

MULTICULTURAL DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS IN LIFE EDUCATION AND JOURNALISM

Life Education and Journalism Writing Instruction at National Taipei University of Business, 2016-2018

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on journalism writing culture and how it can be defined in terms of journalistic roles, on how role orientations relate to cultural diversity values and normative ideas, on the extent to which certain role orientations are supported by teachers at the National Taipei University of Business. This paper examines the publication of the NTU Bulletin newspaper at the National Taipei University of Business from spring 2016 through fall 2019, within a Life Education framework. The NTU Bulletin was the first English language newspaper published at our school, and it was a rich educational/pedagogical experience. As well, I think that this project fits within a Life Education framework, as the articles and features we published in the paper were very much concerned with the lives of members of our school and community, their aspirations, hopes, dreams, everyday efforts, healthy perspectives and growth. In this way it positively impacted the lives of students in the class. This paper discusses the profile of Life Education framework for multicultural students: what they think of the education they receive and the activities undertaken by the university. It also discusses the modalities for constructing and incorporating journalistic culture within researchers.

The newspaper is a full-color paper, printed on A3 and A4 paper. We started with four pages and expanded to six pages. The paper undergone one redesign. It started with a four-week deadline schedule that was reduced to three weeks in the second semester. The paper was originally published in a News English class I taught, and was later moved into writing courses. In terms of education, the paper thus always had a focus on writing improvement with students. This paper has created substantial energy and excitement in ours and other schools.

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Introduction

Journalism is currently undergoing a particularly tumultuous but also fascinating time in many countries around the world. In recent decades we have detected an increasing awareness of and more attention being paid to what purpose journalism should serve in a multicultural society. We have seen this in journalism research and in society at large. The role of journalists in covering multicultural society has fixed a possible equivalent that they, through choices of resources, both can assigned to express problems regarding cultural, immigration and integration issues.

This paper will examine my experience teaching writing in a journalism context at National Taipei University of Business (NTUB) from 2016-2018, by way of the NTUBulletin, an English newspaper published once every three weeks during the semester. This newspaper was couched in a writing course, which was a change from the original intent of the class (more on this below).

The publication of this newspaper proved to be a rich learning and pedagogical experience for both the teacher and the students, which is the first step in my examination of this experience within a Life Education context. The second half of this equation, “Life,” is a view I did not take when I initially composed this analysis, but I have now realized that “Life” was very much in evidence throughout the composition, editing and design processes of the NTUBulletin. With this said, I am reworking this paper into a Life Education framework. One online Life Education program speaks of a valuable “Learning Cycle” for students that includes skills development, awareness, reflection, educational strategies and knowledge (“Life Education” [1]). Just such factors were at work at all times in this class. Another source writes that the main objective of life education is to “facilitate...students to develop mutual respect and a harmonious relationship among themselves, others, the environment and the universe

(“Life Education” [2]). In light of these comments, we can see the abundance and rich focus of Life Education, and though admittedly this educational pedagogy most often focuses on health proper in students, we will see its fundamental values at work in this pragmatic educational project. Students were indeed making good, healthy choices about their lives in this course, achieving a better apprehension of the actuality of themselves and others in their communities, which led to greater understanding and generosity toward the world around them.

To turn to education proper, teaching Journalism and News English are vital English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses seen throughout Asia. With their ample speaking, writing, creative and critical analysis opportunities, they are an ideal addition to any English- or foreign-language program. There is, simply put, much active, beneficial education to offer students in this class, and best of all, most students find it fun and fascinating. The joy of gathering and writing news, immersing in a news, media and

journalism environment, and writing stories and designing newspapers sparks great interest, and immerses students in the lives of members of their community, offering up beneficial outlooks and opportunities for development and growth---these things we focused on specifically frequently in our newspaper (you should see some of the probing feature articles and editorial comment that students produced, some which, such as articles about Chinese New Year or the Asian Tomb Sweeping and Ghost Month festivals, focus on deeply filial and to some extent spiritual topics).

