Media, Allegiance and Civic Education

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Abstract

Philosophies of civilisation, nation, globalisation, and localisation manifest in educational structuring, school hidden curricula, and subject areas like social studies or citizenship education. Additionally, media play a vital role in young people's development of their identities and civic allegiances, apart from what takes place in schools. Media may complement or contradict messages about human living together and one's place in living together provided in educational contexts. Given media's impact, within and outside educational spaces, it would be counterproductive to not examine this impact if one wants to understand how students learn to live together in society. Appreciating the role of media in developing civic ideas can help to enhance strategies of civic education. It can also help to identify skills related to literacy, information processing, and social networking that align with effective development of critical thinking capacities in civic education. This article first explores theoretically how people learn through and engage with media. Next, it considers ways in which media can impact civic identities. It explores how media is impacted by and reflects messages related to civilisation, nationalism, globalization and localism. The article then discusses common ways of responding to media in education. Here, critical media literacy education is examined and reflected upon. Broader educational implications of the exploration are discussed in the conclusion.

Keywords

media – civic education – nationalism – globalisation – civic participation

1 Introduction¹

There is more to civic education than what is usually focused on by educational policymakers and researchers. Understanding that civic education goes beyond a single subject in schools is important, so that aspects of civic education do not fly under the radar of what policymakers, teachers, and scholars consider when they examine and try to enhance civic education (Jackson, 2019). In this vein, it is also worthwhile to recognize that media play an important role in young people's development of their identities and civic allegiances, apart from schools. Media may complement or contradict messages about living together in society that are provided in educational contexts. Appreciating the role of media in developing civic ideas can help to enhance strategies of civic education in schools. It can help to understand media as one source of background knowledge students possess. And it can help to identify skills related to literacy, information processing, and social networking that align with effective development of critical thinking capacities of value in civic education.

This article focuses on the role of the media in civic education. First, it explores how people learn through and engage with media (referring primarily to news media, online or offline, popular culture such as movies and television, mediated and online social networks, and the like). Next, it considers ways in which media impact civic identities and allegiances. It considers how media messages reflect broader ideas in society about the clash of civilizations, and about the values and implications of nationalism, globalization, and localism. The article then discusses common ways of responding to media in education in light of media's impact. In the final section, critical media literacy education is examined and reflected upon.

2 The Role of Media in Education

There are different views about how people interact with and learn from media. The first view is that people are educated by media. One goes online or turns on a television or reads a newspaper, and learns of events they did not know about before, such as the outcomes of sports tournaments, or of natural disasters occurring locally or far away, or of political decisions or conflicts. In this sense, media is a window into the world beyond one's local sphere. It is

1 Some of this text and argumentation is taken from the forthcoming text, Liz Jackson, *Questioning Allegiance: Resituating Civic Education* (Routledge, 2019), with permission previously obtained from the publisher.

like a textbook, but covers daily events. A journalist makes notes or audio or video records, and shares these with people who do not otherwise have access, online, or through television or print newspapers.

In this view, media can be seen as neutral or not neutral. In the case that media is neutral, more media is generally seen as better media, as people have access to more neutral information. When it comes to typhoons or elections or sports, outcomes may be straightforward: People learn about what is going on. Yet from a critical perspective, media is often not neutral, and can therefore have a negative impact. Journalists make choices about *what* to cover. There is more that can be said than can be listened to. Producers of media have their own interests in this situation. Competing with other producers, they may seek the largest audience. This means they may want to cover stories of interest to their audience according to market research. Producers of media may also be impacted by laws, relationships with news sources, or the values of media funders. As a result, what gets covered may align with some private groups' interests. Politicians may not want particular things covered. This could include actions or events that are presumed to put them in a bad light. As a result, media sources may not cover such matters, and people may receive media that is biased, rather than neutral.

In relation, there is the way in which things are covered. A journalist could portray a controversial event in a way that makes one side look better than the other. One way to do this is to give more attention to one side than the other. In the case of a controversial law, describing the views of proponents more than critics, or giving more space to critics than proponents, is a way to bias information. This is said to be bad practice because if people only have access to particular information, they are disempowered to understand fully what has transpired. Thus, providing access to multiple perspectives rather than singular ones is said to be more neutral. One perhaps cannot ever fully understand complicated political events from afar. But being given multiple windows, through different images, accounts, and voices, is seen as better practice.

