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Cultivating the media activist: How critical media literacy and critical service learning can reform journalism education

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Abstract

The task of journalism education has been defined in relation to both the professional needs of the journalism industry and the need to educate well-informed citizens. A key part of journalism education involves introducing students to what Deuze (2005) terms the professional ideology of journalism, which includes commitments to public service, commitments to impartiality or objectivity, and a belief in the ideal of journalistic autonomy. Deuze has argued that this professional ideology has shifted in response to multiculturalism and new media. This article therefore sets out to explore the implications of these changes for journalism education and for the formation of the worldview of student journalists. The article considers a case study of a project involving critical service learning in an introductory class for journalism students. The article proposes that media activism, public journalism, and critical service learning may be drawn upon in journalism education as resources in the formation of an emergent journalistic worldview. Exploring student responses to this project through a framework of Youth Participatory Action Research, the article argues that such efforts can help journalism educators to achieve the pedagogical goal of enabling students to critique existing arrangements of power and develop a globally sensitive perspective while producing news stories across media platforms that reflect a deep appreciation for learning about and understanding the diverse communities they serve.

Keywords

Community-engaged partnerships, critical media literacy, critical service learning, global news audience, journalism education, media activism, public journalism, youth participatory action research

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Introduction

What do journalism students need to know? This question has often resulted in heated exchanges regarding theory versus practice, or industry versus the academy (Glasser, 2006; Nolan, 2008; Reese, 1999). Approaching this question from the perspective of the journalism industry, some have advocated the development of entrepreneurial skills as well as the development of specialized expertise (Baines and Kennedy, 2010; King, 2010; McKinsey, 2005). From the liberal arts view, journalism education is understood in relation to the formation of what Deuze (2006) terms 'super-citizens', or those individuals who can approach existing media industries with both a critical eye and a historical sensibility. This latter approach widens the long-standing professional orientation of journalism education to propose that civic knowledge and civic participation are part of the prospective journalist's skill set (Banaji and Buckingham, 2007; Clark and Monserrate, 2011).

Deuze proposes that one way to move the discussion beyond the industry/university impasse is to consider what unites journalism and journalism education. He looks to what he terms the professional ideology of journalists, which he defines as the 'collection of values, strategies, and professional codes characterizing professional journalism and shared by most of its members' (2005: 445). Deuze suggests that there are five qualities to this professional ideology, which include commitments to: (1) providing a public service; (2) being impartial, neutral, fair, and credible; (3) journalistic autonomy; (4) immediacy; and (5) ethics. By focusing on these common concerns, both journalists and journalism educators might be better equipped to consider what journalism is and can be in a multicultural and multimedia society.

In this article, I focus on the first three of the qualities that Deuze identifies. Whereas journalists and journalism educators agree that it is important for journalism to provide a public service, media activists and public journalism advocates have pointed to the ways that certain diverse communities have remained underserved by mainstream journalism. Some have argued that the journalist's commitment to stand apart from and remain impartial regarding community interests has precluded journalists from being more interactive or involved in community engagement (McDevitt et al., 2002).

How might journalism students come to recognize these problems and reconsider how journalism can be of service to its diverse publics? One approach might be to take students out of their comfort zones to interact directly with members of those diverse publics, particularly with members of the community whose life experiences differ from their own. Service-learning opportunities provide such occasions, and thereby may help students to reconsider their own predetermined definitions of what journalism is, what the responsibility of the journalist is, and how journalism is to meet the needs of various publics. Both journalists and journalism educators can benefit from considering these critiques as we consider how journalism educators go about preparing student journalists for their work.

Many scholars have helpfully explored how to incorporate service learning into the work of student journalism, and this article builds on that work (e.g. Christian, 2007; Smith, 2008). In this case study, I considered how I altered what has been primarily an introductory 'media theory' course so as to incorporate reflective skills that could then be

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applied within the work of student journalism. The course was already structured to accomplish many of the goals of critical media literacy and media activism, such as raising awareness of the role of media in relation to systems of oppression and domination. The challenge was in moving students from the classroom experience of analyzing and critiquing media into the 'real-world experience' of considering why these critiques matter, for whom they matter, and what difference such critiques might make in how one does the work of journalism. In this sense, the project opened the possibility for students to see their work in the media as a form of media activism, in that it raised awareness of the problems inherent to the structure of the media industries. Reflecting on these issues helped students move beyond the individual journalist's responsibility to consider the need to work toward structural changes in the media industries overall, and may have assisted in developing a worldview that students will take with them into the work of journalism.