I have myself been a professional journalist for 25 years, experience culminating not only this class, but in my frequent appearance as an editorialist and feature writer in the Taipei Times, an internationally distributed newspaper in Taiwan. I have taught News and Journalism English at several colleges in Taiwan, including full-fledged journalism English classes, and a number of smaller seminars and study groups. My class designs at these schools have been varied and detailed, drawing on my professional experience as a journalist and writer of other professional materials, and they have introduced students to all of the details associated with this profession, which is a well of rich educational – and again “life” – opportunity.

Journalism ESP courses can be among the most exciting to conduct for teachers, and they are always engaging for students, who share in the excitement and enjoy the pure pleasure of engaging in news writing, and discussing media topics and news. These courses are very challenging, offer valuable learning opportunities with rigorous academic demands, and provide rich creative and intellectual possibilities that are focused scholarly, pragmatically, and to some extent humanistically. Introducing news and journalism studies and media contexts into students lives and experience inserts them into current events, involves them in cultural diversity, brings them close to their communities, and in the best educational sense provides outstanding speaking, writing and analytical opportunities. Such opportunities demand much of teachers and students, such that in our “media-saturated age” with its “evolving ecosystem of journalism and community information,” journalism teachers “need to revive and revise media literacy” (Gillmor, 2009, 1). Several Universities do have at least one “cultural diversity” course in journalism and/or mass communication, and that ethnic diversity and sometime limited access of minorities to the journalism are being discussed in these courses. Although such hardly means that students will become specialized in the coverage of ethnic issues, they will usually have a few weeks of classes and several readings on the topic of cultural diversity, and related issues.

To continue on this line, it has been said that journalism is a principal influence in this “mediatized” society, where “ever more modes of social contact take place through mediated communication” (Dahlgren, 2005, 318). Through this mediation, cultural perceptions and national identity are represented and created. This conception introduces important academic points that can be taught to students, aiding them in understanding the complex functions of media in their lives. As they recognize this

concept, they become aware of exactly how media and journalism impact them, which opens their eyes to deeper consideration of communication matters. Related to this is the role of journalism in citizenship and national character. This is to say that the freedom of speech personified in journalism has become a key element of national existence and individuality in free, liberal democracies worldwide (which Taiwan certainly counts as). Students therefore gain a clearer picture of their own positions and obligations in national life. This relates to the idea of how a liberal education—including the study of media, journalism, writing and the like—can be a platform for better citizenship and community involvement, leading to better public dialogue and contribution to national issues. “Journalism is enabled by the democratic emphasis on freedom of speech, free will, and collective decision making” writes Papacharisi, (2001, ix) and “the purpose of the press is to promote and indeed improve...the quality of public or civic life” (Glaser, 1998, 204). Deuze continues that, “Contemporary research on journalism is inherently global in nature, therefore studies on journalism education need to identify shared questions and challenges rather than focusing on essentialized institutional or national particularities” (2009, 267). This all becomes a kind of Public Journalism, which will be briefly discussed below. In this wide orbit teachers can introduce their students to the broad possibilities of this field, and indicate how this training not only strengthens students’ writing and investigative skills, but also reinforces their collaboration in society. I have discussed this issue in my other writings indicated above.

All of the above again indicates the amazing prospect this class offers for students to discern inner and outer life in all their breadth and complexity, exploring contours of existence that strike at the heart of just what living in the most complete and cognizant way is all about. Here we see students making positive choices about their own education and impact in their community, resulting in vigorous, exploring minds replete with enthusiasm for discovery of the world around them, and their own ability to make a constructive difference.

One principal way I create interest and excitement in a course like this is by discussing the value of journalism education, and the possibilities for a career in journalism. Topics here include the creative side of news writing and production, the field’s role in society, the intellectual challenges and rewards of journalism, the story telling that is elemental to journalism writing, and the improved language and diagnostic skills that result from journalism study. Here again we see the value that this education brings to the lives of students.

