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MEDIA LITERACY AND CITIZENSHIP

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Abstract

Students are inundated with messages via media that relate to their understandings of citizenship. Through the literature review, we find that media literacy and media education has been around for decades, with experiences ranging from watching film to creating their own content in the classroom. Through a holistic approach, this qualitative study uses student surveys and artifacts to help investigate these understandings. Findings include evidence of citizenship demonstrated by students, their beliefs about media, and how media bias impacts their interpretations of current events. In conclusion, there is still some work needed to be done in order to ensure that students have the necessary media literacy skills to help them become more justice-oriented citizens.

Chapter One: Introduction

Research Problem

We live in a world with more access to information than ever before. With access to

information comes the need for critical media literacy skills, and understanding where sources

come from. It is through media literacy that people gain critical thinking, analyzing, and

evaluating skills, all to be used to make sure that people are getting the most accurate

information as possible. According to the National Council for the Social Studies Media

Literacy's statement, "media literacy expands the traditional concept of literacy to include the

forms of communication that dominate the lives of our students" (Sperry, 2016). Media literacy

expands to more than just processing images. It is being able to look through information in

different mediums and being able to depict what is quality information that can be used.

In our schools today, more social studies teachers are implementing lessons and ideas

about how students can become more productive citizens. Initiatives, such as guided inquiry

learning, are being implemented more in the classroom to help the students learn about civics as

well as how they can contribute to their communities. Units that encourage civic engagement

have many positive outcomes such as voting, petitioning for new laws that their schools and/or

community needs, etc. In my own personal teaching experience, the final unit in my government

curriculum is designed as an inquiry unit, where the students research an issue going on within

their community. In addition, the students look at why it is an issue, and propose possible

solutions. At my school, the social studies teachers have been encouraging more students to vote

as well as having students involved in organizations that have to do with students learning about

government and becoming active citizens, such as Generation Citizen, YMCA's Youth and

Government programs, where students get a hands on experience on the roles that citizens can play in our government. We have seen an increase in students becoming more interested in what is going on in our society as well as students becoming more aware of the world around them and the policies and/or laws that impact them on a daily basis.

While teachers are implementing lessons that have to do with citizenship and the importance of community engagement, the resources that teachers use have an impact on how students are learning about citizenship. Depending on the resources that are being used in the classroom, students might be receiving different ideas on what citizenship looks like as well as who gets to participate in the civics process in the United States. The terms "fake news" and "alternative facts" came into popularity within the last few years, specifically during the 2016 presidential campaign cycle by conservative pundits, to criticize stories that they believe did not depict conservatives in a popular light or the information that they believe is inaccurate. From the liberal point of view, "fake news" and "alternative facts" are dangerous concepts as it causes people to question important information because it does not align with their beliefs, not necessarily because the information is untrue. These two opposing sides have created an atmosphere where people are becoming unsure of whether or not the information people are reading is accurate.

It is essential that teachers are looking into the resources they use in their classrooms. Students need to be aware of how the resources they are reading can impact the information being learned and how their interpret current events. It is important to note that current events are events that are happening right now throughout the world today, while historical events are "a chronological record of significant events (such as those affecting a nation or institution) often including an explanation of their causes" (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Social studies teachers have

been creating lessons and assessments that have to do with these skills. The Oklahoma State

Social Studies Standards, for example, the practices overview section describes five skills that

teachers need to be using in their classroom to help make students successful in the class. These

include:

1. Acquire, apply and evaluate evidence

2. Read critically and interpret information sources

3. Analyze and address civic issues

(Oklahoma State Academic Standards for Social Studies, 2019, p. 5). It is also important to note

that there is nothing in the Oklahoma State Social Studies standards that specifically lists out

media literacy. There are specific skills related to engaging with media in the classroom, such as

5.B.9-12.3 Construct visual and/or multimedia presentations, using a variety of media

forms to enhance understanding of findings and reasoning, for diverse audiences B.

Students will engage in authentic inquiry to acquire, refine, and share knowledge through

written presentations related to social studies (Oklahoma State Academic Standards for

Social Studies, 2019, p. 6).

Within the government curriculum, the students are investigating media in relation to the role it

plays in the political process and how it impacts how citizens. Specifically stating USG.5.4

"Analyze factors affecting the political process and their role in government, including the role

of political parties, interest groups, mass media, public opinion, and campaign funding"

(Oklahoma State Academic Standards for Social Studies, 2019, p. 53).

Problem Statement

The idea of citizenship and the resources that students use in the classroom have led me

to research this idea in my classroom. In my high school government class, I teach a lesson about

media literacy. The students take a short "fake news" quiz (see Appendix A) where they determine if certain news stories are real or not real as well as read stories from different news outlets and depict how the information that is posted among them is similar and different. On multiple occasions, I have had students make comments of "I guess fox news [sic.] seemed more real than the others because I heard that CNN was more fake than others and I saw it through the articles" (Student 100) or vice versa, depending on what they are reading at home, conversations they have with peers, family, etc. This comment and others similar have made it clear to me that understanding media and media bias is critical in helping students become well-informed citizens and to help them make important decisions in their lives after they leave school, such as voting.

There has been research conducted on how student biases can impact how they interpret different information (e.g. historical documents, social media, primary sources, etc.) both related to current events and events that have been in the past (e.g. Journell 2016; Krutka & Carpenter 2016; Manfra & Holmes 2018). However, there is a gap of research done regarding how the resources being used today impacts how students view certain topics, such as citizenship. The purpose of this research is to explore the following question: what are students' perceptions of the messages that resources communicate about citizenship? Resources are defined as technology, curriculum materials, manipulatives, textbooks, and any other materials within the school setting. Through this study, I have investigated how media literacy has been implemented, the role that technology has played in the classroom, and what social studies teachers need to do to help their students have the media literacy skills that they need to be successful. In addition, student's understanding of citizenships impacts how they view issues related to that topic in today's social studies classroom.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this literature review, I first researched the history of technology being used in education as well as when media literacy started to become implemented into the classroom curriculum. I then focused specifically on how media bias has been taught to students in the general education setting. Since understanding media bias and having media literacy skills is important to help students critically think about the world around them, I discuss how citizenship education can be used for students to learn about media literacy. Finally, I discuss how social studies educators teach their students about media literacy and the impact that it has on our students and society as a whole.

History of media literacy and technology in the classroom

In order for citizens to be active and participatory, it demands the use of varied literacies. These include but are not limited to reading, writing, speaking, listening, and interpreting. The use of technology and media literacy in the classroom is not a new phenomenon. The original use of media literacy had to do with the practice of rhetoric, which dates back to the 5th century B.C. to help teach politics through oratory and critical thinking skills (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 2). While this skill has been one of the core concepts of media literacy, technology does not seem to play a great role in education until the 1920s, with the use of film in classrooms. It was mainly used to teach topics such as composition in English classes as well as to "promote appreciation for the technique of the motion picture as contrasted from the play and the story" (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 2). In this case, we slowly start to see the shift of how technology can be used to help teach different topics in the educational setting. It is also important to note that there were organizations and journals dedicated to this topic, such as Visual Education, National Academy of Visual Instruction, the Visual Instruction Association of America, and the Division

of Visual Instruction of the National Education Association (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 2). So, while some educators during this time period believed that film can be seen as a strong instructional tool, it was still not utilized by all until later in the mid-20th century.

By now, media literacy has grown from just appreciation of film and incorporated into a small number of classes, to more educators in other disciplines (i.e. social studies) who have started to use it. During the 1950s and 1960s, it was being used "as a cognitive defense against the most overt and disturbing forms of sensationalism and propaganda pouring out rapidly growing culture industries" (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 3). Educators started to show short clips as well as commercials to students. Portable video recorders offered a new way for students to become familiar with the material and content they were learning in class. The use of films also started to be utilized more in the social studies classroom.

By the time the 1970s rolled around, media literacy began to incorporate the idea of citizenship, specifically related to the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Media literacy and technology started to be viewed more like an inquiry approach to different issues that were going on in society at that time (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 3). This meant that the learning was more student-centered as opposed to teacher-centered. Thus, there is more interaction between students and their peers about the information that they are learning, and lessons were created based on student interests, engagement with certain topics and how motivated the students were. In addition, educators and others, called for there to be more:

Transparency in media institutions that enables people to "see how the sausage gets made," challenging the dominant representations presented in the media - including stereotyped representation of age, race, occupation, social class, gender, and sexual orientation (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 4).

