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Using Multimedia Learning Objects in Public Affairs Classrooms: Global Experiences With Hubert Project E-Cases and E-Studies

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the development and implementation of multimedia learning objects to improve the relevance of public affairs education in three national contexts: Kenya, the United States, and China (Hong Kong). We explore how written cases have evolved into a new generation of multimedia learning materials that provide context-specific information to hone public affairs students' critical thinking and pragmatic social skills. Then, drawing upon our experiences, we describe the particular pedagogical strategies used to ensure that the materials can be effective resources in creating dynamic classrooms within each context. In this way, this article introduces themes relevant to understanding how open-access learning objects interact with particular contexts, suggesting new avenues for practice and research in public affairs education.

KEYWORDS

Learning objects, technology enhanced learning, public affairs, active learning

Across the globe, the goals of public affairs education are ambitious. Given so many knotty public problems, students need to learn both the analytical abilities for investigating these problems and the political and social skills for advancing solutions in nuanced settings (Agranoff, 2008; Blomgren, Sandfort, & O'Leary, 2008; Neubauer, Hug, Hamon, & Stewart, 2011). This complex learning demands that students integrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to improve problem solving (van Merriënboer, Kirschner, & Kester, 2003). It

also requires that instructors draw upon the latest knowledge to design and apply the interactive pedagogical methods known to be most effective for adult learners (Caine & Caine, 2011; National Research Council, 2000).

While most scholarly attention in public affairs education focuses on building educators' subject-specific knowledge—about human rights, rural development, child poverty, intergovernmental relations, public budgeting—this article aims to advance an understanding of the processes of

classroom teaching in which faculty try to create interactive experiences. Many pedagogical methods are available to instructors for fostering engagement with course content, such as interactive lecturing, small group exercises, and problem-based assignments. This article explores a new generation of teaching cases that presents information through multimedia formats. We describe and analyze our shared experiences of using public affairs e-cases and e-studies in public universities in very different institutional and cultural contexts: Kenya (Kisumu), the United States (Minneapolis), and China (Hong Kong).

Many proponents of case-based pedagogy have published articles in the *Journal of Public Affairs Education* and similar journals (Gilmore & Schall, 1996; Harney & Krauskopf, 2003; Kenney, 2001; Lynn, 1999; Rivenbark, 2007; Robyn, 1998). However, in their zeal to promote case teaching as an alternative to conventional lectures, many overlook case studies' central value. Educational scientists see cases not as a special tool but more generally as a type of "learning object." In this article, we probe this frame and explore the science that underpins the effective use of learning objects, specifically e-cases and e-studies. While there is a tradition of laboratory studies in educational research, we do not employ that approach because our intent is more modest and exploratory (Brown, 1992). Instead, we briefly describe the institutional position of public affairs education in Kenya, the United States, and China, as well as providing vignettes about how multimedia materials and classroom discussion are implemented across these contexts. We then systematically compare how we have each used the common tool of multimedia materials in our classrooms. While we each deploy these learning objects to increase active learning, there exist variations in institutional context and investment, as well as in classroom processes, across our different national and cultural contexts. Further research about interactive learning in public affairs education must take this into account.

LEARNING OBJECTS THAT PROMOTE CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT WITH RELEVANT CONTEXT

Public affairs classrooms employ numerous pedagogical methods to increase interaction and active learning. However, case studies, which originated from the study of administrative law (Rosenbloom, 1995; Yeung, 2007), are a "signature pedagogy" (Shulman, 2005). An approach used in both public affairs and business education across the globe, a teaching case tells a story of a knotty problem in a particular context. Such cases are often written in a creative way that attempts to bring the situation to life, and some end with a "decision-forcing" element that asks students to decide what they would do next were they in that situation. Cases as learning tools enable students to grapple with the ambiguity that often surrounds practical problem solving and, therefore, have been a staple in public affairs education. Instructors who teach other subjects also regularly use news accounts, public budgets gleaned from state or local governments, official documents or evaluation reports to bring policy problems to life. While such resources do not provide the contextual detail of cases, instructors often use them to highlight the significance of the course topic or analytical method being taught and to motivate students to engage (Finney & Pyke, 2008).

When analyzing both types of contextual materials, part of what public affairs students need to learn is the tacit knowledge that practitioners demonstrate (Agranoff, 2008; Salamon, 2005). Students value relevance. Statistics, budgeting, human resource management, and network governance all become more salient when placed in particular situations and connected to specific policy problems. In this regard, cases, news accounts, or official documents operate as learning objects—artifacts that focus student attention on a key concept or a particular learning objective (Alford, 2002; Carey & Hanley, 2008; Verbert & Duval, 2004). Conventionally, students are asked to brief themselves in the content of the learning object as part of preparation for a class session. In the classroom, instructors employ an array of techniques to stimulate interaction with the

materials: they ask the large group a series of questions to stimulate new ideas and connect to other course concepts; they divide the class into small groups to tackle specific analysis; or they draw upon the materials to spark a simulation. Instructors also use case or current-event learning objects for written assignments, for example, asking students to create action-oriented memos or answer final exam questions based on the material. Thus, relevant learning objects become a tool for engaging students in active learning. They establish a tangible shared experience upon which students can interrogate their implicit understanding of a situation and transform it into explicit knowledge (National Research Council, 2000; Sheckley & Bell, 2006).