The NTU Bulletin: Values, Methods and Output

I launched the NTU Bulletin project in spring 2016, in a News English class I was teaching at NTUB. The background is interesting, seeing how this formal, single-design newspaper emerged. Prior to spring 2016, in my news classes, I often had

students create newspapers, sometimes as final projects, and sometimes several times during the semester. At that time, however, my approach was different. On the one hand, at that time I taught this course with a standard Journalism focus, concentrating on core ideas and skills of this profession, as well as the history and culture of journalism and journalists (primarily in the United States). We used a journalism English textbook, and had a variety of exercises and readings during the semester dedicated to journalism proper. As this class was developed, I launched the idea of students designing their own papers every few weeks during the semester, with various groups of students each designing their own paper. Thus, as the semester proceeded, I received a variety of different designs from students, and we did not have a single unique design created by the class. Though this was fun and challenging for students, and they got in the essential journalism training and experience with a healthy dash of dynamic creativity, I found that readers of the paper were not as interested. When I piled up the many different designs on a news rack, it appeared somewhat messy, and readers were not as attracted. In fact, I found that few people picked up these papers at all. For this reason, I decided to launch a project in which the class as a whole, with my role as managing editor, created a single newspaper with one design. This proved to be quite popular with readers after spring 2016, and we distributed as many as 70 newspapers each issue. Thus the die was cast, and we had a much more appealing approach to our newspaper work.

This has continued to the present day, though there have been changes afoot. We have, for example, changed the design of the NTU Bulletin once. We have also encountered a few difficulties that we had to address, including the complaint of one reader that there were errors in reporting by students. In fact these errors were minor, but it was a good lesson in how to handle such an incident. Most important, I found in fall 2017 that a significant change would be necessary. This is that in this semester, NTUB discontinued my News English class. I found that I was left only with writing courses—which I felt would have to take up the project. I selected one of my writing courses, which I felt had stronger students. Admittedly this was a bit out of the ordinary, as this was technically a “composition” course, to be taught in the standard ways such a course is taught in a university. I redesigned the course, with the aim of publishing the newspaper, while always keeping the aim of “writing” in mind as the core study for students. With the cooperation of my class, we altered our aim, shifting from academic composition, to the creation of this newspaper. As noted, our intent remained the same with this new approach—the study of writing as writing, the construction of creative and well-written “compositions,” though in this case, in a journalistic format. This brings up an important point: How writing in a journalism mode can aid students in their other written academic work, and in turn any other writing they do. And indeed, some might critique my approach, saying that journalism writing is not at all like academic writing. But this is not true, and in fact journalism methods and approaches are very valuable in academic contexts (not least, simply the idea of gathering the Who- What-When-Where-Why and How of any topic being considered—and does not this again sound like an investigation of real life at

work?). Writing ordinary news stories can contribute to overall writing skills for students in substantive ways, and as well, higher-level “essays” are published in newspapers. There were three full-length essay compositions that students created in each issue of the NTU Bulletin, which did indeed exercise advanced writing skills with an academic flair. Two were feature articles written every issue (one a general human-interest feature article, and one an “Art Walk” feature that focused on arts in Taiwan; here I received outstanding stories about local subway art, a player of Japanese instruments and Okinawa folk music, a delightful feature on children’s art, a study of steampunk art in Taiwan, “poetry as medicine,” public art in Taiwan, and more; we see again the rich dynamism and variety that this course offers students). Another was our formal editorial (truly an exercise in significant essay writing and analysis, through which I saw outstanding essays written about gay marriage law in Taiwan, gambling debates in the country, the global warming issue and Donald Trump’s role, and Taiwan’s diplomatic maneuvers). I have commented on the value of these types of writing in terms of a Life Education understanding above.

