

Journalism students as global citizens and mediators: incorporating global current affairs into the journalism curriculum

Roman Gerodimos, Bournemouth University

Abstract: This article argues that journalism education is uniquely positioned to advance global awareness, and makes the case for a curriculum that places greater emphasis on global current affairs. A robust understanding of global issues, and of the challenges facing global reportage, is a vital part of media literacy and can help journalism students fulfil their dual role as global citizens and mediators.

The paper sets the rationale and parameters for the integration of global current affairs into the journalism curriculum, taking into account emerging challenges and opportunities within a competitive, fragmented and multimedia landscape. It also reflects on the development and delivery of an undergraduate global current affairs module and highlights the need for a pedagogic strategy that is grounded in historical and geographical context. Journalism education can play an instrumental role in nurturing global reportage, by developing innovative forms of storytelling and by empowering young journalists to exercise their global voice.

Journalism education as a socializing agent is becoming increasingly powerful in today's media, as a vast majority of newcomers in the profession worldwide come to the job with some kind of training or education in journalism. (Deuze, 2006, p.31)

Introduction and Aim

At a time of transition both for the profession and for the pedagogy of journalism, this paper highlights the role of journalism students as global citizens and mediators-to-be, and makes the case for a curriculum that places greater emphasis on global current affairs. During the last decade the strategic role of education in promoting sustainable development and global citizenship has been highlighted both internationally (e.g., 2002 UN World Summit on Sustainable Development; 2003 UNESCO framework) and in the UK (Osler and Vincent, 2002). It will be argued that journalism education is uniquely positioned to advance global awareness, both directly, amongst journalism students, and indirectly – through them – amongst the public at large.

A growing body of academic literature has been looking at the related concepts of global perspectives, global education, global learning, global citizenship and education for sustainable development, while efforts have been made to map the links and dynamics amongst these interdependent terms (Anderberg et al,

2009) as well as to outline the main actors, means of youth engagement and drivers of change (Bourn and Brown, 2011). However, this is still an emerging field of scholarship and a review of the literature reveals that research on global learning in Higher Education is still “comparatively rare” and “very few empirical studies appear to have been conducted” (Anderberg et al, 2009, p.369).

This is particularly true in the case of journalism education, which has taken significant steps towards accommodating – indeed embracing – technological convergence, yet has been less determined in addressing the challenges posed by globalisation both for the profession and for the world at large. The agenda of the 21st century features *global issues* that are highly complex and interdependent; they blur the boundaries of media genres; their relevance to contemporary audiences is not always apparent, especially within a noisy 24/7 global news cycle, disproportionately oriented towards celebrity culture; their reporting often requires not only familiarity with the issues themselves, but also an in-depth understanding of how global reporting differs from traditional journalism (e.g., the challenges involved with the coverage of conflict or humanitarian disasters, emerging obstacles to press freedom and greater awareness of cross-cultural professional perspectives). Hunter and Nel (2011, p.10) note that “the paradox between the increased globalization and complexity of practice and the marked increase in redundancy among U.K. journalism professionals poses a direct challenge to the pedagogical identity of the field”. Surveying 65 journalists-turned-academics on the areas in which journalism research would be particularly useful, Harcup (2011) also highlighted the need to explore the impact of globalisation on journalism.

Hence, this paper makes the case for the establishment and nurturing of an interdisciplinary field of research, teaching and learning that brings together key elements of international affairs, journalism and pedagogy. For the purposes of this paper, and in the interest of clarity, I use the title “global current affairs” (GCA) to refer to this emerging field, as this title most accurately conveys both its substantive content and its pedagogic agenda (although the issue of the field’s name is of lesser importance to its pedagogic mission). The aim of GCA as a pedagogic field is to provide emerging journalists with the vital context and skills that are necessary for them to fulfil their roles as global citizens and critical mediators between the global and the local. This includes the utilisation of historical, geographical, institutional and political concepts, as well as a reflective engagement with the available tools and emerging challenges relating to global issues. In terms of its position within journalism education, GCA aims to transcend the increasingly sterile divide between “theory” and “practice” as it combines a scholarly context with subject-specific and transferable skills that are vital to the profession. An indicative example of such combination might be the understanding of key theories, institutions and processes of global governance – including the challenges facing the United Nations as well as emerging questions of democratic deficit and online global protest – in conjunction with an ability to identify and critically engage with key sources (e.g. decision-makers and mediators involved with specific aspects of these issues) and resources (e.g. NGO briefings).

The concept of Global Current Affairs, as outlined here, is firmly positioned within the field of civic and media literacy – indeed one might argue that it constitutes one of its building blocks. Global news and current affairs literacy has a dual role in this agenda, both as an instrumental tool and as an end product of this process. It is becoming increasingly clear that the boundaries between scholarly research, pedagogy (learning and teaching), training, professional practice and public dissemination are, to a considerable extent, artificial. The realisation of the dynamic and interactive relationship between these practices can produce huge benefits for the public understanding of, and engagement with, global issues. As Mihailidis (2009, p.9) notes, “[m]aking the connections between media literacy, freedom of expression, and civic engagement can reposition media literacy as the core of new civic education. This can help supporters of good governance see media literacy as an educational response for the information age”.