This article therefore begins with an introduction to critical service learning. It then discusses common ground between the aims of critical service learning, critical media literacy and media activism as a means of introducing the case study, a project that involved bringing together university and high school media students in an interaction that incorporated elements of both critical service learning and critical media literacy.

Critical service learning

Service learning combines formal instruction with experiences that serve the community (Rhoades, 1997). Service learning is experiential and student centered, and as such it dovetails with the latest thinking in effective student learning (Davidson, 2011). The goal of service learning is to utilize reflections on the experiences of service to develop critical consciousness in teachers and students (Jacoby, 1996, 2009; Rosenberger, 2000).

However, not all service-learning experiences are necessarily transformative, as critics of the service-learning model began pointing out more than 20 years ago (Herzberg, 1994; Moore, 1990; Wade, 1997). At their least reflexive, service-learning experiences can reinforce prejudices and can be experienced as a form of 'charity' even as they reinforce the self-esteem of student volunteers (Coleman, 1976). Reciprocity is key. As Kendall notes, in reciprocal service-learning situations, 'both teach, and both learn' (1990: 22).

Some in service learning employ the phrase *critical* service learning or *community-engaged partnerships* to signal different approaches (Koorn et al., 2011). Rosenberger (2000) notes that, in their reflections on the service-learning experience, students must be encouraged to consider the ways that society is structured along the dialectic of oppression and domination. Instructors can help students to recognize that there are differences between actions that oppress and liberate as they also help students to come to recognize their own privilege. In contrast to focusing primarily on meeting community needs, therefore, these approaches place reflection at the core, suggesting that students utilize the experience to consider how their own race, class, gender, and other markings of position inform how they understand the service-learning situation (Trethewey, 1999). Students can use their emotional responses and their discomfort as a springboard to move from blaming individuals to the examination of systemic issues, suggests Rosenberger (2000; see also Cooks and Scharer, 2006; Willink and Jacobs, 2012).

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As students in critical service-learning experiences are encouraged to be open to discovering the limitations of their own perspectives so that they might truly engage dialogically with their community partners, critical service learning holds great potential in relation to a journalism education program that is oriented toward supporting pluralist approaches to journalism and challenging notions of journalistic autonomy, impartiality, and objectivity. Through critical service learning, students may come to question the ways in which the communities where they work have been represented in the news in the past, and therefore begin to reconsider the responsibility of the journalist to the community.

With its orientation to the community, critical service learning already holds a great deal in common with the public or civic journalism movement. As Christian writes in a review of her own service learning and civic journalism experience: 'Civic responsibility, citizenship, civic engagement, knowledge, and learning: the same words that pepper the description of service learning also are central to descriptions of civic journalism' (2007: 111). Critical service learning therefore may have much to contribute to journalism education. Perspectives developed within media activism, which have also informed developments in public journalism, also serve as a resource in relation to journalism education. I therefore review the relationship of media activism and public journalism in the following section.

Media activism

Much of what is characterized as *media activism* is rooted in a critique of the mainstream media. Media activists and those who write or produce for alternative publications frequently criticize the ways that mainstream media have failed to develop certain stories. Media activists have documented and attempt to correct for the absence of dissent, and highlight the mainstream media's failure to produce stories critical of US government policy or of US economic interests, noting the mainstream news media's collusion in supporting the Bush administration's argument for the Iraq invasion in 2003 and the failure of the news to cover the signs leading up to the financial crises that began in 2008, among other stories.

Some media activists and activist organizations in the USA have focused on highlighting the concentration of ownership within the mainstream media, and the way in which the processes of news production reinforce existing power relations (e.g. Shah, 2009). Other media activists challenge this predisposition to reinforce power relations by utilizing the tools of media to advance the causes of social movements and social groups whose media representations are distorted in or largely absent from mainstream media (e.g. article by Echchaibi, this issue). Still other media activists utilize media or 'culture jamming' to highlight the otherwise-hidden relationship between media and power arrangements as they occur in both media institutions and in representations (e.g. Adbusters.org). And others seek to challenge media policies so as to advance the rights of those societal groups that are underserved within the current media landscape (e.g. FreePress.net). All of this work requires an 'alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives', as John Downing (2000: v) writes (see also Atton, 2002).