Brock and Alford (2014) share our concern that historical debates about the legitimacy of case teaching have stymied our field's understanding of the way such learning materials can transform a classroom. In public affairs education, they write, "case discussion is only one form of interactive teaching and... the case study is only one form of [learning] object. A [learning] object is anything that is set up to constitute or prompt the subject matter of an interactive teaching session" (p. 2). In their articles about this topic (Alford & Brock, 2014; Brock & Alford, 2014), the authors highlight how interactive classrooms engage students, enable self-efficacy around learning, support mutuality between students and instructor, and introduce variety into the process. Learning objects are a resource that enable instructors to leverage other pedagogical practices, such as lectures or group activities.

In fact, fueled by the revolution in information technology in the last 20 years, there have been considerable advances in understanding and applying learning objects in classrooms. Because they can be developed and stored digitally, learning objects can be tagged with labels that allow them to be retrieved by others, allowing them to be shared widely among instructors. In this regard, learning objects exist at different levels of granularity; technically, they can be a single photograph, a video clip, text, or other graphical representations.

However, most learning objects bundle these elements to achieve particular learning objectives and are digitally tagged as a "whole." This process enables efficient retrieval by others, as part of the global movement toward open education.¹ Large collections have emerged in content areas mainly outside the realm of public affairs, such as Merlot (Malloy & Hanley, 2001), the Open Learning Initiative at Carnegie Mellon, and Connexions (Dholakia & King, 2006).

However, in 2011, the Hubert Project (www.hubertproject.org) launched to promote more interactive teaching among public affairs instructors globally. The project is a partnership among the University of Minnesota, the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research based in Kenya, and the University of Hong Kong in China. The collection includes video briefs, e-cases, and e-studies about public affairs issues, all of which instructors can use in traditional face-to-face classes as well as in blended or fully online courses. The materials are held in an indexed database that allows users to find and access materials for their own courses and training programs; each product is accompanied by a usage note and can be downloaded or hyperlinked to in any course-management software program. The portability of these materials and the ability of faculty to use them to teach whatever content is relevant in their own curriculum makes the Hubert collection distinct from other open educational collections, the latter of which often enable the sharing of whole curricula or textbooks.

The Hubert materials build upon the public affairs traditions of both in-depth case studies and relevant examples from policy and management practice but introduce the principles of open education (Schweick, Mergel, Sandfort, & Zhao, 2011). Through video or audio, important documents, and photographs, e-cases make more immediate the knotty problems traditionally recounted through written cases. Through assembling similar digital assets, e-studies curate policy reports, news accounts, or data sets in a more integrative and reusable format. While studies of the impact of such

materials in public affairs are rare (Brooks & Sandfort, 2014), research in other professional fields, such as medicine (Gallagher-Lepak, Scheibel, & Gibson, 2009; Hawkins et al., 2004; Kumta, Tsang, Hung, & Cheng, 2003; Sandars & Langlois, 2006) and education (Bruce & Reynolds, 2009; McCrary & Mazur, 2010; Richardson & Kile, 1999), suggests that this type of multimedia content can bolster complex learning of professional competencies.

In fact, Spicer and Husock (2000) suggest that such multimedia materials improve the immediacy of public affairs learning by providing more complete information, more dynamic sequences of events, and more realistic accounts of people and processes. Such materials are also “reusable,” so that instructors can rely on them at different times or in distinct courses. However, in and of themselves, such learning objects do not guarantee an interactive learning experience. As we have each witnessed, it is possible for instructors to simply lecture to students about a Hubert e-case or e-study. In fact, these multimedia learning objects are like any other reading or exercise: their significance depends on how instructors incorporate them by structuring interactive classroom activities that engage students.

Learning science suggests that faculty facilitation, learner-learner interaction, and emotional engagement are all important dimensions that shape learning processes and results (Gibson, 2003). Students take cues from others, both consciously and unconsciously. They need to be challenged but not experience helplessness, threats, or fatigue (Caine & Caine, 2011). In fact, course elements that leverage the social dimension of learning, require students to make choices and reflect on them, engage with puzzles and problem-solving exercises, or work together actually alter adult brains’ neural pathways (Cozolino & Sprokay, 2006; Fink, 2003). This literature stresses that without attention to social interaction, even the most artfully designed multimedia learning object will have little impact (Fink, 2003; National Research Council, 2000; Salmon & Jones, 2004). Our collective experiences using

comparable materials from the Hubert Project suggest that there are important nuances in how to generate such social dynamics in the public affairs classroom.

USING HUBERT PROJECT MATERIALS AROUND THE WORLD

There are some accounts of using written teaching cases around the globe, in teaching public management (Robyn, 1998) and business (Apaydin, 2008; Jain, 2005). The studies about business education stress that context matters for student engagement with the materials. Factors noted as important include the choice and age of the case, students’ backgrounds, norms about learning, and cultural interactions more generally. To begin to explore these ideas in the 21st century public affairs context, we describe our own experiences using Hubert Project materials in classrooms in Kenya, the United States, and China. We do so to echo emerging findings that cultural context influences the processes and outcomes of educational technology (Kawachi, 2003a; Zигuras, 2001). We first provide some contextual information, then describe the pedagogical strategies and consequences, and finally draw comparisons across contexts.

