Teaching responsible suicide reporting (RSR): using storytelling as a pedagogy to advance media reporting of suicide

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Abstract

Reporting suicide is an important but challenging area of journalism practice. Learning how to report this complex, distressing subject is vital for journalists if they are to avoid contributing to the 800,000 annual suicidal deaths worldwide (WHO, 2019). Tuition on suicide reporting in higher education tends to be didactic and theoretical, focussing on media guidelines and codes of conduct. Thereafter, journalists' ability to implement this guidance is mixed. To address this, the authors devised the Responsible Suicide Reporting Model (RSR) which is grounded in news-work and embeds media guidelines within journalistic storytelling, consisting of a typology of suicide narratives and 'othering', ethical rules and a standard of moderation. This study tests the effectiveness of teaching the RSR Model using storytelling-as-pedagogy

and problem-based learning. Firstly, we investigated students' perspectives on current educational offerings on suicide reporting through a survey of 229 students in the UK and Ireland who had no exposure to the RSR model. We then ran workshops with 80 students in the UK, teaching them the RSR model. The results showed that students with no exposure to the model–while they seemed to be aware of the theory of responsible suicide reporting–did not know how to implement it. Students who participated in workshops, where the RSR model was used, reported a greater understanding of responsible suicide reporting, believing they became better critically reflective practitioners.

Introduction

Reporting suicide can be daunting for journalists, and even more so for journalism students who can stumble at the first stages of tackling this highly sensitive topic. Suicide is a global public health problem with one death occurring every 40 seconds, a rate set to increase to one every 20 seconds (WHO, 2017; Befrienders, 2020).

In the UK the number of people taking their own lives is rising – 6,507 people killed themselves in 2018 an 11.8 percent rise over 2017 (ONS, 2019). Suicide deaths are news. Research shows that 41.5 percent of suicide stories in UK regional and national news outlets were based on coverage of coroners' inquests and other legal proceedings; 34.6 percent were event driven i.e. the first report of the suicide; 15.1 percent were tributes to the deceased; 7.5 percent were stories about positive actions in memory of the deceased e.g. fund-raising, and 1.3 percent were stories that marked the anniversary of the death (Duncan & Luce, forthcoming). Frequent coverage of sensitive topics, such as suicide, suggests proper training for journalism students is important, as mindful reporting can positively impact on public understanding of suicide (Hawton & Williams, 2001; Luce, 2019; Skehan et al, 2009). Enabling students to form early opinions about the relevance and importance of learning about suicide reporting can influence their journalism practices when they enter the industry (Hawton & Williams, 2002; Pirkis et al, 2009; Scherr et al., 2017). However, understanding advice from media reporting guidelines supplied by Samaritans, the World Health Organisation and the National Union of Journalists, amongst others, as well as regulatory bodies like the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) and OFCOM is potentially overwhelming, especially for those whose awareness–with good reason–may be no more than an academic lecture presented as part of their undergraduate programme. Journalism educators rightly raise issues of a crowded curriculum when asked to include suicide in their courses despite the momentous risks from uneducated reporting (Baines & Kennedy, 2010; Mills et al, 2019; Skehan et al., 2009). Whilst whole modules dedicated to trauma may be unrealistic (Seely, 2019), there is even less opportunity for dedicated classes on suicide reporting in journalism syllabi

(Melki et al, 2013). But failing to cover this important public health problem in a manner students will re-call and apply in the workplace has serious consequences. Poor reporting by ill-equipped journalists could harm vulnerable people so these 'high-stakes decisions' by journalists require informed ethical management (Duncan & Newton, 2017; Duncan & Luce, forthcoming; Luce, 2019).

Whilst lectures are a resource-efficient method for teaching journalism students about ethical issues like suicide reporting, their efficacy in this regard is questionable (Dalton, 2015; Lowe & Jones, 2015). Any knowledge gained can seem abstract and detached from the actual reporting students might undertake once they enter the industry. Consequently, some students may struggle to connect the application of media guidelines to the act of reporting a suicide responsibly. Some media outlets also fail to engage effectively with key advice from guidelines, leading to irresponsible reporting (Bohanna & Wang, 2012; Pitman & Stevenson, 2014; Tatum et al, 2010) so it is imperative journalism students learn how to report suicide responsibly *in practice* in order to overcome these deficiencies. Giving students practical experience of reporting suicide stories within the classroom could reinforce their understanding of how to write an ethical suicide story. It can expose them to tensions and conflicts around their professional, commercial and ethical obligations to potentially influence their reporting of suicide and mental health (Crane et al, 2005; Hazell et al, 2001; Skehan et al, 2009). Presenting them with actual problems to solve in practice builds their competence and confidence (Charles & Luce, 2016). Burns (1999) observes by valuing process over product and learning over teaching, this form of instruction aims to develop life-long learning skills so students can apply their understanding to new situations.