As mentioned above, media producers may have different interests, and may weigh priorities, to provide more neutral and objective information, versus to self-sustain through appealing to audiences and funders. The fact that media producers tend to appeal to audiences nuances one's view of how media operate. In a sense, the media is influenced by its audience (Jackson, 2014). This means that, in a way, people educate media to educate them.

Stuart Hall is best known for elaborating this view that media is influenced by audiences (1973). He noted that audiences do not merely passively take in messages, but receive them actively. Audiences may react negatively to media, or positively. Their behavior may be changed by media sources in ways

media sources intend, or in different ways. This variation in reaction is based in part on the identities and experiences of the audience members (Allen & Hill, 2004; Williams, 1974/2003). Given different experiences, some may sympathize with a media message, and agree with and endorse it, and internalize it as they reconfirm their preconceived views. Others may reject a source, its premises, stance, and slant. They may internalize nothing of its messages, other than a more negative view about that sort of media and/or its producer. And there are cases in-between, such as where one accepts some aspects of a media message, while rejecting others, or takes away a message that was not intended by media producers. As Carlos Cortes (2005, p. 70) observes,

Some critical theorists argue that media fostering of “nonchange”—or at least a reduction in the speed of change—may constitute the most important behavior-related aspect of the media. From this perspective, interracial buddy movies and desegregated TV news teams may actually retard the process of social change. Rather than role modeling integration, they may surreptitiously suggest that social change is occurring so rapidly and normally that additional special efforts are unnecessary.

Then there is the issue of disinhibiting effects... Do movies that celebrate vigilantism contribute to societal violence by removing inhibitions to imitative behavior? Or do they reduce violence by providing viewers a catharsis for pent-up frustrations? Do films with teenage sex disinhibit such activity by making it appear normative and “safe,”.... Or do they provide a vicarious substitute for the real thing?

Audience size matters to media funders in most cases. Producers may therefore face competing demands to educate in alignment with public service values versus financial sustenance needs. Because audiences take in information in an active way, media producers may be at the mercy of audience interests in certain respects. With online media becoming normal, media producers can capture “page hits”, seeing which stories are popular. Advertisers may consider number of “hits” in making decisions to fund ads in media outlets. A news journalist may want to prepare critical, hard-hitting accounts of complex and important political problems. However, they may be wary to do so, when they know they can get more “hits” if they feature a funny famous cat, or a celebrity affair. A “short and sweet” article will get more “hits” than a long complicated one. Thus, audience values and perceptions influence what messages media produce and how. One might therefore study media not only to find out what people are learning, but *what media learn from people*—the beliefs and attitudes of the public (Jackson, 2014).

It is commonly thought that children are more vulnerable to media than adults. Thus, companies selling adult products or unhealthy products may be frowned upon or prohibited from advertising in ways that target children. Children are more vulnerable to particular forms of media messaging when they are still developing their capacities to distinguish fiction from reality (Schrag & Javidi, 1997). More generally, those with more limited information and knowledge receive new information in a more receptive way than those with a greater background of perspectives to draw upon. At the same time, children do not always respond the same way (or in predicted ways) to messages, and learn from an early age the difference between reality and fantasy (Jackson, 2014). Still, that ideologies impact media messages which in turn shape ordinary people's views, young and old, is important to keep in mind.

Discourses of the clash of civilizations, and of nationalism, globalization, and localism influence media in various ways. In turn, the discourses are reflected in media, so that media serve as an alternative venue for informal civic education.

