enable individuals to recognize how our social identities and beliefs can influence how we seek out, evaluate, and use information. Without an awareness of this relationship, it is far more difficult to examine information and ideas critically. Because most people want to view themselves as reasonable and critical thinkers, our own biases and

motivated reasoning can be difficult to examine. Linker's work helps to make this work easier and more meaningful.

To provide further context for the relevance of Linker's work to information literacy education at this sociopolitical moment, I first discuss research on the relationship between sociopolitical beliefs, motivated reasoning and information behaviors. Then, considering their influence on how we reason and how we engage with information, I explore how the concept of intellectual empathy can inform approaches to information literacy education and how it has influenced the design of my information literacy credit course.

The ideas in this chapter are largely born out of my experiences teaching at this current moment in the southern United States. However, political polarization and social conflict are hardly unique to my class setting or my geographic location. I hope that the pedagogical concepts and strategies that I consider can encourage critical and reflective inquiry far beyond my immediate environment.

Sociopolitical Beliefs, Motivated Reasoning and Information Behaviors

Critically examining evidence and arguments and engaging in critical thought and inquiry is much easier when our views align with those of others or when examining issues about which we don't have strong beliefs. It is far more difficult when considering viewpoints, evidence and arguments that challenge long-held beliefs or their sense of self or of social belonging. This is well supported by research on motivated reasoning, which indicates that our evaluation of evidence and arguments is driven largely by pre-existing beliefs, convictions, or motivations, more so than critical evaluation of evidence. As much as humans may wish to believe that our choices and logic are rational and well-informed, numerous psychological studies suggest that we have far less conscious understanding of and control over our decisions and judgments than we realise (Lodge and Taber, 2005; Taber and Lodge, 2016; Druckman, 2012). We regularly engage in "motivated reasoning" – thinking that is heavily influenced, often unconsciously, by our own beliefs and agendas.

Motivated reasoning tends to be especially strong when we feel passionately about an issue, as is often the case with political and social issues. Thus, evaluating evidence accurately and examining arguments critically is especially challenging when encountering political or contentious issues, which often evoke strong pre-existing beliefs and emotions. As Milton Lodge and Charles S. Taber have found, when individuals engage with information about social and political issues, they are especially prone to automatic cognitive responses that are shaped by preexisting beliefs and biases (Lodge and Taber, 2005; Taber and Lodge, 2016). Moreover, a number of research studies indicate that individuals who are more informed about an issue are more likely to perform more poorly in evaluating the accuracy of information than those who are less informed. This is likely because those who are more knowledgeable about an issue are also likely to have already formulated strong opinions about that issue and thus to be more resistant than others with less strong views to reconsidering their beliefs (Lodge and Taber, 2005; Taber and Lodge 2016; Kahne and Bowyer, 2017). While educators in particular might like to believe that those who are better informed will make sounder and more reasoned decisions, this may not always be the case.

Motivated reasoning does serve some functions. Political and social issues frequently remind people of their core values, beliefs and social connections, all of which are vital to a sense of self

and social belonging. Thus, humans have good reason to think in ways that keep those aspects of themselves and their experiences intact. But people may tell themselves that they have reached certain conclusions through a careful consideration of all of the evidence when that is not necessarily the case. Relatedly, most individuals tend to believe that if they are well-informed on an issue, they are better equipped to fairly examine evidence and arguments about that issue.

Politically polarised climates present further obstacles to critical thinking and dialogue. In the United States this became particularly evident amidst the heated rhetoric of the 2016 Presidential campaign, as family members and previous friends "unfriended" one another on Facebook when it became too difficult to see views or statements that felt threatening or even hostile to their identities, lifestyles or deeply held beliefs and values. In such environments, how does one engage with the "other side," or is it even a good idea to do so?

In such climates the first impulse of many is to retreat to insulated communities and echo chambers, to places that provide some sense of solace from the messiness of our social and political environments. And yet if we remain within those chambers, if they become our only spaces of residence rather than places of respite in which we recharge before engaging with a wider circle of people, polarization will most likely grow even further. Studies by the Pew Research Center suggests that these echo chambers and information silos that we help to construct worsens polarisation (Pew Research Center, 2016, 2017; Barthel and Mitchell, 2017). Not only do we become less aware of the perspectives of others with differing views and the information to which they are exposed; we also become more hostile toward those with differing views (Pew Research Center, 2016). Such circumstances tend to strengthen the human tendency toward motivated reasoning and a dismissal of varying perspectives.