In the following sections, I make the case for the incorporation of GCA into the journalism curriculum further setting the parameters of such an application. I start by looking at the role of journalism students as global citizens, noting that they are ideally positioned to act as mediators between the global and the local. I then look at the evidence regarding the public’s engagement with global current affairs and argue that, despite many revolutionary developments in the area of online engagement and civic protest, global reporting and global awareness (in the UK but also in the US and Europe) are both facing considerable pressure from changing audience habits, amongst other factors. I then outline and evaluate the development and delivery of a GCA unit within an undergraduate journalism programme in the UK, as a case study of global learning within journalism education. It is hoped that this bottom-up approach can inform and complement more strategic and comparative reviews into the role of journalism students as global citizens and the role of journalism education as a locus of media literacy and global awareness.

Journalism Students as Global Citizens

Advocates of global or cosmopolitan citizenship have for a long time and through multiple normative models made the case for a field of civic participation that transcends the narrow boundaries of nation-states (e.g., Dower, 2003; Dower and Williams, 2002). In the past this discussion might have been considered as “academic” or abstract, but recent global developments – from international terrorism to the spread of mass epidemics to climate change to civic mobilisation through social networks to the global financial crisis – have been bringing the realities of globalisation closer to home. The effects of globalisation are already visible, while the structures of 19th and 20th century governance and citizenship are struggling to cope, creating deficits of democracy, legitimacy, policy effectiveness and quality of life – not to mention poverty and global inequality. The media are instrumental to this process: not only do new information and communication technologies accelerate globalisation, but they also frame the agenda and mediate the debate in the global public sphere.

A consensus has emerged both within academia and across government, industry and the voluntary sector about the crucial role that universities can and should play in empowering students to become global citizens. As with traditional citizenship, this includes becoming aware of the ways and means of active engagement, as well as its costs and benefits. It is also a process of understanding one’s rights and responsibilities. However, citizenship is not only about awareness per se; it should ideally enable the citizen to critically engage with these concepts, i.e., to fully understand the possibilities and process of social change and the role of the individual within the community. Hence, global citizenship should enable individuals to develop their own voice and be part of a global dialogue – to participate in the global public sphere with a view to promoting sustainability (Anderberg et al, 2009) and social justice (Bourn, 2010; Bencze and Carter, 2011). This could have a range of results, such as: (i) well-equipped graduates in the global economy, (ii) critical thinkers who are aware of the complex world that they will inhabit and/or (iii) informed social activists (Bourn, 2010; Shiel, 2006).

The incorporation of global perspectives into the Higher Education curriculum is one of the main ways of achieving greater student awareness about their role as global citizens. The benefits of this approach have been demonstrated repeatedly and at different levels (e.g. see Bourn et al, 2006). Global learning enhances the development of critical skills, boosts employability, facilitates intercultural understanding and internationalisation, and ultimately transforms not just students but also HE institutions themselves, making them more environmentally sustainable and morally robust. In addition to these pedagogic benefits, global citizenship brings with it all the benefits associated with civic participation both at the micro-social level of the individual (such as increasing efficacy, empathy and trust; Barber, 1998) and at the macro-social, systemic one (law abidance, social peace, integration, cohesion and welfare; public policy that is more informed about the needs of the people and thus more effective; a political system that better represents the diversity of the community – see Elster, 1998; Nye et al, 1997).

Central to global citizenship is an understanding of the fundamental interdependence between the global and the local, and the realisation of the power that citizens have in bringing about social change. In practical terms, it may be the case that the best way to achieve this is by applying the principles, issues and skillsets of global learning onto specific fields of study, rather than in a generic, catch-all way. Interestingly, recent studies have evaluated the application of education for global citizenship within individual disciplines, such as engineering (Bourn and Neal, 2008) and social policy (Irving et al, 2005), although there seems to be a lack of such application in the field of journalism studies, which the present paper aims to address. Having said that, the similarities across fields, for example in terms of their global implications, or of the challenges faced in promoting global citizenship, can be striking, which only serves to prove that this ongoing, multi-disciplinary dialogue is vital.

A related debate has emerged on whether global learning should be content-oriented or process-oriented; that is to say, whether it should focus on the substance of the current issues affecting the world or the principles behind global citizenship and sustainable development (see Anderberg et al, 2009). However, the gap between the two can be overstated as by far the most effective learning and teaching strategy is the one that combines content with process; engaging students with current affairs in specific localities, while touching upon broader, institutional, systemic or moral debates. It is true that global education should be competence-driven (e.g. Irving et al, 2005), i.e. providing students with core skills not just of global citizenship, but also of critical thinking and empathy. However, I argue that the skills-oriented approach cannot be divorced from the context of ongoing events, which, as the case study outlined later in this paper shows, can be an excellent “way in” to more sophisticated and abstract debates. [As it happens, the same could be argued in the case of media literacy, which is usually interpreted and delivered through a generic, reflective approach rather than an issue-oriented one – see below].

During the last few years we have witnessed the integration of global perspectives across a wide range of disciplines with the aim of enabling graduates to act as global citizens. While the moral, pedagogic and political principle for the conceptualisation of individual students as global citizens applies equally to all disciplines, it is hard to think of a field of study in which a critical engagement with global contexts is more vital. Journalists are not just global citizens; they are also gate-keepers of global agendas, mediators of global change, and interpreters of events and current affairs. Journalists constitute the crucial link between often abstract processes of global governance and individual citizens. Thus, they have a dual duty in the global public sphere: professional as journalists and personal as citizens themselves. Hence, I argue that the integration of global perspectives into the journalism curriculum and the parallel development of global journalism as a field of epistemology are crucial prerequisites for the fulfilment of journalism education's mission in the 21st century.