Recognising the difficulties journalists encounter through their news-work that can affect their ability to fully engage with suicide reporting guidelines, e.g. the 24/7 news cycle, working across platforms, persistent social media engagement, fluctuating employment terms and conditions, burnout and stress, we devised the Responsible Suicide Reporting (RSR) model (Duncan & Luce, forthcoming), which has ethical storytelling at its core. It embeds media reporting guidelines within journalistic practices, thus enabling journalists/journalism students to make ethical decisions as they produce content. Hence, we combine storytelling and ethical reporting functions within one model.

There is little support for journalism educators on teaching their students about how best to report suicide. This research helps fill that gap by integrating learning about suicide into the journalism practice. This means suicide reporting can be taught as a story form, similar to other specialisms like crime or court reporting, within practical journalism classes. Reporting stories and creating content is familiar ground for journalism educators and students, and treating suicide reporting as a practical task replaces the need for a specific didactic-style suicide or trauma class.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, a qualitative/quantitative survey determined journalism students' perceptions and experiences of learning about suicide reporting on their courses, while problem-based learning (PBL) workshops (Burns, 1999; Meadows, 1997; Wright, 2012) were used as an instructional method, alongside storytelling-as-pedagogy to engage students with ethical storytelling using the RSR model. Data from two groups of students was analysed: those who had not been exposed to the RSR model and those who had been exposed to it. The intention was to test whether students' active involvement in producing a suicide story using the RSR model would increase their understanding of this real-world problem. We will explain the RSR model (Duncan & Luce, forthcoming) later in this article, but first, we introduce storytelling as a pedagogical approach to teach the model, alongside problem-based learning.

Storytelling as pedagogy

This article draws on concepts of storytelling-as-pedagogy (Andrews et al, 2009; Conle, 2003; Coulter et al, 2007) to actively engage students and journalism educators in addressing recognised concerns in reporting suicide. These include excessive details of the method, precise information on the location, use of inappropriate and gratuitous language, concentration on sensational circumstances like murder-suicide, and stigmatising those affected by the death. The semantic structures and sequential ordering of information in a story, (e.g. the angle and news publication's style), act as attention-focussing mechanisms (Gerrig, 1993), that aid inquiry decision-making and learning (Andrews et al, 2009). Given storytelling's heuristic nature, this pedagogical approach also seeks to encourage students to reflect on the process, rules and consequences of their active reporting, thus opening the topic up for experiential discussion in class.

Why use storytelling

Conle (2003, p.3) notes the use of narrative–or stories–as curricula 'encompasses not only what is explicitly learned but also what is learned practically, at a more tacit level, touching not only on the intellect, but the moral, practical, imaginative realm'. Journalism is grounded in storytelling and generally, but not exclusively, this results in journalists acting as a conduit to report stories that are not their own but which they shape through their telling (Duncan & Newton, 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen & Schmidt, 2020), the 'means by which social change is enacted' (Coulter et al, 2007: 105). Thus, when storytelling is used to teach responsible suicide reporting, students participate in two story forms. Firstly, they *write* or *report* the story of others' experiences, i.e. the news story of a suicide; and secondly, they *tell* the story of their own experience, i.e. they critically describe their own experience producing the suicide story and how that connects with them personally.

How using stories works in the classroom

There are two approaches to using storytelling as a teaching tool. The first is didactic and tends to be led by the educator where stories are introduced to make moral points from which students are expected to learn (Costa et al, 2007; Savery, 2006). This didactic form can place students in docile roles and although they may recall information more readily because they have heard a story from their lecturer, it does not necessarily involve them in that story. Given journalism is a participatory experience (Deuze, 2005; Singer et.al, 2011) it seems appropriate students learn about suicide reporting collectively.

The second approach is more exploratory i.e. one that involves students and lecturers in finding out together. Through this collaborative process, they can tell, deconstruct and learn from their own personal stories [of journalism] (Coulter et al, 2007) and those of others that they write as news articles. Students need an opportunity to create collective text where they realize they are not alone and that their new experiences are not isolated (Christensen, 2000). It should be noted they are drawing on their suicide *reporting* experience and not their *personal* experience of suicide. They should be advised at the lesson's start that even though their personal experience may inform their journalistic approach, they do not need to reveal intimate experiences as part of their reflective storytelling.

