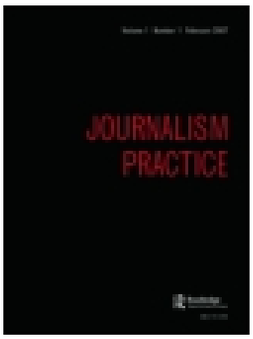

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The Place of Media Organisations in the Drive for Post-pandemic News Literacy

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ABSTRACT

Even before the pandemic, several major UK news platforms had begun engaging in news literacy education. Against a backdrop of declining levels of trust in the news media (Newman et al. 2019) as well as concerns about the rise of mis- and disinformation, providers of news including the BBC; News UK; the Guardian and the Economist (the latter two via their linked foundations) were expanding their own remit as educators about news. In summer 2021 the authors carried out case studies on five of these projects as part of a wider ongoing project mapping the UK news literacy landscape. This paper draws from these case studies, focusing on one key strand: the role of news organisations in the teaching of news literacy to children, and attitudes among those involved in these projects towards these media organisations. It finds that news literacy projects tend to teach a normative version of professional news content as untainted by bias and framing, or accusations of a lowering of standards driven by tough economic circumstances. At the same time, there was a widespread perception from those interviewed that only certain parts of the news media industry were acceptable participants in news literacy education.

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Introduction

In her 2012 analysis of the Stony Brook News Literacy programme, Fleming posed the question: "Is news literacy an extension of the journalistic commitment to the public good or is it an example of pedagogical public relations?" (Fleming 2012). The answer remains a contested one, with scholars debating the desirability and consequences of industry involvement in educating citizens about the news (Hobbs 2010; Buckingham 2019). This paper seeks to develop and expand these normative discussions about the role and responsibility of news organisations in promoting their own future audiences' news literacy by exploring the perceptions and experiences of those involved in delivering industry-backed education in the UK; something that is missing from the existing literature. Its findings have relevance for scholars and practitioners in the USA, where the

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news literacy movement and discussion about industry's role within it are most well established (e.g., Hobbs 2010), as well as to international contexts where these issues have emerged more recently (e.g., Brites and Pinto 2017; Jaakkola 2020). Implicit in this discourse is the wider question of what news literacy is and what it is for.

For some, news literacy, the acquisition of knowledge about the production, content, and effects of news, and the skills to apply this knowledge (Ashley, Maksl, and Craft 2013), is seen in some quarters as an antidote to rising levels of mis and disinformation in populationsIn practice, many intiatives focus not on this wider picture of journalistic processes and their social impacts, but on a narrower functional skills such as fact-checking and verification (Tully et al. 2021); a curriculum that teaches citizens to assess individual outputs but has less focus on critical understanding of the wider technological, political and economic frameworks within which news is generated.

Where the news industry is itself involved in funding or delivering education, the imperative of building an audience that appreciates professional journalism and distinguishes it from other "content" is inevitably present, whether consciously or otherwise.

Meanwhile in the UK as elsewhere, such industry involvement has expanded since 2016. Amid declining levels of trust in news and growing levels of news avoidance (Newman et al. 2022), concern about mis- and disinformation and the economic challenges facing journalism, several major news organisations have either launched their own educational initiatives or become involved in supporting standalone projects.

Such engagement has been welcomed in some quarters, including by the UK government's review into the future of journalism (Cairncross 2019). In the summer of 2021 the UK Government's Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport unveiled a Media Literacy Strategy which suggested media literacy teaching be left to the "rich landscape of businesses, civil society and other organisations taking action" and that government work be focused on supporting this pre-existing activity. Research conducted for that strategy identified 170 media literacy initiatives, of which 19% were provided by media organisations (DCMS 2021).

Industry involvement in news literacy was welcomed, with the link to the financial challenges faced by journalism made explicit. The report stated:

> There are a range of initiatives aimed at improving news media literacy which are part-funded or delivered by news publishers. We want to encourage the industry to continue this work. Given evidence showing a link between higher media literacy and willingness to pay for news, this work could have positive implications for press sustainability. (DCMS 2021)

However, to date there has been little critical examination of this industry engagement or its implications for the wider drive towards a more news and media literate population. Industry practices and journalistic behaviours themselves generate a need for news literacy among audiences, whether to navigate bias or inaccuracy within output or understand that algorithms and analytics might be driving the stories that are surfaced for each individual. Ignoring the shortcomings of the industry itself, Buckingham has suggested, leaves news media-run initiatives open to charges of a conflict of interest or worse—akin to fast food companies teaching children about nutrition (Buckingham 2019).

Scholars have argued that a sophisticated approach to news media literacy fosters a skeptical disposition and a critical attitude toward news content (Craft, Ashley, and Maksl 2017). This paper seeks to address a gap in the literature by exploring whether this is compatible with industry involvement in its provision.

It does so using data collected during case studies of five news literacy initiatives. All five case study projects work primarily with schoolchildren. This reflects the focus of UK the news literacy sector in general—particularly projects that offer in-person delivery rather than only learning resources (DCMS 2021). It also mirrors the focus of news media industry involvement in the sector, as indicated by the researchers' own mapping, discussed below.

These case studies included observations of news literacy sessions in schools and in-depth interviews with both managers and session leaders working for these initiatives, as well as teachers from participating schools. These interviews interrogated attitudes towards the involvement of the news media in news literacy teaching. Our findings lay bare some of the significant gaps in provision for young people as well as highlighting some of the complexities inherent to media involvement in news literacy teaching.

Literature Review

Towards a Definition of News Literacy

A version of news literacy has been understood to be part of media literacy since the 1970s. This was a period when media literacy education began being recognised as a critical practice of citizenship, part of the exercise of democratic rights and civil responsibilities (Hobbs and Jensen 2013). As part of this practice, media educators started teaching children and news and journalism as being central to this citizenship, with the industry understood to truth-seeking and sense-making (Swart 2021).

News literacy emerged as a term in its own right during the early 2000s, as part of a broader trend of "new" literacies—including digital, critical, information or visual (Morris and Yeoman 2021). Nevertheless, to date there is a scarcity of academic work around the term (Swart 2021).

Initially, news literacy was seen as a positive force that could cultivate active, engaged citizens and journalists. As a discipline bridging theory, practice and pedagogy Mihailidis (2012) saw news literacy creating a cross-national dialogue for good governance and civic participation.

