



TEAM GB MEDALS AND OTHER MISINFORMATION

Last week, as the Olympic games in Tokyo closed, my husband remarked that the '2020' Team GB had equalled the performance of the 2012 team, who had had the home advantage.

'Oooh! good for Team GB!' was NOT my response.

Instead, I asked him to show me the data he was referring to and how he had calculated the relative value of the gold/silver/bronze medals. (Turns out we got the same NUMBER of medals, but in 2012 we had 29 gold, compared to 22 this time. So not quite the same outcome.)

Does this matter? When it comes to Olympic performances, no, not really. But it brought home to me how cynical I have become about the 'information' that we are constantly bombarded with.

SEE(K)ING THE TRUTH

When someone we like and trust tells us something, it's natural to believe them. Especially if it chimes with what we already believe (or hope) is true. Hearing it said out loud somehow makes it real. It is much harder to recognise the truth when it doesn't look like we expect (or want) it to.

Those of us who are involved in education (at any level) have a responsibility to help our learners develop critical thinking skills, to be able to assess the masses of information they are exposed to through mainstream and social media.

CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Encouraging them to ask themselves some simple questions is always a good start:

- > WHO has shared the information (are they knowledgeable in this area)?
- > WHERE did it come from (is it original research or several steps removed from the source)?
- > WHY have they shared it now (what is their agenda)?
- > WHICH other sources might confirm the information (are they independent from each other)?

It takes practice for this evaluation process to become automatic, but it's worth putting in the time and effort to develop these habits. It'll make our students more successful learners, and more successful at life generally. For neurodiverse learners, who may understand the world in a different way, this is especially important, to help them avoid the potential pitfalls of irony, jokes, and actual misinformation.

I'm sure as you're reading this, you are thinking of great critical thinking activities you could do in class. Please do share your favourites on the facebook page: www.facebook.com/ELTwell !