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Bridging the Gap Between the Classroom and the Newsroom

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Abstract: Journalism programs are constructed to provide a range and depth of professional knowledge and skills to enable students to bridge the classroom and the newsroom. As opportunities in traditional newsrooms shrink and 21st century newsrooms increasingly expand into digital spaces and take on alternative forms, journalism educators are confronting new pedagogical challenges—not just those related to the mastery of advanced journalistic tools, but also those connected to evolving newsroom values. This stream will discuss challenges inherent in shaping future curricula while exploring opportunities for journalism educators to develop pedagogical approaches that push beyond the replication of traditional newsroom culture.

Introduction

How does teaching journalism need to change to prepare students for the industry as it is now, and to empower them to imagine diverse and changing journalism futures?

As journalism schools revise curricula, from critically rethinking "objectivity" and journalistic distance to shifting the goals of "professional" training, how will emerging journalists fare in contemporary newsrooms?

What is the value of journalism training for students who will not work in traditional newsroom settings, and perhaps not pursue careers in media at all? What skills can journalism schools offer to citizens engaged in a range of fields?

In an effort to start a conversation about bridging gaps between the classroom and the newsroom, the literature shared in this report touches on: traditional links between journalism training and newsroom-oriented practices; reckoning with race, objectivity and change; digital skills training and absences; and journalistic labour outside the newsroom. A limitation of this report is its focus on Western (and often North American) literature; drawing from Thomas Hanitzsch

(2019), further discussion would benefit from engaging with broader international perspectives on classroom-newsroom gaps.

Background

Wanda Brandon (2002) traces out a United States-centred history of journalism education, including its practice-centred and practitioner-led roots, strong foundational ties between the classroom and the newsroom, and the tensions of fitting vocational training into the liberal arts or social sciences settings of universities (pp. 59-62; see also Adam 2001, Gasher 2005, Johansen, Weaver and Dornan 2001, Reese 1999).

At a 2013 conference, Knight Foundation adviser Eric Newton proposed a "teaching hospital" model that would double down on "learning-by-doing," allowing students and their instructors to immediately jump on new trends and deliver journalism to communities that demand more coverage. Newton (2013) described the six elements of a journalism teaching hospital model as:

- 1. "Students doing the journalism;
- 2. "Professionals mentoring them to improve the quality and impact of the journalism;
- 3. "Professors bringing in topic knowledge and raising issues;
- 4. "Innovators pioneering new tools and techniques;
- 5. "Academics doing major research projects;
- 6. "Everyone working together with an emphasis of not just informing a community but engaging it."

Newton argued journalism schools need to create more "empty space" that would allow effective responses to change and facilitate the taking-on of "the thing or the idea to be invented that year or that week, or the new trends that are surfacing ... faster and faster."

David Ryfe and Donica Mensing (2013) took up and challenged the metaphor of the teaching hospital, arguing it overemphasizes reproducing workplace practices when a time of crisis or disruption presents an opportunity "to bring deeply embedded assumptions out in the open and examine each one carefully and reflectively" (p. 5). Previously, Mensing (2010) highlighted "three industry-centered patterns of journalism education that do a dis-service to students" (p. 513):

- 1. "A focus on creating professionals, despite trends towards deprofessionalization and contested meanings of the term 'professional.'
- 2. "A focus on teaching skills and techniques that reinforce one-way communication.
- 3. "A focus on socializing students for a newsroom (that many will never enter), more than engaging in critical inquiry." (Mensing 2010, p. 513)

Mary Lynn Young and Janet Giltrow (2014) also challenged the teaching hospital model's outsized attention to technological innovation or "replicative learning" (p. 60). Rather than speed up, they advocated journalism schools ensure students not only gain professional skills but understand (and have time to test) the values and knowledges underpinning those skills.

In the teaching hospital model, [the] ability to distinguish and locate practice, journalistic ways of knowing, and professional ideologies is not high on the list of learning outcomes. But it should be [...] (Young and Giltrow, 2014, p. 48)

Looking to the post-pandemic future, and a journalism landscape populated by fewer traditional newsrooms in the United Kingdom, Deborah Wilson David (2021) points to the critical/imaginative and professional/training work that journalism students and their instructors will need to learn to balance:

The essence of the vocational element of journalism education is that it should mirror professional practice so we can effectively prepare practitioners for the workplace, but also anticipate the future of the news industries and produce reflective, creative, and skilled journalists who can compete for jobs that do not yet exist. (p. 43)

As we consider challenges and opportunities of bridging the gap between the classroom and the newsroom, we might ask: how do journalism classes work to mirror real-world newsrooms to train students, while entertaining multiple potential futures and critically assessing existing failures?