In recent years, growing concerns about the quality of news output have undermined this approach, and also drawn attention to the field of news literacy and in particular how to define it (Tully et al. 2021). For some, a lack of theory building around the term has hampered existing scholarship (Vraga et al. 2021) with conversations rarely crossing disciplinary boundaries (Tully et al. 2021).

News literacy definitions are bloated, there is little agreement as to what it exactly entails, and this leads to confusion (Vraga et al. 2021; Swart 2021).

This lack of clarity has led to a narrow frame for news literacy which focuses on functional skills such as fact checking and verification (Tully et al. 2021). Arguing a theoretical approach, Vraga et al. (2021) draw a distinction between simply learning the skills that are required to be news literate and identifying a set of behaviours that represent the application of news literacy (news literacy behaviours or NLB). These are not the same thing, they argue, as news literacy measures capability and not performance (Vraga et al. 2021).

The resulting definition of news literacy is thus broader and more nuanced. Being news literate is having the knowledge around the personal and social processes by which news

is produced, distributed and consumed, but also the skills that allow users some control over these processes (Tully et al. 2021).

This distinction between learning the skills to become news literate, and news literacy behaviours, is useful in the context of this paper, which is concerned with examining attitudes among proponents of news literacy who tend to focus on the former.

In the media itself, news literacy is frequently offered as an antidote to "fake news" and characterised as the ability to spot hoaxes, check facts, and understand and appreciate the work of traditional journalists. (Vraga et al. 2021).

Professional journalists are themselves unsure about what news literacy is or what they might do to further it, according to limited research in this area. A Portuguese study asked practicing journalists how they understood news literacy and concluded that they were not at ease defining media literacy and considered their primary role of doing good journalism. One interviewee defined news literacy as analogous to the skills required to produce journalism - the capacity to transform complex issues into simple information but with the deeper insight required by journalistic information (Brites and Pinto 2017).

In this context, trying to find a common understanding of news literacy that straddles how it is taught, and how it is starting to be theorised as a set of behaviours, is seemingly impossible. Necessarily, any reference to news literacy, or being news literate, reported in this paper from interviews carried out, must refer to a skills-based approach (though it is worth noting here that definitions as to what news literacy meant differed, depending on the project). As the authors have already established, for teachers and educators engaged in the field, news literacy has little "name recognition". It is not widely used and is often folded in with other literacies (Morris and Yeoman 2021).

Industry Involvement

There is an established discussion within the literature about whether media or news literacy education can engender a sense of cynicism towards the media. Vraga and Tully point out that fostering scepticism towards news and information while avoiding cynicism is a longstanding goal of media literacy education (2021), while Mihaildis (2009) developed a vision for media literacy education which moved "beyond cynicism" by teaching not just analytical and evaluative tools to critique media, but a focused understanding of why a free and diverse press is essential to civil society.

On the other side of this debate, which is more developed in the US than elsewhere, scholars have explored whether industry involvement in news and media literacy might lead to *insufficient* scepticism.

Hobbs touched on the ethics of the news media, in particular former journalists, teaching news literacy, as long ago as 2010. Writing in a US context she described the "problematic practice" of teaching about news "exclusively from a journalist's point of view … telling war stories about the good ol' days does not inherently work to develop critical thinking and communication skills among students". This narrow approach of news literacy, she added, overlooked inherent issues within contemporary journalism, where partisan politics and smear-fests are the surest way to build audiences. Some programmes, Hobbs argues, should be termed news appreciation rather than news literacy (Hobbs 2010).

More recently, Vraga et al wrote how news literacy advocates and educators largely adopt an a-theoretical approach which puts the emphasis on instruction about the important role of news in society and the norms and practices professional journalists employ in gathering it (Vraga et al. 2021).

For some, these issues have always been present. Druick writes that capitalist interests have long aimed to use media to train students as well as consumers and that media companies aggressively seek out the classroom. Media literacy, with its antiauthority patina, must have seemed tailor-made as the ideal technique for managing youth, connecting their relationship as consumers of media with the need for them to be formed into compliant entrepreneurial citizens (Druick 2016). This is echoed by Buckingham who writes of a long history of companies using schools as venues for corporate propaganda, under the guise of "giving something back" (Buckingham 2019).

Taking a less cynical approach, Jaakkola (2020) described this kind of work as journalism media education or journalism literacy—an attempt to restore the authority and legitimacy of journalism by establishing a boundary that distinguishes it from non-journalism and low-quality journalism. Motivation for such work is not exclusively to do with audience building, though that does play a part, but is also linked to attempts to enhance accountability and provide ways of combatting disinformation (Jaakkola 2020).

For Buckingham, news literacy programmes run by news platforms in the UK are walking a fine line. It would be a problem, he says, if education in "news literacy" were simply a way for traditional media to put across a message of "don't trust them, trust us". He also points out that if the platforms have good materials and solid training, they can be a force for good (Buckingham 2019).

Trust in News, and Mis- and Disinformation

The expansion of the UK's news literacy sector, and with it the involvement of industry, comes as a growing body of literature indicates firstly that trust in UK news media is falling, and secondly, that young people are engaging less with traditional news sources and see less of a distinction between those and other forms of content. Both of these trends represent potential motivation for industry involvement in news literacy. However, there are also tensions inherent in news literacy education being delivered by an industry that appears to have both a credibility and a relevance problem among the people that these initiatives seek to reach. This study seeks to address a gap in the literature by exploring these tensions as articulated by those tasked with delivering that education.

The news literacy programmes analysed in this research have been implemented amid a climate of declining confidence in professional journalism. One major recent study putting overall trust in news in the UK at 36% (Newman et al. 2021), while 67% of respondents to a global survey said they worried about journalists and reporters lying to them (Edelman 2022). Concurrently, there is a growing body of evidence showing that young people's consumption of news content on news websites is falling. Research during the 2019 general election found that young people (aged 18–34) spent just eight minutes a week looking at news sites online. (Fletcher, Shulz, and Newman 2019). A 2021 study pinpointed a "news finds me" attitude amongst the younger generation, with their heavy use of apps such as YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Swart 2021). Any news

they did hear about was received via face-to-face conversations with family members, friends and classmates, and through peer and algorithmic recommendations on social media and news aggregator apps (Swart 2021).

