

A three-way intersection to *The Junction*: publishing opportunity, aspiration and reticence of journalism students at an Australian regional university

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Abstract

Over the last several years, Australian universities have taken part in an initiative where journalism students report and publish on a national publication platform. Instigated in 2014 by Associate Professor Andrew Dodd from the University of Melbourne, the *UniPollWatch* (UPW) project and its successor, *The Junction*, are a national and participatory collaboration between Australian journalism schools and programmes. *The Junction* is a national initiative to publish the best student work and ‘to encourage journalism students through collaboration and work integrated learning’ (Dodd and Davies, 2018). It is underpinned by the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA) and is an extension of the 2016 UPW project where approximately 1000 university journalism students from 28 universities reported on the Australian Federal election. The University of Newcastle (UON) is one of the universities taking part in *The Junction*

and it also participated in the *UPW* initiative. As academics coordinating *UPW*, we found encouraging, stimulating and maintaining motivation around student involvement to be challenging. Those challenges have helped inform how we have approached encouraging student contributions to *The Junction*. This paper is reporting on the challenges we found in *UPW*, the approaches we are taking with *The Junction* and how we might encourage student involvement in the future.

Introduction

In 2016, journalism students and educators from Australian universities collaborated in what has been called ‘the largest newsroom in the country’ (Dodd, Davies, Snowden and Ricketson, 2018, p.47). *UniPollWatch (UPW)* was a national project where student journalists from J-schools in Australia reported on the 2016 Australian Federal election and published on a custom-made online platform.

Around 1,000 students from 28 Australian universities, with journalism educators as editors, sub-editors and supervisors, published 670 articles (Davies, et al., 2017) on candidates, electorates and key election issues. So successful was the *UPW* initiative, that Australian journalism educators agreed to continue with the collaboration by developing an ongoing national publication *The Junction*, an online initiative to publish the best student work and ‘to encourage journalism students through collaboration and work-integrated learning’ (Dodd and Davies, 2018). Both initiatives are examples of work integrated learning (WIL), a pedagogical approach that is becoming increasingly important in a university context.

The University of Newcastle (UON) was one of the 28 Australian universities whose journalism students participated in *UPW*. The UON is also involved in *The Junction*. The rationale behind the decision by journalism academics at UON to participate in these initiatives is a commitment to the pedagogical approach afforded by experiential learning, as well as a belief that student participation will build confidence, enhance professional practice and expose student work to a global audience, potential employers and possible future collaboration opportunities. A further rationale is based on an understanding informed by experience that students at UON approach coursework with a higher level of engagement if it is being produced for an audience beyond the classroom and driven by motivations other than the marking boundaries of the rubric.

However, we found several challenges in our experience of both *UPW* and *The Junction*. Firstly, inflexible university systems meant we were unable to tailor our courses in the timeframe of the Federal election to accommodate embedding the initiative as coursework, thus leading to an increased workload for the participating students and academic staff. Secondly, the timing of the Australian election did not fit into the University’s teaching period, meaning students were working outside semesters, resulting, in some cases, to a reduction in motivation. Thirdly, UON is a regional university with a higher than national average of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, which made it difficult for students to balance their work/university commitments on top of their commitment to *UPW*. While these challenges were difficult, it did mean that we could take on the lessons learnt and tailor our engagement with *The Junction*.

A further challenge at UON, and one that is common to both *UPW* and *The Junction*, is the level of student engagement and commitment. Ensuring students who aspire to work as journalists understand the importance of developing a portfolio, and respond to invitations to seize publishing opportunities, is not as successful as it has been in many other universities involved in the two projects.

This paper is reporting on the UON’s journalism teaching team’s experiences with *UPW*, how we learnt

from those experiences to tailor students' engagement with *The Junction*, the challenges we have found with our initial foray into *The Junction*, and how we intend to continue improving the student experience with this national model of student experiential learning.

The paper also signposts future research opportunities in this space.