Public Affairs Education in Kenya

Within the East African community, Kenya historically pursued a restricted, merit-based form of higher education in which admission was secured through competitive examinations (Hughes & Mwiria, 1990). After independence, primary and secondary schools expanded in numbers throughout the country during the 1970s and 1980s. The few existing public universities at the time operated at no cost to those qualifying for admission (Weidman, 1995). However, as students graduating from secondary schools increased in number, so did the people demanding access to higher education. As a result, the number of public and private universities has expanded dramatically in Kenya in the last 30 years. Currently, 66 higher-education institutions offer various curricula and degrees at the bachelor’s and post-graduate levels (Commission for Higher Education, 2015). This expansion mirrors growth

throughout Africa and has created opportunities within universities to develop new postgraduate degrees in fields like public affairs.

In fact, in 2011, the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research, a nongovernmental organization based in Nairobi, began dialogue with numerous universities across the continent to gauge interest in developing a coordinated Master of Research and Public Policy (MRPP). Faculty from 12 universities in 8 countries actively shaped a standard curriculum that both meets the needs of students and responds to the complex public affairs environment across the continent. A foundational principle was to use the new degree to promote interactive teaching in African universities. The basics of professional ethics, research methods, political economy, and governance were to be taught through case studies, group discussions, simulations, and class presentations.

To develop relevant materials, faculty from the 12 universities developed a number of e-cases and e-studies for the Hubert Project, focused on African policy and management challenges. While there were technical challenges (such as volatile electricity and variable facilities), universities were encouraged to invest in hardware that efficiently supported the development and sharing of these learning objects. Faculty also attended successive training workshops to support the new interactive pedagogy; these sessions focused on aligning materials with course learning objectives, using prepared usage notes, and developing customized teaching plans. The training emphasized the importance of session and overall course design, in which content is scaffolded, moving from basic to more difficult concepts so that students can comprehend and easily unpack the course material.

This investment in the development of both learning objects and interactive pedagogy, while supported by the science of teaching and learning referenced earlier, goes against vested instructor practices and conventional institutional approaches in Africa. In fact, Kenyan faculty regularly encounter increasing numbers of students and externally mandated course

requirements, which can cause faculty to rely on the traditional lecture method as the primary pedagogical approach because it is more familiar. As a result, students casually attend classes and many pay little attention during the lecture sessions because they do not feel obligated to make meaningful contributions. Because they can copy notes from the few attentive students, or use the handouts provided by their instructors, their minds are often not fully engaged. Assessment of individual learning typically takes place through tests, research assignments, and class presentations.

However, in a professional degree like public policy, this approach is not aligned with the analytical or social skills needed by graduates. The curriculum developers of the new MRPP program needed to move beyond this traditional approach. We needed to bring “reality” into the classroom to enable learners to critically investigate the cause and consequences of public issues. We wanted to create learning experiences where students developed viable solutions to policy-related problems and thought about how to implement positive change. This motivated faculty from the 12 universities to develop over 25 relevant e-cases and e-studies from various African situations to be used for professional education in public affairs.

Using Multimedia Learning Objects in a Kisumu Classroom. Maseno University was one of the 12 universities to implement this new curriculum. At this public university located in Kisumu (western Kenya), we began to use e-cases and e-studies during the fall of 2014 at the beginning of the MRPP program. In that first year, 16 students enrolled in the program, most of whom were working full-time during their studies. While undergraduate class size at this university often ranges from 400 to 700 students, the class size in the MRPP courses is smaller (10–25 students), which more easily enables faculty to apply interactive pedagogy. From the beginning, it was clear that the e-case and e-study learning objects resembled other learner-centered tools (Herreid & Schiller, 2013) that are used to stimulate interactive and small group problem-solving activities. Yet their

effectiveness was not predetermined. Initially, students reacted negatively because preparation of the materials required more work than merely listening passively to lectures. Master's students had not yet internalized the expectation that graduate professional education was going to be more demanding than undergraduate education, in which they needed only to occasionally attend classes or review notes prepared by other students.

To clarify faculty expectations in the program, Susan Kilonzo and her colleagues recognized that they needed to do more than simply introduce the new learning objects; they had to alter their classroom practices. Rather than assigning students review of the materials before class, Susan decided to grade student participation during discussions of the e-case in class. She provided guiding questions in line with the learning objectives of the topic and encouraged students to meet before class for group discussions, to better prepare the case. As a result, students began requesting access to materials in advance to enable them prepare for the class sessions, which in turn allowed them to enjoy and benefit from the relevant content. Although many of the learning objects highlight policy dynamics in other African countries, the situations resemble those in Kenya because of the shared history of colonialism and development. In the class meetings, students are invited to interrogate the Kenyan context in light of the e-case or e-study, revealing the similarities and distinctiveness of their own national context.

For example, in an introductory course on research in public policy, Susan uses an e-case about Uganda's experience implementing universal primary education.² This learning object is used in the first course session, to show the usefulness of research in making public policy decisions. The material begins with recommendations from two research commissions, which formed the basis of Uganda's education policy change. It then summarizes both the successes and challenges of implementation, presenting media accounts, outcome data, and video statements by government officials that document the unexpected consequences of missteps in governance. By circling back to research evi-

dence—about teacher training, cost expansion, and demand predictions—students see firsthand how more careful consideration of policy research might have avoided some of the dramatic challenges. This enables learners to reflect on a Kenyan policy goal—universal primary education—and enables them to analyze the challenges and opportunities presented in the case.