Another study that worked with a group of 12–16-year-olds to establish what they understood news to be declared that early adolescents' definitions were slightly broader than conventional definitions, including "everything new". However, the researchers found that traditional newsworthiness criteria were also often mentioned, creating a hierarchy of news (Tamboer, Kleemans, and Daalmans 2020).

Some scholars have argued that in the light of these changing behaviours around consumption, the definition of news should be broadened. Far from being a product of journalistic endeavours, news on social media is any story or claim with an assertion in it (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018); it is any accurate information that facilitates decision-making on both personal and social issues, thus enabling people to more effectively engage with society (Vraga et al. 2021). For those scholars it certainly isn't solely the product of journalistic output.

Meanwhile, there is strong evidence that mis and disinformation are posing significant issues to societies. More than half (58%) of respondents to a major global survey in 2021 said that they had concerns about misinformation (Newman et al. 2021).

This study goes beyond theoretical debate about how professional journalism *should* be framed within news literacy education and explores how it is being framed "on the ground". It examines how that professional journalism is framed relative to other online content within delivery by our case study initiatives; how industry practices are articulated as a means of promoting trust, and the extent to which distinguishing between professional reporting and "the rest" is presented as an antidote to the challenges of misinformation. It raises the question of whether linking news literacy skills (and behaviours) closely with traditional media sources risks undermining their broader applicability and appeal. While previous studies have sought the perspectives of industry about its own involvement in this space (Brites and Pinto 2017: Jaakkola 2020), this paper advances the literature by including those on the receiving end of this involvement.

Methodology

This paper is based on a two-phase research project. Phase one was a mapping exercise that sought to provide a detailed snapshot of the UK's news literacy landscape, with a particular focus on work that was happening within schools. That data were used to inform sampling for a second phase involving mixed-methods case studies of five news literacy organisations working in the UK.

This study was relativist in its approach. The researchers were interested in different perspectives on the perceived problem of limited news literacy among school children, and in approaches to that problem. The aim was not to rank or evaluate individual initiatives but rather to present a picture of the news literacy education sector as a whole; to explore what commonalities and differences exist in conceptions of and approaches to news literacy between different initiatives, and to look at how these relate to conceptions of news literacy among participants (teachers and pupils). Building on Fleming's 2014 case study of the Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University in the USA, this study proposed three main research questions. These were:

RQ1. What is the reach and scope of news literacy education in UK schools?

RQ2. How do practitioners working with UK school children on news literacy view the involvement of the news media industry in news literacy programmes?

RQ3. What do practitioners and participants see as the likely future direction of news literacy education in schools?

Phase one sought to answer RQ1. It involved in-depth desk-based data gathering to build a spreadsheet mapping UK news literacy initiatives. This work was conducted in the spring of 2020 and then revised and updated in June-August 2021, after phase two (case studies) was delayed by the pandemic, in order to bring the data for the two phases into sync with each other.

Phase two sought to address RQ2 and 3. Here, five high profile news literacy initiatives were identified from the mapping exercise as representing an illustrative cross-section of the sector in terms of their relationship with the professional news media; funding model; pedagogic focus and target age range. Projects with industry links represent a significant minority of those identified in the researchers' mapping exercise; 15% of UK initiatives aimed at school children were run by media businesses, 35% involved journalists in at least some delivery. This compares to 19% of all projects identified by DCMS during its mapping, which used a much broader definition of media (rather than news) literacy and across all ages (DCMS 2021).

The researchers chose to focus on initiatives that offered or facilitated substantive taught sessions rather than providing online resources only. Online-only resources can be downloaded and then not utilised, or might be adapted or delivered in part or in whole, by end users that it is difficult or impossible to identify. Focusing on initiatives that have a direct relationship with participating schools and children offered clarity about when and where engagement with an initiative was taking place. It made it possible to gather the views of project managers, session leaders, teachers and pupils, offering a much richer data set than for schemes that offered only online materials.

The five initiatives that became case studies are:

1. BBC Real News (a one-off session then delivered in schools and other settings under the Young Reporter arm of the BBC, focusing on misinformation and distinguishing reliable information).
2. The Burnett News Club (A year-long, paid-for programme of work including classroom discussion on current affairs run by the Economist Educational Foundation, which has since been reformatted under the new name Topical Talk).
3. Shout Out UK (a London-based social enterprise delivering workshops on news literacy within secondary schools as part of a combined offer with political literacy teaching).
4. The Student View (a charity teaching news media and media aimed at secondary school children, offering training in spotting misinformation and basic local reporting skills through "pop-up newsrooms" in schools).
5. NewsWise (a 15-lesson unit of work looking at news literacy concepts for 7–11 year-olds, run by the Guardian Foundation in partnership with the National Literacy Trust and the PHSE Association, a body representing teachers of personal, health, social and economic education).

Each project was contacted via email with an invitation to participate. Necessarily, as is common in case study research, our sample relied on subjects granting access, and so it is in this respect a convenience sample.

A wide range of data was collected from each case study. Projects were also asked to provide data and documents relating to their scheme of work, staffing, reach and scope, budget and connections to the professional news media. This information helped inform subsequent stages of data collection, particularly interview design.

Each participating initiative was asked to facilitate an interview with a senior manager, a classroom session leader and a teacher involved in facilitating their own school's engagement with the project. This again was a convenience sample in that the researchers were reliant on project managers to identify suitable staff members to participate, and to facilitate introductions with participating schools. It was noted that projects were likely to connect us with schools that were likely to be positive about their experiences. However, interviews with teachers were conducted without project staff present and the researchers feel that the testimony discussed below indicates a reassuring amount of independent and sometimes skeptical thought rather than interviewees who were primed to be "on message". In total, 14 interviews were conducted of the 15 planned, with Covid-related challenges making it impossible within the data collection window to interview a teacher participating in BBC Real News. Four participating schools were English secondary schools (three in the Southeast; one in the Northwest), while the NewsWise school was a Welsh primary.