In other words, that more people wanted more accurate media based on what was actually going on in society during that time, as opposed to the stereotypes that people were seeing on their television screens. It is important to note that during the 1970s, we started to see more activism from various groups in American society. With the Vietnam War, Nixon's presidency, etc., more and more people were being critical of the information and accuracy of the news that was being reported out to the public.

Concerns started to arise more in the 1990s as to how much media activism there should be in the classroom. There were even debates about "should media literacy have a more explicit political or ideological agenda?" (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 4). While it was agreed that citizenship is an important skill that students need to grasp, what it looked like varied depending on who you talked to. This decade saw advancement and accessible technology. Educators were being trained to teach about how citizenship enacted to the digital world. The term "digital citizenship" was first coined during this era. Digital citizenship started out looking at how to be safe while on the internet into "the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups as communicators on the Internet and in real life" (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 6). We still see the concept of digital citizenship in our own society today, as the rise of social media has created new platforms for educators and students, specifically with how they communicate with each other, the information that they are gathering, etc.

Overall, technology and media literacy have played a role in how educators and students interact with the information around them. It has evolved from being able to see different concepts in films into how the technology around us, plays a role in the type of citizens that we are in today's society.

Media bias on students

Bias has been a topic that students and educators encounter in the classroom setting.

Various factors can cause both groups to view certain events through a biased lens without even

realizing it. Such factors can include but are not limited to race, gender, sexuality, location,

socioeconomic status, religion, education, and more. One example of this is through the study,

"[My] family has gone through that": How high school students determine the trustworthiness of

historical documents". The study was conducted at an urban, largely Latino/Latina student

population. The students were instructed to look through documents related to the Dust Bowl as

well as experiences that Mexicans and Mexican Americans had in the United States during the

late 1920s. The students looked through photographs, statistics, songs, textbooks, and first-hand

accounts (i.e. journal entries) from either people who lived during this time period or sources that

were about this time period (Harris et. al, 2015). The results were that the students were more

likely to believe the secondary source information as opposed to the primary source information

because they believed that information "tended to be free from bias and include only the facts"

(Harris et. al, 2015, p. 119). The researchers also found that students who viewed the documents

through their own cultural lenses and/or emotional experiences, it had an impact on how they

deemed the sources credible due to their own personal experiences (Harris et. al, 2015).

The notions of perspective and bias are not limited to primary documents. Rather, it is a

contemporary issue as well as to a historical issue. When it comes to the internet, there have

been challenges in attempts to tackle the biases that students have. Mass media has caused there

to be an influx of information, more voices to be heard on various platforms than ever before,

etc. In addition, the immediate and constant updated news cycle in our society has impacted the

way people see and process current events today. However, depending on the news sources that

people are reading, it can put people in a vacuum. For example, Twitter's algorithm is set up as

"the practice is to expose users to new accounts and content that they might be interested in"

(Darcy, 2019). This means that people are only reading information and sources that cater to

their beliefs and causing them to not consider other points of view. What Twitter noticed during

the 2016 election cycle is the rise of political discourse and arguments on their platform as the

users are not getting the full information on various new stories, current events, etc. The impact

that it is has on online users is that:

> This empowers users, who also have easier access today to alternative
>
> media sources largely via the Internet, but this also creates problems
>
> for a society that is concerned with civic goals of working toward the
>
> common good, as it allows users to create a "daily me" of personally tailored content.
>
> (Mason, 2015, p. 1).

Mason is stating here that while it does make finding information easier for individuals, it does

not encourage people to find new sources that they usually read as well as it does not help create

a sense of community since the algorithms are catered to the individual's wants. In order to

combat that, educators need to have a more democratic approach, meaning that the teacher helps

their students explore where their information is coming from, what that information means, and

how that can impact the people around them, both online and in the real world. "A more

deliberative democracy is a worthy goal for civic educators to work toward, and media education

can be an important factor in achieving it" (Mason, 2015, p. 3). More recently, Middaugh's

research with high school students, found and advocated for "making this a routine part of civic

media literacy education can help youth to individually consider and act with civic intention but

may also contribute to a larger set of shared norms that make up a collective set of ethics of

sharing which are still evolving alongside our technology". (Middaugh, 2018, p. 50).

Citizenship Education in the United States

The two types of citizens in civic education that are shown in most state curriculums are the personally responsible and the participatory citizen. The personally responsible citizen is someone that "acts responsibly in his/her community by, for example, picking up litter, giving blood, recycling, obeying laws, and staying out of debt" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). The participatory citizen is someone "who actively participate in the civic affairs and the social life of the community at local, state, and national levels" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). While these two types of citizens can be beneficial in our local communities, they are not, however, addressing the root issues that are going on in our society.

Therefore, teachers and educators need to help students become more of the justice-orientated citizen. This kind of citizen looks at the root issues that are going on in our society today, critically examines and "understand the interplay of social, economic, and political forces" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). By implementing more of a justice-orientated curriculum into the social studies classroom, teachers can help students become more engaged in our current society by having them critically think about how the issues in our society came about, the consequences that those issues have rippled throughout our society, and to come up with potential solutions to address those issues.

When it comes to looking at media literacy, having a justice-orientated approach can help students think critically about the resources they are reading as well as the information that is coming from them. There have been situations where educators have been applying the justice-orientated approach into their classrooms and found that students are becoming more engaged and aware of the world around them. "Media Literacy and the Teaching of Civics and Social Studies at the Dawn of the 21st Century" by Robert Kubey, discussed strategies that teachers

have used to teach civics in their classroom. Such strategies included using internet web-based sources, discussions on what they are seeing in the media in relation to news stories, and even creating media to help students understand the impact that media has on people, specifically in how they communicate with each other (Kubey, 2004). The examples described in this article are examples of how students can be more justice-orientated citizens by being more aware of the technology that they do have access to as well as how the impact that technology can have when spreading information to other people. By becoming justice-orientated citizens online, students will have better online practices, such as communicating with others, researching, etc. as well as have a better understanding of the news and information that is being released by online outlets and the messages they are trying to convey by their followers.

The relationship of social studies in media literacy

It is important to note that teaching students about credible sources and fake news are not new concepts being discussed in the social studies classroom. Phenomenons such as yellow journalism, especially during the Spanish-American War where it was "referred to as the first "media war" (Manfra & Holmes, 2018, p. 9). Other examples included an 1835 story in the New York Sun called "Great Moon Hoax", where the author portrayed the idea that life started on the moon, not on Earth (Manfra & Holmes, 2018, p. 9). These historical examples put into context how the issue of fake news and media literacy has only increased over time, especially with the rise of the internet and social media.

Teaching media literacy to students has a lot of positive benefits, such as developing critical thinking skills, recognizing multiple points of view, become a critical consumer of media, create media responsibility, and many more (Common Sense Media, n.d). Social studies teachers have a responsibility to teach their students the importance of media literacy and the

understanding of where their sources come from. Specifically, the NCSS created the *C3*

Framework (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013a*)*, a curriculum that is designed to

help social studies teachers help prepare students to have the skills and knowledge that they

needed to be the best citizens that they can be. One of the call to actions of this framework is to

emphasize more digital citizenship in the classroom. Digital citizenship is "critical thinking and

ethical choices about the content and impact on oneself, others, and one's community of what

one sees, says, and produces with media, devices, and technologies" (Journell, 2016, p. 145).

This means that online users need to be aware of how they interact with information and other

people online in order for them to make the best choices and to make sure that they have the

most accurate information available to them. Social studies teachers, in particular, have the

responsibility "of educating society's youth to be component and responsible citizens",

according to the NCSS (Journell, 2016, p. 145). Digital citizenship goes hand in hand with media

literacy. Media literacy allows for students:

> To hone students' abilities to evaluate media as evidentiary sources, to identify bias in
>
> mediated constructions of history and society, to understand how media frames issues, to
>
> separate fact from opinion and to assess the credibility of media sources (Journell, 2016,
>
> p. 146).

While Journell does not specifically describe media literacy and technology, teachers can

incorporate media literacy in a variety of ways. These pursuits help students learn to understand

the sources out there for them as well as to help them expand on the idea of what it means to be a

citizen. In *Teaching Social Studies in an Era of Divisiveness,* Journell (2016) provides example

lessons for teachers to implement in their classrooms. Such examples are incorporating social

media platforms in their lessons to identify online biases, using internet images such as memes,

to help students analyze the messages that are being depicted online, and more (Journell, 2016, p. 148). By adding in these lessons into the curriculum, social studies teachers can still teach students about topics such as citizenship, the impact of historical and current events have had on our society today. The concepts and content that teachers cover in their curriculum have changed very little. However, the way that social studies teachers teach in terms of using technology, media literacy, and what citizenship looks like has changed. It is critical that social studies teachers recognize this in order for them to prepare their students to be able to navigate in the digital world today as well as to help students to find their place in society.