Another e-case on social welfare protection highlights the relevance, politics, and varied interests of the issue in Kenya. It begins by exploring the meaning of social protection and uses video clips and charts to illustrate the politics and interests of different actors and stakeholders in defining the agenda. From their own experiences in local communities, many students are familiar with the social protection activities carried out by government or nongovernmental organizations, such as USAID, World Vision–Kenya, UNICEF. By exploring the theoretical significance of the case and how politics within the social protection agenda affect delivery of services to needy communities, students analyze the effectiveness of the policy and suggest how it can be improved. Students' familiarity with similar situations enables them to draw on both community and work-related experiences.

As with any learning object, using such digital cases in the classroom hinges in large part on the instructor's skill in preparation and facilitation. In her classroom, Susan finds it essential to prepare a clear teaching plan with sequenced questions formulated in advance. Seating arrangements that ensure eye contact with more reserved students can also be specified. Because talkative learners can dominate and steer discussions, Susan discovered the importance of being clear about the session objectives. In discussions of both the Ugandan primary education and Kenyan social welfare protection cases, excitement in the classroom was fueled in part by learners' own experiences. Susan needed to be quite directive in helping students move beyond personal experience to consider the larger public policy and research issues. Susan reminded students of the unit's objective several times by asking questions related to the case content. In an interactive

classroom, instructors often must use subtle cues to both encourage everyone to take part in discussions and keep discussions focused on critical issues. When well facilitated, classroom dynamics engage even the most quiet students. As one of Susan's colleagues reflected about his own use of the learning objects, "The heated debates that some of the e-cases elicit cannot allow even the most reserved of the students to stay out of the discussions" (personal communication, September 2015).

Other forms of planning also help ensure engagement around these learning objects. Role-plays can be very effective. If students are assigned roles in advance, they can prepare the material and understand a protagonist's or stakeholder's point of view. For example, Susan authored an e-study of Kenya Power's monopoly focused on exploring the pros and cons of public service provision by private companies in Africa.³ Using real-world examples from the Kenyan context, this material illustrates how customers suffer due to lack of a competitive market in electric power provision. It documents how power units are sold for different fees to various clients and includes complaints filed against the company. Students are asked to assume roles as managers, service providers, and customers. Since most, if not all, learners will take part in staging the case and discussions, such role-plays enable interaction with and evaluation of the issues presented.

According to students surveyed for this article, not all instructors in the new Maseno University master's program use multimedia learning objects or engage in interactive pedagogies. One student noted,

There are times some instructors opt not to use the e-cases either because they are not ready, or they have been missing lectures and there is really no time to interact with the e-case. There are times we have had to discuss the e-cases in the absence of the instructors to make sense of how the case applies to the objectives of the course.

For such students, there is excitement in using a multimedia learning object and its relevance motivates their engagement. In curriculum assessment sessions, students report that the interactive classrooms, which use teamwork and interactive discussions, enable them to develop their critical thinking and analytical skills about real events. One student said,

All I know is that through the use of this approach to learning, I am able to see the real world of policy issues without going out to talk to any stakeholders out there. I am also able to evaluate what is right or wrong about the policies displayed by the case. From such an experience, I can make recommendations on how public policy issues can change for the better.

Public Affairs Education in the United States

While many readers of this journal have been affected by the development of public affairs education in the United States, some might not be aware of how the field's pedagogical tools have evolved. The study of public administration in the United States emerged from the ideas of scientific management, idealized bureaucracy, and administrative management present at the beginning of the 20th century (Lynn, 1996; Rainey, 2009). The development of public policy schools during the 1970s and 1980s brought new tools of econometrics, formal modeling, and program evaluation into the curriculum, but there remains a core commitment to equipping professionals with the analytical and pragmatic skills necessary to engage in problem solving and citizen engagement around public challenges. In the United States, public affairs education encompasses schools that confer degrees in public policy, public administration, nonprofit management, and urban planning. Over 175 U.S. institutions have master's degrees accredited by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA).

As Yeung (2007) describes, Harvard University began to first use the teaching of cases in 1919 and, during the interwar years, the Inter-University Case Program became an important venue for management training in business and

public management. Instead of idealizing public organizations or scientific management, cases left the blemishes intact and presented situations that were political, irrational, and deeply contextual. The express goal of the cases was to teach decision-making skills; or, as Yeung (2007) concludes from his close analysis of that point in history, “The case study offered the public administration student a chance to vicariously live the life of an actual public administrator” (p. 555). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, casebooks continued to proliferate (Rosenbloom, 1995); and within the new public policy schools, situational analysis continued to be a hallmark of public management education (Lynn, 1996). With the advent of the Internet, collections of written case studies and simulations about the U.S. context were developed and shared.⁴ Policy schools at the University of Washington and University of Minnesota sponsored trainings to help faculty understand how to more effectively use these tools to promote interactive learning in the classroom.

The Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota resembles many of the other top 20 public policy schools in the country; it was founded in the late 1970s from within the university’s public administration department, it focuses on graduate education, and it offers a number of postgraduate degrees. The programs appeal to professionals interested in advancing the common good through work in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors. The multisector orientation appeals to both faculty and students interested in making progress on an array of public problems, from education to rural development, sustainable energy production to labor relations. The students who enroll in one of the school’s six master’s programs, five graduate certificates, or doctoral program seek an education that provides diverse analytical and practical tools. To support this orientation, the school has invested in developing its Technology Enhanced Learning Department, which provides support to instructors. While the school has not invested significantly in fully online degrees, it does offer many courses in a partially online “hybrid” format, combining face-to-face instruction with virtual engagement between students and faculty.

Graduate students in the United States are used to technology-enhanced professional experiences, and most have considerable skills in social media, Internet-based research, and visually enhanced presentations (Mergel, 2012). Except for midcareer students, who might have been out of higher education for 20 or 30 years, most students are also familiar with various digital platforms for course materials (such as Moodle). Many instructors require students to supplement readings with podcasts or participation in online reading forums, to enhance face-to-face classroom debates. In fact, at the Humphrey School students preview a “foundations for success” online module before starting graduate school, which allows them to review basic technical content (such as math, economics, writing, and Excel) and get a taste of university processes. Generally, students expect courses that actively engage them inside and outside the classroom. Many instructors employ interactive pedagogical techniques, such as case studies, simulations, and project-based learning.

Using Multimedia Learning Objects in a Minneapolis Classroom. While videos and podcasts of current events in the United States abound, content focused on the daily operations of nonprofit or public organizations, management decision making, or policy-making processes is not easily found in the public domain. This is the value of e-cases and e-studies in the United States. These learning objects allow access to a level of detail about policy analysis, implementation, and evaluation rarely conveyed in media accounts of current events. They offer a window into the thoughts and actions of policy actors and managers, showing the interplay of analytical abilities and social skills required in politically charged environments (Agranoff, 2008; Blomgren et al., 2008; Neubauer et al., 2011).

When students encountered these materials for the first time in Jodi Sandfort’s classroom, they reported appreciation for the “up close” accounts and relevance to their professional development. However, they generally expected such materials at a highly ranked public affairs

school and were surprised to learn that these types of learning objects were a recent innovation. In fact, after the first semester's use of such material, faculty were surprised at the limited student reaction (one way or another) to the substitution of e-cases in place of written cases in the school's core classes. As long as the content was professional—no typographical errors, technological glitches, or content overload—the students engaged with the material, preparing it as they would other assigned readings or material.

Jodi has embedded e-studies and e-cases in a number of courses, aligning their use with overall learning objectives. In her course on policy analysis, she drew on a number of e-studies that pooled policy reports, investigative journalism, and research about a policy problem. Using a standard text for policy analysis (Bardach, 2012), students were required to delve deeply into the curated materials and apply critical analytical steps (defining a public problem, assembling evidence, constructing and selecting alternative interventions), showcasing their analysis in a succinct policy memorandum. In this use, the e-study provided relevant information that students needed to work through systematically in order to craft professional written memos. While the substantive topics varied over time—asset inequality, higher education, early childhood education, wastewater treatment, retirement savings—the visual presentation of various materials, combined with the written assignments, enabled students to engage in “real world” problem framing and solution development.

In a hybrid course on policy implementation, Jodi teaches cases that illustrate key concepts and distinct implementation roles carried out by practitioners. The model of implementation taught in the course spans multiple levels, from policy field to organization to the front lines (Sandfort & Moulton, 2015). She begins with an e-study on the U.S. Emergency Food Assistance Program that introduces the concept of a multilevel analysis.⁵ Then, for each course module, she provides an e-case that illuminates

the implementation tasks at various levels, complementing the theoretical ideas in the course readings. Topics vary from education to health care delivery, sexual violence to affordable housing.⁶ While virtual lectures focus on the foundational ideas, each face-to-face class session provides an opportunity for students to work in small groups on a deeper analysis of the cases, consistent with the analytical tasks at hand. Students practice using worksheets that they subsequently apply to their own field-based research projects of multilevel implementation.

To prepare for a particular class session, Jodi adapts a practice she uses for teaching written cases—a teaching plan. Ahead of class, she reviews the material, considers its role in the course at that particular juncture, maps out critical questions for the students (sometimes shared in advance), and considers the ideal ordering of class discussion and activities. While some instructors like to allocate time for various segments, she adopts a more flexible plan, staying open to where class discussion might evolve but remaining mindful of the key issues she wants students to understand from the application.

Both e-studies and e-cases have provided students with opportunities to systematically apply analytical concepts to specific settings. Students came to the courses expecting the use of multimedia learning materials. Assignments used digital material to provide content and context that allowed students to focus on mastering the basics of professional writing. The small group activities used social dynamics to motivate students to prepare the material and enabled them to practice carrying out analytical tasks that they would later need to do on their own. These activities were scaffolded in the courses, complementing other readings, lectures, and course experiences. Throughout, the learning objects provided relevant content that invited authentic student engagement. In course evaluations, students reported that these materials served as important means for seeing the immediate applicability of course content to professional activities.