It is worth acknowledging, in the context of a paper examining attitudes towards the news media industry, that by definition these interviewees had direct or indirect connections to various parts of that industry. The two BBC Real News interviewees were BBC employees. The two NewsWise interviewees (manager and session leader) were not employed by the Guardian itself but by the linked Guardian Foundation, and the participating teacher had self-identified as "pro-Guardian" by choosing to engage with NewsWise. The Student View has received funding from media organisations including the Financial Times and has FT representatives on its board (as well as former Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger). The session leader interviews from TSV was a former local newspaper reporter. Burnet News Club was linked overtly to the Economist and Shout Out UK has received for example free promotion for a Covid-19 misinformation initiative from The Times. The researchers do not claim that these connections have necessarily affected the views of interviewees in relation to the news media, nor render their perceptions invalid but nor do they claim that this sample of interviewees is likely to have nationally-representative attitudes toward the news media or its constituent parts.

A script was used which included more, in-depth questions including:

- What role does the news media play in your initiative (funding/ institutional links/ journalist volunteers/curriculum design)
- Do you think that this affects your parameters or priorities in terms of curriculum design?
- Do you think it affected the way you are perceived by schools or by policy makers?
- Thinking about the challenges of news literacy (or associated terms) more widely, what role does the news media industry play in creating those?

- What role does the news media industry play in the news literacy movement more widely? What role should it play?

The researchers also conducted an observation of one taught session and a short survey of a participating class of up to 30 pupils for each case study initiative. The survey asked simple questions about news consumption habits, attitudes to news, and the impact of participating in the case study project. Survey data does not form part of this paper and will be discussed elsewhere.

Interviews, observations and surveys took place between May and July 2021. The majority of the data gathering took place within the same window. Interviews were semi-structured, conducted online via Teams or Zoom, with informed written consent obtained in advance via an emailed form. Interviews were recorded and transcribed before being uploaded into NVivo and subjected to thematic analysis.

The transcripts were read again to establish shared codes, and these were then grouped into themes. In all but two cases, they were conducted by both researchers. Observations were loosely structured and non-interventionist, with a flexible schedule offering some guidance for researcher note-making in order to maximise inter-coder consistency.

All but one of the observations were carried out by both researchers and were conducted online via video conferencing software because of Covid restrictions. In these cases, the pupils were in a classroom setting with a schoolteacher present and the external session leader, where relevant, was delivering remotely via video conferencing software. One observation (Shout Out UK) was conducted in-person, with researcher, session leader, teacher and pupils all in the same classroom. Surveys were distributed to and collected from participating pupils by teachers or session leaders.

These multiple evidence sources allowed the researchers to substantiate and expand on points raised during interviews, and to explore themes from multiple perspectives.

This article will focus primarily on responses to RQ2. As such, it is based primarily on the interviews conducted as part of the case study phase, although some additional data gathered during the case studies, notably from observations, is also utilised. RQ1 and 3 will be addressed in forthcoming outputs by the researchers. Data relating to all three RQs has also informed unpublished internal work by the researchers for the UK Government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and communications regulator Ofcom.

Findings

Before exploring responses to RQ2, it is useful to share a key finding from phase one which the authors raise here to set the research in context. The authors found that the scale of classroom-based news literacy-related activity run by external providers in the UK is small. One high-profile initiative, The Student View had by the time of data collection in Spring-Summer 2021 reached just over 2000 pupils since 2016. Another, NewsWise, had worked with approximately 5600 pupils since 2019. The entire school population (age 4–18) is 8.9 million pupils attending 24,400 schools in England in 2020/2021. (This includes state-funded and independent schools.) (Department for Education 2021). Managers from four of the five projects profiled spoke of the struggle to obtain funding and secure the

longevity of their projects, echoing existing concerns regarding the efficacy of relying on commercial institutions or third-sector bodies to educate children in news literacy or associated skills (Livingstone 2018; Buckingham 2019; Morris and Yeoman 2021, etc).

News Above all Other Content

A foundational understanding of news as a civic good (Carey 1993) is an implicit theme underlying the case study data. The manager of NewsWise said of her programme's key learning outcome: "I think … the key thing is that they recognise why news is an important thing for society, for democracy and that … it's part of their lives."

This theme was apparent in the five taught news literacy sessions that the authors observed. In those sessions, one message was that news should be valued above other content, a position already noted amongst proponents of news literacy in the US (Hobbs, Fleming, etc.).

The focus of all the observed sessions was far more in keeping with a "functional skills" definition of news literacy, as described by Tully et al. (2021) than any broader conceptualisation of the terms to include for example the effects of news technologies (Ashley, Maksl, and Craft 2013) or the structures of journalistic production and dissemination. It is challenging within the scope of this study to establish whether this relates to the impact of industry involvement in these projects, or more pragmatic considerations about the age of participating pupils and/ or the short duration of delivery time available in which to tackle complex and broad subjects. However, nuanced perceptions of professional journalism emerging from the interview data suggest that practical concerns played a part.

The session run by the charity NewsWise, over Zoom, with a class of 13 students (aged 10 and 11), focused on training the children how to spot so-called fake news, as opposed to "real" news. The children were provided with a toolkit to establish the provenance of online information, with one sub-section labelled "clues".

This included a list of what the slide described as "well-known and trusted news companies" that the session leader suggested the children could trust, including the broadcasters the BBC, ITV and Sky News, the news platforms the Independent, The Guardian and the Telegraph and the children's news providers First News and the Week. The session leader told the children: "If it's a trusted news organisation, we should be able to trust that it is a real story and that they wouldn't share a fake one."

Similarly, in a workshop over Zoom run by the media literacy charity The Student View for 12-year 9 children (aged 13 or 14), an online quiz on spotting mis- and disinformation that they took gave the answer: "The best way to check if it is false is to see if the story has been shared on trusted news websites, or if it has been debunked on websites like Snopes or FactCheck.org."

In the BBC Real News workshop, participants were shown a video about fake news, with an explanation of the dangers it can post. One given was that its spread meant that people might mistrust all news sources.

The Student View workshop leader opened the session by talking about mainstream news providers, including the BBC, and setting those against social media platforms where they might see information "that might not be true". They went on to ask, vis a vis the BBC: "Does anyone know what impartial means? It means 'not biased' They [the

BBC] try and keep as neutral and open and fair as they can, and try and balance everything up and make it as fair as possible."

The children in the NewsWise workshop were also told about balance and accuracy in the context of a list of clues they could use to spot "fake" news. The workshop leader said:

> If you're a professional news organisation they will pay attention to things like capital letters and spelling … with journalistic writing we are not trying to give our own opinion we are just trying to give the facts and two sides of the story.

