
EXPLORING PARTICIPATORY VIDEO JOURNALISM IN THE CLASSROOM AND THE COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a journalism education project in which television students worked collaboratively with teenagers in a community media club to make short videos about issues that directly affected the teenagers. An analysis of this project using action research methods draws on debates around media and community participation from several theoretical “moments”. These include current debates on online citizen media and participation, “civic media” and public news agendas from the public journalism movement originating in the nineties in America, and much older debates on participatory video production from the 1960s. The author set out how various theoretical concepts from these debates are manifest practically in the project. A key concept is the difference in the roles that the “professional” journalism students and the amateur teenagers adopt in shaping the story.

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INTRODUCTION

Should journalism educators teach students to work with communities and hand over parts of a story to their sources to shape? There are probably many who would react with horror at the idea of giving up some editorial control and who would label this behaviour as unprofessional. These educators could be described as subject to a “professionalization” discourse (Reese & Cohen 2000) where industry norms and practices are taken as absolute and not open to challenge or experimentation. However, there are others who would recognise that journalism is not as static as this professionalisation discourse implies but continually reinventing practices as well as values in response to its critics.

Many scholars of journalism now recognise that we are facing a new moment of “participatory journalism” brought on by the increasing use of the Internet (Hermida 2011; Bruns 2010; Rosen 2006). As journalism educators working with the future generation of journalists, surely one should therefore not just replicate current “professional” practices, but also work towards anticipating as well as reinventing them?

South African journalism has its own particular challenges, however, which demand that journalism educators not simply copy international advocates of participatory journalism. South African journalism is increasingly criticised for the lack of working-class issues and perspectives in the media (Friedman 2011; Duncan 2003) which seems to mirror the increasing class divisions in our society. The picture of South Africa that the media paints may be ignoring many injustices and greater trends because they draw their sources from a very limited pool of people (Friedman 2011; Duncan 2003). Friedman (2011) argues that if journalism is indeed committed to serving not only its middle class audiences but in fact the greater South African public interest, it should find a way to represent issues that concern working class people and draw their perspective into the media.

Participatory journalism could be a solution. Ordinary South Africans from all walks of life increasingly have the means to tell their own stories. Just recently a bystander in a township street used a mobile phone to document the public torture of a man dragged behind a police car in a video that made national and international headlines. As South African journalism educators we should be training journalism students to find ways of increasingly incorporating such amateur storytelling into their journalism to add value and depth to their reporting.

In implementing a participatory journalism project, this author has set out to examine the role journalism students could play in such a partnership, the educational outcomes of such a project and the extent to which this process would enable a voice for marginalised youth.

CONTEXT

The School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University has a history of leading debates around what journalism should be, and not simply accepting it as is (Steenveld, Strelitz & Wasserman 2012). One of the school's key concerns is that journalism should be value-based and that these values should be democracy and justice. In the apartheid years both production and media studies lecturers actively engaged with critiquing mainstream media and exploring the alternative media as a practice that could address those critiques.

In the post-apartheid years as the alternative media disappeared, there was an increasing sense of working at cross purposes. Production lecturers were expected to prepare students for the professional world of the media industry while media studies colleagues were critiquing this same media industry (Amner & Marquis forthcoming). It is only in the past decade that, inspired by the public journalism movement as well as the notion of development journalism, praxis experiments were again initiated in the school (Amner & Marquis *ibid.*). Here students are made aware of the critiques of the media, but are also encouraged to try out different methods to address these critiques through critical media projects. These projects can be equated to the notion of action research, a popular research technique amongst educationists who want to innovate within their profession.

The attempt to innovate television production to adapt it to community participation demanded much lateral thinking, as there are no community TV stations which students could use to find audiences nor already existing community media initiatives which they could join. What many ordinary people in the community do have, however, are mobile phones with cameras. The first project in participatory journalism that was initiated by this author made full use of this technology and mobilised community members to use mobile phones to create hard news stories. Students were paired with community volunteers who had received some training in print journalism at the local newspaper. The television students taught them how to identify a TV news story and film it using the mobile phone's camera. The citizen journalists then had the following week to complete this in their neighbourhood. The week after that the TV students edited the clips for the citizen journalists and helped them to script news narration.