3 Learning about Civilizations and Nationalism through Media

Media teach a great deal about cultures which are seen as outside of or unrelated to oneself. Media often emphasizes the clash of civilizations worldview. Such discourse is most often used by media to describe the relationship between western societies and Muslim-majority societies. Western media often provides a negative treatment of Muslims and Islam (Kamalipour 1997; Karim 2003; Mousa 1984; Said 1997; Shaheen 2001). Arabs and Muslims are typically framed as dangerous and violent in western-based news media and popular culture (Said, 1997; Shaheen, 2001). Said observed that in 1993 there was talk of "civilizing" Arab areas by western media voices. Mainstream western media since 9/11 has also prominently represented Muslims in relation to terrorism, exaggerating a sense of animosity between people in Middle Eastern and western societies, and implying terrorists as exemplars of Muslim or Arab civilization (Jackson, 2014). Additionally, "Arab Spring" western media discourse invokes a binary of western civilization and Islam, as found by Steven Salaita in his analysis of the main themes of articles about the Arab Spring:

The Arabs are finally awakening to democracy... Arabs appreciate (and often seek) the guidance of a fundamentally benevolent United States... Arabs constantly have to guard against their inherent barbarity (i.e., their natural impulse toward political Islam)... Arabs in control of their destiny

are necessarily threatening... Arabs have been dormant throughout their history... Arabs attempt to enter into a modernity decontextualized from its invention and exportation by the West... (2012, pp. 143–144).

In western and especially United States entertainment media, nuanced and positive portrayals of Islam and Muslims have been politicized and rendered taboo since 9/11 (Jackson, 2014). It is worth observing here how media producers are influenced by political processes. When the clash of civilizations is treated as the preferred way for understanding the world, politicians complain that it is improper or unpatriotic to promote recognition of or sensitivity toward Islam or Arab or Middle Eastern culture in media (Jackson, 2014).

While space does not allow for a comprehensive around-the-world argument that traces these themes across contexts, it is not hard to find examples of media coverage focused on civilizational difference as problematic in other contexts. In Asian and Arab societies messages about civilizational difference can easily be found. Mainstream news in Hong Kong describes how “expat brats” will grow into maladjusted adults due to cultural differences between westerners and Chinese people (Wordie, 2015). Another article charges that “in Hong Kong, integration of expatriate children is only skin-deep”, as they are identified (Mughal, 2015) as essentially connected to the British colonial legacy (see also Jackson & Nesterova, 2017). An emphasis on the border between civilizations as problematic, where there are clashes, can be found in Arab news sources (e.g., Kantaria, 2016). With the refugee crisis impacting European Union rhetoric, western civilization is invoked by politicians and others in media to reflect a sense of threat from the cultures and peoples of Africa and the Middle East (Wodak, 2015). This context for allegiance building should not be ignored by those teaching civic education.

More obvious than the influence of civilizational discourse on media today is nationalistic discourse. Media, as Anderson noted (1983), has long had a nationalizing influence independent and separate from that of schools. Media is often nationally organized. It often frames what is noteworthy or mentionable in national terms. News sources today may contain sections on local, national, and international news. Typically, the national level news will be a primary focus. The international is then often defined or framed by its relevance to the national (see Demertzis, Papathanassopoulos & Armenakis, 1999; Mihelj, 2007; Roosvall, 2015).

The extent to which news and other media is regulated by the nation-state varies from one society to the next. In some countries, access to media may be heavily regulated. Alternative information sources may be banned or censored, while main information sources may be produced with funding and

sponsorship from the national government. In China today, Twitter, Facebook, and Google are banned, while the main news source is government-owned. In such a context, maintaining a national identity, a positive overall portrayal of the government and political leaders, and upholding expectations of national allegiance and patriotism are emphasized. In China, media is also specifically produced with its civic education impact in mind. On the other hand, there are contexts where most forms of media are not regulated, and the government takes less interest in what media outlets produce and disseminate. These countries may take little notice of media, apart from ensuring that harmful or dangerous sorts of speech are not being broadly disseminated, such as hate speech, pornography, or incitations of violence. There are also countries where nationally supported media do not put forward nationalistic views. National Public Radio (NPR) receives limited support from the United States government, yet is known for being critical of national government policies and practices. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is funded in cooperation with the British government. Yet the BBC is not known for endorsing government positions.

