Issues in Educational Leadership in Papua New Guinea: A Communication Arts Curriculum Case Study

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Abstract

This paper seeks to contribute to the 2004 review of the Communication Arts Department curriculum at Divine Word University. It examines the way in which the curriculum has developed since the Department began offering courses in 1979, discussing both the practical and ideological influences that have shaped its construction. Originally the course focused on training students to work in the mainstream media. Now the Department would like to expand its curriculum in order to respond to the wider communication needs in the country. Planning the new curriculum is presented as an issue of leadership.

Introduction

Papua New Guinea is committed to development, according to its Constitution's National Goals and Directive Principles (Constitution, p. 2). National development can even be seen as the reason for PNG's existence as an independent state (Moore, 1995, p. 71). The goals and principles promote integral human development, equality and participation, national sovereignty and self-reliance, the very principles that were fundamental to traditional PNG societies, it is claimed (Chalmers & Paliwala, 1984, p. 114). However, these noble traditions and the Christian values mentioned in the Constitution, which, arguably, have never been used effectively as a framework for development (Cox, 1999, p. 10), may be traced back to the colonial system upon which the nation was constructed. It is worth questioning whether, in the headlong rush for development - an ambiguous concept (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 30), full of dilemmas and paradoxes (Jayaweera, 1987, p. 78), a package containing both desirable and undesirable features (Smyth, 1977, p. 3) - we have abandoned these principles and allowed contrary ones to overtake us, thereby ignoring truly human values (Kukari & Ogoba 1999, p. 55) and the real needs of PNG.

This paper looks at the curriculum prescribed for the Communication Arts (Journalism) Department at Divine Word University, Madang. It begins to examine this curriculum's appropriateness as an educational instrument in the developing nation of Papua New Guinea. Firstly I will review the concepts of hegemony, globalisation and education in post-colonial PNG. Then I will provide a context, situating the Communication Arts (CA) Department within the University's mission. Some historical analysis of the CA curricula follows, including discussion of reviews conducted in 1988 and 1998. Finally I will

analyse some issues concerning the direction our curriculum might take in the light of another full review being undertaken this year.

Key concepts

Hegemony

Researchers have examined the concept of hegemony in relation to the cultural dominance of one group of people over another. 'Hegemony' is the term used by Gramsci to designate a ruling ideology which flourishes with the apparent compliance of its victims (McQuail, 1987, p. 66). The dominant group reinterprets reality from the perspective of the elite, constituting a new field of truth (Pagelio, 2002, p. 187). Hegemony has been described as a euphemism for empire (Chomsky, 2003, p. 30) and as a subtle inclusive power over a country's economy (Pagelio, 2002, p. 13). The dominant power may be convinced that it is engaging altruistically in the provision of international public goods (Chomsky, 2003, p. 30) to needy neighbours, while remaining intentionally ignorant (Chomsky, 2003, p. 42) of the irreparable damage being done to people's lives in the process. These international public goods, according to the development discourse, will deliver a better life, but only if people subscribe to the capitalist free-market system (Kukari & Ogoba, 1999, p. 54). Capitalism is portrayed as the only system which will deliver real benefits to the community (Gewertz & Errington, 1999, p. 26). In fact people will be disadvantaged and even penalised if they do not subscribe to capitalism (Hickling Hudson, 2000, p. 129), the discourse asserts. These recalcitrants (Melkote, 1991, p. 26) will miss out on the industrialisation that will bring employment and, supposedly, a better standard of living (Buck et al, 1983, p. 107). Proponents of capitalism see the mass media as the instruments of education, providing information which will change people's attitudes (Melkote, 1991, p. 188).

Yet the dissenting voices say that while the paradigm of capitalism may have worked well in western countries (Melkote, 1991, p. 96), the metastasis of capitalism into PNG is rapidly eroding its cultures (Kukari & Ogoba, 1999, p. 55).