Some teachers have proposed new ways that media and technology are approached in the classroom to help teach students about these topics. One proposal is implementing media literacy, ethics, sociology, and history concepts, otherwise known as MESH into the social studies curriculum. Proponents of a MESH curriculum advocate for a citizenship forward approach to media in the classroom. It is in response to the rise of STEM curriculum, which focuses on the science, mathematics, and ideas that "make a "real contribution" to the world" (Wise, 2019). The main criticism of STEM is that there is no emphasis on the humanities, especially with civics education. Without having any sort of historical understanding, cultural awareness of how our society is set up, and providing students with the skills that they need to enact change, our society will not evolve and will continue to face the same problems that we have been dealing with for generations, in terms of equal rights, political discourse, and mainly more. "Merely focusing on science - absent the political determination to apply science to causes that are beneficial to all - will offer little of value to the future" (Wise, 2019). The MESH curriculum would provide teachers the skills to teach topics such as media literacy and

implementing them in a way that students are able to understand and apply to their everyday

lives.

Another strategy that teachers use is incorporating social media in the classroom. When it

comes to social media, the NCSS (2013b) stated:

The use of social media to create multiple online and blended economic, political, and

social settings with a global reach requires rethinking how to prepare children and youth

to participate in such settings. In turn, such settings are reshaping how children and youth

are able to act as citizens and consumers (Para. 1).

Social media can be a strong learning tool if educators are using it accordingly and know how to

use it. Daniel Krutka and Jeffery Carpenter in their 2016 study, "Participatory Learning Through

Social Media: How and Why Social Studies Educators Use Twitter" investigated the use of

Twitter in the classroom. Educators used it to engage and teach various topics related to

citizenship, such as using the hashtags to find new topics, and having their students engage with

different groups of people on Twitter. What they found was that the educators became more

confident in navigating social media in their classrooms, seeking out other perspectives that are

different from their own and finding a community of educators with whom they can collaborate.

(Krutka & Carpenter, 2016). The use of social media exposes students to the idea of critical

citizenship, which "asks students to investigate what is wrong with the world, why that maybe,

what is their role in maintaining this difference, and what they can do to eliminate that gap"

(Durham, 2019). This can be done in ways such as allowing students to use their voice in an

appropriate way online, creating hashtags that depict issues going on in society, practicing

following and friending people on social media and analyzing what that means, and for the users

to act in an echo chamber, in terms of where and how they are getting their information

(Durham, 2019). This strategy of social media in education allows the students to practice the

strategies that they learned through media literacy as well as it allows teachers to demonstrate

how to be productive digital citizens.

With all the ever more changes with technology, it is critical that teachers know how to

use the resources that they have available to them, in order to keep up with the demands of their

students. Students are being exposed to fake news every day and they need help to differentiate

between what's real and what's not. In 2016, a study was conducted by the Stanford History

Education Group (SHEG), which investigated the media literacy skills that high school students

have. The students were given a series of six exercises, in which they had to distinguish between

fake and real news, news and advertisements, comparing web pages, and analyzing a tweet from

an advocacy group. In their research, the group found that the students struggled to perform these

tasks. This study "constitutes alarming evidence that a large majority of students are not well

prepared to investigate sources of information for their accuracy, relevance, and quality"

(Sawchuck, 2019). It is also important to note that students of color as well as students who did

not come from highly educated households, performed the lowest out of all the student

participants (Sawchuck, 2019). This SHEG study demonstrates that students are struggling with

this topic and that teachers need to teach media literacy to their students in order for them to have

an understanding of what is going on in society and why it matters.

It is also important for educators to make sure that they have the resources and skills to

teach media literacy to their students. However, sometimes, teachers' biases and own perceptions

can impact how this topic is portrayed to students. The study "Social studies teachers perceptions

of news source credibility" dived into how teachers determine what sources are credible.

Numerous studies have been conducted about how people determine credibility, such as

analyzing fairness, trustworthiness, competence, fairness, absence of bias, and many more
(Clark, et. al, 2020).

The results showed that teachers' political ideologies and biases play a role in how they
determine if a source is credible or not. In addition, how the teachers deemed sources as credible
varied, such as if the source aligned with their political ideology and if the information presented
by the source is accurate. What this study conveys is that teachers first need to recognize their
own biases that they might have and how that plays a role in what they deem credible or
noncredible sources.

> The variation in teacher definitions of credibility and their relationship to perceptions of
> source credibility also suggest a need for teacher educators to introduce these concepts in
> their courses and provide opportunities for application and practice throughout their
> programs (Clark, et. al, 2020, p. 9).

By doing this, the teachers will then be able to do a better job implementing this strategy while
teaching media literacy so that their students can have a better understanding of the topic,
specifically related to how to tell the difference between credible and noncredible sources. In
Kahne and Bowyer's study (2017), the participants agreed with statements that aligned to their
own political ideologies, even though that the statements were not always accurate. This
demonstrates that the tendency "of individuals to accept claims that align with their beliefs as
true, even when the claims are not accurate, will undermine the quality and ultimate productivity
of democratic deliberation" (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017, p. 26). This study provides further
evidence towards the necessity of educators discussing the issues of bias and its implications in
their classrooms.

While educators do believe that this topic is important for their students to comprehend, there is hesitation on how to implement media literacy in their classrooms. In "The complexity to teach news media in social studies education" new teacher candidates expressed the challenges they have with implementing media literacy in their classes. Some challenges included being afraid not to push boundaries or potentially controversies with students, with one teacher stating "media analysis can be hard because it can be controversial (Schmeichel, et. al, 2018, p. 93). Another one had to do with confidence.

"For me honestly, it's just more of a self-conscious thing of that I don't feel totally comfortable with it yet. So sometimes I get worried about my limitations and being able to really teach it, especially since they really do use [media] all the time." (Schmeichel, et. al, 2018, p. 94).

Since media literacy is a relatively new topic being implemented in schools, the new teacher candidates did not know how to convey the importance of the topic to their students since they did not have it themselves as students. Other factors that concerned new teacher candidates included time being used to incorporate media literacy in their classrooms, how it plays a role in teaching the social studies standards to their students, and potential resistance to teaching media literacy from their colleagues who have been in the field for many years. However, despite these challenges and concerns, the new teacher candidates believed that this topic is critical for their students to know. One teacher candidate proclaimed:

In my classroom, I want media literacy to be an ongoing lesson for my students. I won't be able to control everything that my students come in contact with in regards to the media, but I can prepare them to focus on credible sources, analyze articles and media

they are reading, and investigate the authors and creators of their media choices.

(Schmeichel, et. al, 2018, p. 96).

The study concluded that "in our current times, the demand for such outcomes and our

professional obligations to provide evidence that we affected them are, indeed, part of the

complex system of teacher education" (Schmeichel, et. al, 2018, p. 99). Through media literacy,

social studies teachers believe it is critical for their students to understand where their

information is coming from (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018) and the important skills that students can

gain from this, such as analyzing information, critical thinking, etc. However, professional

development is needed in order for teachers to master this subject and be able to apply it to their

own teaching practice.

Chapter Three: Methods

In this section, I explain the research method that I used in order to investigate my research question: what are students' perceptions of the messages that resources communicate about citizenship? The participants of this study were students over the course of my semester-long government class. The data sources and analysis provides information on how the students critically think about and demonstrate media literacy skills and citizenship.

Research Design

In order to investigate my research question of media literacy and the impact it has on student's interpretations of citizenship, I used qualitative research method. Qualitative research is defined as:

> An umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques in which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world (Meriam, 2009, p. 13).

In other words, qualitative research is attempting to make sense of what is going on in the world through different experiences and phenomena. I approach this geared towards everyday experiences in all aspects of their world. This type of study is also based on the idea that everyone shares these similar experiences, however, the way that people interpret those experiences can be different. This kind of research allowed me to explore various perspectives and experiences from students to help me gain a better understanding of my research question. It also allowed me more flexibility to explore and interpret the findings of my research. As a classroom social studies teacher, by investigating information that demonstrates student

experiences with media, I gained a better understanding of the impacts that it has on how they interpret information, historical and current events, and lastly, citizenship.

