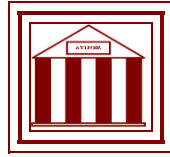# Athens Institute for Education and Research
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Teaching Broadcasting Policy:
A Case Study in Transliteracy

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Abstract

Media literacy in communication education has been an important part of communication curricula for a long time, but the nature of the pedagogical style required to fulfill the needs of our society has changed, making room for an approach that favours transliteracy. The student learning experience in communication policy should expand beyond reading government documents, consulting databases and Web sites. Convergence suggests that students should be able to use a variety of platforms to share information and learn ways of engaging in various communities to prepare them for participation as citizens of the world. This article provides the results of a practical research action protocol exercise with 40 third year undergraduate students. Using a modified wiki platform and mapping tools, students acquired new vocabulary and concepts, built on basic research and analytical skills, learned about the Canadian media system, how to use various platforms and mediums to collect data and analyze it, as well as how to illustrate policy processes using computer software. In so doing, they not only acquired new cognitive and computer skills. Their work contributed to a collaborative international research initiative in media policy mapping which seeks to provide practitioners and researchers with a better understanding of the global media landscape. This article also provides insight into the challenges of using wikis in the classroom to teach communication, as well as demonstrating how these tools benefit students. Future research paths are also explored as the use of wikis for policy teaching is still a recent activity.

Introduction

Collaborative research projects are nothing new, but freely sharing data in a public space is still something of a novelty, particularly in the humanities. Nonetheless, open access believers and the positive results of their various projects are bringing around a slow, but increasingly interesting movement of sharing. In the field of communication, much of the experiments are taking place in the classroom as professors are noticing the need to shift their pedagogical approaches from learning 1.0 to learning 2.0 (Gunawardena et al., 2009). According to Gunwardena (2009), learning has evolved from a perspective that was once formal and structured; instructor led; focused on centralized content; scheduled and planned to a more collaborative bottom-up approach which includes content creation, knowledge networks and mentoring to name a few of its characteristics.

This new way of learning and the interest in collaborative research has also brought about an interest in media literacy. In communication and journalism, media literacy is an integral part of teaching, but its understanding varies from one person to another (Livingstone, 2004; Livingstone, 2008; Koltay, 2011) and, depending on the topic, it seems instruction in this area is limited. However, professors such as Klein (2010) have found ways to bring technology, pedagogy and creativity together to allow students, teachers and citizens to collectively work on a common project. In so doing, they contribute to the development of transliteracy skills which include reading, writing and interacting across a variety of technological platforms (Ipri, 2010). Transliteracy is also a way of mastering a variety of challenges, engaging in debate; constructing knowledge and engaging in citizen participation (Loicq, 2009, Van der Linde, 2010).

In the study of communication policies, the tendency has been to provide students with a static learning experience that includes reading government documents and consulting databases and Web sites. Our current context which includes technological convergence, a diversity of information platforms and increased citizen participation through social networks forces us to rethink the definition of media literacy practices in communication (Meyer et al., 2008) and to extend these practices to the teaching of public policies in the field of communication (O'Neill, 2010). According to Klein (2010), producing and exploring a wide variety of student media through enriched competencies can lead to "increased collaboration and solutions-oriented projects that can be deeply transformative" (p. 87).

In this context, this article focuses on these principles in suggesting a methodology to permit a reflection on the teaching of communication policy that goes beyond the 'learning 1.0' approach while providing researchers with valid feedback on the use of a web platform designed for the purpose of researching, teaching and learning about communication policy. To illustrate this approach, the use of a practical participant research protocol in the context of global media mapping is used. Students exposed to the new learning method participated in an international collaborative research project in communication policy, an area often recognized as being dense and vague (Savage, 2007).

Methodology

In Fall 2010, 40 students who took part in a Policy Studies course at the University of Ottawa (Canada)[1] accepted to participate in an pedagogical exercise where a wiki[2] platform

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[1] The course description is "Study of the principles governing information and communication regulations, national and international. Examination of the legal and regulatory systems of Canadian media. Issues in the social and cultural domain." (University of Ottawa).