Globalisation

In spite of postmodernism's rejection of the concept of a single universal rallying point, a single overarching orderly schema (O'Farrell, 1999, p. 14), it seems that the world has been seduced by the pervasive and persuasive (Yamuna, 2002, p. 493) imperialism inherent in the western idea of globalisation (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 408). PNG's Constitution encourages the nation to be free from every form of domination or oppression (Directive Principle 1) and to undertake wise assessments of foreign ideas and values (Directive Principle 3). However, it seems that we have excused the western concept of globalisation from any rigorous form of wise assessment, particularly in relation to its dominating and oppressive characteristics. The advocates of globalisation promote western values, often claiming that they

merely constitute good practice which will benefit everyone. They believe that globalisation fosters equality amongst people, a certain homogeneity that helps all people to form one community. Such beliefs are sustained by the self-legitimising myths (Foskett & Lumby, 2003, p.8) that surround western values. However, globalisation can also be seen as a new form of colonisation (Pagelio, 2002, p. 18) which moves people towards a confused uniformity. It is insensitive to the beauty of diversity (Narokobi, 1987, p. 157) and militates against the celebration of difference (Foskett & Lumby, 2003, p. 13). Globalisation promotes a model of consumer growth that relies on the overuse of resources (Hickling-Hudson, 1999, p. 84), say its critics. This model simply cannot be sustained in many developing countries, including PNG.

Education in post-colonial PNG

Education is seen by many people in PNG as the gateway to cash employment (Matane, 1986, p. 1), socialising students into the modern state (Demerath, 2000, p. 11). People assume that there is a close relationship of dependence between education, development and modernisation (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 33). But much modern development theory is predicated on Eurocentric ideas (Kukari & Ogoba, 1999, p. 54), because indigenous systems seem to curtail progress (Gewertz & Errington, 1999, p. 14). Indigenous systems have even been vilified to such an extent that children grew up with negative attitudes towards their cultural heritage (Trapnell, 2003, p. 9). The 19th century sociologist Auguste Comte believed that the scientific elite should solve social problems, thereby weakening the influence of traditional social and religious systems that were stifling progress (Baird, 1997).

Western education is regarded by some as an elitist system designed to achieve economic growth (Smyth, 1977, p. 4) in a free market economy, built on the assumption that all participants are acquisitive, individualistic (Jayaweera, 1987, p. 82), autonomous and competitive persons (Kukari & Ogoba, 1999, p. 54). The egalitarianism (Gewertz & Errington, 1999, p.2) that rated collectivism as more valuable than individualism in indigenous communities is now replaced, in the western educational model, by a culture of inequality and exclusivity where the successful competitors progress up the socio-economic ladder (Demerath, 2000, p. 12) at others' expense. In this model the focus is on informing the individual rather than changing systemic inequities (Buck et al, 1983, p. 109). Marxist theorists Bowles and Gintis describe the western beliefs about equal educational opportunity and meritocracy as a façade which simply protects the wealthy (Blackledge & Hunt, 1991, p. 138). Schools reproduce this dominant ideology, alienating students from their ethnic ways (Yamuna, 2002, p. 494) and maintaining education as an instrument of neo-colonialism (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 30).

Tertiary institutions especially locate students firmly in a western educational milieu (McLaughlin, 1994, p. 63), and Divine Word University (DWU) offers its own particular kind of western international education.

Context

According to its vision statement, DWU is a Christian university, open to all, serving society through its teaching and research in a Christian environment. DWU's vision together with its corresponding mission statement and charter show how DWU simultaneously embraces the national goals as stated in the PNG Constitution (National Goals and Directive Principles, No 1) and the Catholic Church's goals of promoting justice, peace and integral human development (Gaudium et Spes, 39). Christian churches in PNG are key players in the nation's development, with their education and health networks being highly influential instruments of modernisation and westernisation. Whiteman (1984) writes that missionaries, both expatriate and national, can be placed along the continuum that separates cultural brokers at one end from cultural destroyers at the other. He also argues that Christianity has been adopted as an effective way of coping with the inevitable disruption that change brings to cultural systems in PNG (Whiteman, 1984, p. 97).

In all courses at DWU students are encouraged to become competent and ethical professionals, so that they can help to overcome the serious leadership deficiencies in the country. In what can be regarded as a culturally naïve process, it is expected that if students are exposed to information (Buck et al., 1983, p. 108) then they will accept western models of leadership, and gradually begin to reform leadership in the country. But the western ethics in the DWU courses are often at odds with traditional ways and with what have become systemic practices in the students' own places. What is taught, as well as the language used, both have an alienating and frustrating effect on students (McLaughlin, 1997, p. 90).

