

# CULTIVATING THE DEMOCRATIC MIND

## THE UNDERSTATED ADULT EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTIC OF PUBLIC JOURNALISM

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### Abstract

The article analyses formative texts of public journalism, written in the USA in the 1990s, by constructing comparisons to adult education. The article initially introduces the rationale of paralleling public journalism with adult education by discussing the congruence of aims, methods, and definitions of professional roles between public journalism and American pragmatist adult education. The authors use the methods of intellectual history to analyse the intervention in the public conduct of citizens, which the leading early proponents of public journalism, Jay Rosen and Davis Merritt, constructed. The article demonstrates that Rosen and Merritt's idea of intervention consists of two distinct elements. First, Rosen and Merritt urge journalists to animate social association and thus create prerequisites for citizens to recognise their public and political agency. Second, they suggest journalists to promote inclusive and solution-oriented public discussion among the citizenry. Adult education recognises both elements, yet the purpose Rosen and Merritt articulate for intervention is abstract and instrumental, compared to adult educational purposes, and their view on citizen empowerment is more restricted. The abstract ideal of public life, as opposed to the emancipation of persons, is at the centre of Rosen and Merritt's argument.

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## Introduction

A radical definition of the task of professional journalists emerged in the USA in the late 1980s and 1990s as public (civic) journalism developed. Developers of public journalism based their approach on the claim that *the public*, the body of public-oriented and civic-minded citizenry, had dispersed as a consequence of the increasing withdrawal of citizens from collective and political life (Rosen 1991a; 1993b; 1993c; 1995; Merritt 1994). Public journalism was an intellectual and practical experiment of seeking ways to reconstruct *the public*, an effort which sometimes meant beginning from the initial prerequisites of togetherness. Advocates of public journalism, such as Jay Rosen and Davis Merritt, argued a change of orientation was necessary across society from private to public life, from political apathy to engagement, from detached advocacy to public discussion and collective problem-solving. Rosen and Merritt argued that journalists should be the initiators of this change (Rosen 1991a; 1994a; 1994b; 1995; Merritt 1994; 1995; Merritt and Rosen 1994), thus considerably extending the task of professional journalists. Merritt suggested journalists should step from newsrooms and press boxes to the “swamps” of civil society (Merritt 1995, 72-74) and those arenas, in which private individuals have the opportunity to join the public realm as citizens.

The seminal texts of public journalism promote a cultural and political change in the USA by promoting a change in people’s minds. In this article, we analyse the formation of public journalism by constructing comparisons to adult education. We argue that aims, methods, and journalists’ roles in public journalism manifest concepts of adult education. We argue, further, that the argument of the purpose of public journalism differs from the concepts of adult education and that the developers of public journalism did not adequately discuss the concept’s purpose.

The intellectual context, in which public journalism formed, provides the connection to adult education. The ideals, practices and organisations of adult education informed the emerging concept of public journalism implicitly through the legacy of John Dewey and through the close association of public journalism developers with civil society agents, many of whom operated within the field of adult education. Public journalism comes particularly close to the pragmatist tradition of American adult education, which influenced by Dewey, has pursued progress and democracy through the development of cooperative and problem-solving skills of citizenry (e.g. Stewart 1987; Kett 1994; Elias and Merriam 2005). Public journalism not only shares these aims with pragmatist adult education but also the method of organised collective discussion. Pragmatist adult educators believe approaches of collective discussion are the primary method, through which adults learn democratic skills, such as public speaking and listening and collective planning and group work (Lindeman 1926/1989; Stewart 1987; Brookfield 2005). All these elements are articulated in the formative writing of public journalism.

How adult education could enhance our understanding of public journalism has nevertheless remained unarticulated. The leading advocates do not discuss the issue in the formative texts and the affinity to adult education has remained almost unrecognised in the otherwise intensive scholarly interest in the concept and practice of public journalism. An explicit link has been argued by Perry (2003; 2004) who equates “civic journalism” with “continuing adult education” (Perry 2003, v,

77) and suggests the role of “civic journalists” is parallel to the role of participatory teachers (Perry 2003, 38). Despite these arguments, Perry’s focus is elsewhere and consequently he does not proceed to a thorough analysis of the overarching features of public journalism and adult education.