[2] This is an initiative of a consortium of the Working group on media policy of the International Association on Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) which includes McGill Universtity

and a variety of tools available on the following website http://www.globalmediapolicy.net were used to visually map a Canadian broadcasting policy of their choice. The objective of their participation was two-fold. On the one hand, the project was chosen to enhance student transliterary skills and improve the overall media policy learning experience, but on the other hand, the project produced a testing ground for the tools on the web platform providing much needed feedback to the steering committee about use of their website and its content. The user-generated content, in turn, serves researchers, practitioners and activists in providing information on how global media policy is constructed worldwide.

The online platform corresponds to the traditional definition of a wiki, but with limited access. Because of the ongoing discussion regarding the accuracy of information posted to wikis (Lamb, 2004; Wheeler, Yeomans, & Wheeler, 2008; Messner & South, 2011) the steering committee took precautions to oversee the mapping project and evaluate the quality of information before posting it to the site. Uploading information is reserved to a select group of people who request access. Registration to the site is necessary, but also vetted by a member of the steering committee before access is granted. Four main content themes were selected to test the platform. Canadian broadcasting policy was the one chosen for the classroom project. Several students worked on the same theme in order to ensure accuracy of the data, but submitted individual maps. Students chose topics such as 'how to get a radio licence?' or 'how does a Canadian bring forth a complaint about an infraction to an ethical code on television?' In total 28 policy processes were documented by the students and uploaded to the platform after being evaluated for format and accuracy by a research assistant working for the steering committee.

A practical action research protocol was used to conduct this study. As described by Creswell (2008), this form of research is common in a pedagogical setting where a teacher, students and administration engage in research together to study an issue. In the process, the teacher develops his/her performance and the student improves his/her learning. As Creswell (2008) explains, this type of study includes "a teacher [who] collaborates to study a local problem, develops as a professional, uses a systematic approach to inquiry (e.g., gathering and analysing data), and implements a plan of action" (p. 602). This model was applied in a university classroom setting to find a new way of looking at policy studies and also to assist a group of international researchers in testing a new platform to map communication policies. The process as described by Creswell (2008) involves 10 steps. They are described below and have been adapted to the current study:

1) *Review of the literature:* In this case, the review pertained primarily on the use of wikis in the classroom. The objective was to find out what kinds of studies had already been conducted on wikis and to determine some of the problems that had been encountered in using such a platform.

2) *Communication:* In this case, telephone and e-mail correspondence with the steering committee was favoured to obtain precisions on the uses of the web platform and to discuss potential usage issues. During this phase, the professor inquired on how the test platform was to be used and what the desired outcomes should be to align student activities around the overall objectives of the project.

3) *Themes:* From the literature review on the use of wikis in the classroom and after corresponding with members of the steering committee, it was determined that the pilot project would involve the mapping of Canadian broadcasting policies. The mapping would take place on 'an island,' that is a section of the web platform designated for all policies related to Canadian

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(Canada), the University of Padoue (Italy) and the Central European University (Budapest). The wiki-like platform is available at http://www.globalmediapolicy.net

broadcasting. It provides an example for researchers and practitioners around the world of the potential uses of the platform. This project was to take place in two different classes, one in Ottawa and one in Montreal, to get a broader perspective.

4) *Data collection*: At this point, students were asked to use 4 different templates provided on the website to map out the process that they had chosen in conjunction with the professor. For example, a student who chooses licence renewals needs to fill out the organization template for each organization involved in the process. He also needs to fill out a document template for each document necessary to complete the process. The same process is followed for people and resources.[3] Resources are additional information relevant to the process, but are not necessarily official documents. Once the templates are complete, students visually organize their information to provide a map of the process. During this step, the professor made note of difficulties raised by the students on the class blog and in any e-mails requesting assistance.

