

Newspapers in Education and Building Democratic Citizens

Aralynn Abare McMane*

SUMMARY

The World Association of Newspapers, which represents 17000 newspapers, places great importance on Newspapers in Education and young reader programs as a vital way to increase reading among young people, heighten their sense of the vital importance of newspapers in democratic society and – the organization readily admits – encourage them to become newspaper readers. Indeed these projects constitute one of the organization's four main activity sectors, along with marketing and management activities, press freedom development work and activities for editors in chief. In more than 50 democracies worldwide, schools and newspapers have created partnerships that help a new generation of citizens learn the importance of press freedom and journalistic ethics. Such programs encompass two overall kinds of tasks: use of newspapers in a classroom and the real, if temporary, journalistic experience for young people.

NIE, or Newspapers in Education, dates from at least the late 18th century when one newspaper in the new democracy of the United States made the suggestion to use newspapers for education as an economical way to expand access to knowledge. "Learning in the hands of the few affects the nobility, but generally diffused is an effective barrier against every invasion of the rights of man," the author concluded. (*Portland Eastern Herald*, 8 June 1795, probably quoted from a British newspaper). By the 21st Century, the mature democracies of Europe all had some sort of program,

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whether nationwide organized by a newspaper association or locally created by one or two editors.

From the start, newspapers were seen as an inexpensive, effective way to enhance classroom work. Since then, newspapers have provided the basis for studying a myriad of subjects, from basic literacy to the highest levels of critical thinking. Foreign language, geography, math and so forth. Increasingly, these projects have involved media literacy and an appreciation for the need for tolerance.

In new democracies, these programs have proven themselves especially important as enhancements to – and often substitutes for – media literacy and civics textbooks that are too often out of date or simply nonexistent. For example, in 1998, the Estonian newspaper association began creating NIE kits based on ideas gathered from across the globe. The first kit explained newspapers; the second was designed to help schools teach about elections. This was critical because there were no appropriate textbooks. The association created a package of exercises on A4 paper and 4-page full-color newspaper that included information about newspapers and the election process while showing different ways that newspapers treat information: graphics, commentary, and so on.

In each case, supplies ran out quickly at workshops the association organized for teachers who showed high enthusiasm for the approach.

Press Freedom and Understanding Media

In too many countries, the possibility of a free press remains just a dream or a very fragile reality. Newspapers in Education help spread the message that it is vital to defend press freedom worldwide in the quest to assure a democratic legacy to the next generations. That fight, as statistics continue to testify, is far from over.

The year 1999 was a particularly violent year for attacks on journalists with 71 dead, according to the World Association of Newspapers and others. The territories of former Yugoslavia had the highest toll of 22, followed by Sierra Leone with 10 and Colombia with seven. Well over a hundred journalists continue to spend long sentences in prison. Now, some 21 are imprisoned in China, while Burma, Ethiopia, Turkey and Syria also have alarming numbers of journalists in jail.

The quest to free imprisoned journalists increasingly involving the young. For example, postcard. The young became part of a massive international effort for Pius Njawe, a newspaper publisher in Cameroon who was sentenced to two years in prison for printing an article suggesting that the country's president suffered a brief malaise while watching a football match. Njawe, suffering badly from an untreated eyes infection, diabetes and other ailments. He was held in a small, filthy cell with fifty other prisoners, chained to each other by the feet.

The European Journalist for a Day project in Belgium created a postcard printed in several newspapers for young people to send to the Cameroonian prime minister. The post card carried a photo of Mr. Njawe with the pre-printed address of the Prime Minister and room for a message on the back. Young people also sent a flood of messages to Pius himself. Today, he is free after serving only ten months of his sentence.

Even the most banal project can add a press freedom element that gives it extra importance. The Austrian newspaper association added press freedom as a key part of the prize ceremony for winners of its summer puzzle contest. Children heard from several African journalists in exile talk about the terrible conditions of trying to do reporting in their own countries.

W A N produces a kit of information to be used on Press Freedom Day, the third of May. It has statistics, press freedom posters, international texts, and essays and political cartoons about press freedom around the world. In 2000, for the first time, the kit included eleven exercises for young people about press freedom and freedom of expression. (The kit is available on the WAN web site – www.wan-press.org – in German, Spanish, English and French.)