Background

The University of Newcastle and journalism education

The University of Newcastle is a regional university situated in Newcastle, Australia. Newcastle is located approximately 160 kilometres north of Sydney and is the second largest city in the state of New South Wales and the seventh largest city in Australia. Newcastle is a one-university city and in 2018 the University had more than 37,000 enrolments. In terms of student population, UON has a higher than sector number of students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds: one in four domestic students in 2017 were from low SES backgrounds (University of Newcastle, 2017). Students from such backgrounds have been identified as underrepresented in higher education (Pitman, et al., 2016) and in 2017 the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education reported that around 17.1 per cent of higher education students from around the country were from low SES backgrounds. UON's figure of approximately 25 per cent of the student population coming from low SES backgrounds is substantially higher than the national average.

In a study that explored the economic factors impacting student learning in higher education in Australia's regional universities, Devlin and McKay (2018, p.1) found that 'financial challenges were found to be one of the most significant barriers to student success' with 'competing priorities relating to carer duties, parenthood and paid employment with study' (ibid., p.2). Australian Census data demonstrates that participation and attainment rates for bachelor-degree qualifications for people in inner regional, outer regional and remote areas remain behind people from metropolitan areas (Nelson, Readman and Stoodley, 2018). National data show that students enrolled in regional universities have higher attrition and lower completion rates than students who study in capital city universities (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2016). These findings align with the experience of UON's journalism educators and were particularly evident during our participation in UniPollWatch.

At UON, journalism is offered as a major in a generalist Bachelor of Communication programme. The Communication programme offers four majors: public relations, media production, media studies and journalism. All students in the programme complete eight core courses, eight directed courses in their chosen major and eight electives. Those electives can be from anywhere in the University allowing enrolment (many health courses do not allow enrolment of students outside of specific programmes) or from elsewhere within the Communication programme.

In 2018, the Communication programme had approximately 650 student enrolments and the journalism major had 179 students across the three-year programme. Core courses for all Communication students include introductory courses in communication, digital media, vision and sound as well as audience studies, law and ethics, and creativity in communication and media. The courses offered to journalism students include Introduction to Professional Writing, Introduction to Journalism, Feature Writing, Radio Journalism, International Media Studies, Television Journalism, Public Affairs and Communication, Journalism, and Communication Professional Placement. Students choose eight out of these nine courses and they are structured to direct the students through text, vision and sound across a variety of platforms throughout the programme. To complete their programme, students choose eight electives to enhance their skills from offerings including photography, media production courses such as film, television and documentary, sound, film and digital studies, but they can also choose electives from outside the programme: politics, history, marketing, cultural studies, business, performing arts, etc.

Academics who teach in UON's Communication programme have embraced innovative WIL experiences for students. The programme employs an educational approach that embeds work-based projects throughout the degree, from first year to final year. These projects form an integrated and assessed part of the academic programme. The journalism major offers authentic assessments throughout all of its courses (Fulton, Scott, James and Sandner, 2017) and work with local media to ensure students are getting real world experi-

ence. Journalism students experience embedded assessments where they produce work that is published and broadcast with media outlets including the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the *Newcastle Herald* news platforms and UON's radio station 2NURFM (ibid., 2017). These authentic assessments provide students with the opportunity to present their work to an audience beyond the academy. The journalism major includes assessments such as writing submissions to federal, state and local government inquiries on behalf of not-for-profit and non-government organisations, and producing an audio story for the ABC's Heywire competition for regional Australian youth.

The Heywire competition has been particularly successful as an authentic assessment. As part of the radio journalism course, students are required to produce a 2-4 minute radio story and submit it to the Heywire as part of a national competition. Heywire is 'young regional Australians telling it like it is and making a difference' (ABC Heywire, 2017) and those aged 16-24 living outside Australian metropolitan areas are invited to submit stories about themselves in either video, photo, audio or text. UON's radio journalism students submit an audio story as part of their assessable coursework. Up to this point, UON has produced five Heywire winners as well as several "Highly Commended" awards. This type of endorsement builds students' confidence and, according to student evaluations, 'there is an added incentive to produce their best work because it is not being done only for academic assessment, but will be seen and heard by their peers and uploaded to an ABC-hosted website' (Fulton, et al., 2017).