Media activism is related to what Lievrouw (2006) has observed is a growing tension between two differing views of the media environment. On the one hand, there are those

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who view journalists and other media professionals as ‘content creators’ or ‘interpreters’ and gatekeepers who present their work *before* an audience and who are legitimated through their association with (and payment by) mainstream media industries. On the other hand, however, are those who embrace what Lievrouw terms the ‘alternative view’ that ‘sees the environment primarily as a venue for participation, speech, interaction, and creativity’ (2006: 115). This view is broader and more inclusive regarding who ‘counts’ as a journalist, who might engage in journalistic endeavors, how the people formerly known as ‘the audience’ might participate in constructing understandings that are valued and valuable for all in the workings of a democracy, and how technological companies like Google might be pressured into financing these emergent forms of journalism. This alternative view of journalism appears in many recent debates about journalism and journalism education (Bugeja, 2011, 2005; Pintak, 2012; Rosen, 2012).

A number of scholars of journalism have worked in relation to the tradition of media activism to highlight the ways professional journalism has sometimes eluded explorations of power relations. This similarly raises questions regarding the professional ideology of journalists as persons who offer a public service and must do so through journalistic autonomy and the language of impartiality. Rosen (2010) argues that this language, which he terms the ‘view from nowhere’, too often allows journalists to avoid exploring how they are situated in relation to the stories they tell. This problem is compounded as journalists tend to seek out members of the elite as ‘experts’ and may also participate in self-censorship and in actively silencing dissent to protect their own positions (Boler, 2010; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Schiller, 1981). Media activism and its ‘alternative view’ of journalism are therefore also broadly related to developments in what has become known as civic or public journalism.

Public journalism

As Glasser and Craft note of the public journalism movement, public journalism ‘denotes a simple but controversial premise: The purpose of the press is to promote *and improve*, and not merely report on or complain about, the quality of public or civic life’ (1996: 153). Public journalism is therefore *activist* in the sense that it expects journalists to be participants in a democracy, and it challenges the idea of the journalist as neutral observer who stands apart from the stories she tells.

Public journalism is related to the rise of new forms of what Benson terms ‘accountability journalism’. Replacing the elitist notions of journalists as professional gatekeepers, we are now seeing an increase in the influence of what he terms ‘deliberative’ practices, in which journalists facilitate dialogue among members of the public, and ‘pluralist’ practices in which journalists encourage understanding across lines of difference. In short, as Russell notes, the job of the public journalist is ‘to facilitate dynamic engagement among diverse publics’ (2011: 20).

Those engaged in public or advocacy journalism seek an alternative that preserves the seeking of truth, accuracy, and comprehensiveness but that challenges what Schudson (1981) termed the ‘naïve empiricism’ of objectivity. Public journalism did not introduce the debates about journalistic objectivity, but it did provide a rationale for why journalists, and journalism educators, might question this norm of the industry. As Mindich

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(1998) powerfully argued in his review of objectivity, the idea of objectivity and 'balance' allowed the *New York Times* and other papers to address 'both sides' of the lynching story in the early part of the 20th century, thus delaying mobilization against this human rights violation and others like it. The failings of objectivity are in part why even the Society of Professional Journalists has removed the term from its code of ethics, replacing it with the terms honesty, fairness, and courage (1996).

Consistent with views articulated in critical service learning as well as in media activism, students in university media courses need to be given opportunities to recognize that the media representations they see in the USA are not neutral but rather echo a host of assumptions. Assumptions about race, ethnicity, and nationality are embedded in US media, as well as intertwining assumptions about which groups and individuals have the right to speak for themselves, and which groups and individuals are instead frequently relegated to being represented by others (and thus are represented *as* Others). Many textbooks and syllabi within journalism education now reflect this approach, and this view is also consistent with moves toward embracing cultural diversity and recognizing prejudice within K-12 education (see Croteau et al., 2011; Glimps and Ford, 2010). Thus, it is likely that at least some students in university journalism courses will have had prior encounters with this type of analysis. Journalism educators generally agree that understanding the role of media industries in relation to political and economic interests is a key aspect of developing a critical sensibility that can inform journalistic work in a multicultural society.

My particular interest in designing a critical media literacy program for journalism students was part of an effort to address a larger question: How might journalism educators help their students to see themselves as agents of change and as empowered to work within a changing media environment in which they can work to help shape the media in dialogue with the communities they serve? To explore this question, I embarked on a project that brought together critical media literacy and critical service learning in a methodological framework of Youth Participatory Action Research.