Therefore, when journalism students report a suicide story and make decisions about what to include they critically reflect on their own and fellow students' understanding and experiences of not only journalism, but of media reporting of suicide itself. Namely, they share each other's stories. As Coulter et al. (2007) note, story sharing allows them to clarify further their own personal understandings. People learn through persuasive discourse that allows them to see different perspectives rather than via an authoritative transmission of the facts (Bakhtin, 1991) and as part of this process educators can encourage reflection by carefully framing questions so answers lead to more questions (Alexander, 2001).

Phillips (2012) identified three motifs within storytelling pedagogy that could inform teaching practice and be useful to journalism educators. The motifs could also assist students in understanding their own learning by providing them with an interpretative structure. Firstly, she advises students **walk in the shoes of others** to enable them to experience others' lives. Whilst maintaining a distance from sources is expected in some types of news story, those involving trauma need a more empathetic approach and emotional connection because of the nature of the source's lived experience (Duncan & Newton, 2017). The questions on truth, tone and language and avoiding stigma in the standard of moderation in the RSR model (see below) speak directly to this empathetic approach as they focus on the human interaction between journalists and the people in their stories. Secondly, Phillips (2012) suggests **story-tailoring** which underlines the need for responsiveness in storytelling to build a community and meaning with an audience. This requires the educator, as facilitator rather than tutor, to engage in deep-listening of students' interests, experiences and temperaments in order to tailor subsequent storytelling to students' needs. Within suicide reporting this reflective process would encourage students to respond to their audience's moods regarding what is and what is not acceptable. The third motif, **spinning and weaving,** maps connections between stories and what students learn from them to form meaning. The stories can be either those written by journalism students or existing stories they critique. This motif is concerned with ongoing critical reflection of how stories are told and of what they contain. The journalist, like a storyteller, 'spins and weaves a tale by leading listeners from one element to the next', making the interrelationship between them visible through the way they tell the story (Phillips, 2012, p.119). For responsible suicide reporting, students would *spin* out what they already know from writing general news stories, mapping connections between core news writing techniques and the suicide story they are constructing. Additionally, they would *weave* in those elements that are specific to suicide coverage, like attention to sensitive language. The ethical quality of these specific elements would be tested using the three-step RSR model (below). Thus, they turn back through their story, checking its veracity and accountability, creating 'an intertwined loop of connections' (Phillips, 2012, p.115). By reflecting

on (Schon, 1987) this interconnected process students are positioned to form new understanding for future suicide stories they may write.

Problem-based instruction in storytelling

Whilst the characteristics noted above signal useful teaching approaches, a recognised instructional method can provide a suitable framework to teach the RSR model through storytelling. Problem-based learning is a versatile method suited to the process of reporting suicide stories. It is a flexible technique in that the problem is structured fluidly with no preformed solution parameters and no single correct answer (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Savery, 2006). The problem is deliberately ill-structured because 'problems in the real world are ill-structured (or they wouldn't be problems)' (Savery, 2006, p.12). PBL is concentrated experiential learning arranged around students' investigation and resolution of messy, real-world problems where they are engaged problem solvers who become self-directed learners through determining the key problem and the criteria needed to solve it (Torp and Sage, 2002). Thus, the student drives this method as the director of any learning activities (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980). The problem is used as a tool to understand abstract knowledge (Wood, 2003) in order to improve putting that knowledge into practice (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980). Thus, what students learn through self-directed study should be applied back to the problem so they can reanalyse it and find solutions (ibid; Savery, 2006). This method favours a collaborative team approach (Hmelo-Silver, 2004) involving both students and lecturer. That said, once set the problem, students can work independently then bring their contributions back to the group to form collective ideas (Wood, 2003). Additionally, the lecturer should adopt the role of facilitator but without providing declarative knowledge so that students' learning is exploratory and so they take responsibility for their own solutions and learning (Newman, 2005; Savery & Duffy, 1995). As part of this role, it is essential the educator directs an extensive debriefing at the end of the learning session (Savery, 2006).

Problem-based instruction is a recognisable storytelling method for journalism academics. When they ask their students to report a news story, a feature, online or broadcast content they set them a problem the students have to solve. Because students are often given free rein to interpret the problem there are no set solutions other than to produce an effective piece of journalism within loosely defined parameters. Covering suicide presents distinct problems and to assist in solving them we offer the Responsible Suicide Reporting model.

