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Proactive communication management beats hostile media exposure: training for multicultural community leaders in living with mass media.

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Abstract

Proactive communication management instead of mortification in the glare of hostile media attention became the theme of a four-day training program for multicultural community leaders. The program Brisbane from December 2009 through to February 2010 was conducted under the auspices of a Community Media Link grant program shared by Griffith University and Queensland Ethnic Communities Council, together with Journalism academics the Oueensland University Technology. Twenty-eight participants from 23 organisations took part, with a team of nine facilitators from the host organisations, and guest presenters from the news media. This paper reviews the process, taking into account: its objectives, to empower participants by showing how Australian media operate and introducing participants to journalists; pedagogical thrust, where overview talks, accompanied by role play seminars with guest presenters from the media, were combined with practice in interviews and writing for media; and outcomes, assessed on the basis of participants' responses. The research methodology is qualitative, in that the study is based on discussions to review the planning and experience of sessions, as well anonymous, informal feed-back questionnaires distributed to the participants. The findings indicate positive outcomes for participants from this approach to protection of persons unversed in living in the Australian "mediatised" environment. Most affirmed that the "production side" perspective of the exercise had informed and motivated them effectively, such that henceforth they would venture far more into media management, in their community leadership roles.

Keywords

Ethnic communities, media, training

INTRODUCTION

This article reports on a media training for spokespersons program from multicultural organisations in South-east Queensland. The objective of the training was to empower the participants, such that they might be well informed about mass media organisations and practitioners, and their practices; informed of their own options as spokespersons, and practiced in ways whereby they might work effectively with media. It took the approach that the spokespersons would profit from obtaining an insider view, with the training sessions conducted by Journalism academics and engaging practitioners as resource persons. The project was designed with reference to literature on relations between ethnic or multicultural communities and mass media. This identified both friction between ethnic leaders and media, and options for achieving good communications through use of media.

The training was in four, four-hour sessions, weeks apart, devised to take participants through a short journey: from obtaining and testing understandings of mass media, through to role-play and other practical exercises permitting a forensic review of certain issues in the news (and how and why they might be managed, respectively, by journalists and by community leaders); and then on to practice in "doing media". The latter would entail, for example, recording interviews and writing for news outlets; with replays, reflection and review. instructional model was conventional, using small-group discussions, drawing on the resources and knowledgeableness of the participants.

As an opportunity for research, the process was studied on an observational basis and records made at each session. The problem for research was to assess the state of relations between mass media and the multicultural leaders, and their mutual proficiency in producing fruitful media content; and the potential for developing those relations. A research question was devised: in the case of the multicultural community representatives seen in Brisbane, did their media competence understanding advance through training, such that their relations with mass media would develop towards more satisfactory production of media content, from the viewpoint of both parties? For definitions: Content embraced all news products and other media products on public affairs topics. The quality or fruitfulness of content was firstly definable in terms of orthodox news values, e.g. was the relationship producing fresh content for media audiences that was new, interesting, important and informative? Further, a test could be applied as to whether communication between community leaders as informants, and journalists as seekers after information, was effective enough to provide a flow of information that met the needs and interests of the two parties.

The methodology for this inquiry qualitative and interpretative, recorded observations, and commentary on the course of training provided by the participants would be evaluated in light of the values outlined above. Methods of inquiry were: To consult existing research literature for information on the context of relations among multicultural or ethnic communities and mass media. A further method of inquiry was to make participant observations, on their responses to the learning stimuli and messages provided to them, and to question whether these responses indicated change towards more effective and productive media making. Feed-back provided by participants was reviewed in the form of questionnaires, being a standard questionnaire on course experience, filled out virtually by all participants each time; and also an extended questionnaire filled out by a small number of participants. The was to probe their background attitudes towards dealing with mass media, and seek more elaborated explanations on any change that may have occurred.

In the outcome. respondents overwhelmingly assessed the training as valuable to them in their community work, both in providing new and often unexpected information about mass media, and in invoking some change in their outlook and behaviour. The responses of the participants showed an informed awareness of the teaching and learning plan that was in use, and assent towards it. They said that overall, progress had been made towards getting more media content published, and towards, in the process meeting the interests and needs of all parties.

