FAKE NEWS

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What do the words fidget spinner, gender-fluid and fake news all have in common? They were all shortlisted as the Collins Dictionary Word of the Year for 2017. Taking the top spot on the list was fake news, defined as, "noun: false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting."

The term itself is an oxymoron. If it is fake, it isn't news, because news is based in fact. If it is news, it therefore cannot be fake. Perhaps the term itself is the problem. Hoax, fabrication, misinformation and down-right lies would be more accurate if one was to suggest the news being reported was untrue, and written or produced to mislead others.

However, semantics aside, it has become wildly popular in the last few years and used incessantly by United States President Donald Trump, as a way to denounce media outlets that disagree with him.

Mary McGuire, Associate Professor and Undergraduate Supervisor from the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University, explained, "Fake news is propaganda or disinformation that is produced to mislead people, to damage others or attract readers. This term has broadened in recent years thanks to Donald Trump. He uses the term fake news when it is really news that isn't fake at all. He uses the term when he doesn't like what is being reported or it is inconvenient or doesn't flatter him."

Whether you are a fan of Trump, or your fingers curl into a fist in rage when you hear his name, fake news is now a mainstream term that needs to be addressed in schools. With the rise of social media and platforms like Instagram and Twitter, opinions can be shared instantaneously and students need help determining fact from fiction.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan was a long-serving American politician, as well as a sociologist and diplomat. He said, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts." This statement has a stronger meaning than ever when we live in a world where people can no longer agree on the same facts. When journalists research and report facts, others call that information fake news. Social media now allows users to connect with like-minded people who have similar views. This allows media consumers to customize their newsfeeds reinforcing narrow viewpoints. If people are following newsfeeds that only support what they believe, a tainted view of the world can be produced, and then everything outside of that viewpoint can be called fake news.

As early as Grade 1, the Ontario curriculum begins to address Media Literacy. Under the specific expectation 1.1, Purpose and Audience, the curriculum states, "identify the purpose and intended audience of some simple media texts." By the time students hit Grade 12, the curriculum has numerous expectations, which relate to understanding media. Under the specific Critical Literacy 1.5 expectation, students are required to "identify the perspectives and/or biases evident in media texts, including increasingly complex texts, and comment on any questions they may raise about beliefs, values, identity, and power (e.g., comment on the different perspectives on an issue revealed in the news websites of different cultural groups)." This type of critical reflection, as laid out by the curriculum, helps ensure students learn how to determine if "fake news" is real, or not.

In response to the curriculum, and teenagers' use of social media, high school teachers are including specific lessons about fake news in their programs. Imman Sarhan, an English teacher at Lorne Park Secondary School in Mississauga with the Peel District School Board, already has a go-to lesson