

Learning of Media Ethics via Participation in Television Series Production

Soraya Ngamsnit

Abstract

The objective of this qualitative research was to probe a learning by doing approach in teaching media students the required media ethical issues by tasking them to produce television series. At present, various media contents, such as, television dramas, news talk shows and advertisements, have often been criticized for their lack of ethical judgement. Aiming to design an effective approach for students to learn media ethics, the researcher confidently postulated that the learning by doing approach in which students take a full participation in producing television series would enable them to acquire the awareness of media ethical issues as well as make informed decisions on ethical issues.

The television series production processes were divided into three main steps (pre-production, production and post-production). Students participated in every step. In the first step, students were tasked with writing their preferred script of a television series highlighting media ethical problems. In the second step, students produced a television series. In the third step, students presented their television series to the public.

The project revealed that students' participation in the production of television series helped students develop an active response to the problems of media ethics. This approach was also found to offer students a sense of self-contentment of having develop their informed judgment and their sharp criticisms of the media contents violating media ethical issues. In conclusion, students' active learning and direct participation in producing television series can be a satisfactory teaching method of media ethics and an important opportunity for students to enjoy making their own television series.

Keywords: learning by doing, media ethics, participation, television series production.

บทคัดย่อ

การมีส่วนร่วมในกระบวนการผลิตสื่อละครโทรทัศน์ของนักศึกษา เนื่องจากปัจจุบันจะพบว่า ปัญหา ด้านจริยธรรมในการนำเสนอรายการต่างๆผ่านสื่อมวลชนมีจำนวนมาก ทั้งละคร ข่าว และโฆษณา ผู้วิจัย ต้องการให้นักศึกษาได้เรียนรู้จริยธรรมสื่อมวลชนอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ ส่งผลต่อทักษะการวิพากษ์และการ

ตัดสินใจเชิงจริยธรรม ซึ่งกระบวนการเรียนรู้มีส่วนร่วมในการผลิตสื่อละครโทรทัศน์น่าจะช่วยให้นักศึกษาสามารถเรียนรู้จริยธรรมสื่อสารมวลชนให้กับนักศึกษาได้

ผู้วิจัยออกแบบขั้นตอนของการเรียนรู้การผลิตสื่อละครโทรทัศน์ออกเป็นสามขั้นตอน ได้แก่ ขั้นตอนก่อนการผลิต ขั้นผลิต และขั้นหลังการผลิต โดยให้นักศึกษามีส่วนร่วมออกแบบการทำงานและวางเนื้อหาละครในทุกขั้นตอน โดยมีเงื่อนไขหลักคือนักศึกษาจะต้องร่วมกันเลือกปัญหาที่จะนำเสนอผ่านสื่อละครโทรทัศน์เพื่อรณรงค์จริยธรรมสื่อมวลชน จากนั้นจึงนำมาผลิตและนำเสนอเป็นละครสั้น

การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลจากการมีส่วนร่วม ผู้วิจัยใช้เกณฑ์การตอบสนองของนักศึกษา พบว่า มีความกระตือรือร้นสูง มีความภาคภูมิใจในผลงานของตน มีการวิพากษ์วิจารณ์เกี่ยวกับการนำเสนอเนื้อหาผ่านสื่อ และตัดสินใจเชิงจริยธรรมได้ชัดเจนขึ้น กล่าวโดยสรุปได้ว่า นักศึกษาได้เรียนรู้จริยธรรมสื่อสารมวลชนผ่านความสนุกในการผลิตละครโทรทัศน์ของตนเอง

คำสำคัญ: การเรียนรู้, จริยธรรมสื่อมวลชน, การมีส่วนร่วม, กระบวนการผลิตสื่อละครโทรทัศน์

Introduction

At present, media content producers have been widely criticized by audiences on social media platforms for their lack of ethical judgements. To compete for audience's popularity, media have been known to publicly display graphic images of dead bodies, uncensored pictures of the accused youth. Additionally, media report are notoriously employed "improper" descriptions, misleading readers or exaggerating stories ranging from headlines to core contents. In many cases, the news content violates the informants' right to privacy. Besides, television series are also known to contain socially improper sexual and/ or violent scenes, and forcefully insert countless brands of product placements. Advertisers and brand owners also flout media professional rules and regulations by over-exaggerating or hyping the properties of products, emphasizing the superstitious beliefs or reproducing social biases and discriminatory attitudes in relation to gender, race and social status.