The Junction is another way for students to engage with industry and as an incentive for students to produce their "best work". Guiding this consideration is the belief – informed by both formal and informal student feedback – that work that is produced to go beyond the classroom is approached by students with a different attitude. Furthermore, such opportunity will enhance student learning by providing an opportunity to publish to a global audience. Under the supportive guidance of academics who are experienced journalists, student contribution to *The Junction* results in enhanced confidence and enriched professional practice, as well as exposing students to a national network of potential employers and possible future collaboration opportunities.

UniPollWatch and The Junction

In 2016, approximately 1000 students from 28 Australian universities took part in *UPW*, a national project where journalism students produced coverage of the 2016 Australian Federal election and published on an online platform. Under the guidance of journalism educators, students produced articles about policy areas, completed candidate and electorate profiles, and wrote stories about electoral results. A purpose-built website housed this work, which included written pieces, images, videos, vox pops, visuals, etc.

The *UPW* project developed in response to several challenges in journalism and journalism education: digital disruption of the industry; an increasing emphasis on work integrated learning (WIL) in Australian university programmes; and, the decrease in journalistic coverage due to the high level of redundancies in Australian mainstream media (Dodd, et al., 2018). It was initially set up in 2014 to cover the Victorian state election (Dodd, et al., 2015). Four Victorian universities collaborated to report on the election and provide students with the opportunity to engage in political journalism, but importantly the collaboration resulted in a template for 'large reporting projects, involving journalism programmes at many universities working together to cover topics for the public's benefit, while enabling students to gain real-world skills' (ibid., p.222). While the instigators of the 2014 Victorian state election project identified some key challenges, they found it did provide a model for the 2016 *UPW* project implemented throughout much of the nation.

UPW was mooted as a national project at the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA) annual conference in 2015 (Dodd, et al., 2018) with the 2016 Australian Federal election identified as an ideal opportunity for a logistically ambitious collaboration across Australia. Australian Federal parliaments are elected for a maximum of three years and a general election was due sometime in 2016. JERAA was nominated as the national publisher of *UPW* and a committee was elected to manage the project. The publishing model included an editor-in-chief, a deputy editor and an editorial committee with its members taking on state editor roles. At the local level, universities had campus editors. State editors acted as a liaison between the universities in their state and the editorial committee, provided support and had the final approval on stories to be published on the *UPW* site (ibid.). State editors were responsible for quality assurance and legal issues with the editor-in-chief providing a higher level of approval for questionable legal concerns such as defamation. JERAA took on the role of publisher and the responsibility of legal liability for the project, a decision that Dodd, et al. call 'significant' because, 'it signalled the organisation's

willingness to extend its remit as a publisher and to engage in real world, current and civic journalism as a means to serve a public good and enhance journalism pedagogy' (2018, p.41).

The editorial structure included a high level of collaboration and consensus amongst participants, including a newsletter and a Facebook page, but also included distinct levels of hierarchy, thus providing a level of autonomy for participants while ensuring a clear structure for decision-making. As noted by Dodd, et al. (2015), the first iteration of *UPW* was set up using a 'teaching hospital' model, where 'journalism schools can provide essential services to their communities' (Anderson et al., 2011, p.1). The second iteration was an example of Felin and Zenger's 'consensus-based hierarchy' (in Dodd, et al., 2018, p.39), where a horizontal structure enables peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and the ability to problem-solve quickly and effectively.

Different universities structured their involvement in different ways: 'Some offered it as a voluntary extra-curricular activity, while others embedded it in courses and made the work compulsory and assessed, some used it as a minor assessment and others dedicated whole units to it' (Davies, Dodd, Kremmer and Van Heekeren, 2017, p.219).¹ There was also a mixture of educational levels of participating students, from first year through to post-graduate, and universities employed a wide range of student activities: group/team work, student editors, students as sub-editors, story pitching, photo-editing, and multi-media work as well as producing articles (ibid.). UON offered the opportunity to students as a 'voluntary, extra-curricular activity', a method we found challenging for a range of reasons that will be discussed further in this paper.

