Keynote: SCASL 2020 Regional Librarian Meeting

Frank Baker's Keynote Remarks: 2020 SCASL Regional School Librarian Meetings
Thank you so much for inviting me here today.

As many of you know, I've been advocating for media literacy for a long time. I want to thank those of who HAVE attended my workshops AND for incorporating elements into your own work and sharing it with your teachers & students. You are at the heart of battling misinformation and I consider every one of you partners in teaching media literacy. Today I am hear to acknowledge you and to say emphatically: I appreciate you.

In 2018, dictionary.com declared MISINFORMATION the word of the year. In 2020, Frank Baker declares VERIFICATION as the word of the year. From my POV, not enough students (or adults for that matter) are bothering to verify what they read. That's a huge problem.
During a workshop I conducted on fake news, a teacher told me "my students don't care if it's fake" and if that's a widespread sentiment, then we better also deal with their apathy.

Recently the Media Literacy Now organization initiated a campaign to get all 50 state's legislatures to pass "media literacy in education" measures. I approached them and they pointed to a "model media literacy" bill which I took to my local lawmaker. I urge you to read HB 4673 because it's very comprehensive—and includes information literacy and much more. I am happy to say it was pre-filed in the legislature this past November. It would require the State Department of Education to insure that media literacy is taught. If passed, it tasks the State Department with creating a task force to provide recommendations: I have already told the SCASL

leadership that I would NOT serve unless school librarians have a seat at the table. There is no guarantee this measure will go anywhere this year, but I am simply WAVING the red flag—trying to get people's attention.

One of the most striking reasons why media literacy is needed is revealed by a close examination of the 2017 2019 SC Ready test results. Among other things, a report commissioned by the State Dept of Ed—evaluating those test results— called for more English Language Arts (ELA) instruction in middle and high school because in 2017 those students were weak at "evaluating sources for relevance, credibility, and validity." In 2018, they were found to be weak in the standard that says "Gather information from a variety of primary and secondary sources and evaluate sources for perspective, validity, and bias."

Those two standards are at the heart of what you as library media specialists teach.

The timing could not be more critical. Why? The new owner and publisher of the Los Angeles Times said recently that "fake news is the cancer of our times." Powerful words for sure.

There is an explosion of fake news and disinformation all over the news media, especially the social media many of our students attend to. They don't tend to think critically about what they consume. Thomas Jefferson famously said (and I paraphrase here) the health of a democracy depends on an informed electorate. I ask: what happens when people are ill-informed; who are media ILLITERATE, who don't think critically about what they read?

Why is teaching critical thinking about media important? Studies have already pointed to foreign actors who not only tried to interfere in our election process in 2016, but also continue to do so today. Many of the Russian fake clickbaits WERE believed…websites such as PROOF FOUND THAT OBAMA WAS BORN

IN KENYA and POPE FRANCIS FORBIDS CATHOLICS TO VOTE FOR HILLARY.

And it's not just the Russians: you can find (and realistic looking) fake websites for Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. How are students supposed to know what is authentic and what is not? How many of us remember when the website MartinLutherKing.org fooled millions of students who thought IT was a legitimate webpage.

Why is this important? We need to look no further than an important Stanford History Education Group study from mid-November…which found more than **96 percent** of high school students surveyed failed to consider that ties to the fossil fuel industry might affect the credibility of a website about climate change. Last year, the National Center for Education Statistics found that "more than one-third of eighth-graders in the U.S. say they "rarely" or "never" learn how to judge the reliability of sources",

This comes on the heels of the Stanford group's 2016 survey of 8 thousand MS, HS and college Ss which found that:

— 82% of middle-schoolers couldn't distinguish between an ad labeled "sponsored content" and a real news story on a website
— More than two out of three middle-schoolers couldn't see any valid reason to mistrust a post written by a bank executive arguing that young adults need more financial-planning help
— nearly four in 10 high-school students believed, based on the headline, that a photo of deformed daisies on a photo-sharing site provided strong evidence of toxic conditions near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in Japan, even though no source or location was given for the photo.

The researchers have concluded that current digital literacy instruction is inadequate and that students research skills are "troubling" and "dismal."

Thankfully, the Stanford Ed Group, recognizing the weakness in

how students read information on the web and in social media, created a free online curriculum that I want you all to be aware of. (And you're going to write this one down.) If you GOOGLE the phrase CIVIC ONLINE REASONING, you will come to their excellent, field tested, lessons plans and accompanying assessments. It includes lessons like Evaluating Wikipedia; Website Reliability;
Evaluating Claims on Twitter and YouTube and much more. I urge you all to become familiar with it and use it.

Another recommendation from this group is that we start to teach students how to READ LATERALLY. Instead of students reading a web page from top to bottom, it recommends that they open a second tab—and begin investigating the source of the page they're on.