There is little attempt in many DWU courses to integrate western practice with traditional PNG values. Anecdotal evidence suggests that leaders educated in the western models have not significantly improved the quality of leadership exercised in certain fields in the country. It can be argued that the western leadership structures that encourage divisions and promote unequal relations are merely perpetuating the oppressive aspects of neo-colonialism (Pagelio, 2002, p. 19) and preventing the development of authentic PNG leadership.

DWU students appreciate their privileged minority status. They are acutely aware of the burden of responsibility that a university education places upon them in the PNG context, especially in relation to the 'gateway to cash employment' idea mentioned above. Some students have even withdrawn from courses simply because they think they will not cope with the financial demands that will be placed on them for the duration of their working lives. They often speak about their dilemma of living in this western University culture while trying to maintain tenuous links with their traditional roots.

In 2004 DWU offers courses leading to diplomas and degrees in ten Departments. One of these Departments is Communication Arts (Journalism), offering the only full-time journalism program available in PNG.

The DWU Communication Arts Department

The Communication Arts (CA) Department at DWU began offering courses in 1979, and has educated students who now work in the print media, in radio and in television in PNG, and in information offices, media units, public relations (PR) offices and non-government organizations (NGOs). It aims to produce well-rounded media professionals, with a range of relevant skills, who will play an important role in the future of the country (DWU, 2002, p. 2). Lecturers at the diploma level treat journalism as a craft to be learned by hands-on practice (DWU, 2001, p. 56), so they place an emphasis on the practical skills that are required in the workplace.

Students are selected for Communication Arts (CA) on the basis of high marks in Grade 12 English, a professed interest in journalism and good references. Other influences are also at work during the selection process. In spite of the departmental selection committee's judgment that only a small number of students should be enrolled due to the limitations of our equipment, we were required to select 38 applicants this year, lest we lose HECAS funded places at the university. Most of the students in CA come directly from high school, with women outnumbering men by a ratio of two to one. Some mature age students are also enrolled after working in the media, business, education or public relations, provided that they can demonstrate appropriate English language skills.

The CA Department regards English language skills as fundamental for all its students, as many media organisations work in English. First year students take compulsory semester courses in written communication skills (5 hours per week) and in verbal communication skills (4 hours per week). However, current staff members strongly believe that in order to promote better communications throughout all levels of PNG society, we should spend more time developing students' skills in *tok pisin* (Rooney, 2003b, p. 87).

Curriculum

The CA Department, together with its companion Business Studies Department, have both been vocationally oriented from their beginnings. Journalists experienced in western media models designed the CA program in response to a need to train people who could be immediately employed in the country's media outlets. But the privately owned media in PNG are constrained by the realities of the business world. They serve the leaders and the opinion makers in the elite communities and the mainly English speaking expatriates in the country (Rooney, 2003b, p. 80). The 72% of adults in PNG who are deemed to be illiterate (United Nations, 1999, p.110) are therefore alienated from the media, denied the equal opportunities called for in the Constitution (Directive Principle 2.1) and denied the basic human right to communicate (Goonasekera, 1987, p. 69). The media can be seen as agents of power rather than agents of the people (Robie, 1996, p. 81). The powerful over-access the media and become the primary definers of the news (Rooney, 2003a, p. 123) and the targets for the advertisers. By continuing to educate journalists to work

in the media in PNG, it can be argued, the CA Department is merely contributing to the perpetuation of this hegemony, and not addressing the wider communication needs of the nation.

The Maslog review

After undertaking a review of the CA curriculum in 1988, Crispin Maslog from the Philippines recommended that journalism at DWU be expanded into a course in Development Communication (Maslog, 1988, p. 2), and that an existing Philippino model be introduced into the Department. It was thought that this new thrust in communications education would attract both funding and students, as happened in South America and the Philippines. But from 1991 to 1994 only four students graduated with Bachelors degrees in Development Communication. No extra funding appeared and the degree programme was discontinued. In spite of its strengths, especially its plan to educate students away from the western hegemonic model of media, the program was not driven by the realities of communication in PNG. It lacked the support of the communications sector. The program was not PNG homegrown, nor was sufficient time allowed for it to be adapted to the needs of the country.