Questions

Reckoning: How/are newsrooms changing?

2020 revealed weaknesses everywhere—in financial models that brought entire companies near death, in the loss of in-real-life events [...] or rocked by their decades-long lack of diversity and history of discrimination, revealed in the wake of George Floyd's death and the great 'awakening' in the white mainstream on the plight of African Americans. [...] But out of all this turmoil I do see one bright light—the end of the journalistic myth of 'objectivity,' forcing a much needed refocusing on fact-finding and telling the truth.

Danielle C. Belton (2020), then editor-in-chief of *The Root*, writing a NiemanLab prediction for journalism in 2021

Newsrooms in the U.S. and Canada [...] have been forced to acknowledge that they have to do better: in who they hire, who they retain, who gets promoted, what they cover, and how they cover it.

Pacinthe Mattar (2020), a Toronto-based journalist, writing in the essay, "Objectivity is a privilege afforded to white journalists"

In *Reckoning: Journalism's Limits and Possibilities*, Candis Callison and Mary Lynn Young (2020) write the scope of North American journalism's crises are too often contained as "either economic decline and/or technological disruption and change" (p. 2). These discourses fail to get at the field's "structure, colonialism, race, gender and class" (p. 3). Callison and Young propose unearthing journalism's foundations, in part by evaluating how objectivity has been used to root "power relations, the performance of white masculinity" and maintain "social orders" (p. 5). Setting aside objectivity or "a view from nowhere" as central to journalistic practices demands acknowledgment that, "what journalists think happened is deeply related to who they are and where they're coming from in broad and specific senses" (p. 207).

How can instructors create exercises that invite students to navigate their own situated knowledge as they learn how to approach the work of reporting? This is one challenge to take up in the journalism classroom. Sonya M. Alemán (2014) illustrates the critical attention needed to how teaching news values and reporting skills "may be fashioned by whiteness" in the classroom, in textbooks, and in instructor-student interactions (p. 73). Teri Finneman, Marina A. Hendricks and Piotr S. Bobkowski (2021) show that centring diversity and representation in news coverage demands strategic planning; by analyzing a campus newspaper in the United States, they found, "the next cohort of reporters may be poised to repeat earlier generations' diversity coverage failures if pedagogical adjustments are not made" (p. 2).

But how are these challenges being taken up in newsrooms? In an opinion piece published by *The New York Times* in 2020, Wesley Lowery noted legacy media,

[...] has allowed what it considers objective truth to be decided almost exclusively by white reporters and their mostly white bosses. And those selective truths have been calibrated to avoid offending the sensibilities of white readers. On opinion pages, the contours of acceptable public debate have largely been determined through the gaze of white editors.

Omega Douglas (2021) interviewed journalists of colour working in the United Kingdom's largest news organization to explore "*why* and *how* discriminatory patterns, as well as contradictions, occur" in news production (p. 2). In part, Douglas shows the "often-superficial nature of diversity measures [...], and tensions that arise when journalists at the receiving end of racism are tasked with addressing it and the unjust nature of this burden is amplified when their suggestions for tackling racism aren't implemented by organisations" (p. 5). Douglas concludes:

• "It's vital global news organisations employ and nurture journalists who represent the rich diversity of the societies news media claim to speak to and for, so important stories aren't missed, or mis-told and journalists of all backgrounds are free to do their work without fear of prejudice in the field or the organisations they work for." (p. 14)

• Failure to provide institutional support "will lead to recurring racism, continued attrition of Black journalists and feelings of, as [one interviewee] says, 'surviving, not thriving', for those fighting for racial inclusivity within journalism." (p. 15)

Indira S. Somani and Tia C. M. Tyree (2021) explored the importance of mentorship for Black broadcast journalists in providing guidance, career advice and "navigating interpersonal work-related problems" (p. 194). They suggest undergraduate programs,

[...] could prepare young Black broadcast journalists before entering the newsroom by helping them understand the modern-day culture in newsrooms and creating opportunities for the acquisition of a mentor prior to entering the workforce. (p. 195)

Disability: How/could newsrooms transform?

