

## **Media Education Research Journal** ***Journalism: New Challenges* - a shop window for practitioner research.**

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### Introduction:

The Journalism and Communication department at Bournemouth University recently produced a textbook on current issues and challenges in journalism to enhance the educational experience of undergraduate students. The book, *Journalism: New Challenges* (Fowler-Watt, K., and Allan, S., 2013) provides the additional benefit of 'show casing' the research and pedagogy of colleagues, both in the department and in industry. Published, by our research centre, CSJCC, and free to download at <https://microsites.bournemouth.ac.uk/cjcr/publications/> it is also available as a hard copy. The title is placed in the library, distributed at conferences and given to visiting speakers as a 'thank you' for sharing their wisdom and expertise with our students when they visit the faculty. As a co-editor of *Journalism: New Challenges*, this 'thought piece' has enabled me to reflect on the genesis of the idea, to analyse the book's production, with a focus on the blend of theory and practice, and to consider the impact that it has had - on contributors, reviewers and students.

### The birth of the idea: *Journalism: New Challenges*:

The main ambition of the book is to provide a dynamic picture of how academics and practitioners, working and researching side by side, are engaging with key challenges in journalism and to encourage students to become a part of that conversation. The introduction explains its aims, whereby 'each of the chapters revolves around a particular challenge to journalism that is of pressing significance'. The digital landscape provides a context: a Bournemouth University practitioner-academic, academic, or an industry practitioner who has a working connection with the Journalism and Communication department wrote each of the twenty-nine chapters. The editors' introduction, states that it is our 'shared intentions to encourage fresh ways of engaging with thorny questions - new and longstanding - from distinctive vantage points.' This

enabled the contributors to reflect on their own practice and to share innovative ways of engaging with familiar concepts, such as the journalist's relationship with sources or the ethical issues associated with reporting conflict. Critical reflection is a prerequisite for understanding because it "is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb 1984; 38). The production of news is an instant and immersive activity, so it is important that journalists understand the 'thought –processes, attitudes and personal values, which shape the story' (Fowler-Watt, 2013:16). This is what Shon (1995) calls 'knowing-in-action', the opportunity to reflect on the knowledge of practice.

In order to encourage students to extend *their* thinking beyond the contents of the book, we developed a set of 'Challenging Questions' at the end of each chapter. This gives them an opportunity to consider how they might engage with key issues in journalism within the workplace, encouraging them to develop a professional perspective. There is also a list of 'Recommended Reading' 'to help push the conversation onwards'. The ambition is to encourage students to think beyond its contents and to read it actively, so that they, too, reflect on the challenges and the debates.

In addition, it enables us to focus a spotlight on the blend of theory and practice that we believe to be sacrosanct – the book is imbued with this philosophy. The intention is to expose students to the blend of theory and practice, to encourage them to operate as reflective practitioners, since 'there is a constant need to reflect on one's work, what one is trying to achieve' (Moon and Thomas, 2007:7). Through the genesis of this book, academic colleagues were able to integrate their research into academic practice, disseminating their subject knowledge to students and colleagues and enabling them to enhance their profile, whilst making a contribution to pedagogy.

#### Integrating research and subject knowledge into academic practice:

The book took shape as the Leveson Inquiry and subsequent report unfurled, providing added resonance to certain issues: ethics, trust, leadership, and the

state of the tabloids. Chapters were also commissioned to cover areas that we felt needed to be explored – storytelling in a digital landscape, citizen journalism, the state of the magazine industry, advocacy journalism. A key editorial challenge resided in providing a structure and a coherent style for each chapter, whilst allowing the ‘voice’ of each contributor to be clearly heard. We tackled this with a clear briefing note, which beyond the conventional housekeeping issues associated with a book’s production, requested “a lively quotation or two – positioned beneath the title and before the first paragraph – which speaks to the key challenge being addressed by the chapter”. Beyond commissioning, co-ordination and reworking of chapters to conform to this accessible, but coherent shape became a major weekend activity for the co-editors! The theory/practice blend was further highlighted by the structure of the sections of the book – shorter industry-led pieces intercutting longer, more theoretically and conceptually based chapters – and through shared authorship of chapters. I contributed a chapter in one of my own areas of specialist interest – editorial leadership, written with a colleague from the BBC College of Journalism, Andrew Wilson. This combined approaches to academic practice with real-world examples from the BBC’s Editorial Leadership course. The aim of the chapter is to share with students the learning points from the editorial leadership course and to instil in them the notion that everyone in a news room is a leader to encourage ‘ a greater level of engagement in the decision-making process in newsrooms’ so that editors can ‘embrace the challenges presented by the digital 24/7 news environment’ (Fowler-Watt and Wilson, 2013:219). In the Challenging Questions section, they are invited to consider how they, as a new journalist, might interact with an editor.

