

It Doesn't Matter How Many "Doses": One-Shots Aren't Cures

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Drawing from Wendy Holliday's use of metaphor to generate exploration around information literacy discourse,¹ we pose some preliminary ideas about mapping a vaccination metaphor onto one-shots. We do so to offer another lens through which to explore the mechanisms and implications of one-shots being viewed as common-sensical and unassailable. Thus, we apply the timely vaccination metaphor to dig deeper into damaging assumptions about one-shots investigated in Pagowsky's "The Contested One-Shot."² These assumptions include the claim that more sessions circumvent the problems of one-shots and that one-shots create transferable knowledge for learners. Finally, this article considers how these assumptions inform and are informed by prevalent understandings of how misinformation works.

Just as vaccines can be construed as "the solution" rather than one tool in a larger-scale effort, so have one-shots become relied upon to "inoculate" learners against information literacy deficits that they should no longer exhibit further on in their academic careers. While vaccines have recently been discussed in terms that suggest that they are magical cloaks that protect against infection, what they really do is train your body to fight off disease. As we've seen with the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccines can provide protection that reduces the chances of hospitalization and death for many people, but they don't prevent transmission or mutations; for that we also need nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs). Seen this way, the "failure" of a single shot (a one-shot!) should not be ascribed to the librarian who did not administer the needed dose, or, as Pagowsky argues, "doses" as one-shots, plural, are arguably the same as a singular "one-shot" without curricular integration. As "tacked-on" additions with little relationship to the curriculum (in this metaphor, little relationship to NPIs), one-shots cannot provide "immunity" to misinformation whether they are "boosted" by more one-shot content or not. Like older vaccine formulas trying to respond to new mutations, static one-shots also cannot, in and of themselves, assist students in responding to new information literacy contexts. Or, to frame this within the vaccine metaphor and in terms of corresponding learning implications, students given the "one shot" of information literacy frequently fail to apply what they have learned to new information literacy situations in ways that demonstrate they have been able to transfer knowledge. Once "exposed" to information literacy, learners are not equipped to "fight off" misinformation even if they can correctly evaluate for what it is. As other librarians have noted, "The tactics we've taught students for evaluating items one at

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a time provide slim defenses against the networked efforts of organizations that flood feeds, timelines, and search results."³

In fact, as has been recently confirmed in a study conducted on digital literacy,⁴ the ability to correctly evaluate information does not predict whether an individual will choose to spread misinformation. While this study named the literacy at hand as "digital," the competencies involved clearly have overlap with what librarians consider to be information literacy and with the content of so many of our one-shots. Thus, to return to the vaccination metaphor, "inoculation" through one-shot pedagogical strategies geared against misinformation does not mitigate "spread." Even if we manage to assist learners in their ability to more reliably evaluate information, that doesn't mean that they'll make the ethical choice about sharing misinformation. There is something irrational at play. The one-shots present a "common sense" approach to misinformation in which librarians are viewed as metaphorically inoculating students against practices like sharing misinformation they've already accurately evaluated as false. But, as we see with discussions about neutrality, this "common sense" approach does not factor in information systems that "inflict structural violence on BIPOC," nor does it acknowledge the motivations behind any other form of epistemic injustice.⁵ It also doesn't account for research around "sticky" information, which sometimes sticks around even after being corrected because it's linked in people's heads with other information they know to be true or because it provides them with a sense of safety or because it is a norm within social groups.⁶ As discussed by Maura Seale in relation to information literacy practices informed by the Standards, this "mechanistic" and "simplistic" view of how someone becomes information-literate is also "positivist" in its disregard of the means of knowledge production.⁷ Positivism approaches the world by observing it and reducing complexities in the attempt to identify universal patterns without acknowledging the social construction of knowledge.⁸ From this positivistic, mechanistic perspective, becoming information literate should then be "procedural," as scripted and carefully controlled as many of our one-shots.

When we cling to the applicability of the "one-shot"-as-vaccination metaphor, we are left with a sense of befuddlement: why don't students know what they're supposed to know about evaluating a source by their third year of college? After all, they received the right dose of IL at the very beginning. Following that train of thought, we might very well think that the solution to the problem is a "booster." *What we need is more one-shots!* But thinking along those lines prevents us from taking on the implications of fundamentally misunderstanding how information literacy works, especially in a time rife with misinformation. And, perhaps even more powerfully, we continue to neglect the role of our students as agents in an information ecosystem in which they are not just acted upon but also function as actors, making choices that are frequently not common-sensical, checklist-oriented, or as predictable as the one-shot model.

What we instead propose is to shift the metaphor that the vaccination one-shot enacts and reconsider IL instruction as one part of a suite of nonpharmaceutical interventions: practices based in community, with each member responsible for playing a role in the well-being of the group and with librarians, faculty members, and students working and learning together. As Barbara Fister notes, students come to us with knowledge of how information works in social media contexts and can be great advocates in their home communities, sharing "what they know and are learning about information systems to their friends and families beyond academia."⁹ As we've seen with the pandemic, a single shot given to a single person isn't enough to stop it. We need to think beyond the individual.

Notes

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2. Nicole Pagowsky, "The Contested One-Shot: Deconstructing Power Structures to Imagine New Futures," *College & Research Libraries* 82, no. 3 (2021).
3. Alaina C. Bull, Margy MacMillan, and Alison Head, "Dismantling the Evaluation Framework," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (July 21, 2021), <https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2021/dismantling-evaluation/>.
4. Nathaniel Sirlin et al., "Digital Literacy Is Associated with More Discerning Accuracy Judgments but Not Sharing Intentions," *Misinformation Review* 2, no. 6 (December 2021): 3.
5. Amelia N. Gibson et al., "Struggling to Breathe: COVID-19, Protest and the LIS Response," *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion an International Journal* 40, no. 1 (2021): 77, <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-07-2020-0178>.
6. Charlie Warzel, "The Bad Ideas Our Brains Can't Shake," *The Atlantic: Galaxy Brain* [newsletter], (February 22, 2022), <https://newsletters.theatlantic.com/galaxy-brain/62071e1adc551a0020867247/trust-the-science/>.
7. Maura Seale, "Information Literacy Standards and the Politics of Knowledge Production: Using User-Generated Content to Incorporate Critical Pedagogy," in *Critical Pedagogy and Library Instruction: An Edited Collection*, eds. Maria Accardi, Emily Drabinski, and Alana Kumbier (Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2010), 222.
8. Philip Kwaku Kankam, "The Use of Paradigms in Information Research," *Library & Information Science Research* 41, no. 2 (2019): 85–92, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2019.04.003>.
9. Barbara Fister, "Lizard People in the Library," Project Information Literacy: Provocation Series (February 3, 2021), <https://projectinfolit.org/pubs/provocation-series/essays/lizard-people-in-the-library.html>.