Introducing the case study

Youth Participatory Action Research supports a similar commitment to pluralist ways of developing understanding between researchers and research participants. Dentith et al. note that participatory action research:

> … relies on collective investigation, indigenous knowledge, participation, communitarian politics, and collective action, within a framework that acknowledges the problematic history of research which has been done to people or for them instead of with them. (2009: 159)

In this approach to research, young people – including in this case both high school and university students – are seen as competent actors who can contribute reflections on their own experiences. They are not the subjects of research so much as they are collaborators in the research. In Youth Participatory Action Research, students and the researcher are 'co-learners' (Cammarota and Fine, 2008). The students involved in this project therefore provided insight into the shaping of their experiences and also offered feedback and

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reflections on their experiences once the class was completed. In the next section I describe the project itself and the involvement of students in it.

The case study

The university students participating in this critical service-learning project attended a medium-sized private university with a strong record in both study abroad and in service-learning experiences. Participating students were enrolled in an introductory course in media and culture that fulfills general education requirements and that is designed to introduce students to the journalism major. As part of their final assignment for the class, students were asked to participate in a critical media literacy and critical service-learning module that had five components.

First, students were to familiarize themselves with several of the most significant frameworks for thinking about the role of media in society, including theories of media effects, audience interpretation/cultural studies, media consolidation (political/economic theories), theories of framing and agenda setting, media ecology theories, and the roles of media in globalization (see Appendix 1 for details).

Second, they then selected the framework that was most resonant for them, and wrote a brief essay on why they thought that this framework was important and what was at stake and for whom. They included real-world examples of the problems at the heart of this framework to illustrate its importance.

Once they'd written their essays, for the third step they shared their essays with fellow class members with mutual theoretical commitments, working as a member of a production team to develop a 2-minute video essay (Figure 1). After more than 16 hours of in- and out-of-class time devoted to developing basic skills in scripting and video essay production using iMovie, students showed their essays to their fellow students for feedback. Once the videos were completed, they then collectively selected the videos that they felt would be most interesting to show to urban high school students as part of a collaborative learning situation. They made this selection based on what they learned about the high school community through in-class research and discussion.

For step four, therefore, university students went to the high school's after-school digital media club, and made presentations for the high school students that involved

Activism and Social Media: an essay on media ecology

News *in China and the U.S.*: an essay on international framing and agenda-setting in news

The Pitchfork Effect (are music websites determining our taste in music?): an essay on framing and agenda-setting in music news

Racism in Children's Movies: an essay on the negative effects of stereotypical representations of race and ethnicity

Figure 1. Videos by university students selected for and shown to diverse high school students.

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showing their productions and discussing why they elected to produce the video they had. The university students were also asked to devise several questions to encourage a dialogue with the high school students. For the final step in the module, university students were then asked to write a reflection on this experience, considering what they learned from the high school students and how the exercise would inform their future work as a journalist (see Appendix 1).

The high school students and their teachers were quite interested in facilitating this interaction with the university students. The high school serves a large number of refugee and migrant families as it provides outstanding programs in English Language Acquisition and in English as a Second Language. More than 70 percent of the students meet the Federal Government's measure of poverty in the USA and qualify for the free or reduced-price school lunch program. Many in the high school want to increase the number of students who go on to pursue university education, and thus teachers, administrators, and students viewed these interactions with university students in the high school setting as a means of building confidence among the high school students. In effect, the discussion about university learning before and after the session with the university students enabled the high school students to see themselves as meaningful contributors to and successful participants in a university experience. It also enabled them to see themselves as contributors to citizen discussions about concerns related to the media. The showings and discussion demystified the process of developing a video essay, and thus provided an excellent introduction for the high school students who would later produce video essays on topics of their own choosing. Thus, the interaction was part of a larger effort to engage the diverse high school students in viewing themselves as prospective interpreters and commentators within their community; in other words, as individuals ready to embrace tasks associated with journalism.

Twenty-five university students and 19 high school students participated in this project. Before the university students visited the high school after-school club, both groups of students (those at the university and those at the high school) did in-class research about the other community. The university students read about immigration trends, the role of media in globalization, and changing forms of media consumption, and were invited to think about the high school students as members of the diverse community that journalism is meant to serve. The high school students were encouraged to think about the college students as modeling for them what a university seminar experience might entail. Thus, members of both groups were encouraged to place value in learning from the other, and both recognized that the members of the other group shared their interests in learning more about the role of media in society. In the next section, I review the university students' reflections on this experience. Due to the limits of space, the high school students' experiences will be addressed in a later essay.