The scope of this study did not permit researchers to interview multiple session leaders or conduct multiple observations for each project, and it is thus impossible entirely to eliminate the impact of the individual session leaders' personal perspectives on delivery of the observed sessions. It is possible that the emphasis on classical, normative journalistic professional behaviours would have been different with a different sample. In the case of Burnett, sessions are delivered to pupils by their own school teachers and thus the range and impact of personal opinion is theoretically large. With BBC Real News, journalists take time out of their "day job" to deliver a session, and so again the pool of people running sessions is considerable, albeit they are all BBC staff. The other three case studies are small projects with a small team of staff delivering the sessions, and thus the personal perspectives of individual session leaders de facto have wide reach within each project's delivery. In all five cases, furthermore, the focus on journalistic norms is embedded in teaching materials and thus likely to be present to at least some extent irrespective of the individual running a given session.

Interview data indicate meanwhile that those involved in delivering the news literacy sessions recognise the binary distinction between news as good and other content as problematic. They also spoke about varying levels of quality amongst published journalism in the UK, using terms such as "trusted news sources" or "good journalism".

This acknowledgement of "good" and perhaps less good sources of journalism was echoed by the manager from Shout Out. In their interview they spoke of a return to "good journalism". "So I would say the one most important things they could do is to go back to doing good journalism and again, not every not every publication, but I think a return to good journalism is really imperative." Such sentiments indicate awareness about issues of trust as discussed in the literature review, and in this context, the promotion of professional journalism within taught session could be seen as an effort to restore some of that trust by raising awareness of normative journalistic behaviours such as fact-checking and accuracy.

At the same time, the nuance in interviewees' own attitudes to the industry suggests that some of the emphasis on news as trustworthy and distinct from other content found within the sesisons stems from pragmatic decisions about what is teachable within the scope of these projects, rather than unfettered idealism about the current state of the UK journalism industry.

Trained Journalists Above Other Content Creators

Just as those interviewed, and observed, placed an emphasis on news above other forms of content, they also spoke about the work of trained journalists as distinct from other content creators online. As above, this is common practice for news literacy initiatives and something that both Hobbs and Fleming noted while examining similar US initiatives.

This was exemplified by a session leader from the political literacy organisation Shout Out, during a workshop. The session leader asked: "Are you going to believe 'Gary in the US' or a journalist who has trained?"

The workshop, for year 12 students, focused on conspiracy theories. The students attending were shown examples of several well-known online hoaxes including the Plandemic video (2020). This content was directly juxtaposed against content created by journalists from the Guardian and the BBC, with the session leader explaining that conspiracy theories spread because of lack of trust in the aforementioned mainstream media.

The session leader asked those attending to put their hands up if they trusted journalists; none did. They responded with this defence of the media:

> You all said you don't trust journalists—where else are you going to get your news from? Who will you trust? Someone random on the internet or someone trained? By causing more distrust of media you are breaking up democracy a bit—if you don't trust the media, you are getting people to go to other sources.

For the session led by NewsWise, a key message was that in spotting fake news, one must verify the author. Point one of a checklist, shown as a slide called Stop Question Check Decide, was: "Who reported the story? Are they are a real journalist or a news organisation you have heard of?"

In the Student View workshop, part of the lesson was about demonstrating how journalists work in order to demonstrate their authenticity. For example, one answer given to an online quiz read: "A lot of people think journalists are lazy and haven't checked the facts. A good journalist wouldn't publish anything unless they have made sure everything is true, or as true as it can be."

In a separate interview later, the session leader spoke of their pride that children they worked with may appreciate journalists more having done the workshop.

> One thing I feel proud of, and I think it's maybe my bias, having been a local reporter and a journalist, is they start trusting the news a bit more. … It's both and trusting the news but also being a bit more critical when they're online.

Likewise the manager from NewsWise, in their interview, placed importance on teaching children in their workshops about the training that journalists can go through.

> I think that can be really powerful when people understand you do have to be trained as a journalist, you have to have legal training you have to do fact checking, you need to find various different sources to make sure that what you're writing is actually accurate you know those highest standards of journalism that you want people to look to.

This emphasis on "good" journalists and "real" news, with an associated mistrust of other content creators, was echoed by a session leader from Shout Out UK in their interview.

> My point is that journalists do make mistakes. But if they own up to them, that's still ethical journalism … This person [faceless social media persona] … I can't find who they are and they refuse to accept that they've made a … mistake. Which one should you trust more? Hopefully the kids understand they should trust the mainstream news sites.

For the news literacy programme run by the Economist Foundation, the role of trained journalists was more explicit; the course organisers used Economist journalists to fact check their lesson content. One manager said in their interview:

> All of our schemes of work … then go through the whole Economist's editorial process so they'll go back to a subject specialist who will check for bias, and just challenge us on things that we might be saying … it then goes to a senior editor who will proofread everything to ensure … spelling, punctuation and grammar is spot on. That goes to our fact-checking team.

There was a sense from some interviewees that the involvement of journalists and news organisations in the creation and delivery of content added authenticity and credibility to the process. They felt that a better understanding among audiences of the processes of journalism might lead to a more trusting relationship with it. A BBC journalist who delivers the corporation's "Real News" workshops defined news literacy as: "What news means to someone who is just consuming it and where they're getting it from, but also understanding the people who created [it]."

News Literacy as Outreach for Building Audiences

As discussed above, of the five case study initiatives, three have direct links to news media brands: NewsWise, Burnet News Club which is run by the Economist Foundation, and BBC Real News. The Student View works with a range of news platforms and for the workshops it was running during summer 2021 it had received funding from the Financial Times. Shout Out UK has no direct media affiliations. All said they used journalists, to greater or lesser extents, as guest speakers (The Student View, Newswise and Shout Out UK) or as course content advisors (Burnet News Club). BBC Real News sessions are delivered by BBC journalists.

Managers of the initiatives did speak of the role their workshops could play in building up audiences for the news media amongst the younger generation that appears to be moving away from traditional news media (Drok, Hermans, and Kats 2018). As a senior manager from BBC Young Reporter said: "It's very much engaging with an age group, who might not traditionally engage with the BBC … or engage with news." Similarly, the NewsWise manager made a direct link between the workshops and new audiences: "Ultimately, if these children who are doing this programme, see that news is important, it means that they will be news consumers in the future." The Shout Out UK manager observed that because audiences currently don't value information, this work "is really … key … for the news industry to survive".