A comparison of public journalism with adult education is, however, worthwhile because it reveals the incoherence in the argumentation of public journalism, thus opening up opportunities of renewal. While a comparison with adult education helps to understand the logic between the aims and methods of public journalism, the process immediately brings out any flaws in the argument concerning the purpose of public journalism. The decisive difference is that the argumentation of adult education centres on living persons, whereas the argumentation of public journalism centres on the abstract concept of public life.

Outlines of citizenship reform similar to public journalism can be found in the writing of several scholars of adult education (e.g. Lindeman 1926/1989; Korsgaard 1997; Welton 2002; 2005; Brookfield 2005). All these scholars, like the architects of public journalism (Rosen 1991a; 1992; 1993b; 1999b; Merritt 1994; 1995), raise visions of citizens who participate in rational and inclusive discussions about public issues and deliberate over solutions to common problems. The scholars of adult education, however, consider the emancipation and equality of persons as the purpose of advanced participation and deliberation. The purpose that public journalism offers to participation and deliberation derives, in comparison, from the desire to consolidate the prerequisites of public life.

The centrality of an abstract idea of public life contributes to an instrumental conceptualisation of the purpose of public journalism as citizenship reform. Public journalism’s view of citizen empowerment is limited, which may have hampered the progress of the movement.

In the remainder of this article, we introduce initially the rationale of paralleling public journalism with adult education. The focus is on adult educational ideals, practices and organisations that were present in the contexts, in which public journalism gradually developed, and which thus implicitly facilitated the formation of public journalism. We then analyse the intervention in the public conduct of citizens, which the leading early proponents of public journalism, Jay Rosen and Davis Merritt, constructed. We suggest the idea of intervention manifests the underlying, though implicit, influence of adult education on public journalism. Comparisons with adult education scholars enable us to discuss the aim of the intervention, the role Rosen and Merritt reserved for journalists and the purpose they offered for the intervention.

We use the term *public journalism* because it was Rosen’s and Merritt’s choice. They did not draw distinctions between public journalism and parallel emergent terms, such as civic journalism and community journalism (Rosen 1994b; 1999b; Merritt 1995).

The analysis covers a series of texts written in the formative era of public journalism by Rosen (1991a; 1991b; 1992; 1993a; 1993b; 1993c; 1994a; 1994b; 1995; 1999a; 1999b), Merritt (1994; 1995) and Merritt and Rosen (1994). The 1990s was the period, during which public journalism gradually formed from various emergent ideas and practices through conscious co-operation between American scholars and journalists. Rosen, Professor of Journalism at New York University, aspired to

include journalists' views in the dynamic academic discussion that surrounded the concept of *the public*. Rosen argued the theoretical discussion covered issues that were urgently relevant in newsrooms but needed to be conceptualised in terms that would make sense among journalists (Rosen 1991a; 1994b). Merritt, a journalist for over thirty years and editor of the Wichita Eagle newspaper became Rosen's fellow advocate after Merritt had launched reforms that became classics of the field. Public journalism, according to Rosen (1994b, 377) "took shape in large measure around Merritt, who assumed the role as the original public journalist." The 1990s texts of Rosen and Merritt are of particular relevance as they had a major influence on how public journalism was understood both in the USA and elsewhere.

The analysis draws on methods of intellectual history (Collingwood 1946/1994; LaCapra 1980; Hyrkkänen 2009) which is a hermeneutic process of inquiry. Intellectual history seeks to interpret complex texts in order to both understand the thinking of writers and to enact a dialogue with the texts beyond their conventional reading and the historical moment of writing (LaCapra 1980).

The method of intellectual history involves examining the networks of problems and solutions writers weave in their texts (Collingwood 1946/1994; Hyrkkänen 2009). The analysis of introduced problems and proposed solutions may show that writers, while developing solutions, transform their initial thought of the nature of problems. Both proposed problems and solutions are further perceived as intellectual choices writers have made within particular contexts. Hence it is essential that researchers pursue comprehension of the contexts yet try to eschew context dominating reasoning (LaCapra 1980). The interest of intellectual history is to understand how writers conceived those contexts and what they made intellectually out of them (Hyrkkänen 2009).

### An Adult Educational Solution to a Journalistic Problem

The overriding problem Rosen and Merritt introduce is a sense of twin crises: anxiety in American journalism intertwined with a notion of failure of the US political system. Amidst alarmingly declining readership rates and the increasing withdrawal from political life of citizenry, journalists seemed to lose both their audiences and their belief in the democratic purpose of the profession (Merritt and Rosen 1994; Merritt 1994; 1995; Rosen 1994b; 1999b).

