

School library case study

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Using the school library for critical literacy

Librarians have always been gatekeepers of information by providing the best and most reliable resources available and showing users how to find them. This hasn't changed with the advent of the Internet – in fact it has become even more necessary. The difficulty comes with the fact that everyone has information at their fingertips, but many people struggle to evaluate the validity of that information and where it comes from.

“We aim to empower our pupils with the skillset to confirm facts in a world of disinformation; and promote thinking that is clear, logical and assumption free.” (Cathal Coyle, Librarian)

Case study – Year 8 critical media literacy project at St. Patrick's College, Dungannon

The 'Young News Readers' Critical Media Literacy Project is designed for children aged 8-12 by *The Irish News*, a regional daily newspaper based in Belfast which features local, national and international news items. It was introduced in St. Patrick's College, Dungannon in January 2017 to complement pupils' coverage of the Newspapers module that is taught as part of the Year 8 English curriculum to the entire year group (currently 105 pupils).

St. Patrick's College places a great emphasis on the 'literate learner' as a text participant – i.e. one who forms and communicates their own interpretation through their knowledge of the vocabulary, punctuation, grammar and structure of texts. During this project, the impact that images can present to the reader was also examined, and this is included as the lesson plan example.

Week one of the project introduced the newspaper and its layout; before the pupils used the newspaper, the teacher/librarian introduced the types of articles *The Irish News* contains and its format; they had previously learned about different types of newspapers during English class.

In **Week two** of the project, pupils participated in the 'Scavenger Hunt' where they worked in



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pairs to locate information. Once the pupils had completed this, they were asked about the techniques used to locate the information and how successful they were. This metacognitive discussion encouraged pupils to be aware of and to understand their own thought processes; in particular the question that asked for pupils to locate an article that concerned them, and what their concern was, ensured that pupils had to consider what type of stories impacted on them and consider why that was the case.

Week three focused on pupils learning to evaluate information in the newspaper using six criteria for newsworthiness. Pupils spent 5-10 minutes reading the newspaper at the beginning of class and were encouraged to think about why stories have been included. They reviewed types of information included in the newspaper that informed, entertained and persuaded.

Pupils were presented with six criteria for news on the whiteboard:

- **PROMINENCE:** A person, organisation or institution in the story is important or well-known.
- **PROXIMITY:** The event happened nearby, which makes it relevant.
- **TIMELINESS:** News that is happening and is of interest to readers right now.
- **UNIQUENESS:** The news was unexpected, out of the ordinary and unusual.
- **CONSEQUENCE:** The news will affect/impact a large number of readers directly or indirectly.
- **HUMAN INTEREST:** A news story that touches lives, imagination or emotions of readers.

In pairs, pupils were tasked to find examples of a story that meets each criterion, and volunteers were asked to read headlines from their newspapers that were good examples of each criterion.

Week four focused on the 'Lead Article'; the objective of which was for pupils to learn how to evaluate information in the newspaper for its newsworthiness. The teacher/librarian distributed a list of front-page Irish News headlines and asked pupils to decide which three headlines they thought represented the most important news stories of the day. Pupils discussed whether the lead article (and the other stories) was designed to inform, persuade or entertain.

Contributed by Cathal Coyle, Librarian at St. Patrick's College Dungannon, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland.