Media Literacy in the Third Space School Library.

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Abstract

This article shares the findings from a study which applies a theory of change for dynamic media literacy to foster resilience and promote positive consequences in the media ecosystem through a collaboration between academic/educational media literacy practice and the UK School Library Association.

The research generates transferable findings to support capacity-building for school librarians to work with young people in third spaces to foster media ecosystem change through third space media literacy work. This article:

1. Synthesises the intersection of libraries in general and school libraries in particular with media literacy using the theoretical concept of 'third space;'

2. Describes the project's methods, activities and data collection;

3. Shares the findings with regard to situating school libraries as third spaces in which to enable the positive impact of media literacy development on the capabilities and resilience of young people.

Keywords: Media Literacy, School Libraries, Third Space, Ecosystems, Resilience.

Media Literacy, Wellbeing and Resilience

This study investigates the benefits of media literacy activities in the school library on secondary school students' (age 14-15) wellbeing and resilience in the digital environment. Wellbeing in this context was related to mental health but our definition of mental health was broad and informed by participants' self-disclosure of having experienced challenges in the digital environment, as opposed to diagnosed mental illness. As Ofcom state in its 2023 report on mental health and media literacy:

> Media literacy initiatives to support mental health could be seen as a spectrum – from treating people with a diagnosed mental illness to protecting people's wellbeing. (Ofcom, 2023: 4).

Within this spectrum, this study is related to the protection of wellbeing through agency and the resilience we were hypothesising as attendant to digital literacy.

Ofcom's research identified four core principles which resonate with our approach: that
- we now live online;
- online spaces can contribute to good mental health;
- the most positive online experiences are those shaped by user needs; and,
- "the rapid pace of change means we are learning as we go."

These core findings are congruent with two core aspects of our intervention. Firstly, the needs of users shaping positive experiences in the digital world is in keeping with our hypothesis that more agentive media literacy improves the health of the ecosystem for everyone. Secondly, that this 'learning as we go' requires reciprocal knowledge exchange in media literacy third spaces, as opposed to a transmission model whereby media literacy is taught by those who have it to those who lack it.

The Uses of Media Literacy for Agentive Resilience

To this end, we have developed a theory of change moving beyond solutionism to work more in the complex 'problem spaces' of media literacy. We endeavour to find ways to identify how citizens can 'defend' themselves more agentively, *using* their media literacies (Bennett et al, 2020) to make the ecosystem healthier in the future, so that there is simply less danger to be resilient *to*.

Our theory of change was first developed for BBC Media Action, to strategically drive the work they do with local journalists and audiences in fragile societies around the world, and since deployed for projects with the British Council, Global Challenges Research Fund, e-nurture network and the UK Government (see McDougall - Rega, 2022 for a detailed account of how the ToC is used in our previous projects). Our reason for developing a theory of change for media literacy was informed by understanding that "*the adoption of a theory of change approach enables researchers to evidence aspirations or intentions just as well as concrete outcomes… and provides a language to narrate their stories and articulate value in terms they understand.*" (Boulil and Hanney, 2022: 127)

A more detailed version of the theory of change and user guide is available on the website for the UK Government project: https://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/research/projects/evaluating-media-literacy-theory-change. The following is a summary of the inter-related elements.

ACCESS	Access involves when, where and how we have access to media in everyday life for citizenship, education, work and health.

AWARENESS	Media literacy enables people to have a critical awareness of how media and information represent people, events, issues and places. On a larger scale, media literacy helps us to understand how the media environment we are engaging with is constructed.
CAPABILITY	Media literacy can lead to new capabilities for civic engagement through digital media and technology and increased employability through the gaining of creative and/or digital skills.
CONSEQUENCES	Media literacy can contribute to significant change if we take media literacy actions that can make a constructive and positive impact on the media ecosystem in our lives and on the lives of others in a functioning civic society.

Fig 1: Theory of Change for Agentive Media Literacy

The desire is to use such a theory of change to see better media literacy as environmental, drawing on re-appraisals of Freire's contribution to epistemology and social change in the digital age (Suzina - Tufte, 2022) or in what Fry (2022) describes as an intersect of context, content, power and paradigm, always differently inter-related context and' in the impulse to "understand the whole environment of possibility' (2022, p. 157).

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Third Space

A 2021 report from the Great School Libraries campaign quoted a member of school library staff as saying: "*I'm not as intimidating… you find yourself talking to the pupils and they invest a lot more into you than maybe they would necessarily talk to a teacher about.*" A 2018 report from the National Literacy Trust found that: "*children and young people who use the school library have, on average, higher mental wellbeing scores. Those who don't use the school library are nearly twice as likely to have low mental wellbeing than they are to have high mental wellbeing*". (Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2018: 3). The 'Reimagining learning spaces' (2013) research, recent work published by Willis, Hughes & Bland (2019) has uncovered a direct correlation between the importance of school library design and wellbeing for students, reporting on "*the interactive, learner-centered, inclusive and flexible spaces that were identified by students as extending their learning opportunities, and contributing to their sense of wellbeing.*" (2019: 121).

For some students, the school library may be the only space where they can come and speak to like-minded peers and/or a trusted adult that isn't their classroom teacher or a parent (Korodai 2019). Oldenburg (1997) observes that libraries are spaces where one can rest, escape from the mundane, and emotionally discharge. Advocates suggest that the library is a good location for mental health support as it is commonly perceived as a 'safe space' (Benedetti et al., 2020). In the school library, Gray (2017) argues that the role of the teacher librarian is to encourage social and learning opportunities by reflecting the needs of the school community and the students who come to use the space (Clark and Teravainen-Goff 2018; Morehart, 2016). School librarians adapt to change and foster student wellbeing by instilling a sense of belonging, community and relaxation.

Where media and information literacy meets guided inquiry, this safe space also becomes something more transformative – a potential 'third space' which allows the student to explore

concepts between what they already know and the curriculum they are taught. Articulating the value of media literacy in the way this theory of change seeks to measure requires the design and sustainable operationalising of a conducive 'third space', which "*involves a simultaneous coming and going in a borderland zone between different modes of action… The third space is thus a place of invention and transformational encounters, a dynamic in-between space that is imbued with the traces, relays, ambivalences, ambiguities and contradictions, with the feelings and practices of both sites, to fashion something different, unexpected.*" (Bhabha, 1994, p406, see also Potter and McDougall, 2016).

The Third Space is not necessarily a physical space, but a coming together of people to exchange experiences and expertise (or, in the literacy research discourse, 'funds of knowledge') from their everyday lives (the first space) with more educational or institutional kinds of knowledge, for example, in a school (the second space). The school library, despite being located within the second space (the school), by virtue of being in between the formal school curriculum and the informal learning we associate, is a potential third space, both physically and as a space for thinking differently about knowledge. Media literacy activities in the school library can, in these ways, bring students' funds of knowledge (first space) together with critical thinking skills from information professionals and teachers (second space). However, a third space can also impact on the spaces it converges. This means that the media literacy learning that takes place in the school library would make a difference to the way that media literacy with regard to wellbeing is understood in the school (second space) as well as generating positive consequences in the everyday digital lives of students (first space).

This intersection mapping validates our hypothesis and informed our intervention with regard to two observations: (1) media literacy can improve young people's wellbeing and resilience to the digital world with related mental health improvements and (2) school libraries can facilitate conducive 'third spaces' in which to develop media literacy, generating positive outcomes for young people.

Intervention

Following a profiling exercise focussed on online behaviours and digital wellbeing, a sample of 14-15 year old students who self-disclosed as having experienced challenges in the digital environment were recruited. The intervention then consisted of the school librarian (SL) working with the students and a group of teachers from a range of subjects and pastoral roles on a set of activities using resources produced for the project and facilitating a set of workshops with the students.

The third space in which the intervention took place was both physical (the school library, being in between the formal school curriculum and the informal learning we associate with literacy and the use of information in the broadest sense) and a way of thinking differently about knowledge. In this case, the resources, activities and workshops sought to connect the students' 'funds of knowledge' together with the critical thinking skills from the information professional (SL) and teachers. This convergence of valuing the situated media literacy practices of students (from the first space) and providing a new, more critical and reflective 'mindfulness' for future media experiences (from the second space) embedded the study in the theory of change that the intervention used to both trial and measure the approach.

ToC Element	Workshop	Activities*	Outcomes: Participants are able to..

1	Access	Digital Me	Digital Wellbeing Reflections Burst Your Information Bubble	Be reflexive about their digital habits, positive and challenging, and how their digital environment relates to their wellbeing. Understand why a healthy digital ecosystem is good for everyone & what they can do to be more resilient within it.
2	Awareness	Digital Mindfulness	Algo-Literacy Lateral Reading	Pause, reflect and take a more critical approach to digital life, data visualization, how algorithms influence our behaviour and how this impacts our mental health. Understand triggers in the digital environment which impact on wellbeing and start to think about how to respond differently.
3	Capability	Digital Action	'Hack for Good' Family and Friends in Digital Life	Put media literacy skills into action for personal mental health benefits. Plan for relationship changes in the digital environment.
4	Consequences	Digital Change	Digital Pushback Being a Digital Influencer	Put media literacy skills into action to improve the digital ecosystem.

