

Hands-on or hands off: reviewing the newsday as a teaching tool

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Abstract

Journalism is now a graduate occupation and apparently it is extremely difficult to enter the industry without a degree. Training no longer occurs systematically on the job. Instead, the industry increasingly relies upon higher education to provide it. While some see this as a positive and natural role for higher education, others believe vocational training should be separated from academia. The emphasis on employment-related skills has sparked a renewed debate about the right approach to the teaching of journalism. One of the most widely used teaching tools available to journalism educators is the Newsday. Although popular both amongst the educators and the students, the Newsday as a teaching tool is inadequately researched and so this paper aims to provide an introductory review of existing literature on Newsday and underlying theories.

Introduction

The first writing courses were offered at US colleges in the nineteenth century, and the first academic journalism department was established in 1908, at University of Missouri.

Other pioneers in the teaching of journalism included Michigan State University, the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Kansas State University. Right from the beginning, it was obvious that there was no single approach to journalism education, which soon became an interdisciplinary mix of the humanities and

the social sciences. Some institutions focused primarily on hands-on training, while others treated journalism as social science.

Journalism education in Britain gained a firm foothold in the university sector much later than in the United States and parts of Western Europe (Frohlich and Holtz-Bacha 2003). In 1991 two polytechnics launched Britain's first undergraduate, single-subject journalism programmes (Delano 2001, cited in Hanna and Sanders 2007). By early 2006, 38 British universities were offering journalism as a single-subject first degree. Some of these also offered first degrees combining journalism with other subjects. A further 28 universities offered such combined degrees only. Some journalism first degrees in Britain have vocational training in at least 50 per cent of their content. Others, badged by universities to include journalism, contain much less training (Hanna and Sanders 2007, p406).

Now more than ever, journalism graduates are expected to have the capacity to engage immediately and effectively in the professional setting where they secure employment and so the higher education sector places great emphasis on teaching skills suitable for entry-level jobs (Stephens 2002 cited in Mensing 2010). Some scholars (Dickson 2000 cited in Mensing 2010) see that as a problem, saying that journalism education has always been under fire by both practitioners and academics for focusing too much on the teaching of skills and techniques. Accreditation rules have encouraged a journalism curriculum that includes a small core of conceptual courses and an emphasis on reporting, editing, writing, and production courses (Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications 2004 cited in Mensing 2010, p515).

This emphasis on employment-related skills is at the centre of debate about the right approach to the teaching of journalism. As Atkins (1999) explains, proponents of the acquisition of such skills maintain that it is both in the interest of the individual student, and in the interests of local, regional and national competitiveness to do so. He says that this argument is based on a view of the 'contract' between higher education and society, where in return for the public monies invested in it, higher education must contribute to the economic prosperity of the country.

Philip Gaunt identified several essential levels of journalism education, including the following:

- (1) understanding the media system in which journalists work;
- (2) basic skills, such as writing and editing;
- (3) the use of technical equipment;
- (4) understanding social, cultural, and economic issues in society; and
- (5) specialized training for certain areas in the profession.

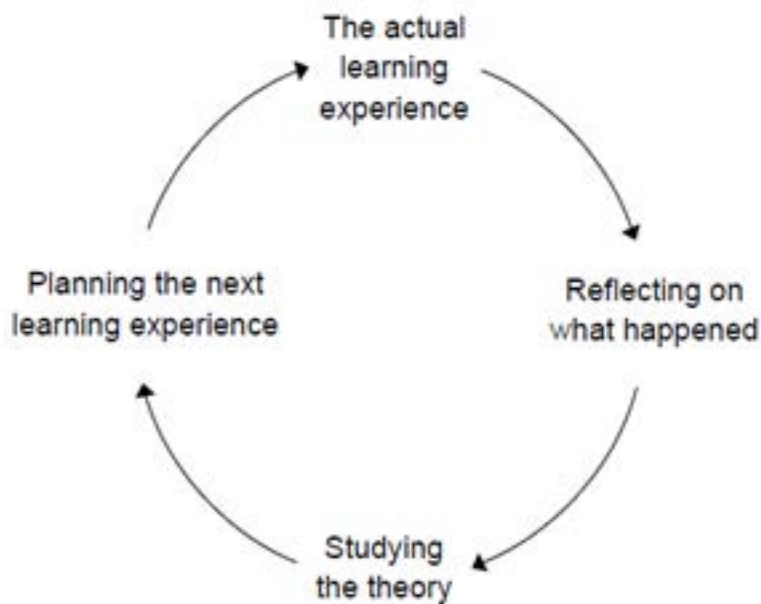
The categories boil down to two different visions in journalism training: practical skills and content and theory (cited in Blom and Davenport 2012).