In any case, in practice news organizations within countries often have nuanced relationships with national governments that result in some national sentiments being represented over more critical messages about the government. The White House Correspondents' Association regulates access to White House staff disseminating federal and presidential news. It has a delicate relationship with government officials who may refuse to cooperate with journalists if they quote statements off record or seem to bias stories against them. In such a context, self-censorship is one response by journalists who want to remain in good standing with sources. This entails not publishing statements or information that would be seen as negative by their sources, for example. More extremely, some news sources that may engage in public flattery of government sources to gain better access. For instance, Fox News was favored by Trump early in his presidency, while he was critical of news agencies he regarded as more negative, such as *New York Times*.

Such dynamics intensify in times of war and national strife. In the build up to the United States-led coalition's intervention in Iraq following 9/11, President George W. Bush and his staff claimed they had evidence that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. Mainstream news sources repeated and thus validated these claims. However, it was realized later that weapons of mass destruction did not appear in near-operable condition in Iraq. In 2004 the editors of the *New York Times* issued a public apology:

The problematic articles...depended at least in part on information from a circle of Iraqi informants, defectors and exiles bent on "regime change"

in Iraq... Complicating matters for journalists, the accounts of these exiles were often eagerly confirmed by United States officials convinced of the need to intervene in Iraq. Administration officials now acknowledge that they sometimes fell for misinformation from these exile sources. So did many news organizations—in particular, this one....

On Oct. 26 and Nov. 8, 2001, for example, Page 1 articles cited Iraqi defectors who described a secret Iraqi camp where Islamic terrorists were trained and biological weapons produced. These accounts have never been independently verified....

On Sept. 8, 2002, the lead article of the paper was headlined “U.S. Says Hussein Intensified Quest for A-Bomb Parts.” That report concerned the aluminum tubes that the administration advertised insistently as components for the manufacture of nuclear weapons fuel....

Five days later, the *Times* reporters learned that the tubes were in fact a subject of debate.... The misgivings appeared deep in an article on Page A13.... The *Times* gave voice to skeptics of the tubes on Jan. 9.... That challenge was reported on Page A10; it might well have belonged on Page A1.

This apology was one of many provided by media within and outside the United States, which conceded that official statements were too readily accepted in the climate of terrorist anxiety. A lack of critical questioning thus helped build and promote problematic justifications for war and intervention, leading to a biased information landscape. In such contexts, critical voices can be cast as unpatriotic, thus contributing to self-censorship by those with skeptical views, while fear-mongering voices are disseminated more widely.

National identities and civic behaviors are now being reinforced in sophisticated ways by media as shaped by partisan political actors, with significant impacts on national decision making. The 2016 United States election of Trump and British vote to exit the European Union (Brexit) were both influenced by the use of findings about how voting behaviors could be impacted by targeted media campaigns (Hersh, 2017; Jackson, 2018). This is an important new kind of civic pedagogy, although it is far removed from the sphere of those traditionally seen to be educators in these societies.

Finally, national media can work hand in hand with schools in repetitive ways. In the United States, “Channel One” news is produced for young people and disseminated in schools, encouraging students to refer to and accept the messages from mainstream news media passively (De Vaney, 1994). There are also cases where news producers work with textbook publishers. After 9/11, a handful of textbook publishers included special media-branded and produced inserts, to help students understand terrorism and United States-led interventions

in Iraq and Afghanistan (Jackson, 2014). With hindsight knowledge of mainstream media's uncritical treatment of unjustified statements of the government, it would appear that independent messages encouraging young people to be critical about national media were truly lacking. In this case, educators, journalists, and politicians seemed to work in harmony to spread one view of things.

4 Learning about Globalization and the Local through Media

Convergences of individuals and communities enabled by information technologies as part of globalization have had an influence on many people's sense of global consciousness and engagement. That there is a global multitude or mass has been explored by theorists focused on twenty-first century protest movements, in the Middle East and in western societies, protesting economic neoliberalism and the acts of the World Bank, and fascist government policies and trends (Castells, 2012). Use of cellular and mobile phones and online social networks has been identified as important in encouraging participation in these events. Political and ideological communities online can also be joined and facilitated to include people from around the world. As self-authorship and personal creation of online communities and social forums has become possible, many are learning to engage and see themselves as part of a global mass of likeminded people.