Student responses

One video essay that had been very popular among the university students received more mixed responses among the high school students. The video highlighted the ways that the US mainstream news media had focused on the positive role of Facebook and other social media in the 'Arab Spring' revolutions. However, the student's video also

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celebrated the ways that news reports depicted new media as allowing those from the West to efficiently give funds and support to those in need in Africa, thereby positioning Africans as recipients of western largesse rather than as actors and partners in their own struggles for human rights. Among those in the high school audience expressing politely lukewarm reactions to this video were students who had moved to the USA from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia.

In her reflection paper after this encounter, the producer of this video essay wrote about how the experience had made her aware of her own unintentional biases. She noted that she wished she'd included:

> … more perspectives in my video essay, if possible. I think it would be beneficial to focus on the prevalence and use of media in underdeveloped countries, instead of only focusing on how media is influencing activism among those in the United States.

This student had felt empowered in her ability to learn iMovie and to communicate what she felt was an important message via video, but she also came to recognize that, in the encounter with diverse high school students, she was able to learn something about herself and about how her own assumptions were inadvertently communicated through her media creation.

Whereas this university student's essay had sought to articulate the role of media in social change as consistent with the media ecology school of thought, the video essay that generated the most animated discussions among the high school and university students drew upon agenda setting and framing research. This second video highlighted contrasts between the ways that Chinese and US news media covered Tibet's relationship with China. Produced by students who had come to the university from China, this video included translated footage of Chinese protests against CNN's coverage of Tibet and suggested that those in China viewed Tibet differently from the China/Tibet relationship portrayed in US media. The university students who produced this video argued that national interests influenced the ways that international issues are framed within mainstream media.

Several university students wrote final essays that included a reflection on viewing this video with the high school students. One highlighted what a high school student who had moved to the USA from Ethiopia had said in response to this video:

> [A video essay produced by two of the university's Chinese students] talked about how the Tibetan conflict with China was portrayed [in Chinese media] as if Tibet had always been a part of China's domain. Then [a high school student] talked about how in the Ethiopian media they said they were invading Kenya for political reasons when in Kenya the media was saying that the invasion was retaliation for a passed [sic] war. … Both experiences helped me realize how media is in effect a commodity in other countries around the world.

In this comment, the university student recognized that news was not a transparent relaying of reality either in the USA or abroad, but was rather 'a commodity' that was produced for consumption and that therefore tended to reinforce mainstream national assumptions that differed according to location. Recognizing that it was a high school student who had made the observation about the parallels in how news relates to national

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interests around the world, the university student continued: 'I got a real-world glimpse at the new generation of media users', who might access and interpret news from a variety of sources from around the world rather than limiting their news intake to one or two mainstream news media sources.

Another student reflecting on the same video wrote, 'I thought it was really interesting to see that news is presented differently everywhere', and another noted that the discussion caused her to consider her own video essay more critically. As this student observed, 'I feel that our video now just reaches out to Americans, which is very limiting.'

Not all of the students who wrote responses to the joint activity focused on critiques of journalism or on the university students' own roles as media creators. Some students drew fairly basic connections between readings on globalization and their interactions at the high school, such as the student who had a conversation with a recent immigrant student and wrote, 'I did not realize before our trip and before reading this chapter (on globalization) that American-exported movies are popular all over the world.' Another noted more critically, 'my video (on the economics behind the popular US music industry) was more relatable to different cultures than I thought it would be, and this is a testament to how much American culture is exported around the world and contributes greatly to globalization'.

Other students were able to draw connections between globalization readings, the problem of media consolidation, and the lack of diverse voices in mainstream media. One student who worked on a team that created a video essay about media consolidation wrote:

> After learning more about media globalization, I agree even more with my group's video essay about media economics. The effects of the dominant industry business model – in which advertising revenues finance big media, which in turn lowers program quality and encourages media conglomeration and consolidation – is not just a struggle within the media in the United States, but is a struggle in the media industry worldwide. This business model creates a challenge for the voices of American subcultures and international cultures to be heard within media.

This student noted that after the visit with the high school students, she noticed that her video focused on concentration within the industry without mentioning the effects this had on minority and international populations, and noted that were she to revise her video, she would include this perspective.

