Teaching Students to Evaluate Websites

Summary: The Internet is now a permanent part of education, with students being increasingly asked to find information from websites. In an article for *The Reading Teacher*, several university professors discuss a framework for teaching elementary students how to evaluate which websites are good and trustworthy sources of information versus those that are more questionable sources.

Practical Applications

The authors give their framework the acronym "WWWDOT":

- **W**ho wrote this and what credentials do they have?
- **W**hy was it written?
- **W**hen was it written?
- **D**oes it help meet my needs (and How)?
- **O**rganization of the site? [Where is the key information located, how do you navigate?]
- **T**o-do list for the future [Other websites to check, follow-up actions, etc.]

The authors then give the following suggestions for teaching the WWWDOT framework in four 30-minute sessions:

- **Session One:** The teacher leads the class in a discussion about the trustworthiness of the information on the Internet. Then, the teacher introduces the "WWW" parts of the framework through direct instruction, providing examples and concrete information (e.g. where to find the "last-updated" date)
- **Session Two:** The teacher reviews "WWW" and introduces the "DOT" components. The teacher then has students review all six components by pulling up a hoax site (the authors give the example of a website about a "tree octopus") and leading the class in a discussion.
- **Session Three:** The teacher provides each student with a WWWDOT worksheet and has them use it to analyze three different websites on the same topic (in this case, the Underground Railroad)
- **Session Four:** The teacher leads the class in a discussion/debate about which website was the most trustworthy and which was the least trustworthy, prompting students to use evidence from the WWW framework.

The authors conclude by suggesting teachers evaluate students' abilities to evaluate websites through observation, questionnaires and open-ended response questions.

Conclusion and Citation

Students are only going to need to use the internet more as technology becomes increasingly prevalent in the classroom, so teaching elementary students how to evaluate the trustworthiness of internet sources is of paramount importance. The WWWDOT framework is a promising method for achieving that goal.

Zhang, S., et. al "The WWWDOT Approach to Improving Students' Critical Evaluation of Websites." The Reading Teacher, 65.2 (2011), pp. 150-158. http://bit.ly/vOBILu (subscription only).