LITERATURE AND BACKGROUND TO THE TRAINING PROJECT

assumptions Certain common and observations surround the question of multicultural communities and mass media. The first is that mainstream mass media (commercial and national broadcasting, and the daily press) fail to provide adequate representation of communities or service to them. The second is that being able to participate more in media making would help to meet many of their needs, (and may provide valuable personal stimulus and many individual community uplift to assumption members). Α third observation is that members of these communities locked from are out participation many aspects in of "mainstream", general community life, with poor access to mass media being one of these aspects. A fourth, however, is that avenues are open to individuals and groups to change this situation, in a process of empowerment, with again a dimension - finding ways to successfully participate in mass media is possible.

The theme of dissatisfaction with the breadth and quality of mass media is common in media research. For instance Meadows et al (2009: 36) cite Downing and Husband (2005) identifying 'continuing failures on the part of mainstream media, globally, to fulfill their potential to inform, enlighten, question, imagine and explain ...'. Part of seen that problem is as expanding commericalisation, increasing hence treatment of citizens as consumers leads media services to address large homogenous demographic groups, leaving out minorities. Meadows et al refer to a 2004 Foundation for Development report endorsing the work of local broadcasting services which were helping to make up for

a perceived deficiency by 'getting close to the creators of culture ... Citizens who feel they are being listened to are likely to participate with more vigour and enthusiasm in society than those who have been treated primarily as a consumer ...' (38-39).

An example was given of indigenous community broadcasting, providing audiences with a primary level of service across many areas - social cohesion, maintenance of language and cultures, boosting self-esteem. education. providing a source of news and information (98). In the same discussion Ien Ang (1999) speaks of exclusion as part of 'everyday awareness': 'For example as a foreigner you are constantly prevented from having a sense of belonging ... it has a lot to do with the indifference of the dominant culture ... [members of which] have the privilege of not having to question their own ethnicity, identities and cultural specificities' (101).

A treatment of difficulties experienced by multicultural communities with the new media of digitised mass communications in all forms, by Jakubowicz (In Jenkins and Thorburn 2003:207), offers a useful definition:

"Multicultural" can be taken to refer to a statement about demographic differences among groups, based on some idea of culture distinctiveness (national history, country or region of origin, shared family history, language, religion, cultural practices, etc.). Yet to speak of a multicultural world is to take a further step, to require an equivalence of the respect for different cultures as a political ideal. This may entail

implicit challenge to hierarchies

That statement draws attention to the key point that groups will often be very diverse, but share a prime identity. It draws attention also to the question of respect, which arises in all countries where rights are protected under law and democratic practice, whereby all have a wholly legitimate claim to the means of full participation in public life.

Jakubowicz sets out to demonstrate how the general situation is problematic for "multicultural" participants, by exploring such developments as the entry of global corporations into new media, looking to standardise products for bulk markets, leaving out minorities; or the hegemony of English language in writing of software. (217)

Inequality of access to cyber media is confirmed in the results of several investigations: US Dept of Commerce reports, in harmony with other studies, in 1999 found that African American households were starkly lacking in new technology resources compared with other groups. A contemporary survey of 54,000 Australian media users indicated that Internet access figures could be usefully differentiated along ethnic grounds, with highest usage among groups born in the United States and Canada, the lowest among those born in Italy and Greece (218-9).

The argument drawn from these facts was concerned with 'pyramids of power reinforced by cultural hierarchies' (206), and in response groups at lower points in the power structure may be seen empowering themselves through media use. Meadows et al (2009:118) report on a large field study of users of indigenous and multicultural broadcasting, which found the broadcasting

experience was 'improving the emotional and social wellbeing of many ethnic community group members' – an outcome, and precondition of full engagement in the life of society. A particular strength of the local community media services reported on in that study was the blurring of distinctions between audiences and producers (132, 38). It was found that the social isolation being countered by such involvements was strongest, as expected, among refugee communities (146).

The above observations and arguments are usual for a discussion of communities and mass media. The leadership of ethnic and other minority organisations will commonly declare they must contend with an outsider status and work towards empowerment. Representation in the mass media is an aspect of the outsider status, for instance with displays of lack of knowledge on the part of journalists and others in mass media, or very harrowing, hostile treatment of problem issues, like "ethnic" crime or illegal immigration. One key option empowerment is in the field of local or community media, as mentioned previously Another is to seek to influence change in larger mainstream media systems towards more inclusiveness.