Context and Participants

This study took place in a university town in the South. Within the confines of our state, the school is in a liberal bubble. This liberal bubble largely consists of the largest public university in the state. Since growing up in a college town and being exposed to various educational experiences from members of the community, the students generally expressed ideas and events that can have a greater impact outside of the community that they grow up in. At the time of this study, the participants were seniors in high school, where some of them, if not all of them, turned eighteen and will be voting for the first time in the next presidential election (2020). All participants were students in my U.S. Government course, a required semester-long class. The information and skills they learned in my course would be something that they could use well beyond their educational careers.

Data Sources and Analysis

Since the nature of the study is student-centered, I gathered data geared students and their experiences with media literacy. Specifically, the data was about student biases, experiences working with media and other resources, their understanding of citizenship, etc. As a classroom social studies teacher, by investigating information that demonstrates student experiences with media, I was able to gain a better understanding of the impacts that it has on how they interpret information, historical and current events, and lastly, citizenship. The students that I work with are high school seniors, so my information is more geared towards that age group. However, the information from the study could apply to other grade levels and age groups as well.

Instruments

In order to investigate my research question, I developed and administered two classroom assignments that I used as data sources: student surveys and student artifacts (see Appendix B and C). The use of surveys in research is to describe "what is" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). For these student surveys, I included questions about news sources, what they believe media literacy is, and the role it plays in how people interpret the news. The goal of the survey is to hear from more students and therefore, to hear more experiences about how media literacy has impacted their views on various topics, such as citizenship. It is important to note that all data collected was anonymous to avoid any conflicts of interest.

The use of student artifacts was also collected in my research. Artifacts are anything that can be found in a given environment. Examples of artifacts can include but are not limited to, documents, writings, tools, official records, newspapers, diaries, etc. (Merriam, 2009, p. 139). In this case, student artifacts are considered assignments that students have worked on over the course of the semester for my government class. The use of student artifacts allowed me look at student perspectives about media literacy as well as how they view citizenship. The use of artifacts also provided me with more variety of student perspectives as the artifacts were from various assignments that they worked on that had to do with media literacy and citizenship. It is also important to note that I used student artifacts from students who are eighteen years old and past work that had no bearing on their final grades for my class.

In order to analyze and read through the research, I used a holistic approach. The holistic method "applies a single code to a large unit of data in the corpus, rather than line-by-line coding, to capture a sense of the overall contents and the possible categories that may develop"

(Miles, et. al, 2013, p. 77). Since I have collected a significant amount of data, using the holistic approach allowed me to review the data in a broader context.

To begin my analysis, I first read through student surveys. While reading the surveys, I wrote down topics and ideas that the students discussed in their responses. I then went back through the surveys to highlight similar ideas and topics that students discussed as well as insightful quotes from students. For the current events assignment and the media bias assignment, I read through the student's work and coded them based on the levels of citizenship that the student demonstrated through the assignment.

Going through the research, I created three different analytic tables in order to organize the information (these analytic tables are located in the Appendix section of this study). The first table is designed for the current events assignment. The table is used to determine whether a student's work could be used in the research data as well as to determine how well students were able to understand the topics covered in the assignment. For example, the students had to provide an article for the assignment as well as include an explanation of why the article is important and provide a connection of the topic to the government curriculum. If the students were able to meet all of these steps, then their work was included in the research.

The second table lists out the different levels of citizenship created by Westheimer and Kahne (2004). This table is used to see how students use citizenship in both the current events and media bias assignments as well as what type of citizenship they are demonstrating. For example, in the current events assignment, I critically read through the student's explanation of the article's importance and how it connects to the government curriculum. One student wrote this observation as part of their current events assignment:

This has a connection to me because it is impacting the world I live in. It could mess with

the stock, travel, my sense of comfort with the surroundings. Anyone and everyone can

get sick with this, society can literally be somewhat thrown off (Student 15).

With this information and many others, I used the criteria of personally responsible,

participatory, and justice-oriented citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) to categorize where

the students' responses fell under which level of citizenship.

The third table is for the media bias assignment. It is to help to determine whether a

student's work could be used in the research data and to see how much of an understanding a

student has in regards to depicting media bias in the news that they read. I used Journell's (2016)

explanation of identifying media bias to help categorize the student's level of understanding. For

example, when evaluating a student's ability to provide an understanding/evidence related to

media bias, I analyzed Part II and Part III of the media bias assignment. It was in these specific

sections that the students explained their thought process on what sources they thought were

biased or unbiased, what the sources were saying (or not saying) in the articles and the impact

that media bias and misinformation has on how people interpret the news. After reading through

the student's explanations, I examined the student's level of mastery and categorized their

responses as 1, 2, or 3 (See Appendix Section, Figure 3).

Chapter Four: Findings

The findings section provides the results of the research study. The research is examining how student perceptions are impacted by the messages that resources communicate about citizenship. The section leads with descriptive statistics, followed by analysis about the information that students provided in their current events assignment, their survey responses, and in-class media bias assignment. Through these three entry points, I then critically evaluated, analyzed, and organized all of the information that the students provided throughout the research.
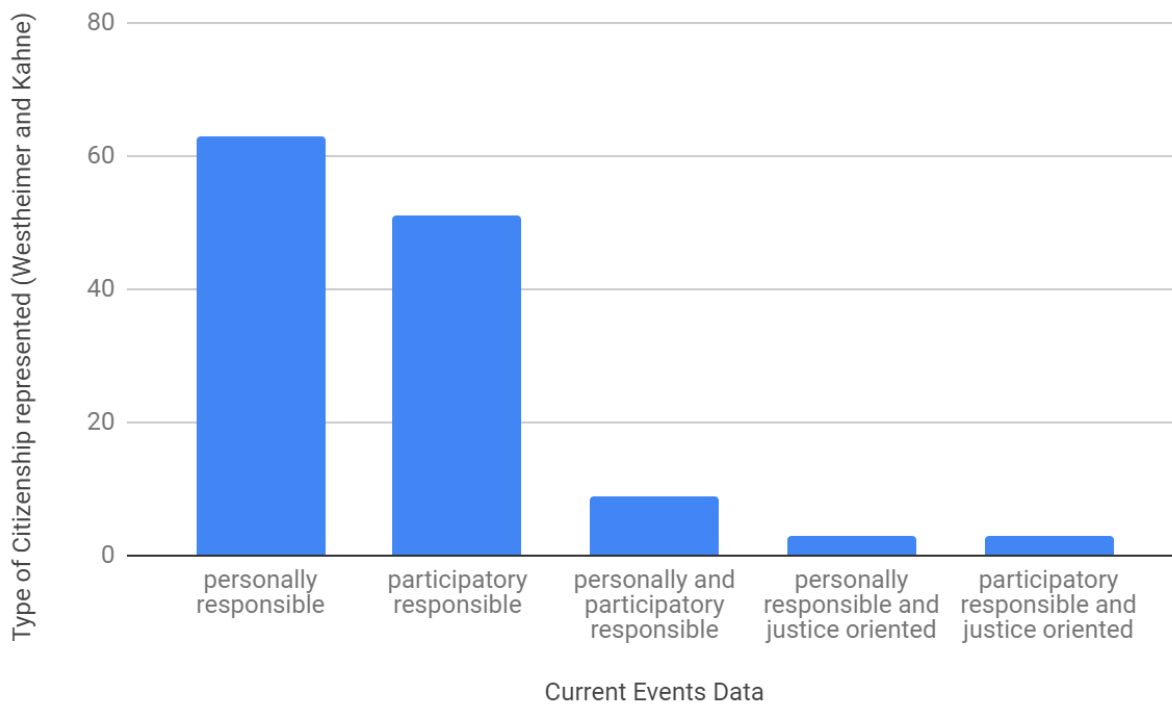
Descriptive Statistics

The first data I investigated is the current events assignment. When it came to selecting news sources, students selected the New York Times the most, with it being cited forty-three times. CNN was the next highest cited source with sixteen, followed by USA Today (n= 12) and Fox News (n= 6). Other news sources that students cited in their current events assignment included: National Public Radio (NPR), BBC, NBC, CBC, The Washington Post, The Guardian, Politico, Daily Herald, ABC, Time, The Wall Street Journal, Time, and local news outlets such as Oklahoma News 9 and the OU Daily, the University of Oklahoma's student newspaper. It is important to note that while the students in the research study did complete the requirements to be included in the research, there were twenty-five students who did not list the news source that they used to complete the assignment.

