Teaching Source Evaluation in Politically Polarized Moments: Exploring Metacognitive Practices & Critical Pedagogies

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Workshop Overview

- Reflect on the relevance of recent political tensions (globally and locally) to student learning, information behaviors, and information literacy instruction.

- Consider how research on motivated reasoning, cognitive development, and classroom climate can inform information literacy instruction.

- Explore pedagogical approaches that encourage self-reflection, open inquiry, and appreciation of social, political, and cultural contexts when seeking, evaluating, and using information for a particular purpose.

- Develop and share instruction activities that encourage reflective and

A “Post-Truth” Era?

“Post-truth”:

“relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”

– Oxford Dictionaries

“Alternative Facts”

Meet the Press interview with Kellyanne Conway (January 22, 2017)

Kellyanne Conway:

“You’re saying it’s a falsehood, and …our Press Secretary Sean Spicer gave **alternative facts**.”

Chuck Todd:

"**Alternative facts** are not facts. They are **falsehoods**."

Political Polarization in the U.S.

"Republicans and Democrats are more divided along ideological lines – and partisan antipathy is deeper and more extensive – than at any point in the last two decades."

- Pew Research Center, 2014

"When it comes to getting news about politics and government, liberals and conservatives inhabit different worlds. There is little overlap in the news sources they turn to and trust. And whether discussing politics online or with friends, they are more likely than others to interact with like-minded individuals."

– Mitchell et al., 2014

Opening Reflection & Discussion

Have recent political events or issues influenced your campus/classroom/other instructional work?

Have you ever experienced political or ideological tension in the classroom? If so, what was that experience like (e.g., emotionally/physically/intellectually)?

Do your experiences suggest anything about teaching and learning in politically charged contexts? Or more specifically about teaching source evaluation and source use?

Political Polarization & Reasoning: Key Concepts & Research

“Hot Cognition” & Politics

Affect-laden nature of sociopolitical concepts: triggers automatic cognitive responses based on already established beliefs and biases

“[M]ost citizens, but **especially those sophisticates with strong political attitudes**, will be biased information processors.”

(Lodge & Taber, 2005, p. 455)

Motivated Reasoning & Information Behaviors

Kahne & Bowyer (2016) (survey of youth ages 15-27)

- Students susceptible to motivated reasoning: seek evidence that fits their own beliefs and discount alternative perspectives.

- Individuals with greater political knowledge are more prone to confirmation bias.

- Political knowledge did not improve judgments of accuracy, but media literacy education did.

"**Standard educational responses** to these priorities often emphasize content knowledge and generic analytic abilities. However, a growing body of research demonstrates the **limited value of knowledge and analytic abilities when it comes to making evidence-based judgments in highly partisan contexts**."

– Kahne & Bowyer, 2016 , p. 4

Responding to Motivated Reasoning, Fostering Accuracy Motivation

- Being required to justify one's opinions
- Considering various perspectives
- Reflecting on one's own reasoning process

(Druckman, 2012)

Beyond “Standard Responses”

Adversarial Argument & Academic Culture

"[T]he philosophic enterprise is seen as an **unimpassioned debate between *adversaries* who try to defend their own views** against counterexamples and produce counterexamples to opposing views."

(Moulton, 1983, p. 153)

Adversarial Method & Curriculum

Adversarial method dominates most critical thinking textbooks; undermines true critical thinking

(Hundleby, 2010)

"Because we view those with whom we argue as opponents and not collaborators, we are not positioned to hear their claims with any openness of willingness that would enable us to see how their conclusions are related to our own."

[Linker, 2014, p. 87, reporting on Hundleby (2010)]

Intellectual Empathy

"the *cognitive-affective* elements of thinking about identity and social difference"

(Linker, 2014. p. 12)

Coalescent Argumentation

"bring about an agreement between two arguers based on the conjoining of their positions in as many ways as possible" (Gilbert, p. 70)

"treat argument as a *human* endeavour rather than a logical exercise" (Gilbert, p. 77)

"make room . . . for those practices used by actual arguers" (Gilbert, p. 77)

Information Literacy & Reflective Inquiry

"Only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem at first hand, seeking and finding his own way out, does [the student] think."

John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 188.

