RESEARCH ONLINE

Asia Pacific Media Educator

Issue 2 Article 16

1-1-1997

Journalism practice informs new multicultural journalism course

P. White
SBS Radio Training

David Blackall
University of Wollongong, dblackal@uow.edu.au

Recommended Citation
White, P. and Blackall, David, Journalism practice informs new multicultural journalism course, *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 2, 1997, 127-130.
Available at:http://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss2/16

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

RESEARCH ONLINE

Journalism Practice Informs New Multicultural Journalism Course

A new 24 credit point Graduate Certificate in Multicultural Journalism is being offered by the University of Wollongong. Developed in consultation with Special Broadcasting Services (SBS) Radio division, the course emphasises cultural sensitivity in the presentation of news and current affairs. The curriculum is tailored to provide skills for news media professionals in translating news from English to other languages. This is the case in SBS radio where mainstream English language (sourced from AAP and similar wire and online services) is translated into 68 different languages. Thus in developing the curriculum, SBS Radio becomes a valuable resource for case studies and experience.

Peter White & David Blackall

SBS Radio Training & University of Wollongong

The news media in multicultural countries such as Australia are notable for their linguistic and cultural diversity. Australia features many newspapers in languages other than English as well as a diversity of non-English language programming both from community-funded radio and television broadcasters, and from the government-funded Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). This diversity raises a number of interesting challenges and opportunities for media educators.

The established tradition of journalistic training is invariably designed to meet the professional needs of a news culture which is monolingual and largely monocultural. The journalistic training objectives are likewise premised on the assumption that the news market is basically monocultural. With increasing diversity in language, cultural and ethnic mix in Australia, journalism educators, must of necessity, rethink the assumption that the English language mainstream media necessarily provides the only legitimate approach to the journalistic enterprise.

The Graduate School of Journalism at the University of Wollongong has this year introduced a new course designed specifically to address these issues. Its Graduate Certificate in Multicultural Journalism is intended to provide training for

©AsiaPacific MediaEducator
Issue No.2
Jan-June 1997

journalists who wish to develop a culturally and linguistically diverse approach to their profession. It is expected much of the interest in the course will come from journalists working in community radio and at SBS. However, practitioners from English language media organisations will also be attracted to the course as a means of developing their expertise to deal with the multicultural and multilingual reality of contemporary Australian society. (The 1997 first semester enrolments have, in fact, included both English language and non-English language broadcasters).

The strength of the course is built on the unique strategic alliance between the SBS and the Graduate School of Journalism. The theoretical components are complemented by the multi-language and cross-cultural experience of SBS Radio journalists. The course's centrepiece is the subject, Multicultural Journalism, which explores both the theory and practice of journalism in the context of contemporary Australian society. Multicultural journalism will be informed by the SBS experience as much as it will be from the research and experience of the teaching academics.

The Multicultural Journalism subject includes the following modules:

1. **The community-oriented journalist and coverage of political controversy and conflict.**

- Theories of journalistic objectivity and impartiality
- Rhetorical impartiality and reporting community ideological differences and disputes.
- Impartiality and reporting power struggles within community groups.
- Media bias, ideology and the reporting of national and inter-ethnic conflicts and warfare.

2. **News values and multicultural perspectives.**

- Mono-culturalism — the theory and practice of mainstream news selection.
- The role, ideology and cultural perspective of the international wire services.
- Alternative, cross-cultural, counter-cultural, post-colonial and indigenous perspectives on news values.
- News values and community-based journalism.

3. **Journalism and theories of multiculturalism, cultural identity and racism.**

- Cultural identity as a social, ideological construct.
- Minority groups as social/political constructs.
- The politics of racism.
- Mainstream stereotyping and reporting of ethnic minorities.
- Theories and practice of multiculturalisme.

- Strategies for challenging stereotyping and racism.

4. **Cross-cultural approaches to story telling and the news report - the ideology and rhetoric of news story style and structure.**

- The culturally determined nature of 'narrative' structures.
- The mainstream news story as a rhetorical device: cultural and ideological consequences.
- Alternative modes of story telling.

The practical component of the course stems from an ongoing research programme into the experiences of SBS radio and television journalists, consultations with community broadcasters, a study of journalistic practices in societies outside Australia and the journalistic experience of one of the course presenters as ethnic affairs reporter for the Sydney Morning Herald.

Its theoretical components are derived from both sociological and linguistic disciplines. In terms of social theory it will rely on recent work into culture, identity, racism and the media from a post-colonial perspective. (See, for example, Joel S. Kahn's recent, *Culture, Multiculture, Postculture,* and the collection of essays, *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media,* edited by Andrew Jakubowicz).

It will also bring insights into the language, textual structure and rhetorical impact of news writing provided by the sociologically informed theory of language known as Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). This linguistic theory has been developed over the past several decades by the linguist M.A.K. Halliday and his followers at the University of Sydney and other universities in Australia and overseas. Functional grammar provides the tools to go beyond simple content analysis to explore how basic vocabulary choices, grammatical structures and general patterns of textual development may reflect unstated but, nevertheless, powerful cultural, social and ideological values and objectives. It provides the tool to develop systematic comparisons of the rhetoric of news reporting across languages and cultures.

It is not possible in the current context to provide a detailed account of the cross-cultural comparisons which will be developed during the course. It is possible, however, to provide a brief exemplification of one of the phenomena which will be central to the course's theoretical agenda.

Those familiar with traditional journalistic training texts will be aware of the importance of the so-called 'inverted pyramid' as the primary model of news reporting textual structure. The 'inverted pyramid' is typically presented as the 'standard' in English language reporting and, in some cases, the only mode of

'hard news' reporting. Cross cultural and cross-linguistic analysis, however, quickly reveals that the 'inverted pyramid' structure is by no means so dominant nor widespread in non-English language journalism. To go beyond English-language 'hard news' reporting is to immediately encounter a range of alternative 'standards' for 'hard news' reporting. One such alternative is illustrated by the following translation of a front page report from the leading French daily, *Libération:*

> *Five-past-two in the morning, yesterday, in the town of Brighton, in the south of England. In the bar of the Grand Hotel, the last Conservative Party parliamentarians prepare to return to their rooms. Margaret Thatcher, in her office, puts the finishing touches to the closing speech of the annual conference of her party. The hotel is inhabited by almost the entirety of her cabinet, politicians and deputees Suddenly there is an explosion. The Irish Republican Army has planted a bomb on the third storey. Margaret Thatcher is alive but four people have been killed, thirty others injured including a minister and deputy. After the shock passes, faithful to her image, the British Prime Minister announces that the conference will continue.* (Libération, 13-14 Oct., 1984 p.1)

The coverage of the unsuccessful 1984 IRA bombing attack on the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, could never have been structured, as above, if Libération had been subject to the English language régime of the 'inverted pyramid'.

It is felt then, that this course stands at a leading edge of multicultural journalism education as it interacts with 68 languages in the SBS journalism context. The curriculum will develop organically and interactively; as much from the culturally diverse and professional student body at SBS Radio as it will from resources within the Graduate School of Journalism and academe internationally. Thus, the course will involve the advice and insights of both experienced journalists and academic journalism educators. The curriculum development through a blend of 68 languages, and a critical university and professional mix, makes this course unique in its applicability to the changing contexts of a multicultural and international news market. ■

DAVID BLACKALL lectures at the Graduate School of Journalism, University of Wollongong (Email: david_.blackall@uow.edu.au). PETER WHITE works at SBS Radio Training and lectures in Linguistics at Sydney University (Email: pwhite@mail.usyd.edu.au)