To take this a little further; it should be noted that throughout the above discussion a theme emerges of communities taking action, freely associating, and forming alliances to assert cultural identities and advance their interests, such as working through political lobbying. Often the situation is framed in terms of victim-hood and domination, but the argument that has been traversed here does not lend itself to a simple paradigm of victim and dominator groups in society. The situation is dynamic with much effective action going on to continue changing it. For example it is

shown in the work done by Meadows et al that the community broadcasting movement is successful, attracting very substantial and loyal audiences which aver that the services meet many of their needs. Notions of victimhood are thereby weakened through this ability to act, assert the right to make changes, and achieve successes in that.

Secondly, in mass media dealings with publics, there is a well-known concept of the active audience. Even ostensibly passive choice can be construed as action, in many ways. For example watching television may not relate to advertising (against which sales-pitching viewers might or might not have their own psychological defences), but to studying local vernacular language, as a life skill in a new country. Understanding of media use as social action is taken further in the work of Renckstorf and others (1996, 2001).

The concerns of multicultural community leaders and spokespersons are articulated in declarations of principles and purpose, for instance by one of the sponsoring bodies of this training project, Communities the Ethnic Council Oueensland (ECCO). However, commonly found with advocacy on behalf of communities' interests, mass communication issues, and mass media are not a central concern. For example the declaration of the 2009 Multicultural Summit hosted by the ECCQ (ECCQ, 2009) set out 10 values and principles, stressing the entitlement of persons to equal rights, freedom, toleration and participation in the life of society. There were statements pressing for recognition of such principles in government programs and policies. Possible applications to mass media, though, were only indirect.

A set of objectives under the same declaration again emphasises government services, specifically listing housing, health care, access to transport, interpreter services, education including teaching of English. It included just three, though certainly well-targeted, express references to mass media.

One of those number 23. supported provision of "accurate information to media and government and to combat misinformation provided to community...", and urged the encouragement of media with a multicultural focus such as SBS and ethnic broadcasting.

The leaders' manual published by the ECCQ (ECCQ, undated: 69-70), similarly indicates acute concern with mass media, seeing it as a problem area, and deals with it briefly and defensively:

Using the media can be a double-edged sword – it can be good to promote your project or activities but it can also backfire and bring bad publicity.

You should therefore think <u>very</u> carefully before you approach or speak to the media. Here are some hints for using the media:

Local media are usually 'friendlier' than mainstream ...

If you are approached by the media, make sure you ask them exactly what the story is about ... If you are not comfortable ... it is quite alright to say "no". You should also say "no" if you

think they are unsympathetic ..."

Doubtlessly due to experience with negative publicity, mass media is seen as peripheral but dangerous. However there are also many precedents for success with media in conveying community messages, and the task in hand was to provide education and training that would enable spokespersons to communicate effectively with and through the mass media.

CONCEPTUALISATION AND CONDUCT OF THE TRAINING EXERCISE

The media training project for community spokespersons arose from a perception (consistent with the findings reported in the literature, above), that while the array of organisations in the multicultural field had definite strengths in political lobbying, welfare and community building, they could profit from an application of expertise in mass communication through media. The project launched by the ECCQ and Griffith University under a Community Media Link Queensland grant included a scheme for introducing working iournalists multicultural concepts, and multicultural leaders. It adopted into that, a proposal from Journalism educators at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to also community spokespersons prepare for dealing with the media.

Consequently a set of resources was assembled suitable for running a pilot training scheme: namely, experienced journalists and media academics; the membership rolls, policy maps, good will and administrative resources of the ECCQ;

and access to media facilities notably the **OUT** radio studios and computer laboratories, and those of the multicultural broadcaster 4EB-FM associated with that university. This base of knowledge would also include, of course, advanced cultural and social knowledge on the part of prospective course participants from the multicultural community organisations. Nine staff members and advanced-level students from the host organisations acted as facilitators, with five visiting resource persons from media industries.

Planning for the course was done through meetings of the Advisory Committee under the Community Media Link grant. It opted for half-day week-end programs suitable for a clientele of busy people, with four sessions normally spaced at least a fortnight apart, to cover the projected volume of teaching. Taking into account the holiday period the classes were set for Saturdays 14 and 28.11.09, and 6 and 13.2.10. Invitations to participate were sent out through the mailing lists of the ECCQ.