- Imagine you are advising an editor on the ways in which they might get the best out of new journalists in their newsroom? What methods might you employ? Consider what the new journalist may need from the editor.

Having read the chapter, the student is also encouraged to think about the integration of theory and practice within the newsroom context:

- Define 'great journalism' and 'great leadership' in your own words and provide an example to illustrate each of the definitions in practice.

The 'Recommended Reading' section urges the reader to explore the autobiographical writing of 'great' editors, such as Harold Evans of *The Times*, to dip into the editorial guidelines of the BBC and to interact with the BBC College of Journalism website, which is a rich educational resource. Students are learning on many levels, through reading the textbook, through wider reading, through engaging in debate via the Challenging Questions and by citing quotes from relevant chapters in their essays for undergraduate journalism courses. This is not, however, a 'course reader' – it is intended to add value to the students' learning experience, to encourage them to delve into current issues and to understand how theory and practice are interlinked.

#### Reflections on the experience:

As an open access publication, a free PDF download, the book has been reposted in weird and wonderful places - most of which we can't track, such as personal blogs. The book is publicised on the websites of the accreditation bodies for journalism education, the National Council for the Training of Journalists and the Broadcast Journalism Training Council. It was also circulated to other HE institutions via the MeCCSA website ([www.meccsa.org.uk/](http://www.meccsa.org.uk/))

It has received unsolicited positive reviews – one from journalism lab in the Netherlands <http://www.journalismlab.nl/2013/12/goed-nieuw-gratis-boek-over-huidige-journalistiek/> translated as follows:

Sometimes you encounter by chance it 's a gem. That happened to me recently.... Journalism. New Challenges ... is all the more such a good book because it is not limited to the now well-known problems caused by digitization, but also strikes plenty of mostly untraded paths, while the old paths are not avoided.... this book provides an overview of the current state of affairs as I have encountered. A must for professionals, researchers and teachers.

The book gave the contributors, particularly those who combine journalistic practice with pedagogy, a chance to reflect and to take stock of the challenges facing them. Leveson held up a mirror to us all, but there are many other

challenges that we need to compute beyond the well-worn debates around collapsing business models, such as evolving genres of news reporting, our influence on audience, the impact of digital convergence, as well as questions we often ask ourselves about the very nature of our existence as 'professional' journalists. One contributor, Mary Evans, freelance arts critic and reviewer who wrote the chapter '*Entrepreneurial Journalism: the Life of the Freelance*' felt that the book provided a route map at a difficult time in her professional life:

*"As I'm currently experiencing journalism's new challenges first hand, it will be handy to have an instruction manual - and a very good-looking one at that. "*

As a practitioner-academic at BU, Mathew Charles, felt that that experience of writing a chapter for the book entitled, '*Documentary and advocacy journalism: when a story becomes more than just news*', enabled him to reflect on his craft:

*Practice and theory work best when they influence each other, and writing this chapter opened my eyes to the various dimensions this relationship can take - a relationship, which is at the centre of journalism education*

Post-Leveson, just as journalism as a practice has come under the spotlight of the academy, so journalism education is also under scrutiny. Through the publication of *Journalism: New Challenges* we hope to have made a lively, useful and credible contribution to the debate.

**Fowler-Watt, K.**, 2013, *The Storytellers tell Their Stories: the Journalist as Educator*, EdD thesis, University of Southampton.

**Kolb D.A.**, 1984, *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

**Moon, J., & Thomas, G.**, 2007, *The Challenge of Reflective Writing for Media production students and some proposals to encourage better practice*, CEMP Research Paper, Bournemouth University.

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