One teaching tool available to journalism educators is *Newsday*, which bridges most if not all of the above mentioned levels. Although widely popular both amongst the educators and the students, there is little research into *Newsday* and underlying theories. This paper is divided into three parts: the first looks at general theories of learning, the second at teaching of journalism and the third at *Newsday* as a tool itself and its applicability.

Theory of learning

There are several models that try to explain how people acquire skills, how they learn. The two main schools of thought on how learning happens are the behaviourist and the cognitive. Behaviourists say that learning happens through stimulus, response and reward, in other words, that it is a conditioning process. The now widespread emphasis on expressing the curriculum in terms of intended learning outcomes can be said to derive from the behaviourist school of thinking. The cognitive view focuses on perception, memory and concept formation, and on the development of people's ability to demonstrate their understanding of what they have learned by solving problems. It arose from the work of Lewin (1952) and was extended by Kolb (1984) in his *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Kolb's model says that most of what we know we learn from experience of one kind or another, and then breaks this down into four stages, turning them into a learning cycle (see figure 1).

Race (2001) agrees that the most effective form of learning is experiential learning – 'learning by doing'. However, he departs from Kolb in identifying a new, highly important element in the process - the internal motivation that makes a person want to learn something in the first place. He describes this as 'wanting'. In



Source: Kolb (1984, p38)

Figure 1: Kolb's learning cycle

In his model, the four basic elements that constitute successful learning are:

- wanting (motivation)
- doing (practice; trial and error)
- feedback (seeing the results; other people's reactions)
- digesting (making sense of it; gaining ownership).

Race's model of learning differs from that of Kolb in that its various elements are regarded as constituting an integrated, interacting whole – like the ripples on a pond.

HE institutions have recently realised that in addition to subject-related knowledge and skills, students also need to acquire the competence to use this knowledge in real situations. This requires active learning or learning by doing (Race 2001). This is where competence is usually measured in performance, where students can apply passive, theoretical knowledge usefully in real situations.

Based on the Active Learning approach, many HE institutions have for a long time incorporated into their teaching programmes laboratory, field and studio practicals. Those are used to develop skills or acquire knowledge, and among the reasons for using practicals are:

- Developing manual and manipulative skills
- Developing applied understanding of a subject's basic methodology
- Consolidating basic knowledge
- Developing higher cognitive skills and professional attitudes
- Developing communication skills

In many professional programmes, such as architecture, business, dentistry, engineering, fine arts, and healthcare, much of the declarative knowledge is learned not for its own sake so much, but to construct a platform for launching informed decision makers and performers into the workforce (Biggs and Tang 2007, p135). There are two broad steps in educating students for such professional decision making. The first is to build up the appropriate declarative knowledge base, and the second is to put it to work. Thus far, this follows the traditional fill-up-the-tanks model: declarative knowledge is built up first, the application of that knowledge second. In that context, Harvey and Knight (1996) suggest that good teaching is that which depends upon academic staff seeing their role as facilitators of transformational learning, not merely as

purveyors of data.

One way of engaging and motivating students to become responsible for their own learning is by integrating active learning and appropriate assessment into the curriculum. When meaning and understanding are created by the student's learning activities (Biggs 1999), the academic's role changes from source of all knowledge to learning facilitator. Students in this scenario embark on a path of experiential learning, which Brandon defines as a process during which a person experiences an event, acquires competencies, and then compares the knowledge gained during the process with the knowledge gained in similar situations (2002, p62). Dewey (1958) views experience as a great liberating force for people, and a form of learning that gives people room and movement. Experiential learning plays a large and important part in journalism teaching.

Journalism teaching

The knowledge journalists need is divisible into two categories: the generally academic and the professional (de Burgh 2003, p96). Most British universities now claim that their journalism degrees 'integrate' theory and practice (Greenberg 2007 cited in Wright 2012). As Poerksen (2010 cited in Wright 2012) says, this 'promise' may appeal to university applicants, but it is misguided, as it implies that the two will complement one another - when they often don't. Researchers for the Higher Education Academy in the UK have criticised Journalism educators for failing to clarify what they mean when they claim to link theory and practice (Wright 2012).

Nevertheless, the skills journalism students acquire are similarly divisible, into the transferable and the specific or vocational. The transferable skills include research and investigation; information assimilation and assessment; communication skills; and expression (de Burgh 2003, p99). The profession-specific skills include news story analysis and construction, professional conventions in production, operating skills, production management, interviewing and the very particular teamwork that is required in covering a big newspaper story or making a TV programme (de Burgh 2003, p101).

