

# World Journalism Education

## Education is a spring

Asians, Americans, Australians. A handful of Africans and a couple of Arabs. A sprinkling of Canadians, Mexicans, Finns. An Israeli, a Chilean and quite a few others. In total, 450 people from some 50 countries. In common: they're all lecturers and trainers. Busy swapping notes in Singapore at the first-ever World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC) in July. It's a resource-rich pool of ideas and experiences.

Coincidentally, the event came a fortnight after the global newspaper industry's annual meeting (WAN and WEF in Cape Town in June), and shortly before African editors were due to debate with presidents in Accra, Ghana, in July.

Being sandwiched between these occasions neatly symbolises the significance of the WJEC. The point is: journalism education is a spring. It bubbles into much that is in the newspapers. It underpins much of the intellectual firepower the African editors would have mustered (had the presidents arrived in time for the debate).

Like many conferences, the WJEC included a share of duds who simply make you depressed about the future of media. But overwhelmingly it showcased a worldwide cadre of cosmopolitan individuals committed to providing the best journalism education possible:

One was Rebecca MacKinnon, founder of Global Voices and a former CNN correspondent now teaching in Hong Kong. She gets her students to blog in order to learn about RSS and social media. Another was Yevgenia Munro, a journalism teacher from Russia who works in New Zealand. She's collated what her fellow educators around the world see as crucial for assessing the quality of a news story. It's evolving into a tool for students to score their own work. South African Margaretha Geertsema, now living in the United States, is on a mission for journalism teachers to learn from how the Inter Press Services news agency mainstreamed gender issues into coverage.

Driving much of the event was Indrajit Banerjee, an Indian living in Singapore whose Asia Media Information Centre merged its own annual conference with the WJEC. With this kind of fusion of folk, it followed that many interesting things were said at the congress.

One of the conference strategies that I found particularly valuable was that of the "syndicate teams" who met regularly to speak on focused topics. Delegates signed up for the topic they were interested in and stayed with that group for the duration of the conference. The list included topics such as the status of journalism education in the academy; the role of journalism in changing the media; adapting journalism education to a digital age, etc. The group I joined was called "Journalism research and journalism as research – the production of journalism at universities". We ended up talking about two issues: the implications of producing journalism in universities and the unique challenges of generating academic research about journalism.

We found that a factor we all had in common was that, within our institutions, two very different groups of people work side by side. On one hand, there are people whose working environment has always been that of the academy. On the other there are those who have made a dramatic transition from another world – that of journalistic practice. It was evident from the discussion that the tendency, within all our institutions, was to attempt to assimilate this second group into the world of the academy. Some members of

our syndicate, in fact, saw themselves as facilitators who worked towards bringing journalists into the fold, by finding ways of creating incentives for academic scholarship and helping so-called "production" staff to develop research interests.

There was no doubt, judging from the discussions in the syndicate and elsewhere in the conference, that there is increasing and quite serious pressure on those who come into universities as media practitioners to start "operating as academics" within their institutions. The message to "production" staff is that they have to do more than "just" teach and produce media; above all, they must also publish academic work. My sense up to now has been that that, within my own environment in South Africa, former journalists can still (barely) get away with being so-called "production people" who do not do research in our universities. For the "production" people in the syndicate – and within the WJEC generally – this was clearly not possible; you have very little future within the university if you are not prepared to contribute to scholarship. Everywhere you turned at the conference, there was a journalist with a paper to present.

It seemed to me, listening to the conversations in our

How to teach when students exhibit two different languages and social classes was the topic addressed by Ujjwala Barve of the University of Pune in India. (Answer: look at the positives, not the problems; enlist the students as co-teachers.)

Canadian Terry Field presented on what his students had learnt about globalisation in an exchange programme with the US and Mexico. (What? Their lives had changed).

Texas-based Brazilian Rosental Alves preached in effect that much journalism teaching today amounts, albeit unconsciously, to instruction in media history. He shook up the skills and mindsets of old, industrial-era media.

Refreshingly, there was no debate about whether journalism education should cover theory or practice – it was accepted that both are essential to producing thinking and skilled practitioners. The main issue was how to teach in a fast and fluid media landscape, and how to prepare students for jobs – like moderating user-generated online contributions – that have only recently been invented, or which are even yet to emerge.

### On the agenda were six key subjects:

1. Counting and comparing programmes around the world.

Early results came through from a global census on journalism education. Organiser Charles Self announced a list of 1 859 journalism schools at tertiary level around the world, adding that there may be double that number. An online survey, completed by 193 schools, puts new technology and funding as the top challenges for journalism teachers<sup>1</sup>. Also released were figures from a Unesco survey, done partly by Rhodes University's J-school, which listed almost 200 schools in Africa. Only 15% of these have any Internet presence, and less than 1% offer online educational resources or display their student's work<sup>2</sup>.