The curriculum was designed as a two-level process, entailing: (i) An introduction to the mass media (its composition, business orientations and general prerogatives in a free society; the professional outlook and mentality of media workers, and their operating procedures); in short, to show media are like and how they can be dealt with. (ii) Media practice, with the learners bearing in mind the messages obtained from the introduction to mass media, such that participants would practice making telephone calls to media offices, prepare media releases, reports or speeches, make reports for own-media (e.g. newsletters, web logs), and take part in drills of broadcast interview situations, experienced from the perspective of interviewer and interviewee.

It was presumed that the participants might approach the experience with preconceived notions including some animosity born of bad experience. for instance unsympathetic media publicity of refugee issues. It was presumed also that participants might expect "media training" to be simply "hands on" experience with broadcast equipment, without the backgrounding in how media function, and how to get into interview situations with them. Further, participants were expected to have prior experience with corporate short courses using packaged materials, and this program would be more open-ended in approach, different experience. predictions proved to be well-founded, as the participants would tell in their feed-back on the program, although as community leaders they also proved perceptive and adaptable to the course of learning.

The learning and teaching approach was the transmission interactive, (for messages about mass media) and practical (through the use of workshops for skills training and recapitulation on the exercises). An expected attendance of 20 to 30 meant that the sessions could be run on a "small conference" basis, convening as a plenary session, (to hear from a media guest) or as two small groups for discussion of topics. Materials used for group exercises included typical bundles of "leads" or "files" used by journalists to "read-in" on the background to an unfamiliar issue. These included loosely targeted newspaper clippings, hand-written notes or print-offs. The task would be to quickly establish a new point of information

as the "peg" for a story in the news.

Participants might work with such materials

when role-playing as news reporters, and

when role-playing as public relations

persons (themselves) catching up on a story

and developing an angle on it to propose to

news media. Topical issues were used, such

as attacks on Indian students, or interviews given by spokespersons for "Antarcticans". These latter closely resembled a particular refugee community, answering questions about misadventures of some of their community members. "Real-life" aids were also used, e.g. a guide to depositing complaints about mass media coverage with relevant regulatory or professional agencies (ACMA, Press Council, MEAA – Australian Journalists' Association); also the Social organisation's Media Change guide. "Achieving Media Coverage ..., http://media.socialchange.net.au, (accessed 22.10.10).

Central to these pursuits was the "production side" approach. The participants, as a lay group in relation to news media, were invited to adopt the perspectives of media practitioners and share their experiences -- in order to be able to understand and manage media more effectively. This procedure meant moving away from the more familiar habit of first making a critique founded on observation of media products.

Consistent with the "production side" approach, "Meet the Journalists" sessions were included, bringing in journalists from ABC Online, The Australian, The Courier Mail and APN regional newspapers, and also a former politician versed in dealing with media, and the manager of the multicultural station 4EB-FM; all to explain outlook, tasks, practices media objectives. A strong, supplementary aspect of the training was to promote local and community media to the participants as highly amenable and effective communication channels which they could use, and which resembled "own channels" in which the boundaries between media users and producers are much more fluid than in the case of central, mainstream media outlets. Advice was offered: that a message crafted and given to smaller outlets would not be wasted effort, but could be kept ready and employed at any time with larger outlets, and would be essential readiness practice in the meantime.

Presentation of data obtained from participants' responses

Twenty-eight people attended at least one of the four sessions in the course, with 26 contributing written feedback for facilitators. In composition, the group had 11 female and 17 male members, drawn from 23 organisations. The latter included: The peak body ECCQ, and multicultural advocacy groups or government agencies, e.g. Multicultural Development Association, Multicultural Communities Council; "national" organisations (Hong Kong, Sri **Sports** Association, Finnish Lanka Association, United Somali Association, Kiribati Australia Association, Rwanda Association of Queensland); religious and other communities groups (Gold Coast Multi-cultural Festival Association, Youth Interfaith, Oral History Association, African Seniors and Elders in Queensland, Islamic Students). The participants therefore were from diverse backgrounds with differing interests. Some were political lobbyists, others were persons providing for the aged, organisers of community cultural events, or organisers of welfare and social life for members of smaller ethnic community groups.

