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## Developing global citizenship through critical media literacy in the social studies<sup>☆</sup>

Jason Harshman

University of Iowa, Department of Teaching and Learning, N235 Lindquist Center, Iowa City, IA 52242, USA

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### ABSTRACT

The transnational movement of people and ideas continues to reshape how students and citizens imagine places and cultures. Considering our constant exposure to information delivered via mass media, global educators are tasked with engaging students in learning activities that help them develop skill sets that include a globally minded, critical media literacy. Grounded in cultural studies, and framed by [Andreotti's \(2006\)](#) work in critical global citizenship education (GCE) and [Appadurai's \(1996\)](#) concept of *mediascapes*, this article examines how eleven global educators in as many countries use films to teach about what they considered to be the "6 C's" of critical global media literacy: colonialism, capitalism, conflict, citizenship, and conscientious consumerism. How global educators foster globally minded, critical media literacy in their classrooms, the resources they use to teach about perspectives too often marginalized in media produced in the Global North, and how educating students about media informs action within global citizenship education in the social studies are discussed.

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### Introduction

Technologies that include Netflix, Youtube, Hulu, satellite television, tablets, and smartphones, to name a few, have democratized production and consumption, as well as provided cheaper and quicker access to information and entertainment. Researchers argue that as a result, U.S. students are more likely to learn about history and the current state of the planet by engaging with film and web-based media outside of a classroom rather than reading books or conducting primary source research in school ([Stoddard & Marcus, 2010](#)). Recognizing the prevalence of these issues, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) published a position statement on media literacy in 2016 that reminds educators how "the deluge of unfiltered information that streams through the Internet has necessitated a change in our pedagogical orientation—forcing us to focus more on teaching students to analyze and evaluate information rather than to remember it" ([NCSS, 2016, p. 1](#)). As more avenues of access become available to privileged populations in certain parts of the world, and cultures are deterritorialized through these technologies, relying on images and texts that present culture and place as homogenous misrepresent, and thus misinform students about, the complexities of the world. Consequently, social studies teachers are faced with challenges and opportunities to include more voices and perspectives about cultures, conflicts, oppression, and resistance within global citizenship education (GCE) ([Appadurai, 1996](#); [Gaudelli & Siegel, 2010](#); [Merryfield, 1998](#)). Already

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E-mail address: [jason-harshman@uiowa.edu](mailto:jason-harshman@uiowa.edu)

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charged with developing civic literacy, social studies educators are well positioned to utilize films as texts for building critical thinking, disrupting how students imagine the world, and including voices too often marginalized by media produced in the Global North about the Global South.<sup>1</sup>

Using films that elevate counter-narratives within world history is an important, but rare approach when developing students' global perspectives. Relying upon Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi* (1982) to teach about India's fight for independence, Edward Zwick's *The Last Samurai* (2001) for lessons on Meiji Japan, or Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* (2001) to teach about East Africa or post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy, instead of films produced in the places where the events one is teaching about transpired, and/or that center on perspectives that disrupt narratives that favor the Global North, perpetuate a colonizer's gaze. Further, when the directors, writers, producers, actors, costume and set designers, and other players responsible for creating the setting and aesthetic of a film are from the Global North, critical global literacy must be extended to what transpires behind the camera and during the production process in addition to what is (re)presented. That is, critical global literacy is right to include analysis of the encoding and decoding system at work within media in order to challenge the fixed, often stereotypical messages about the "other" that are produced, circulated, and consumed (Hall, 2006). Similar to asking students to conduct a point of view analysis when working with primary sources, global educators ask students to consider the positionality of a writer, director, and actor in a global context, as well as the signifiers they rely upon to convey their messages. This kind of thinking about sources and authors, producers and storytellers, in an era of digital media saturation, is part of a twenty-first century approach to critical global literacy education.

Based on data drawn from a research project that included educators from around the world, this article couples theory and practice to answer the question: How do educators use films to teach about global issues and develop globally minded critical media literacy? Findings from a five-month study that utilized on-line discussion forums to bring 120 International Baccalaureate teachers in 36 countries together revealed that educators used films to: (1) help students think more critically about images and messages encoded in media; (2) introduce the perspectives of those who are often marginalized in films produced in the Global North to develop perspective consciousness and a critical lens for analyzing inequity within global systems; and (3) prompt students to reflect on media production and consumption habits away from school as a way to self-evaluate their media and civic literacy skills.

The positionality of the teachers who participated in the study is also considered, since participants teach in countries that have been, and to some extent still are, colonizers and colonized. Although all were IB teachers, by bringing teachers from the Global North together with teachers who were born and/or now teach in areas of the world still marked by colonialism—the Global South—new ways of thinking about how to teach about inequality and power dynamics within a shared curriculum, as well as the importance of point of view analysis when working with digital media produced in the Global North and South, new ways of thinking about the use of film for the purpose of critical global literacy emerged. Data show that across the history, English, science, art, and civics courses that were represented, the most frequently discussed global issues were capitalism, citizenship, and colonialism, along with concepts related to conflict and what it means to be a conscientious consumer of media. Yet, how the teachers approached the issues and the films they use differed, and the discussion forums provided space for deep discussions about experiences related to these global issues, and the shaping of their own perspectives and biases. These "6 C's"—capitalism, citizenship, colonialism, conflict, and conscientious consumerism—provide a framework that global educators can employ when they teach critical thinking skills related to global issues and media consumption. The films that teachers used, the questions and concepts they presented to students, and what these practices mean for the future of critically minded global education and digital media literacy are discussed below.

### Cultural studies and critical global citizenship education

Teaching students about cultures and their complexities, while trying to provide a conceptual understanding with which they can work, is a "messy" endeavor (McRobbie, 1992). Discussions about culture are further complicated because the expedited movement of people and ideas in our global age means that cultures "have their locations, but it is no longer easy to say where they originate" (Hall, 2006, p. 164). As "an interdisciplinary endeavor concerned with the analysis of cultural forms and activities," cultural studies can inform the work of global educators, because like GCE, cultural studies provides theoretical tools for analyzing the power relations "which condition [the] production, circulation, deployment and, of course, effects" of culture (Bennett, 1998, p. 60).

For IB teachers and global educators alike, teaching for global mindedness, or world mindedness within the IB curriculum, comprises "a frame of reference, or value orientation, favoring a worldview of the problems of humanity, with mankind, rather than nationals of a particular country as the primary reference group" (Sampson & Smith, 1957). Developing global mindedness also involves a willingness to be open-minded (Merryfield, 2012) and continual reflection upon why and how people come to have a different perspective of global systems and global issues (Case, 1993; Gaudelli, 2016; Hanvey,

<sup>1</sup> The terms Global North and Global South, while problematic due to their construction around privilege and power related to map making (Lewis & Wigen, 1997), were preferable to study participants rather than what they deemed to be more pejorative terms such as Third World or underdeveloped. The Global North was understood to include economically developed countries in Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and a few others, whereas the Global South included economically exploited countries such as India, Mexico, Brazil, and regions including, but not limited to, Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

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