2. Group brainstorms on topics like adapting journalism education to a digital age. Among the conclusions:

- Every journalism teacher needs to become more competent about digital media – and make more use of ICT in teaching.
- Because it's all new, the old hierarchy of "know-

it-all" teacher and "empty-head" student doesn't wash. Instead, the challenge calls for joint experimentation and mutual learning<sup>3</sup>.

3. Assessing the quality of J-schools.

Among the systems outlined at WJEC:

- The US has voluntary peer review based on 10 standards – like what the curriculum covers, how student feedback is gauged, equipment, etc<sup>4</sup>;
- French-speaking countries look at what's covered by a programme, the means of implementation and the relevance to media<sup>5</sup>;
- European Union countries use a standard called the Tartu Declaration which sets out the skills that a journalism student should graduate with<sup>6</sup>.

Work towards an African system was presented. This emerged out of a Unesco project (again involving Rhodes) that drew 30 African J-schools into a dialogue. The system pinpoints three broad criteria for what should count towards being a potential centre of excellence in African journalism education:

- internal: the curriculum and capacity of the journalism school;
- external: professional and public service, society links and stature;
- future-focus: plans and momentum.

What's distinctive here is how a journalism school impacts not only on students and the media, but also on society at large<sup>7</sup>.

4. Disseminating research about best practice. Among the papers presented were:

- support for media rights as a criterion for evaluating journalism education;
- using a blog to encourage journalism students to engage in critical reflection;
- from podcasts to attitude shifts: the value of the oral history interview in introductory journalism classes;
- go far: taking students out of their comfort zones (offering students experiences in foreign

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## Two issues,

... by Jeanne du Toit

syndicate, that this drive to assimilate journalists into the academy has its problems. Such assimilation does not transform the academy, and may therefore simply reconfirm the divide between the academy and communities of journalistic practice. One proposal that the syndicate made in this respect was for an annual digest, targeting journalists, which reviewed new academic research about journalism. In this way, journalists could be made aware of academic material of relevance to their work.

But the assimilation does not necessarily even transform the journalist-who-becomes-an-academic. One member of the group, a former television journalist who teaches in an American university, told us that he had now gained all the credentials required of him as an academic; he had published papers, and acquired a PhD. He talked cynically

# Conference

## bubbles

by Guy Berger

- reporting);
- students as journalists “working in the neighbourhood”;
- after the Tulip Revolution: journalism education in Kyrgyzstan;
- scholarly turn of journalism education: redesigning curricula at university level in Bangladesh;
- making every comment count: effective formative feedback to journalism students.

### 5. The basic debate.

Given the diversity of journalisms everywhere, a lot of debate went into what can and should apply to journalism education anywhere.

A common denominator was devised by almost 30 journalism education organisations in the form of a Declaration of Principles of Journalism Education<sup>8</sup>.

According to this document, journalism education should prepare graduates to work as highly-informed, strongly-committed practitioners with high ethical principles and able to fulfil public interest obligations.

It also states:

- Journalism education is an academic field in its own right, with a distinctive body of knowledge and theory;
- Journalism educators should be a blend of academics and practitioners;
- Journalism educators should maintain strong links to media industries. They should critically reflect on industry practices and offer advice to industry based on this reflection;
- Journalism students should learn that despite political and cultural differences, they share important values and professional goals with peers in other nations.

Some blogs later critiqued the declaration, saying it was silent on the place of journalism in

supporting democracy, and how this impacted on journalism education<sup>9</sup>.

Recognising global issues, the declaration notes: journalism students should learn that despite political and cultural differences, they share important values and professional goals with peers in other nations; and there should be global collaboration to boost journalism education as an academic discipline and ensure that it plays a more effective role in strengthening journalism.

### 6. Unesco’s model curriculum.

Assuming that there should be common universal components for any journalism curriculum, UNESCO launched a resource booklet at the conference that puts forward recommended course outlines and textbooks<sup>10</sup>.

### Future calling

WJEC participants hope to meet again in a couple of years – perhaps this time in Africa, if a suitable host can be found. At this maiden meeting, the hard logistics were done by Singapore’s Asia Media and Information Centre. Given the challenges facing media in Africa, journalism education on the continent could benefit greatly from a shot in the arm akin to the Singapore dialogues<sup>11</sup>.

The ultimate value test of conferences like these is whether they help J-schools to make more impact. It’s hard to see how they could fail.