Fig 2: Intervention Design

	Needs	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
ACCESS	14-15 year old students who have disclosed experiencing challenges in the digital environment impacting on their mental health need to develop digital literacy so they can make different decisions about what to access and how within their digital lives.	'Digital Me' workshop and independent activities: ● Digital Wellbeing Surgery ● Burst Your Information Bubble	1 workshop delivered, 1 independent activity completed by 8-12 participants. Learning demonstrated through the independent activities and the workshops.	Participants use increased digital literacy to plan different access choices in their digital lives to improve their mental health. <u>Measured by</u> ● Work produced ● Reflective exercise / survey ● Focus group	14-15 year old students who have disclosed experiencing challenges in the digital environment impacting on their mental health are more reflexive about their digital habits, how the digital environment relates to their wellbeing, why a healthy digital ecosystem is good for everyone & what they can do to be more resilient within it.
AWARENESS	14-15 year old students who have disclosed experiencing challenges in the digital environment impacting on their mental health need to be more critical in their digital lives through digital literacy.	'Digital Mindfulness' workshop and independent activities: ● Lateral Reading ● Digital Triggers	1 workshop delivered, 1 independent activity completed by 8-12 participants. Learning demonstrated through the independent activities and the workshops.	Participants use increased digital literacy to use media and information more critically and mindfully. <u>Measured by</u> ● Work produced ● Reflective exercise / survey ● Focus group	14-15 year old students who have disclosed experiencing challenges in the digital environment impacting on their mental health are able to pause, reflect and take a more critical approach to digital life, data visualization, how algorithms influence their behaviour and how this impacts on their mental health, understand triggers in the digital

					environment which impact on their wellbeing and think about how to respond differently.
CAPABILITY	14-15 year old students who have disclosed experiencing challenges in the digital environment impacting on their mental health need to be helped to put digital literacy skills into action to improve their mental health.	'Digital Action; workshop and independent activities: ● 'Hack for Good' ● Family & Friends in Digital Life	1 workshop delivered, 1 independent activity completed by 8-12 participants. Learning demonstrated through the independent activities and the workshops.	Participants use increased digital literacy to articulate understanding of how they might put their DL into practice beyond the project to be more resilient through agency in the digital environment. Measured by ● Reflective exercise / survey ● Focus group	14-15 year old students who have disclosed experiencing challenges in the digital environment impacting on their mental health put digital literacy skills into action for personal mental health benefits and take actions for relationship changes in the digital environment.
CONSEQUENCES	14-15 year old students who have disclosed experiencing challenges in the digital environment impacting on their mental health need to be helped to put digital literacy skills into action to improve the digital ecosystem.	'Digital Change' workshop and independent activities: ● Digital Pushback ● Being a Digital Influencer	1 workshop delivered, 1 independent activity completed by 8-12 participants. Learning demonstrated through the independent activities and the workshops.	Participants use increased digital literacy to articulate understanding of how they could play a role as positive peers in the digital environment to improve the ecosystem for everyone. Measured by ● Focus group	14-15 year old students who have disclosed experiencing challenges in the digital environment impacting on their mental health put digital literacy skills into action to improve the digital ecosystem.

Fig 3: Theory of Change *(project level)*

What impact do we want to have on participants?					
	Knowledge	**Skills**	**Dialogue**	**Attitudes and Norms**	**Behaviour**
ACCESS	People are more aware of the range of media and information sources available to them in the ecosystem.	People have the skills to make use of and make sense of the media and digital environment and to be more safe and resilient.	People can discuss their media access, online safety and skills needs with their family and / or peers.	People are more reflective about the access choices they are making for themselves.	People feel motivated to make better and in some cases safer access choices
	People are more aware of risks and potential harms,	People have the critical skills to evaluate the credibility, fairness and diversity of their access to media and information.	People participate in dialogue about media access, online safety and media literacy skills with stakeholders.	People choose to broaden their access to more diverse media and information.	Diverse publics represent themselves, taking opportunities provided by media literacy projects and programmes that include them.
	People are aware of the skills they need to access the full digital media environment.	People have the skills of reflection and personal judgement to evaluate their digital literacy and assess their media engagement habits.	People engage with advocacy media and more diverse representations and this generates dialogue between groups and reduces polarization of discourse.	People expect to have access to media which acts in the public interest and an online environment which is safe and protects digital rights.	People engage more with public interest media.