In addition to these works, students wrote general news articles for the paper, which are in some ways different from academic composition, but do in fact exercise valuable writing skills that can be used in any form of writing—and again as noted get students in touch with everyday life and the world. Don’t forget that almost all journalists typically refer to themselves as “writers” when discussing their careers. That is, they are focused on writing as such, and improving these skills. One UNESCO report, “A Reflective Model for Teaching Journalism,” says that journalism education can develop in students “self-reliance, confidence, problem solving, and adaptability, while simultaneously gaining knowledge and developing a sense of efficacy in their ability to negotiate inherent dilemmas in practice.” Genuine Life skills we see here, and these are exactly the skills that students want and need, which capture the true value of journalism writing in education. I have found that Taiwanese students are in general fascinated by this, and eager to study these topics. UNESCO includes the following “problem-based learning methodology” that develops “skills in critical reflection.” This model nicely encapsulates a real-world approach to scholarship, writing and analysis, and what sorts of approaches students can take as they learn and write:

1. Start with issues that begin in the real world.
2. You are here...what will you do now?
3. Topics put the real world in a theoretical context.
4. Subjects critically reflect on real world problems.
5. Themes recognize the nature of the problem and decisions to be made.
6. Matters identify processes for resolving problems.
7. Areas critically reflect on processes used on problems.

We can see in the above the value of this approach in developing essential writing, analytical and awareness skills in college students, and in sum an approach that encompasses the values of Life Education.

As our class unfolded, and we began our once-every-three-weeks publishing timetable, I took on a fairly prominent role as the managing editor of student work. I modified this approach in some ways as the class proceeded. Simply put, I began by simply editing each story that crossed my desk—our aim was always near-perfect English in the newspaper; it was not intended to be unalloyed “student work,” but a professional publication equal to any major newspaper. In a sense this is no different from what I do in any composition course: I correct and edit student papers, which they can review and learn from. But initially in the NTU Bulletin it was a bit different, in that I edited the student work, but did not hand back to them the edited papers for their review. They were able to observe the edits, and could compare this to their original work (and indeed several said they did exactly this), but generally speaking this method was not what was usually expected in a “composition” course, where students receive corrected papers back from the teacher. This method changed, however, and later in the semester I began to edit student writing, on paper, and I returned these to students, and told them to make the corrections, and get the work back to me. We thus engaged in a two- and three-step editing process that very much involved the students, and brought them into a genuinely active and engaged writing process. I found this was a superior method and I continued with it. I gave students a score of 0-100 on all of their stories and kept these records. At the end of the course I averaged these grades, observed student attendance and behavior, calculated how many stories each group had published, and gave them a final score.

The design processes of the paper were handled by two students, and I made minimum suggestions about design (I later took on a much more prominent role in design). Though this skill is somewhat different from what is normally expected in college composition, it is not wholly outside the needs and experience of writing for students. I have long found that designing papers (most importantly final papers, theses, dissertations and the like) is not only a good idea and more attractive for readers, but can also add to the import of one’s work. Design, in a word, works hand in hand with one’s actual writing, and contributes to the content and substance of a paper.

I advised students on these skills, and even gave a PPT presentation in which I examined design skills and visual displays in papers. This included important points such as the idea of graphical integrity, rendering pictures as instruments for reasoning about quantitative information, thinking about the reader’s “eye,” and enriching the density, complexity and multidimensionality of displays and information. Consider this idea in terms of Life Education, how students find the “design” of their lives adds to the content of their interaction with others. I have a number of PPTs I used about various elements of journalism writing, and also an examination of Public Journalism,

which I hoped to introduce to students in order to motivate them to try to employ this approach. Public Journalism is a movement in the United States that attempts to situate newspapers and journalists as active participants in community life, rather than as detached observers. It seeks to make newspapers forums for discussion of community issues, enablers of diversity in localities, and processes of discussion and debate among members of the community. Public Journalism is a communitarian idea, holistic, in a sense philanthropic, and a method I hoped students would embrace, as I am sure this approach can improve and deepen student writing and awareness.

The semester proceeded, and we got out our papers every three weeks, on time, on deadline (and there is another key life skill for students to study and master).

Student Response

I examined student response not in a fully analytical context, but by way of a survey I gave them asking about life education in this class. This survey was taken somewhat early in the fall 2019 class, and so students might not have had the complete picture on what they were receiving, but it may nevertheless be useful in seeing how they felt. In the past I had surveyed students about their general feelings about the class and whether they had learned about writing, and I have reported these findings in other papers.

