

## REVIEWS

### Reality Check! Integrating Information Literacy Skills Across the Curriculum

A review of *Reality Check! Evaluating Online Information* produced by the Media Awareness Network, 2004.



by Linda Shantz-Keresztes

As a senior high school teacher-librarian, and past district library consultant and Web Awareness trainer, I was excited to hear about the Media Awareness Network (MNet) classroom resource for evaluating online information.

I was one of twelve educators trained through Alberta Learning in 2000 to deliver MNet's Web Awareness professional development workshops – Safe Passage, Kids for Sale and Fact or Folly. After three years of working with teachers, our training group identified a clear need for student resources to promote quality research practices and ethical use of online information. I was therefore delighted to hear that MNet had produced a classroom resource for just that purpose.

*Reality Check! Evaluating Online Information*, applies the journalistic framework "who, what, when, where, why and how" to Internet content. The package – which is available on CD or can be downloaded from the Internet – consists of three components: a PowerPoint presentation (for teachers who have access to a data projector and want to stimulate full-class discussion); an Independent Study Unit (for individual student use), and a Teacher's Guide containing discussion guides, handouts and assignment sheets. The first two components are interchangeable; teachers can decide to use one or the other – or take a "mix and match" approach, covering some units as a class, and assigning others to be done independently in the lab or from an Internet-connected home computer.

*Reality Check!* covers a wide range of topics – from optimizing online searches, and investigating the originators of Web site content, to examining bias and purpose in online information and applying ethical considerations to copyright and plagiarism. An Introduction provides general background and encourages self-assessment around teens' own online research practices.

This resource is timely, as schools are becoming increasingly frustrated with time wasted on poor quality searches, questionable findings and plagiarism. I particularly liked the way *Reality Check!* handles the plagiarism issue, addressing two types – intentional and inadvertent. It treats the issue delicately and responsibly by allowing students to reflect on their own ethical frameworks for use of online information and by providing practical guidelines for references and citations from online information sources. The When module, regarding timely versus accurate information, is an important lesson; it is currently part of the pre-planning requirement for our student research unit. The Who and What modules teach Web content deconstruction skills – essential if students are to become more critical users of online information. The strategies in the How module for

effective Internet searching are a blue-print for any school.

Teacher-librarians have always appreciated the Media Awareness Network's advocacy for credible library resources, both print and online reference databases. In the Why module, students are challenged to pick a research topic and compare their research experiences in the library and on the Internet – the point being that often one research source is not enough and that sometimes one, or the other, may in fact be a better bet, depending on the topic and type of research. The *Reality Check!* approach to all these issues parallels the strategies we currently use in effective school library programs.

*Reality Check!*'s interactive Independent Student Unit is designed for learning through critical inquiry and response around key Internet literacy issues. Each module links students directly to Web sites for reflection and examination. This, and the fact that the examples are on young people's radar screens, make the resource relevant and engaging. The Canadian content, including a survey of 6000 students across this country in 2001, also lends credibility and authenticity to the unit for students, who can identify with the information. The acknowledgement that the majority of Canadian students turn to the Internet first for research (41%), ahead of the school library (19%) and the public library (16%) would be, I think, an accurate reflection of our student body.

This is an outstanding resource for senior high schools and provides an excellent vehicle for infusing information literacy and technology skills, as they apply to Internet information, across the curriculum. After completing *Reality Check!*, students will be life-long learners who are better equipped to engage effectively and ethically with online information.

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COST: A two-year licence for Reality Check offers unlimited use, with a CD for every licensed school. Individual school licence – \$300; District licence – \$200 per secondary school in district.

To preview or order Reality Check, visit , e-mail [licensing@media-awareness.ca](mailto:licensing@media-awareness.ca) or call the Media Awareness Network at 1 (800) 896-3342.