Three initiatives saw their work as helping refresh the industry itself. For NewsWise and The Student View, this was linked to making the industry more relevant through encouraging diversity and representation. Research found that 92% of the journalism workforce came from white ethnic groups against a national average of 88% across all UK workers (Spilsbury 2021).

The NewsWise manager saw news literacy as widening diversity in journalism: "It's also seeking to address that idea that there's not enough diversity and representation in the news, so getting children to engage with the news and see that it's important."

For the Student View manager, lack of diversity was undermining trust in news for certain audiences.

> Lack of diversity in media does not help in terms of credibility and trust. And that again is for all organisations, no one has nailed it at all … it is a massive issue and one that we can't solve on our own but we can certainly help to make journalism seem more like a realistic career by giving these taster sessions in schools.

To Brand or Not to Brand

While building new audiences is an acceptable facet of news literacy initiatives according to those interviewed, there was a shared wariness against being seen as explicitly motivated by this purpose. As discussed above, workshop content in the main centred on underlining the importance of trusted news and trained journalists but did not promote specific brands. The manager from NewsWise said that being seen to do so could damage the credibility of the project.

> We're very conscious of the fact that most people wouldn't know that the Guardian Foundation is separate to the Guardian and we have a website is hosted on the Guardian website … You've got to be so careful that you're not just either actually promoting one form of journalism or one brand of journalism or saying we're great, or we're trustworthy, or that you're perceived in that way, which can be just as damaging. So I think it's quite delicate.

In a similar vein, a staff member from Burnet News Club spoke of the issue of being part of, yet separate from, the Economist.

> I think the messaging is quite difficult to say that we're independent, but we're part of them, because obviously then when we're asking for us to contribute financially. I think sometimes there's the question of, but aren't you the Economist? And we're trying to prove that we are, but we're not.

These concerns seem to reflect an implicit awareness of Buckingham's "fine line" that industry-linked initiatives must tread if they are to avoid accusations of self-interest.

The views of two of the teachers from participating schools interviewed for the case studies would suggest these concerns have some foundation. One teacher whose students attended a Financial Times-funded The Student View workshop said:

> I just thought, Oh, fancy. Aren't they nice to be giving back, do they get any tax perks? … We had BP come to school … Tottenham Hotspur are offering us a walk around the pitch next week. They have to do these things. My brother works for Shell, I know how these people are.

Another, whose school works with NewsWise, said of the offer of free workshops for her class:

> And I wondered, what's in it for them, you know? Is it is it enough that my children are being subjected to the Guardian on a regular basis and they might grow up to be Guardian readers? And I have thought about this. I was hoping it was for the good.

This would indicate that there is some scepticism even among those who participate in industry-backed news literacy projects about the motivations for their existence. The Shout Out manager shared this scepticism, while raising the question of what the media industry might do instead of engagement in education. They said:

> I'm a bit too cynical to ever think it's benevolent. What I would say in terms of what the news industry needs to do … is push good journalism and promote media literacy … but don't just set up a spin-off [news literacy] foundation purely for PR purposes.

News Media is Part of the Problem—Not Just the Solution

The researchers observed differences between the portrayals of journalists and news content within taught sessions and the personal views of those delivering the sessions

or managing the news literacy projects themselves. Within sessions, a normative view of the existing news media industry was presented as distinct from other (less reliable) content providers, and a positive force for empowering citizens within a democracy. Interviews with session leaders and managers revealed more nuanced personal perspectives on the role of journalism news literacy-related challenges within society around accuracy, misinformation and bias.

As Fenton (2010) writes, the ethos and vocation of journalism is seen as embedded in a relationship with democracy and its practice but that isn't the whole story. It is, she argues, also embedded in a history of commercial practice, regulatory control and technological innovation. There was broad recognition of these issues amongst interviewees, in particular around the pressures to make money due to the impact of digitisation on news platforms resulting in lower-quality content. Unsurprisingly, those interviewed were also aware of low levels of trust in the news media in the UK.

The Student View session leader said:

> Some of this stuff the news industry are doing is great. … But I do feel, obviously .. there's a lot more they can do. … the whole reason why some disinformation spreads is because they [people] don't trust traditional media, so it's a catch-22.

This was echoed by the Shout Out UK manager, who said:

> I'd say it's … about building that critical consumer base, where you don't want people believing in a newspaper, just because it's been around for a while and you don't want people not believing, just because it's been around for a while, you want there to be genuine critical thoughts.

For those associated with the initiatives, but not employed by them, the criticism of news industry practices was in places stronger. As a teacher working with NewsWise said: "I got this impression that any news, as long as it sells a paper, that nobody really cares … so as long as they get clicks." One teacher working with Burnett News Club said that some UK newspapers had deep-rooted issues in the way that they "promote certain news stories that they target certain diverse groups".

There was also recognition of issues of bias and framing in news content. The Student View manager said: "News is about trust, and you know, when news organisations just have a bias or political persuasion, people just won't believe it, and I think that's the thing that news media hasn't really reckoned with." Expressing an awareness of varying levels of quality amongst mainstream media outlets, the session leader from Shout Out UK said:

> I suppose the UK journalism is a very hot bag. The first bit is it's so easy to find examples of problems. Like I never have to look that far like there's certain newspapers and certain people I can go "brilliant, let's look at this and showcase bias. Let's look at this and show misinformation".

For Shout Out UK, staying separate from media organisations is important in avoiding accusations of bias. The manager said:

> We stay separate from media organisations, for the simple reason that, in the same reason why we say we don't have government formulating the political literacy side of the curriculum just because again, we're talking about them. They're never going to be non-biased about how journalism operates. And I think it's important, especially for the integrity of media literacy, to have that separation.

This tension—between on the one hand, workshop content that urged students to consume news content above other content and the other hand, frank recognition of shortcomings within the news industry—demonstrates the challenges for news platforms working in the field.

Only Certain Parts of the News Media Industry Should Do News Literacy

A further nuance was that interview data revealed a consensus among participants that only certain parts of the news media were viewed as acceptable proponents of news literacy. In other words, there should be limits on who could or couldn't deliver these initiatives, as long as those currently at the table were permitted to carry on doing their work.

Throughout the 14 interviews, one publication was consistently singled out as not suitable for involvement in this kind of work—the Daily Mail. This was not prompted by the authors, who asked the interviewees: what role should the news media industry play in news literacy initiatives?