Only two within the group attended all four sessions; four were present at three sessions, eight attended two, and 12 attended one only; (broadly, 14 took part in eight hours of classes or more). Attendances on the days: 14.11.09 (15); 26.11.09 (14); 6.2.10 (9); 13.2.10 (13). These respondents provided discriminating comments on their course experience, as might be expected given the background of most as leaders often engaged in themselves providing training. The

evaluation was positive, tempered through adopting a critical approach.

First session 14.11.09: The version of the feed-back questionnaire employed that day, and the next, invited respondents to use a four-point scale of excellent/good/fair/poor, to evaluate the (i) content of the activity, (ii) the facilitators, and (iii) participants' ability to apply learning obtained from the course, i.e. amenability of the content to uptake and use. Nine or ten of the 15 respondents rated each of the values "excellent", otherwise "good", (except for one "fair" response to applicability of the learning). Eleven of the respondents averred they would implement changes in their community work as a result of the training received.

Among strengths listed on the treatment of content, the respondents proposed:- Content mainly generated from among participants, while the activity brought together a cross section of advocacy groups, and it 'valued participants' pre-existing knowledge'. The approach to information was seen to be solution-orientated, and 'different ideas were really explored'. Topicality with the materials and examples was a strength; with 'good examples', 'solid practical points to follow up on'. The sessions were found to have a strong rationale. using goals and strategy, orientated towards preventing conflict. They also had a 'strong focus on media', and gave a 'real picture of the media market in Australia and the possibilities to reach them with our messages for the communities'.

The facilitators were seen as 'very experienced' and informative, able to use an interactive approach to create a 'feel-free environment'. They had 'brought stakeholders together and brought out their aims and objectives' for greater exposure. The facilitators' strong news knowledge enabled them to bring up interesting

examples. Applicability of the lessons to vouchsafed, practice was participants owning to acquiring a 'better attitude and approach to media in general', which would translate into more media-orientated activity, 'contacting media in a proper organised fashion', building on media contacts already made, making new contacts with journalists, testing ideas with local media, and providing 'credible rather than colourful sources', that is to say protecting vulnerable persons where you can put forward skilled spokespersons instead.

Second session 28.11.09: Half the responses in all three categories (content, facilitators, applicability) rated the activity 'excellent', the other half 'good'. Eight of 10 answering the question, said they would make changes in their own work in response to what they had learned. Participants said they obtained much new information, new learning, 'getting to know how the journalists do things'. Teaching of interviewing through role play by facilitators including guests from media was 'very important and the experience of facilitators was eye opening'. 'Interesting speakers showed proper interviewing techniques'. One respondent proposed more time for practical sessions and open discussion. Facilitators having background in media had been 'very entertaining while knowing their subject thoroughly'. Apart from the learning of interviewing techniques, responses in regard to applying the lessons included a resolution to 'monitor news stories more and respond when there is an opportunity to build a relationship with journalists'.

Third session 6.2.10: A more detailed questionnaire was employed for the last two sessions, looking for more information for this research, inviting participants to register agreement or disagreement on a five point scale (Strongly Agree, A, Neutral, D,

Strongly Disagree), to questions about their experience:

- 1. The training met my expectations
- 2. I will be able to apply the knowledge learned
- 3. The content was organised and easy to follow
- 4. The materials distributed were useful
- 5. The facilitators were knowledgeable
- 6. The quality of instruction was good
- 7. Group participation and interaction were encouraged
- 8. Adequate time was provided for questions and discussion

In summary, responses to these criteria rated the experience as 'strongly agree' in four out of the nine cases, the rest 'agree'. The first four performance criteria were rated the weakest, though marginally so; 'agreement' being chosen for those more times than 'strongly agree'. It could be inferred that members of the group found the activity well set up with able facilitators (points 4-8), while they had to give more consideration to whether the organisation and applicability of the content had matched their expectations. written comments, one contributor suggested that more time be allocated for the sessions. Materials distributed were not given highest rating, or in one case were 'neutral', suggesting rated that authenticity of the 'difficult' bundle of haphazard material used for research - as in the "real world" of media – was not always well taken. As mentioned above business course participants may be conditioned to expect bought kits, with produced-up workbooks, packaged online presentations and the like.

Fourth session 13.2.10: This became a popular session bringing together knowledge from previous times, with video recording of interviews, and use of playback for discussion on the communication principles entailed. Nine of the 13 respondents gave a 'strongly agree' rating across the board. Once again the first four criteria were slightly less favoured. Written comments included: 'More of such training would boost confidence', and 'I have learned a lot and it is going to help me deal with media in future'.

