

# Underlying value concepts in training programs for media practitioners

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**Underlying Value Concepts  
In Training Programs For Media Practitioners**

**By**

**Crispin Maslog**

UNDERLYING VALUE CONCEPTS IN TRAINING PROGRAMS  
FOR MEDIA PRACTITIONERS

by Crispin C. Maslog\*

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From the way the topic assigned to me this morning is phrased,  
I am not sure what is expected of me.

Am I to discuss what are, or what should be, the underlying  
value concepts in training programs for media practitioners?

And looking at the entire program for this workshop, I see that  
the topics assigned to the other speakers are the value concepts  
proposed by Unesco in its call for a New World Information and Com-  
munication Order. In other words, the value concepts that should  
be are already defined elsewhere in this workshop.

Therefore, it seems what is left for me is the area of communi-  
cation education and training, particularly training. I make a dis-  
tinction between communication education (formal degree programs)  
and communication training (practical, skills-oriented short term  
programs for practitioners).

The questions for me to answer seem to boil down to these: What  
value concepts, if any, are we teaching our students in the class-  
rooms, and to the practitioners in our short-term training programs?  
How are we doing it? How do we feel about the value concepts of the  
New World Information and Communication Order called for by Unesco?  
Should we and can we teach them in our classrooms and in our train-  
ing programs?

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Before I go into the heart of the topic assigned to me, however, I would like to comment on a couple of these value concepts proposed by Unesco and which have been discussed, or will be discussed by the other speakers in this workshop.

## I. NEWS VALUES

The matter of how editors and reporters select the news for their newspapers or radio newscasts is interesting. What values guide them in their selection of news? Where did they learn those news values? Are these news values relevant to their societies?

As I recall some of the news values that we have been teaching our journalism students over the years are immediacy, conflict, oddity, prominence, significance, proximity and human interest.

1. Immediacy led to the spot news mentality. What happens today is news, yesterday is today's history. This also led to the events-oriented syndrome. When a fire breaks out, or a crime is committed, there is news. When there is no fire or no crime, there is no news. No news is good news. This also led to the scoop reflex among newsmen. They had to be first with the news, whether accurate or inaccurate, balanced or not.

2. Conflict led to sensationalism. When people argue, beat or kill each other, that's news. But when they are in love and at peace, no news.

3. Oddity led to the Ripley believe-it-or-not syndrome, exemplified by the classic definition of news: When a dog bites a man, that is not news. But when a man bites a dog, that's news. In the papers the other day, there was a twist to this news formula: a dog shot a hunter. That's why disasters are news.

4. Prominence led to our worship of the rich and famous, and idolatry of the superstar. EDSA was consummated by Cory, Enrile, Ramos, Butz, Cardinal Sin, and a supporting cast of nameless millions. I was one of the nameless millions manning the barricades at EDSA for two days and two nights, incidentally.

And so on, with the other news values, which we inherited from the West. These are the existing news values. Are these values, which are based on Western culture and the laissez faire theory of economics, still relevant to our situation? This is what Unesco is asking. My reply to that question is that perhaps some of these news values are no longer relevant to Third World societies.

For example, why should we be concerned only with spot news, and forget the evolving events? Some newspapers of course are now very much aware of trend reporting. An obsession with spot news leads us to focus our attention on what a person says in his speech, rather than what he does over a period of time. What Enrile says in his speeches perhaps is not as significant as what he is doing. What Tolentino says about Cory's trip to the U.S. is not as important as what he has done at the Manila Hotel recently. Deeds should be more important than words.

Or why should we focus attention on disagreements, rather than agreements? On the unusual rather than the normal? Is it because we have to sell the newspaper? Should we be concerned only with profit and give the public what they want, and not what they need? I submit that the mass media have an obligation to continually educate their public, and not just feed their baser instincts.

Or why should we write mainly about the rich and the powerful? How about the ordinary man who in his own way has labored in his own vineyard for his family and his community? How about the masses who have suffered social injustice in silence over the decades? Or the soldier who has had to face the bullets of the enemy up there in the hills?

I think that the image of our world as a crime-ridden, strife-torn war zone is due largely to the obsession of the mass media to highlight conflict and downplay the day-to-day peaceful life that people lead.

