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Media literacy snapshot shows students need help navigating the news

Researchers at the University of Tasmania have identified an urgent need for greater digital media awareness and media literacy support for Australian teachers and students.

A new Institute for the Study of Social Change report titled *A Snapshot of Media Literacy in Australian Schools* explores the challenge of teaching young people to separate fact from fiction in an age of online news manipulation.

Authored by Dr Jocelyn Nettlefold, who leads the Media Literacy Project partnership between the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the University of Tasmania, and Dr Kathleen Williams, the University's head of journalism, the report draws on a recent survey of Tasmanian primary and secondary school teachers.

It also provides an overview of news consumption trends and the proliferation of misinformation in the digital realm, while highlighting concerns about students' abilities to identify false news.

The report calls for a multi-stakeholder approach to media literacy and media education in Australia and greater support and training for teachers.

Key findings:

- Of the 97 teachers from the State, Catholic and Independent sectors who took part in the snapshot survey, the majority (77%) feel equipped to guide students on whether news stories are true and can be trusted, but nearly a quarter (23%) do not.
- Overwhelmingly, teachers view critical thinking about media as important but when asked how often they explore critical engagement with news stories, nearly a quarter of the teachers surveyed (24%) said they rarely turned it into a classroom activity.
- Many teachers, particularly those at the secondary level, are deeply worried about students' reliance on digital and mobile media for news.

- There are inconsistencies across educational sectors about the teaching of media literacy under the Australian Curriculum.

The teachers, who were predominantly aged over 35, tended to trust traditional media including the ABC and local newspapers, TV and radio, but reported low levels of trust in social media.

“With research showing Australians, particularly younger Australians, are increasingly relying on social media for news, this discrepancy between how teachers and students access news raises some issues,” Dr Nettlefold said.

“Teachers need to be supported with specialised media education resources to explain the news media environment, and the way participants are engaged in it, including social and ethical dimensions.”

Read the full report at www.utas.edu.au/social-change

Next week, on September 10 and 11, the ABC and University of Tasmania will host a national media literacy conference in Hobart featuring senior editors, journalist and academics from across Australia. View the full program at <http://www.utas.edu.au/navigating-the-news> and watch the key speakers online via ABC iView or www.livestream.com/UniversityofTasmania

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