Also the relationship between journalists and their employers was unsettled. The tacit contract between journalists and publishers that used to guarantee newsroom autonomy had now ceased to protect journalists (Rosen 1993a). The craft was under commercial pressures and strained to cut the costs of newsgathering.

Moreover, the pride and commitment of journalists to keep citizens informed about formal politics seemed to have been turned against the profession as citizens displayed disgust towards political elites. Journalism had become part of the establishment, which citizens now disregarded (Merritt 1994; Rosen 1994b). "Journalists in the United States are at a critical point in the history of their craft," summarised Merritt and Rosen (1994, 3). "[T]he conditions that once gave their work its central importance change drastically or disappear" (Merritt and Rosen 1994, 4).

Since Rosen and Merritt intertwine the troubles of journalism and democracy, the solution they introduce aims to relieve the predicaments of both. The solution is the revival of citizens' participation in public life. Strategies to attract journalism

audiences will fail “unless readers also want to be citizens” (Merritt and Rosen 1994, 4). Citizens who engage with public life will have an interest to stay informed, which in turn consolidates the operational preconditions of journalism (Merritt 1995, 114). Persuading and equipping citizens to engage with public life becomes the primary task for journalists.

The task that Rosen and Merritt propose for journalists means intervention in the public conduct of adult citizenry. We argue the intervention manifests two underlying contexts that implicitly contributed to the development of public journalism both as a concept and as a variety of practices. The first contributor is American pragmatism and the thinking of the key pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (Perry 2003). The second contributor is the explicit civic educational agenda of many of the foundations and organisations whose visions and rhetoric Rosen and Merritt adopted for their texts and whose practices were espoused to guide public journalism practices.

Rosen (1999a, 24) states the shortest definition of public journalism is “what Dewey meant.” The keyword of public journalism, *the public*, is a concept Dewey used to refer to individuals who join together to discuss and experiment with solutions for commonly experienced problems and identify themselves as a politically viable group (Dewey 1927/2003; Heikkilä and Kunelius 1996; Coleman 1997; Rosen 1999b). Dewey’s concept (1927/2003) involves a definition of citizenship, in which there are four particular characteristics: First, citizens orientate towards public issues voluntarily and willingly; secondly, they use their experiences as material, and discussion as the method of examining the world; thirdly, they have an ability to pool their individual capacity and tackle the problem they have faced and fourthly, they are conscious of the interrelatedness of problems and seek free interplay with other citizens and publics. Dewey’s concept, in other words, presumes a variety of abilities that are not self-evident but have to be learned.

Dewey’s *public* became an influential ideal in American pragmatist adult education, with Eduard Lindeman, his friend and colleague (Stewart 1987), being the “chief interpreter” (Brookfield 2005, 63). In accordance with Dewey’s concept, Lindeman (1926/1989) argues the crux of democracy is citizens’ ability and willingness to apply democratic principles in everyday social life. In order to advance the development of such ability in citizenry, Lindeman (1926/1989, 7) suggests adult educators should perceive experiences as a “living textbook” of adults. Lindeman argues the real experiences of life are adults’ greatest source of learning. Collaborative and problem-solving discussion is learnt in situations in which people speak about and solve problems collaboratively and, in which the discussion is deliberately organised to encourage increasing participation and interaction. The tasks of adult educators are to provide for such situations and to lend support to adults as they consider their concerns and observations in a larger context of the changing society. Teachers should not pursue directive roles but facilitate learning by assisting adults to reconstruct experience (Lindeman 1926/1989, 109-123; Stewart 1987, 153-169).

It is striking how literally Rosen (1994a; 1999b) and Merritt (1994; 1995) transfer this idea to journalism even though they never mention either Lindeman or pragmatist adult education. Rosen and Merritt initially propose making the concerns and realities of citizens the starting point for news coverage. If this proved to be an

appropriate device of journalists to initiate public discussion, Rosen and Merritt go further and urge journalists to create opportunities of assembly, discussion and problem-solving in homes and neighbourhoods. In this vein, journalists should not only invite citizens to bring their mundane experiences and observations to public discussion but also to facilitate citizens in the connecting of concerns and observations to more generally shared public problems. The role Rosen and Merritt reserve for journalists is congruent with pragmatist adult education as Rosen and Merritt suggest journalists should facilitate but not direct citizens' assembly and discussion.