May I sum up this part of the discussion with a quote from Neville Jayweera, Director of Research and Planning for the World Association of Christian Communication, speaking on Unesco value concepts for a New World Information and Communication Order:

"There is a tendency to accept as universally valid news values that have been developed to meet the needs of individualistic industrial societies. The sensational, the spectacular, the tragic, the sordid and the deviant, tend to get prominence over the orderly, the integrated, the normal and the constructive. These values seem to have evolved as an attempt to gratify the subjective needs of fast paced, individualistic societies than out of a desire to represent accurately an objective reality."

## II. PROFESSIONALISM

In the Philippines, there are only two professions I know of that have no prior requirements (or license) to practise. One of them is the world's oldest profession. The other is journalism, or the broader field of mass communication.

In this country, any Tomas, Ricardo and Generoso, as long as he can put two or more sentences together and pound the typewriter, can be an almighty journalist, especially now that the big bad dictator is gone. You don't even have to be a college graduate. As long as you can write, you can become a reporter, eventually an editor and a columnist.

In a situation like this, there is very little chance for professionalism to flourish. A profession has a body of knowledge and standards which are enforced among its practitioners. I see very little of it among Filipino mass communicators today. We have codes and codes of ethics, but they are honored more on the breach than on the performance.

What are these value concepts that we have tried to inculcate in our students, and in practitioners when they do decide to come to our short-term training programs? Objectivity, accuracy, balance, fairness, a sense of social responsibility.

To this list Unesco has added, in the report of the McBride Commission (Many Voices, One World), other value concepts: integrity, dedication, respect for human rights, high quality, accountability, truthfulness. These, Unesco now says, are value concepts we should teach. To which we communication educators say, amen.

When we talk about professionalism, however, we often limit ourselves to the journalist (the reporter and editor at various levels). And yet, the roots of the problem, the lack of professionalism among our media practitioners, lie elsewhere. The roots are higher up -- the owners and publishers.

### III. ETHICS FOR PUBLISHERS

I treat this as a separate topic to give it the importance it deserves.

Like the matter of attending upgrading seminars and workshops for example. In my experience, unless the seminar is held abroad, it is difficult to get the working journalists to come. Either they feel they do not need the training or more probably, their publishers do not allow them time off their jobs to upgrade themselves.

And then the matter of ethics. No matter how many codes of ethics we have, if the journalists are getting starvation wages, they will accept bribes, or worse, use their positions to blackmail. Ethics can hardly survive on empty stomachs.

And yet so many of our publishers (and this applies to broadcast media owners also) have been reaping huge profits all these years.

Why not a code of ethics for publishers? But then, who is going to enforce it? The public, perhaps, through press councils.

Perhaps worth considering by Philippine media practitioners is the experience of the Australian Journalists Association.

Journalists cannot practice their profession in Australia if they do not belong to the Australian Journalists Association. The AJA sets the requirements for the practice of the profession.

Depending on their qualifications, they start at a particular grade, ranging from D upwards to C, B, A and A1 (the highest rank). Each of these grades have particular required qualifications and

definite salary scales. Once you meet the minimum requirements, you are given the corresponding rank and salary. No haggling.

The Australian Journalists Association is a union which negotiates with the publishers for the journalists. They have collective bargaining agreements which are renewed every so many years.

The AJA is a model for other countries to follow. The Australian journalist is probably among the best paid, most economically secure, and professional journalists in the world. The AJA is a model worth studying and emulating.

#### IV. DEMOCRATIZING OWNERSHIP OF MEDIA

Press freedom is meaningless unless people have access to the mass media. Access is assured if the mass media are not controlled by monopolies, but instead are owned by the people. The more people owning the mass media, the more chances their voices will be heard. This was one of the recommendations of the Philippine Association of Communication Educators (PACE) during their recent conference. To quote from the PACE conference recommendations:

#### PREAMBLE

Mass communication and other forms of communication in the Philippines exist to serve the Filipino people. Therefore they shall be founded on the principles of truth, freedom, social justice and democracy and dedicated to the ideals of nationalism. Ideally, the mass media in a democratic system should be of, for and by the people. While mass communication is a business in a free enterprise system, it is also a public service. It has a social responsibility to assist in the attainment of the larger freedom

which enables the citizens to develop and live a life that is decent and humane. It shall strive to give the masses accurate information and greater access to its facilities so that it may effectively serve as a forum for two-way communication between the government and the governed. It shall foster the highest standards of ethics, professionalism and faith in a Supreme Being.