The challenge is not to merely add another – international – layer to journalism, above the local and national ones, but to prepare students for a fundamentally different paradigm of global news, mirroring the increased complexities and interdependence between global, national and local phenomena and actors. Berglez (2008) offers an articulate conceptualisation of what global journalism might – or indeed *does* – look like:

The national outlook puts the nation-state at the centre of things when framing social reality, while the global outlook instead seeks to understand and explain how economic, political, social and ecological practices, processes and problems in different parts of the world affect each other, are interlocked, or share commonalities (2008, p.847).

Berglez rightly distinguishes the normative discussion on the moral need for a global journalism from the experienced reality of interdependent issues and peoples, and the need to capture, interpret and communicate that reality. The call for the integration of global current affairs into the journalism curriculum is not only a normative one, but a pragmatic response to the realities of globalisation. For example, an understanding of the links between international terrorism, transnational organised crime and weapons of mass destruction is vital in order to interpret events both in remote parts of the world and in our local communities. This includes a basic familiarity with the networks, movements and illegal trafficking of arms, drugs, human organs, minerals, diamonds etc from/to different parts of the world, the flow of money, the impact on the global economy and governance systems, as well as the direct effects on the security and quality of life in local communities across national boundaries.

Directly linked to this process of interpretation and reportage is the paradigm of journalism; its traditions, rituals and cultural “baggage”. Therefore, a reflective process of engaging critically not only with the content of global current affairs, but also with the ways and means through which these affairs are reported in different regional or cultural settings should be a vital part of media education. An increasingly more integral part of that discussion is the role of the internet and more specifically online news and citizen journalism. The emergence of participatory news and user-generated content in particular is leading to an historic shift within journalism (Allan and Thorsen, 2009; Deuze et al, 2007; Allan, 2006). The processes of news-gathering, selection, editing and transmission, as well as the agents of these processes, are changing. Through the use of social media and first-hand accounts, citizens are becoming amateur journalists with profound effects for both journalism itself and the world at large. While the makeshift practices and firsthand accounts of citizen reporters cannot replace the output of mainstream, professional organisations (Reich, 2008), citizen journalism still poses considerable challenges in terms of editorial standards, ethics, personal safety, market sustainability, innovation etc.

Consequently, journalism graduates must survive within an increasingly volatile and competitive industry, which highlights the need for universities to cultivate their core critical thinking skills as well as their in-depth understanding of complex global situations. At the same time, the need for a media literate and globally engaged public is perhaps greater than ever.

Global Current Affairs as an essential part of media literacy

Perhaps ironically, in this age of globalisation, promoting global citizenship amongst journalism students and global awareness amongst the broader public is becoming increasingly difficult. Coverage of world news is dwindling across American and European media, while news organisations are disinvesting in foreign reportage to an extent that signifies a systemic failure on the part of the media (e.g., Carroll, 2007; Alltmeppen, 2010; Livingston and Asmolov, 2010). Established news organisations, which have both the resources and the public service responsibility to cover world affairs through local bureaus, foreign correspondents and in-depth investigations, prefer to use wire services and focus on local stories (Zuckerman,

2008), which means that coverage of global current affairs is repetitive, superficial, occasionally inaccurate and lacking in context. A comprehensive survey of international factual programming by the International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) showed that in 2010:

The main UK terrestrial channels broadcast fewer hours of new international factual programming than at any time since the study began in 1989. International content is in decline on every terrestrial channel except Channel 4, and BBC1 has now replaced ITV1 as the channel with the least amount of new factual coverage of developing countries (Scott et al, 2011, p.2).

There are multiple reasons for this systemic decline in the coverage of global current affairs and isolating or measuring the impact of individual factors is an almost impossible task. The end of the Cold War may have deprived international news of the sense of imminent conflict and drama, while another salient factor seems to be the radical transformation of media consumption habits due to increased competition and quantitative choice (Utley, 1997). That is to say, the rise of cable, satellite and digital television in conjunction with the diffusion of new media and the decline of newspapers have created a different pattern of media consumption – one based on segmentation, user choice, escapism and superficial, fragmented and multiple reception as opposed to a broadcast, public service model encompassing the “old” media of analogue TV, radio and the daily newspaper. The extent to which this new model is less controlled by gatekeepers (who might exercise their public service responsibility and provide global affairs coverage) is debatable, as is the extent of actual choice that multiple channels and billions of web and media outlets offer. In any case, quality international news is considered as expensive, complicated and not popular enough to compete against entertainment genres.

However, Carroll (2007, p.2) makes a powerful argument in favour of news organisations investing in foreign news coverage. She notes that coverage of global current affairs adds value to a news organisation that is not easily measurable in net profits, but which in the long term far outweighs the costs as it attracts employees of higher quality, guarantees exclusives and grants that organisation greater credibility. The call for greater contextualisation and more in-depth coverage of world news is quite pressing if one considers the impact that this systemic failure has had on the public’s comprehension of global issues.