Aiming to create an effective and relative approach to learning media ethics, the researcher came up with a concept of students' active learning approach which allowed students to participate in every step of the television series making process. Students were divided into two groups: actors and administrators. Each group had different participatory levels. The administrators had a higher level of participation because they partook in every step of the production from planning to post-production processes.

The reason influencing the researcher's choice of television series production as a means to achieve the desired learning outcome was the complicated process in making television series requiring an active participation of production crew in all three steps.

Since television series are often believed to reflect real life situations, they are suitable materials for inserting real life facts and ethical issues. Unlike live performance or plays, television series can be widely distributed, particularly through free online platforms and social networking sites, such as YouTube.

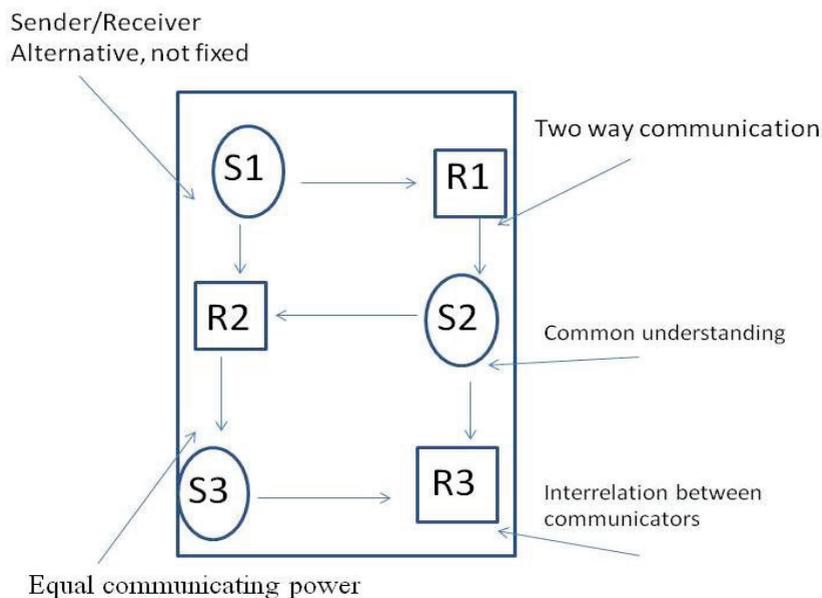
Literature Review

This pilot study showed that television series, demanding active participation from those involved in the production processes, provided an ample opportunity to gauge the effectiveness of this learning by doing approach in teaching media ethical concerns to students. This activity also enabled the two-way communication approach between instructor and students as the desirable model for this learning by doing approach strategy.

These are the concepts that researcher applied for research design

Concept of Communication Model

The communication model employed in this research followed the Ritualistic Model or the two-step communication process enabling the changing role from being a receiver to being a sender (Kanjana Kaewthep, 2006, p. 5)



The objective of this ritual communication model was to create a common understanding and an inter-relationship between the sender and receiver. The drama process involved using a production approach that changed the audience's role to the producer's role to sharpen knowledge, understanding, emotional sensitivity and behavioral adjustments including polishing the taste of esthetics of the youth (Kanjana Kaewthep, 2009).

Three steps of participation were as follows:

1. Self study was the step to study students. In this step the students were the audience.
2. The practical training step was to train students to have necessary production skills so that they could produce a television series by themselves.
3. Learning from lessons was the step that returned knowledge to students by organizing seminar sessions allowing students to discuss and to criticize the series they had produced. At this step students assumed the roles of production managers.

Upon completing the three steps, students' participation in the television series production could be a preferred method in developing communication arts students' learning enthusiasm and critical thinking when making informed decisions regarding media ethical concerns in students' daily lives.

Concepts of Media Ethics

The researcher followed the rules of "Do" and "Don't" for media practitioners described in the media ethics handbook commissioned by the Office of National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (2014). Some of these rules are:

"Do not use personal opinions to judge persons in the news or distribute or extend the news with personal opinions"

"Do not use improper pictures, pictures that are related to the products or not real pictures in the advertisements that may lead to consumer's misunderstanding"

"Promote television drama representing positive models or television drama promoting efforts for achievement of a righteous livelihood"

"Use polite, proper words that do not constitute discriminatory attitudes based on race, nationality or skin color when presenting products"

"There should be no product placements in the news programs and the news programs should not be presented in commercially promotional styles"

Concept of Community Participation

The Social and Environmental Research Institute of Chulalongkorn University (2002, cited in Parichart Sthapitanon - Sarobol, 2000) mentioned five participation activities: participation in planning, activity performance, benefit uses, benefit receiving and evaluation.