5) *Analysis:* The professor analyzes the templates and maps provided by the students. This process ensures the quality of the processes being mapped and the accuracy of the information provided.

6) *Results:* The professor sends the most accurate maps to the steering committee for further screening before the templates are posted to the site. Students hired by the steering committee review all the templates to make them uniform before uploading them to the website. Unfortunately, the maps created by the students were not uploaded to the site in their original form. At the time, no specific mapping tool was selected to create maps. Maps are currently generated by the platform through information posted to the site.

7) *Emerging themes:* Themes that emerge from the results are sorted to develop 4 activities.

8) *Activities:* The activities are logged into an action plan (see Table 1)

9) *Share findings*: The professor sends feedback to the steering committee about the issues regarding platform usage and the students receive feedback about their participation and the outcome of their work.

10) *Reflection on future questions:* The professor reflects on the use of the platform for further classes, the use of the platform for research, as well as the benefits and pitfalls of collaborative research.

The practical participatory research model is very useful in a situation like this one where there are two overlapping objectives and where both are being observed simultaneously. On the one hand, you have the meta research which involves the professorial and administrative (steering committee) interests in pioneering the wiki platform for teaching policy, but also for conducting research. On the other hand, you have the micro research which involves the student oriented objectives of teaching communication policy and improving transliterary skills. Consequently, the results and discussion focus on these two broad areas.

Results and discussion

Learning with the collaborative digital platform (wiki)

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[3] See http://www.globalmediapolicy.net/policy-documents for an example of policy documents that have been entered into a template.

The most rewarding aspect of this 'experiment' is the learning outcomes for the students. In filling out their templates, they learn how to repurpose information using new technology and, for some, using a new platform. As we now know, learning about technology is an essential part of learning for any student in our society (Adams & Hamm, 2006), however, most people limit themselves to a few types of software and certain tools. For some students, the use of a wiki was not new nor was the use of templates, but for others, it was a novel experience altogether. For the majority of students, the use of mapping tools was different. By offering them the opportunity to use new technology or use technology differently, we help students get out of their comfort zone to bring them to a different level of learning.

Through this exercise, students also learn how to collaborate on a project that relies on multiple competencies such as reasoning, the ability to make choices and the ability to communicate ideas to others in a succinct way. Providing students with a safe testing ground to make choices, explore alternative solutions and ways of explaining relatively complex concepts, as well as modify their environment, prepares them to make decisions that are similar to those they will need to formulate in their own personal lives and in society (Adams & Hamm, 2006; Hennessy, 2012).

According to Hendricks (2004), people who visit thematic websites and have likeminded interests are those who benefit most from the Internet. Social networking, wikis and blogs are examples in "the practice of expanding knowledge by making connections with individuals of similar interests" (Gunawardena et al., 2009). The global media mapping platform presents an example of people interested in communication policy who work collaboratively in an online forum. Having students participate will potentially create a new group of followers for the site and potential contributions. The use of the Internet also creates a new location of learning (Buckingham, 2003) with access to knowledge that is not available elsewhere, interaction with peers and simulation. It is also a place where it is possible to observe a phenomenon in a controlled environment which would most likely not be observable elsewhere (Adams & Hamm, 2006). In this case, public policies come alive with mapping tools and visualization. Without these tools, students are limited to what they read, hear through lectures or observe in occasional live debates. However, we hope they will be active participants in society when they leave university, so why not encourage participation during the learning process?

Searching for information, conducting research, learning about a process, mapping out abstract concepts, challenging reality, redefining preconceived notions and synthesizing information are only some of the abilities students learn through this type of experience. They also need to be resourceful and autonomous, two required qualities to prepare for participation in societal activities (O'Neill, 2010). When it comes to information, they learn the difference between 'good' information and 'bad' information, a skill which is essential (Potter, 2004), particularly in a society where we are consistently exposed to information from a variety of sources. Students also learn about media industries, how to construct their reality and make sense of their chosen topic, in order to understand the deep societal role media takes on at the local, national and international levels Mihailidis (2006).