Many of these skills are gained through Team Based Learning, which is regarded as an instructional strategy and not merely a teaching technique. Pedagogically, team learning itself is not new and has origins from multiple educational theorists. As Gomez, Wu, and Passerini (all cited in Han and Newell 2014) argue, TBL-related theories are primarily based on constructivism and social learning. As Han and Newell (2014) point out, constructivism centres on the paradigm shift from the traditional teacher-to-learner knowledge transfer, to a learner-as-an-active-agent learning process where students contribute to developing their own knowledge through engaging in pre- and in-class activities. In the field of journalism and mass communication, team learning has been identified as a principal pedagogical trend, as teamwork is one of the dimensions central to the objectives in communication curricula (Han and Newell 2014).

Much has been discussed about the need to ensure that degree programmes increase graduate employability and the need to connect degree curricula and employability by introducing work-based or work-related learning (Mason & Robinson 2009 cited in Heathman and Mathews 2014). In research undertaken on behalf of the UK's Higher Education Academy, Moreland defines work-related learning as 'involving students learning about themselves and the world of work in order to empower them to enter and succeed in the world of work and their wider lives'. He asserts that work-related learning therefore involves students in four interrelated areas of learning: learning about oneself – capabilities, confidence, life interests and career decisions (Efficacy and Metacognition); learning and practising skills of value in the world of work (Skilful Practices); experiencing the world of work (or facsimiles thereof) to provide insight (Understandings); and learning how to learn and manage oneself in a range of situations, including those to be found at work (Metacognition). For educators, this presents a challenge: how best to not only incorporate these four areas of learning into the curriculum, but also find an appropriate, meaningful form of assessment that can measure such development (Moreland 2005 cited in Heathman and Mathews 2014, p29).

As the demand for workplace-ready graduates increases, so does the need to shape teaching designs and assessment methods to replicate workplace practices. Along with it comes a need for a range of creative and active learning approaches that engage students and enhance their understanding (Rao & Stupans 2012 cited in Heathman and Mathews 2014). In the teaching of journalism, *Newsday* is a widely used tool and an interesting example of work-related learning, as it combines classroom and real-life professional experience for students.

Newsday as a teaching tool

Most journalism courses in HE run simulations of which Newsday is the principal one. Newsday is a hybrid activity in which a classroom is turned into a newsroom, where the print, TV or radio news programme is compiled to more or less professional deadlines, under the management of practising editors managing for the day. These exercises are very popular with students who see them as exciting and 'real' because of the deadlines and sometimes because of the professionals who are brought in to whip them into shape. The rationale for Newsday is to provide a learning experience for students that would replicate, as closely as possible, the real world of journalistic practice.

As de Burgh points out, Newsday serves several different learning and teaching functions: it is an assessable test of students' journalistic and technical abilities; it provides a framework in which students gain understanding of how newspapers and broadcast shows come together and what is realistically possible under technological and professional conditions; it provides the excuse for inculcating professional disciplines from the basics such as studio behaviour to the administrative, such as the tailing and clocking of broadcast packages; students are subjected to pressures not only to achieve deadlines but to exploit the newest technology and other resources to the full (de Burgh 2003, p101).

Other simulations which can be used on their own or in conjunction with Newsday include pitches to commissioning editors, reports to class and interviews with (usually local) decision-makers, experts and opinion-formers.

Rhodes and Roessner (2008) investigated the teaching of magazine publishing through experiential learning, considering 16 magazine publishing courses in US universities where students worked together in simulated newsrooms to produce magazines from concept to publication. The study found that linking learning, thinking and doing by providing students with 'real-life' educational experiences in their workshops meant that the courses were answering the calls from industry and educators for more hands-on, real-world approaches in the classroom. They found that the students were initially anxious but this bred confidence as they began to understand more about working together and managing the pressure of professional deadlines.

Because of this Newsday is without a doubt a useful teaching tool that draws heavily on the theory of experiential learning. It is by no means the exclusive format for teaching journalism, but as an example of experiential learning it is an essential ingredient in any journalism course. According to Rhodes and Roessner, the ideology of experiential learning was introduced into the American educational system in the mid-1930s, based on John Dewey's philosophically pragmatic approach, which emphasized the role of experience and reflection in education. Experiential learning "links learning, thinking and doing" by providing students with real-life educational experiences through fieldwork, internships, or workshops, and journalism and mass communication programmes continued moving in that direction (Rhodes and Roessner 2008, p35). Beginning with the National Institute of Education's Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education and the Oregon Report in 1984, educators and professionals suggested that professors at the nation's journalism schools should utilize more hands-on, real world approaches in the classroom. In subsequent years, the need for more hands-on was echoed by other journalism professionals and educators (Rhodes and Roessner 2008, p36).