A range of studies and scholars from different backgrounds, following different methodological approaches, have outlined a lack of public understanding of global current affairs which can partly be attributed to the decline in media coverage, as well as to changing audience/reader habits. The link between news media use and political awareness is well known (e.g. Pasek et al, 2006). A study by the UK’s Department for International Development (DfID 2000: 1) identified “a serious problem with audience understanding of development issues, especially on news programmes” and highlights the need for “continued work on making global issues comprehensible to viewers”. Similarly, Philo (2002) demonstrates the negative effects in terms of news comprehension of low level explanation and stresses the importance of illustrating the interdependence of global issues. This is particularly crucial insofar as younger audiences are concerned. It has been shown (e.g., Gerodimos, 2010) that many young people find it hard to understand current affairs and feel that news coverage requires a lot of prior knowledge while political discourse is either patronisingly simplistic or intimidatingly complex.

Furthermore, Zuckerman (2008) makes the point that even the output of civic media may be incomprehensible to domestic audiences due to cultural or linguistic barriers, lack of relevant context and background knowledge and inability to authenticate or judge the material’s credibility. Hence, it appears as if, at a time when emerging challenges make engagement with global current affairs more crucial than ever, rather than investing in more extrovert forms of journalism, news organisations are reducing both their physical presence across the world and the amount of coverage devoted to global affairs. Yet, what many studies of both adult and younger audiences demonstrate is that contemporary citizens genuinely want to know more about the world at large, although they are unable to do so.

It is often argued that the web can provide contemporary audiences with masses of information regarding international affairs at the click of a button. In fact, this argument has often been used as the rationale for the further devaluation of foreign reportage across broadcast media. Yet, that theory is based on two fundamentally flawed assumptions: namely that, firstly, audiences are, or ought to be, self-motivated (some people are, many aren’t); and, secondly and perhaps more saliently, that audiences have the skills, news literacy and prior understanding of issues in order to filter and evaluate global current affairs material themselves (a few do, many don’t):

Audiences can now find their own routes to making sense of the world. But have passive audiences already deserted television to become curious and self-motivated global citizens or in an age of information overload do we underestimate the potential for television to remain the key source of information about the wider

world for the UK public? (Padania et al, 2007, p.4).

In fact, in a comprehensive survey of UK adults' media literacy, Ofcom found that "when people are asked for their views on which media they would trust *most* to provide fair and unbiased world news, TV is trusted most by 72%, the internet by 7%, radio by 6% and newspapers by 3%" (2011: 7 - emphasis in the original). Padania et al concur: "Television remains the main source of information for audiences – including young people – about the wider world. Broadcasters and NGOs should resist the temptation to direct disproportionate resources to online media." (2007, p.7).

The emergence of the internet as a dominant news medium embedded in people's everyday routines poses several challenges in terms of audiences' media literacy: the majority of citizen media around the world are "filled with the daily trivialities that also characterize American blogs" (Zuckerman, 2008, p.5); most people in the UK use the internet to search for topics that they are already interested in and "rarely read anything online which tells them about the lives of people in other countries" (Fenyoe, 2010, p.2); self-selection and sophisticated search engine algorithms are creating a "filter bubble" (Pariser, 2011) – a comfort zone, from which users are finding it increasingly hard to escape; the dependency on search engines itself raises questions about users' media literacy (Fenyoe, 2010, p.3) as many users don't know where to start from; while, marketing and aesthetics are becoming the key factors determining whether a user will be attracted by, and ultimately trust, a website, highlighting the tensions that exist between the current hegemony of online consumer choice and those civic responsibilities that are critical to a healthy democracy and global citizenship (Gerodimos, 2012).

In this context, is it possible to develop global learning that promotes media literacy and that equips journalists to engage with confused and busy audiences? And how does GCA fit in the journalism curriculum? Given the torrent of messages and available content, Scott et al (2011, p.29) note that "the question for international programming is 'what are its principal USPs and how can social and online media be used to enhance these?'. This is, in fact, part of a broader question regarding the factors that motivate citizens to engage with public affairs in general, and motivating journalism students to become global citizens in particular. It has been shown that demonstrating the benefits of civic participation in moral and practical terms is key to boosting a citizen's sense of efficacy, i.e., an individual's confidence in the impact of their own actions (e.g. Bowler and Donovan, 2002). A cyclical, reciprocal relationship normally exists between efficacy and participation: the more meaningful a citizen feels that their civic action is, the more likely it is that they will be participating, further boosting their sense of efficacy, and so on. Scott et al (2011, p.3) argue that current affairs producers should challenge many viewers' assumption that "there is nothing they can do' to address global issues like poverty by offering clear options so that audiences feel that they can undertake action that will make a difference".

Linking public or global affairs to citizens' lifeworld, i.e., their immediate, micro-social environment, is also crucial, particularly in the case of young people. On the one hand – and contrary to contemporary myths – it has been repeatedly shown that young people are not indifferent to global issues (Gerodimos, 2010; Bourn et al, 2006). On the other hand, many young people feel profoundly disempowered, disconnected from the institutions and processes of democratic participation and ultimately emotionally detached from public affairs. A comparative analysis of youth participation organisations and issue-oriented Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Gerodimos, 2008) and a subsequent analysis of young people's own responses to NGO material (Gerodimos, 2012) showed that NGOs using personalisation and small-scale, tangible civic action succeeded in emotionally engaging young people, while youth organisations failed because they promoted participation in a generic and decontextual way, focusing on a vocabulary and repertoires of engagement that were far removed from young people's everyday realities.

Based on this analysis, it is argued that a learning and teaching strategy which uses specific issues as the starting and focal points of a global learning curriculum could effectively engage students (while also avoiding conceptualising engagement in the narrow sense of participation or action, as opposed to a broader sense of behaviour that includes the learning process – see Bourn and Brown, 2011). In other words, what I am arguing for is the utilisation of current affairs (and, in particular, global current affairs) as key starting points of a process of media and civic literacy.

