Why newsrooms should retain their senior journalists: learning through Legitimate Peripheral Participation

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Thinking about journalism education and practice generally suffers from the Cartesian legacy that separates mind from world, and hence makes separations of theory and practice common sense. Attempts to repair this division are often made via the concept of *praxis*, but this does not easily translate into a plausible understanding of learning in practice beyond a general acceptance of the idea. The concept of legitimate peripheral participation provides a more plausible way not only of imagining situated cognition, but of imagining how newcomers to the newsroom may learn their practice from seniors in typical mentoring situations. This paper reflects on a basic statistical case study of journalists' opinions of their most valuable learning experiences.

The study of journalism faces a peculiar set of challenges in the academy where, from the day it was included in a university calendar,[1] it has had to contend with the contradictory imperatives of *theory* and *practice* (Rowe 2004). On the one hand, journalism is obviously a practical occupation, and that identity powerfully steers notions that 'to know' journalism means getting to grips with its industrial practice. Theory becomes the tail of a very practical dog, and any theory that fails to illuminate or to describe the practice plausibly enough becomes plainly false.

Were theory to be the dog and practice its tail, we would be well advised to consider British analytic philosopher Gilbert Ryle's (1949) famous denunciation of the "ghost in the machine" metaphor that animates the Cartesian body-mind problem that continues to inform key positions in cognitive science and cognitive psychology, which in turn guides much common sense about learning and human action. Instead, as Ryle explains, "when we describe people as exercising qualities of mind, we are not referring to occult episodes of which their overt acts and utterances are effects; we are referring to those overt acts and utterances themselves" (1949: 25). Ryle presses on with a discourse on the distinction between "knowing that" and "knowing how"

[1] Journalism was first included in a university calendar in the United States of America immediately after the civil war there. Defeated Confederate General Robert E. Lee proposed the programme in 1868 (Sloan 1990: 3).

(1949: Ch. 2), alluding to our intellectualist propensity to instinctively label these *theory* and *practice*.

> Why are people so strongly drawn to believe, in the face of their own daily experience, that the intelligent execution of an operation must embody two processes, one of doing and another of theorising? Part of the answer is that they are wedded to the dogma of the ghost in the machine (32).

Hence the nagging suspicion that journalism education and training may be wedded to the same dogma; not necessarily as a pedagogical *principle*, but as an effect of having to contend with the somewhat competing options of formal teaching and informal mentoring. The contention is over whether one or the other ought to be the preferred route into a journalism career. The competition is over which should be privileged as a prelude to that career. It is a question that occupies journalism educators – so it seems – far more than practitioners themselves. Some educators advocate *practice* to be the privileged route (Starck 2001, Windschuttle 1998). Others hold *theory* to be the proper ground for journalism education (De Burgh 2003; Henningham 1999; Reese and Cohen 2000). Others sensibly attempt to reconnect theory and practice through the concept of *praxis* (Burns 2004; Hochheimer 2001; Wasserman 2005) – and so allude to Emmanuel Kant's oft quoted dictum, that practice without theory is blind, and theory without practice is empty.

At first sight the dictum indicates that academic coursework without authentic context-based experience offers theory without practice, and therefore remains empty. The impulse is, therefore, to simply combine the two elements – lectures on *theory* followed by *practical* exercises in a computer laboratory (after 'live' exercises in interviewing and note taking) – and to expect journalism novices to thus become 'newsroom ready'.[2] But combining theoretical and practical elements (Humpty Dumpty-like) does not necessarily constitute *praxis*.

It is difficult to imagine any journalism educator today not accepting the pedagogical truth of *praxis*; yet abstracted from the Marxist critique that informs it, the concept becomes a gloss that leaves unquestioned the dualistic bedrock of common sense founded upon what Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor attacks as the modern "epistemological construal … that fits well with modern mechanistic science … [and which] contributes to the present vogue of computer-based models of

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[2] This is not meant as an excessive criticism; most journalism departments are nested in bureaucratic institutions. Given their curriculum constraints, a bifurcated structure such as this is probably about as far from the norm as many journalism departments would be allowed to go.

the mind" (Taylor 1987: 467).[3] This epistemological model is the "contour map of the way things obviously are with the mind-in-world" and comes across as the only way we can sensibly see things, or as too obvious for words (Taylor 1984: 19). "[T]he model becomes the organizing principle for a wide range of the practices in which we think and act and deal with the world" (Taylor 1984: 20).