Such a kit was not an original idea with WAN, Costa Rica and Australia is but two countries that has done similar projects.

The related notion of media literacy is a growing element in newspapers in education programs. Most programs offer an array of lessons that range from teaching the basic instruction in the parts of the newspaper to forcing students to critically analyze treatment of the same topic in several newspapers.

Tolerance and Fairness

Just as important, Newspaper in Education and Young Journalist projects are teaching children about tolerance and fairness.

With most schools in Northern Ireland are segregated, the *Belfast Telegraph* felt it was important to give an insight into the work each do and help banish perceptions and misconceptions about schools on the ‘other side’.

For example, Catholic and Protestant school children regularly work together on a joint newspaper publication which the paper prints. Also, once a month a school is given a page of the *Belfast Telegraph* newspaper to write about themselves. Thus, the newspaper is playing a vital role in bringing greater understanding and tolerance to children across the sectarian divide.

In Korea, the newspaper *JoongAng Ilbo* helped children to come to grips with the terrible facts of war – and the potential for peace and personal conflict resolution – with exercises during the Kosovo conflict.

The originator first had teams of student’s debate whether human nature is fundamentally peace-loving or addicted to conflict and war. They circled headlines of aggressive, war-like behavior in red and peace-like behavior in green. Next they identified commonalties and differences for each situation. They wrote do's and don'ts about peace. They even created anti-war posters.

They read stories about the Kosovo conflict and then set up two negotiations teams to try to resolve the war, to do their best to arrive at a satisfactory agreement. Then they were asked what they learned from the negotiation process.

They looked at photos and articles like these of people in refugee camps and explored what they might feel if they or their families were refugees. Students also

played the roles of the people they saw in the news – pilots, doctors, reporters, and refugees – trying to feel and think as that person.

It was not all about war. Teachers also asked students to identify a person or organization that deserved a peace prize, and provide reasons for their recommendation. Finally they had to think about a personal situation they thought was unfair and begin to work out how to resolve it.

Young Reporter Programs

Another technique for teaching young people about the importance of press freedom and journalistic ethics is by allowing them to live awhile inside the skin of a reporter beyond the experience of the newspaper they might produce in their schools.

Such efforts have become very high-tech and elaborate in some places. In Nordic countries, three centers have opened at newspapers that take groups of 15- to 17-year-olds through a strong show of news photos then send them through a series of reporting assignments with the help of computers, interview simulations and mobile phones.

The more common approach simply gives young people the chance to be a reporter for a day within the context of an adult newspaper. In Europe, it grew to a massive, week-long “Journalists in Europe” project that involved up to 6000 students in five countries produce working in teams to produce thousands of daily newspapers. Such projects are common in North and South America as well.

Ming Pao newspaper in Hong Kong began such a project last year when it recruited 400 student leaders and gave them intensive workshops over several weeks in reporting, editing and photography. Also last year, the Russian newspaper *VMESTE*, gathered 250 adolescents from 5 Siberian Cities to create their own newspaper, after having written their own ethics code.

Effects

Media effects research ranks among the most difficult and imprecise, but a few scholars have begun to look at NIE projects in new democracies. In one study worthy of replication, Morduchowicz et al. (Stanford, 1996) analyzed the effects of the NIE program on 2 000 sixth and seventh grade students in Argentina (through pre-test, treatment, post-test with control group). Though the research has limitations, non-random sample and short-term effects, it produced some interesting findings.

All the communication measures were significantly affected by the NIE program, including at home behaviors such as discussing politics with family. Researchers found a significant impact on the number of issues on which students expressed opinions. Importantly, students whose teachers used the newspaper expressed significantly greater tolerance for diversity and stronger pro democratic values. Finally, students in the program expressed more interested in political issues and in taking part in political events, than those in the control group. (Fuller report of Morduchowicz study available upon request from WAN secretariat, 25 rue d'Astorg, 75008, Paris, France)

In 1998, the Swedish newspaper association commissioned a literature review of studies relating to the newspaper reading habits of the young and of NIE programs. ("Newspaper, young readers and education," Ebba Sundin. Available on WAN web site at www.wan-press.org.)