Rosen and Merritt are directing journalists towards an arena not conventionally included in the scope of professional journalism. The unfamiliarity becomes visible when Rosen (1991a; 1993c; 1994b) struggles to apply Dewey's vision to the actual working contexts of American journalists. "Dewey's faith in public capacities was inspiring," Rosen (1999b, 67) writes, "[b]ut he did little to specify how his dream could be made to work." How journalists could actually push through a qualitative change in people's public conduct remains rather vague in Rosen's and Merritt's texts. The methods had to be found from beyond the borders of journalism and journalism research. A variety of American organisations did contribute to the entrenchment of discussion groups as a characteristic method of public journalism.

One of the major forces behind the development of public journalism was the Kettering Foundation, a research institute with an explicit civic educational agenda. Established in 1927 to promote scientific research, the foundation shifted its focus in the 1970s to "democracy and what makes it work as it should, which led us to pay particular attention to the role of citizens" (Kettering Foundation n.d.). The Kettering Foundation was involved at the outset in public journalism with the Foundation's involvement in the initiatives in the 1980s at the Ledger-Enquirer newspaper (Rosen 1999b), which are regarded as the first examples of public journalism (Rosen 1991a; 1993b; Haas 2007). In 1993-1997 the Kettering Foundation operated *The Project of Public Life and the Press*, which enabled the evolution of public journalism as a concept (Rosen 1994b) and put large numbers of American journalists in touch with the idea (Rosen 1999b).

A further civic educational affiliation came in the figure of Daniel Yankelovich, social scientist and chairman of the research and public engagement organisation Public Agenda. Yankelovich had co-founded the organisation in 1975 "to re-engage the public on important public matters, to allow different groups to be heard and work together on solutions" (Public Agenda n.d.). Yankelovich's book *Coming to Public Judgment* was published in 1991 on the threshold of the formative era of public journalism. The way Yankelovich (1991) models citizens' opinion formation through discussion was "particularly effective" (Rosen 1994b, 380) as public journalism entered American newsrooms. Merritt and Rosen refer to the model repeatedly (e.g. Merritt 1994; 1995; Rosen 1994a; 1994b).

Yankelovich (1991) argues that journalists understand public opinion too narrowly and measure the quality of public opinion as an equivalent of being well informed. As the quality is defined as factual mastery, citizens do not have, in contrast to experts, any real chance to impact on public discussion and political choices. Yankelovich, writing from long experience within public opinion research, argues citizens have an alternative type of solid judgement to make, value judg-

ments. Yankelovich guides journalists to cultivate citizens' judgment via a model involving the three stages of "consciousness raising," "working through" and "resolution." Yankelovich emphasises the "working through" stage, which he argues was largely missing in American society and culture (Yankelovich 1991, 65). The "working through" stage means that citizens, while *discussing together* about a variety of alternative choices to a current political issue, confront the full consequences of their views and re-evaluate their views from this perspective.

By the time public journalism began to take shape, Yankelovich's Public Agenda and the Kettering Foundation had already developed discussion techniques and programmes to enhance the "working through" stage (Yankelovich 1991, 237-255). Among the methods that were adopted for public journalism were National Issues Forums, in which citizens considered problems of national importance by discussing alternative solutions with help of guide books.

The Study Circles Resource Center is another example of an organisation whose expertise on discussion methods was used in public journalism initiatives (Charity 1995). The centre, established in 1989, and now known as Everyday Democracy, has designed and conducted hundreds of community initiatives in the USA (Everyday Democracy n.d.).

The overarching element linking these organisations' approaches is the emphasis on ensuring each discussion is simultaneously inclusive and ambitious. The approaches combine the endeavours of inviting citizens to come and speak together with the effort of seeking to address solutions to significant problems at local and national levels through these discussions.