When it came to the news stories categories, students selected stories that involved the United States the most with fifty-six. Stories that fell into the health category came in next with fifty-one. International stories (seventeen), science and technology (8), and local news (6) all followed after that. In addition, using the framework of Westheimer's and Kahne's (2004) different kinds of citizenship, most of the students demonstrated examples of personally responsible citizenship with sixty-three responses. The participatory responsible category of

citizenship was the second most demonstrated example with fifty-one responses. It is important

to note that many of the students in their responses demonstrated more than one example of

citizenship, with examples of personally and participatory responsible citizenship (9), personally

responsible and justice-oriented citizenship (3), and participatory responsible and justice-oriented

citizenship (3). It is also important to note that ten students had responses to the current events

assignment that did not fall under one of the kinds of citizenship (see Graph 1: Types of

Citizenship represented (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) - Current Events).
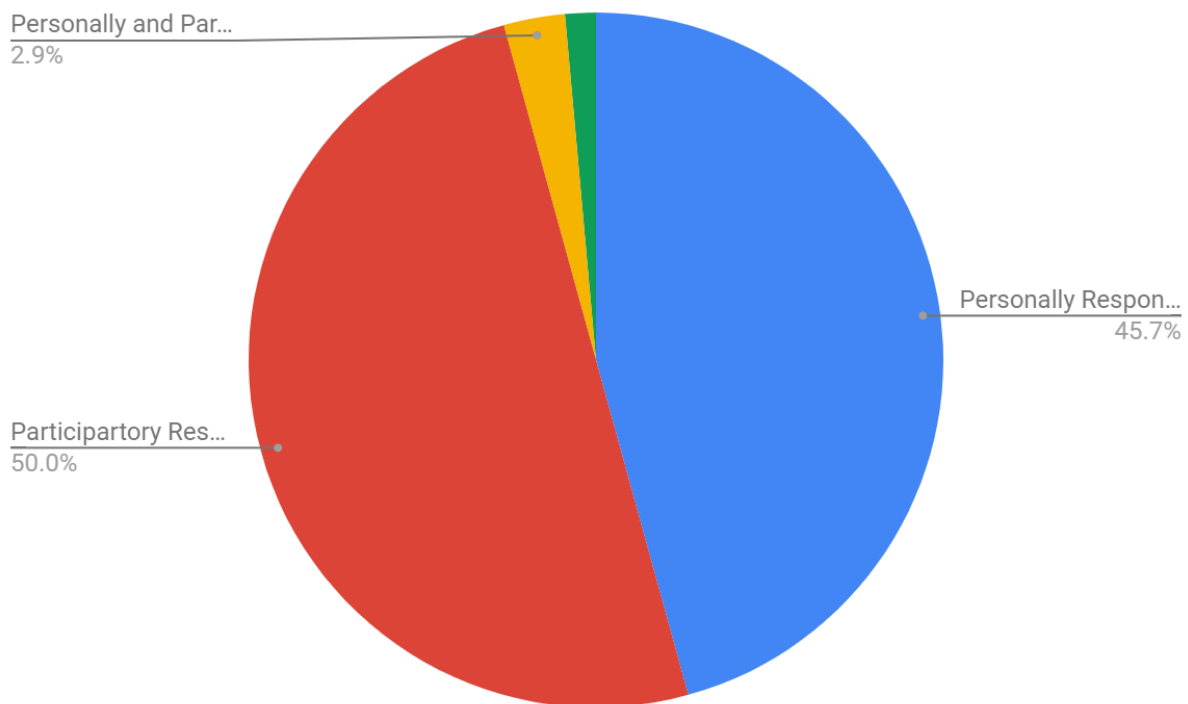
Graph 1: Types of Citizenship represented (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) - Current Events

Secondly, I examined the media bias assignment. For this assignment, I used Journell's

framework (2016) for the first two sections of the assignment. Examining this assignment,

almost all of the students demonstrated some knowledge of recognizing what media bias is. Out

of the work submitted, fifty percent of students provided examples of where they saw media

bias, such as through specific news sources they viewed, the language that was in the stories they

read, etc. For the second part of this assignment, most students demonstrated participatory

citizenship with thirty-five responses. Personally responsible citizenship was demonstrated the

second most with thirty-two, followed by a mix of participatory and personally responsible

citizenship with two students, and one student with participatory responsible citizenship and

justice-oriented (See Graph 2: Types of Citizenship represented (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) -

Media Bias Assignment.

Graph 2. Types of Citizenship represented (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) - Media Bias

Assignment

There are three parts to the research study. The first is a survey about what students know

about media literacy and how they think about it when they are looking at news and current

events. Out of 125 students, 92 students completed the survey (response rate of 73.6% return

rate). The second part of the research study is the current events assignment. About once a month, students were asked to find a news story going on that is related to government, either in the United States government or international government. This happened three times over the course of the semester. In total, there were 143 current events responses submitted from students. It is important to note that since the assignment was ongoing, there are multiple entries from the same students as well as some responses were not taken into consideration as they did not complete the assignment requirements. In total, 129 student responses were used to explore my research questions.

The last part of the research study is a media bias assignment. This assignment was required that the students looked into the topics of what is media bias and media literacy and the impact that it has on how people interpret news and information being presented. The assignment has two parts: the class presentation with the discussion portion, and the in-class activity. The class presentation served as an introduction to the topic of media bias and media literacy, while the in-class activity allowed for the students to explore these topics further and for them to think about how these topics influence how they read and interpret the news.

Through the following research results, there is evidence that students' perceptions are impacted based on the messages that resources communicate about citizenship. In the following section, I will describe the ways in which student survey data and assignments reveal these connections. This includes the influences of the stories that students read and how they interpret that information, how students feel about how they determine what is considered a credible resource, what it means to be media literate, and why it is important.

Student Survey

When evaluating and critically analyzing through the survey results, I went through all of the responses for one question at a time and looked for similar responses/themes that students had. These categories emerged based on what students said about how students view the news, what they look for in current events, issues and topics that are important to them, what does a credible source look like (Harris et al, 2015), what does media literacy look like, and the importance of media literacy (Journell, 2016). Categories "cover or span many individual examples (or bits of units previously identified) (Merriam, 2009, p. 181). The categories were then used to help interpret the data as well as find meaning within the data that was collected.

Question #1: What is something that you look for when looking through current events (either past or present events)?

When students look through current events, the majority of responses have to do with topics that they are interested in and/or if the topic impacts them. These responses tended to be more personal to the students. For example, one student response was "I typically look for things that would affect me or my family and friends. If it doesn't relate to me or interest me in any way then I'm less likely to click on it" (Student 5). This kind of response was one of the most common responses from students, which demonstrates how students view current events and news based on what is going on in their own personal world around them (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Other responses that students mentioned had to do with current news stories that are currently going in either in the United States or stories that were occurring all over the world. Multiple students mentioned looking for "the big headlines" in news sources so they know what

is going on in the world. In addition, students looked for stories that had credible sources to back

up their information. One student in particular discussed:

> I look for credibility in my sources. For example, before I believe something, I check to
>
> see who posted it and if it is a credible resource or not. This is especially important when
>
> it comes to politics because some sources are very biased and will twist the news into
>
> something it is not. (Student 2)

This example from a student demonstrates the process of how a student determines what is a

credible source or not (Clark et. al, 2020; Harris et. al, 2015). The responses from students who

looked for the "big" headlines as well as looked for credibility in sources tended to have a more

worldly view on why these things are important. The students were not just thinking about how it

impacted them on a personal level, rather, they were thinking about how the stories impact the

world around them, how news stories impact decisions people will make, etc. The survey

responses really demonstrate the level of personally responsible citizenship when discussing the

impact of the news (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

It is interesting to note that one student did mention how one student discussed how they

use social media more than news sources, except for major news stories. "When a big event

happens, I will look at more news articles than social media posts. I would say that I use social

media for information about 80% of the time" (Student 22). This is one of the first responses that

specifically talks about the role of social media when looking at news and current events. Social

media, especially in this day and age, is something that does play a strong influence on how

people interpret the news and current events (Durham, 2019). It is intriguing and created

curiosity on why more students did not mention this topic.

Question #2: How do news sources play a role in how people (including you) interpret current events?