However, despite their close collaboration with the citizen journalists, the students remained far removed from the realities of living in the community. A community member in the talk-show had to point out to a student presenter that the greatest danger for children playing in rubbish was not loss of self-esteem, but serious risks to their health. Furthermore, the news values in these stories were often related to "bad news" (Harcup & O'Neill 2001) such as underage smoking.

While the bad news frame worked for many of the packages (YouTube 2010), in some of them they seemed rather forced. For example, there was one story where the community volunteer citizen journalist later admitted that she simply wanted to tell the story of her hero who had a good job as a receptionist but, in collaboration with the students, the story ended up focusing on the fact that this woman had not received a bursary for further study. In the studio talk-show discussion, a community activist felt that this angle did not recognise that many working people in the community were indeed successfully studying for certificates part-time and paying for their own studies. What this author began to realise was that dominant “negative” news values (Harcup & O’Neill 2001) and the emotional distance of factual reporting were influencing the framing and selection of news stories. It did not seem appropriate for people located inside a community to talk about their friends and neighbours. The reports appeared callous and judgemental or, at their best, simply lacked nuance and reflection.

As an educator, this author was becoming very conscious of the impact of collaboration with the students in shaping the stories. Therefore, in another project, a method was developed where our journalism students would still train people from the community to film news events on their mobile phones, but this time the citizen journalists would edit their own stories “in camera”. This researcher was hoping that by giving the citizen journalists editorial control of a story they would find new ways to share the news in their own voice, free from the constraints of news conventions. The citizen journalists were shown how to use live narration, describing what they saw as it happened and how to use the pause button to change the scene. The community journalists then sent their stories back to the students via Bluetooth, with the students uploading the stories online and blogging about it.

Some interesting stories were received, such as a report on a break-in at a Pakistani trader’s shop (YouTube 2011a) as well as a report on a police arrest of an alleged thief (YouTube 2011b). These stories provoked more questions than they answered such as why the person who was arrested seemed to be in great pain and was left groaning on the floor while discussions with the police continued. It seemed as if the accused thief had been beaten up, but the citizen journalist did not deem this newsworthy at all, choosing instead to report on who had arrived on the scene and what the police were doing. It also was not clear whether the long time the police took to respond to the Pakistani shopkeeper’s call was related to xenophobia or simply general inefficiency. The stories suggested that the citizen journalists were conceptualising the audience of their stories as people like themselves, with the same knowledge of background context. Many of the stories were indeed very insular and dealt with private matters, such as a story which focused on how music has changed a citizen journalist’s life. What marred these stories was often a lack of quality, both technical and story-crafting quality, as well as a “public quality”:

the stories lacked a public frame which would link individual difficulties to broader social concerns. They were difficult to watch and generally lacked a “so-what” component. The most successful stories were clearly those that involved more collaboration with students.

The project in participatory journalism with the Upstart Youth Club, which is the focus of this article, arguably responds best to many of the concerns raised above in both the hard news collaboration with students and the more autonomous citizen journalism project. Here we partnered with a literacy organisation that exposes young people to media production. Together with the Upstart Youth Club we planned the process of engagement more carefully as well as various steps developed with the organisers to fulfil the project brief of giving voice to issues that are of great concern to the teenagers. We involved the teenagers in preparation for the project and structured various interactions, which included planned time for the students to spend time in the world of the teenagers before the filming so that they would understand it better. The role of technology and the technical training played a smaller part and instead we focused on a series of interviews and listening skills. As current debates in participatory journalism seem to focus so much on the role of technology, this author would therefore like to use this article to consider the debates around the values and the process of collaboration that inform various traditions of participatory journalism, and use this educational project as a case study to set out what this means in practical terms.

PARTICIPATORY JOURNALISM

Current debates

Current definitions of participatory journalism relate the concept closely to the technological environment of social and online media which has over the past ten years facilitated the producing, sharing and commenting on media by people who are not journalists or media workers (Singer *et al.* 2011). While participatory journalism is recognised as important by journalists, it is generally not taken seriously and journalists see it either as tip-offs to follow up for “real journalism” or as fulfilling a community function enabling readers to experience some sense of belonging (Heinonen 2011: 46). When there is collaboration between journalists and citizen journalists it is considered to involve journalists coordinating and motivating users to provide information for stories that would be difficult to acquire otherwise, suggesting that amateurs only do some of the legwork while journalists still craft the stories (Singer *et al.* 2011).