Inclusive collective discussion is a classical adult educational method, which has been widely employed as a means of societal reform, for example, in the Nordic countries (e.g. Korsgaard 1997; 2002; Rinne, Heikkinen and Salo 2006). The notion of discussion groups as an adult educational method helps to understand the relevance of Rosen's and Merritt's proposal, as they suggest journalists should initiate collective discussions in homes and neighbourhoods. While discussions were of occasional importance to public journalists who used them as material for news coverage, the ultimate relevance of the discussion method lies far beyond the sporadic stories of a newspaper. The relevance is the learned habit of the adult population of discovering the world in thoughtful, respectful, and public-oriented interplay with each other.

We proceed now to discuss more specifically the reconstructing of *the public*, at which Rosen and Merritt aimed through the intervention they proposed in the public conduct of citizenry. We separate the intervention analytically into two distinct elements, both of which are known in adult education. We argue that Rosen and Merritt consequently blended into one approach the two distinct roles for professional journalists. First, they suggested that journalists should perform as animators of social association, thus aiming to create the social prerequisites for *the public* to emerge. Secondly, they suggested journalists should act as cultivators of the discussion in which the emergent *public* engaged.

## Journalists as Animators of Social Association

The mental landscape, in which Rosen and Merritt situate the emergence of public journalism, depicts a gloomy picture of American communities weighed

down by pervasive long-term problems and ineffective politics. Voter turnout is low and citizens “isolate themselves in their own narrow concerns and seek safety and solace in insular communities and activities” (Merritt 1995, 3). A large proportion of the population has stopped caring about politics and withdrawn from public life, thus making irrelevant “one of the traditional demand factors in journalism – information upon which you can act” (Rosen 1993a, 52).

This is the contextualisation Rosen and Merritt make, as they introduce the rebuilding of social and communal ties and a sense of togetherness, which we call the first element of the reconstructing of *the public* in public journalism. The objective is that individuals shall awake in their isolated privacy and join together to seek solutions to common problems as citizens. Rosen writes about the need to face the challenges of “public time” (Rosen 1991b, 22-23; 1993b, 10) and “public work” (Rosen 1993c, 27-28). Dwelling in public time and doing public work mean that people, instead of being ignorant of their circumstances, voluntarily choose to confront the problems of the political present.

The role of public journalists is therefore to persuade people to make this voluntary choice. Journalists are suggested to make politics matter and “civic life a compelling alternative” (Rosen 1992, 30) and create “a climate in which the affairs of the community earn their claim on the citizen’s time and attention” (Rosen 1993b, 3). The task of journalists is thus to contribute to “what had earlier been a premise for the daily newspaper – the existence of a public attuned to public affairs” (Rosen 1993b, 5).

Rosen (1991a; 1992; 1993b) and Merritt (1994; 1995) urge journalists to leave newsrooms and go out into society and support face-to-face discussions at locations both domestic and public. Informal get-togethers organised by public journalists were manifestations of this role, as well as citizen assemblies, some of which gathered hundreds of citizens.

In the footsteps of John Dewey, Rosen and Merritt thus turn towards publics that are “in eclipse” (Dewey 1927/2003, 304-325), believing that journalists can assist their audiences to recognise their agency as citizens (Rosen 1991a; 1993b; 1994a; Merritt 1995). The names of early campaigns manifest the effort to claim citizens’ influence over issues already seen beyond citizens’ control: “Your Vote Counts,” “Solving It Ourselves” and “Taking Back Our Neighborhoods” (see e.g. Merritt 1995, 80-87; Rosen 1999a, 43-55; Sirianni and Friedland 2001, 193-217).

Perry (2004) refers briefly to a partial congruence between public journalism and the ideas of adult education philosopher Paulo Freire. The reconstructing of *the public* through the animation of social association indeed resembles Freire’s approach in that it is a grassroots approach, which aims to evoke a sense of agency amongst people who do not yet identify themselves as political actors. Freire preceded public journalism initiatives in emphasising the thorough acquaintance of educators with communities, in which they work. His approach also highlights the time-consuming and delicate character of community projects.

The most apt of Freire’s concepts in the context of reconstructing *the public* is that of “generative themes” (Freire 1972/1990, 68-95). Freire employed multidisciplinary research groups that, by collaborating with people and spending long periods in communities, gathered concepts and meanings that dominated people’s lives. Generative themes thus captured the situation as described in the people’s



own words and comprehension and subsequently formed the bases for situation specific adult education programmes. These programmes aimed, through dialogues, to contribute to critical consciousness about the possibilities of influencing and changing the difficulties that confronted people.