Teaching the Responsible Suicide Reporting model

We devised the RSR model (Duncan & Luce, forthcoming) to enable journalists–and journalism students–to make ethical decisions about their storytelling whilst under pressure from various news processes (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Hanusch, 2017).

It embeds reporting guidelines within journalism practice and functions within the storytelling process so they question their choices as they produce content and do not have to go elsewhere for guidance. This pragmatic, internal model addresses hindrances to journalists' use of guidelines like lack of awareness, reluctance to consult them, tight deadlines and pressures from staff shortages. It goes beyond adherence to codes of conduct that concentrate on explicit details of the method to understand other potential harms, like stigmatising content. The model consists of three parts: a typology of suicide narratives and 'othering'; a set of ethical rules, and a standard of moderation.

How does it work?

For teaching purposes, the model can be perceived as a three-step graduated process (see Figure 1). Each step must be achieved before students move onto the next.

Step 1. Typology of Suicide Narratives

Students start by determining what type of story they are writing. The familiar ground of constructing a story gives them a framework to assess potentially harmful content. There are five suicide story types:

Event-driven stories, the media's first recognition that a newsworthy suicide has occurred, a common story type. Students should be wary of being too explicit when describing the method and location, whether they should place 'suicide' in the headline, sub-headings or intro, and concerning web analytics, how often they use the word 'suicide' in the text.

Post-judicial stories, the type journalists write most frequently, are reports of inquests, and more rarely
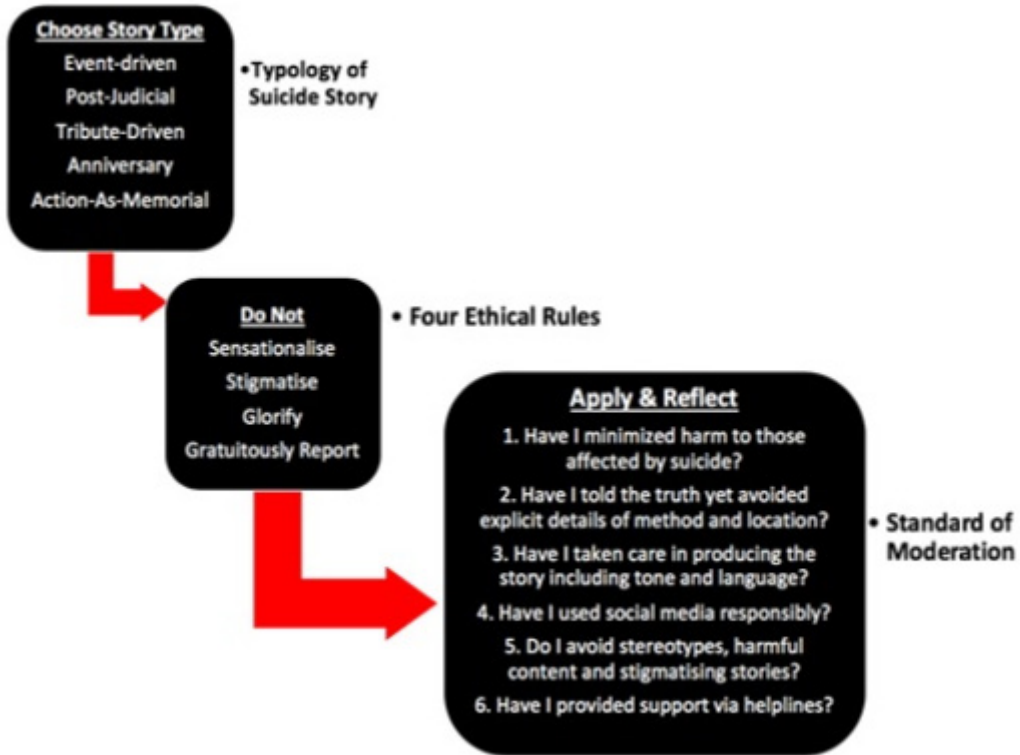
Figure 1. The Responsible Suicide Reporting Model (Duncan & Luce, forthcoming)

other legal proceedings. Given explicit details are often presented as evidence, journalists may be tempted to include extensive detail, resulting in gratuitous, sensational and stigmatising reporting. Students should be aware of the need to balance accurate, full disclosure with potentially harmful content.

Tribute-driven stories focus on the grieving family and friends who pay tribute to the deceased.

Anniversary stories normally mark the death's first anniversary but can cover later ones, and revisit the circumstances of the death alongside describing how the bereaved are coping.