A number of other students similarly came to interesting self-realizations regarding the ways that their own assumptions of ethnicity and class and their biases of privilege were reflected, and not challenged, in the mainstream US news media. One, for instance, related:

> After visiting the high school, I recognized how important diversity is in the media. I realize now how growing up in a predominantly white and upper-class suburb has blinded me to the diversity of our country … The only voices heard in the world are those that are within affluent nations or chief media companies. If the world had access to media in a 'global village' setting then there would be an influx in the diversity of opinions. This increase would educate the world on issues in a myriad of contexts.

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This student drew connections between the community members she encountered among the high school's diverse population and her appreciation of a pluralist form of journalism that would include diverse voices in media.

In spite of the encouragement to reflect on interactions and on what they themselves had learned in the experience, some students were more comfortable articulating their own learning through the role of teaching, rather than co-learning with, high school students. As one student wrote:

> If even only one student learned from our video about why horizontal integration and the concentration of media ownership is bad and found it to be clever and humorous then I believe our video succeeded in what it was supposed to do and I would not change a thing about it.

One could argue that at least this student seemed to develop a passion about the need to express concern about the concentration of media ownership. However, a few students seemed unable to conceive of a co-learning situation of shared power and instead assumed that they were endowed with the responsibility of helping students they assumed were subordinate. As one student wrote in a troubling comment:

> I think it is really important for everyone to know these statistics (about media ownership); therefore, being able to share it with the vulnerable high school students really put purpose and importance to the video … I feel like the students learned a lot about the media (from the videos we made).

Despite encouragement to reframe this perspective of 'vulnerable' high school students versus empowered university students (some of whom were the same or very close in age to the high school students), this university student viewed the high school students not as partners but as the 'audience'. She seemed to embrace the traditional view of media creators and journalists as charged with a mission rather than armed with resources to facilitate dialogue and deliberation. Her reflection calls to mind Coleman's (1976) point about critical service learning: that sometimes university instructors need to work hard to help students utilize service-learning experiences to challenge their own assumptions.

The university students had utilized a class blog to post their full reflection papers. This enabled both me as the educator and the students' fellow classmates to read the reflections before our class discussion about the experience. During that class, I raised themes that had emerged in their reflection papers, namely: the role of national context in the shaping of political news; the self-realization of how the news media's perspectives reflect the biases of the privileged; the increasingly global nature of media audiences even among US communities; and the relationship between media ownership patterns and the exclusion of certain voices from mainstream media. Thinking about the reflection papers that had not grappled with what I felt were the most challenging aspects of the critical service-learning interaction, I encouraged students to think again not about what they had *taught*, but about what they had *learned* in the interactions and by showing their videos. Not surprisingly, the students who had written the more basic responses remained silent.

The student who had produced the video about how new media could help in revolutions and in aid to Africa volunteered that, on reflection, even though she liked the upbeat

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message in her video about how social media could play a role in involving people in activism, she observed that her video largely showed 'white people helping brown people'. She told the class that were she to remake it, she would not focus exclusively on NGOs and international not for profits, but would include more examples of how people in underdeveloped areas used media in local social change efforts.

Because of this student's critical self-reflection in class as well as the discussion about privilege and worldview that ensued, the university students had an opportunity to reflect in new ways on their own experiences as media producers within a diverse community. Whereas it would be unrealistic to think that all students could come to see that as media makers they are not in the business of helping the more 'vulnerable' but rather learning from and ideally partnering across lines of difference, I hoped that the follow-up discussion might have highlighted the kind of learning that is possible with critical service-learning interactions, particularly for those students who had not previously seen the relevance of the engagement. I believe that this outcome was realized for many of them, as, in their final evaluations of the course, several of the students mentioned the critical service-learning experience as one that they found particularly meaningful. Some of the students have sought out opportunities to develop deeper partnerships with the high school and its students, including providing support and guidance as high school students develop their own student-led projects.

Discussion

It can be difficult to move university students beyond the feel-good experience of helping others that is an inherent part of the service-learning experience. As is clear from the student reflections, critical service-learning interventions do not guarantee that students will experience engagement or self-reflection as a result of their participation.