The answer, however, is not as simple as merely listening to other viewpoints. Research on confirmation bias shows that having one's own views challenged can result in a "backfire effect" that further reinforces those views, especially is they are strong. Interestingly, among the ways to reduce the likelihood of this backfire effect are making information less threatening. Reframing information can have a powerful effect, as can self-affirmation exercises like writing about an experience in which one felt good about themselves after acting according to a value that is important to them (Hardisty et al, 2010). Such research suggests that a disarming approach, like an intellectual empathic mindset, may reduce the likelihood of the backfire effect.

As such studies show, highly contentious issues often evoke strong beliefs because these issues are often personal. For example, how can an immigrant or a Muslim not have strong feelings about the US ban on immigrants from certain Muslim countries? Or how can a working-class student who has learned from an early age that immigrants are the reason that their family can't get a living wage be empathetic to Mexicans working in the U.S. illegally? Beliefs about such issues are often inextricable from individuals' social identities and senses of self. And those issues have become especially heated as political polarization has grown. Having one's beliefs questioned or considering alternatives to them can feel like a threat to one's sense of self and to one's community (and in some cases it may be).

It is easy to feel paralyzed when looking at the current political climate and the daily news. But this all points to the importance of ensuring that information literacy education addresses issues of social identity and difference, and their influence on beliefs and information behaviors.

For most educators this is unfamiliar and uncomfortable terrain. We may fear mis-stepping despite good intentions. Part of my own uncertainty comes from recognizing that I, like many educators, possess a certain social privilege as a middle-class and educated individual. I am also white, cisgender, able-bodied and a U.S. citizen, which result in certain social privileges that distance me from social inequities that affect many of my students on a deeply personal level. But the alternative, to do nothing out of fear of mis-stepping, is an even greater risk. Linker's conception of intellectual empathy has helped me explore ways to rethink my teaching in this current moment.

Intellectual Empathy and Critical Thinking

The term "intellectual empathy" is often referenced without being clearly defined. This reflects the concept's complexity and the challenge of adequately describing it. But outlining what intellectual empathy involves is a useful starting point for conversations about how education can foster more reflective and empathic thought. Among the first places that the term "intellectual empathy" appears is in Richard Paul's work on "intellectual virtues." Intellectual virtues are capacities that are vital to both cognitive and moral development and without which "intellectual development is circumscribed and distorted" (Paul, 2000, 163). These virtues include "intellectual humility, courage, integrity, perseverance, empathy and fairmindedness" (Paul, 2000, 166).

Intellectual empathy, as defined by Paul, involves the ability "to imaginatively put oneself in the place of others in order to genuinely understand them" (p. 169). This is critical to considering varying perspectives and to critically reading and evaluating sources that may not align with one's preexisting views, capacities that are vital to true inquiry and democratic dialogue. As Paul continues, intellectual empathy

> requires the consciousness of our egocentric tendency to identify truth with our immediate perceptions or long-standing thought or belief. This trait correlates with the ability to reconstruct accurately the viewpoints and reasoning of others and to reason from premises, assumptions, and ideas other than our own. This trait also correlates with the willingness to remember occasions when we were wrong in the past despite an intense conviction that we were right, and with the ability to imagine our being similarly deceived in a case at hand (p. 169).

Paul's discussion of intellectual empathy and other "intellectual virtues" articulates the value of more holistic pedagogical approaches that encourage reflection on one's own experiences and perceptions and their relationship to those of others.

More recently, Linker has explored the importance of intellectual empathy. She examines how issues of social identity and social difference can be barriers or bridges to more critical thought (elements to which Paul gives less attention). For her, "intellectual empathy" is "the cognitive-affective elements of thinking about identity and social difference" (Linker 2014, 12). This requires deliberate reflection on the roles that social identity and social difference play in human beliefs and reasoning. Linker's approach, informed by the work of Miranda Fricker, is rooted in an understanding that "many insights into judgments about credibility, reliable testimony, and rationality are lost if we fail to face the complexities of social difference, privilege, power, and disadvantage" (Linker, 2011, 113; Fricker, 2007).