Overall, *UPW* was deemed successful: 'The project provided active coverage of 125 of 150 House of Representatives seats, 346 lower house candidates, 26 prospective senators and nine key policy areas, much of which was under-reported in mainstream media' (Dodd, et al., 2018, p.47). This success led to the development of *The Junction*, an ongoing online publication to 'showcase the best work being produced by Australian university journalism programmes and explore new ways for students across the country to work together' (Media Release, *The Junction*, 24.10.18). *The Junction* launched in October 2018 after the idea was floated at the JERAA conference in 2017. After *UPW*, there was a momentum towards this national collaboration and it was driven in a spirit of belief in opportunity for students and cooperation among academic staff nationally. All participating universities were requested to make a financial contribution for the hosting of the site and payment for a webtrainer. At the time of publication, 22 universities from Australia and New Zealand, including UON, are part of *The Junction*. Its aim is to encourage collaboration between universities but also to give students the opportunity to publish work on a national platform, thus forming part of a portfolio. Research on the *UPW* initiative demonstrated that it was a success as a WIL project for the majority of the participants (Dodd, et al., 2018) and WIL is a key framework for *The Junction* as well. *The Junction* is different from *UPW* in that its remit is to include a broader range of rounds such as entertainment, health, history, rural, science and technology, and sports as well as politics. However, it is still a platform where election reportage is encouraged as shown by the coverage of the 2018 Victorian state election, where, in a similar fashion to the original *UPW* in 2014, students from Victorian universities reported on electorates, candidates and issues of the day.

UON was one of the universities that took part in the national *UPW* initiative and, with financial support from the University, journalism educators and journalism students are participating in *The Junction*.

Work Integrated Learning

There have long been links between the teaching and learning of journalism - in Australian higher education and the Australian media - through students undertaking further learning in the workplace. Regardless of whether it is called an internship, placement, practicum, project, supervised professional experience, professional practice or work experience, most journalism programmes or journalism majors in Australian universities encourage students to undertake WIL opportunities, where successful completion of learning in the workplace will result in credit toward their programme of study. The desired outcome of WIL is to provide a meaningful connection or bridge between learning in the academy and doing in the workplace.

WIL is an 'umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum' (Patrick, Peach and Pocknee, 2009, p.1) and aims to improve the employability of graduates through the provision of experiential learning which is related to the courses being studied at university. In WIL experiences, where transformative and meaningful student

1 For a detailed description of UniPollWatch, please see Davies, *et al.* (2017) and Dodds, *et al.* (2018).

learning is the outcome, workplaces and employers, universities and students are not independent agents but share relationships that can result in benefits for all parties.

For workplaces and employers, research has shown that businesses participating in WIL see its value in the graduates who enter the workplace (Engaging Employers in Work Integrated Learning: Current and Future Priorities - Report to the Department of Industry, 2014). Reasons for employer involvement vary and may include 'to "give back" to the industry or profession; aid future recruitment; access new thinking and ideas; establish links with universities, emerging research and practice; and to refresh the organisation' (Universities Australia, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Industry Group, the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Collaborative Education Network, 2015).

For students, WIL opportunities can contextualise their education and bridge the experience between preparing for work and operating in a work environment. The Australian national WIL strategy sees WIL as helping students 'ensure they are equipped to plan, instigate and navigate careers in an environment where conceptual, adaptive, personal, technical and vocational skills - their human capital - will be continually drawn on and challenged' (Universities Australia, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Industry Group, the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Collaborative Education Network, 2015).

For universities, many of which enjoy long-standing relationships with a range of employers, WIL provides opportunities such as formalised feedback loops on the relevance of the education being provided to students. WIL programmes can help universities maintain relevance to employability through a better understanding of how rapid changes in technology, redefined notions of work and evolving expectations of students pertinent to competitiveness in the labour market.

As stated earlier, journalism students at UON did not respond to an invite to undertake *UPW* as a WIL experience with supervision being provided by academic staff. This was somewhat surprising, as students certainly see the importance of WIL opportunities provided in a formal course at UON. There are high levels of non-prescribed engagement and optional enrolment by students into the Communication Professional Placement course, so students clearly recognise the benefits of workplace learning and industry engagement. We received some informal feedback that students generally regard engagement with workplaces and employers as being more beneficial for future aspirations because of the opportunity to grow industry contacts rather than engage further with academic staff via the production of journalism that is not for assessment, which is the model offered via the *UPW* and *The Junction* initiatives.