Action-as-memorial stories are about the bereaved family and friends undertaking a campaign, fundraising or setting up a charity in memory of their loved one.

These last three narratives emphasise the people affected by the suicide rather than explicit details of method, location, language and tone. The exception is where the death becomes a 'suicide event', usually celebrity suicides or where a death or several deaths are framed from a dramatic news angle; here the duration of coverage is the problem.

Step 2: Apply Four Ethical Rules

Once students identify the story type they consider whether it stigmatises or 'others' anyone. Stigma consists of labelling, e.g. defining someone by their mental health symptoms instead of seeing the person; stereotyping, where they are defined by recognised undesirable characteristics in the minds of others or themselves; and separating, where people think in terms of 'us' and 'them') leading to perceived differences and inferiorities (Link & Phelan, 2001; Campbell & Deacon, 2006). Journalists can ethically test their stories as they construct them by applying four simple responsible reporting rules:

Do not sensationalise: Sensationalised reporting is when journalists use the word 'suicide' in a headline, or use quotes e.g. 'heaven has a new angel' or 'RIP Babes'.

Do not stigmatise: Stigmatised reporting can occur through labelling, e.g. describing someone as a 'victim of bullying', 'autistic', or labelling them based on their religion or nationality.

Articles

Do not glorify: Glorification can occur when suicide is presented as a life choice in a story, or the story explicitly describes a method.

Do not gratuitously report: Gratuitous reporting can occur when the reason for the suicide is overly emphasised, alongside the specific location of the death, e.g. Golden Gate Bridge or Beachy Head.

Step 3: Apply Standard of Moderation

Next students move to Step 3 and apply the standard of moderation. It embeds ethical principles, e.g. minimizing harm, truth-telling, with key advice from suicide reporting guidelines, e.g. using social media responsibly and providing helpline information within a story (NUJ, 2015; Samaritans, 2013; WHO, 2017a). It is a moderate or middle way between excessive, irresponsible reporting and timid, sanitized reporting.

Students should ask themselves six questions:

Have I minimized harm to those affected by suicide?

Have I told the truth, yet avoided explicit details of method and location?

Have I taken care in producing the story including tone and language?

Have I used social media responsibly?

Do I avoid stereotypes, harmful content and stigmatising stories?

Have I provided support via helplines?

By asking these questions as the story is created, they become integral to the reporting process. Whilst this is the model's third stage, it can also stand alone, so if a journalist can do nothing else they can apply these six questions as they report. Thus, they check their reporting is moderate in content, tone and language.

Recognising that active involvement increases students' understanding of real-world problems, we wished to test the effectiveness of teaching the RSR model using storytelling-as-pedagogy and problem-based learning. We also wanted to gain insight into students' current educational experiences and perceptions of suicide reporting. Consequently, we applied a mixed-methods approach by firstly surveying students who had no knowledge of the RSR model. Secondly, we hosted workshops with students in which they engaged with the RSR model using storytelling-as-pedagogy and problem-based learning. Thereafter, they completed a questionnaire on their views of our approach.

Study 1: Student perspectives of suicide reporting without exposure to the RSR model

Methodology

A total of 229 respondents on journalism, media and communication degrees from 25 universities in the UK and Ireland completed our survey in 2018 which was disseminated through programme leaders and Twitter. The survey was a mix of fixed-response questions eliciting quantitative data and open questions for qualitative data. Most respondents identified as journalism students (91%) and 20% were international students. Females made up 66% of respondents and 81% were aged 18-23. They were asked specifically about the inclusion of suicide reporting in their curricula and their understanding of reporting suicide responsibly.

Results: Assessing the relevance of suicide reporting to students' studies

Respondents were asked how many times they recalled suicide being raised during their studies. Regarding lectures, almost 40% said it was never mentioned and 28% said it was raised two or three times only. Similarly in tutorials and seminars: 70% said it was never discussed in tutorials and 8% said only two or three times; around 60% said it was not raised in seminars and 16% said only two or three times. In terms of practical teaching situations, almost 75% reported it was never raised during workshops and 10% said only two or three times. A similar result occurred during news days (72.7% and 9.6% respectively), although news days are dependent on unpredictable news agendas. Despite an apparent lack of suicide forming part

of the curricula, students were aware of the value of learning about reporting suicide. Almost all students thought it was somewhat important, important or very important (24.8%, 32.4% and 41.8% respectively) for universities to include suicide reporting in their journalism/media courses. Additionally, more than 86% thought it would be relevant to their future careers, with 41.3% stating it was somewhat important, 29% stating it was important and 16% saying it was very important.