Intellectual empathy offers ways to examine evidence and arguments more critically than is possible if individuals are unaware of their own positionality (various social identities and the privileges and disadvantages that come with them) and how they influence their world views and relationships to others. Empathy here is a matter of thinking, feeling and reflection. As Linker explains in Do Squirrels Eat Hamburgers?: Intellectual Empathy as a Remedy for Residual Prejudice:

"The intellectually empathic person seeks to develop empathic responses so as to gain a better ground epistemologically—not only with regard to her own beliefs but with regard to the assessment of evidence more generally. Thus, the objective of intellectual empathy is not to imagine that one can simply feel what another person is feeling but rather that one treat the reports of others, particularly those whose social experiences are vastly different from one's own, as credible sources of information for reflectively assessing one's own system of belief."

(Linker, 2011, 125)

This approach is distinct from traditional (and more pervasive) representations of critical thinking that describe evidence and reason as "objective" and uninfluenced by a speaker's social context or identity. Despite the prevalence of "objective" models of reasoning and argumentation, research on motivated reasoning repeatedly shows that one's beliefs and sense of social belonging are highly influential in their reasoning and evaluation of evidence, arguments, and information sources. Moreover, when a person identifies with a dominant group, it is much easier to dismiss or to silence the views of those in non-dominant groups. To ignore the powerful roles that social identity and social difference play in reasoning and argumentation is likely to make one more susceptible to cognitive biases that prevent deeper and more critical thought.

At the same time that intellectual empathy emphasises the importance of valuing and listening to the experiences and perspectives of others, this does not mean that any individual viewpoint is just as valid as that of another. Suggesting otherwise runs the risk of absolute relativism, according to which facts, evidence, and certain material realities (e.g., climate change, social inequalities) are inconsequential. For Linker, an intellectual empathic listener does not dismiss the importance of evidence and reasoning. Instead they are able to think more critically because they are "attuned to rhetorical contexts involving social difference." Such an individual considers social difference when "assess[ing] the consistency and coherence of their own beliefs and feelings before making an interpretive judgment" (Linker, 2011, 124).

For Linker, developing our reasoning in this way involves four key skills:
Beginning with the perspective of mutual compassion:
- Acknowledging "that advantage and disadvantage occur within a matrix of intersecting social properties" (as is described in Kimberly Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality)
- Recognizing that social privilege tends to be invisible to those with that privilege.
- Recognizing "maybe it's you" judgments, in which an interpreter dismisses a speaker's claim because the interpreter views the related issue as social rather than personal, and learning "to treat these judgments as opportunities for information and evidence" (125, 133)

These capacities, Linker believes, work together to better enable individuals to recognise, assess, and reduce residual prejudice (125). Diminishing such prejudice is vital both for creating a more just society and for enabling the kind of reflective, critical thought for which scholars like Fricker hope (Linker, 2011, 125; Fricker, 2007; Lipman, 2003; Lakoff, 2009).

I would also add to Linker's conception of intellectual empathy that some viewpoints may not be perspectives with which to empathise. As danah boyd argues,

> Empathy is a powerful emotion, one that most educators want to encourage. But when you start to empathize with worldviews that are toxic, it's very hard to stay grounded. It requires deep cognitive strength. Scholars who spend a lot of time trying to understand dangerous worldviews work hard to keep their emotional distance (boyd 2018).

Linker's four skills of intellectual empathy are crucial for exercising discernment about the limitations of empathy, though Linker does not discuss those skills in these terms.

Linker's book Intellectual Empathy and Social Justice (Linker, 2014), a text for college students on critical thinking, illustrates practical applications of her conception of intellectual empathy. Here she invites students to consider how their own backgrounds, experiences and social identities influence their beliefs, thinking and social interactions. She simultaneously introduces students to the science of how the human brain forms and maintain beliefs and how this affects human reasoning, interpersonal relationships, public and political discourse and larger issues of social justice.