	Impact Measures for Access (actions by people, enabled / supported by media literacy interventions): ● People upskill their media engagement. ● People care more about diverse and inclusive media representation ● People access public interest media more and access broader information sources. ● People make healthier and safer media and online access decisions. ● People expect to be live in a healthy media ecosystem.				
AWARENESS	People know what public interest media is and why it is important	People make informed risk calculations with regard to online behaviour, media engagement and information circulation.	People can articulate online safety risks and which media and information they trust, and why.	General acceptance of online risks, harms and unverified information reduces in communities and societies.	People are more mindful in their engagement with and / or their sharing of media and information.
	People develop understanding of how to assess if information credible.	People use critical thinking skills to assess how media texts and information sources are constructed and to evaluate their intentionality.	People have a space for dialogue with family and / or peers about risk, harmful consequences or misinformation affecting individuals, social groups and communities.	Media literacy leads to a reduction in tolerance towards others who share unverified information.	People challenge one another when negative media and information norms are evident in their everyday lives.
	People understand better the representational practices of all media	People use critical thinking skills to evaluate the diversity and equality of their media ecosystem as a whole.	Representation gaps and media bias can be safely discussed by people.	People expect media to act in the public interest and to represent diverse publics inclusively as norms.	People feel empowered to challenge unhealthy media ecosystems.
	People are more aware of how to be safe and resilient online and in the media ecosystem.	People use critical thinking skills to develop understanding of media ownership and regulation.	Stakeholders listen and respond to more media literate people when they discuss representation gaps and media bias.	Media literate publics demand more equal and diverse ecosystems and safer online environments.	Stakeholders are motivated to respond to more resilient and media literate audiences and users in their professional practice.
	Impact Measures for Awareness (actions by people, enabled / supported by media literacy interventions): ● People think more critically about media representations. ● People observe representation gaps and media bias and want to do something about them. ● People are more aware of unsafe or harmful online experiences and want to play a part in reducing them. ● People care more about misinformation and want to play a part in reducing the spread of it. ● People are aware of how media ecosystems or more or less healthy and understand their rights to live in a healthy media and information environment.				
CAPABILITY				People think of themselves as media makers / information providers.	People assess and deal with resilience to online risks and media content abundance and act with self-efficacy in response to media and information.
				People see the connection between their media literacy and educational and / or economic opportunities.	Media literacy enables people to engage in civil society and / or to campaign in digital media contexts as activists.
				More agentive and resilient attitudes circulate among people towards media and information, enabled by digitally literate people	People value safe online experiences, public interest and trustworthy media.
				Stakeholders are motivated to produce	Stakeholders expect to engage with and /

				and provide media, information and online experiences for more resilient media literate publics.	or employ or educate more media literate citizens.
	Impact Measures for Capability (actions by people, enabled / supported by media literacy interventions): ● People use their media literacy to improve their lives, ● People use their media literacy for civic engagement, ● More resilient and media literate publics makes the relationship online platforms, media, users and audiences more balanced and healthier ● People become more resilient to online risk and harms and misinformation over time, through preventative media literacy .				
CONSEQUENCES	People are more aware of the consequences of online actions and of sharing media content and information			More positive behavioural norms are established in the media and information environment.	People make activist media for positive change.
	People understand better the consequences of media representations			People are motivated to act as positive peers in the media and info ecosystem, to be safe online and help to keep others safe.	People challenge the negative or harmful uses of media literacy by others.
	People know the consequences of a lack of diversity or bias in the media ecosystem			People stop sharing unverified content and information and encourage others to be more mindful.	People who are themselves negatively impacted online harms, misinformation or exploitative media representations are capable of speaking out.
	Stakeholders respond to more media literate publics by taking more responsibility for the consequences of diversity or bias.			Stakeholders respond to more media literate audiences and users in their practices with a focus on positive change.	Stakeholders' obligations to more resilient and media literate publics reduces negative media impacts.
	Impact Measures for Consequences (actions by people, enabled / supported by media literacy interventions): ● Online harms reduce through a change in mindset in more resilient users with higher expectations ● Misinformation and harmful content sharing reduces ● Positive, activist media production increases ● Stakeholders respond to media literate publics by changing their practices for positive change ● Media ecosystems are more diverse and inclusive				

Fig 4: Change Objectives – highlighted = within project scope

	Potential for ML leading to change	Nature of evidence of change or potential for change (latent or manifest)
ACCESS	In encouraging students to be reflexive about their digital habits, project may lead to positive change. and challenging, Understand why a healthy digital ecosystem is good for everyone should increase participation	Survey and focus groups

	Targets children who self-identify issues with access	
	Intervention in a neutral space opens up access	
AWARENESS	Encourage a more critical approach to digital life, data viz, algorithms and impact on mental health.	Work produced
		Reflective exercise / survey
	Understand and identify triggers that influence wellbeing – consider how to respond.	Focus group
CAPABILITY	Develops digital literacy skills in support of positive mental health.	Reflective exercise / survey / Focus group
CONSEQUENCES	Applied digital literacy skills	Focus Group

Fig 5: Evidence Mapping

Results

The following forms of data were collected:

- Baseline survey data
- Work produced by students
- Focus group with participants – audio recorded and transcribed
- Interview with school librarian
- Interviews with participants (in Zoom, 2 x individual, 1 paired, with SL attending for safeguarding purposes).