Results: Student perspectives on learning how to report suicide responsibly

We were keen to establish what students already knew about reporting suicide so we asked them how they would report a suicide story. Despite the limited number of times suicide reporting was addressed in learning activities, students appeared to have a broad grasp of the key issues (135 responses). They recognised the importance of reporting the facts rather than speculation, being truthful, honest and impartial and the need to report in the public interest. One student said they would report 'with facts and compassion, seeking to inform and with the hope to spread awareness'. Another said they would report with 'compassion and cold hard facts'. Avoiding harm also appeared to by uppermost in their thoughts. They consistently described the need to report 'sensitively', 'respectfully', 'compassionately' and to do so 'empathetically and informative[ly]' with 'severe caution'. They stressed the significance of avoiding details of the method, seeking advice from guidelines and the need to include helplines. They were also clear on avoiding sensationalism and stigma. One student said they would 'report in a non-glamorised, realistic and helpful way'.

Referencing the IPSO Editors' Code of Practice we asked them what they understood by 'excessive detail of the method used' (Clause 5, Suicide) and 'inquiries and approaches should be made with sympathy and discretion' (Clause 4, Intrusion into grief or shock) (IPSO, 2018). Most of the 135 students who responded knew the dangers of including explicit details. One said: 'The story should not look like a tutorial on how to commit suicide.' Students acknowledged doing so could have serious repercussions, especially for the bereaved and vulnerable. One student said: 'We don't want to normalise it, we don't want to encourage it.' Another said: 'It's journalism, not a horror movie. Show some respect.' However, although they understood the need for restraint around method no-one referred to it as part of a code of practice. They seemed less clear about what was meant by sympathy and discretion with responses ranging from 'don't ask for too many details' and 'respect people's privacy' to 'it means the family's wishes take place above the editor's desires'. Whilst they recognised this was about sensitivity towards the bereaved their responses were mostly generalisations about being respectful, compassionate and empathetic. There was little indication they actually knew *how* to report with sympathy and discretion. Equally, when asked what they understood by responsible reporting their responses (154 in total) were broad, similar to the question on how to report suicide, and were a mix of ethical concepts like fairness, respect and minimizing harm and journalism processes like accuracy, use of language and being cautious. Many conflated reporting responsibly: having an obligation to behave according to professional standards, and reporting sensitively: having a considerate appreciation of others' feelings.

Students seemed to have greater awareness than projected from the limited exposure intimated by the data on their learning activities. However, 30-40% of them did not answer these questions, possibly because they lacked sufficient knowledge. Of those that did, the general vagueness of their responses gave a sense they are aware of the theory without knowing how to implement it. Although it is encouraging most surveyed students recognised key issues, we posit that exposing students to our RSR model would familiarise them with the practical actions for responsible reporting.

Study 2: Student perspectives of suicide reporting with exposure to the RSR model

Methodology

A total of 80 journalism students (50 undergraduates and 30 Masters) on UK degree programmes participated in three workshops during 2019-20 on Responsible Suicide Reporting. Students were introduced to the RSR model and told it was grounded on what they already knew–how to write stories based on news values and making decisions about content. They were asked to view themselves as storytellers, who in

striving to report responsibly should put themselves in the shoes of the people affected by their stories (Phillips, 2012); the intention here is not to compromise journalistic impartiality but to encourage them to be empathetic, a concept that is important to reporting traumatic events.

In order to do this they were given two tasks:

to critique two suicide stories, and

to write a suicide story using the RSR model.

Afterwards, students completed a questionnaire to collect mostly qualitative data on their attitudes to the RSR model and using real-world, storytelling problems to learn about it. Inductive thematic analysis was used to establish common themes relating to students' experiences of the RSR model and storytelling/PBL.

Task 1 – Investigating real-world problems: deconstructing suicide reporting

Students were asked to critique published suicide news stories to gauge their reaction to the content e.g. whether they thought the reporting was harmful, stigmatising etc. They considered how they would report them: what would they include/leave out, what they found offensive and why, what they thought was potentially harmful to their audience. The two selected stories both breached, or came close to breaching, media reporting guidelines and advice from regulatory bodies like IPSO. In groups, students collaborated, discussed and noted what they considered were the problems with the stories. The lecturer, as facilitator, assisted their learning by prompting them to explore certain issues more deeply. This was achieved by asking students questions about an issue they had identified and encouraging them to determine the answer for themselves. Applying the RSR model's standard of moderation provided students with a tool to decipher excessive, gratuitous reporting and determine what they would do to tell a more restrained, judicious story.