Linker also emphasises the influential and often unrecognised role that cognitive biases related to social identity and difference can play in reasoning and argumentation (Linker, 2014). As she explains, because issues of social identity and difference often are deeply personal, it can be particularly difficult "to find arguments that rely on reasons and justification rather than insults and hostility" (81). Because of their personal nature, we often have automatic and visceral "gut level" responses when engaging with such issues. Moreover, issues of social identity and difference at "imbued with a history of inequality and opposition, which constrains not only our choices but also our concepts and our language" (81). In the context of information literacy, these constrained choices include whether we seek out information that challenges or complicates our own beliefs; how we evaluate the evidence and arguments in that information; and whether, how and why we use that information for particular purposes.

Linker's work suggests that critical thinking requires more than analytical skills alone: one also needs to become more cognizant of the roles that identity, affect and cognition play in one's engagement with information. These are aspects of information literacy that generally receive limited attention, despite their powerful influence on how people think and engage with information. They are also probably the hardest aspects of information literacy to teach, and they require time and a venture into less certain territory. But these barriers begin to lessen when educators engage with the work of others like Linker.

Intellectual Empathy and Social Justice offers strategies and key concepts that help individuals to recognise when they or others may be reacting unreflectively to issues of social identity and difference and to develop constructive responses to such moments. Two of the book's foundational concepts have been particularly useful to me in structuring my information literacy course around the theme of cognitive bias:

1)   the web of belief, a metaphor for how we form, preserve or change our beliefs and

2)   the "adversary method" of argumentation, which describes the traditional Western approach of "winning an argument," which often limits critical thought and a consideration of social differences

These interconnected concepts provide points of departure for exploring how beliefs, reasoning and people's relationships to information are largely shaped by social identities, experiences and environments in ways that often are not always visible.

The "web of belief

The web of belief – a metaphor for how people form, maintain or change beliefs – provides a foundation for Intellectual Empathy and Social Justice (Quine, 1951, Linker, 2014) As Linker explains, our beliefs are like a spider's web: each belief is connected to the others, and a change to one part of the web inevitably affects the other parts. Because people prefer to have a strong web, they generally resist changes to it. Individuals are particularly reluctant to make changes that lead to instability, as is the case if a core belief that lies at the web center is challenged.

Core beliefs are the strongest and often the oldest beliefs. They are therefore the most difficult to change. Often these beliefs are closely tied to one's sense of self, to social identity and to core values. At the edges of the web are peripheral beliefs, which are the least resistant to change, since they do not cause radical shifts in the entire web. Intermediary beliefs reside somewhere between the center and the outer edges of the web.

For the most part the web of belief helps people think and act efficiently throughout the day, but it can also limit the ability to think critically. For example, the web of belief illustrates how all individuals are susceptible to confirmation bias (the tendency to believe information that aligns with pre-existing beliefs and to reject information that misaligns with those beliefs), since confirmation bias helps people preserve stable webs.

The web of belief provides a foundation for Linker's later focus on the relationship between issues of social identity and difference, beliefs and argument. As she discusses, social identity plays a significant role in cognitive judgment and in views of social and political issues, particularly when those issues call to mind "core beliefs" that have shaped much of one's sense of self and one's thinking over time. Thus, thinking critically about information that may not fit into one's core beliefs often requires examining one's social identity in relation to one's web of belief. This web metaphor is particularly valuable when entering conversations about issues that often are more contentious, as it enables students and teachers to recognise a shared humanity that can ground and re-ground challenging discussions.

The Adversary Method of Argument and Cooperative Reasoning

Another foundational concept in Intellectual Empathy and Social Justice is the "adversary method" of argumentation. The adversary method, a term introduced by feminist philosopher Janice Moulton, describes the aggressive rhetoric and approaches to argument that are characteristic of much of Western culture and scholarship (Moulton, 1983). As Moulton describes it, an adversarial approach, encourages individuals either to uphold or to refute arguments in their entirety and to make the judgment that an argument is either completely right or wrong, rather than considering if some elements of an argument are useful while other elements should be questioned or could be modified and thus strengthened. The adversary method discourages individuals from examining an issue in relation to evidence and perspectives that complicate their own argument and that could actually be used to strengthen that argument. Thus an adversarial approach tends to encourage more simplistic thinking, rather than an appreciation of nuance and complexity.