A study of various participatory journalism projects has, however, revealed that there is a wide range of possible ways in which journalists and citizen journalists cooperate in terms of story input, including citizen agenda-setting and story-

crafting (Nip 2011). Between the two autonomous poles of conventional journalism authored by journalists and citizen journalism authored solely by citizens, there exists a whole spectrum of collaboration (Nip 2011). On the side of the spectrum closest to absolute citizen editorial control one finds Guided Citizen Reporting, where citizen journalists produce stories of their own but have some guidance from professional journalists. Closer to the pole where journalists hold editorial control one finds Citizen Response, which involves citizens simply publishing commentary on journalism (Nip 2011). Where it gets interesting is in the murky middle section, where journalists and citizens start to share editorial control, which Nip (2011: 137) terms “Guided Professional Reporting”:

In this level, citizens may be involved in more than one stage of the news, including shaping the news agenda, forming the story perspective and providing information during reporting.

As Nip explains, there were very few participatory journalism projects she encountered in this category. It comes as no surprise as journalists generally guard the gate-keeping role as their prerogative (Hermida 2011: 21).

It requires a mind shift for journalists to accept responsibility for shepherding an ordinary person’s story into the fold of the mainstream media. Carpentier (2003) describes this shift in identity in BBC producers as moving from “gate-keeping” to “gate-opening” and argues that this shift in identity is crucial for the success of participatory video production. Here the aim is to maintain an egalitarian relationship between professional producer and amateur. However, like the ideal egalitarian relationship between student and teacher described by Paolo Freire, “‘abdication’ is never complete, neither can it be expected to be complete”, the professional producer remains ultimately responsible for the success of the relationship and the project (Carpentier 2003: 438). The reason why these BBC producers may have been willing to give up their gate-keeping role can be related to their buy-in with the social values of the project, which aimed to help ordinary people from marginalised sectors of society tell their stories so as to promote a more open, inclusive society.

This value-based appreciation of participatory media stands in contrast to the journalists Heinonen (2011: 45) describes who generally have a purely utilitarian concept of participation and relate it to commercial imperatives and building the brand of the media outlet. There are some journalists who do, however, see citizen participation as playing a “dialogic role” in that their voices add and deepen journalistic stories and may even help create original stories (Heinonen 2011: 45, 50).

Whether or not citizen journalism provides alternative perspectives that provide a more diverse political view of the world, as some (Rosen 2006; Bruns 2010)

have suggested, remain a matter of debate. Critics argue that citizen journalism has developed as “a practice in search of a theory” and that it needs to embrace the principles of public good in order to overcome its shortcomings and build on its strength as enabler and gate-opener for journalism (Merritt 2010: 22). Some scholars have noted how the initial enthusiasm for the transformative power of citizen journalism to introduce new levels of accountability has waned as it was found to be even less likely than professional journalism to promote a sense of civic responsibility:

As more citizen-initiated journalism unfolded, traditional notions of gatekeeping that for generations had confined the press to a narrow, prescribed model were swept aside. But the citizen created coverage that emerged in its stead was all too often fragmented, incomplete, and in its own way even narrower, addressing private issues and concerns rather than anything related to building a more robust public sphere (Rosenberry & St John III 2010: 4).

Merritt (2010) proposes that the only way to return this sense of public good to citizen journalism is for it to return to an earlier theoretical moment in journalism studies, and that it should find politics in the principles of the public journalism movement.

The public journalism movement

The public journalism movement emerged in the USA in the 1990s in response to the perceived increasing gaps between the media and citizens, and the media and the government. The mainstream media was critiqued for privileging elite voices by focusing their stories on official sources, often far removed from the realities of people on the ground. The public journalism movement attempted to reform journalism by incorporating more public voices into the media. It developed a method for identifying different “civic layers” for stories in a geographical area and called it “civic mapping” (Harwood & McCrehan 2000). These civic layers ranged from official spaces where official leaders could be found, to gradually less official and more informal spaces such as marketplaces, hairdressing salons and homes, where there were different people who set the tone for the conversations that took place in these spaces. It meant that journalists had to get off the phone, out of the newsroom and back on the street and find the spaces in these civic layers and the people who played a key role in these conversations, and to create their own civic maps that revealed a range of different sources. It was then up to the journalist to uncover a citizen’s agenda, or various competing citizen’s agendas, which would highlight the issues of concern for the community. This citizen’s agenda would then influence the newsroom’s news agenda, the stories that the journalist would cover and the way that they were framed, researched and presented.