Public Affairs Education in Hong Kong, China

Hong Kong has diverse choices for postsecondary education, including several world-class universities. Five higher-education institutions existed in the city the 1970s, but the number has increased significantly in recent years, mirroring the growth of higher education throughout China. The government is committed to providing quality and diverse courses to meet the needs of the growing population and to enable its public affairs leaders to participate on an international scale. Higher-education institutions feel pressure to develop and implement competitive and innovative programs within this context.

The University of Hong Kong is one of the top universities both in Hong Kong and in Asia. Since 1978, the Department of Politics and Public Administration in the Faculty of Social Science has offered a Master of Public Administration (MPA), making it one of the longest-standing MPA programs in Hong Kong. The program focuses on preparing graduates to be effective public sector leaders through an innovative public policy and public administration curriculum, which includes courses in human resource management, public policy analysis, collaborative governance, and nonprofit management. In 2014, the department created a nonprofit management degree and, in 2015, a Doctor of Public Administration in response to increased student demand. In these programs, there is frequent academic exchange with the top international schools of program design, external examination, and co-teaching in some core courses.

Through this international exchange, faculty recognized a significant gap in learning materials, as most available content focused on U.S. and European contexts. For example, some public administration faculty were relying on a Kennedy School of Government written case about Indianapolis.⁷ The case explores the criteria and decisions of outsourcing public services to the private sector in the United States and brings readers to a decision point: the mayor needs to decide which service the government should outsource given the conditions. While this is a relevant case in the United States, it is

not that appropriate to Hong Kong because of the latter's different institutional relationships. Additionally, the decision undertaken by the mayor hinges on the time of year of events (spring) and how this affects the underlying rationale for choosing street repair before snow removal. This basic mismatch—in setting, elected official status, accountability, and governance—limited the use of this and similar materials. It motivated faculty to develop multimedia cases relevant to Hong Kong and Asia more broadly. Since 2013, the social science faculty at Hong Kong University has developed six e-cases as part of the Hubert Project, and more are under development.

Using Multimedia Learning Objects in a Hong Kong Classroom.

Students in the university's MPA program are mostly civil servants working in police and fire services, hospital administration, and home affairs, but professionals from nonprofit or private for-profit organizations also enroll. Although the postgraduate courses have a smaller number of students than undergraduate classes, faculty are still challenged to encourage active participation. Students are familiar and comfortable with the conventional lecture method in classroom settings; they are conversant with note taking and individual research and group discussion assignments. However, they sometimes pay little attention during traditional lectures because the pedagogical approach is not learner-centered. Students often just copy notes from the few attentive students or use handouts provided by their instructors.

Hong Kong University is committing resources to changing this practice among Chinese students. The university made facilities improvements designed for the tools of the 21st century to create truly student-oriented learning spaces. Helen Liu and her colleagues now teach in classrooms designed to facilitate group interactions, using robust Wi-Fi and computer access (Figure 1). Students also must learn to work with an electronic platform for their course materials (Moodle) and access digital learning objects such as the Hubert Project e-cases. The physical and virtual infrastructure signal to students that professional education in public

FIGURE 1.
Classroom at Hong Kong University's
Centennial Campus



affairs offers new skills for responding to the challenges facing China today.

Because most students come from fairly segregated professions—regularly interacting only with others inside their bureau or field—they enter graduate school with that orientation and initially resist stepping outside of this role to make meaningful contributions in the classroom. Using multimedia learning objects provides neutral content around which students can all engage, thereby enhancing the quality of classroom discussion. In fact, rather than instructing students to “turn to page X and read Y” (a conventional teaching method), the instructors show short video clips from the e-cases to initiate discussion. Faculty then pose questions that prompt students to analytically grapple with the content and actively explore the its underlying issues (Kawachi, 2003b). This is quite different than conventional classroom higher education in Hong Kong.

The structure of these learning objects—which depend on embedded videos along with text and other visuals—allows students to observe the emotion of actors in the policy or management situation. In her classroom, Helen encourages examination of these “characters,”

so that students can better understand the actual situations where the case is set and develop more interest in resolving the problems. For example, one e-case explores Love Plus Hope, a social enterprise that aims to achieve social good while making profits. It employs young designers and unemployed women to establish a domestic brand and revitalize Hong Kong’s fashion industry.⁸ Through interviews with industry and social welfare leaders, the e-case establishes the importance of creating a clothing brand that achieves both social good and profits. When students watch the video of the founder sharing the fundamental values promoted by Love Plus Hope, they are usually moved and impressed because of the immediate relevance of the simulation to the social problems close to home.

In her nonprofit management course, Helen uses another e-case, “Collaboration Challenge,” which features stories of real-life low-income families who live in Hong Kong public housing.⁹ The e-case documents how social service providers from various sectors work together to resolve policy and management issues. Through a study of various stakeholders’ perspectives, represented through videos, social media, and radio broadcasts, students must apply their research skills. They are required to cull information from various sources to understand the problems presented. This active engagement has inspired empathy in many students for the situation of low-income families and a better understanding of the issues and challenges of service organizations. During class, students are asked to assume roles representing the multiple stakeholders who need to work together in the case and to make presentations from these perspectives, proposing solutions to improve service delivery through collaboration.