Even a cursory glance at the four core elements of media literacy (Livingstone, 2004) shows that the model is applicable to the discussion on global awareness and journalism education:

Access: taken in its broader sense of coming across relevant material, access to global current affairs is limited due to scarcity of coverage in traditional media and information saturation on the web. Ways to increase access include greater investment in international reporting, as well as its incorporation across different genres of news media.

Analysis and Evaluation: coverage of GCA is lacking in context, and audiences – especially young people – lack basic historical and geographical knowledge that is a prerequisite for any form of meaningful engagement with GCA messages. Providing background information on the localities, key actors and events surrounding an issue is an essential tool of news literacy.

Content creation: for citizens to become active producers of global civic content, an understanding of the interdependence between the local and the global is required; demonstrating the global impact of local actions (and vice versa) facilitates citizens' voice expression, encouraging them to take part in a global dialogue.

It is true that media literacy has traditionally been conceptualised as a process-oriented reflective process (e.g., Hobbs, 1998, Lewis and Jhally, 1998). Mihailidis (2008) points out differences of conceptual approach and application across universities in the US, arguing for a media literacy curriculum that favours specific learning outcomes rather than specific content. The approach proposed here is somewhat different, though complementary: that is to say, specific content is important for news literacy and, through that, transferable, reflective or theoretical learning outcomes can *also* be served.

The next section outlines the learning and teaching strategy, including transferable learning outcomes, and key lessons emerging from the delivery, by the author, of a Global Current Affairs unit as part of an undergraduate journalism course at a UK university.

Reflecting on the implementation and evaluation of a Global Current Affairs unit

In an attempt to further distil and apply the pedagogic agenda outlined above, the paper reflects on the development of a Global Current Affairs unit, delivered as part of the BA (Hons) Multi-Media Journalism programme at Bournemouth University. The unit aims to engage students with current issues at a global level, while also encouraging them to reflect on the issues and challenges facing journalists reporting on global affairs. The purpose is to develop students' news literacy, including both an understanding of major and ongoing issues, and the role of the media in covering those issues, as well as their professional ability to cover such stories.

The unit takes a thematic (issue-oriented) and topical (news-oriented) approach to teaching and learning, with a view to understanding globalisation in an applied, grounded way. Emphasis is placed on demonstrating the links amongst issues and the links between global developments and local contexts. The curriculum is interdisciplinary and employs elements of politics, international relations, geography, history and journalism studies in order to provide the theoretical canvas. An important thread of the unit that runs parallel to these global perspectives is the reflective element, which encourages students to examine these issues from the perspective of reportage – i.e., reflecting on the importance and relevance of issues, and also on ways of reporting, identifying key sources and resources and considering the challenges associated with them. Therefore, the unit's intended learning outcomes cover both an understanding of subject-specific material that could be labelled “the agenda of the 21st century” – global issues, role of various actors, perspectives regarding the role of the nation-state, global governance etc – but also skills that are highly transferable to the workplace.

An example of the topics covered, and of how current affairs can be used as entry points into a more theoretically informed discussion on globalisation is the first session which introduces students to key aspects of US politics, such as the separation of powers, the electoral cycle, the polarised civic culture of recent years as well as the salient political issues. This is achieved through a “who's who” of American politics as well as a review of recent events and key landmarks of the Obama Presidency: loss of the Democrats' filibuster-proof majority of 60 in the Senate and subsequent loss of the House of Representatives, key legislative achievements such as healthcare reform; the role of the Tea Party; the Tucson shootings and President Obama's speech; the role of the State of the Union Address; the recent Republican primaries and the role of the economy as a salient electoral issue.

While a two-hour session could not possibly cover all aspects of American politics in depth (indeed, a considerable portion of those two hours is occasionally spent explaining the concept and logistics of the filibuster, which many students struggle with), students leave the session having a basic understanding of key concepts and ongoing issues, which immediately allows them to engage with the news at a completely different level. Hence, when subsequent sessions examine the obstacles facing global action on climate change or reform of the United Nations, students are able, for example, to identify the role played by the US Congress in both issues, which affect everyone. Furthermore, having reflected on the resources available to them, their possible strategies of reportage as well as subject-specific challenges facing them as reporters (e.g., how to make the intricacies of US politics relevant to the daily lives of British audiences), students

develop a toolbox that they can carry with them to the workplace.

Other topics covered in the GCA unit include: an extensive coverage of developments in post-Soviet Russia, including the role of the oligarchs, the strategic importance of oil and gas pipelines, and the challenges facing journalists, leading to a critical evaluation of Edward Lucas's proposal (2008) of a New Cold War; Iran's nuclear programme and Israel's response, in conjunction with the progress achieved and obstacles facing nuclear non-proliferation; the links between Weapons of Mass Destruction, international terrorism and transnational organised crime (such as the drug war in Mexico, piracy in Somalia and the exploitation of Africa's natural resources); the rise of China as an economic super-power in conjunction with questions about its record on human rights and freedom of the press; the interdependence of food prices, development, climate change, energy and security (e.g., conflict in the Niger Delta); and the challenges facing the European Union, including Greece's debt crisis and how that has highlighted tensions between globalisation, democracy and citizenship.