Kanjana Kaewthep (2006) indicated that ordinary people participated in the community radio operation as being media receivers, re-tellers, program public relations monitoring local problems or a participation in special activities of community radios. Participation in the radio programs included phoning in to share ideas, requesting songs and reporting news. Participation as the program producers in all 3 phases include the pre-production, the production and the post production. Participation as the resource person, is the role of informers who give information to the community radio program producers. Participation in the decision making of community radio operation are volunteers whose offer free service the broadcast. Other types of participation activities include participation as various committee of community radio and participation in special activities for community radio such as working as public relations officers and fund raising officers.

Concept of Drama

Tisana Khemmani (2009, p. 353) explained that using drama with its lively contents was an effective method helping learners acquire the learning objectives and understand the subject matter with long retention. The important aspects of drama in relative learning approach include script writing, acting, and viewing, and discussing and concluding what learners gain from participating in the drama making processes.

Analogous to Pornrat Dumrung (2014)'s emphasis, the two types of drama employed for this research as well as for other human development projects were:

1. Drama in Education (DIE) - the process in which the teachers and the drama producer trained participants in the activities or children in classrooms. The activity did not emphasize the outcome of production but the development of participants in the drama production activities. When participating in the activity, participants would learn and gain direct experiences from the designed topics. At the same time, the participants would learn the concept of communication processes and work together as a team. DIE would display the assumed roles of those in history.
2. Theater in Education (TIE) - a mixed form of drama requiring audience participation, audience interaction and post-viewing discussion. The drama script was developed partly by a group-brain storming and partly by the discussion with the teachers. The content was often related to the lessons, social

problems and the audiences' age, for example, drug problems and teenage pregnancy.

Concept of Edutainment

Edutainment is a process of integrating with academic and entertainment contents to enhance desirable knowledge and attitudes, and to change the audience's behaviors by using different forms of mass media, including drama, rock music, movies and cartoons, to convey the designed knowledge and information to the target groups (Singhal & Rogers, 1999, p. XII).

Edutainment, the use of media materials with entertaining content: drama, cartoons or songs, is useful in enhancing audiences' quality of life without forcing them to learn necessary information and knowledge, such as, safety protection measures, health care tips, precautions about mental health (Lull, 1992, cited in Singhal & Rogers, 1999, p.108).

Chaianant Samutvanit (cited in Tisana Khemmani, 2009) explained that *pluen* (Thai. play and learn) theory is a mixture of mindfulness and fun to trigger an eagerness to learn. The use of television drama as a learning material is one way to promote learning with happiness.

The researcher used Parichart Sthapitanon - Sarobol's (2000, pp. 353-354) concept of edutainment in the communication process. Parichart proposed that people involving in the edutainment should have understood the following concepts:

- Systematic thinking - overall thinking, instead of partial thinking - all concerned parties should have some things to support the effects of the core of edutainment.

- Participatory thinking – avoiding the imposition of ideas onto the target audiences, rather encouraging all parties to achieve collective thinking or having equal participation in edutainment content design and learning creative presentation techniques.

- Ethical thinking - all concerned parties should think of ethical principles and the greater benefit of society. Creating edutainment materials should not be based on personal nor corporate benefits.

Gagne's Learning Theory

To entail students' relative learning of media ethics by producing television series, the researcher also used Gagne's learning theory in communication processes.

For the mass media ethical practice, Gagne's learning theory was often popularly used to design the communication processes with students, the researcher's target group.