> These are of course never monolithic; but in a given society at a given time, the dominant interpretations and practices may be so linked with a given model that this is, as it were, constantly projected for the members as the way things obviously are. I think this is the case – both directly, and via its connection with influential modern understandings of the individual and his freedom and dignity – with the epistemological model (Taylor 1984: 21).

That model has had its impress most visibly on Newtonian causal theories of learning, such that 'good practice' must be an epiphenomenon of 'good theory', and similar mechanistic views (Beckett and Hager 2001: 39-40, 56; Primbram and King 1996: 153). Just as the 'dog and its tail' metaphor has a heuristic ring to Cartesian thinking; so too does the view that an internship at a media firm that conducts an apprenticeship without even a modicum of formal theory amounts to a regime of unreflecting mimicry. The choice falls falsely between *formal* and *informal* education (see Strauss 1984). But real life knows no such distinction:

> Attention to learning from informal experience will come as no surprise for any of us who are parents, or who for some time have been involved in what is typically the work of professionals, such as lawyers, teachers, medicos and nurses. This is because such activities as these deal in human values and actions with consequences for which one is held responsible, such as child-rearing, technical and clinical diagnoses, litigation and so on. All these activities require practical judgement, that is, decisions about what to do next to bring about the most efficacious result - the 'practical', or appropriate, contextually-sensitive solution to whatever is the issue or problem. These judgements have not traditionally entered much into the theory-driven acquisition of a formal education, but now universities are being forced to rethink that tradition (Beckett and Hager 2001: 41).

There is at present a significant boom in the literature that reconnects experience, learning and practice in the field of education; and not all of it is quite so recent (Boud, Cohen and Walker 1993; Johnston and Pietrewicz 1985; Pitman, Eisikovits and Dobbert 1989). This literature is augmented by a field in practice theory that –drawing significantly from insights gained in ethnomethodology – researches learning in the workplace. Again, there is a boom in not only the literature,

[3] It would be quite remarkable if one were to think otherwise, and to embrace the required Aristotelian alternative to Cartesian dualism may put one at considerable odds with the expected rationale of journalism education: to equip students for modernity's sense-making mechanism *par excellence* (see Hartley 1996).

but the range of studies that take organizations and work seriously from the point of view of *mentoring* and *learning*.

This paper applies central ideas about mentoring and learning found in the concepts of *Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Lave and Wenger 1991) and *Communities of Practice* (Wenger, McDermot and Snyder 2002), to a basic statistical analysis of journalists' perceptions of how they best acquired their professional expertise. The analysis follows a previous paper (Caldwell, forthcoming) on an ethnomethodological conversation analysis of senior reporters, with more than fifteen years experience, talking among themselves about their experiences and their views of newcomers to the industry. Evident in that data is a belief that newcomers are not being mentored as they had been when they were juniors. In many respects these findings resemble Henrik Ornebring's (2008) description of the self-understandings of journalists in Britain. So too, the concepts of "situated learning" and "legitimate peripheral participation" provide both an imaginary and a description of how this condition can be addressed.

By legitimate peripheral participation Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger "mean to draw attention to the point that learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practice of a community" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29). But as this study intimates, legitimate participation is not limited to workplace contexts, but offers much promise in its capacity to *inform* journalism education and training in the academy. As Philip Henning writes in opening his chapter on situated learning:

> Taking a situated learning viewpoint promises a broader perspective for research and practice in instructional design. The diversity of disciplines that are interested in a social or practice learning point of view include linguistics, anthropology, political science, and critical theory among others allow researchers and practitioners to look beyond psychology-based learning theories (Henning 2004: 143).

Case study of journalists' perceptions on learning

The data of this paper are drawn from a survey of journalists at a newspaper situated in a South African city. The site employs more than fifty journalists in various capacities and segments of the organization. Forty-two of them responded to the survey, and their work experience in journalism ranges from eight years in to 44 years. The survey presented respondents with 16 positive statements (given in pages

13-14 below) which they were asked to evaluate in terms of their career experience. Most of the statements were drawn from the findings of earlier conversation analyses of nine 30-minute interviews between senior journalists conducted at the same firm. Each participant had a career spanning more than 15 years. Each was a conversation of the type that might happen in a *natural setting*. The interviews were recorded on audio tape and transcribed using standard notation used in ethnomethodological conversation analysis.