The curriculum obviously covers quite a broad range of topics, which was a deliberate decision in order to familiarise students with most major global current affairs, but also be able to demonstrate the interdependence of issues. Taught sessions can only act as the starting point of the learning process so self-directed learning is crucial to this pedagogic process. Reflecting on the delivery of the unit, one of the main patterns observed so far has been the level of student enthusiasm for the unit, as demonstrated through formal and informal feedback, attendance and engagement during the taught sessions. For students to articulate questions which are not merely factual but usually go into the interpretation of actors' motivations or background issues is probably the most crucial pedagogic output. Not only does it demonstrate the development of critical thinking skills, but it also familiarises them with the uncertainty, nuances and multiplicity of interpretations facing journalists on an everyday basis.

Another interesting lesson emerging from this experience is the importance of structuring the material around a timeline of events, which helps students contextualise developments and gain a more in-depth understanding of issues. Jacoby (2008, p.301) argues that:

The importance of chronology has been downplayed at all levels of the educational system for the past fifty years, and that is largely the work of those who fail to understand that students can hardly be expected to comprehend why things happened – the frequently stated mantra of progressive educators – if they do not know what happened and when.

Furthermore, and in addition to set texts covering global issues in extensive depth (e.g., Johnston et al, 2002; Seitz, 2008; Smith, 2008), newspaper articles have an important role in the learning and teaching process. Press cuttings are used and critically evaluated on all the major themes covered, providing both the background as well as an outlet of professional reflection. The systematic collation and use of newspaper articles has a number of pedagogic benefits, which are possibly under-researched:

It provides a useful chronology of key events, which, apart from providing a basic historical framework, also helps students contextualise events by linking them to their own recollections of those events' media coverage

It demonstrates how complex, ongoing issues are reduced to short, coherent stories that enable readers who are unfamiliar with the background of issues to engage with the narrative of those stories

It gives us a glimpse of editorial policies and choices, especially in terms of framing and agenda-setting

It provides students with useful examples of how complex global issues can be personalised or linked to local communities

It is a useful source of edited maps, infographics and relevant images, which are themselves an important object of study as carriers of stereotypes and connotations.

Hence, this pedagogic experience has shown that reflective news curation can act as a crucial pedagogic tool of global learning and media literacy. Yaros (2006) proposed an Explanatory Structure Building model for the structuring of news stories with a view to aiding comprehension amongst non-experts. Our case study supports the view that more research is needed in developing innovative forms of current affairs storytelling that place emphasis on timeline and context, making the material accessible to non-specialist audiences.

Insofar as the unit's assessment strategy is concerned, as Sperandio et al (2010) note, assessing a curriculum that is oriented towards facilitating global citizenship and engagement with complex global issues constitutes a massive challenge. Even the initial process of translating the intended learning outcomes into tangible assessment criteria can pose difficulties, let alone the subsequent process of measuring the primary

or secondary pedagogic, journalistic or civic impact of the curriculum. The first part of the assessment scheme was a comprehensive written test combining 50 factual (multiple choice) questions on the material covered, with open-ended (comprehension) questions on key reports and a critical evaluation of an unseen report on a global issue. The written test certainly succeeded in motivating students to digest the taught material and it is a good method of achieving a high level of familiarity with global current affairs, while also allowing students to focus on a particular issue.

An effort was also made to utilise the assessment scheme as a core part of the learning and teaching strategy, i.e. as an outlet for the primary development of global learning skills. This was particularly the case with the photo-essay, which is part of the investigative and reflective portfolio – the second method of assessment. The photo-essay encourages students to link a global current affair of their choice to a local community through original photographs. The broadest possible definition of community was chosen, including local/geographical, professional, social and other communities, although one of the conditions posed was that the community should have a physical presence, rather than merely a virtual/online one.

The photo-essay has a dual pedagogic mission. Firstly, in an age of increased multimedia convergence and visual user engagement, it is imperative that journalism students develop their photojournalism skills and are able to tell stories through images. The success of online photo-essays on current affairs (such as the BBC News website's "In Pictures" (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/in_pictures/)) and the increasing prominence of visually-oriented news storytelling demonstrate that there is an opportunity for journalists to engage with audiences in innovative, affective ways. Furthermore, the main challenge and key objective of this particular assignment is to encourage students to think of how global issues are embedded in our everyday life, or affect communities, in tangible, *physical* ways. Being able both to conceptualise a global current affair as a geographically present reality, and at the same time to communicate that through a coherent visual narrative, means that a journalism student assumes their dual role as a global citizen and mediator. Hence, the emphasis during the student training process was not placed on the technical or technological aspects of photography, as much as on the conceptual and aesthetic ones.

The photo-essay appeared to be by far the most successful element of the assessment strategy, with students producing highly sophisticated work of outstanding quality that demonstrated achievement of the unit's aims. Investigative photo-essays featured topics such as alternative energy in two local southern coastal city communities, Portsmouth and Southampton [Images 1, 2 in appendix], ethical food production at Gonalston Farm in Nottingham [Images 3, 4 in appendix], and the fishing industry in Hastings [Images 5, 6 in appendix]. Judging from student feedback and performance, the photo-essay succeeded in allowing students to inhabit their role as global citizens, consider the impact of global issues on local communities and reflect on their future role as mediators responsible for communicating that impact through a visual medium.

Looking forward: what is the role of Global Current Affairs in the journalism curriculum?