According to philosopher Catherine E. Hundleby's analysis of critical thinking textbooks, the adversary method dominates most critical thinking textbooks (C. Hundleby, 2010). Reporting on this research, Linker explains that this approach undermines critical thinking: "Because we view those with whom we argue as opponents and not collaborators, we are not positioned to hear their claims with any openness or willingness that would enable us to see how their conclusions are related to our own" (Linker, 2014, 87). Such an approach to argument reinforces one's own biases and assumptions and allows one to keep their "web of belief" intact in its current form.

I would add that this does not mean that claims that are founded on a complete disregard for well-founded evidence (e.g., denial of climate change) or that dismiss universal human dignity and rights (e.g., white supremacy) should be considered legitimate topics for debate. Such ideas often shut down dialogue more than they open it. Hateful rhetoric can also have a silencing effect, particularly for students from marginalized groups who may feel less free to speak. Such argument also does not align with the skills of intellectual empathy that Linker describes in When Squirrels Eat Hamburgers (e.g., beginning with mutual compassion, recognizing that social privilege is often invisible to those who have that privilege).

The combative qualities of adversary argument, which are typically associated with masculinity, have made argumentation more accessible to white men with a high degree of social privilege. As Hundleby writes, "[t]he pervasiveness and authority of adversarial argumentation suppresses forms of discourse more available to people who are socially marginalised, regardless of their personal preferences, their comfort levels with different styles of communication, or their cognitive abilities" (Hundleby, 2013, 3). Not only does the adversary method reinforce traditional power structures. It also limits true critical thought because it is driven by attempts to "win an argument" and to poke holes in another person's reasoning, rather than by a genuine interest in deepening understanding. (Hundleby, 2013; Moulton, 1983; Linker, 2014). Though oppositional argument may be at times be useful, Hundleby and Linker express concern about when it is presented as the only available approach (Linker, 2014, 87).

While the adversary method that Linker describes is characteristic of much of teaching about argumentation, more cooperative approaches to argument can encourage deeper and more critical thought. Cooperative reasoning, an alternative that Linker proposes in Intellectual Empathy and Social Justice, draws from Linker's principles of intellectual empathy (outlined in Do Squirrels Eat Hamburgers?) As she writes,

> Cooperative reasoning involves thinking and reasoning cooperatively about social identity and difference, because when we reason in an adversarial manner, we fail to access the relevant feelings, experiences, and data that are all necessary for understanding the oppressive aspects of social identity. We need to think through these issues together, and this means hearing about how each of us experiences social systems and social categories (96).

Such cooperative reasoning involves mutual respect, as well as an acknowledgement that our own privilege is usually invisible to those who have it (96). When others express experiences of injustice, we should therefore consider our own privileges and keep an open mind before jumping to conclusions about that other person's experiences. Using this frame of mind is likely to reduce the negative effects of our own conscious and unconscious biases and to enable us to be more reflective and civically engaged community members, both within and outside of our classrooms.

Intellectual Empathy and Information Literacy Pedagogies

As the title of this chapter implies, the concept of "intellectual empathy" has been vital to my instructional work. The 2016 U.S. Presidential election and its aftermath prompted me to re-envision my credit-bearing information literacy course, as well as my view of information literacy education more broadly. Over the past two years I have continued to reshape my information literacy course, as Linker's work and the questions it raises have come to play an increasingly significant role in my curriculum.

The most obvious change to my course design has been the course theme, cognitive bias and information behaviors. This focus provides a lens through which students can reflect on the social, political and personal nature of information, while also developing concrete information skills. The class explores topics such as how individuals form, maintain and change beliefs; the powerful and important role that personal beliefs and identity play in our information behaviors and the challenges of evaluating information related to issues about which we feel strongly (as is often the case with political and social issues).

Given the course theme, the web of belief provides a helpful metaphor from the very beginning of the semester. It serves as a touchstone as the class explores the relationship between cognitive bias and information behaviors, common forms of cognitive bias (including confirmation bias and implicit bias) and possibilities for and challenges to counteracting cognitive biases. The adversary method of argumentation and alternatives to it are introduced one to two weeks after the web of belief. This encourages the class to consider how Western and academic cultures and political and public discourses can reinforce cognitive biases and limit thinking.

Taken together, the web of belief and the adversary method help the class to make better sense of the intense political polarization that is now particularly evident in the United States and elsewhere. These concepts are relevant to the various ways that students develop their understandings of information as social, political and personal and of themselves as active agents in complex information environments.