The tendency to offer more practical journalism instruction is followed by calls for increased academic research on experiential learning in journalism education. Dewey (1958), often identified as the father of experiential learning, called for pragmatic education, one that linked knowing to doing. Examining models of experiential learning in magazine publishing, Rhodes and Roessner argued that 'If experience is the best teacher, then journalism education should include professional training in the classroom' (2008, p305).

However, some scholars remain sceptical of experiential learning, concerned that experiences detached from context and conceptual instruction can ring hollow. Noting Dewey's admonishment that "not . . . all experiences are genuinely or equally educative," Katula and Threnhauser argue that there already exists "an abundance of 'doing'" in many communication curricula, not all of which may be appropriately thought out (all cited by Parks 2015, p127). Creating an experiential project in which students reported and edited on deadline meant less in-class time for instruction, reflection, and review. In previous news writing courses, the professor had run students through a series of practical reporting assignments covering crime, courts, city government, and other beats. Some scholars have suggested that the trade-offs prompted by experiential learning could be too great—that too much traditional and analytical instruction is sacrificed in the name of "real-world" experience (Parks 2015, p136). Pedagogical discussions should not polarize scholarship and practice; 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

(Parks 2015, p137).

Group projects (such as *Newsday*) are becoming increasingly common for two major reasons: they aim to teach students cooperative skills, in line with ILOs or graduate attributes relating to teamwork; and the teacher's assessment load is markedly decreased (Biggs and Tang 2007, p219). Group projects, however, are not always popular with students, because the assessment may not take into account individual contributions (Biggs and Tang 2007, p219). Gray (2001 cited in Heathman and Mathews 2014) emphasises that work-related or work-based learning should include the acquisition of technical skills, but it must also involve reviewing and learning from the experience. The importance of such practical experience – and subsequent reflection – follows the model of Kolb's learning cycle (1984). Based on this conceptual model, a learning design that incorporates hands-on work in the newsroom, followed by formative feedback and the regular opportunity to apply learning week after week before a final summative self-assessment, should prove effective for the students (Heathman and Mathews 2014, pp29-30).

A simulated work environment also enables students to undertake problem-based learning (PBL) by working as a group to tackle a common challenge. Highly regarded in several disciplines, and shown to result in learning with a longer 'shelf-life' (Dochy et al 2003 cited in Heathman and Mathews 2014), PBL represents a shift to student-centred education with process-oriented methods of learning in which students have the opportunity to learn material in the context in which that knowledge will be used (Ahlfeldt et al 2007 cited in Heathman and Mathews 2014, p30). Finally, as Lynch et al. (2006) note, the emphasis upon situation and context provides a broader yet deeper way in which everyday learning in higher education and the workplace can be understood.

Group projects are commonly used in tertiary education to practise team-work (Kuisma 1998, p2). Working as a member of a team is an essential characteristic in many professions but this ability does not always develop naturally and should therefore be practised (Jacques 1991 cited by Kuisma 1998, p2). A disadvantage of the group project compared with an individual project is that it may allow the less enthusiastic students to be carried along by their colleagues. It may also put an excessive pressure on the more able group members who feel that they have to shoulder the responsibility for the whole group (Kuisma 1998, p2). There is a lot of anecdotal evidence which shows that this is exactly what happens on *Newsdays*.

Conclusion

The concept of learning by doing is similar to other constructivist perspectives on learning, such as that of Bednar et al (1995) who argued that real world problem solving, and using the tools available in problem solving situations, are key. Models of experiential learning aimed at complementing existing learning and teaching approaches have been used across disciplines for a number of years. However, though the teaching of practical aspects of journalism is commonplace in journalism education, research on this process is limited. For example, Steel et al (2007) argue that ways in which students learn from and with each other through the development of communities of practice within journalism is relatively under-researched. Another area further research into *Newsday* as a teaching tool should address is that of role play and its effect on the learning process, as on a *Newsday* students are not only expected to work as a team, but as a team with a clearly structured hierarchy, where peers stop being peers.

Projects such as *Newsday* are productive models for meeting both practical needs identified by the profession, and pedagogical needs identified by scholars. Future studies should continue to examine how practical journalism experiences can meet the pedagogical needs of students and the civic needs of communities (Parks 2015, p137).

The ultimate objective of journalism education should be to improve the practice of journalism not only by training skilled practitioners, but also by teaching how journalism impinges on other areas of public life and illustrates critical social issues. Understanding these issues is as relevant for the media-literate press consumer as for the would-be professional. From the standpoint of the news media themselves, however, the training role predominates. This, combined with accreditation requirements by bodies such as NCTJ or BJTC in the UK, makes further research into various aspects of *Newsday* essential.

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