Overcoming challenges of the collaborative digital platform (wiki)

Although this project brought about a number of positive aspects for teaching and learning, it did raise several issues not only for teaching with digital technology, but also for improving the wiki platform. First of all, the platform demonstrates the importance of having a common understanding of the vocabulary used on the platform. For example, users need to know what 'an island,' 'a map' and a 'policy process' are. The difficulty here may lie in the fact that students are still acquiring the knowledge in this area and may not be sufficiently familiar with the required vocabulary to perform accurately within the site.

There is also an issue surrounding semantics with regards to the templates. Many fields require users to select a label from a dropdown menu for classification purposes. It seems the interpretation of these labels varies substantially among users. These classifications need to be tested for intersubjective validity to improve usage. Also, during the first attempts at filling out the templates, no definitions of the categories were available. They were eventually provided after alerting the steering committee to the problem. Regardless of the definitions, the subject matter makes it difficult for two different people to fill out the templates in the same way. Like Gaines (2010) explains, communication is vague because there are always a variety of possible interpretations and perspectives. The bottom line is that templates and procedure should be understood in the same way for the majority of users, if not all of them, to ensure the quality of online content.

The uploading of data to the platform is reserved to members of the steering committee and those who obtain permission from the committee, making it difficult to modify the information. Though this process may be good for educational purposes (Raman, Ryan, & Olfman, 2005), several authors believe that the collaboration of the masses makes the strength of the wiki; that user contribution represents more than the sum of its parts; and having more participants improves dissemination of knowledge (Lamb, 2004; Ransbotham & Kane, 2011; Wheeler et al., 2008). A broader community may also increase the depth and extent of information available, which is noted as a pitfall of wikis (Messner & South, 2011). As Ransbotham (2011) explains "moderate levels of membership turnover are desirable in social media communities, because such levels offer new information and abilities to the community, without compromising its ability to retain the content it has generated" (p. 622). Managerial implications of this study also suggest that managers might instinctively try to maintain a core group of members to participate, but they should really try to encourage the community to remain open to outsiders to introduce new material and perhaps even allow a replacement of leadership over time for continuity and evolution of the community (Ransbotham & Kane, 2011). So far, this project has limited participation of the research community because many still feel they need to be paid for their contribution. There are also some concerns about recognizing individual contributions on the site and ensuring copyright protection. This might not be an issue if the possibility of editing content was open to a wider committee. Again, only those with a password provided by the steering committee can edit content. Nonetheless, once the information is uploaded, as Ransbotham's (2011) study demonstrates, substantial editing after the first entry 'demotes' it in the face of users.

Another problem is linked to the creation of maps. For many students, the mapping of a policy or a process is a very difficult task. Without examples on the website or a designated software program, the activity is found to be quite frustrating to students. Without a designated tool, maps are obsolete, as it is the coherence among maps and in relation to the entire web project that give them life and meaning. After this experience, the steering committee came up with a series of mapping tools which automatically generate maps from the data that is imputed rather than having the users create their own maps. This has the benefit of creating a uniform output on the one hand, but on the other, it takes away from creativity and limits the options for data to the platform.

Improving transliteracy skills

Thomas (2005) believes that participating in the worldwide conversation requires people to learn how to use recent tools and participate in online networks like blogs and wikis. Students involved in this project not only have the opportunity to map out policies and create their own wiki, but also to participate in a network of researchers, practitioners and students who are creating a repository of media practices from around the world.

Though no particular measurement is employed to evaluate to what extent students developed specific abilities, it is possible to take the pulse of their level of transliteracy from the work accomplished, which is a similar strategy to that of Sjoberg and Ahlfeldt (2010) who measured media literacy. Aside from wikis, students are exposed to a variety of platforms and documents to explain their various policies. It was the first time most students used mapping tools. Creating electronic maps brings out elements Burke (2008) believes are essential to all new media pedagogical initiatives, such as the importance of perceptions, the relationship between events and space, location and time. In addition, this project highlights long-term efficiency (Potter, 2004), which is the possibility of achieving many objectives at once. In this case, it is the possibility of visually seeing concepts imbricated in each other to allow for in depth analysis.

