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Trust, Criticality, & the Open Web: Three Approaches to Teaching Lateral Reading

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Definition of Lateral Reading

- The process of moving off of a webpage to see what others say about it
- An alternative to evaluation checklists that accounts for how the creation of online information has evolved

Presentation Learning Outcomes

- Become familiar with the practice and importance of lateral reading (LR) and the skills and mindsets it involves.
- Become familiar with different approaches to teaching LR and challenges of learning and teaching about it.
- Reflect on the potential relevance and applications of LR in your own teaching context.

Agenda

- Background on lateral reading (LR)
- Our projects
- “Layers” as metaphor for teaching LR
 - Student mindsets
 - Student learning
- Pedagogical takeaways
- Continuing questions

Lateral Reading in Action

Videos from Mike Caulfield*

- “Online Verification Skills — Video 1: Introductory Video” <https://youtu.be/yBU2sDIUbp8> (3:14)
- “Online Verification Skills — Video 2: Investigate the Source”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hB6qjlxKItA>
(2:45)

SIFT

- **S**top/Pause.
- **I**nvestigate the source.
- **F**ind better coverage.
- **T**race claims, quotes, and media back to the original context.

Click restraint

- The practice of scanning all search results from an Internet search before deciding which links to follow
- Video: How to Find Better Information Online: Click Restraint

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbPEiCGxVVY&feature=youtu.be>

(2:19)

Our Projects

Rowan University, Glassboro NJ

- 100% asynchronous interactive module
(<https://libguides.rowan.edu/tutorial-evaluatingonline-resources1>)
- Scaffolding (pre-activity, modeling, opportunities for practice and feedback, reflection)
- Mostly first and second year students have completed.

Rowan University (Glassboro, NJ)

- Many students used “checklist” habits both before and after tutorial completion, though there was increased use of lateral reading strategies.
- Many students appear not to know what questions to ask in order to do deeper source evaluation. Others seems to intuitively ask critical questions once doing LR.
- Our data collection so far supports findings in literature (improvement in LR practices, but learning needs to be reinforced and teaching expanded and sustained).

Gustavus Adolphus College (St. Peter, MN)

- Discussion-based, credit-bearing information literacy course called “Clickbait, Bias, and Propaganda in Information Networks”
- Exploration of information ethics and social justice in relation to networked media systems
- Half semester, interdisciplinary course with students from all years of study
- For their final project, students wrote chapters for the course’s open access textbook exploring the information ecosystems of different social media platforms

Gustavus Adolphus College (St. Peter, MN)

Through a variety of readings, discussions, activities and assignments, students used lateral reading to understand:

- How some voices are privileged while others are marginalized
- How to develop trust in information sources on the open web, especially social media

Indiana University (Kokomo, IN)

- Started teaching lateral reading as one of the participating campuses in the [Digital Polarization Initiative](#) in 2018.
- Focus on introducing [SIFT](#) (developed by Mike Caulfield) to students as an alternative information verification method and providing them with hands-on opportunities.
- Flipped one-shot information literacy instruction session (pre-activity, demonstration, group activity and presentation, after-class assignments)

Indiana University (Kokomo, IN)

- For all students in the *ENG-W 131 Reading, Writing, and Inquiry I* classes, most of them are freshmen and sophomores.
- Many students rely on web domain extensions (.edu, .org, etc.) and other checklist items to judge the source credibility.
- Some students trust their own experience over contradicting evidence when it comes to examining the news items.
- Assessment data shows positive outcomes.