In recent correspondence one of the graduates recalled that she enjoyed doing the course, but she felt that the constant references to studies conducted in the Philippines did not help the students to apply their knowledge in the PNG context. With the benefit of hindsight we suggest that with patience and perseverance the course could have become quite relevant and sustainable in PNG. Its three idealistic, well-intentioned expatriate designers remained only a short time in the country, leaving behind no person qualified to continue the program.

Development communication

Theories of development have abounded. Sustainable development was the catch-cry for a time, as was the GNP approach, followed by the trickle-down strategy, the basic needs identification, the equity model and the quality of life (Dahlan, 1987, p. 193). Each theory assumed that communication was a vital element in the development process (Goonasekera, 1987, p. 64). Development communication theory has also matured in step with development theories. When the revolution of rising expectations became a spiral of rising frustrations and as the capitalist ideal came to be seen as neither desirable nor attainable (Jayaweera, 1987, p. 84), self-reliance and partnerships were identified as the way forward. User-initiated activities, self-help programs and grassroots participation required two-way communication. Development problems were reassessed as having less to do with lack of information and more to do with structural inequities, a lack of resources and a lack of involvement by people. Instead of blaming the victims, it was seen as more accurate to blame the way information programs were conceptualised, designed and delivered. Information was to be delivered to the whole community and not just to selected individuals, as occurred in the western models of education. A

high level of comprehension of messages was to be aimed at, with development support communicators helping the beneficiaries to bridge the gap between the ordinary people and the technical experts in particular fields (Melkote, 1991, p. 263). They would use such means as group media, folk media, posters, photos, comics, drama, puppetry and music. Communication processes were expected to move towards empathy, truth and a sense of responsibility, with a focus on empowering the marginalised in the name of total human development (Ramirez, 1987, p. 227).

Social change is central to development journalism's mission. Western journalism's so-called 'commitment to objectivity' is replaced by a commitment to the local community. Communicators are not neutral observers but rather participants in community affairs (Bowd, 2003, p. 126).

Inspired with his new vision that Communication Arts graduates should be prepared to work in development communication as well as the mainstream media in PNG, Maslog designed a program offering the following units of study:

The Maslog Curriculum	
1. Communication for Community Development	7. Communication for Political Development
2. Communication & Culture	8. Organisational Communication
3. Communication & Christian Values	9. Fundamentals of Group Communication
4. Communication Policies & Planning	10. Communication Campaigns
5. Community Newspaper Management & Production	11. Educational Broadcasting for Rural Development
6. Development & Science Reporting	12. Communication Processes & Models

The Jefferson review

After 1996, all courses at DWU were reviewed in order to expand and strengthen them to university standard. The new report into the CA curriculum, undertaken by former BBC editorial executive John Jefferson in 1998, criticised the Maslog proposals as unworkable and unhelpful for students about to take up work in the existing PNG media.

Jefferson came to evaluate the CA department's contribution to journalism education in terms of its stated aims of forming well-rounded professionals. Jefferson found that students graduating with a CA Diploma in Journalism were ill equipped for the requirements of the media, especially with regard to both English language and technology skills. He judged that the student-produced magazine, *Diwai*, demonstrated a level of language skills that tertiary institutions should not accept. He attributed the students' low levels of practical skills to insufficient emphasis on the writing courses and to a lack of equipment

in the department (Jefferson, 1998, p. 5). These criticisms caused the staff to reassess their approach to teaching in the CA department. They saw that the only way forward in this situation was to re-emphasise the practical skills and to introduce students to media technologies. They realised that the wider community's generally accepted levels of functional literacy in English were just not appropriate for journalism students and had to be dramatically improved. Maslog's curriculum aimed to produce 'well-educated' people who would be trained in the technical skills after they joined the workforce. On the other hand, Jefferson recommended that the technical skills should be well taught first, and if students graduated with a desire to begin their learning for life, then they would achieve success in the media industry.