### Endnotes

1. <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=941123224498>
2. [www.unesco.org/webworld/en/african-journalism-schools-database](http://www.unesco.org/webworld/en/african-journalism-schools-database)
3. <http://gberger.files.wordpress.com/2007/07/educating-multi-media-journalists-syndicate-report.doc>
4. <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/>
5. [www.theophraste.org](http://www.theophraste.org)
6. <http://www.ejta.eu/index.php/website/projects/>
7. [www.unesco.org/webworld/en/african-journalism-schools-report](http://www.unesco.org/webworld/en/african-journalism-schools-report)
8. <http://gberger.files.wordpress.com/2007/06/wjc-declaration.doc>
9. <http://nml.ru.ac.za/blog/guy-berger/2007/07/12/debating-declaration-journalism-education.html>
10. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001512/151209e.pdf>
11. <http://gberger.files.wordpress.com/2007/06/african-j-school-excellence-final-draft.pdf>

formerly as students. It was clear, though, that they had conquered this world as well, reinventing themselves in a way that bridged the gap between the academy and journalism. They spoke about their students, their universities and their own work in a way that quite naturally combined the language of practice and reflection.

There are, of course, alternatives to expecting journalists to play catch-up within the academy, until they learn how to be scholars. In the syndicate we spoke, for example, about the importance of acknowledging journalistic practice itself as valuable intellectual work within the university. One idea that was floated here was that the assessment of such work should not be done only by people from an academic background, but that panels should include experienced media producers who are established in their fields and are not working in the university environment.

All the ideas of this group – like the others – were presented in plenary, and compiled for the WJEC organisers to take further.

about the value of having done so – saying that now that he had jumped through the necessary hoops, he wanted to return simply to teaching his students. His academic achievements did not, according to him, make any impact at all on his own thinking about his journalistic practice or the way he would teach.

By contrast, there was a very impressive group of women from Australia at the conference who had all been print journalists and have now established themselves as academics. They shared notes over supper about how intimidating it had been for them to enter university environments, even though each of them had been a well-established professional in their other world. For some of them, universities had been completely alien, since they had not even been there

## two groups

## Declaration of Principles of Journalism Education World Journalism Education Congress Singapore, June 2007

We, the undersigned representatives of professional journalism education associations share a concern and common understanding about the nature, role, importance, and future of journalism education worldwide. We are unanimous that journalism education provides the foundation as theory, research, and training for the effective and responsible practice of journalism. Journalism education is defined in different ways. At the core is the study of all types of journalism.

Journalism should serve the public in many important ways, but it can only do so if its practitioners have mastered an increasingly complex body of knowledge and specialised skills. Above all, to be a responsible journalist must involve an informed ethical commitment to the public. This commitment must include an understanding of and deep appreciation for the role that journalism plays in the formation, enhancement and perpetuation of an informed society.

We are pledged to work together to strengthen journalism education and increase its value to students, employers and the public. In doing this we are guided by the following principles:

1. At the heart of journalism education is a balance of conceptual, philosophical and skills-based content. While it is also interdisciplinary, journalism education is an academic field in its own right with a distinctive body of knowledge and theory.
2. Journalism is a field appropriate for university study from undergraduate to postgraduate levels. Journalism programmes offer a full range of academic degrees including bachelors, masters and Doctor of Philosophy degrees as well as certificate, specialised and mid-career training.
3. Journalism educators should be a blend of academics and practitioners; it is important that educators have experience working as journalists.
4. Journalism curriculum includes a variety of skills courses and the study of journalism ethics, history, media structures/institutions at national and international level, critical analysis of media content and journalism as a profession. It includes coursework on the social, political and cultural role of media in society and sometimes includes coursework dealing with media management and economics. In some countries, journalism education includes allied fields like public relations, advertising, and broadcast production.
5. Journalism educators have an important outreach mission to promote media literacy among the public generally and within their academic institutions specifically.
6. Journalism programme graduates should be prepared to work as highly informed, strongly committed practitioners who have high ethical principles and are able to fulfill the public interest obligations that are central to their work.
7. Most undergraduate and many masters programmes in journalism have a strong vocational orientation. In these programmes experiential learning, provided by classroom laboratories and on-the-job internships, is a key component.
8. Journalism educators should maintain strong links to media industries. They should critically reflect on industry practices and offer advice to industry based on this reflection.
9. Journalism is a technologically intensive field. Practitioners will need to master a variety of computer-based tools. Where practical, journalism education provides an orientation to these tools.
10. Journalism is a global endeavour; journalism students should learn that despite political and cultural differences, they share important values and professional goals with peers in other nations. Where practical, journalism education provides students with first-hand experience of the way that journalism is practised in other nations.
11. Journalism educators have an obligation to collaborate with colleagues worldwide to provide assistance and support so that journalism education can gain strength as an academic discipline and play a more effective role in helping journalism to reach its full potential.