Task 2 – Putting self-directed learning into practice: writing a suicide story

The second task asked students to write a suicide story using the RSR model that was based on information provided by the lecturer and gleaned from an actual suicide article published in 2019. They were told they were writing a news story about *an event* (Step 1: Typology of narratives) under deadline without access to guidelines or advice from colleagues. Thus, as they produced their stories they were advised to reflect on the elements to report in an event story; then consider the rules around stigmatising, sensationalising, glorifying and gratuitously reporting (Step 2: Apply four ethical rules), and lastly apply the six moderation questions to their decision making (Step 3: Apply standard of moderation). The lecturer-as-facilitator adopted an enquiry-based approach to encourage students to make their own ethical decisions. The problem they were presented with was deliberately ill-structured to reflect messy, real-world problems with no single, correct answer (Savery, 2006; Torp & Sage, 2002). Students were encouraged to work collaboratively to decide on the content they felt they should include. The problem was used to understand the abstract concepts of reporting suicide through practical application, enabling students to apply the knowledge they had gained through exploratory, self-directed study back to the problem so they reanalysed it and found suitable solutions.

Results: Assessing the effectiveness of the RSR model for teaching students about suicide reporting

Students were asked in the questionnaire about two areas where the RSR model could influence their decision making. These were stigma and reporting grey areas, common dilemmas but opaque and complex (Duncan & Newton, 2017).

Addressing stigma makes up a significant part of the RSR model, given it is the driving force behind the four ethical rules. It also appears in the fifth question in the standard of moderation. The questionnaire asked students how exploring stigma as part of the RSR model helped them to understand the effect labelling someone as different in their stories could have on public perceptions. It also asked how the RSR model helped them to make decisions about grey areas in ethical decision making e.g. whether to include a suicide note in their reporting or not. Samaritans guidelines on suicide (2013) advise against inclusion because of the potential harm to vulnerable people. However, last messages, particularly from social media, are appearing more frequently in suicide stories. Some notes from social media are used without the family's approval but increasingly these are included with their consent in apparent contravention of guidelines. This leaves

journalists with the dilemma of either adhering to prevention organisations' advice or ignoring it to include the note according to the family's wishes.

Using Phillips' storytelling motifs, several students demonstrated the motif, *walking in the shoes of others.* One said: '[It] helps to put yourself in their shoes and understand how you can harm a specific group by stereotyping.' Other comments included, 'I never knew about the extent to which suicide affects people. I never though[t] labelling was harmful before' and 'It [the RSR model] made me consider the feelings of the victim's family.' Students also reflected on the outcomes of what they wrote and how it could be interpreted. One student said: 'It helped me understand that what I write about can have consequences', while another said: '[It] Makes you consider the terms you use more and how people could interpret them/be affected by them.' Another student commented on the dangerous notion of providing a step-by-step guide to the method: 'It helped me understand that I shouldn't write down roadmaps in articles.'

There was also evidence of *story tailoring*, in their questionnaire comments. Students responded to their perceived audience's moods by being aware of the need to tailor their reporting to acceptable practices. One student said: 'It was helpful to have that [the RSR model, advice on stigma] in the back of your mind and to consider it when working on a story.' Several reflected on the importance of appropriate content and language choices: 'It [the RSR model] helped identify the language and story details that we should use.' Another said: '[It] made me think about including facts but making sure not to dramatize the facts.'

The last motif, *spinning and weaving* was also present within students' comments. Students created new understanding by making connections between their storytelling and their learning: 'It makes you realise that stigma is a huge problem that should not be highlighted in the article.' Another added: 'It gave me a more detailed view on stigma and how big an impact it can have.' One student said the RSR model made him 'consider things I may not have beforehand' and another said the RSR process reaffirmed his thoughts, suggesting on-going reflection was present throughout the learning process. On-going reflection was also evident in these statements. 'It helped to understand that what you write can cause harm and add to the stigma. We have to make sure we don't add to the problem and be more understanding.' Another said: 'It made me recognise the responsibility of a journalist and how they must weigh up a range of factors.'

Results: Determining the usefulness of the Standard of Moderation as a guide to reporting suicide responsibly

Despite no prior knowledge of the standard of moderation our workshop students rapidly adapted to using it in their storytelling. In the questionnaire they were asked how the six moderation questions helped them to solve some of the problems of suicide reporting. Their responses predominantly fell into two categories: usefulness and reflection on their learning.