All of the responses discussed that news sources play a role in how people interpret current events. One common response is the idea of news sources providing constant information to people all day, every day. People read news stories from outlets that they see on a daily basis, so the more that they read from a certain outlet, the more likely they are going to believe that specific news outlet. "News sources are everything in today's world because they give us our daily information that we rely on every day" (Student 2). The way that our current news cycle is set up, plays a strong influence on how people get their information. One student specifically discussed the idea of the quality of news sources. The student stated, "if a source has often been discredited and has shown to be biased, I tend to ignore them and look for current events elsewhere" (Student 18). The students again are demonstrating the process of determining accurate information (Clark et. al. 2020), as well as recognizing the influence of the current news cycle playing a role in the information that is presented as well (Journell, 2016).

The majority of responses to this question is that biases that are portrayed in the media also plays a role in how people interpret current news stories and events. Multiple students discussed how biased news gives only one side of a story, people are not getting all of the accurate information, which can influence how people view current events going on, as well as news stories and networks, tended to "pray on emotions a lot", manipulating people to believe stories in a certain light. One student in particular described news biases like this:

> News sources are essentially the perspective almost like a prescription for glasses. It can
>
> help you, or totally make the view worse as writers often paint the story in the way they

want to portray it, which could negatively or positively, rather than an informing or

neutral manner" (Student 20)

This quote is demonstrating the impact that biases have on the information that they consume,

therefore influencing how people interpret current events depending on the viewpoint they are

listening to (Harris et. al, 2015). For this survey question, the students tended to demonstrate the

impact of the news cycle and how the news is portrayed plays a role in how people view various

events going on in society. Specifically, the students thought the news cycle and media biases

impact the larger society as a whole. In addition, some students brought up specific examples of

news sources that they believe play a role in how much they influence people. Fox News and

CNN for example, were mentioned multiple times, as well as they were mentioned on how

biased both sides are. "For example, a lot of people believe that certain news sources such as Fox

News and CNN are very extremist when reporting on certain issues" (Student 21). These

students are using their own personal experiences to be able to identify when news sources are

being biased (Harris et. al, 2015). There were not as many personal responses compared to the

last question, leading me to think that the students believe that this topic is something that all

people need to be aware of, this being an example of participatory citizenship (Westheimer &

Kahne, 2004).

It is interesting to note again that a student brought up the influence of social media. The

student stated "I feel like news sources play a smaller role than social media, but still a role.

"From my experience, many people around my age (eighteen) get most of their information from

social media; news articles just do not capture a reader's attention as well" (Student 22). Social

media again is a huge way that people receive information about what is going in the world

today (Durham, 2019).

Question #3: How do you decide that a source is deemed credible?

When determining if a source is credible, the majority of students responded with ideas of the reputation of a news source. For example, students talked about how they look at sources that have been around for a long time as well as look at news sources they have heard of before and are familiar with. Student 1 explained, "credibility is determined by how long a news source has been around" with another one adding, "I ask myself if I have heard about the source before, but most of the time the really well-known sources will have important news announced very quickly, which is not a big issue" (Student 3). Students cited examples of what they believe to be credible are some of the more popular news outlets and papers, such as The New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, BBC, and others. In addition, one student provided specific examples of news sources that they stay away from because they are known for their biased views, such as CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News. This shows that the reputation of a news source, what they are known for, etc. does play a strong role in how a news source is viewed as credible (Clark et. al, 2020).

Another common idea that students discussed was looking at sources that provide a neutral stance to an issue or they portray stories that provide both perspectives on what is going on. In other words, students look for stories that do not have a lot of bias in them. "A source is credible when it is not totally biased and not filled with speculation and opinion" (Student 2). Another student explained, "I try and look for sources that look at multiple perspectives on issues, and don't discredit other's opinions but expand on the different ideas" (Student 21).

One topic that I found interesting was that students talked about determining the credibility of the type of news source they selected. In the following examples, students critically think about whether the source they are consuming is credible as well as using personal

experiences to help lead them to that conclusion (Clark, et. al, 2020; Harris et. al, 2015). Students

talked about the idea of URLs in websites playing a role in how they determine the credibility of

a source. "Usually if it is .gov, .org., or something on a website that is from a university or other

largely known college of any sort then I will use that source" (Student 9). Other students have

mentioned that they try to stay away from .com websites unless they are able to verify the

information posted on that site. Another strategy discussed was searching through the news

source to find out who the author is, where the information came from, the date of when the

information is posted, funding for the news sources, etc. The information that these students

discussed are strong examples of using media literacy and applying it in their lives, in order to

help them become more accurately informed on what is going on in society (Journell, 2016).

Something else that I found interesting was that there were multiple students that could

not state how they were able to determine how they deemed news sources credible or not.

Multiple students stated that they did not know or that is something that they do not really think

about when looking at news sources. One student even stated, "I honestly don't know that is

something I want to figure out" (Student 10). This highlights a gap of a specific media literacy

skill that students are lacking and understanding its importance. The gap will have an impact on

how students interpret information and what they will do with that information in the future

(Journell 2016; Kubey, 2004). Overall, the majority of the student responses to this question

tended to come from a more personal perspective and their thought process of how they look for

credible news sources.

Question #4: Do you believe it is important to know where your news sources come from? Why

or why not? Please be sure to explain why.

An overwhelming response to this question had to do with avoiding the spread of misinformation. The spread of misinformation, students believe, can cause people to not get the full picture of what's really going on in the world, as well as the misinformation spread, could be damaging. One student even used the anti-vaccination movement online stating, "misinformation can be harmful when spread on a large scale, and, as anti-vaxxers have shown us, even lethal" (Student 1). This is a more extreme example, however, the idea of misinformation causing harm was also a common response from students.

The majority of the student responses had a mix of both personal as well as thinking about the impact that misinformation has on society as a whole (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Multiple students discussed how they did not want misinformation because they wanted to have the most accurate information possible. "The reason for this is because we need to know where the news is coming from, we don't want to hear information from a source that we can't trust. We want to fully trust a source so that we know that a piece of information is real" (Student 3). This kind of response demonstrates the idea that it is important to have the most accurate information as possible so that the person does not seem like they are uninformed and does not know what's going on.

In terms of the societal aspect, the students believed that it is important for us as a society to have the most accurate information as possible to help people see multiple perspectives and attempt to gain a better understanding of viewpoints that differ from their own. A student stated, "yes, ignorance and lack of credible information are two very big issues in society today. A lot of hate and judgment stems from misinformation that people get from different medias" (Student 21). By people being exposed to multiple perspectives, it will help people understand viewpoints

that differ from their own as well as to hopefully become more tolerant and understanding

overall (Journell, 2016; Mason, 2015).

Question #5: What does media literacy mean to you? What does it look like?

With describing what is media literacy, most responses had to do with analyzing the

different media sources that are out there, being able to determine what information is real and,

what information is biased or inaccurate. "Media literacy is all about being able to analyze and

depict the media sources you're looking at and being able to make sure that they are worth your

time and credible" (Student 2). Other students talked about the idea of knowing how to navigate

the internet and their online presence. By being able to do this, then people will be able to know

where to access credible information, decipher misinformation from accurate information, and be

able to truly know what is going on in society in order to understand the significance of current

events (Journell, 2016).

Something interesting to note is that students pointed out that media literacy also involves

creating and evaluating media. Multiple students discussed the idea of "comprehend media and

its content, as well as create it" (Student 20). Sometimes when looking at media literacy, the idea

of creating media is not always a topic of conversation. It is more along the lines of knowing

where your information is coming from and the impact that the media as a whole has on the

information that society is receiving (Kubey, 2004; Mason, 2015). However, it is also important

for students to think about the creation of various media so that they can critically think of the

impact that certain media has on the information people receive, how it can be manipulated to

influence other viewpoints, etc.

An important point that needs to be taken into consideration is that some responses had to

do with not knowing what is media literacy. However, the majority of the students were able to

explain the importance of knowing where your information is from, what a credible news source

is, and answer other questions related to media literacy throughout the survey. This shows that

there is a disconnect between students knowing what media literacy is and understanding the

importance of it in our society today (Journell, 2016).

There were also a couple of responses that talked about how media literacy needs to be

discussed in different classes more so that students can have a better idea of why this topic is

important when reading and listening to the news. One student stated it best:

It is important that it should be talked about more. Everyone used technology today, but

not everyone uses it right. Media literacy looks like being able to discern between sources

and determine what information is accurate. People tend to believe anything they read

online. I know that I am guilty of this too. Media literacy spreads awareness about this

and prevents it (Student 23).

