Social justice for teachers in the news production process: Teacher and journalist perspectives of ‘misrepresentation’

Aspa Baroutsis, Martin Mills
The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

This paper is concerned with the damages caused to the teaching profession by negative media constructs of teachers. Journalism tends toward ‘re-telling stories’ rather than simply ‘disclosing them’ (Goode, 2009). This practice, during news production, tends to privilege voices that are not flattering to teachers. Teachers have little opportunity to respond. This lack of teacher voice in news texts raises social justice concerns as teachers are not afforded the opportunity to provide counter perspectives to those being offered by the press.

The focus of this paper is on the absence of teacher voices in the print media and the lack of opportunity teachers have to address unjust treatment. Here, we use the notion of political injustice to frame our analysis. Fraser (2009) refers to this as ‘misrepresentation’, that is where a group is denied the opportunity to actively address other forms of injustice, economic and cultural, being perpetrated against them.

Our analysis draws on qualitative data drawn from two data sets. The first data set comprises of a document analysis of 147 newspaper articles published in The Australian, a nationally circulated newspaper owned by News Limited, the Australian subsidiary of Murdoch’s News Corporation. These data were drawn from a purposefully selected timeframe of 18 months during 2009-2011. The second data set includes 19 semi-structured interviews: two with journalists and 17 with teachers. While this study is located in Australia, media ownership and journalistic practices are transnational and therefore have relevance in the European context. Both teachers and journalists in this study presented valuable insight into social justice and the news production process, albeit from different perspectives.

This paper details the practices in news production, focusing on aspects of journalists’ often simplistic reportage of teachers’ work; journalists’ perceived limited access to first-hand information, often due to ‘gag-orders’ on teachers by education authorities; coupled with teachers’ hesitancy to speak to the press due to the ‘horror stories’ regarding the perceived ‘misquoting’ during the reportage process. The significance of this paper is that it provides an opportunity to open up a nuanced dialogue about the media and education, to promote an understanding of the ways in which the media works, and to explore the social justice implications of particular media and educational relationships.