In this paper I have argued that journalism is an ideal discipline for the application of the principles and methods of global learning. Journalism graduates are not only global citizens but also *de facto* gate-keepers and mediators between the global and the local. The skills transferred through global learning and media literacy are vital not just for trainee journalists, but for all informed citizens, especially in an era of complex, interdependent issues and torrents of competing media messages.

The paper made the case for a generalist module that covers major global issues and debates in an accessible way, facilitating students' understanding of those affairs' relevance to our everyday life. An undergraduate global current affairs unit was presented as a case study of integrating global learning within the journalism curriculum. The apparent success of this project, especially in terms of student satisfaction (Table 1 below), passion and output, further highlights the demand on the part of young people for a contextualised and historically informed curriculum that addresses ongoing debates. While, as with any pedagogic strategy, the learning and teaching scheme outlined here requires a certain amount of investment and content-driven delivery, the benefits in terms of pedagogy and student experience seem to far outweigh the costs, and content-intensive sessions can smoothly lead to meaningful and reflective self-directed learning.

TABLE 1: Global Current Affairs – Student Unit Evaluation for academic year 2010/11

Evaluation question	mean
Unit is stimulating and challenging:	4.63
Unit relevant to current debates:	4.79
Workshops interesting/accessible:	4.33

Training seminar helpful:	4.48
Quality/amount of materials on VLE:	4.70
Putting enough hours of homework:	3.11

Anonymous feedback survey; Likert-scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree); Covering unit delivery, learning resources, assessment and the student's own role; as well as the opportunity for qualitative comments on strengths, weaknesses and topics that the students would like to be covered.

This pedagogic experience demonstrates that the synergies between journalism education and global learning are very substantive. This is true across all steps of the pedagogic process, such as the intended learning outcomes, the teaching and assessment methods, as well as the acquired skills and competencies, which also serve all steps in the process of media literacy. Moreover, the incorporation of global current affairs into the curriculum tackles several areas of tension in journalism education, such as the perceived dichotomy between theory and practice (Hunter and Nel, 2011), critical reflection versus skills, and research versus teaching (Harcup, 2011). The conceptualisation of theory as an abstract and luxurious philosophy removed from the reality of the profession, or even worse, as an irrelevant distraction, is a common pitfall. Rather, scholarship needs to be – and, increasingly, is being – reframed as the fundamental context which future journalists ought to command in order to survive, function and thrive in a competitive and cacophonous public sphere. That is to say, theory is not only a means of explaining or analysing past practice (Harcup, 2011) but also of shaping future practice. As with any transmission of principles or values, it is normatively charged – and so it should be.

Obviously, any such process of reflection would not be complete without a consideration of the limitations or weaknesses of the proposed approach. It should be noted that the pedagogic model described here is specifically designed for journalism education, hence its broader application and benefits ought to be tested. Furthermore, the outlined curriculum could be characterised as time-sensitive in the sense that both the line-up of the topics covered and the material within those topics have to be constantly revisited. However, my experience of delivering this particular unit over the last three years shows that there is remarkable continuity in the “narrative” of global current affairs. That is to say – as with every other module being launched – after an initial period of curriculum development, the material can be easily updated and tailored to each academic year's circumstances while maintaining a core narrative about the agenda of the 21st century.

One of the main difficulties faced during the delivery of the unit was ensuring that students invested the time and energy required to complete appropriate independent study, not so much during the assessment-intensive final few weeks, but from the very beginning. In an increasingly consumerist Higher Education environment, in which student expectations are very strategic, and attitudes towards independent learning can be counter-productive, demonstrating the relevance of political and historical narratives, including that of stories taking place in remote parts of the world, can be a challenge. However, the level of students' engagement with the material is a good indicator of whether they, in turn, will be adequately inspired and motivated in order to play that role as professional journalists facing audiences preoccupied with the distractions of escapism and entertainment offered by the media.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have argued that it essential we stop treating global awareness and engagement (both within higher education and amongst the public at large) merely as the responsibility of the individual student or citizen who is adequately self-motivated and media-savvy enough to be self-empowered. While engagement – local, national and global – is a central element of civic duty shared by all citizens, in an age dominated by consumer choice, multimedia distractions and complex and multilayered decision-making processes, providing citizens with adequate support and resources for them to engage at the global level is not a luxury – it is a fundamental question of enfranchisement and democracy. Hence, at the particular level of journalism education, and while acknowledging the responsibility of individuals and the importance of independent learning, students should be provided with the appropriate context, direction, structure and media literacy tools necessary to access, evaluate and ultimately create globally relevant stories.

This brings us to the future of global current affairs, for which the role of journalism education is absolutely critical in two ways.

Firstly – and this is probably the more pressing and challenging of the two issues – journalism education can be instrumental in securing the future of foreign reporting by helping develop and apply new forms of storytelling and dissemination; especially forms which acknowledge the gradually more important role of marketing and social media, as well as the increasingly less relevant boundaries across genres and media.

This paper fully concurs with Zuckerman (2008) in making the case for new narrative forms of international reportage that attract wider audiences, especially those not traditionally engaged with global issues. This may happen by exploiting the potential of social media to mobilise and involve audiences: “Producers need to consider how they can learn lessons from other genres, such as youth drama, which have achieved a great deal as a result of their innovative use of social and online media.” (Scott et al, 2011, p.3).