Enrolled students express support for the use of multimedia learning objects in the program. Not only do they find the materials more engaging, they develop a more robust understanding of different industries and sectors in society. For example, the social enterprise case inspired students because of the passions of leaders who described their visions of solving unemployment and poverty problems through

TABLE 1.
Comparative Program Factors

| | Kisumu, Kenya | Minneapolis, United States | Hong Kong, China |
|---|--|--|---|
| Professional degrees | Master’s of Research in Public Policy (MRPP) | Six master’s degrees, including Master’s of Public Policy (MPP) and midcareer Master’s of Public Affairs (MPA) | Master’s of Public Administration (MPA) |
| Expanding demand for degree(s) | Yes | Stable | Yes |
| Student expectation of relevant content in multimedia elements | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Widespread use of course management software | No | Yes | Yes |
| Institutional investment in creation of multimedia learning objects | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Institutional investment in faculty training in interactive pedagogy | Yes | Yes | No |
| Institutional investment in facilities improvement to support interactive pedagogy | No | No | Yes |

rejuvenating Hong Kong’s textile industry. The public housing case helped students understand the basic needs and challenges of those in need who face a fragmented service system. These materials not only exposed students to diverse communities but also provided a common experience of program delivery in Asia, particularly important for the international students in the class. By structuring the use of the cases to focus on research, Helen enabled students to developed new skills in using animated newspapers and social media. Students also strengthened their critical thinking through initiating role-playing and discussions.

Nevertheless, there were some challenges involving students’ learning styles and technical problems with the multimedia learning objects. Although most students enjoyed learning through video and radio broadcasts, some reported difficulties taking notes while simultaneously watching videos. Some of the videos also loaded slowly. So while the use of multimedia e-cases has stimulated new ways of learning and teaching in Hong Kong, faculty recognize that they must attend to students’

individual learning styles and continue to find new ways of incorporating learning objects into their classrooms.

COMPARING THE USE OF MULTIMEDIA LEARNING OBJECTS

These three accounts from Kenya, the United States, and Hong Kong represent the deployment of similarly structured Hubert Project e-cases and e-studies—robust learning objects that capture important topics for public affairs education. The accounts showcase similarities and differences across the three geographical contexts that are important for scholars and instructors to keep in mind going forward. These differences are felt at both the institutional level and in classroom delivery. Table 1 summarizes the institutional-level factors across the settings, such as student expectations, technology platforms, and other institutional investments. These conditions provide a foundation upon which faculty and students build effective utilization of any digital or multimedia learning object in the public affairs classroom. For example, various types of institutional investment can build capacity for effective use

of such learning objects. While all three institutions invested in the creation of these materials, they did not equally invest in faculty training or facilities improvements to support interactive learning. While some instructors were trained in how to use materials to facilitate interactive learning, those who were not found it difficult to use the digital content effectively. In fact, while the curriculum used in Kisumu required use of e-cases and e-studies, students' evaluation reports indicated that some instructors never used them. In Hong Kong and Minneapolis, faculty who developed materials or sought out training were more likely to feel comfortable using them.

Table 2 summarizes some key factors about classroom practices across these three contexts. We all discovered that although students were familiar with the traditional cases presented in written format, the use of e-cases and e-studies was novel. Especially in Kenya and China, students found multimedia tools to be a fascinating approach to learning. In both of these contexts, students at first resisted the new learning objects because traditional teaching

methods like lectures and handouts were more familiar. In the United States, perhaps because of more familiarity with interactive pedagogies and technology-enhanced learning, students were less surprised by the use of multimedia cases. In all three contexts, students valued the real issues presented by e-cases and e-studies that immediately enhanced the relevance of the analytical and evaluative skills taught through other course materials.

For this value to be realized, instructors needed to change their own preparation and build skills to appropriately facilitate discussion and analysis. In all three locations, ample preparation, customized assignments, alignment of classroom activities such as group work and discussions with session objectives were all important for the learning object to have its desired effect. In Kisumu and Hong Kong, faculty encountered technical challenges that affected students when they were not physically in the classrooms. Power outages, Internet connectivity challenges, and limited access to hardware created barriers for some students. To mitigate some of these challenges, faculty at both sites developed the

TABLE 2.
Comparative Classroom Practices

| | Kisumu, Kenya | Minneapolis, United States | Hong Kong, China |
|--|---------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| Required more intense preparation by students | Yes | No | Yes |
| Required alteration of faculty preparation | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Needed to overcome technological or accessibility challenges | Yes | No | Yes |
| Enabled new formats of student assessment | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Changed interaction between instructors and students | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Enabled new professional skill development | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Facilitated innovation by students | Yes | Yes | Yes |

learning objects so that they could be accessed without Internet connectivity (for example, through flash drives), though this created additional technical details to be worked out between the instructor and students. In the end, students took the materials and ideas from the e-cases and applied them in innovative ways through simulations and course projects.

Finally, across these sites, faculty developed different ways for students to display their new professional skills. In Kisumu, Susan encouraged application of a particular case to current Kenyan public affairs debates. In Minneapolis, Jodi required production of policy memos as a way of gauging students' analytical thinking. In Hong Kong, Helen used role-plays to enhance students' understanding of contextual issues. These approaches—customized to context and desired learning outcomes—engaged students at different levels of thinking and evaluation.

Key Questions for Practice and Research

As an exploratory investigation, this article exploits the experiences of three teachers who use the same type of multimedia learning objects in master's-level public affairs programs on different continents and in different higher-education settings. Through a close reading, some additional questions for practice and research in public affairs education come into focus.