Extended questionnaire

A longer questionnaire was sent to participants after the end of the program inviting them to elaborate on comments made in the initial feed-back documents. Only eight were returned, but provided sufficient commentary to be useful as a supplement.

The first section of the questionnaire asked the respondents about the extent of their prior contacts with mass media, and their view of the treatment of ethnic and multicultural issues, generally, in the news media. One had never previously been in contact with mass media; the rest had sometimes had contact; no respondent had often had contact. Of the seven who had made contact, one had found the experience very rewarding; the rest rewarding enough; none said disappointing or terrible. As for the respondents' view of the treatment of ethnic / multicultural groups and issues in both news coverage, and general sections of the mass media: five considered this treatment to be 'good', while two said 'bad', and one 'very bad'. (Choices had been 'very good', 'good', 'indifferent', 'bad', 'very bad').

The next section asked the respondents for their judgment of the efforts of mass media, before and after their own exposure to training. Six were tolerant, describing the media as either very good organisations giving good service, or ordinary-enough organisations doing the best they could. Four of those respondents registered no change in attitude, and two indicated an improved, but sympathetic understanding, by downgrading the media from 'very good' to 'ordinary enough ... doing the best they can'. Two respondents were unimpressed by mass media, viewing them both before and after the training, as 'very mediocre organisations doing a poor job'. None took fourth. hostile option of organisations deliberately misrepresenting reality'.

A less reserved response was achieved by a test applied at the end of the questionnaire, where respondents were given a list of 56 words to describe mass media (See Appendix). Half were positive descriptors and half were pejorative. The list of words was randomly compiled through discussions among facilitators on the training program, drawing on general discourse journalism and media, heard in the context of doing journalism, or studying media issues at university. The respondents were asked to mark any number of words that they considered an accurate description of mass media and media products. The following are the words marked in the two groups, positive and pejorative, and the frequency of references to each.

Accurate, considerate, creative (+2 additional mentions), entertaining (+2), hard-working (+1), highly-skilled (+1), intelligent, interesting, reasonable, well-expressed

Arrogant (+ 3), biased (+2), cynical, dull, inflammatory (+1), ignorant, ill-conceived, intrusive (+1), lazy, provocative (+1), sensationalist (+1), silly, stupid, unfair, untrustworthy (+1), untruthful,

While drawing on only eight respondents the outcome of this exercise suggests that such a test with a large group might produce a definite indicator of attitudes or at least opinion. In this case, the overall response is tending towards a negative bias. Ten positive words were chosen, and 16 positive indications in total (four words being mentioned by more than one respondent). On the pejorative side, 16 words were chosen, with 26 pejorative indications overall. Three of the respondents chose only pejorative words, two others chose positive words but for one pejorative word in their list, and the remainder gave a more balanced selection. They all chose only between four and ten words each.

The outcome of this test is consistent with the assumption that community spokespersons, as a background attitude, are discontented with mass media, and it therefore highlights an obstacle to achieving working relationships with journalists.

These respondents, when questioned on the impacts on them of the training in media relations, said they could adjust such negative feelings. Six responded that they had learned new things which changed their opinion in an important way; two chose the less affirmative statement that they had learned some things which might influence a change of opinion; none took the option of saying they had not learned anything particularly new affecting outlook, or had learned nothing and would not be changing their mind. Similarly, six agreed with the statement: 'I am much better equipped to deal with mass media as part of my work for

my community organisation'. Two took the more reserved option: 'I have learned something which should help with my work ...'. None averred that they had learned very little, or that they had come away with a more negative feeling than before about their ability to deal with mass media. The usefulness of this limited set of reports, to the researchers, is that it signals the possibility, that through acquiring knowledge of mass media and training in media relations, spokespersons may be equipped to suspend or side-step obstructive, negative impressions of mass media which they have.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESPONSES AND CONCLUSION

The respondent group, if not all professionals in the multicultural sector, presented as an able leadership cadre prepared to work proactively to take advantage of opportunities with mass media. The phenomenon of dissatisfaction with media obstructs efforts of community organisations to engage with journalists, and a significant amount of this background dissatisfaction was evident in the responses. At the same time the participants overall indicated little animosity in regard to their own direct experience with media, and were interested to learn from practitioners. Most members of this group judged that the training was directly applicable to actual work they planned to do with news media; it had in fact provoked most to want to proceed with such work. As for whether mass media is to be seen as peripheral to the "real" affairs of life – like jobs, housing, health, legal protection or education - or forming part of the centre; the responses received would indicate it was being moved more towards centre stage, in the view of those taking part. With practice in use of media, the idea of mass media as part of the social cement of communication becomes more persuasive.