Political Polarization & the Web of Belief

An essential aspect of the course is considering the current sociopolitical moment in the United States and its influence on political and public discourse, including in the online environments that have become prevalent in everyday life. The concepts the web of belief and the adversary method prove useful as participants reflect on their own information habits and personal experiences in relation to research on political polarization and media habits.

Toward the beginning of the course the class reads the first chapter of Intellectual Empathy and Social Justice, entitled "The Web of Belief." Students reflect on the relevance of this concept to the course theme. Various course materials build on the concept of the web, as students consider issues like the spread of misinformation in politically polarised climates and the human impulse to maintain our webs of belief. Research from the Pew Research Center, such as the 2014 report Political Polarization & Media Habits and the more recent 2017 report The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider, provide evidence for the increased ideological divisions in the United States and suggest the significance that information behaviors and online news sources play in this polarization (Mitchell et al, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2017). Brief videos like "Why Our Brains Love Fake News" and "How You Can Burst Your Filter Bubble" draw

connections between our beliefs, confirmation bias and online information environments (Above The Noise, Public Broadcasting, 2017; BBC Trending, 2017).

Evaluating Source Credibility & Source Bias

The web of belief is also a powerful concept for teaching about source bias and source credibility. This metaphor illustrates how one's worldview and beliefs are often closely tied to one's experiences, background and sense of self and social belonging. This creates an opening for reflecting on the influence that identity and experience often have on the representation and the interpretation of facts and evidence.

A related resource, the video "How Journalists Minimize Bias" (from Facing History's lesson unit "Facing Ferguson: New Literacy in a Digital Age") illustrates that identity and perspective can shape the creation and the consumption of the news. The 6.5-minute video consists of interviews with journalists on their experiences reporting on the events surrounding the death of Michael Brown, an African-American youth killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. These reporters discuss the difficulties of gathering and evaluating information on this event as the story unfolded. They articulate that facts and evidence remain vital to understanding events and the issues surrounding them, at the same time that critically examining their own biases and perspectives enables them to provide more accurate and balanced reporting. Awareness of one's own identity, worldviews and biases (not a denial of these) can strengthen one's ability to critically evaluate information (Facing History and Ourselves & the News Literacy Project n.d.).

Among the challenges the journalists discuss is being cognizant of their own biases in order to resist any inclination to dismiss evidence that might not support their own immediate assumptions or preconceptions. USA Today reporter Yamiche Alcindor, a black woman, articulates how an awareness of one's background and experiences can strengthen one's ability to critically evaluate and report on news events. She also reflects that some audience members may prematurely and unfairly draw conclusions about the nature of her reporting when they see that she is African-American. Her thoughts about reporting on Ferguson strike a chord with many students, in particular those who have themselves been affected by police brutality or by negative perceptions of well-intentioned law enforcement officers. Alcindor, like other reporters featured in this video, conveys the importance of seeking out differing perspectives and interpretations of facts and evidence and evaluating that information critically. The ability to critically analyze information, she suggests, is strengthened by one's awareness of their identity, beliefs, and various alliances and groups of social belonging.

Facing Implicit Bias

Recognising and reducing biases is, however, hardly simple, especially when those biases are implicit and deeply rooted in a culture and in personal and collective histories. Most people, myself included, would rather view ourselves as fair and unbiased, but research on implicit bias presents the unsettling reality that implicit biases are part of being human. Our brains begin to create associations from the day that we are born, and most of these association are automatic and unconscious. The longer those associations are reinforced, the stronger they become and the more challenging they are to reshape. The enslavement of blacks in the United States, violence and sexual abuse against women, the stigmatization of anyone veering outside of the heterosexual or gender norms and the dehumanization of anyone who looks different – all of

these have powerfully shaped our perceptions of and relationships and responses to others. Asking students to face this reality and its relationship to our judgments, behaviors and relationships is a tall order.

Acknowledging implicit bias may be easier when a class is first introduced to concepts like the web of belief and the adversary method, as my teaching experiences thus far suggest. The web of belief and alternatives to the adversary method draw attention to a shared humanity and encourage openness and non-defensiveness. As research on debiasing indicates, feeling less threatened better enables individuals to examine information that may be unsettling (Sherman and Cohen, 2002; Cohen et al, 2007).