The interviews formed the basis of a research project on 'talk at work' as a constitutive element of journalistic practice; that is talk in the routine, mundane, taken for granted ways that mediate the actions of *doing journalism*. For ethnomethodologists, naturally occurring interaction is the most important part of the everyday work of constructing the social fabric of everyday life, even though our mundane talk and gestures – the slightest and uneventful yet cooperative 'things we do with words' (Austin 1962; Grice 1989; Searle 1969) – are most often "seen but unnoticed" (Garfinkel 1967; Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970; Sacks 1972, 1984). It is the language of the everyday that Michel de Certeau (1984: 199-200) refers to as the "murmuring" of ordinary practices that do not "speak" as of institutional power, but constitute what he calls an "immense remainder" of our experience that is not symbolized in our language. This remainder is concomitantly left obscure in the background (1998: 61), though becoming that mystical dimension that "cannot be dissociated from the system of statements" (1998: 159) that make up the discursive positions of institutional power.

Given the utterly empirical method of CA, the analyst approaches each transcript with an eye towards what the participants in talk-in-interaction are actually *accomplishing*. Questions of ideology, discourse and matters external to the actual event as given in the transcript are vigorously proscribed. We can consider, for example, the following short fragment which occurs early in one of the interviews, where the interactants talk about how the interviewee got into journalism. Perhaps for reasons of not completing a qualification, though perhaps not, the interviewee expresses a view that journalism can only be learned in practice and *in situ*. But the talk-in-interaction also evinces the rare instance where, for the interviewee, being in journalism is a family tradition – even to the point of working for the same firm.

26 V: I I I >I came out from school<

27 G: Ya
28 V: From school
29 G: Ya:,
30 V: And then I went part-time to study:: er::*g* (.) >at
the::
31 TECHnikon< (.) for journalism the problem is
which
32 I couldn't complete (.) and uh::: (.) I feel having a
33 diploma in journalism then did not help you (0.7)
34 in >in the newsroom<
35 G: Ya
36 V: I'm sure you know
37 that as [well::
38 G: [practical exper[ience
39 V: [practical experience is the
40 bes::t >best way to go<
41 (1.0)
42 ya but hav::ing having your first uh:: (.) uh sports story
43 published uh years ago (0.8) that was the highlight for
me.
44 G: Yes
45 V: And you know eh (0.6) an::d (.) more so because I
46 had my father was in journalism.
47 G: Yes
48 V: And uh:: >basically following in his< his
footsteps.
49 G: And your brother's in journal[ism
50 V: [and now >he followed
me<

One thing to notice, firstly, is the amount of tacit knowledge that is displayed, and secondly, that giving an account is not left to one party, but is accomplished cooperatively. G's responses ("Ya", in lines 26-35) to V work towards keeping the V's account going by acknowledging his statements; except that the tone between "Ya" (L27) and "Ya," differs. G partially repeats his reference to "school" (L28), which G interprets as 'trouble', which he acknowledges by saying "Ya" slightly slower, ending in a lower tone of voice, thus *repairing* the interaction.

One of the tenets of CA is a recognition that all talk occurs in adjacent pairs. For example, in the above fragment we see how and lines 26-28 form a first pair part, and line 29 forms the second pair part. Normally minor interjections such as "ya" and "hmm" simply work as if to indicate "next", "keep going", and so on, and are not normally considered a pair part. Another is CA's specific definition of context; which is the participants' own accomplishment rather than a condition outside the talk (although conversation analysts readily acknowledge that talk at an interview and talk

at a restaurant *are* shaped by their respective situations). But the CA understanding of context, we see how V works towards establishing this in lines 30-40. V finesses the problem of not having completed his tertiary journalism education in terms of its benefit to newsroom practice (L30-34), to which G basically says "next". But this will not do. There is something at stake here, and V initiates repair that G is made to complete; which he does by emphasizing the first syllable in "practical experience" (L38). V agrees by means of a partial repeat and extension (L39-40). The one second interval that follows without an interjection from G is significant. The context has been established, and talk may continue unproblematically.[4]

Each transcript in the project had one or more sections in which the participants talk about their experiences as junior reporters. Again, the tacit knowledge is most notable; and from a CA perspective, the cooperative work done in reconstituting the context is plainly evident, as the following fragment indicates. Here we see G initiating a lot of *repair* (L499, 512, 515, 523, 527), but doing so quite phatically in order to confirm the context of their existing alignment on the matter at hand.