Gagne (cited in Tisana Khemmani, 2009, pp. 75-76) proposed that the learning processes consisted of 9 steps:

1. Gaining attention - this step encourages learners to pay attention to the lesson. The attention can be triggered by external and internal motives. This step is often accompanied by various teaching methods motivating learner's interest in the lesson: class discussion, question and answer sessions, quizzes or use of teaching aids.
2. Informing the learning objectives - this step informs learners the objectives or results the learners are expected to gain from this learning process. This step is said to help learners design and plan their own lessons. This method is also known to help learners meet learning objectives effectively.
3. Stimulating the recall of pre-requisite capabilities - this is the stage that learners recall previous sets of knowledge in order to produce new sets of knowledge. Learning is therefore a process of knowledge integration between the older sets of knowledge and the newer sets of knowledge.
4. Presenting the stimulus - this step is aimed to help learners start the new project with teaching aids appropriate for learning activities.
5. Providing a learning guidance -this step helps learners do activities by themselves following teachers' guidance.
6. Eliciting the performance - this step helps students perform learning and behavioral expressions according to the designed learning objectives.
7. Feedback – in this step, teachers evaluate the students' performance or students' expressions to find out whether their behavioral expressions are correct or not.
8. Assessing the performance - this step assesses the learners regarding how much they have learned according to the learning objectives. The assessment is done by questions, observation, examination or interview depending on the learning objectives. The only important thing was that the measurement tools must be qualified, reliable and valid.
9. Enhancing the retention and transferring knowledge - this step is the conclusion which the past lessons are repeated and re-examined to generate a new set of knowledge. This step is often accompanied by various means such as work assignment, report or additional classroom activities

Related Literature

Following the community action approach and lessons learned from her study of the effects of alcohol consumption among youths, Wongphuek (2006) asserted that youths' direct participation in the drama production was considered a positive solution allowing participating youths to take parts in one or many roles of the production team, including audiences, actors, data providers, supporters and observers. This multi-tasking participation resulted in behavioral changes among youths in relation to alcohol problems and other behavioral problems. Community members were also offered an active role in public campaigns for raising community awareness of social issues such as excessive alcohol consumption.

Working with the Makhampom drama group, Duangkhae Buaprakhon et al (2004) conducted a research on the use of drama as an essential strategy for community development. This project assessed the effects of this developing approach on individual and collective levels. Buaprakhon found that drama can explicitly change knowledge, understanding, attitudes and behavior at personal and community levels.

Yada Wittayapanpracha (2009) studied the effects of drama on the ethical development of youth using mixed research methods in analyzing data from documents and experimental research with a pre-test and post-test designs. The samples were collected from 350 secondary school students, year 1-3, in the Bangkok area. The objectives were to study ethical concepts and how to include ethics and morality into the drama named "*Thong Lon Lang*" (Thai. Gold overflowed on your back) and to study ethical knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of students from secondary schools in the Bangkok area after seeing the drama "*Thong Lon Lang*" and to compare the level of ethical knowledge, attitudes and behavior of secondary school students in Bangkok area before and after seeing the drama "*Thong Lon Lang*". Findings were that students gained more ethical knowledge, attitude and behaviors after seeing the drama.

Methodology

Research Question

Following the learning by doing approach teaching model, this research was designed to assess whether students' participation in television series production processes would facilitate students' learning of mass media ethics. Attention was also made on the production activities that entailed the learning process.

Methods

One hundred eighteen students enrolling in the course "Mass Media Ethics and Laws" under the Department of Communication Arts at a Phranakhon Rajabhat

University took part in this research. They were divided into 2 groups: the production crew (actors and production technicians) and the administrative crew.

To monitor and observe students' active involvement in the designed learning process, the following research tools were employed:

1. Evaluation forms were used to collect students' feedbacks and comments regarding the conjectured understanding of media ethical issues and their decision making on media ethical problems.
2. Observation forms were used to record students' roles in their production of television series.
3. Students' drama scripts and students' notes were thoroughly examined for explicit and implicit evidence of their understanding of ethical issues.
4. Interview forms were used to collect students' subjective reflection of their experiences in the production processes.
5. List of discussion topics for focus group was also used in collecting students' collective reflection on this learning by doing activity.

Data Collection

Data for analysis were collected by the following steps:

- Students' knowledge, understanding and their ethical decision making skills were recorded by using students' evaluation forms.
- Students were divided into smaller groups for focus group discussions about the current ethical problems in mass media. Prior to the discussion, the researcher briefed students on mass media ethics. Students, then, selected ethical problems to present in their television series production as part of a campaign for raising public awareness of mass media ethics.
- Students engaged in all steps of the television series production. They took turns acting for the series, working as production crew and providing necessary information as resource persons. They also took turns teaching their acting crew acting and instructing the production crew the use of studio equipment. Students constructively wrote their scripts and worked independently on scenes and props design.
- After the production of their television series was completed, the series were disseminated on social media sites.