To encourage students to consider how implicit biases may influence human thinking and behaviors, I also invite them to take a version of the Implicit Association Test (IAT), created by researchers interested in implicit social cognition that is beyond conscious awareness. The IAT measures implicit biases through an online activity in which participants make very quick and automatic associations between certain images and words. For example, an IAT related to racial bias involves relating positive or negative terms like good or bad to images of black or white people. IAT participants are not given time to think, so their implicit biases are likely to surface. Though a person may intend to treat and to view all individuals with the same degree of respect, because implicit bias is learned unconsciously and begins to form at a very early age, it develops without one making a choice about it.

I present the IAT as an optional bonus activity, since taking the test involves giving consent to researchers to collect the data from completed tests. Students are asked to explain how the test measures implicit bias, and to reflect on their experience completing the test. They are not asked to share the results of their test, though some choose to do so. The IAT is eye-opening; it helps students gain a better understanding of how profoundly implicit biases affect our thinking, and it makes apparent the relevance of the web of belief to our everyday thinking and behaviors. The fact that most of us share similar implicit biases, regardless of our social identities, may help students to recognise that cognitive biases are part of what makes us human and that working to counteract them can be a shared goal, regardless of what our own social identities are.

Researching on Cognitive Bias

All of the above materials and activities help to build toward a final research project, in which students develop and explore a research question related to cognitive bias. (The project consists of 1: a research statement in which each student articulates their question, its significance and key issues and themes evidence from their information gathering and analysis and 2: a corresponding annotated bibliography.) This project provides an opportunity for students to apply and to build on what they have learned about cognitive biases, as they seek out varying perspectives and critically evaluate a range of information sources.

Since beginning to teach this course through the lens of cognitive bias, I find that students are more invested in and engaged with their research. They generally develop more nuanced research questions and are more strategic in searching for and evaluating sources. The time that is given to developing a fuller awareness of the influence of beliefs, identity, cognition and affect on reasoning and information behaviors provides a meaningful context for students' research and better enables them to develop research skills that have more traditionally been associated with information literacy instruction. My experiences thus far suggest that students are developing

stronger research and information skills in my course than previously and, moreover, that they are taking away a deeper awareness of the intersections between identity, belief, and information behaviors, aspects of information literacy that have far-reaching implications for fostering democratic dialogue and civic engagement.

Conclusion

As I continue to explore approaches to teaching that encourage intellectual empathy in both myself and my students, I face new questions and moments of discomfort and uncertainty. But it is also worth those moments of unease. As danah boyd again reflects,

"The path forward is hazy. We need to enable people to hear different perspectives and make sense of a very complicated—and in many ways, overwhelming—information landscape. We cannot fall back on standard educational approaches because the societal context has shifted. … We need to get creative and build the social infrastructure necessary for people to meaningfully and substantively engage across existing structural lines. … [W]e need to focus on the underlying issues at play. No simple band-aid will work" (boyd, 2017).

The societal context that boyd describes will continue to shift, potentially in more hopeful and empathic directions. Information literacy educators have a powerful role to play.

References

Above The Noise, Public Broadcasting (2017) 'Why Do Our Brains Love Fake News?' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNmwvntMF5A.

Barthel, M. and Mitchell A. (2017) 'Americans' Attitudes about the News Media Deeply Divided along Partisan Lines', Pew Research Center's Journalism Project blog, 10 May 2017. http://www.journalism.org/2017/05/10/americans-attitudes-about-the-news-media-deeply-divided-along-partisan-lines/.

BBC Trending (2017) 'How Can You Burst Your Filter Bubble?' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mh1dLvGe06Y.

boyd, d. (2017) 'Did Media Literacy Backfire?', Data & Society: Points, 5 January 5 2017. https://points.datasociety.net/did-media-literacy-backfire-7418c084d88d#.b0e5tqxzs.

boyd, d. (2018) 'You Think You Want Media Literacy… Do You?', Data & Society: Points, 9 March 2018. https://points.datasociety.net/you-think-you-want-media-literacy-do-you-7cad6af18ec2.

Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan (2016) 'Returning to the Classroom after the Election', CRLT Blog blog, 9 November 2016. http://www.crlt.umich.edu/node/93815.