Rosen and Merritt certainly encourage journalists to listen to the people, follow the citizens' agenda and to contribute to awareness about citizens' possibilities of bringing about change. There is correlation between Freire's quest for generative themes and "community conversations," a public journalism initiative used, for example, by the newspaper *Virginian Pilot*. Journalists employed community conversations to discover how citizens named and framed issues; journalists, then, used citizens' frames as the basis of the newspaper's political reporting (Rosen 1995; 1999b).

We nevertheless hesitate to construct a straightforward link between Rosen and Merritt's public journalism and the thinking of Freire who was far more politically oriented than Rosen and Merritt and consequently far more explicit in his criticism towards the existing political systems.

Other than Freire, who developed his philosophy in Latin America, grassroots and community approaches of adult education have been developed in many countries and cultures. Developers of public journalism have an opportunity to seek cooperation with culturally specific adult educational approaches that aim to animate citizenship at a collective level by starting with the interests, cultural traditions, and needs of local people.

Our view is that Rosen and Merritt's initial assignment for journalists tries to nourish the domain of social relationships, through which experiences about common ground with others do emerge. For Dewey, such experiences were a necessary conditional premise if a notion about engaging oneself in a political public sphere was to develop in a human being (Honneth 2007).

## Journalists as Cultivators of Inclusive and Solution-Oriented Discussion

Our second element in the reconstructing of *the public* and the consequent role for journalists in public journalism represents a more detailed ideal about public life. Political apathy and social disengagement of citizens are no longer the primary concerns. The focus is now on the formal modes of public discussion and on the ability of journalism to support procedures, through which citizens can arrive at public will.

The objective is a particular form of public political talk. Rosen writes about a "meaningful public discussion" (Rosen 1991a, 268), "useful discussion" (1993b, 9) and a "reasoned debate in the public sphere" (1991b, 23). Both Rosen and Merritt write in abundance about a discussion that would solve problems. Although the definitions for discussion, dialogue and deliberation remain unspecified, the pursuit of Rosen and Merritt is clear. They aim to provide for those public conditions, in which citizens with varying backgrounds can talk thoughtfully about their views concerning political issues and consciously and responsibly choose their common future. Rosen and Merritt thus repeat the early 20<sup>th</sup> century ideal of the advocates of deliberation. The ideal was that citizens learn to test their view in reciprocal reasoned discussions similar to discussions of formal deliberative bodies (Gastil

and Keith 2005). Citizens' opportunities to come together and discuss the issues of the day in open-minded and reasoned circumstances were enhanced in nationwide campaigns in the USA (Gastil and Keith 2005, 10-13). The ideal was revived in the USA at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the simultaneously developing public journalism was occasionally attached to the initiatives now referred to as deliberative democracy initiatives (Rosen 1999b, 10-16).

Deliberative discussion sets expectations on citizens. While describing the responsibilities of every citizen, Rosen (1992, 32) lists the responsibilities of paying attention to important issues, listening especially to differing views, acknowledging inconvenient facts, and regarding the truth as well as evincing civility and mutual respect in public speech.

Rosen thus addresses an issue declared by some contemporary adult education scholars as a decisive learning challenge of adulthood (e.g. Welton 2002; 2005; Brookfield 2005). The challenge, congruent with ideals of deliberative democracy (Miller 1992/2003; Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Held 2006), introduces a citizenship aim more delicate than the mere coming together of citizens. The challenge refers to the readiness to consider one's values, opinions and aspirations with relations of those of others, and to adjust one's view in a manner that does justice to those whose views differ. Where Welton (2002; 2005) and Brookfield (2005) define the challenge as an assignment for adult educators, the same task occurs thus in public journalism and is reserved for journalists.

The deliberative ideal receives a functional manifestation in both Rosen's and Merritt's texts. The focus is set on the means to enhance the ability of citizens to proceed in a search for political solutions. In other words, Rosen and Merritt were interested in channelling citizens' discussions and deliberations into solving current political problems. Here Yankelovich's model about coming to public judgement (1991) had "a special place" (Rosen 1994b, 380). When many scholars discussed communicative or deliberative ideals at an abstract level, Yankelovich was able to offer a concrete model that steered journalists step-by-step.