The Jefferson Curriculum	
1. Verbal communication skills	8. Journalism ethics
2. Written communication skills	9. Community reporting
3. Computing for reporters	10. Feature writing
4. News and current affairs awareness	11. Layout and design
5. PNG Infrastructure	12. Broadcast journalism
6. Basic reporting	13. Media Law
7. Introduction to news photography	

Jefferson's new course outline came directly from the model used for newspaper training in England (Rooney, 2003b, p. 77). The English trade school course has now become a Divine Word University course. While staff members agree that his course has helped the students to develop their language skills, there are concerns that the other skills he emphasises bear no relation to the needs of the majority of people in PNG. For example the course directs students of community reporting to concentrate on official sources, meetings, major events, telephone interviews and important speeches for their stories. Clearly this approach does not recognise that the needs of PNG communities are vastly different from the needs of communities in Britain. The ordinary people in PNG are not seen as capable of generating material for stories in community reporting. The course on feature writing included travel, leisure and pleasure topics, television and cinema reviews, all of which are far removed from the world of the ordinary PNG person. Jefferson claimed that there was an international consensus about what should be taught to potential journalists and that journalism was essentially vocational rather than academic (Jefferson, 1998, p. 1). This is clearly not the case. The issue is still being debated (Herbert, 1996, p. 61).

Vigorous debate has taken place in academic circles concerning the theoretical foundations of journalism since the days of Joseph Pulitzer who, in 1904, proclaimed that journalism would one day be as prestigious a discipline as law or medicine (Adam, 2001, p. 315). Journalism educators understand that serious divisions exist between theory and practice (Bromley, 2001, p. 251) and some write about the battle lines in the media wars (Burns, 1999, p. v), with the journalism theorists pitted against the practitioners. The former argue that unless a sound theoretical base is found for journalism, the discipline will

retain its inferior ranking (Oakham, 1998, p. 24), well below law or medicine. The latter assert that they are the 'real journalists' (Burns, 1999, p. v). There is a schism within academia about what is the best preparation for journalism (Day, 2002, p. 1), although there is some recognition that journalism needs to build connections with academic culture (Adam, 2001, p. 324). Brief outlines of five journalism programs at Australian universities, for example, indicate that theory is always combined with hands-on experience (Day, 2002, p. 5), as educators walk the tightrope between professional and academic emphases (Johansen et al., 2001, p. 481).

Jefferson encouraged us to take a broad view of the situation. He recommended that DWU should rekindle its relationship with professional media associations including the Media Council and the Journalists Association. He saw an urgent need for interaction between people in the media industry and the students and staff at DWU, in order to raise the university's profile as a trainer of journalists, and to give students practical experience of the media in action. Jefferson called for the staff to recognise the real 'handicaps' that PNG students bring with them to the university, particularly under-developed English skills, lack of knowledge of current affairs and little media familiarity (Jefferson, 1998, p. 1). Many PNG school students are taught English by fellow fourth language English speakers in a non-reading culture with little opportunity for immersion in the language (McLaughlin, 1997, p. 92). The units now studied by students in their first, or 'foundation', semester are designed to address these handicaps. Following Jefferson's judgement that DWU was being left far behind in the field of education in technology, students are now taught how to use modern electronic media equipment.

As far back as 1993 the diploma program outline maintained that 'the stress is on actual writing rather than exposure to theory' (DWI, 1993, p.78), but this stress seems to have varied over the years according to the academic or practical backgrounds of staff. Even today DWU is unequivocal about journalism at the diploma level being a craft rather than an academic pursuit. The emphasis remains firmly on the practical skills training, the 'how' of journalism. But that is not to say that the 'why' of journalism is ignored. Formation is taking place rather than an apprenticeship (Adam, 2001, p. 318). This emphasis is about to change, as it is now believed that our curriculum should move away from the specifically trade school approach to include critical evaluation, political philosophy and PNG cultural issues (Rooney, 2003b, p. 85) as well as regenerating development journalism.