Authentic assessments as a strategy for broader engagement

Journalism education has long struggled with the provision of 'industry fodder' and providing an educative experience that ensures students can articulate why to do something as well as how to do it. John Dewey (1938), a pioneer in experiential learning, emphasised the importance of what he called 'pragmatic education' where 'knowing' and 'doing' are intimately linked. Australian journalism academic Jenna Price surmises a popular approach to the pedagogy underpinning a popular - if not the dominant - approach to journalism education in Australia when she emphasises doing journalism and the thinking about the processes and issues surrounding the production of journalism as being intimately entwined:

You know, the whole thing about journalism and journalism education is that you are not teaching them to be mindless little puppets, you're teaching them to think about what they're doing, so of course they can make the product, but they can also think about how they're making the product. (Price, 2012)

Parks (2015, p.137) provides a similar view by pointing to the equal importance of practice and scholarship: 'journalism educators rather should aspire to arm students both with experiences mirroring professional practice and with knowledge of how communication theory and research can make journalism better'. Both *UPW* and *The Junction* provide students with the opportunity to both do and think about journalism via authentic assessments. Radinsky, et al. (1998) described an authentic learning environment as a space where students engage with a target community by completing tasks and assessments as part of a profession, in this case the profession of journalism. An authentic assessment can be viewed as a focused task that develops and provides feedback on key skills and knowledge students will need for employment and carried out in a manner that reflects the kind of conditions and outputs that have relevance and similarity to some of the

work they may undertake in employment. Authentic assessments require students to demonstrate how they can use and what they can do with what they have learned, rather than merely demonstrate memory of facts. Authentic assessments also enable educators to evaluate if and how students use higher-level thinking and organisational skills. The combination of doing and thinking in authentic assessments promotes experiential learning and encourages academic staff to reflect upon the issues raised by Katula and Threnhauser (1999) to provoke thought around pedagogical approach and best practice. Such questions focus on key principles in authentic assessment including intention, planning, reflection, and evaluation, into a pedagogical approach.

Discussion

While UON participated in the *UPW* project, academic staff teaching journalism found the stimulation of student involvement to be challenging. Several factors influenced the difficulties we found: inflexible university systems; the election timing; and, the demographic makeup of the students at UON. *The Junction* will involve students differently at UON from the methods employed with the *UPW* project. Rather than using student volunteers, as with *UPW*, academic staff will embed publishing opportunity into journalism courses, using *The Junction* as an incentive for “best work”. Our initial engagement with *The Junction* had similar issues as *UPW* - the timing of its launch in October 2018 meant courses were well under way. The following discusses UON’s experience with *UPW* and the challenges we found, and how we used that experience to encourage and enhance students’ experience with *The Junction*. Finally, we discuss the future of the initiative and how this example of experiential learning can prepare students for an evolving workplace.

UniPollWatch – the Newcastle experience

The 2016 Australian Federal election was announced on 2 May and held on 2 July. *UPW* editors allocated six electorates to UON. In terms of logistics, three journalism academics each took on two of the electorates and assigned students to write articles and profiles, and to provide original images. The academics also took on the sub-editor role on the students’ work before it was uploaded onto the *UPW* site. Another academic took on the administrative role of keeping track of stories - the student or students allocated, where each was up to, ensuring images, and ensuring profiles and stories were uploaded. Student volunteers were recruited and offered the option of including the work as part of their programme either in a generic projects-based course or as part of the Communication Professional Placement (WIL) course. No students took up these options and, as a result, all participants were undertaking the work outside of their usual University commitments; the students took on the opportunity as a ‘voluntary, extra-curricular activity’ (Davies, et al., 2017, p.219). Over the course of the project, ten student volunteers took part and they were primarily final year students with one second year student becoming involved. Where possible, two students were allocated to each electorate but there were variable levels of engagement from these students. The overall *UPW* initiative generated 670 news stories (Davies, et al., 2017) on the 2016 Federal election and UON contributed 32 articles. It should be noted that we encountered three challenges around student involvement, engagement and ownership of the project. The challenges were interrelated to each other.