In his book, Yankelovich (1991) makes a conceptual separation between "public judgment" and "mass opinion." Mass opinion is an aggregate of individual opinions gathered through opinion polls and routinely reported by the media. Public judgement, by comparison, is a conclusion from thoughtful processes, in which people work together through their conflicting emotional and ethical positions and finally formulate legitimisation for political choice. This process may take years, Yankelovich (1991) argues, but when citizens have worked through it, they have dealt with the consequences of their views and are ready to decide between political options.

Especially Merritt (1994; 1995) makes the point of introducing Yankelovich's model as an assignment for journalists. This means that journalists, while covering a relevant political issue, display the distinct standpoints and alternative options that emerge from citizens' discussions, consolidate the information base and clarify the rationalisations and probable consequences of options. Merritt (1994; 1995) argues journalists can in this way assist *the public* on its journey towards a conscious and rationalised choice.

Yankelovich (1991) stresses that moving from mass opinion to public judgement does not mean moving from being poorly informed to being well informed. Public

judgement moves beyond the “information-absorbing side” of opinion formation to “the emotive, valuing, ethical side” (Yankelovich 1991, 59). Since people filter information through their value systems, journalists must develop the skill for dealing with values (Merritt 1995). Writing clearly about beliefs and priorities becomes a major objective for journalists (Merritt 1994; 1995).

Adult education scholar Welton (2005) considers mass media as one of the greatest obstacles to public cultures that nourish the learning of deliberative democracy. It is remarkable, therefore, that Rosen and Merritt direct journalists’ attention towards the deliberative ideal and orient journalists to experiment with the materialisation of that ideal. American public journalism initiatives enabled large numbers of citizens to experience events consciously designed to support the deliberative model of discussion. Citizens had opportunities to practise public speaking, listening and collective decision-making in the contexts of real and current issues.

## The Missing Purpose

The separation in this essay of the two aims of the reconstruction of *the public* and the consequent two journalist roles is analytical, whereas Rosen and Merritt present them rather in the same sentence. A combination of social togetherness and deliberative procedures of problem solving exists in Dewey’s thoughts (Honneth 2007). Analytical separation illuminates that public journalism operated in two challenging fields. While, Rosen and Merritt suggest journalists should start from the beginning by creating prerequisites for a sense of social belonging and citizenship; they also suggest journalists should contribute to an advanced form of civic conduct, which presumes that citizens are willing to question their own views and to do justice to those who think differently.

One could assume that, after expecting so much from citizens, Rosen and Merritt would rationalise the purpose of the change they propose from a citizen-centred perspective. Such a rationale is missing, however, as Rosen and Merritt direct their rationale to support the vision of a dynamic public life. The focus is, thus, on the abstract concept of public life and not on the living persons whose conduct will define whether or not the vision will materialise. Dewey (e.g. 1888/1997; 1916/1955; 1927/2003) and all the other adult education theorists present in this article differ from Rosen and Merritt by situating humans at the centre of their theories.

The abstract view on the purpose is thus setting public journalism apart even from the scholar most cherished in the intellectual development of the movement. John Dewey not only pursues an overall orientation to public discussion of society but *through the discussion* the freeing of individual capacity and personal growth, the widening of understanding and discernment, and the directing of these achievements to social aims. There is thus a very clear sense of purpose, and a definition of purpose, in Dewey’s thought. Dewey’s citizens recognise their mutual interests as human beings, respect the equality of each other as persons and use their intelligence in joint action for the creation of a more human and equal world (Dewey 1888/1997; 1916/1955; 1927/2003).

As the person-centred articulation of the purpose is missing, Rosen and Merritt’s insistence on the active participation of citizens acquires a surprisingly instrumental tone. Rosen and Merritt address neither the varying resources for participation of citizens nor structural inequalities, such as unequal distribution of welfare, which

may exclude large sections of citizenry from public life. They also ignore the complexity and extensiveness of the human processes their citizenship ideal presumes. For some adults, the development from political indifference to tolerant public citizenship would presume a profound change of habits. Mezirow refers to such a process via his concept of transformative learning, which enables individuals to become critically aware of the presuppositions that guide their habits of perception, thought and behaviour (Mezirow 1990a; 1990b; 2009). A desire to contribute to such a profound change in another person is not a trivial wish and would require some ethical reflection, yet the need for such reflection is not evident in either Rosen's or Merritt's writing.