Findings

After completing this learning by doing experiment, the researcher found that there were seven steps necessary for engaging students in the learning of media ethics:

Step 1: Evaluation forms were used to assess students' critical thinking and their ethical decision making before participating in the television series production. Six picture depicting stories of mass media ethical concerns were given to students. Students were then instructed to write their opinions about the provided pictures.

Picture 1. After reviewing the media presentation of dead bodies, most students did not express their critical thinking and ethical decision making.

Picture 2. Most students did not demonstrate critical thinking or ethical decision making regarding product placements in television series.

Picture 3. Some students displayed their critical thinking and ethical decision making in relation to about racial discrimination.

Picture 4. Some students exhibited their critical thinking and ethical decision making when being shown pictures of violent scenes, dead bodies, or accused persons.

Picture 5. Most students demonstrated their critical thinking and ethical decision making when being shown the depiction of rape in the television series.

Picture 6. Most students revealed their critical thinking and ethical decision making when being shown advertisements with warning descriptions or implicitly misleading advertisements.

Step 2: Students were pretested about their knowledge, understanding and ethical decision making.

After briefing students on mass media ethics, the researcher organized a focus group discussion about current mass media ethics. Students then selected the "Do" and "Don't" media ethical rules which were publicized by the NCBT to insert into stories of the television series. The "Do" and "Don't" media ethical rules that were included in the campaign for raising the public awareness of mass media ethics were:

1. Do not present images of people smoking cigarette, consuming alcoholic drink and using other narcotic substances. Do not present these products in such a commercial way as this might have been interpreted as inviting viewers to act accordingly, or misinterpreting that such action is a good conduct.
2. Do not use inappropriate pictures, pictures unrelated to the product, or inauthentic pictures that can mislead consumers about the product.
3. Do promote dramas containing the positive representation of diverse groups of people, or dramas optimizing efforts for success in a politically correct manner.

4. Do not present pointless, nonsensical, or false stories potentially leading to unintelligent beliefs.
5. Do not include personal opinion when criticizing persons involving in the news stories, or to fabricate the news content with personal opinions.
6. Do not use scenes that are considered satirical, disrespectful, or offendable to specific groups of people, races, ethnicities, sexes, classes, religions, beliefs. If such scenes are used, other scenes revealing true stories must be accompanied at the earliest opportunity.
7. Do produce dramas containing social constructive engagement issues which are appropriate to the current Situation. The dramas should also provide solutions to social problems by using positive role models for the public.
8. Do not present advertisements misleading the actual properties of the products and services. Using celebrity brand endorsement must not include the exaggerated claim of the actual properties of the products.
9. Do use polite and contextually appropriate language. Do use language that do not constitute explicit and implicit insults on race, nationality, or ethnicities when presenting the concerned products and services.
10. Do not employ product placements in the news programs or news talk shows.

Step 3: The production of television series as a learning step – students performing resource persons roles provided acting instructions to acting crew and technical assistance to production crew.

Step 4: Students selected their group representatives to form a research team tasked with providing research questions. Then, all groups worked together and designed the research process. Every student volunteered for his/her preferred jobs, such as, script writers, make-up artists, stage managers, props masters, and actors. Everybody was responsible for their selected work. Some students performed more than one duties. For example, some students worked as producer, script writer and director. Other roles in the production were: assistant director, three principal actors, four supporting actors, make-up artist, hair stylist, time keeper, slate marker, custodian, two still photographers, one camera operator, and one switcher.

Step 5: Students all participated in the planning process to produce a television series for a mass media ethics campaign in consultation with the research team. Students then agreed on research tools and sample selections, as well as produced follow-up schedules to monitor their work progress and assessment. As a facilitator, the researcher offered advice and guidance only when needed. Each group wrote their own scripts and edited them before proceeding to the production stage.

Step 6: Students participated in the television series production as demonstrated in the following pictures:



Step 7: The representative from each group conducted a focus group discussion to verify the appropriateness of the research content. This activity was designed to find out if television series can influence students' perception of mass media ethical issues. The focus group results from all groups had almost the same answer. Almost all students revealed that the produced television series were "fun", "practical" enabling them to have first-hand experience in the production of television programs and to comprehend the mass media ethics. The following excerpts from focus groups discussions exemplified the above points.