Such experiences also do not automatically enable students to see themselves as public journalists with an activist orientation rather than 'stenographers to power', to use Barsamian's (1992) critique of traditional journalism. Yet when journalism educators pair critical service-learning interactions with opportunities for thinking about the role of media in public life, we may open the possibility for students to reconsider what it means to be a media creator and an activist engaged in changing the way media industries operate and to report in the interests of the publics they serve. In this sense, students can be encouraged to develop a sense of themselves as 'super-citizens'. They can be empowered to consider the perspectives of the communities that make up the public, ponder their own perspectives in relation to those of others, and begin to address the problems related to the ways in which the media industries have been structured economically. Such learning is important given the fact that almost three-quarters of all journalism students today are white and middle class (Smith, 2008). The failure to develop a globally sensitive worldview is a journalistic liability, and one that journalism educators must strive to address by developing in students an appreciation for diverse perspectives and diverse experiences with media.

Giving students opportunities to work in partnership with community members is related to the public journalism model, and there are important precedents in journalism education that have similarly engaged students in creating news for and with members of

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their communities (e.g. Christian, 2007; Smith, 2008). But in this case study, students also incorporated aspects of critical media literacy and media activism into their productions. This means that they were invited to embrace and express a viewpoint about media, and then were given an opportunity to consider how members of diverse communities responded both to their viewpoints and to perspectives in the mainstream news media. Media activism like the critical media literacy project outlined here can involve encouraging students to participate in a social critique of media systems, but it is also a way for them to acknowledge their own biases so that they do not reproduce the mistakes of elitism that journalism has encountered in the past. Like those engaged in public journalism, we can encourage our students not only to report on but to *act* as agents and co-learners who see their task as working to improve public life for all members of the communities they serve.

This article has largely found common ground between critical media literacy, media activism, and critical service learning. There are some important differences that must be accounted for, however. First and foremost, educators are not activists when they are in the classroom. This is because, as educators, we must be sensitive to the students who do not want to challenge the status quo and who hold commitments that differ from our own. Educators are charged with recognizing that students examine and change their worldviews on timetables that may differ from those of a single class. We need to meet students where they are and encourage the growth that they are able to embrace at the time. We may encourage them to question what they take for granted, but we may not penalize them for either voicing perspectives that differ from ours, or for not drawing the conclusions that we wish they would about their own worldviews. Whereas many activists might protest that activism is also about working with people and worldviews over time, activists are charged with building communities and movements – a process that rewards common goals in a way that a classroom cannot. Those who consume and participate in media activism do so as a matter of personal choice, whereas those participating in coursework are not choosing to participate in media activism but rather are fulfilling what may be a variety of educational goals. This case study suggests that when students feel invited to consider their worldviews in relation to their work as media creators and consumers, and when they are given opportunities to make these considerations in non-threatening environments that enable them to co-learn with those whose life experiences differ from their own, they may be able to consider for the first time whether or not their worldviews are consistent with the work of media activists.

Voakes (1999) has pointed out that there will always be a tension in journalism, and in journalism education, regarding how journalists can serve the public without pandering to it, and how journalists can serve as facilitators who help members of the public learn what they need to know. This case study demonstrates that there are other choices beyond serving and pandering, and these involve engaging in exchanges that enable journalists and future journalists to both teach and to learn from their publics in ways that may be transformative for both publics and for the journalists themselves. It may be that these efforts influence mainstream journalism in only small ways (e.g. Benson, 1998, 2005). Yet bringing together journalism students and diverse publics beyond the university to engage in critical media literacy both helps university students learn about the

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need to consider the role of their own worldview in relation to the media they create and consume, and affords them an opportunity to see how media might look different were it to include the viewpoints of diverse community members.

Conclusion

This article has argued that given today's global reach of digitally available journalism, educators must strive to empower students to embrace a self-concept as a globally sensitive journalist who seeks truth, accuracy, and comprehension, but one who is also a member of that global community rather than merely a neutral observer of it. This work may best occur as the result of an intentional effort, undertaken in addition to the development of journalistic skills and in relation to the development of critical media literacy informed by perspectives from media activism and public journalism.

To help students develop a globally sensitive worldview, this article has argued, students need to gain an awareness of media criticisms that have long been a part of the media activist and critical media literacy traditions. These traditions alert students to problems associated with media consolidation and ownership concentration, such as the tendency of news organizations to rely on elite sources and to overlook or distort news that is relevant for minority communities. By developing self-awareness of their own position and privilege relative to larger systems of oppression and domination, students can synthesize what they learn about media structures with specific courses of action as professionals in the media industries.