The general responses from this question showed that this is a topic that impacts all of us in

society. Some students used their own personal experiences and reactions to demonstrate that

having media literacy skills is something that all people need to have in order to make sure that

they know what's really going on in our society today (Journell, 2016; Mason, 2015).

Survey responses

While looking through the survey responses, I noticed that three themes popped up. The

first one is that almost all of the students were able to demonstrate and explain different media

literacy skills. Various students discussed the importance of knowing where information comes

from and identifying biases in the news. These are all skills that are related to media literacy.

Based on the responses from the students, they are able to practice and implement some sort of

media literacy skill in their own lives (Journell, 2016). To what extent that they practice it and

how in-depth they get with the skills does vary from student to student. However, the fact that

they have the basic media literacy skills does show that they are able to use it without too much

difficulty.

Another theme from the surveys is that all of the students understand the importance of

knowing where their information comes from. The students all discussed that when people do

not have the most accurate information, it will influence how they view the news as well as

influence their viewpoints on various issues. Overall, the majority of students did discuss that it

is not ideal due to the repercussions that it could have. This ties back to the idea of participatory

citizenship as students are critically thinking about the impact that misinformation has on society

(Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

One thing that I noticed was that very few students provided examples of what happens

when people have misinformation when it comes to civic duties, like voting. A couple of

students did mention how there are consequences when people have misinformation but failed to

mention specifics on how it would impact voting and decision making, how people view their

public officials, try to make changes in society, etc. The misinformation of news and current

events plays a huge role in how people act in their communities. This is something that needs to

be specifically discussed and looked at more with students so that they can understand the civic

consequences of misinformation (Durham, 2019; Kubey, 2004).

The last theme is that media literacy needs to be discussed and implemented more in the

classroom. This was noticed when some students could not answer a couple of the survey

questions, specifically related to how to determine what a credible source is as well as define

what media literacy is (Clark et. al. 2020; Journell, 2016). In addition, the last survey question

when students discussed the importance of knowing what media literacy is, how relevant it is in

our current society, and that it needs to be specifically talked about more in school, demonstrates how students want to learn more about this topic (Kubey, 2004; Schmeichel et. al. 2018). It is a promising sign that students do want to explore this topic more in-depth in schools and critically think about how it impacts the world around them. The next step is for educators to take the time to add this topic into their curriculum.

Current Events Assignment

When it came to selecting news stories, the stories that the students picked fell into the following categories:

1. U.S. News (n=56)

2. International News (n=17)

3. Local News (n=6)

4. Health (n=52)

5. Science and Technology (n=9)

What made you choose your article?

The overwhelming majority of respondents identified that they selected articles because it was of interest to them. There were markedly fewer responses for the other possibilities but the second most often selected was "catchy title." Both of these responses relate to more of student preferences, biases, and general information that appealed more to them on a personal level (Harris et. al, 2015).

Sources picked

The most common sources that students selected for their current events assignment were the New York Times, CNN, Fox News, BBC, and USA Today. The main reason why these sources

were chosen by students is that these news sources are popular and reputable according to the

students. In addition, these sources provide the most up to date and current information about

various events going on in the United States and around the world. Some other responses from

students included that the sources had content that was interesting and not biased. This

demonstrates again that students are both going with their own personal experiences (Harris et.

al, 2015) as well as they are able to understand what neutral (and unbiased) sources look like

(Journell, 2016).

Why is this story important?

There was an overwhelming response from students that their chosen topic impacts people

currently or it will impact people in the near future.

Connect the article

This response varied from content that we had covered during class. This ranged from specific

topics that we covered (i.e. political ideologies, political parties) or discussions that discussed

what responsibilities that the government has, such as the economy, role of the president, how

should governments be handling the Coronavirus pandemic, etc. In addition, there were also

some responses that students made a personal connection to the story. While evaluating the

current events articles, I also organized them into three categories, based on Westheimer's and

Kahne's (2004) notions of citizenship. The reasoning behind this is to investigate how the

resources that students viewed communicate about citizenship.

Media Bias In-Class Activity

For the in-class activity, there were three parts to the assignment. The first part required the

students took a fake news quiz to determine if they were able to tell fake news from real news.

The second part was for the students to research stories from three different news sources: Fox

News, CNN, and MSNBC. These sources were selected to have the students look at different

viewpoints of events that are currently going on. The third part was for the students to reflect on

the following two questions:

1. How do news sources play a role in how people (including you) interpret current events?

2. Do you believe it is important to know where your news sources come from? Why or

    why not? Please be sure to explain why.

When it came to analyzing this assignment, I used two different frameworks. The first

framework is using the topic of understanding media bias that Journell (2016) had discussed in

his work. His framework describes the skills that students need to become media literate, which

is "to hone students' abilities to evaluate media as evidentiary sources, to identify bias in

mediated constructions of history and society, to understand how media frames issues, to

separate fact from opinion and to assess the credibility of media sources" (Journell, 2016, p.

146). With this framework, I was able to determine how well the students were able to identify,

recognize potential biases they see in the sources they read, and understand the impact that it has

on how people interpret the news.

Although it is not explicitly stated when discussing citizenship, the notion of

understanding media bias to help understand what is going on in society and to make decisions,

such as voting, is an important aspect when practicing citizenship. The media bias framework

was used to evaluate the first and second parts of the assignment since the students are looking at

different news sources and determining what biases, if any, that they see in the news that they

read. The second framework that I used was Westheimer's and Kahne's (2004) notion of

citizenship. This framework was specifically used for the third part of the assignment since it is

having students reflect and think about the importance of media bias and the impact that it has on the information that people consume.

Media Bias Assignment Results

Based on the assignment submissions, the majority of students are able to identify the topic of an article, potential biases, viewpoint (and lack thereof). The students demonstrated this by being able to complete the assignment and discuss the various topics in their work. For example, in Part I of the assignment where the students took the Fake News Quiz (see Appendix A), the students discussed how they could tell the difference between fake news and real news based on the headline of the article as well as the source of where that article headline came from. In Part II of the assignment (see Appendix B), the students had to look through CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC and search for different stories on the respected websites. The students then had to identify where they saw facts, opinions, or both while reading the articles. Based on their responses, the students were able to identify which articles they believed had both facts and opinions and be able to explain their reasoning as to how they got to that conclusion (Harris et. al 2015). The assignment submissions again demonstrate that the students know how to practice media literacy skills (Journell, 2016).

When it came to Part III (see Appendix C), the reflection part of the assignment, the students mainly practiced aspects of either personally responsible or participatory citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). For example, students discussed that it's important for them to know what's going on so that they can feel informed on a personal level and not feel left out of anything important going on, which falls in line with personally responsible citizenship. When it came to examples of participatory citizenship, the students discussed how it's important to know

what is going on so that they are not spreading misinformation to other people, help educate

others who are not sure what is going on about a particular issue, voting in the future, etc.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter examines the impact of the results of the research. Specifically, how the research results from the students demonstrate how media literacy (or the lack thereof) impacts the kind of citizens that educators are helping create. In addition, the research critiques how media literacy is being taught in the social studies classroom. The final section of this chapter serves to help social studies educators examine their practice in regards to why and how they can implement media literacy in their curriculum.

While looking through the survey responses, one of the things that I noticed was that students noted the disconnection between students knowing what media literacy is but being able to put media literacy skills into practice. For example, in the media literacy survey, students expressed how they did not know what media literacy is or they have heard of the term before but were confused about what it means. However, when they did the media bias in-class assignment, the students were able to demonstrate some media literacy skills by identifying biases in the stories and in the headlines. Based on this information, there appears to be a gap in students having the full knowledge of what media literacy consists of, what it looks like in practice, etc.

Again, it is important to note that within the Oklahoma State Standards, there is no media literacy standard that the students have to cover. At the national level, the Common Core Social Studies standards also have no mention of media literacy. In order for the topic of media literacy to be considered important and crucial in the making of a productive and active citizen, schools and educators need to start implementing media literacy into their curriculum (Kubey, 2004; Mason, 2015; Schmeichel et. al., 2018). From the information discussed and mentioned in the literature review, the concept of media literacy and media education is not new. It is a topic that

has been covered in some shape or form for the past few decades in education, especially with the increase in technology and social media used in education.