#### OWNERSHIP OF THE MEDIA

1. The Conference is aware of the tremendous powers of mass media that, if allowed to stay in the hands of only a vested few, could become an unwitting tool of oppression and injustice. While media monopolies would make economic sense, they do not necessarily serve the public interest.

2. A democracy thrives on many voices, not only one voice. A concentration of ownership of media therefore would tend to limit the number of voices heard. Such constraint erodes the democratic concept of pluralism in society. Preventing the concentration of ownership is a vital need to make democracy thrive.

3. Therefore, the Conference strongly recommends that the ownership of mass media in the country be as broad-based as possible. This means that media monopolies must sell shares of their company to the public, with no single individual, corporation or group of individuals holding majority shares.

4. The Conference also recommends that in line with the broadening of media ownership base, more community-based newspapers and broadcast stations should be established in the rural areas and ownership can be in the form of cooperatives to insure wider participation of citizens.

5. The Conference also recommends that the ownership of the mass media in the Philippines should be left entirely to Filipino citizens.

6. Be that as it may, the Conference recommends strongly that cross-ownership of media be prohibited.

#### V. COMMUNICATION EDUCATION/TRAINING AND THE NWICO VALUE CONCEPTS

Finally the question comes to what are we in communication education and training doing about these problems? Or what are we doing about the evolving NWICO value concepts?

We in the Philippine Association of Communication Educators (PACE), which count as members some 44 out of the 50 schools offering communication degree programs or majors in the Philippines, started discussing these concerns two years ago.

In our annual conference in 1984, we invited mass media practitioners to discuss with us our communication curricula and the problems of producing graduates ready to work for the mass communication industry and other agencies employing our graduates. Central to our discussions was the problem of moral values.

We came up with a Declaration of Commitment, which defined our vision of what our graduates should be or could be, and looking back at it now, one notices great similarity in our vision to the value concepts that the Unesco is espousing. To quote from this PACE Declaration of Commitment:

Communication education, therefore, must endeavor not only to train but also to form:

Men and women of conscience, who will have developed their moral and ethical sensibilities, and who will have acquired a special sensitivity to issues which involve the defense of truth, the promotion of justice, and the safeguard of individual freedom.

Men and women of courage, who will stand by principles and act according to the dictates of conscience, and who will be ready to endure hardship, resist social pressure, and even stand alone when it should mean upholding a value, promoting an ideal, or defending a principle.

Men and women of commitment, who value their dignity and individual worth, because they see their profession as an act of service to the nation, especially its poor, its ignorant, and its dispossessed; and who have committed themselves to the task of enhancing the dignity, preserving the worth, and promoting the welfare of their people.

It was the hope of the communication educators gathered at the conference that as they delineate for themselves the profile of the ideal communication graduate, they also clarify the goals and objectives of their individual communication programs, and so affirm that:

The aim of communication education is not merely to train a skilled work force for the job market in the communication field; but, just as important, also

To educate individuals who will take it upon themselves to assume the responsibility of shaping media, of exercising leadership in the profession, and of articulating the needs and aspirations of the masses.

These stated goals underscore the importance of reexamining periodically the status of communication education in the Philippines: asking where it is now, in what direction it is heading, even to the extent of challenging the Western foundations and philosophical assumptions which have for so long informed its teaching and consequently, also student learning.

The ideal communication education that PACE espouses is one that is Asian in perspective and Filipino in its cultural roots. It is an education that seeks to promote high standards of professional competence, and aims to develop men and women of conscience, courage and commitment.

This is our vision in PACE, a vision that is similar to Unesco's NWICO value concepts. We know that this is not the reality outside that our graduates will encounter. But we in communication education are building for the future, as the training institutes for media practitioners, like the Philippine Press Institute and Communication Foundation for Asia, are training for the present. We need this vision. Because it is this vision that gives meaning to our work, guides our actions, sets our goals and makes things happen.