However, as this case study illustrates, it can be useful to meld this recognition of the limits of the media environment with opportunities for self-reflection on one's role, position, and worldview in relation to that environment. University students can benefit when they are given opportunities to recognize that their own perspectives are not always as globally sensitive as they might wish. Sometimes, students come to realize the need to adjust their worldviews when they are confronted with feedback on their own creations, whether from their instructors or from those whose backgrounds differ from their own. And sometimes, as illustrated in this case study, university students are able to understand discrepancies between global perspectives and their own worldviews simply by being invited to share their work in a setting that is different, and more diverse, than their university classroom.

In this particular case study, a key moment occurred when one university student was willing to share her own experiences of self-recognition and adjustment of perspective. As a result, other students were then able to engage in self-reflection as well. I learned from this experience that it is worthwhile to afford students multiple opportunities to reflect on their own developing insights regarding how they see themselves as media creators in relation to the diverse communities in which they hope to work. In this way, they can reflect on the lessons their peers have learned and thus may deepen their own initial reflections.

This project assumes that, as aspiring media creators and consumers, students have a responsibility to recognize non-inclusive perspectives both in the broader media and in their own work. It further assumes that this recognition is a key foundation in helping students to recognize that there is a connection between the consolidation of the media

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industries and the limits in the embrace of a global perspective in news. As noted in the comments of some of the university students, they are able to make this connection, which in turn may challenge their views of how they want the media environment to evolve in the future and what they might do to participate in this evolution.

This article has demonstrated the potential of critical service learning for engaging young people both in critical self-reflection and in a reconsidered role for journalism. Critical service learning can help students to move from what they think they know about journalism to the fascinating things that journalism could be: it can help to move students from thinking about journalism as *what is* to *what ought to be* (Thevenin, 2012).

Time will tell whether or not the students in today's university journalism courses learn the lessons of speaking *with*, rather than merely *to*, diverse communities. But participation in journalism education assignments that lead them to consider and then reconsider their own views in relation to public journalism may be able to help in this process.

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Appendix 1

Critical media literacy/service-learning module

Five components to student learning

1 Attain an understanding of the concerns that differing audiences might have about news (by learning about media theories):

   a. Some are concerned with the need to avoid the perpetuation of stereotypes and at the same time to represent diverse societal viewpoints (theories: media effects and audience interpretation/cultural studies).
   b. Some are concerned about the economic concentration of media and resultant biases (theories: political/economic approaches to media).
   c. Some are concerned about the influence of nationalistic perspectives that shape news (theories: agenda-setting, framing).
   d. Some are concerned about the ways in which changes in media technologies contribute to changes in society, making certain avenues possible while closing off other possibilities (theory: media ecology).

2 Develop confidence in articulating the critique that most resonates for you.

   a. Research the critique so as to understand who has made it (or makes it) and why.
   b. Develop clarity of thought about why the critique appeals to you.
   c. Write a brief essay arguing for its importance, and for whom (or why) it is important.
   d. Consider real-world examples that illustrate the problem at the heart of this critique as it plays out.

3 Work as a member of a production team to develop storytelling skills in articulating a specific example of how your chosen critique has played out in media.

   a. Outline ideas and select the most compelling one.
   b. Consider how you might utilize visual images and onscreen words that can convey meaning in telling the story .
   c. Develop a video script presenting the story.
   d. Produce a short video for public consumption by young news consumers.
   e. Show your 2-minute critique to fellow students for their feedback and suggestions for clarity/improvement and for selection of the four best class projects to share in the next phase of the project.

4 With your university peers, show the 2-minute critiques your class selected to high school students whose backgrounds and life experiences may differ from yours (and/or from those of your university peers).

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a. Lead them both in a discussion of the issue your critique raises, and listen for how the life experiences of others informs their understanding of the subject you've chosen to critique.
b. Consider how their own responses may perhaps challenge you to rethink some of your own assumptions as they were embedded in your own story or in the stories produced by your peers (e.g. listen for the unexpected).

5 Write a reflection on the experience.

a. Demonstrate analytical skills in identifying differing audience responses.
b. Articulate what you have learned through this exercise that will inform your future work as a journalist (or in a related media profession).

Overall learning outcomes

1. Awareness of news critiques: who makes them, and why.
2. Self-awareness of the critique that resonates most strongly for you.
3. Articulation of that critique in relation to specific storytelling.
4. Development of story selection, development, scripting, and producing for online format.
5. Development of visual communication skills for online storytelling.

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