These contributors can be seen as a group wanting to tackle the reality of victim-hood in the experience of mass media by multicultural communities, through developing an informed assertiveness on their own part as community leaders; through learning rules of the media game. At the same time, such action on their part, based on knowledge, to change relations among media and publics, might contribute to the 'implicit challenge to hierarchies' identified in the literature review (Jacubowicz, 2003; page?).

The approach to teaching and learning was endorsed, beginning with an introduction to media. seen as both media organisations and media practitioners, and moving into skills training for doing media. It included engagement of practitioners in the training, as informants and leaders; and conducting classes mostly as interactive small group sessions or workshops, able to existing knowledge draw on resourcefulness of the practitioners The review themselves. of this media training program for community spokespersons has led to an assertion that multicultural interests may develop effective access to use of mainstream media, especially where leaders in the field study these media and have preparation for becoming engaged. It has demonstrated by reference to participants' feedback from an intensive course in media management, that representatives of community organisations will develop a strong disposition to take action, in using media. The same persons will agree that relations between mass media and the multicultural community are fraught with difficulties, over misunderstandings, journalists' lack of knowledge, and often enough disingenuousness on the part of journalists looking for a contentious story. (In a final discussion to review the training course, it was proposed, with some consensus of support, that the participants might act as mentors or tutors in a future project, where journalists in their turn would be the learners, to find out about perspectives of the multicultural communities).

In a few cases in discussions within the training exercise, individuals, out of exasperation would raise the idea of having strong guidelines or strengthened regulation of media, to prevent unfair reporting being done with impunity. More pronouncedly though, the participants took a managerial approach, seeing media management in terms of problem solving. They appreciated and identified with the course coordinators' choice of method, to work through a series of hypothesised problem situations.

A key question remains: will this approach work? While the training program did include treatments of the anatomy of issues in the news, to better understand the reportage that went on, participants had to take it on trust from the facilitators that informed media management would bring results; that problems, and certain "problem" they encountered people in media organisations, would not prove intractable. The participants said they had obtained for the first time, essential knowledge about media systems, and would set out to apply it. Mass media concerns had moved from the periphery of mind and experience, to being seen as more central to the work people were doing. They accepted advice to develop, and build expertise using "own" media, which is to say their own online services, and extend their engagements with local and community media – seen from the literature as a zone of high-impact communication for communities.

In regard to mainstream media it can be argued that a "production side" training approach has generated awareness pointed the way to action, except that outcomes cannot be assumed. Whether change is to occur in media treatment of multicultural issues as a result of the training exercisewill depend to a large extent on the application of the individual spokespersons, working by trial and error. The experience of this course may have demonstrated practical options for multicultural communities to begin work towards an actually transformed situation. This may contribute to strategic change, from an enforced passivity often in the face of mortifying treatment in mass media, to effective intervention as principals and rights-holders in public debate.

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Appendix

Choices for the "word test".

'Would you mark whichever of these words would describe what you think of the mass media and mass media products, such as the daily news? You might circle none at all, some of them, or all of them.

Accurate, Arrogant, Attractive, Biased, Bigoted, Boorish, Boring, Conscientious, Considerate, Creative, Cynical, Discreet, Dull, Entertaining, Fair-minded, Generous, Good-humoured, Greedy, Hard-working, Highly-skilled, Incompetent, Inflammatory, Ill-conceived, Ignorant, Insightful, Interesting, Intelligent, Intrusive, Kind. Loud-mouthed, Lazy, Mean, Nasty, Offensive, Pleasant, Polite, Practical, Reasonable, Provocative, Responsible, Right, Sensationalist, Sensitive, Silly, Stupid, Talented. Tiresome. Tolerant. Unfair, Unintelligible, Untrustworthy, Untruthful, Well-expressed, Well-informed, Wise, Wrong.'

This paper will be accessible from the QUT database from November 2010: http://eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/Duffield, Lee.html, (accessed 7.7.10).