A teacher who works with the Burnett News Club said:

> I don't like the Daily Mail, which is ironic because I do read it … I think there are issues of equality, gender diversity, inclusiveness that they don't promote. I don't think it's an acceptable way to show that to children or to show in general as well. So, if, if they'd come to us, then I would probably say right, I'm not doing that … And the same with the Sun, and those types of newspapers, things like the Mirror, things like the Star. It's almost like saying that is that is your fast food takeaway.

This view came up repeatedly. A teacher from a school working with The Student View echoed this. The authors asked them: "And obviously this was funded by the F.T. (Financial Times) would you have felt comfortable if it was run by another media outlet?" The reply was: "Not if it was the Daily Mail."

A teacher from a school running Shout Out UK workshops said: "I would never do a workshop with the Daily Mail for my students." A teacher from a school running NewsWise workshops said: "If it was run by the Daily Mail I wouldn't be doing it. There you go. I'm going to be honest with you."

Session leaders employed by the initiatives appeared to have similar views. A session leader from Burnett News Club said: "I would be really concerned I probably don't need to say, if like The Daily Mail started going into loads of schools with their programme for schools." The Student View session leader said: "The Financial Times is good because it doesn't really have the same … connotations of bias … with the Daily Mail group … some of the kids would, and the teachers would, be a bit sceptical."

A session leader from NewsWise said:

> You know I love saying to people, I work for the Guardian Foundation … I would possibly imagine with particularly with the schools that I go to and that I've worked in and the number of teachers that I know that there would be more sympathy towards working with an organisation like the Guardian and there would be the Daily Mail or The Times.

The session leader and volunteer BBC journalist working on BBC Real News said:

> There are sections of the media that I am a little less comfortable in, but, I mean again, I try and sort of take it away from my personal biases, but I'm not a big Daily Mail consumer, and there are certain things for example in the Daily Mail that I'd be very uncomfortable promoting as good journalism to other people but I always try and balance it.

Discussion and Recommendations

This study aimed to explore attitudes towards the involvement of the news media in news literacy teaching, from a cohort of individuals associated with five news literacy initiatives in the UK. As part of that process, the authors also analysed how the mainstream news, and how mainstream journalists, were understood and framed in five workshops put on for schoolchildren in the UK. Outcomes revealed that while those involved with the workshops and news literacy initiatives did not subscribe to an idealised view of news media in the UK and were concerned with issues of trust and poor-quality content, these concepts were not included in workshops.

Managers from the initiatives were wary of being accused of favouring one news outlet over another, yet spoke openly about the hope that their work might encourage more young people to consume news and thus reinvigorate news media in the UK. This study reveals therefore that the tensions explored by literature from the US about the challenges and desirable limits of industry influence within news literacy teaching are valid in the UK also. Some of the delivery observed as part of this study falls under Hobbs' term "news appreciation", raising questions about whether these projects are always promoting independently-minded critical evaluation of information rather than boosting "positive regard and appreciation for journalism" per se (Hobbs 2010). Arguably, Fleming's question in a US context about whether news literacy can be seen as "pedagogical public relations" is answered affirmatively for at least parts of the UK news literacy landscape.

The researchers do not suggest it is unreasonable that a financially-challenged industry might want to promote its value to potential future audiences, but suggest that policymakers and school leaders should be mindful of such motivations when turning to industry-linked initiatives to deliver news and media literacy education.

A further emerging theme that the authors identified were concerns about diversity in the UK media. Of the five initiatives chosen for the case studies, two included the need to promote diversity in the media as one of the key planks of what they thought news literacy was. This broadening of what news literacy should be poses further challenges for researchers and those working in the field, adding as it does to an already bloated definition (Vraga et al. 2021).

As those working in the field have already identified, the discipline of news literacy both within and outside of the academy is hampered by its newness. News literacy as understood in a popular context is seen as an antidote to "fake news" and often defined as the ability to spot hoaxes, check facts, and understand and appreciate the work of traditional journalists (Vraga et al. 2021). That definition is clearly borne out by the findings of this study. So what happens when normative beliefs and attitudes about journalism cut across the deeper knowledge needed by those learning news literacy to judge the quality of reliability of news content (Ashley, Maksl, and Craft 2013)?

These normative beliefs were in abundance in the workshops for schoolchildren that the authors observed. Yet this is not surprising. Firstly, most were funded by, or run by, news organisations and their employees. They are thus unlikely to adopt a critical stance of their own profession. As Spanish journalists say, "perro no come perro"—a dog doesn't eat dog—the news media does not criticise the efforts of colleagues at other outlets (Talant, Zablon Oloo, and Caithlin Mercer 2021). Secondly, these workshops

were aimed at children drawn from an age range of 10–17, and while the literature is scant, recent studies reveal a relatively passive style of news consumption in that age group, centred around social media and with a lack of critical evaluation (Tamboer, Kleemans, and Daalmans 2020). Given that knowledge, and the experience of the educators, injecting a level of criticism towards the media, whilst encouraging the young people to consume it, would be complex. Time in workshops is limited and efforts were centred on how to spot mis and disinformation as against trusted news sources.

These findings are a useful addition to news literacy literature as they provide evidence (the small scale of this project notwithstanding) of news literacy programmes taking an a-theoretical approach in their workshops, teaching fuctional skills within a narrow frame (Vraga et al. 2021; Tully et al. 2021). They expose the gulf between what nuanced, critical news literacy education could or should look like (Craft, Ashley, and Maksl 2017), and the reality on the ground—a gulf exacerbated by a range of practical issues including funding challenges and the small size of the news literacy sector. As such, this study brings the pragmatic lens of classroom experience through which theorerical constructions of the perfect news literacy education, were time and money no constraint, could or should look like.

One factor that *was* common across the case study initiatives, however, was an emphasis in teaching materials on the civic responsibilities of the news media and the key role news plays in a democracy. This chimes with Mihailidis' call for media literacy education to teach an explicit understanding of media's necessary role in civil society (Mihaildis, 2009). As outlined above, the authors argue that this messaging was in part present because the sessions observed were delivered by programmes with links to the media industry. It would simply make no sense for their interventions to foster cynicism towards the news media—or indeed scepticism. Here there is a crucial divergence from Mihaildis' view of an ideal media literacy education approach creating "informed skeptics" who question media intentions, ultimately helping shape a better media industry (Mihaildis, 2009). (It should be noted that Mihaildis is writing about media literacy education at university level). In general the workshops observed did not touch on how the industry itself could be improved.