However, to do public journalism well does not mean that a journalist should give citizens unfettered control of the news agenda and in so doing compromise the journalists' ability to maintain a critical editorial and reportorial stance in relation to the community, or that it should force journalists to gloss over community conflicts for fear of offending certain community segments (Haas 2007: 33). Wasserman and Amner (forthcoming) agree with Haas on this and argue that South African journalists should use civic mapping to discover sources from a range of places that cross the divides of our very unequal society, but that the Constitution should hold greater influence in determining the journalist's news agenda when it clashes with the citizen's agenda.

This particular cognitive approach to civic mapping, based on tapping into people's conversations, has not been without its criticism from within the public journalism movement. Campbell (2002, in Haas 2008) defines a structural approach to civic mapping which is focused on transformation. Here journalists identify structures that can solve public issues and then abandon their political neutrality to work actively with these structures and organisations to find solutions. Haas (2008) calls on journalists to use both approaches to civic mapping so that they not only understand communities better, but they also understand the mechanics that can make change possible.

Participatory video production

In considering how to get people involved in producing video collaboratively, one cannot ignore the participatory video movement that emerged in the 1960s in rural Canada and has since become a standard method for development projects across the world. The participatory video movement currently privileges the handing over of cameras to communities, but as Bery (2003) points out, there is a spectrum of participation options available to community participants and professionals, many of whom do not involve community filming. The process followed by our students and the Upstart teenagers is probably closest to Bery's "co-learning" which is defined as follows:

Local people and outsiders share their knowledge: Community members and outside video producers discuss the issues and develop the script. The production is made jointly with an outsider directing the process. Local audiences will see and have access to the product so as to share it with communities (Bery 2003: 106).

This co-learning method where outsiders still operate the technology also fits the first instance of participatory video developed on the Canadian Fogo Islands and known today as the "Fogo process" (White 2003). The Canadian Film Board initially commissioned a series of films for public broadcast so as to enable a national dialogue on the topic of poverty. It became clear that this was not an

issue that could simply be reported on by middle-class producers using standard conventions, when the screening of the first documentary led to the public humiliation of the impoverished family featured in the film (Crocker 2003). This example reinforces the argument that it is not sufficient to simply represent people who are marginalised, but that they should be actively involved in participating in the production process to avoid such misrepresentations. The embarrassment resulting from the film prompted a collaborative approach to the subsequent films, where communities were actively involved in defining the issues that were of concern to them.

The participatory video process is not neutral but committed to the improvement of the conditions of the communities involved (White 2003). It is this concern for giving a voice to the voiceless which was at the centre of the concern for its leading filmmaker, Colin Low (Memorial University Extension Service 1972). The production process involved building a relationship with community members and interacting with them not only as subjects, but spending time with them as human beings.

The Fogo process also modelled experimentation with a range of filmmaking styles, exploring a variety of aesthetic codes that differed from an objective journalistic representation. Post-production involved one of the most important decisions, which was to present material as driven by people instead of issues. In this way it allowed for the suspension of judgement as, instead of evaluating who was right or wrong in the juxta-positioning of quotes on a topic, the viewer could be drawn into the world of one subject and appreciate his or her concerns (Crocker 2003). Focusing on people-driven films also allowed for voices of leadership to start emerging in the community as some people's voices resonated particularly strongly with community concerns (Crocker 2003).

A central component of the Fogo process was the series of screenings that took place for the community that was also the subject of its films (Cain 2010: 81). Such screenings can serve as a catalyst for transformation in that it help subjects form a sense of self-worth and facilitate a community developing a collective identity (White 2003). In terms of the issues raised in the films, screenings may serve not only to bring awareness of collective problems but also facilitate discussion, consensus building and mobilisation.

The people of Fogo Island seemed to have gained a better understanding of themselves, and their neighbours and individual communities were able to realise their common problems crystallised through film. Something of an Island community began to emerge (Memorial University Extension Service 1972: 5-6). The screenings not only conscientised villagers but also allowed officials to hear the concerns of the villagers and to respond to them. These responses from officials

were in turn recorded and taken back for screening in the villages, facilitating a deliberative culture. Participatory video production often emphasised the process as more important than the end product and therefore its screening outside of the community was not always seen as important as the development it facilitated within a community (White 2003).