Dewey's Conception of Reflection

- Meaning-making process through which one develops a deepened understanding of the connections between various experiences and ideas

- Systematic way of thinking, rooted in scientific inquiry

- Occurs in community and through interaction

- Involves valuing personal and intellectual growth

(Rodgers, 2002, p. 845)

“Research as Inquiry”: Dispositions of the *ACRL Framework for IL*

- consider research as open-ended exploration and engagement with information
- value intellectual curiosity in developing questions and learning new investigative methods
- maintain an open mind and a critical stance
- seek multiple perspectives during information gathering and assessment
- demonstrate intellectual humility (i.e., recognize their own intellectual or experiential limitations)

“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.

- dana boyd, “Did Media Literacy Backfire?,” 2017

"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."

- dana boyd, "Did Media Literacy Backfire?," 2017

Epistemological Development & Classroom Climate

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Students & Epistemological Thinking: Kuhn's Cognitive Development Scheme

- **Absolutist:** Absolute Truth; Right/wrong answers

- **Multiplist:** Acknowledgement of uncertainty and of multiple perspectives; Skepticism toward expertise; May see different viewpoints as equally valid

- **Evaluative:** Some things unknowable, but recognize expertise

(Hofer & Pintrich, 1997, p. 103-104)

Student Social Identity & Development

"Even though some of us might wish to conceptualize our classrooms as culturally neutral or might choose to ignore the cultural dimensions, students cannot check their sociocultural identities at the door, nor can they instantly transcend their current level of development."

(Ambrose et al., p. 169-170)

Reflection & Discussion

- What pedagogical implications for your own teaching do you see in this research?

- Does any of this research resonate with your teaching or personal experiences?

Fostering Positive Class Climate & Learning

Fostering Inquiry

- Make uncertainty safe.
- Resist a single right answer.
- Incorporate evidence into performance and grading criteria.
- Model inclusive language, behavior, and attitudes.

(Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 180-181)

Fostering Positive Class Climate & Learning (continued)

- Establish and reinforce ground rules for interaction.
- Anticipate and prepare for potentially sensitive issues.
- Address tensions early.
- Turn discord and tension into a learning opportunity.
- Facilitate active listening.

(Ambrose, 2010, p. 183-185)

Pedagogical Praxis

Developing & Sharing Instruction Ideas

Group Activity:
Examine an instruction resource. (5 minutes)

Review your groups activity handout(s). Brainstorm ways you might use the resource in your individual or collaborative instructional work. Prepare to share one instruction idea that fosters reflective inquiry.

Classroom Ground Rules
(Examples)

- Be open-minded. Respect that not everyone with share your view.

- Be honest and real with one another while remaining respectful to everyone.

- Reflect before responding.

- Understand that we all sometimes have inaccurate information. Be open to critically examining information and reassessing it if need.

Classroom Ground Rules (continued)

- Don’t monopolize the conversation. Give everyone a chance to share.
- Do not interrupt.
- Accept and respect that others may have different views. Remember that our goal is to learn through our interactions with one another, not to convince others of our own perspectives.
- Appreciate that we all have unique experiences and backgrounds that shape our perspectives.
Appreciate that we can learn through listening openly to one another and sharing about our viewpoints.

Framing and Selecting Issues for Class Discussion

- **Empirical issues:** answerable through observation or experimentation; conceivably a "right" answer
- **Political issues**: questions about how people should live together; require more than empirical evidence

- **Settled questions**: general agreement that a certain decision is warranted
- **Open questions**: matter of controversy

The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education, Diana E. Hess & Paula McAvoy (2015)

Post-Break Group Work

(2-4 people, 15 minutes)

Form a group based on a shared instructional interest (e.g., topic, information practice, instruction resource).
Develop a related instruction activity.

Prepare to share:

- Instructional focus
- Desired results (e.g., essential understandings, abilities, dispositions)
- What students will do
- Remaining questions or reflections

Examples of topics:

Motivated reasoning, examining bias
- "Post-truth" rhetoric
- Political polarization
- News media/Journalism
- Styles of argumentation (e.g., adversarial, coalescent)

Examples of practices:

- Considering multiple perspectives
- Fact-checking
- Examining bias
- Evaluating claims/arguments/reasoning

Instruction Resources

- "Political Polarization in the American Public." *Pew Research Center*. June 12, 2014

- *Web Literacy for Student Fact Checkers* (Mike Caulfield, 2017)
  - "Building a Fact-Checking Habit by Checking Your Emotions," from
  - "Four Strategies"

- Blue Feed, Red Feed (*Wall Street Journal*)

- AllSides.com

- "Kellyanne Conway Says Donald Trump's Team Has 'Alternative Facts.'" *Washington Post*

- Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Code of Ethics

Closing Thoughts

Are there takeaways from our workshop that you will bring back to your teaching practice?

What remaining questions or concerns do you have?

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