The **baseline survey** was sent to 83 year 10 students, of whom 34 responded, with a 60/40 gender response (F/M), which is representative of the year group and school demographic as a whole. For the purpose of identifying students whose responses indicated their suitability for the intervention, 2 survey questions were identified as the most significant disclosure. These were related to feeling uncomfortable or worried when finding content on the internet and being sent messages or pictures that made respondents feel upset or bullied. Responses to these were then cross referenced to mood indicator questions, about respondents' outlook and how cared for they were feeling. These were used as filters to identify respondents to invite to take part in the project. 12 students met this selection criteria (answers to the two filter questions and their mood responses) and were invited to participate, with a provisional participant information and safeguarding document provided. 8 students accepted and took part, after providing informed consent from both themselves and parents / carers / an in loco responsible adult.

Whilst this study is focussed on an intervention in a school library, and therefore this benchmarking data is only used here as a recruitment filter, some notable outcomes from the 34 responses to the survey are to do with the relatively high levels of lower wellbeing but the lack of correlation, as perceived by the respondents, to digital / online experiences. 42% responded 'never' or 'not much of the time' when asked about feeling relaxed. 46% stated that they think good things will happen in their lives either not much or only some of the time. 38% said they think lots of people care about them not much or some of the time. However,

whilst 70% had encountered worrying or uncomfortable material online, only 30% reported directly negative impacts on wellbeing, such as feeling upset or bullied, and 78% disclosed that they had sent unkind messages or content to others through the internet or social media. Therefore, as we also found in the dialogue generated during the intervention, there was a sense of our participants being 'well defended' and projecting digital wellbeing challenges onto others. This was validated by our interview with the school librarian, who was equally surprised by this lack of correlated disclosure, which was at odds with anecdotal evidence from everyday interactions with the cohort.

The intervention programme was refined and updated from previous delivery and adapted for the cohort by the SL, whose experience of delivering the programme was that it foregrounded the pastoral and relational role and the skills required for such work, meaning that the SL was equally important to the (third) space. In other words, whilst the 'in between' (school subjects and informal learning) nature of, and experiences in the school library as a setting - for the in person workshop and virtually extended to the independent activities - was a key element of the new practice model, the ways in which the SL can support wellbeing through the existing relationships with students and distinct interpersonal practices was equally, and perhaps more important. This was raised as an issue with regard to the lack of professional development for the role, as the SL is often not included in training due to contractual restrictions. As we account for later, with regard to this study's 'untypical' context this 'imbalance of opportunities' (GSL, 2023) cannot be sidestepped when advocating for the new practice model we are testing in this project. "In those secondaries with library staff, a third receive no training" and "40% indicated that they spend less than three quarters of their time carrying out their core library duties due to the range of other roles and responsibilities held by the member of staff" (Great School Libraries 2023:13).

The programme had been planned to run for a longer period, with more time in between workshops for independent activities, but, as is so often the case, pressures on the school timetable and the demands on the time of the SL and the students necessitated a pivot to a more compressed schedule. However, this actually had benefits, since the intense focus on the work was more positive for students. As the capability to consequences conversion involves a Hackathon followed by a digital activism exercise, it was reported back that the relationship between the two was better captured by running them in immediate succession. Another—perhaps more predictable observation—was that, had the students had longer for the independent activities between workshops, it was actually less likely that they would have completed them, as continuity and 'in the moment' focus for learning is at such a high premium for this age group.

A recurrent theme was that, in the short space of time we had for the intervention, it was difficult to get to the deeper issues beneath the surface of 'resilience', since, in many ways the cohort were very 'savvy' with some aspects of media literacy at least. For example, lateral reading was something they were already doing, so they were able to reflect on this in positive ways but risks related to misinformation seemed less of a concern. Indirectly related to having relatively high levels of media literacy, they did not consider themselves to be marginalised or subject to macro inequalities and this made the 'Pushback' element more localised. The SL reflected that this might take longer to galvanise and could be moved to take place before the Hackathon, raising useful learnings for us to consider with regard to the inter-related aspects of the theory of change.

In terms of the pedagogic approach, comparisons were made with other school activities related to health and wellbeing and online safety, and it was a shared view among both participants and staff that the combination of the 'third space' and the active learning design had led to much higher levels of engagement for this kind of intervention than other experiences which had been more 'one way' and singular.