499 G: And you think it was different (.) uh fifteen years ago (.)
500 perhaps?
501 T: ↑We::ll fifteen years ago when I started off I mean (.) I
502 don't know if this is any better or when I started (.) when
503 I joined the XXXXX_ I did (0.9)
504 >routine calls< and delivered newspapers everyday
505 (.) for [about .hhh a year
506 G: [ya (.) so did I (.) so did I.
507 T: .hhh and wrote cap::tions =
508 G: = yeah =
509 T: = I can remember begging: the the news editor PLEASE
510 I don't wan- he he told me CAPtions are VERY
511 important I ↑DON'T want to write captions an(h)y .hhh UM,
512 G: So you you had a tough internship,
513 T: (0.8)
514 it was it was VERY [very very tough [(.) I mean nobody -
515 G: [ya [yeah not the kind
516 today perhaps.
517 T: Yaaah (.) I mean nobody thought you were good
518 everybody thought that you were terrible and,
519 G: Yeah =
520 T: = you know that you needed to be taught a lesson.
521 G: Yeah.

[4] Without going to the empirical lengths of interpretation as CA does, deciding the participants' attitude towards practical experience could only be made on the basis of explicit *linguistic* devices – though the field of pragmatics does offer considerable assistance.

522 T: Um
523 G: Woulda (.) would you say journo a uh the thee >sort of<
524 senior journalists the (.) the school you came through was a
525 lot TOUGHer,
526 T: It - =
527 G: = the people were a lot harsher didn't (.) have to
528 worry too much [about what human rights an: =
529 T: [well it was-
530 = yeah:: [absoly
531 G: [listen:: >you got to< you gotta klap
532 with [this,
533 T: [Yeah:: (.) but (.) but also because the newsrooms
534 didn't really need you (0.7) cause they had ↑good
535 newsrooms and they had lots of senior people,
536 G: Ya

Drawing from an analysis of all the transcripts, and selecting segments such as the above – where the participants cooperatively build their agreement on *situated learning* (Lave 1988: 25ff) – I compiled a list of statements and presented these in the form of a questionnaire to be completed by as many journalists as possible at the same site. A few were completed by journalists in other sites, but all worked for the same firm. Eleven statements came directly from *positive* assessments in the interviews. The remainder (4, 6, 7, 12, 13) were added as inversions of negative assessments. The statements were as follows:

1. My most important learning experience came during a casual conversation with a colleague in the newsroom.
2. I learned most about being a journalist when my news editor (or other line manager) criticised my work performance.
3. My most influential learning experience came from observing the work habits of a colleague(s) who was more accomplished than I was.
4. My most important lesson came during my tertiary training (Tech, Univ.) before I began my career.
5. The lesson(s) that improved my expertise most came from a senior reporter who was my effective mentor.
6. My expertise improved most significantly after I attended a training event conducted on site (at my place of work).
7. The lesson that impressed me most came during a casual conversation with a colleague(s) after work (e.g., in the pub).
8. My most important lesson came when, having made a mistake, a colleague (of equal rank) corrected me.
9. The lesson that improved my performance most came when my news editor (or other line manager) explained to me what I was regularly doing wrong.
10. My most important learning experience came when I was assigned a task(s) that I found to be particularly repetitive, difficult and/or unpleasant (e.g. lots

of caption writing, or subbing fillers).

11. My best learning experience came when I worked on one or more projects as a relatively junior member of an investigative team.
12. A positive turning point in my career came when I wrote or did something (work related) for which I (could have or nearly) lost my job.
13. My expertise improved most after I was sent on a training course (or sabbatical, long assignment, etc.) mid-career.
14. My expertise improved most after a senior reporter (not one I considered a mentor) corrected me for something I was doing wrong, or not doing well.
15. My expertise in journalism was improved by working on a specific story (or news beat, or specialisation) that presented a particular set of challenges that are not usually found in general reporting.
16. My expertise improved after I received an award (or some form of recognition) as a journalist.

Respondents were asked to score each statement according to a standard Likert Scale ranging from "true in my experience" (5) to "untrue" (1). Forty two journalists responded to the survey.[5] The cumulative results are given in the tables below, showing in the left table a summation in percentages of all the respondents, and in the right-hand table combining the agreement and disagreement scores.