For those instructors carrying out adult education in public affairs, these accounts suggest a natural interaction between the institutional context of our work, our students' backgrounds and expectations, and our own pedagogical techniques. The way we plan for courses and prepare for class sessions is important. As instructors, our actions structure what focus their attention on and how they interact. For example, how we communicate social expectations—such as grading in-class participation, breaking students into small groups for further analysis, or running simulations based on case content—is significant. Although this teaching practice is generally aligned with research stressing the significance of social interactions in adult learning (Caine & Caine, 2011; Gibson, 2003; National Research Council, 2000), specific adjustments should be made to ensure that instructor technique is reasonable

given students' expectations. In preparing to use digitally enhanced learning materials, and ensure that they are more than an interesting diversion, we as instructors should aim to consider these questions:

- What is the learning purpose for including this multimedia learning object in this part of the course?
- Does the learning object address the unit/session objectives?
- What are the minimal goals in the session? What are the ideal goals?
- How might social interaction motivate more engagement around the concepts?
- What are important content elements in the learning object? Given the context, what questions or exercises based on the e-case or e-study content could ensure that students learn as much as possible?

By doing our own preparation, selecting materials purposively, and facilitating engagement around the course content, we can improve our own as well as students' technical and social skills relevant to professional practice within public affairs.

For those interested in empirical studies of professional instruction, these accounts and the variation between them also suggest some basic questions worthy of further systematic exploration:

- What motivates instructor use of multimedia learning objects in the public affairs classroom?
- What mediates the use of such learning objects? For example, does participation in communities of practice or engagement in learning networks influence this process? Does a commitment to the science of teaching and learning alter how these and other digital materials are used?
- Does exposure to these learning objects and teaching processes influence students' development of necessary professional public affairs competencies?

Empirically exploring these types of questions will increase our knowledge about how relevant

learning materials affect the learning outcomes we desire in public affairs students.

This article has compared the use of a common type of multimedia learning object in public affairs education. In doing so, we illustrated how student expectations and institutional context implicitly shape the processes we develop as instructors for using the same types of materials. This also echoes emerging findings from empirical studies that cultural context influences the processes and outcomes of educational technology (Kawachi, 2003a; Ziguras, 2001).

Thirty years ago, Donald Schon (1987) challenged instructors in professional schools to grapple with some of the questions raised by the accounts presented here. While research provides professional schools with explicit content knowledge to teach, the value added in professional education is likely in the processes used to shape learning experiences. Because competent professional practice deals with ambiguity, students cannot definitively be taught what they need to know. Instead, in an interactive classroom, they can grapple with important issues, practice what they need to do, and learn more about the contexts where public affairs work happens. As we have seen in the three accounts shared here, the specific details of context vary tremendously given the historical and institutional realities of the country. However, using learning objects and engaged facilitation offers the potential to focus student attention on critical professional issues in public affairs.

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NOTES

- 1 Open education is a movement to create and share resources in the public domain for learning. Some examples of open-education resources include textbooks, course outlines, modules, streaming videos, tests, and software (see Casserly & Marshall, 2010; Littlejohn & Pegler, 2014).
- 2 “Universal Public Education in Uganda,” retrieved from <http://54.72.213.104/MRPPCases/UgandaEducation/index5.html>. Kenya, Cameroon, Burundi, Ghana and Rwanda all eliminated primary school fees in public schools in 2003; other countries Malawi (1994), Tanzania (2000), and Uganda (1997) were earlier adopters of this policy and can provide important learning opportunities for new policy practitioners.
- 3 “Monopoly of Kenya Power in Service Provision,” retrieved from <http://54.72.213.104/MRPPCases/Case13-Maseno/index5.html#screen/8f6f00e5-21ee-4415-a81f-a5acc901555>.
- 4 Collections that require a usage fee are Electronic Hallway (www.hallway.org) at the University of Washington’s Evans School and the case program at the Kennedy School of Government (www.case.hks.harvard.edu). Open-access collections include Syracuse University’s Maxwell Schools’ e-PARCC (www.maxwell.syr.edu/parc/eparc) and Rutgers University Cases and Simulations Portal (<https://casesimportal.newark.rutgers.edu>).
- 5 “Multi-Level Policy Implementation of the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP),” retrieved from the Hubert Project: www.hubertproject.org/hubert-material/368.
- 6 The specific cases vary over time. In 2015, they were “Safe Harbor: Minnesota’s Efforts to End Child Sex Trafficking” (www.hubertproject.org/hubert-material/225); “Can We Afford the American Dream?” (www.hubertproject.org/hubert-material/354); and “Reach Out and Read” (www.hubertproject.org/hubert-material/200).
- 7 “Organizing Competition in Indianapolis: Mayor Stephen Goldsmith and the Quest for Lower Costs (A),” Harvard University Kennedy School of Government Case Program, C18-95-1269.0, retrieved from <http://case.hks.harvard.edu/mayor-stephen-goldsmith-organizing-competition-in-indianapolis-b>.

- 8 “Love Plus Hope,” retrieved from the Hubert Project: www.hubertproject.org/hubert-material/241.
- 9 “Collaboration Challenge,” retrieved from the Hubert Project: www.socsc.hku.hk/ExCEL3/collaboration-challenges.

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