Student work produced for the programme offered us another data set. This included PowerPoint slides produced in response to the 'Information Bubble' and lateral reading activities (for example, on different media representations of a UN climate report) and the outcomes of the Hackathon and Pushback activities (for example, *Aware: The App*, designed to "protect, engage and learn."). The work generated demonstrated engagement with the project and evidence of the core learning outcomes for each activity being met, in general terms.
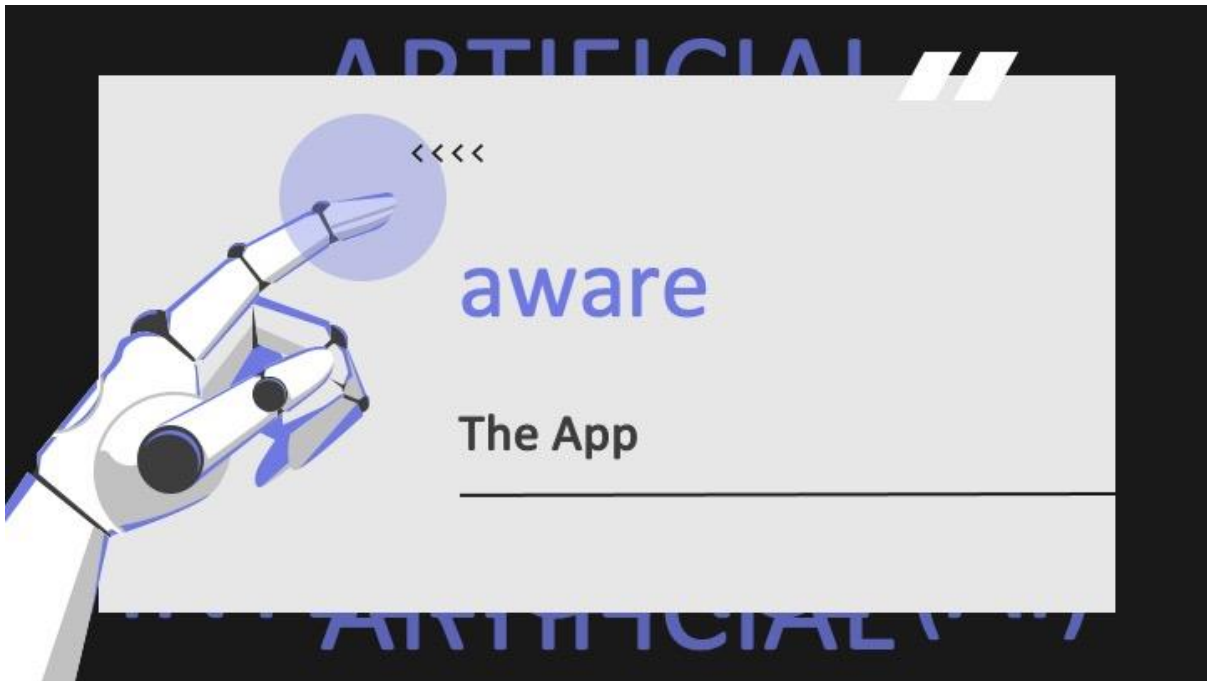

Figure 6: Student Work (Hackathon)

Figure 7: Student Work (Information Bubble)

A focus group was held with the participants and interviews were held with the school librarian, two individual students and two other participants in a pair. All were audio recorded and transcribed. The focus group asked participants more about their experiences in the project, whilst the interviews were related more to experiences in the digital world, to add a more discursive and qualitative layer to the baseline data. From the transcription analysis, the following significant experiences and perceptions were presented:

"Driving into the Skid"

The role of the school librarian is a misunderstood role, and is crucial for digital literacy, but the mindset of being a school librarian who is enabling this kind of 'third space' education for both information literacy and digital wellbeing is not typical. Whilst a school librarian may often run workshops in extra-curricular, pastoral sessions, related to misinformation or online safety, a programme such as this is dependent on both a confident and forward-thinking school librarian (in this case, the Chair of the UK School Library Association) and a conducive school setting. The latter was also atypical, being a relatively very well-resourced school where the desire to take a proactive approach to digital literacy to '*drive into the skid'*, as opposed to trying to swerve away, could be supported. This resonated with the findings of the *Parenting For a Digital Future* research (Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2020), with regard to the discourse of screen time and risk reduction reducing voice for parents to articulate more nuanced and complex concerns about parenting in the digital age in broader terms. School librarians, being at the vanguard of media literacy work with young people, also find their remit being more about research skills for the curriculum and reducing 'screen time' than "changing your own digital sphere."

Our participants commented positively on the school library environment as helping them feel '*socially comfortable'* and on their relationship with the librarian meaning they felt more able to share personal experiences than in a subject class. Furthermore, during the intervention and in the focus group, the SL was able to repeatedly share her own digital experiences and very comfortably perform the role of being in a reciprocal learning space, which was more from her professional way of working, over time, than something 'required' in our project design. It was strikingly clear that these environmental and relational aspects had been cultivated over time, prior to this project:

> *In this library, I have never been asked a question to which there was a right answer, nor has there been an obligation to answer. It's a very relaxed environment where there is nothing to achieve unless you personally want to.*

This leads us to reflect on how environment informs thinking and learning and how the different configuration of the second space in the library frames learning as more intrinsic, albeit always linked to the formal curriculum, by virtue of being in the school. In this way, we can see most clearly how the library becomes a third space when used to situate media literacy, since the location and the learning practices come to share such an 'in between' causal relation.