	1	2	3	4	5	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
1	3	9	11	13	6	12	11	19	
2	3	8	3	16	12	11	3	28	
3	3	1	5	12	21	4	5	33	←
4	13	6	7	11	5	19	7	16	←
5	3	3	4	17	15	6	4	32	←
6	2	11	14	13	2	13	14	15	
7	7	12	12	8	3	19	12	11	
8	5	5	10	17	5	10	10	22	
9	3	5	3	21	10	8	3	31	←
10	9	12	6	11	4	21	6	15	
11	6	4	15	12	5	10	15	17	
12	14	9	10	5	4	23	10	9	
13	10	9	10	7	6	19	10	13	
14	4	8	11	17	2	12	11	19	
15	1	5	5	18	13	6	5	31	←
16	12	5	10	10	5	17	10	15	
	98	112	136	208	118	210	136	326	

The right-hand table (simplest for our purposes) indicates a number of common attitudes towards learning. For instance, for the fourth statement we see an almost equal distribution of strong opinions expressed on both ends of the spectrum (19, 16). Respondents were asked whether, prior to entering their journalism careers, they had

[5] As a breakdown, 15 of the respondents were women, and 27 were men. Other distinctions were: 14 entered their journalism careers having first attained a tertiary qualification in journalism, 16 had attained a different tertiary qualification (e.g., B.Sc, B.A.), 5 had not completed their tertiary studies, and 6 had matric.

acquired a tertiary journalism qualification, completed any other qualification (such as a Bachelor of Arts degree), had completed some tertiary study, or had completed secondary school. Comparing the category of journalism graduates with a category of other graduates and those who had not completed their degrees or diplomas (irrespective of whether these were in journalism) with journalism graduates feeling slightly more positive than the remaining respondents about the value of their tertiary education in their careers.

	1	2	3	4	5		Agree	Neut.	Disagreee
Journalism tertiary	2	4	2	4	2	n=14	6	2	6
Non-journalism tertiary	8	1	4	7	2	n=22	9	4	9
N = 36									

Supposing there was considered to be no warranted difference between those who agreed, and those who disagreed, and these figures were combined. Using a Chi-square analysis we see that the difference between the two categories (journalism and other graduates) could hardly be less significant ($p = 0.95408$). Furthermore, by excluding the neutral respondents the p-value becomes 1. Of more significance, even at first sight, are the responses given to statements 3, 5, 9 and 15. These statements concern (3) learning through observing a more accomplished and experienced colleague (78.57% agreeing completely), (5) learning through being mentored by a senior reporter (76.19%), (9) learning through in being corrected by a superior (73.81%), and (15) improving one's reporting skills by working on a non-routine story or similarly challenging task (73.81%). While each statement across all cases has a mean score of 4.119, 3.905, 3.881 and 3.714 respectively, the question becomes how random these scores might be across the entire sample. That is, how uniformly does each respondent agree or disagree with all four statements?