The benefits of interpersonal discussion for audiences’ engagement with media messages were articulated decades ago as part of the “two-step flow” model. Robinson and Levy found that talking about the news had at least as powerful an effect on comprehension as mere exposure to the news media:

Public understanding of the news does increase as people talk about it. Journalists and others would do well, then, to consider ways to create and present news which stimulates or otherwise takes advantage of this interpersonal “second stage” of the information flow (1986, p.172).

Social media – and emerging social trends such as viewers discussing on Twitter the media narratives that they are simultaneously watching on television – may offer an opportunity for that second stage to materialise.

Another way to develop alternative forms of storytelling on global issues is by utilising soft news (Carroll, 2007): global news is not short of drama and new generations of journalists should be encouraged to develop innovative storytelling formats that utilise the fascinating aspects of global current affairs, alongside traditional reportage. The commercial success of robust and often groundbreaking global investigations of international organised crime told through gripping formats (such as Misha Glenny’s *McMafia: A Journey Through the Global Criminal Underworld*) shows that it is possible to reach and educate a large audience.

Furthermore, the informative and engaging role of fictional narratives (such as TV drama, films and novels that attract the curiosity of large audiences) should be acknowledged and embraced. Padania et al (2007) note the educational impact of fictional narratives such as *Blood Diamond* and *The Constant Gardener*. Scott (2009, p.3) found that people who had watched feature films and read literary fiction set in developing countries thought that these fictional narratives:

had the ability to change their perceptions and enhance understanding but television drama had failed to realise this potential. This research found that, while television content about developing countries can engage and enthuse all audiences, this can only be achieved if a broad range of relevant connections to the lives of those in the audience is made in all genres of programming (Scott, 2009, p.3).

Secondly, and finally, journalism education has an additional role which is more long-term but equally important: graduates who have engaged with the world at large and also with their own role and responsibilities as global citizens and mediators may be more likely to lobby their editors or news organisations in order to invest more heavily in foreign reporting and global affairs coverage. Therefore, today’s students will become tomorrow’s ambassadors for global citizenship and sustainable development in the newsroom. Carroll (2007) reminds us that “foreign correspondents provide an essential contextualizing function, reporting stories in terms that local audiences understand and making connections to local issues that a wire story would be unable to make” (Zuckerman, 2008, p.4). A critical engagement with that role during higher education may prove to be a formative experience that will define a professional’s future decisions and, ultimately, affect the world.

Appendix

Image 1: Sample from student photo-essay (alternative energy in two local southern coastal city communities, Portsmouth and Southampton – by Mark Allaway)



Image 2: Sample from student photo-essay (alternative energy in two local southern coastal city communities, Portsmouth and Southampton – by Mark Allaway)

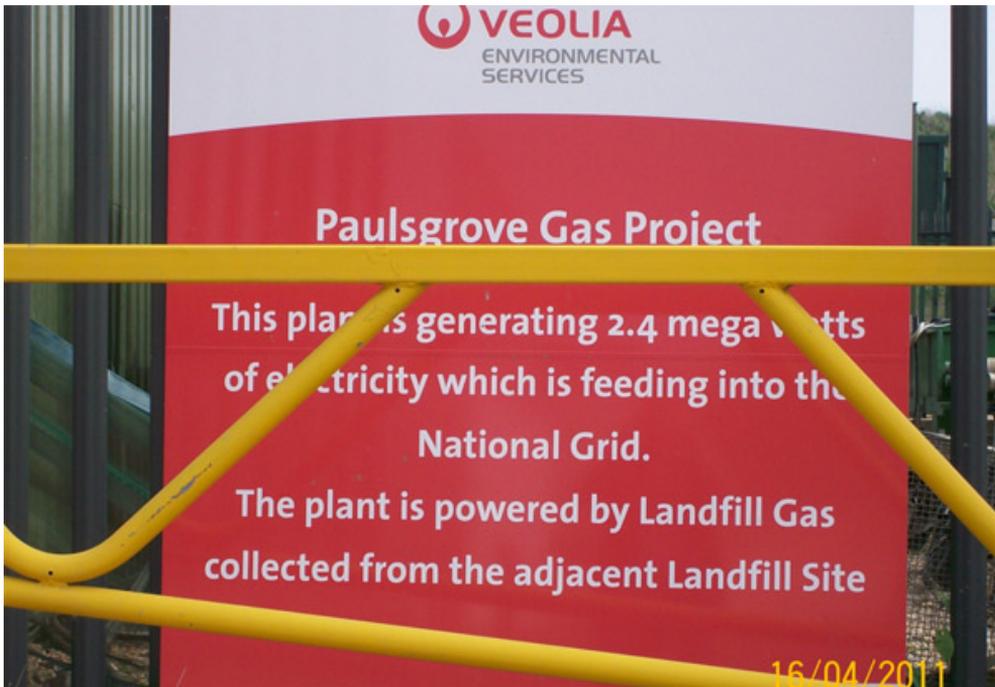




Image 3: Sample from student photo-essay (ethical food production at Gonalston Farm in Nottingham – by Eli Beaton)



Image 4: Sample from student photo-essay (ethical food production at Gonalston Farm in Nottingham – by Eli Beaton)



Image 5: Sample from student photo-essay (the fishing industry in Hastings – by Lu-Hai Liang)



Image 6: Sample from student photo-essay (the fishing industry in Hastings – by Lu-Hai Liang)

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Contact Roman Gerodimos, on rgerodimos@bournemouth.ac.uk