The ability to analyse, to evaluate and to create content are, according to Livingstone (2004), three critical abilities to master in a world where you need to create to participate. This exercise demonstrates how these abilities are developed in a classroom setting by transitioning from traditional media literacy competencies to more complex ones and by allowing students to manipulate and improve their knowledge of media industries with a hands-on experience.

Networking

Learning from each other and having the opportunity to reciprocate interactions with other people's ideas to construct meaning is a notable added benefit of online community building (Gunawardena et al., 2009). In this project, like that of Greenhow and Robelia (2009) with teenagers, having a social networking platform for pedagogical reasons is worthwhile as students can help each other through difficult situations. The wiki platform, in this case, is supplemented with a classroom chat room and blog to allow for instant consultation among peers. Online posts provide evidence that interaction and mutual aid increase when students work on the mapping activity as opposed to other coursework. According to Lamb (2004) social support during a learning activity which uses social networks can provide validation for work, recognition for creative initiatives, support from 'veterans' and support related to the task at hand. The classroom blog logs provides evidence of this type of support. Eaton's (2011) study on collaborative learning communities in *Second life* demonstrates that the supportive learning approach is appreciated among students and many of them continue cultivating their learning experiences outside the virtual world. Wheeler (2008) also notes that social networks encourage learners to return to the same sites to repeat the pleasurable experiences. In this case, participants returned to the platform after the activity to see how their participation impacted the platform content, to learn more about policy and to foster relationships with others who have similar interests. A number of e-mails received by the professor once the course was over attest to this fact.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research activity demonstrates that it is possible to teach and learn at the same time. Though the professor set out to assist the Global Media Policy initiative by providing an example of the use of the platform for an international audience, the experience was to be beneficial to students. Having students participate in the project makes policy lively and interesting and makes students feel they are part of a bigger endeavour. The students come into the course wanting to learn about policy. In the process, they accomplish several goals including improving transliteracy skills (use of multiple platforms, writing, reading, visualisation of a complex subject, participation in the construction of knowledge), improving their networking abilities and most importantly participating in an international project that they can use for their portfolio.

The mapping steering committee benefits by obtaining data for their web platform, but also by learning about some of the difficulties related to the platform that were not anticipated when it was first developed. For example, major contributions are now attributed to individual participants; various concepts are now explained through the use of mini glossaries and mapping tools have now been integrated into the platform to facilitate the visualization process. For the professor, the practical participation model is beneficial as all three groups benefit from the exercise.

For future applications, however, some criteria for success would be useful. For instance, it might be a good idea to survey students at different stages to obtain feedback on specific issues that were drawn from the literature on the use of wikis. It would be useful to have students explain their processes in class to have a broader understanding of a variety of policies and processes at the end of term. Overall, the project did meet the required objectives of teaching course content, improving transliteracy and learning among students. It also fulfill the needs of the overarching research project involving the improvement of the platform and documenting Canadian broadcasting policies for future research in communication policy.

Table 1. Action Plan

Activities	Timeline and steps to be taken
Teaching about communication policies	When?: When future courses on communication policy are taught Ensure students are exposed not only to policy in action, but also policy in development and the different stakeholders from the first class.
Overcoming challenges of platform use	When?: At the time of publication, during meetings and presentations Ensure people are aware of the common pitfalls to using the platform from issues of copyright, to perceptions of the content
Improving transliteracy skills	When?: When future courses on communication policy are taught Ensure students understand that one of the goals is to improve transliteracy and explain to them what is involved and how it is relevant to their future careers
Networking	When?: In all future communication with platform users Ensure a reliable communication tool (blog or listserv) where students, professors, practitioners and all users of the web platform can communicate about their findings, their issues with the platform and other themes of interest

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