"I want to get back to a normal feed"

Instagram and TikTok were frequently cited as the two social media spaces where significant mental challenges are presented (in general, for the age group, these were not attributed to personal experience by our participants):

> *It's important to realise how much we rely on technology, I definitely rely on TikTok too much. You never know what to actually trust.*

> *Instagram has less restrictions so it can cause more problems.*

> *With TikTok you don't know what you are going to see so you have to keep scrolling. And often the comments on videos are so horrendous, you wouldn't ever see that in the real world, but the fact that people think they can see it, it's like what they really think, unfiltered, then that's very scary.*

I end up spending even more time (on TikTok), even when I am really bored with it, or I skip through and skip through but don't interact with it, even if I am interested in it, because I want to get back to a normal feed.

There was a shared view that, particularly with Tik Tok, the apparently 'random' nature of the video feed leads to 'desensitization'. But very interestingly, in relation to media effects and cultivation theories, this is not due to being constantly exposed to similar, violent or 'mean world' content, but more about the constant juxtaposition:

It's, like, such a stark contrast, between 'My Mum has cancer, please interact so she doesn't die' and then 'oh, here's my friend, I am going to smash her face with a cake. That kind of desensitizes you, and I don't think that's a great thing.

For these participants, the main challenges shared as being significant in their lives were not so much to do with specific content as a failure to moderate time spent online. Individual participants shared examples of having to spend time recalibrating the algorithm so that their video feed would be more in keeping with their interests and preferences and we heard a lot of examples of being concerned about social media posts but then being able to 'move on'. When we heard about challenges experienced, these were either in the past or about others:

When I was a bit younger, I didn't really know what was OK and not OK to post online, so I would hurt people's feelings and only feel bad about it later when I realised the effect on people.

Some of my friends have had bad experiences online due to their mental health, but for me, I am quite resilient.

The statements above are indicative of general articulations by and between the cohort and this means that, as a research team, we need to consider the efficacy of the survey questions asking about experiencing difficult situations online and views on mental health and the digital world in general, with regard to how well they filter recent and personal experiences.

With regard to previous experiences of education, online safety, usually in PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) had been much more commonly experienced than the more holistic media literacy education this study was modelling, with many examples cited of 'scare tactics' but a general feeling that even these interventions (albeit like our own) did not usually make any difference to online behaviours, these were only impactful in the moment, during the school day. There was consistent evidence of an unhelpful prior framing of educational activities being more focussed on online safety or information literacy for school work than the more positive uses of digital media in everyday life, another example of second space dynamics being an impediment to more agentive media literacy education.

"Some people our age have problems."

The lack of correspondence between the survey data and participants' reflections during the focus groups and interviews was striking, with high levels of confidence in their own resilience and this being largely from their own, self-directed experiential learning, rather than being attributed to either first space support (e.g., from parents or carers) or second space (school):

It comes with experience, I now know what I want to avoid and what I want to actively seek out.

The main concern my parents have is that technology makes me lazy, that they see that I can do things that I shouldn't be able to do so easily, it's so easy to find things, like, to cheat. But I don't actually think it's too much of a problem.

Another interesting 'critical incident' was presented by the 'information bubble' activity NOT yielding as different search outcome results as anticipated, perhaps due to school firewall settings or due to the demographic similarity between participants. However, in the focus group, this was raised and then a rich discussion followed about why this was the case, and how this might have been different, which in some ways presented itself as a clear example of 'third space learning' and, with this cohort, perhaps more useful than the 'scales from eyes' outcome typically associated with that activity.

"Swept Up by the Algorithm."

From all of the data sets, we observed a degree of 'masking', which meant that the data generated with us through the qualitative methods during and post-intervention did not match up fully with the baseline data. Digital challenges were described more as uncomfortable than problematic for mental health. In our previous research, we have found that spending more time and using more creative methods is often a way to get through this reticence, or projection to others – '*some people our age have big problems with…*'. But there was also the sense that the framing of the project might have been out of synch with aspects of our intentions, and our theory of change, with researcher bias being not only unintended but actually counter to our aims, since our participants seemed to be of the view that the desired change was more about reducing screen time than taking more positive action. As a research team, our speculative explanation for this is that discourses around online risk and mental health mean that for this age group, there is such a pervading and normative language around over exposure that the hypothesis that being more literate in the digital space means not doing less but doing things differently, and in some cases, doing more, is contradictory to the participants, and would take a lot longer to work through. However, we did find evidence of manifest change in more critical thinking about the validity of online information (albeit building on relatively high levels for the age group) and also the latent potential for a shift in behaviour through increased 'algo literacy':

> At the very least, I am more aware when I start getting swept up by the algorithm, and I have started making an effort to stop that, and I assume I will more in the future.