THE UPSTART VIDEOS

The aim of the Upstart videos was to create a number of videos that would each feature a story focused on one person, an Upstart teenager, similar to the people-focused films of the Fogo process (Crocker 2003). Each film would centre on a problem encountered by this teenager in his or her daily life or, as we put it to the young people, “something that ticks you off”; hence in defining this it was the teenagers who set a citizen’s agenda (Harwood & McCrehan 2000). The teenagers were encouraged to work with the journalism students to shape the stories in which the teenagers would share their lives. Therefore the project brief was similar to the Fogo process in that the technical production was dealt with by the “professional” journalism students, while the Upstart teenagers were given the responsibility to make sure the stories were told in a way that was true to their lives.

The journalism students were told that while they needed to work collaboratively with the Upstart teenagers to come up with the stories, it was their responsibility to ensure that the stories were well-crafted with strong narratives and that these stories could be linked to broader issues of social concern. In this way the journalism students played a role in steering the stories away from some of the pitfalls that citizen media often encounters (Merritt 2000). While they were informed by a citizen’s agenda they still needed to follow their own journalistic values linked to the values of our Constitution (Wasserman & Amner forthcoming). The students had to produce short videos in which they reflected on the process of collaborating with the teenagers and were tasked to answer various questions. The quotes used here were gathered from these “The making of” the videos.

Drawing up an agenda

An important part of the process was that the journalism students had to learn an entirely new way of conceptualising their journalism. Whereas previously the students had pitched stories to lecturers who either assigned a story or shot it down, now the process was more complex. They had to learn to become “gate-openers” (Carpentier 2003) for the stories the teenagers wanted to tell. The students worked with the teenagers in small focus groups. Here journalism students were tasked with steering the discussion to issues of concern to broader society; hence topics such as one student’s concern that his favourite soccer team was experiencing a losing streak were not chosen. This did not mean that issues dealing with private

life were not taken up; indeed a number of stories dealt with issues that could be considered private matters such as sibling rivalry, pregnancy, drug abuse and social media addiction. Taking on the Fogo ethics of prioritising the participants' safety, any filming that could endanger the Upstarters was avoided.

Kelly (TV student): First when we brought all the Upstarters and we got all the ideas the biggest story that came out was gangs that were targeting the school, but as soon as we found out that it would have been dangerous for our Upstarters to be involved we went back and we told the kids no let's do another thing.

An important role played by the journalism students was to encourage and validate the issues brought up by the teenagers as worthy of telling. One girl spoke about how what most irritated her in her day to day life was being bullied by boys at school who tried to remove her clothes, but that she could not see this as the legitimate topic of a film until the students persuaded her that it was. The teenagers were encouraged to speak in their own register, using their own expressions and their own language. It was very different from the mobile phone news experiment we did the previous year in which young people were drilled to speak like broadcast journalists. They took more ownership of the stories, and some teenagers, like Masi, became actively involved in planning how they would like their story to unfold.

Justin (TV student): The way I think that we actually went about doing it is we sat, we spent a lot of time actually thinking about it first, actually thinking about a narrative and an actual storyline that would do the story. Me and Masi understood what each other wanted from this (YouTube 2011c).

Masi wanted to be a television presenter but was concerned that he would not achieve his dream because many of his teachers were regularly absent for much of the school day. Instead of producing a serious investigative report on truant teachers in which Masi would become a victim, he wanted to be the hero of the story. Masi's story (YouTube 2011d) began with him in the television studio presenting a show and berating his teachers for robbing him of his future. Then he magically reappears back at school to guide us through the evidence. In this way Masi uses humour and visual language to claim a position of authority over his difficult circumstances. Unlike a hard news narrative where Masi might have come across as the victim of a negative story, he now became a hero confronting adversity.

In another case, the teenager driving the conceptualisation of her story had very particular ideas. Aviwe had a few friends who had fallen pregnant while at school. She wanted to make a film where the issue included pregnant girls in the conversation discussing it seriously, not only as gossip. She was particularly

enraged by the patronising attitude that government-sponsored advertisements seemed to adopt:

Gabi (TV student): I asked her like what she thinks needs to be done and she talked about the government having to make ads that appeal to them - her generation as teenagers and then I gave [her] the idea that they should come up with an ad that will appeal to them and she got all her friends involved and they just came up with an ad. All I did was just facilitate it and refine it (YouTube 2011e).