The present survey included six questions, which included the following:

1. Have you found this course to be a rich learning experience?
2. Life Education is said to be a process in which you can make healthier choices about how you live through education. Do you feel you are getting that in this course?
3. Have you achieved a better apprehension of the actuality of yourself and your educational life in this course?
4. Have you felt more connected to your community in this course?
5. One program speaks of a valuable "Learning Cycle" for students that includes skills development, awareness, reflection, educational strategies and knowledge. Do you feel you are getting this in this course?
6. Have you felt you have been given a "window onto life and your world" in this course?

In general the answers to these questions were positive. A number of students simply spoke about how the course had helped in their English writing, a fundamental educational aim in this course. Question 1 was a unanimous "yes," which is a strong indication of the values and quality of this course. A handful of students expressed doubt about question 2. In some senses this question is a bit more abstract, and "making healthy choices" is not how students feel about education in Taiwan. There

were also a few “no” answers on question 6, and again a “window onto the world” is a bit immaterial, though other students said the paper had helped them to know the world better and see with new eyes. One said “publishing the newspaper has really helped me get to know the world better.” Otherwise the answers were overwhelmingly answered “yes.” Students spoke of how they felt more active and involved in their publics, with one student answering, “through the process of publishing the newspaper I have felt more connected to my community” (a touch of “Public Journalism,” which I talked to students about and encouraged them to see their work this way).

Perhaps best of all, one student answered question 3 by saying “I have achieved better apprehension of life,” another answered this question with “I have a better recognition of myself,” and one said “I have learned to be more responsible in this course.” Two answered question 2 by writing “Yes, of course. I’m on my way!” and “I think I will get better and better.”

In sum I felt satisfied with the results of this non-scientific survey.

Conclusion

This concludes my examination of my work with the NTU Bulletin during the last few years. This class continued in fall 2018 into January 2019, and met with even better response from students. In a similar questionnaire I gave to students (which limited answers to “Agree” and “Disagree”), the results were astonishing. Fully 100% of the answers agreed with the questions. To continue, in terms of ideas and suggestions about how to conduct the course, in 2019 several students enthusiastically said “Thank you!” and so this was rewarding for the teacher. In a similar vein, one student said “I think that it’s a great experience to learn journalism writing. It’s my first time to do this. I also think it’s cool and when I see my work published, it makes me feel a sense of accomplishment,” and several other students similarly stated that the class had increased their personal confidence and confidence in their writing. Another student said “We also have to work together to complete the news, which let us learn a lot during this class,” and others students agreed with this observation.

This class had real significance in terms of diversity (the bulk of the student have been Taiwanese students, with males and females, with a few students from others countries including Myanmar and Indonesia), and Asian student education, which I have been involved with for many years. Students proved to be remarkably skillful and efficacious in these journalism skills (which were in essence outside their normal areas of study), and as the very first English language newspaper in NTUB, the NTU Bulletin had real import for students at NTUB, professors, and many readers at other schools. During publication, I have been asked to distribute copies to other schools, and speak about the experience of publication and training in the course.

I hope this sketch has given a clear picture of the value of this newspaper to my students, and how it has bolstered their writing skills, and given them a look into a professional practice, which I am sure some of them will enter after graduation. I am very happy about the results, and confident that this writing instruction, though different in significant ways from what is usually expected in a “composition” course in Taiwan, was of real substance to students, and can be applied to all of their college writing. I have seen students develop their skills in enthusiastic ways, received great feedback and enjoyed seeing student work published in a professional format. These rewards have been great for me and for students.

To conclude on a note that introduced this paper, in addition to the practical skills I have described, I feel that students have been given a window onto life and their world that they have eagerly embraced. They have responded in healthful, positive ways as they have constructed stories that reflect and describe the communities they live in, their neighbors, classmates, and many others. That is a Life Education that I have seen they value, and I feel they will continue to appreciate. Though as noted I did not initially view the class this way, to do so now has been extremely gratifying.

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