Towards the end of the focus group, participants asked the researcher questions about digital presence / online footprints, with regard to concerns about being vetted when applying for jobs in the future. This was due to the timing of an online safety session in PSHE—two weeks prior to our intervention—which was so often referred to as a comparison point that it emerged as a key factor in the study. On the one hand, the pedagogic/relational approach we had taken in our third space was generally understood to be a more positive and nurturing way of working than the 'shock into action' presentation about online risks and future job prospects – "*whatever you post online, it always stays there, your digital footprint will follow you everywhere.*". But at the same time, when we asked questions about taking action to change behaviour in the digital world (consequences, from new or increased capability), this comparison worked against us. The longer term, more sustainable aims of our model, the idea that students are more likely to be resilient and safe and their wellbeing will subsequently improve if they are more agentive and change-oriented, in an active way in the digital ecosystem, did not 'cut through' the sense that 'taking action' must be more about doing less on the internet, reducing risks by spending less time online, sharing less, being more risk averse in social media. This meant that our—perhaps too subtle—shift in thinking from reducing screen time to taking more positive action—just as we hope young people will with regard to the natural environment—was probably lost in the more immediate resonance of the 'shock tactics' employed in the pastoral talk on risky behaviours.

Participants also felt that our intervention would generally have far more impact on their critical reflections than on digital skills or the application of them, since these were already

high, and least likely to change their actions. But this was not due to any design fault in the intervention, but simply because we came too late. With them having lived their whole lives online, they were already immersed in a kind of 'digital habitus' which would be very difficult to change – "*this is stuff we have grown up with.*' They generally felt that this would work better with a younger age group, to 'get there earlier', before such habits become entrenched, but they also reflected on how, in the UK at least, the combination of parental, educational and regulatory attitudes to digital technology would make the idea of working on such material with younger children very difficult, if not impossible. This presents us with a compelling paradox for this kind of work, along with the other, perennial challenge related to recruitment and engagement for digital literacy projects such as this:

> *If you were to give this programme to every single student in every single school, a good part of*
> *===them, because they had to do it, would not listen and would not take anything away. We all*
> *actively chose to be here.*

In this casual distinction between choice and mandate/coercion, we can see again the value of the library as a third space. Our participants chose to participate because of their deep trust in the library space and in the school librarian. For these students, the school library is invitational, low stress and student-centred, in contrast to whole-school presentations or classroom activities on the same topics. The changes we observed, albeit relatively modest and with a 'savvy' cohort, happened because of the mindset of the students, and their readiness to reflect and potentially change their media behaviours, towards a healthier ecosystem. This projection onto less willing others is also about an induction into more reflexive learning practices, for which the library is a significant factor.

Findings and Signposts for Further Research

Our intervention has generated the following key findings:

- For a school library to be a third space and facilitate the conversion of media literacy into capability for young people, the school librarian must be an advocate for media literacy in combination with pastoral experience and the setting must be adequately resourced.

- The third space school library enabled young people to be reflective about their digital habits, but there was less evidence of them being reflexive with regard to behaviour changes for their digital wellbeing.

- Young people in the study demonstrated existing awareness of the nature of the media ecosystem and the need for their peers to take a more critical and mindful approach to digital life, data and algorithms, for better mental health, but this was generally projected onto others, since they considered themselves to be generally resilient.

- Through the work produced in the third space school library, young people showed an advanced understanding of the need for changes in the digital lifeworld for their age group but felt that they had engaged with our project too late to make these changes in their own lives.

- The young people in this specific setting met the learning outcomes from the activities designed to convert capabilities into consequences via digital media activism, but there was little if any evidence of either existing activism or new intentionality.

These findings validate the approach as a conduit but mean we were unable to evidence the change we hoped to see in participants' digital relations with their peer group, family and school (first and second space impacts), due to the balance being more towards reflection than reflexivity and the relative confidence articulated in their own digital resilience. This did not correspond to the survey data and presents a conundrum which is familiar in the research field.

This study's small sample size and short duration produced findings which show that, if the requisite conditions are in place, the third space school library model is more effective for doing more agentive media literacy work than online safety workshops, for example. However, the following extensions to our approach are required, by way of further research:

- Comparison of the outcomes of this intervention across a range of school library settings;

- Profiling and follow to track digital media behaviours, pre- and post-intervention;

- A reflexive element to run throughout the intervention, requiring more time in between workshops;

- Triangulation of data sets to move beyond self-reporting of both wellbeing challenges (and resilience) and of digital behaviours.

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