Aviwe's advert (YouTube 2011f) did not embarrass pregnant girls or patronise them, but drew on her knowledge of her friends who had become pregnant and the hard lessons they had learnt. It showed a pregnant girl sheepishly greeting the father of her baby with a rub of her enormous tummy and a shy "Here's your baby, sweetie" greeting, to which the callous boy replies "No, honey, here's my baby" as he pulls a new girl closer. The sense of recognition was evident in the whoops of cynical laughter when her friends viewed the advertisement for the first time.

As video allows for the use of subtitles, many of the Upstarters were encouraged to use their home language, isiXhosa. They were also encouraged to use their own voices and conversational style, which seemed to provide a real sense of ownership of the stories compared to a previous experiment where they used broadcast news narration style written mainly by the students.

As Carpentier (2003) highlights, the collaborative process is not always easy and despite the egalitarian notion of the partnership it is up to the "professional", in this case the journalism student, not to "abdicate". Several of the journalism students expressed frustration about teenagers who arrived late or missed appointments or seemed to be "in a teenage mood swing" after committing to filming deadlines, but they dealt with these by finding ways to continue filming.

Crafting stories

The journalism students used their much more extensive experience to come up with powerful ways to tell the teenagers' stories. Some journalism students used metaphorical ways to visualise the stories told by their teenager. They found ways to illustrate the dreams of a future shattered when the school's science teacher was retrenched and no replacement was provided (YouTube 2011g). The students set up visual metaphors based on the dreams expressed by different young people in the class.

Rugare (TV student): Well, what we did is we tried to find a visual metaphor that would work. We went with the idea of learners making things and then later these things are destroyed (YouTube 2011h).

The film shows a science pupil's sketch of himself as a doctor being crumpled up, and the learner who dreams of becoming a pilot has his paper aeroplane trampled.

The student journalists were explicitly instructed to make sure that the stories all had a public context relating the issue that was troubling their teenager to broader social concerns. For example, a teenage girl who has to spend long hours fetching water simply saw this as a great irritation and inconvenience, but the students linked it to her hopes for further study. They focused on questions exploring her lack of time to complete her homework due to all the time spent fetching water. In other films the teenage subject was encouraged to speak to other people with similar problems to show that this is a shared problem with public implications. It is this process of finding an angle and creating a context that is very much part of the skills we teach journalists. In fact, Barlow (2010: 48) describes the creation of such contextual ties and story angles as one of the processes of gate-keeping practiced by journalists.

Journalism students were, however, not always successful in creating such contextual links, as the story of a teenage boy who hated doing chores at home demonstrated. The journalism student struggled to find out exactly why the boy had such strong feelings and eventually pin-pointed it to the bullying he encountered from his older, unemployed brother. As more than a third of out-of-school youth neither study nor work (Cloete 2009), it might have been easy to find similarly frustrated, violent older brothers which could have made the story more than one of a private frustration but instead about the shared frustration of a generation of unemployed young people.

All of the participatory video experiments we conducted involved the production of stories based on eye-witness accounts, personal experience and visual evidence collected by the filmmakers. In this sense these were reports, not simply commentary. They were therefore clearly different from much of the citizen journalism that is criticised for lacking such empirical basis and instead consists mainly of opinion, commentary, and evaluation of current events (Merritt 2010). However, we steered away from following a strict objective journalistic style as it would indeed have been deceptive for the teenage journalists to attempt to pretend to have some distance from the concerns and conflicts in their neighbourhood or their street.

The screenings

From the start the Upstart teenagers were aware that their films would be screened to an audience of peers, and this sense of audience helped to create a sense of voice and empowerment. One of the stories that created a particular impact in the screening was Aviwe's story (YouTube 2011i) about the lack of hope that often accompanies living in poverty and which combines poetry with

articulate reflection. Through the screening of this film, Aviwe achieved the kind of leadership status that is described in the Fogo process (Crocker 2003) as the natural formation of leaders germinating from producing films based on people, not issues. Through such films certain people are able to articulate community problems in a way that resonates with others. Aviwe's film has become the central focus of a new Upstart holiday programme that focuses on rekindling hope under difficult circumstances and she speaks to other Upstart teenagers about her life. In fact, a number of films from this process are being used as themes to facilitate discussions with Upstarters.