The timing of the Federal election led to the first challenge: we were unable to adapt the journalism courses due to inflexible university systems. The Communication programme is offered during UON’s semester teaching periods, which run from the end of February to the beginning of June (Semester 1) and the end of July to the beginning of November (Semester 2) and the University requires notice for changes to courses, including assessments, which must undergo review by committees before they can be implemented. The 2016 election campaign ran from May to July, thus changes to the curriculum and assessments could not be included in the journalism courses.

As noted earlier, students were recruited to the project on a volunteer basis. A challenge relating to the voluntary nature of student involvement was that UON journalism academics were required to manage *UPW* outside of their existing workload. Workload issues were reported by other universities involved in the project (Dodd, et al, 2018). It was one of the issues raised most frequently by all participants, although other academics managed this by embedding the work in journalism courses. Dodd et al. (2018, p.46) pointed out that with *UPW*, ‘two-thirds of the campus editors in the 2016 iterations effectively received workload recognition by embedding some or all of the work in units they were teaching’. Further, those authors recognised the danger in using student volunteers when they noted the issue of staff burn-out as a risk ‘if the journalism

work does not fit neatly within existing curricula, and if assessment tasks cannot be fashioned around the project's requirements' (ibid., p.47).

A further challenge related to the timing of the election. The July election date fell outside the semester leading to difficulties in maintaining student motivation and, as Davies, et al. noted, led to 'students losing focus after the end of semester, students being busy with other assignments and students losing access to university systems at the end of semester' (2017, p.226). Our experience suggests that UON students studying journalism often use the time between semesters to undertake paid work, to travel and to explore WIL opportunities that focus upon building relationships beyond the University. As a regional university with a wide recruiting area, including rural and remote communities, the semester break also provides an opportunity for students to return to their homes. While the commitment from some of our volunteers continued in the semester break, most found it difficult to maintain the necessary motivation, particularly as they were not receiving credit for their work.

Finally, and as noted earlier, UON includes a higher than sector average of low SES students - approximately 25 per cent compared to the national average of 17.1 per cent - with many of the volunteers finding it difficult to fit additional activities into their university/work life. These figures have an impact on the kind of time that students are able to make available to do work, i.e. assessments, that is not counted towards their degree. As academics coordinating UPW, we found stimulating and encouraging student involvement was challenging. Those challenges have helped inform how we have approached encouraging student contributions to *The Junction*.

The Junction – *the Newcastle experience*

As proponents of experiential learning and authentic assessment, the journalism academics at UON believe involvement with *The Junction* is beneficial to journalism students seeking to demonstrate journalistic skills. The University has funded our participation and one of the academics took on the role of UON editor. However, in a similar way to *UPW*, the timing was slightly off, with the initiative starting in October after semester two had already started. We managed this timing in several ways. Academics had already collated some of the excellent student work from semester one and offered invitations to the students who produced that work to consider submitting it for publication. We required their permission because the work was created before *The Junction* was officially launched. Not all students responded to the invitation to submit work but we received six articles from that invitation. That work has been published on *The Junction* site. Another approach was through the course management sites (Blackboard) of each journalism course as well as the Communication programme management site (Blackboard), where we asked for student contributions, pointing out the importance to students of developing published work, portfolios and networks. This request resulted in two pieces of work, one of which was unsuitable for publication.

Although we encourage students to publish over the course of their programme - announce opportunities in mainstream publications, send emails to invite students to publish their work online and provide prizes and other incentives from industry contacts seeking journalism content - we find it difficult to convince students to pursue the publishing of their work. A clearer strategy and more nuanced understanding of student resistance to publishing their work is required and at this point in time, we are struggling with how best to achieve higher levels of involvement. A study in 2015 on Australian journalism students and their attitude to journalism (Hanusch, et al. 2015; 2016) discovered that not all journalism students in Australian universities intend to seek work in journalism. UON's student answer to the inquiry about future aspiration demonstrated 69.7 per cent of respondents wanted to work in journalism, indicating around 30 per cent of respondents intend to seek other opportunities. Perhaps the relatively high percentage of students having no intention of working as a journalist may feed a disinclination to seek publication.