Student 1:

The knowledge gained from studio: I learned about the production equipment in studio.

The knowledge gained from this subject: I learned about ethics and laws.

Feelings after viewing their own clip and the clips of other groups: I'm not quite happy with the clip my group produced but happy with what we have done.

Student 2:

The knowledge gained from studio: I gained good feelings from studio. It's such an impression because I've never learned or practised in the studio. Most course are theories. But here learning by practising or the hand-on learning allowed me touch and see the real things. This activity helped me gain more experiences and various skills.

Knowledge gained from this subject: Many things, experiences, skills, knowledge that I've never known before. I'm sure the experience from this class will be useful in the future.

Feelings after viewing their own clip and the clips of other groups: It is clear that my group and other groups have creativity. We expressed our creativity in different ways. I'm impressed with new ideas and techniques, not the old things.

Student 3:

The knowledge gained from studio: I had a lot of fun learning many kinds of production equipment in the studio.

Knowledge gained from this subject: skills and knowledge and how to use many kinds of equipment in the studio. This knowledge will be useful in the future. Also, learning the mass media ethics and laws, rules and regulations are certainly applicable for my future career.

Feelings after viewing their own clip and the clips of other groups: It was fun. I was pleased to learn. The drama with ethical issue can be applicable to our daily life issues.

Student 4:

The knowledge gained from studio: It was fun. It was such a challenge when learning in the studio.

Knowledge gained from this subject: I gained a lot of experiences that could be used in the daily life, the life skills.

Feelings after viewing their own clip and the clips of other groups: It was quite funny and entertaining.

Student 5:

The knowledge gained from studio: I've learned many things about drama production and television production.

Knowledge gained from this subject: I think what we learned about the ethics could be used in our daily life.

Feelings after viewing their own clip and the clips of other groups: I'm very happy to have the chance to learn with friends. This activity helped us gain group unity. The drama could be used in daily life.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study focused on the participatory process of making television drama series to promote the relative learning of mass media ethics. All steps used in this research were designed for students to have active participation in all the steps including

Pre-production - It was the necessary step preparing students for the activity. Students were first briefed about basic knowledge assessment methods. They were then given additional knowledge of the mass media ethics, and subsequently trained in acting and operating television production equipment. After that, students were offered sessions on the advanced techniques in to script writing, actor selection, stage, props and wardrobe allocation, budget planning, time frame scheduling and necessary appointments.

Production - Students produced the series at the university's media studio according to the date and time pre-scheduled for the production. Students were reminded about the importance of punctuality and the run-through-technique using three cameras without editing between the takes by using the switcher to switch pictures from each camera upon the director's order.

Post-production - Students needed not to edit the videos because of the run-through technique using three cameras. Student then uploaded their videos onto YouTube for presentation and dissemination.

From these three steps of television series production, the researcher collected data from face-to-face-discussion and from individual students' Facebook statuses. The researcher found that students were eager to learn and to participate in every step of the television series production. The researcher also offered advice to students how to interpret and encode the concerning ethics into the actual scripts. Before the shooting began, rehearsals were also organized by students. Pictures of behind the scene were taken and uploaded onto Facebook. Captions were added in the series. The production clips were also shared among students themselves. This indicated their sense of pride and unity in the collective learning activity as being pointed out in the interview.

Students who were representatives of their respective groups revealed that watching television series or dramas was no longer pleasurable because after getting through this class activity students were confronted with questions regarding production techniques such as, "why the series producer used such pictures?", or "why the series

producers inserted this kind of advertisements?”. Students all agreed that current television dramas were full of many “inappropriate” scenes possibly violating the media ethical guidelines. Students performing the administrative roles demonstrated their higher level of learning than students in the acting group. The researcher therefore argued that the more participation the students take, the more issues regarding media ethical the students are likely to learn.

In conclusion, the students’ overwhelming responses in the research indicated that the learning by doing approach had enabled students to energetically engage in their actively relative learning of media ethics. Students also voiced that their participation in the television series production had given them a sense of achievement, enabling them to criticize television programs with ethical dilemma, and to make an ethically informed decision. Students’ active participation in the television series production can then be used as an effective means to constructively teach media ethical concerns to students.

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