Finally, WAN does its own survey every two years of the basic content and approach of NIE programs worldwide. Research for the latest study is underway and will be reported at the 4th International Newspapers in Education Conference and then available from the WAN secretariat (WAN Secretariat, contact_us@wan.asso.fr, telephone: +331 47 42 85 00, fax + 331 47 42 49 48. The NIE Conference, whose theme is "Readers: The Next Generation" will be 16 to 19 September 2001 in Cape Town, South Africa. Simultaneous translation will be assured in English and French. Details at www.wan-press.org.

Sample Exercises

1: Why can't we always write what we want?

From the WAN NIE kit

- There are some tough topics like suicide, crime, rape, and violence. In some countries you can freely write about one or more of these themes. In some not. Some countries have restrictions. Can you name more tough topics?
- Do you know of topics that newspaper, radio or TV in your country are not (really) allowed to treat? If so, how do you feel about this?
- Check the treatment of such tough topics in the newspaper. What is the problem? How is it handled? Do you agree?
- Can you find evidence of limitations on freedom of expression can you name?
- Do you know of any special rules or regulations regarding newspapers that created by students in their schools? Comment on them.

2. Make Yourself Heard

From the WAN NIE kit

- What do you think are the most effective ways of being heard?
- Try to find examples in the newspaper where people are making themselves heard.
- Does the newspaper have a page, telephone number or e-mail address where readers can express their opinions?
- On which subject in the newspaper would you like to express your opinion?
- If possible, tell the newspaper what you think about that topic.

3. A Front Page of Freedom

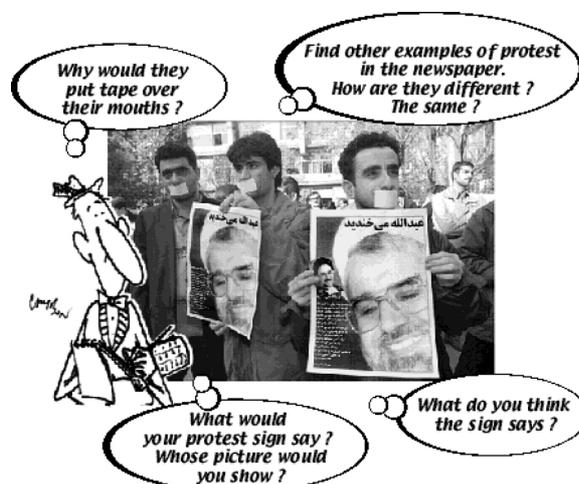
From the WAN NIE kit (graphic shows front page)

- Make your own newspaper title
- Make your own headlines and an articles
- Draw or find your own cartoon or picture
- Make your own photo caption

4. **What do they write about us?**

From the Estonian NIE kit

- Read the daily newspapers during a week and mark all items concerning the young people.
- How many articles did you find?
- What were the main issues of the items? Which were the most and the least interesting articles in your opinion?
- Can the worst article be improved? Try to improve it.



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Novine u obrazovanju i stvaranju demokratskih čitatelja

SAŽETAK

Svjetsko udruženje novinskih izdavača, koje predstavlja 17 000 novina, polaže veliku važnost uloži novina u obrazovanju i ostvarenju programa “mladih čitatelja”, smatrajući to važnim načinom razvijanja čitateljskih navika kod mladih ljudi, te podizanjem njihovih osjećaja za važnost novinarstva u demokratskim društvima i – što organizacija često ističe – na taj način ih ohrabriti da postanu čitatelji novina. Naime, taj projekt je jedan od četiri osnovna područja djelovanja organizacije, uz aktivnosti vezane za marketing i menagement, unapređenje slobode u novinarskom poslu i aktivnosti koje su vezane za rad glavnih urednika. U više od 50 zemalja s razvijenom demokracijom, škole i novine ostvarile su različite oblike suradnje kojima pomažu novim generacijama građana naučiti važnost novinarske slobode i etike. Tu se razlikuju dvije osnovne vrste zadataka: upotreba novina u školskoj nastavi i stjecanje iako kratkotrajnog ipak konkretnog novinarskog iskustva za mlade ljude.