On the other hand, global engagement and consciousness created by mainstream media has often had a negative orientation toward one's relationship to others globally. That globalization is full of risks, of global warming and disaster, the "Y2K" scare at the turn of the millennium, financial loss and threat, and global terrorism, are some messages one can discern in mainstream media about the global stage, as media has among its main aims to share about critical, urgent issues, rather than global peace and harmony, for example, which are less "newsworthy" (Jackson, 2014; Gur-Ze'ev & Roth, 2007). Such news could plausibly be part of why today a rise in nationalism can be observed, as people wish to turn away from sad and negative stories about things happening in the world, as showcased by mainstream news organizations.

Local identity formation is also impacted by media. As Christopher Ali (2017) notes, "the local is mediated, dependent upon communication. We experience this in everything from face-to-face conversations mediated through language, to local news on television and in newspapers, to digital storytelling enabled through mobile and Web-based geolocation services" (p. 21). Local media is often regarded as essential for developing a sense of place-based community.

In Canada, the United States and Great Britain, historically local media has been valued. Yet neoliberal and globalization values are undermining local media in these contexts. Ali (2017, pp. 80–81) describes this as “default localism”. In this case, the local is treated as inherently good and worthy of preservation, but in an abstract way, not contending with “what exactly is in need of saving. Is it local television as a business, local newscasts as a genre, or localism as a normative idea? ... [A]re we speaking solely of communities of place, or do communities of interest and ethno-linguistic communities factor in as well?” Increasingly, local media operators and producers are disadvantaged over national and global systems, given financial structuring of media production and dissemination. David Hess (2009) notes that media in the United States is now dominated by large corporations. While there is diversity of media sources, “the venues that reach the largest audiences tend to select stories that are compatible with the neoliberal politics of the corporate owners. The perspectives of social movements, the voices of ethnic minority communities, and political perspectives incompatible with the corporate owners tend to be filtered out or reduced greatly” (p. 186). Local participation and production have decreased over time. Ellen Goodman (2009) describes this as a “broad market failure”, as there may be insufficient market demand for particular, local media, despite local media’s importance to local civic engagement. Alternative news sources need funds through advertising, but this can be difficult if they send messages alternative to corporate neoliberal messages. At the same time, historically community-based magazines and media have been purchased by newspaper chains, with rights and production at the local level decreasing in this process. Localization messages are not likely to be reported on or supported by consolidated and national and international news sources in this context. “Localism bashing” can also be seen increasingly in major news sources over time (Hess, 2009, p. 207).

Online media offers the strongest potential today to localist movements, as production and access costs are negligible so long as people are attracted to and can find the sources. Hong Kong today faces similar challenges to the western societies mentioned here. An online news source *Hong Kong Free Press* was founded in 2015 to provide a local voice. It is also dedicated to discussing controversial topics involved with the relationship of Hong Kong and China, topics which other media producers are becoming less focused on. However, localism is often at risk of favoring the values of elite and majority members of society over minorities. Thus, local and localist media can be seen to reflect those values as the essentially local values or the appropriate values to hold locally. In localist news coverage of ethnic minority issues in a society, one might find that more attention is paid to the perspectives of those in the

mainstream ethnic group, for example, over the voices of ethnic minorities, thereby disadvantaging those groups in gaining equitable representation in media (Nesterova & Jackson, 2017). Who gets attention and who does not, and which perspectives are favoured, are critical questions to consider in promoting localist agendas in media.

5 Educational Implications

Neither students nor teachers are removed from these issues. Teachers and students are part of the same mediated world as the rest of a society. Teachers and students typically refer to mainstream media to understand national (and local and international) events. Media is complementary to or competing with textbooks and teacher knowledge and training when it comes to civic education.

One important consequence of recognizing media's role in education is to understand that what can be done in a classroom is limited. Teachers do not exist in a vacuum with students, but can be questioned by students, based on what they see outside the classroom. Mainstream media is produced for profits at a scale vastly outweighing those provided by any private schools' tuition fees and donations. Media producers fund research that aims to understand and in some cases change people's behaviors at a scale exceeding that mandated, or even desired, by schools and educators (Jackson, 2018). These behaviors are not only about which website to go to, or which magazine to buy. They may be related to which politicians to vote for, and may have an incalculable value to some groups within a society. Media's impact on the development of identities and civic participation should not be discounted today, in relation to classroom civics.