"Layers" Running across Our Projects

Student Mindsets

Student Learning

Issues of Ethics and Social Justice

Surface vs. Depth in Lateral Reading

*Student Mindsets:
Attitudes, Perspectives, Experiences*

Unlearning and Developing New Habits

Many students have been taught ineffective evaluation strategies that often interfere with new learning. (e.g., web domain as essential, taking at face value information on an About page)

(see Wineburg et al., “Educating for Misunderstanding,” 2020)

Unlearning and Developing New Habits (con'd)

- Addressing misunderstandings
- Recognizing reasons that some traditional web evaluation strategies are ineffective
- Gaining practice with new strategies that are reinforced over time

Scaffolding

- Tapping into students' prior knowledge + introducing new concepts and practices
- Modeling lateral reading, ongoing opportunities for student practice and immediate feedback
- Modeling metacognition and inviting student metacognition and reflection
- Identifying student challenges and in response developing additional scaffolds

Healthy Skepticism

- Oftentimes, any indication of bias would lead students to distrust a source outright.
- The act of lateral reading was about how to build trust, rather than foment more distrust.
- Teaching then became about teaching students how lateral reading can help them look for ways to trust once they have moved off the page.
- The degree of trust that one seeks depends on the information need. The depth of one's source analysis will reflect that.

Student Learning

“Surface” vs. “Depth” in Lateral Reading

- Surface: going off of the page in question to seek other coverage, but not knowing how to seek *trusted* coverage or coverage that provides further insight into the original source (e.g., assuming that if a source includes one verifiable fact the entire source is credible)
- Depth: being at more skilled at asking critical questions (e.g., creator’s motivations, agenda, or purpose)

“Surface” vs. “Depth” in Lateral Reading

- Many students didn't know the critical questions to ask when they “went off the page.” Others did this without prompting.
- More scaffolding needed to encourage metacognition and critical source analysis among all students.

Ethics and Social Justice

- To develop trust in information in order to be informed citizens of the classroom and the world, students must learn how systems of oppression make evaluation more difficult.
- Students employ lateral reading (LR) and discuss algorithmic bias, unethical information production, and post-truth.
- Students need to understand that previous methods of information evaluation or even surface lateral reading are not enough.

Pedagogical Takeaways

Scaffolding

- “Unlearning” and developing new habits for source evaluation
- Need for more scaffolding
 - Common overestimation of students’ exposure to certain ideas, practices, or skills (e.g., evaluating source creator’s motivations)
 - Critical thinking that goes into effective lateral reading (e.g., the need to investigate motivations/purpose/perspective when finding other coverage and determining what coverage to trust)
- Approaching lateral reading and related skills and concepts as a collaborative effort of all educators

Issues and ethics of information creation and production

- Unpacking the layer of how an information ecosystem operates makes teaching lateral reading more difficult and requires a more nuanced approach.
- Students' acceptance of surveillance and the power of social media in our information networks as just "part of life"
- Students need to understand their rights as information consumers and producers and what they should come to expect from and look for in their information sources.

Timeliness and Looking Ahead

- Centrality of online environments in virtually all aspects of everyday and civic life
- Political polarization and the prevalence of misinformation online
- High stakes of discerning credible news and health information amidst a pandemic
- Utility extends beyond the college classroom/academic life

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Teaching Resources

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<https://libguides.rowan.edu/EvaluatingOnlineSources>
- Caulfield, Michael Arthur. *Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers*. Pressbooks, 2017.
<https://webliteracy.pressbooks.com/>
- Mike Caulfield: Online Verification Skills Videos (produced by [CIVIX Canada](#))
 - Video 1: Introductory Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBU2sDIUbp8>
 - Video 2: Investigate the Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hB6qjlxKItA>
 - Video 3: Find the Original Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRZ-N3OvvUs>
 - Video 4: Look for Trusted Work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJG7kFmS0FE>
- Michael Caulfield’s Check, Please Starter Course:
<https://www.notion.so/Check-Please-Starter-Course-ae34d043575e42828dc2964437ea4eed>
- Fister, Barbara, Rachel Flynn and students in IDS 101, “Clickbait, Bias, and Propaganda in Information Networks. Pressbooks, 2019. <https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/informationnetworks/>

Continuing Questions

- What challenges do you have or anticipate having with teaching lateral reading?
- What potential do you see for collaboration with other educators to integrate lateral reading into teaching and learning?
- Other ways that concepts/practices we've explored intersect with your work?