Encouraging, engaging and promoting student publication

We are considering several options. In future offerings of the courses in the journalism major, all journalism assessments will provide students with an option to have their work published in *The Junction*. Other options include a reinvention of the journalism major where all assessments are expected to be produced with an expectation of publication in *The Junction*. This option may be confined to final year students or a new course could be developed that focuses specifically on students producing work for *The Junction*. A

mixture of these approaches could provide the best outcome. Parks (2015, p.138) notes that ‘experience-based courses should not be the exclusive format for teaching journalism, but experiential learning is essential to a quality journalism education’. As advocates of approaches that embrace experiential learning, we see the inclusion of a project where students complete assessments that may be eligible to be published on a national platform as an enhancement of the learning experience. We think an important part of student growth is writing not just for assessment but, as part of our commitment toward authentic assessment, that students’ work will be published. We have had success with this approach in a radio journalism course where students know they are producing journalism to meet a brief for the ABC’s regional youth programme initiative, Heywire. To date, UON has produced five student winners and all have emerged with greater confidence about their ability to create stories.

Conclusion

Our experiences with working on these national journalism projects has been mixed. The *UPW* initiative, while challenging, provided information about how to manage future projects of this nature. As a regional university, with a higher than sector average of low SES students, our strategy of using volunteers for *UPW* meant students were not as motivated as they might have been had the work been included as coursework. Reliance on volunteers also saw an increase in unrecognised workload for the journalism educators. Our initial foray into *The Junction*, while not as challenging as *UPW* - in part because of its ongoing, rather than tightly defined timeframe - has presented its own issues, including how to motivate students to publish their work. However, an ongoing strategy for *The Junction* should ensure a satisfying and productive outcome for students in the form of a portfolio and working in a professional environment.

The Junction provides students with an opportunity to publish to a global audience. As one part of a suite of WIL and authentic assessment, *The Junction* is an opportunity for students to produce their “best work”. Publishing on a national scale, where others will read their work, provides an incentive for students to engage in professional practice with a level of engagement that is not as apparent when the work is produced just for academic assessment. Students will work with professionals (i.e. editors, sub-editors and journalists), thus consolidating and applying knowledge they have learnt at university in a professional context. The authors believe this will enhance students’ professional practice and provide material for a student portfolio that reflects both existing capability and future potential.

Our experiences with *UPW* and *The Junction* offer a rich opportunity for future research. In the first instance, and perhaps the most important area of research, the student experience is a key area to be explored. While formal student feedback at UON typically demonstrates that WIL assessments are appreciated by journalism students, and we as journalism educators believe this type of experience is valuable for students’ future prospects, that may not be the entire student experience and there is a need to more deeply investigate students’ engagement with embedded assessments. How does this type of learning fit into their educational aspirations, how does it affect their work and their attitude to that work, what is the experience of working for publication beyond the classroom? As noted by Parks (2015), not all students appreciate real-world experience. A further area for investigation is to attempt to discover why students are reluctant to publish their work to a broader audience and identify the specific factors that impede or facilitate student involvement. Is it a regional university experience, is it because of the student demographics, how can we encourage publishing and professional development?

Another area to explore is a continuation of the study after students graduate. The main idea behind both *UPW* and *The Junction* is to provide students with a portfolio and increase their employability. To discover if the initiatives are successful, it is imperative to ask students who have graduated if their experiences at university were helpful.

Finally, with a number of Australian and New Zealand universities participating in the initiative, cross-university research projects would provide data on how different universities and their students interact with and publish to *The Junction*. While the initiators of *UPW* and *The Junction* have researched and published (Davies, et al., 2017; Dodd, et al., 2018), their focus has been at the macro level of the project. At a micro level, comparative research could be done between similarly sized universities, between metro and regional universities, between larger and smaller universities, and cross-culturally, investigating the experiences of Australian universities and New Zealand universities and student enthusiasm or reluctance to publish their work.

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