Regarding usefulness one student commented the standard gave far more detail about reporting suicide than the IPSO code, whilst another said it was an 'easy step-by-step [guide] to understand how to success-fully report suicide'. Generally, students thought it provided them with a better understanding of how to produce an ethical suicide story. They described the six questions as helpful in framing the story, in keeping them on track, and in better understanding what to write, because they outlined the core factors. One student said: 'They helped by giving a structure of thought that can be referred to when needed.' Another said: 'Vital, they are a solid guideline that I will keep in mind going forward.'

It was evident students reflected on the new learning they acquired through using the standard of moderation. It gave them 'insight into how to carefully report' and made them think through the issues before they included something in their stories. Students also seemed to gain greater awareness of responsible reporting by applying the six questions. One said: 'With all the questions, I never deeply thought of how damaging these stories could be.' Another said: 'Makes you consider everything like social media etc. Makes you consider your language more. Number 2 [telling the truth whilst avoiding explicit details of method and location] helps you judge when to report the facts but not to go into detail.' One student reflected on the effect of their reporting on vulnerable people. They said: 'It helped me to take a perspective on how my article would make other people feel. It's an easier guideline.'

Results: Assessing the effectiveness of using storytelling as a pedagogical approach to teaching students about suicide reporting

An aim of this study was to gain insight into students' perceptions of using storytelling as a means to understand the RSR model and its application. We posited that placing students within a familiar environment i.e. reporting stories, would enable them to grasp the unfamiliar and more complex task of reporting suicide.

Therefore, it was important to determine whether students shared this premise.

Using Phillip's (2012) storytelling motifs, it was evident students judged the effectiveness of working on real-world suicide storytelling problems on the new understanding they had gained and the potential for ongoing reflection to reinforce their learning (Burns, 1999; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Savery 2006). They *walked in the shoes of others*. By crafting stories of real-world problems they could empathise with those affected by suicide stories. Commenting on undertaking Task 2, one student said: 'I think that it is useful and good practice. Using real stories can show how it will affect those when putting yourself in the families' position.' Another student echoed this: 'Put yourself in the families' shoes. [It] makes it more real, take it more seriously.' Another reflected it 'helps to prepare you to become more understanding'.

Spinning and weaving dominated their responses. This is not surprising given it is concerned with learning and reflection. Students recognised the enriched learning that came from producing their own stories based on real-world problems. One said: '[It] Really helped to see how bad at reporting people are. And how easy it is to correct it.' Another said they found using storytelling to learn about suicide reporting 'very useful as it gave us a taste of how to go about it'. Another said: 'It helps to use real situations because it can be hard to decipher what details we should/shouldn't use. Makes it more relevant.' Many students commented on the value of problem-based learning and being able to practise in the safe environment of the classroom. They described it as the best way to learn, that it was useful, beneficial and more interactive. One student said: '[It] Allows you to make mistakes before you properly report one [a suicide story]. Makes you realise how difficult it is to report.' Another said: 'I think it's essential to practise this if there's a chance that you will be publishing stories like [that] in the industry soon.'

Conclusion

It is evident that journalism students see the benefits of actively practising suicide reporting in the classroom. It enables them to unpick the moral dilemmas of reporting such a traumatic experience, allows them to empathise with those who are affected by suicide, and importantly permits them to make mistakes before they have to report a real death by suicide. Problem-based learning offers them the opportunity to prepare for ill-structured, real-world challenges, making them active learners who can transfer the skills they have mastered in the journalism lab to the professional newsroom or freelance situation. Using storytelling as a pedagogical approach anchors them in the familiar ground of producing a news story, feature or broadcast content so that they can concentrate on ensuring their coverage stands up to the ethical scrutiny outlined in our Responsible Suicide Reporting model. We designed it to be part of the news process, internal to the production of news rather than distracting journalists from their stories in search of the correct advice. The aim is to ease the reporting process rather than hinder it. Based on our findings, we posit that exposing students to our RSR model will familiarise them with the practical actions for responsible reporting. We recognise that further testing and evaluation of the RSR model is needed worldwide. We also acknowledge that journalism educators may need support to teach this challenging topic so we have developed further resources for them at: www.suicidereportingtoolkit.com. Teaching the RSR model through storytelling and problem-based learning is a pragmatic way forward to educate tomorrow's journalists about their responsibilities to be truthful, respectful and to prevent further deaths by suicide.

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