The 2004 review

As this paper is being prepared, another review of the CA curriculum is in progress. So far we have initiated a strategy to canvass the issues, obtain input, realign our vision for the department and construct a reformed curriculum. All stakeholders are being surveyed, including present and past students, media executives and employees, provincial government information officers, representatives from NGOs, PR officers, community leaders, academics and ordinary citizens.

According to continually updated information kept in the Department, former CA students seem to have an excellent record of finding employment, even in recent years when enrolments have increased. In 2001, 13 students graduated with a diploma; 5 continued their studies, and 8 found work - 5 in the mainstream media, 1 in a government department, 1 in teaching and 1 in publishing. In 2002, 33 students graduated, with 20 now working, 11 continuing their studies and 2 unaccounted for. Likewise in 2003, 34 students graduated, with 21 now working, 11 studying and the remaining 2 not in paid employment. It is difficult to refute the suggestion that this situation cannot continue, given the limited places available in mainstream journalism. Our current diploma students assume that very few of their number will find employment in the mainstream media. Naturally they are asking for the curriculum's focus on journalism skills to be broadened to accommodate the needs of other communications fields. When choosing work experience placements, they are tending to move away from the mainstream media, opting instead to work with other organisations which have indicated a willingness to accept them in the communications field.

Jefferson found that CA graduates were not properly skilled in written communication to meet the needs of the media in 1998. This was his conclusion after hearing judgements from media representatives. Employers have told us that they have been happy enough with the performance of our recent graduates, but they are now wanting even more from them. They agree with the critics that journalistic endeavour in the country needs to be strengthened (Rooney, 2003b, p. 82). They want to employ journalists with degrees in Economics, Politics, Law, Sociology, Business, Marketing and History. However, our current policy of enrolling mostly school leavers prevents us from meeting that demand.

As we continue our review, and begin to design a new curriculum, we will be trying to strike a balance between educating students in a development communication ideology, and educating students for the jobs available in the marketplace.

There is a general perception among staff and students that the needs of PNG centre on issues of governance, participation and organisation. While we are busy developing a curriculum to respond to these undeniably important national needs, consideration must be given to the needs of our students. I have made many observations that are similar to those of Moore (1995) concerning journalism students. They have great difficulty overcoming habits caused by their shyness and compliance. These characteristics help them to gain high marks in Grade 12 and to enter University, but often prevent them from achieving their full potential in the Communication Arts course (Moore, 1995, p. 68). However, if we were to accept into the department only older students with degrees and experience, many of these difficulties would, perhaps, not arise.

According to information received from the Registrar of DWU, parents of most of our current CA students are well educated. Nearly 55% of CA students have at least one parent with a tertiary qualification, while another 30% have at least one parent in a professional occupation with a secondary education and 15% have parents involved in subsistence farming or are described as 'unemployed.' Students say that parents in the first two groups speak at least some English at home, thereby improving their children's chances of obtaining the high grades in English at Grade 12 level that helped them to gain entry into the CA course. Most work in professions in the major centres; they have already moved away from their traditional roots to some extent. Most students say that, after graduating with a tertiary qualification, they expect to live an even more western kind of life than their parents do. Most see themselves working in western jobs. They relate easily to the pre-packaged globalised youth culture depicted in the modern media, yet they know they are losing something intrinsically valuable in their traditional systems, thereby generating the ambivalence that comes with cultural hybridity (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 24). It will certainly be a challenge for us to interrupt their upward social mobility, direct their attention away from western activities and reinculturate them into village cosmology through the study of development communication.

As part of the review we are also being asked to consider the question of general education at the diploma level. We need to look at other options such as moving towards a more generalised curriculum, offering History, Literature, PNG Cultural Studies and Media Studies. Further issues are coming to light each day as this review proceeds.

Conclusion

After examining the Communication Arts curricula at Divine Word University in the light of the key concepts of hegemony, globalisation and education in post-colonial PNG, it seems clear that we need to strike out in a new direction. Our focus on meeting the needs of the mainstream media in PNG has prevented us from even looking at the wider communication needs of the country, let alone meeting them. By expanding the curriculum beyond the craft elements of journalism we will, hopefully, help our students to achieve their intellectual potential at University so that they might become better people, appropriate leaders and active contributors to development in PNG (National Goals and Directive Principles, No. 1).

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