However, students are still struggling with understanding the importance of media literacy. This could be due to various circumstances, such as lack of technology at the school, educators not having enough time to cover it in their curriculum, cover it once in class, and do not explain more in-depth the importance of media literacy, etc. The point is that the way that technology is used today in our society is not going away anytime soon and that our students need to have the skills and understanding in order to navigate various spaces involving technology and how to decipher information in order for them to make important decisions, like voting, petitioning, and many more (Journell, 2016; Mason, 2015). All educators, especially those in the social studies classroom, need to take responsibility and start adding in media literacy strategies into their curriculum on a consistent basis. By doing this, students will then get the full understanding of what media literacy is, why it is important, and be able to apply those skills in their everyday life.

I expected to see more participatory citizenship and/or justice-oriented responses from my students. However, based on the current events responses, it seemed that the students took a more personally responsible approach, where the students see events happening in society and apply it to their own lives. With the media bias assignment, more of the students took a participatory responsible approach and discussed how media bias can impact society as a whole. Such examples provided including it could impact how people vote, influencing people's thoughts, and therefore actions towards a certain topic going on in society, etc. When and how the students practice citizenship highlights the difference between how students see the role that they have in society and the issues that they believe need to be addressed.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the timing of when it took place. It should be noted that with the current events component to the study, the in-person classroom instruction was cut short to the Coronavirus pandemic. While some of the students were still able to work on the assignment, the number of student submissions decreased drastically compared to when the instruction was in person. In addition, most of the submissions were related to the Coronavirus and the impact that it was having on the world. Due to these related circumstances, it caused there to be potential limitations on the types of citizenship demonstrated by the students as well as the variety of stories that students discussed in their current events assignment. If this study were to be conducted again, I would expect there to be an increase in the variety of types of citizenship demonstrated as well as the data set would increase as there would be more student current events submissions.

In this research study, I used three different entry points to help gain multiple perspectives about what students know related to media literacy. However, only one lesson specifically talked about media bias, which is one specific part of what makes up all of media literacy. If the study were to be conducted again, I would have added in more media literacy specific lessons where the students build off of different skills or critically think about different aspects of media literacy. In addition, the lessons could potentially be spread out over the course of a semester, for the students to learn more in-depth about the different aspects of media literacy and to show how they have grown in understanding that topic. Lastly, the current events assignment could work in conjunction with media literacy by asking the students questions related to a media literacy task (i.e. identifying bias, how to research, etc.). This could help

reinforce the idea to students where they will run into media literacy-related topics as well as to help them practice those skills in a practical way.

Conclusion

Media education and media literacy have been in education for decades. Students have been working with media in various outlets, ranging from watching films in the classroom to creating their own media for classes. When it comes to understanding and practicing media literacy skills, there is a disconnection with students on the importance and relevance of that topic. Educators, especially social studies educators need to provide and create opportunities for students to learn and hone those skills in order for the students to understand the importance of understanding bias, know where their sources are coming from, how to navigate social media and other online spaces safely, and other skills associated with media literacy. If the end goal as social studies teachers is to help our students become more insightful and active citizens to help make our communities better, then students need to have a strong foundation in media literacy.

In this study, I researched the question of what are students' perceptions of the messages that resources communicate about citizenship? Based on the research and data from this study, students are influenced by the media and news that they consume on a daily basis, which can play a role in how students demonstrate citizenship. This study lends insights into the ways students view, express, and understand citizenship in the United States. In addition, this study discusses the importance of media literacy and the impact that it has on students when they are learning about various topics, ideas, current events, etc. in the social studies classroom. With the findings, I hope to bring ideas and new solutions on how to help students identify biases that are in the resources that they read as well as to help teachers to think about how they use

media/technology in their classroom. This could potentially lead the way to future studies on

students' participatory citizenship if not, more justice-orientated citizens.

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Appendix Section

Appendix A http://factitious.augamestudio.com/#/

Appendix B

1. How do news sources play a role in how people (including you) interpret current events?

2. How do you decide that a source is deemed credible?

3. Do you believe it is important to know where your news sources come from? Why or

    why not? Please be sure to explain why.

4. What does media literacy mean to you? What does it look like?

Appendix C

Media Bias

Part I: Real or Fake news

You will play the Factitious game to determine how well you're able to depict real vs. fake news **http://factitious.augamestudio.com/#/. Click on the medium level to start playing and keep going until you fail.**

1. How did you do in the game? How well you were able to depict real vs. fake news?

2. What was something that stood out to you while playing the game?

Part II: Looking at the News

For this activity, you will utilize 3 websites:

- CNN: https://www.cnn.com/politics
- Fox News: https://www.foxnews.com/politics
- MSNBC: https://www.msnbc.com/

Go to each of the webpages listed and examine the stories on their home pages. Specifically look at stories having to do with public policy, legislation, etc.

1. What are the top 2 headlines on each homepage? List them below.

CNN:

1)

2)

Fox:

1)

2)

MSNBC:

1)

2)

3. Find a topic that is addressed on 2 or 3 of the different websites. Read the articles and list the topic below.

4. Were the articles mainly made up of facts, opinions, both, or neither? Give an example.

5. Was there a particular news source that seemed more legitimate than the others or did they all reasonably seem the same?

6. Does the language from the articles seem subjective? Does it make you feel a certain kind of way about the topic?

Part III: Reflection Questions

Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. How do news sources play a role in how people (including you) interpret current events?

2. Do you believe it is important to know where your news sources come from? Why or why not? Please be sure to explain why.

Figure One

Current Events Assignment Evaluation	Degrees of Mastery	Student Examples
An article was provided for the assignment	Finding an article on a news source Understanding the difference between a search engine and news source Demonstrate the ability to access materials	-The New York Times - student 31 -CNN - student 5 -NBC News - student 19
The student provided an explanation of why the article is important.	Understand how to access materials Provides a clear summary of the article Provides a synthesis of the importance of the article	-"Schools have to report how many of their students are living under poverty. Oklahoma has a low of reading cost." - student 16 -"Coronavirus has spread to 47 countries. The economy slid for the 6th day straight. The S&P 500 reached an all time high last week and now faced its worst day since 2011. Airlines are one of the hardest hit companies." - student 23
The student provided an explanation of how the article connects to content and discussions in the government classroom.	The student is making comprehensive connections to the content and discussions in the government classroom	-"After taking multiple political ideology quizzes, I found that I place pretty far left on the political spectrum, so this article is relating to the party that I will most likely be a part of when that time comes." - student 6 -"It helps me stay informed on electoral decisions and who will become president in the future" - student 88

Figure Two

Types of Citizenship	Definition	Student Examples
Personally Responsible	Acts responsibly in his/her community. Thinks more on a personal level when looking at issues in the community.	-"This has a connection to me because it is impacting the world I live in. It could mess with the stock, travel, my sense of comfort with the surroundings. Anyone and everyone can get sick with this, society can literally be somewhat thrown off." -student 15 -"People in Oklahoma have been getting tested." - student 7
Participatory Citizen	Actively participate in the civic affairs and the social life of the community at local, state, and national levels. Thinks beyond themselves when looking at issues in the community.	-"It is affecting the human race" - student 6 -"The story is important because it is a representation of the advancement of knowledge in our society. The information found in it can inspire more people to discover new things." -student 12
Justice-Oriented Citizen	This kind of citizen looks at the root issues that are going on in our society today and critically examine and "understand the interplay of social, economic, and political forces"	-"Because of climate change progressing rapidly, and the world focus currently being on the Coronavirus, there is little help combating this issue. If we aren't able to reverse some of the effects of climate change, the world may come to an end faster than we'd like." -student 115 -Because people of color are part of our country, too, and they need to have their voices heard. I am Hispanic, but also a first time voter who is

		passionate about political issues, and it matters to me that people like me who are less fortunate are able to vote." - student 117

Figure Three

Media Bias Assignment Evaluation	Degrees of Mastery
The student completed the assignment.	Have completed 50% Have completed 75% Have completed 100%
The student discusses and provides an understanding/evidence related to media bias (Journell To hone students' abilities to evaluate media as evidentiary sources, to identify bias in mediated constructions of history and society, to understand how media frames issues, to separate fact from opinion and to assess the credibility of media sources (Journell, 2016, p. 146)	1- recognized or identified bias 2- recognized or identified bias, provide examples 3- recognized or identified bias, provide examples and explain the significance of bias
The student provided an explanation of how the article provides media bias and/or media literacy and how it impacts the information that they consume	1- explanation of bias or media literacy 2- explanation of both 3- explanation and discusses impact (either personal or societal impact)