Addressing social justice and unequal distribution of welfare might have been assignments of too political a nature for public journalists who already ran the risk of condemnation by their colleagues. Texts that aim at convincing large journalist audiences (Merritt and Rosen 1994; Merritt 1994; 1995; Rosen 1994a) display clear negotiations on the limits of appropriateness of journalists' assignments. The fear of overtly political assignments does not, however, explain the absence of ethical justification for the intervention in adult citizens' conduct. This absence suggests that citizens as human beings, living unique and vulnerable lives, were not that central in the formative thought of public journalism. Rosen and Merritt retained instead the attachment between journalism and the functioning, though democratic, of the formal political system.

## Discussion

We have, in this article, analysed the intervention in the public conduct of adult citizenry, which Jay Rosen and Davis Merritt introduced, by constructing comparisons to adult education. We have argued that Rosen and Merritt's idea of change reflects the ideal of *the public* of the pragmatist tradition of American adult education. We analytically separated Rosen and Merritt's idea of intervention into two elements, which enabled us to demonstrate that Rosen and Merritt had two aims. First, they wanted to evoke a sense of togetherness and agency amongst people who had not yet identified themselves as public and political actors; secondly sought to advance inclusive and solution-oriented discussion amongst *the public* that now existed.

Rosen and Merritt, in other words, suggested journalists should initially create the social prerequisites for *the public* to emerge, after which they would cultivate the public discussion, in which the emergent *public* engaged.

This article demonstrated that also the primary method of public journalism, organised collective discussion, is congruent with the pragmatist tradition of American adult education. Adult educators have employed approaches of discussion as methods, through which adults learn to practise democratic skills, such as public speaking and listening, equality, respect, and tolerance, as well as compromise and collective problem-solving (e.g. Lindeman 1926/1989; Korsgaard 1997; Welton 1997; 2002). By learning these skills in the micro-settings of discussion groups, adults gain capabilities for political participation, the orientation of which they define on their own. The discussion method thus emphasises the self-direction of adults and limits the role of educators to facilitating the process and guaranteeing inclusive procedures (Larsson 2001). The role Rosen and Merritt introduced to journalists

is congruent with this concept as Rosen and Merritt suggested journalists should facilitate but not direct citizens' assembly and discussion.

The adult educational perspective views the crux of public journalism as the willingness to use journalism in stimulating circumstances, in which individual adults began to consider what democracy could mean in their social relationships and how they could actualise citizenship in problems they confront. Public journalists used their professional skills, networks and technologies with a view to inviting people together, and with a view to organising and designing inclusive and thoughtful discussions, which enabled adults to articulate concerns, listen to others and strive for resolution.

The congruence of aims, methods, and professional roles within public journalism and adult education notwithstanding, we have revealed in this article that the argument of the purpose and the lack of ethical justification separate Rosen and Merritt's public journalism from the counterparts of adult education. The purpose and justification Rosen and Merritt offer is not the emancipation of persons, through the inclusive and problem-solving discussion, but the blurred ideal of dynamic public life. This shortcoming in Rosen and Merritt's argument weakens public journalism as a citizenship reform. Rosen and Merritt, as the architects of public journalism, by refraining from articulating their purpose in terms of emancipation and social equality, have declined to refer to public journalism's most powerful source of legitimacy.

Yet Rosen and Merritt did manage to draw attention to an issue which, almost twenty years after they introduced public journalism, is increasingly relevant. The issue is that efforts to revitalise journalism as a democratic arena are meaningless unless human beings want to be citizens and consciously choose democracy to be a guiding principle in their life. Rosen and Merritt remind us that journalists cannot presume people evince a democratic and public orientation unless that orientation has first been learned.

The notion that journalism can initiate this type of learning is inherent in the key scholarly literature (e.g. Carey 1987; Glasser 1991) that surrounds public journalism, yet the issue of public journalism's educational capacity remains shallow until it is conceptualised in terms of educational philosophy or research.

Adult education deserves thus to be incorporated into the research and practice of public journalism. Adult education can enhance public journalism's understanding of the necessity of ethical reflection, offer culturally sensitive methodical support and clarify the understanding of the purpose of public journalism. Adult education can prevent public journalism from narrowing into a market-driven attempt at exploiting citizens' discussions for news-benefiting ends. Adult education can, instead, reveal the genuine prospect of a societal and cultural change, which Rosen's and Merritt's texts suggest.

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