In this context, there are two major ways of seeing the role of education in relation to media. First, media can be seen as something to include or not include in schools (Warnick & Burbules, 2007). For decades, including media in education has been broadly supported to enhance student interest in "real world" activities, update contemporary knowledge, and in some cases to entertain. The aforementioned "Channel One" special school-based news program is one example of inserting media into schools.

Today, many working in this area will say it is insufficient to simply include media in education, given the possible negative impacts of media on people's development and understanding of the world. Thus a second way to see the role of education in relation to media is to advocate for schools to teach critical media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2007). This means that students learn not

to take everything in the media at face value. Instead, teachers discuss media as a system of production and feedback, as choices of media producers, as a socially constructed practice, and as not necessarily neutral or objective (Jackson, 2014). With the advent of use of personal data by corporations and political groups, understanding how online sources use this data, and how one can be manipulated cognitively, emotionally, and politically by messages or by imbalanced media information, would also be vital to include in such media literacy (D'Olimpio, 2018).

Though such approaches are well intentioned, there are a number of challenges to them in practice. First, such approaches are idealistic when it comes to the capabilities and skills of educators. One of the most challenging aspects of educational use of media has been that educators are hardly on the front lines of savvy media use. Instead, teachers often feel “left behind” in using media, and burdened to “catch up” (Warnick & Burbules, 2007). With the rise of online technology, young people interact with and use technology in different, often more substantive, ways than older users. Thus, it is questionable that teachers can not only catch up with, but surpass younger users in the use of mediated technology in education. The game of “catch up” here also implies that teacher trainers (that is, professors) come to the front lines of media savvy. This is challenging to implement in real life.

Furthermore, when it comes to skills to decipher and critically receive media messages, there is no indication that the average teacher will be more critical and active in receiving messages than students, particularly in cases where media constructions are not better understood by older people in society than younger people. Not all teachers are media literate, or critical about media literacy. Furthermore, what counts as “critical” will depend on each teacher’s own stance. Whether it means to share “two sides of the coin”, multiple perspectives, or what is perceived as the minority or non-dominant view are significantly different options, with different implications (Jackson, 2014).

Finally, critical media literacy approaches presume that teachers are or can be authorities over their students, in relation to messages gleaned outside the school, about the world outside the school, from other sources. From a broader view, one might say that teachers and schools and media all play a similar role. They all provide technologies of sharing the wider world with young people in a condensed, specially prepared format. Arguably today those technologies outside the school are competing sources of information alongside teachers. What this means is that young people may not appreciate the views of their teachers about Russia or Afghanistan or the United States over what they learn from other sources, such as their family and friends, and non-school media (magazines, websites, etc.). When it is difficult for teachers to stay on the same

page as their students when it comes to media usage, their perceived authority about media usage is also not likely to be high. Thus, critical media literacy education as traditionally practiced is partly a superficial reaction to a serious challenge.

6 Conclusion

This article examined the relationship between media and civic education. As discussed, civilizational and nationalistic discourses are prominent in media, while national systems of media regulation and journalism play a role in the dissemination of nationalistic messages in media. Globalization has a role as well, in a complex relationship with localism, as media localism is increasingly transformed (and in effect weakened) through a kind of globalist neoliberal restructuring process. While globalization and localism are both also reflected in part of media, their impact may be less or more complex than that of nationalism, as a result of competing pressures at the national level.

Media has a complex educational role. Media does not only teach, but people also teach the media, in turn. In an increasingly sophisticated and dynamic online media environment, this creates a challenge to educators who want to decrease or ameliorate possible harmful impact of media on what students learn about the social world around them. Teachers may not always be media savvy themselves, or seen as authorities, as online media becomes more sophisticated and diverse, and are more extensively engaged with (and engaged in different ways) by younger people. In this context, media literacy education needs to be critically evaluated and employed, as a simple lesson in a classroom is not likely to have a major impact while online media becomes more compelling and effective.

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