COVID-19 has proven that adaptation is possible, as local news anchors deliver broadcasts from their kitchen counters or produce radio segments from bedroom closets. But it remains to be seen whether the increased flexibility will continue to be afforded to journalists and whether this will mean an increase in disabled journalists in Canadian newsrooms.

John Loeppky (2020), a Canadian journalist, writing in the essay, "Newsroom accessibility in a post-pandemic world"

There is little crossover between critical disability and communication studies, Chelsea Temple Jones, Sheyfali Saujani and Anne Zbitnew (2021) write, reflecting on a 2020 roundtable examining media representations of disability, workplace barriers, and "what it means to grapple with stereotypical tropes about oneself and other disabled people" (p. 100). The roundtable they discuss brought together blind and visually impaired journalists and offered avenues for considering potentially transformative changes to the structures of newsrooms, journalism classrooms and journalistic storytelling. The authors advocate thinking "more flexibly about career paths for mainstream journalists and the need for a public commitment to ensuring accessible workplaces" (p. 111), for example by:

- ensuring there are accessible transportation options to get to a workplace ("which may not be available in smaller regional or rural markets");
- "accessible technologies and physical environments" for work;
- broader disability and intersectionality training for media managers and staff;
- and, recognition that, "While deadlines remain crucial in the news industry [...] recognizing that time for accessibility can be built into many deadlines will be a crucial step forward to supporting disabled people's representations in newsrooms" (p. 111).

Digital skills: How/are newsroom expectations met ... or exceeded?

The only thing I really don't want to become, even if I'm 90 and I suck at it, is, like not caring about technology or not trying. I want to try because I want to meet people where they are and that's what we do. [...] We were able to come together and really think about new strategies which really is about hiring new people, people straight out of school. I don't need people with the

same experience, who have done it for years. I want people who are fresh and new.

Evy Kwong (2022), *Toronto Star* audience editor, speaking during a virtual roundtable, "News 'ForYou': How TikTok is helping newsrooms reach new audiences," presented by the Canadian Journalism Foundation

For emerging journalists to be newsroom-ready, many agree they must be able to produce digital content seamlessly between platforms. Ainara Larrondo Ureta and Simón Peña Fernández (2018) write: "Journalists with thorough training in reporting across media, including social media, are especially in demand in the current marketplace." (p. 878)

But is it possible or productive to separate classroom digital training from students' future employability in newsrooms?

- Surveying investigative reporters and editors in the United States, Seong Jae Min and Katherine Fink (2021) found journalists, for the most part, use "simpler technologies such as web design, audio/video production software and spreadsheets" (p. 1998). They also found that while the journalists surveyed valued traditional skills over digital ones, they wished to gain digital skills training "to increase their autonomy, prestige, and employability" (p. 1999).
- After surveying recent graduates of a Canadian university journalism program and newsroom leaders, Aneurin Bosley (2019) found entry-level reporters were most likely (and most expected) to (1) "use social media for research and finding contacts/sources," (2) "disseminate information on social media," (3) "interact with members of the public on social media," and (4) "write SEO headlines for online news or information items" (pp. 17-18).
- In 2015-16 and 2016-17, Jane B. Singer and Marcel Broersma (2020) surveyed students in journalism programs in the Netherlands and in the United Kingdom and saw that they anchored changes in journalism and their own future careers to emerging technologies (pp. 332-333). "But taken as a whole, their responses suggest that these students view change at a relatively superficial level, without calling into question core understandings of what journalism does, is, or should be" (p. 333).

Singer and Broersma conclude the surveyed students' views of change aligned with newsroom views, but ask whether newsrooms need "more disruptive employees [...] to enable the industry to respond to the fundamental disruptions it faces" (p. 334).

Callison and Young (2020) suggest new technologies create openings for contemplating new practices, roles and tensions in newsrooms, as well as new ways of thinking about journalism. How can such openings or openness add to conversations about the classroom and the newsroom? What is the value in experimenting with a range of digital platforms to tell journalistic stories in the classroom that may exceed the parameters of what a contemporary newsroom asks of its reporters? What kinds of digital skills do journalism students need to learn, whether they work in a newsroom in the future or in another industry altogether? How could fostering an environment of creative experimentation empower journalism students to try out new technologies in the future, as well as new approaches to doing journalism?