Cohen, G. L., Sherman D. K., Bastardi A., Hsu L., McGoey M., and Ross L. (2007) 'Bridging the Partisan Divide: Self-Affirmation Reduces Ideological Closed-Mindedness and Inflexibility in Negotiation', Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 93 (3): 415–30. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.93.3.415.

Druckman, J. N. (2012) 'The Politics of Motivation', Critical Review 24 (2): 199–216.

Facing History and Ourselves & the News Literacy Project. n.d. 'How Journalists Minimize Bias', accessed 3 July 2018. https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/video/how-journalists-minimize-bias.

Fricker, M. (2007) Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198237907.001.0001/acprof-9780198237907.

Hardisty, D. J., Johnson E. J., and Weber E. U. (2010) 'A Dirty Word or a Dirty World? Attribute Framing, Political Affiliation, and Query Theory', Psychological Science 21 (1): 86-92.

Hofer, B. K., and Pintrich P. R. (1997) 'The Development of Epistemological Theories: Beliefs about Knowledge and Knowing and Their Relation to Learning', Review of Educational Research 67 (1): 88–140. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543067001088.

Hundleby, C. E. (2010) 'The Authority of the Fallacies Approach to Argument Evaluation', Informal Logic 30 (3): 279–308.

Hundleby, C. E.(2013) 'Critical Thinking and the Adversary Paradigm', APA Newsletters 13 (1): 2–8.

Kahne, J., and Bowyer B. (2017) 'Educating for Democracy in a Partisan Age: Confronting the Challenges of Motivated Reasoning and Misinformation', American Educational Research Journal 54 (1): 3–34. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216679817.

Kuhn, D. (1991) The Skills of Argument. 1st US-1st Printing edition. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lakoff, G. (2009) 'Empathy, Sotomayor, and Democracy: The Conservative Stealth Strategy', Huffington Post, 30 May 2009. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/empathy-sotomayor-and-dem_b_209406.html.

Lenker, M. (2016) 'Motivated Reasoning, Political Information, and Information Literacy Education', Portal: Libraries and the Academy 16 (3): 511–528.

Linker, M. (2011) 'Do Squirrels Eat Hamburgers?: Intellectual Empathy as a Remedy for Residual Prejudice', Informal Logic 31 (2): 110–138.

Linker, M. (2014) Intellectual Empathy: Critical Thinking for Social Justice. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Lipman, M. (2003) Thinking in Education. 2nd edition. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lodge, M. and Taber C. S. (2005) 'The Automaticity of Affect for Political Leaders, Groups, and Issues: An Experimental Test of the Hot Cognition Hypothesis', Political Psychology 26 (3): 455–82.

Mitchell, A., Gottfried J., Kiley J., and Matsa K. E. (2014) 'Political Polarization & Media Habits', Pew Research Center's Journalism Project blog, 21 October 2014. http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/.

Moulton, J. (1983) 'A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method'. In Harding S. and Hintikka M. B. (eds) Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science, edited by 161:149–64. Synthese Library. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-306-48017-4_9.

Paul, R. (2000) 'Critical Thinking, Moral Integrity and Citizenship: Teaching for the Intellectual Virtues'. In Axtell G. (ed) Knowledge, Belief and Character: Readings in Virtue Epistemology, 163–175. Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishers.

Perry, W. G. (1999) Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme. Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Pew Research Center (2016) 'Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016'. http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/06/06-22-16-Partisanship-and-animosity-release.pdf.

Pew Research Center (2017) 'The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider'. http://www.people-press.org/2017/10/05/the-partisan-divide-on-political-values-grows-even-wider/.

Quine, W. V. (1951) 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', The Philosophical Review 60 (1): 20–43. https://doi.org/10.2307/2181906.

Sherman, D. K., and Cohen G. L. (2002) 'Accepting Threatening Information: Self–Affirmation and the Reduction of Defensive Biases', Current Directions in Psychological Science 11 (4): 119–23. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00182.

Taber, C. S., and Lodge M. (2016) 'The Illusion of Choice in Democratic Politics: The Unconscious Impact of Motivated Political Reasoning', Political Psychology 37 (February): 61–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12321.

Walton, G. (2017) 'Information Literacy Is a Subversive Activity: Developing a Research-Based Theory of Information Discernment', Journal of Information Literacy 11 (1): 137–155.