Despite this lack of nuance regarding the news media in the workshops, there was a sophistication of views towards the it expressed by some interviewees including an understanding of bias and framing and declining trust. The authors are interested in how those ran counter to their projects' workshops, which adopted a normative view of journalism. These views were more akin to the definition of news literacy as espoused by Craft et al in 2017 who argued then that it must foster a sceptical disposition and critical attitude towards news content itself (Craft, Ashley, and Maksl 2017).

The authors did not ask those interviewed why they didn't include these concepts in their workshops but the implicit understanding was that it was too complex for them to teach children simultaneously to trust and not trust the news. These projects have limited scope in terms of their contact time with participating children (for example BBC Real News is a workshop of roughly one hour; The Student View has switched to a single three-hour workshop for remote delivery since March 2022). There is only so much content that it is possible to get through at this time, again raising questions about whether even those children who do participate are receiving sufficient education in this area.

Further, there was a hierarchy of trusted news sources that the authors identified in some workshop content, with those delivering the lessons favouring outlets like the BBC and the Guardian over tabloid newspapers. In this context, the Daily Mail emerged as a useful focal point for assorted frustrations about the news media that were voiced during the interviews. Here again it should be remembered, as discussed above, that all interviewees had indirect links to at least one news media organisation via the funding models or branding of their initiative.

The antipathy towards the Daily Mail and the conviction from several news literacy managers that the Daily Mail should not be teaching news literacy raises an important broader question, namely: on what grounds can one news media organisation (or indeed government or a regulator) exclude another outlet from the news literacy "scene"? Who is the final arbiter of who can and can't launch a programme?

This study reveals that this dilemma goes beyond the involvement of the news media industry and speaks to a wider issue regarding the UK news literacy landscape as a whole. Any external provider of an educational initiative that requires funding and resource in terms of staff time is likely to have "skin in the game", whether that is media organisations who have an understandable motivation to promote the merits of professional journalism rather than a critical approach to news itself, or other funders such as tech companies who might be said to have their own agendas and priorities.

This paper's findings thereby raise important practical questions about desirable delivery mechanisms for news literacy, and indicate that these mechanisms are inextricably linked to how we can feasibly conceptualise the field. It remains unclear whether projects based on short-term interventions into schools by external providers can realistically hope to capture the nuance and complexity of issues such as professional journalism's contributions and failings within the information landscape, irrespective of whether projects are affiliated to individual media brands. Are such external projects necessarily limited to what has been described as a kind of protectionist "solutionism", (McDougall and Rega 2022) whereby the answer to information disorder is simplistically presented as "trust in news"? By extension, if news literacy were to be delivered at greater scale and depth, as part of a wider programme of critical digital literacy within school curriculum and delivered by teachers independent of external funding sources, this could pave the way for a more nuanced and agentive approach. However, this would not necessarily solve either journalism's trust and engagement problems or society's wider challenges. Indeed, the thinking of McDougall and Rega warns that media (and here by extension news) literacy capability can be deployed to further polariastion, misinformation and problematic media representations (McDougall and Rega 2022).

Our study also revealed that the initiatives involved were reliant on an uncertain funding model so could not say for how long their activities would run.

However, the UK government proposes to leave the work of media and news literacy to the third sector and news media organisations already in existence and has largely limited its role in its 2021 Media Literacy Strategy to helping them work together better.

The authors believe that it is problematic to leave the teaching of news literacy to external providers for these reasons and have already argued that a critical form of news literacy be taught in UK schools as part of the national curriculum (Morris and Yeoman 2021). This would assuage worries around the reach, evaluation and longevity of the work currently being done by UK news literacy initiatives (to be published soon

by the authors), and crucially would help counter the narrative, legitimate or otherwise, that news platforms are only doing news literacy for good PR.

This approach is not without precedent. In Finland the government has established a regulated, centralised media and information literacy strategy (Jaakkola 2020) with other mainland European countries such as Estonia implementing similar strategies. In summer 2021, Illinois became the first US state to require news literacy courses at every high school, with 14 other states having media literacy standards included in their curricula (Medlin 2021).

A news literacy curriculum for UK school pupils put together by educators, working with experts in news and media literacy, could include a critique of the news, and enable students to challenge journalistic norms, while also teaching them the fundamentals of how news works. As Tamboer et al. concluded in their study of Dutch teenagers, their consumption of news was so passive that teaching news media knowledge alone under the banner of news literacy was not enough. To really make an impact, motivating critical news consumption was of the utmost importance for early adolescents (Tamboer, Kleemans, and Daalmans 2020).

Moving news literacy into schools does not mean it should sit solely in the hands of teachers. As Morris and Yeoman argued in their 2021 study, journalism educators in Higher Education would be well-placed to support these efforts.

While the authors raise concerns about news literacy being left to insufficiently coordinated independent projects run and funded by news organisations and others, they do not reject the notion that professional journalists have a role to play in engaging with audiences, dispelling misconceptions about their work and promoting the value of verified information. Professionals from newsrooms, in a more universal and schools-driven model of news literacy, could talk to students about their work and in turn could return to their workplaces refreshed and with a better concept of the impact their work is having on younger audiences.

The authors believe that news literacy education has an important place in the educational landscape but that it cannot be left in the hands of external providers including news organisations. This view was echoed in the study carried out with 11 Portuguese news journalists, in which the consensus from the interviewees was that the time-poor, cash-strapped industry should not be taking the lead on news literacy, schools should (Brites and Pinto 2017).

Like our fellow scholars we remain hopeful that research will find creative and effective ways to increase news literacy as part of a broader effort to combat the spread of misinformation (Tully, Vraga, and Bode 2020). Useful further research could examine attitudes to news literacy within UK newsrooms themselves, following the work in Portugal, or adopt a more longitudinal view of the new literacy landscape, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of its constituent initiatives. As part of this, the question of whether the news literacy provision that is currently available via these initiatives constitutes sufficient education in this field, even for the small minority of children that participate in them, could be further explored. More in-depth research with a sample of those participating children, for example, self-reported surveys and focus groups about confidence in news literacy, coupled with news literacy skills testing to establish whether confidence levels match with competency, would be welcome.

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