Hostility: How/do newsrooms support reporters?

Both online and off, "journalists face an increasingly hostile environment" (Lewis, Zamith and Coddington 2020, p. 1061). Following interviews with women journalists in Germany, India, Taiwan, the United Kingdom and the United States, Gina Masullo Chen et al. (2020) write "gendered online harassment was a frequent issue," particularly for television reporters, and journalists "saw it as an important part of their jobs to engage, but when they did it, they knew they would get even more unwelcome and hurtful responses" (p. 889).

Journalists are often expected to be online and available to their audiences (Holton et al. 2021, pp. 1-2; see also Bossio and Holton 2021). Avery E. Holton et al. (2021) write, "Women journalists increasingly face harassment in the very spaces they are being told to establish themselves in as journalists, to seek and curate sources, and to build individual and organizational brands" (p. 2).

Chen et al. (2020) found the journalists they interviewed "overwhelmingly wanted more training to handle harassment and for their news organizations to protect them from abuse" (p. 891). They argue journalism schools must teach students "how to handle the online harassment that comes with the job" and how to deflect what they may face online, so it does not hamper their ability to engage online" (p. 891). In their interviews with journalists who had reported they were being harassed, Holton et al. (2021) found newsroom editors "took such reports seriously, referring [journalists] to human resources or legal resources within the organization" (p. 9). Newsroom leaders also shared a range of advice:

To address chronic and escalatory harassment, organizations offered journalists a number of prescriptive, and individually oriented solutions. Those included ignoring the harassment or harasser(s), engaging in a less defensive manner, countering with positive comments or humor, reporting the harassment to the social media platform [...], talking to other journalists who had experienced harassment, decreasing stress through yoga, running, or meditation, and seeking mental health resources through insurance provided by the organization. (Holton et al. 2021, p. 9)

However, the authors suggest broader approaches that could start in newsrooms and expand:

- "training for editors"
- "policy and procedures that can be followed in cases of chronic or escalatory harassment"
- "work-based support networks and resources"
- "overall acknowledgement of what has become a difficult daily reality for journalists on social media"
- changing "work expectations and taking other steps to reduce the burden of exposure on social media"
- "at a societal level, news organizations could advance a national dialogue that values journalists and their work in an effort to change the cultural climate that contributes to this harassment" (Holton et al. 2021, p. 13)

Labour: How/is work outside the newsroom valued?

In *Writers' Rights: Freelance Journalism in a Digital Age*, Nicole S. Cohen (2016) describes a media landscape so rich in potential for journalists to get published, it raises the question: "why is it so difficult for freelancers to earn a living?" (p. 6)

Investigating the experiences of freelancers, a precariously employed yet growing segment of the media labour force, demonstrates the importance of considering the organization of labour and the conditions in which journalists work for understanding contemporary media and journalism, conditions that flow from the unequal power relations between labour and capital. (Cohen 2016, p. 232)

Cohen's work raises a series of questions: How can independent journalists advocate for themselves independently and collectively, and do journalism schools have a role in supporting such advocacy? If more emerging journalists are expected to engage in some degree of freelance reporting, what skills do they need to gain in journalism school, and how are these skills different from newsroom skills?

Taking up how journalists might publicly raise money for their work using crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter, Andrea Hunter (2015) suggests journalists "are also challenging the journalistic norm of objectivity, with many turning to crowdfunding in order to fund advocacy journalism or journalism that has a 'point of view'" (p. 273). Hunter argues, "journalism schools, when teaching entrepreneurial journalism on new platforms, such as crowdfunding platforms, should incorporate ethical issues pertaining to conflict of interest into the curriculum" (p. 284).

Conclusions

In briefly touching on a range of issues, including race, objectivity, disability, digital journalism, online hostility, and labour, this report aims to open some questions about how changing journalism curricula can support student learning and prepare emerging reporters for careers in journalism. There are certainly more questions to ask and more nuances and experiences to consider as we collectively discuss how to bridge gaps between the classroom and the newsroom.

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