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Developing digital detectives: Essential lessons for discerning fact from fiction in the 'fake news' era | Book Review

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Abstract

Many educators are eager to increase media and information literacy among their students. *Developing Digital Detectives: Essential Lessons for Discerning Fact from Fiction in the 'Fake News' Era* (2021) by Jennifer LaGarde and Darren Hudgins provides educators with media and information literacy instructional strategies that center around four lenses supported by key questions. In a previous publication, the authors acknowledge that technology isn't the cause of disinformation but its enabler and amplifier. *Developing Digital Detectives* brings to focus that we, at times, are driven by emotion rather than logic and provides critical lenses with which to view media and information content.

Key Words

Media literacy; information literacy; digital citizenship; fake news

Developing digital detectives: Essential lessons for discerning fact from fiction in the 'fake news' era

LaGarde, J., & Hudgins, D. (2021). *Developing digital detectives: Essential lessons for discerning fact from fiction in the 'fake news' era*. International Society for Technology in Education.

Fake News. A recently well-known term that has taken the place of misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, and more simply a disagreement.

The book *Developing digital detectives: Essential lessons for discerning fact from fiction in the 'fake news' era* (2021) seeks to provide educators with tools, techniques, and support in implementing media and information literacy into their classrooms. The authors, Jennifer LaGarde and Darren Hudgins build upon their previous work by defining critical lenses with which media and information consumers can use to discern misinformation. While the authors refute the term “fake news”, each critical lens will provide educators and students with the key questions as a means to locate quality information and discern mis/dis/malinformation across media. The book’s overarching purpose is not just to teach “real” versus “fake” news, but to provide a means with which readers and media consumers can think critically, ask quality questions, seek confirmation, and identify triggers created to flame a response.

“we’ve also come to believe that the term fake news itself has become toxic: a slur sometimes used to discredit content that challenges one’s own beliefs. That’s why, apart from this in explanation (and the title), the term doesn’t appear anywhere else in this book.” (LaGarde & Hudgins, 2021)

The first half of the book, chapters 1-4, identify four key lenses media and information consumers can use. *Chapter 1: The First Lens: Triggers* focuses on managing your emotional response to information. This chapter challenges the reader to consider their emotional response to content, and if there is no emotional response, the reader is then challenged to consider whether or not other individuals or groups of people would have an emotional response. The second chapter, *The Second Lens: Access* brings to question device use. Content and information may appear differently on desktop or laptop screens than it does on a mobile device. In addition, lateral reading and using hyperlinks becomes a challenge on a mobile device as tabs are opened one

on top of the other rather than horizontally. In *Chapter 3: The Third Lens: Forensics*, the authors pose questions to the reader to help them dig deeper into media and information content. This lens shifts the focus from finding the right answer to asking the right questions. The final chapter of this section of the book, *Chapter 4: The Fourth Lens: Motives* has the reader flip the script by putting themselves in the shoes of those who create suspicious content.

Chapters 5-7 highlight media and information literacy for young learners and begin to encourage the connection between information and emotions. Media and information literacy is a global skill, and these chapters bring to light the importance of working together and discussing information even at an early age. The final three chapters, 8-10, include a social-emotional learning component that is associated with media and information literacy education. Each of these chapters focuses on grade-level groupings (i.e. grades K-3, 4-8, 9-12) and includes lesson plan examples. Each lesson plan includes graphics to support the instruction, as well as learning objectives and the ISTE Standards (ISTE, 2022) for both students and educators.

In our ever-changing and sometimes volatile digital world, it is important for educators to engage in media and information literacy education. Using simple checklists such as the Current, Relevant, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose (CRAAP) test (Blakeslee, 2004) is outdated and no longer relevant. Many times, it is easy for students to locate the right information concerning the currency, relevancy, authority, accuracy, and purpose of media content. The real challenge comes from asking the right questions and digging deeper into the motives behind the content and, by extension, the producer or publisher. For educators to really encourage a media and information literate student population, they must begin using strategies that help students look more critically at media and information. For digital age learners, this means using critical lenses when examining media and information content, including social media posts.

Author Jennifer Lagarde is a former public education teacher with experience as a school librarian and digital teaching and learning specialist. She has been published in various professional journals including *Library Journal*. LaGarde's work extends far beyond K-12 public education as she now teaches courses focused on emerging literacies and young adult literature at Rutgers University. Her work has been recognized in the *New York Times*, the American Association of School Librarians, and the Carnegie Corporation. (LaGarde & Hudgins, 2021)

Darren Hudgins, author, is the director of Think | Do | Thrive, LLC. With over 20 years of experience in education, edtech, and educational coaching, he is an ardent

advocate for cross-curricular learning experiences that involve real-world scenarios that engage and stretch educators and students to *think, do, and thrive*. Hudgins is a champion of “active learning and creating opportunities for educational communities to improve”. (LaGarde & Hudgins, 2021)

LaGarde and Hudgins previously published *Fact vs Fiction: Teaching critical thinking skills in the age of fake news* (2018) with the International Society for Technology in Education. *Developing Digital Detectives* (2021) is an extension of their work to spread media literacy education.

Additionally, the authors' work in *Developing Digital Detectives* (2021) is supported throughout the final chapters of the book with the inclusion of lesson and unit plan examples. To further support the printed lesson and unit plans in the text, a supplemental website, The Evidence Locker (2021), houses additional lesson plans, unit examples, graphics, posters, an interactive participation map, and an embedded Twitter feed. This text, and its supplemental materials, are a valuable contribution to media and information literacy education for K-12 and pre-service educators.

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