The films were also shown to others: the Upstart coordinator, accompanied by some of the teenagers, took several films to show to the mayor and senior directors of the city council. The films were also shown in two schools where both learners and teachers attended the screening. Some teachers became uncomfortable with the challenging way topics like corporal punishment (which has been outlawed but is still widely practised) were addressed. There was also a special screening for parents of Upstarters, which provoked many comments from parents thanking Upstart for helping their children voice what was wrong in their community.

Zandi Radebe (Upstart fieldworker): They're raising issues that their parents were silent on. The entire communities have grown, I suppose, weary because of course they raise these things at different platforms, but nothing ever gets done and they just eventually keep quiet and don't raise things at all. So they were not just speaking for themselves but they were raising these silent voices of these very critical issues that affect the entire communities.

The Upstarters expressed delight and pride at seeing themselves raise issues in front of an audience of peers. As White (2003) highlights, the process of encountering one's image on screen can be a highly transformative process creating a sense of identity and empowerment.

Nqatyiswa (Upstart teenager): I was scared that I was going to be killed or everything is going to be done at me, but I started making choices for myself, started saying no that isn't good, started saying I could go to school because it's my future, started to say everything that is based on school. So I think it changed everything (YouTube 2011c).

The participatory process not only transformed the Upstart teenagers but also the journalism students. Our students predominantly come from middle-class backgrounds and are often unaware of the kind of hardships poor communities suffer and the injustices that are now shaped by class, not race.

Justin (TV student): The reason I feel very strongly about the kind of things Masi's experiencing is because I just don't, I can't actually comprehend that that's something that's actually happening in this country at this time.

Some of the experiences, like bullying, were familiar to the journalism students, but they could not comprehend that there could be no institutional support for this kind of problem and that parents could be powerless and schools not adequately functional to deal with these issues.

Candice (TV student): I think like there are quite a vast number of differences like with things they have actually had to go through. I always assumed that if someone does something wrong [at school] they get can get kicked out I would think.

Through this experience journalism students begin to cultivate a sceptical attitude to hegemonic middle class “common-sense” notions of South African society, thus learning to listen to alternative voices. The process allowed the Rhodes students to expand to their identity as “gate-openers” (Carpentier 2003) and learn to allow the experience of others to help determine issues to be covered.

Zandi Radebe (Upstart fieldworker): Standing from the perspective of Rhodes University there are certain things that you will not be able to see, and I think the film collaboration... it broke down that barrier.

CONCLUSION

To some extent this experiment in participatory journalism showed that it was useful to help shift our students’ mind-frames and move them away from what Friedman (2012) describes as “a view from the suburbs” so that their view of South Africa becomes holistic. Benefits for the Upstart teenagers appeared less tangible. While the initial reaction to these stories in the screenings was positive and affirming, questions remain about the actual impact. The story exposing corporal punishment (YouTube 2011j) in one of the schools resulted in a recorded commitment from the principal to stop this practice. Yet the following year when our students returned to the school it was still taking place. This disappointing circumstance fails to bear out the tenets of the Fogo process and the public journalism movement which, as models of deliberation, have been successful in holding the powerful accountable for social ills.

In Canada and the USA, journalists were able to create real dialogue between officials and ordinary people in processes that held government accountable. In South Africa the political culture emanating from the dominant ruling party has increasingly come to reject criticism in the media instead of engaging with it (Wasserman & Jacobs 2013). We showed the mayor several films of young girls who were afraid of walking long distances. Nothing was done to improve services so that they would not need to walk such distances; later one of the girls was attacked while walking home. In light of this, the Upstart coordinator expressed concern about the extent to which the project actually assisted the teenagers.

This suggests that in creating participatory projects with citizen journalists one needs to think carefully of ways to keep stories alive and ensure follow-up so as not to produce more of the “weariness” that the Upstart coordinator described to be common among the older generation. We do not need a tier of cynical and jaded citizen journalists who are labelled and ostracised in the process of producing media about their lives. It may be time for South African journalists to embrace Haas’ (2008) argument that in order to ensure democracy and keep government accountable, a structural approach to civic mapping is needed, in which journalists help connect local activists with channels for social change.

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