I brought with me a video that elaborates on this process.
Lateral Reading Tutorial (3 minutes)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hB6qjIxKltA&t=1s

But let me be clear here today, media literacy encompasses MORE than just assessing sources.
It also involves both ANALYZING & CREATING all media messages…everything from photographs, magazines, advertising, film, propaganda and a host of other timely topics.

One of the reasons that I support this new media literacy legislation is that the majority of teachers, including you all sitting here today, have received LITTLE IF ANY instruction on media literacy in your colleges of education. That's a problem. And since you've been a librarian, more than likely you've not had much training in media literacy. That too is a problem.

So what does REAL media literacy look like? [This is a preview of my breakout…]

One of the things that I include is the economics of media..why are newspapers losing advertisers? What is the

impact of media mergers? Why did an ad in the SuperBowl cost 5.6 million dollars? What do TV ratings mean? Who benefits when presidential candidates buy time on local TV stations?

TV would not exist without advertising revenue. Shouldn't we be teaching WITH & ABOUT those commercials?
Right now we are in the midst of another presidential election and many of us have already seen commercials by the candidates. The people who make these slickly produced spots understand what techniques will push the buttons of the potential voters. Emotion is often used as a powerful propaganda tool.

We've just come out of another holiday season, where literally hundreds of toy ads bombarded kids in the months leading up to Christmas. These spots, all available online, are perfect to use with students to engage them in understanding the persuasive techniques being used.

I am also a big fan of <u>visual literacy</u>—something many of you already understand and teach.
But how many educators today use INFOGRAPHICS—the visual representation of numbers and other information—in their instruction? More and more of our news and information is presented visually and now the SATs have added more of these examples.

A <u>magazine cover</u>, for example, can be used to teach about color, design, layout, font, rule of thirds and much more. I use them all of the time to teach those media literacy questions….QUESTIONS like
who is the audience; who benefits; what techniques are used to make a cover attractive;
and if you could recreate the cover, what might it include?

<u>Propaganda</u>: when I say that word most teachers think back to the persuasive techniques used during WWI and WW II. But propaganda is alive and well in our contemporary culture, yet

I don't find that in our standards. Recently my colleague Renee Hobbs created a crowd   sharing web page called MIND OVER MEDIA-Analyzing contemporary propaganda. She encourages readers to submit examples. I contributed several.

Africa: when I uttered the that word, I wonder what image immediately came to mind? Did you think of the map; or animals, or jungles or indigenous tribes-people? Well if you did- you've just demonstrated how strong STEREOTYPES can be.
In my workshop, I show educators images of downtown Johannesburg, Lagos, and Nairobi with their bustling downtown skyscrapers. This is also Africa, just not the African many of us have been exposed to. So THE MEDIA perpetrate and repeat these stereotypes. At a recent workshop, after asking participants to come up other examples, I mentioned "the ditzy blonde," "the Arab terrorist," and the "Italian Mobster." And I am willing to bet you thought of some TV show or movie that helped promote these stereotypes.

Speaking of movies; I regularly use film clips with teachers to explore how movies are also texts which can be read. That's right: Reading a Movie. Where the director positions the camera implies meaning; as does lighting, sound, music, set design and more. It's known as the language of film, but again, my experience tells me most teachers haven't been trained so they don't know how to call student attention to film technique. Adding insult to injury,
most textbooks don't address movies as texts. That's also problematic.

Before closing I want to return to fake news. As librarians you know how important it is for students to question what they read and to verify. For several years now I have been
  recommending to librarians ONE simple something you can do NOW to aid in your own   efforts. As you probably know, there are a number of excellent POSTERS—like the CRAAP DETECTION TOOL— which contain advice on how to question DURING research, especially in the age of disinformation. My recommendation

here is: create a 8 X 11 poster of one of those infographics and post it next to <u>every </u>computer at school—where students will see it. You can also call attention to it when you're helping them conduct their research. This morning, I want to invite you to take a picture of your poster—in your media center—and send it to me so that I can share what SC librarians are doing to educate the next generation.

I don't think I used the entire time you allotted me this morning. I hope that's OK.
I do invite you to come to my breakout session where I will be demonstrating my approach to teaching media literacy—giving you concrete ideas to get you started.

Time is of the essence: media manipulators, propagandists, fake news purveyors are not going away—not as long as they can make money from their mischief. Instilling HEALTHY SKEPTICISM ought to be one of our major goals.

I conclude with a quote from the recent Stanford study: It is a WAKE UP CALL
"Reliable information is to civic health what proper sanitation and potable water are to public health," "We need high-quality digital-literacy curricula, validated by rigorous research, to guarantee the vitality of American democracy."

Thank you very much.