No.	3	5	15	9	Mean	
14	5.000	5.000	5.000	4.000	4.750	Highest 50% of those respondents who agreed with statement 3, without reservation
16	5.000	5.000	5.000	4.000	4.750	
24	5.000	5.000	5.000	4.000	4.750	
34	5.000	4.000	5.000	5.000	4.750	
5	5.000	5.000	4.000	4.000	4.500	
20	5.000	5.000	4.000	4.000	4.500	
26	5.000	4.000	4.000	5.000	4.500	
28	5.000	4.000	4.000	5.000	4.500	
25	5.000	5.000	3.000	5.000	4.500	
17	5.000	5.000	4.000	3.000	4.250	
27	5.000	4.000	4.000	4.000	4.250	
33	5.000	4.000	4.000	4.000	4.250	Lowest 50% of those who agreed without reservation.
43	5.000	5.000	3.000	4.000	4.250	
19	5.000	5.000	2.000	5.000	4.250	
37	5.000	5.000	2.000	5.000	4.250	
42	5.000	1.000	5.000	5.000	4.000	
7	5.000	4.000	5.000	1.000	3.750	
32	5.000	4.000	4.000	2.000	3.750	
29	5.000	4.000	2.000	4.000	3.750	
31	5.000	2.000	5.000	2.000	3.500	
4	5.000	2.000	2.000	4.000	3.250	
22	4.000	5.000	5.000	4.000	4.500	Highest 50% of respondents who agreed with reservations, or disagreed.
13	4.000	5.000	5.000	3.000	4.250	
23	4.000	4.000	5.000	4.000	4.250	
1	4.000	4.000	4.000	5.000	4.250	
8	4.000	4.000	4.000	5.000	4.250	
15	4.000	4.000	4.000	4.000	4.000	
12	3.000	4.000	4.000	5.000	4.000	
9	4.000	3.000	4.000	4.000	3.750	
11	3.000	5.000	5.000	2.000	3.750	
18	3.000	3.000	5.000	4.000	3.750	
36	1.000	5.000	5.000	4.000	3.750	
3	4.000	3.000	4.000	3.000	3.500	Lowest 50% of those who held reservations or disagreed with statement 3.
21	4.000	4.000	2.000	4.000	3.500	
10	3.000	3.000	4.000	4.000	3.500	
30	3.000	4.000	3.000	4.000	3.500	
38	4.000	1.000	4.000	4.000	3.250	
6	4.000	4.000	3.000	2.000	3.250	
39	4.000	4.000	3.000	2.000	3.250	
2	1.000	5.000	1.000	4.000	2.750	
40	2.000	1.000	4.000	1.000	2.000	
41	1.000	2.000	4.000	1.000	2.000	
	4.119	3.905	3.881	3.714	Mean score by all statements	
	5.000	4.143	3.857	3.952	Mean of upper 50% of cases	

N=42

The table ranks all 42 cases in descending order according to its mean score across the four statements. On statement 3 the sample coincidentally divides into 50 percent agreeing without reservation, and the remainder regarding the statement with reservations. The remaining columns 5, 15 and 9 are arranged according to their

descending mean scores. Fifteen, 13 and 10 respondents agreed to these without reservation.

As the table shows (and as a scalogram would illustrate), there appears to be no pattern of entailment between these statements. While the upper 50 percent (determined by mean score) of those who agree that they learned most about journalism through observing a better skilled colleague show a high level of agreement with the other statements, the lower 50 percent evinces a far lesser prospect of there being any entailment between these statements – and even less so than the second to lowest quartile. One might even suspect that a significant difference exists between the quartiles according to categories of those who utterly agreed with statement 3 and those who did not. But a Chi-square analysis with the average of the means of each of the upper two quartiles constituting the experimental group, and the average of the means of the lower two making up the control group, $p = 0.9739$, which 'in all probability' is barely more statistically significant than the probability found between journalism and non-journalism graduates in the same sample. This would appear to indicate a high degree of uniformity between the four statements across the entire range of 42 cases. This finding is barely more significant when comparing the average means of each quartile in statement 3 with the combined mean scores of statements 5, 15 and 9. $X^2 = 0.326$ and $p = 0.9551$.

Exploring the sample further, were we to combine all respondents' attitudes towards the value of the tertiary education in relation to their opinions of their experience of learning in work-related situations, and to consider statement 3 as an index of learning at work, we begin to see something of statistical significance in the data. If we compare responses to statements 3 and 4, and combine the scores into groups of agreement and disagreement (excluding those cases that entered journalism after secondary school), we get a Chi-square of $X^2 = 9.888$ with two degrees of freedom, or $p = 0.007126$, which is *highly* significant.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
Statement 4	15	6	15	n = 36
Statement 3	27	5	4	n = 36

It would be mistaken to conclude from these findings that a tertiary education, at least in the opinions of journalists, serves no benefit in embarking on such a career.

For a start, the six respondents who had gone into journalism 'straight from school' had been in the practice for between 21 and 44 years. It is also understandable that they should have given statement 3 a score of 4 or 5; and given correspondingly low score to statement 4. Furthermore, the survey did specifically ask for the respondent's education *before* entering journalism, and not for any subsequent qualifications. Again, the five respondents who had completed *some* tertiary training before beginning their careers may have completed these since then.[6] The same may apply to those in the secondary school category. But irrespective of these differences, the overwhelming majority of the sample went into journalism *with tertiary experience*, and the consequent capacity for *learning* that tertiary *experience* improves.

Praxis and lingering dualism

A study that stands out in the (admittedly 'historical') literature on journalism education is Warren Breed's (1955) important paper of its time, *Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis*.[7] Breed's study, set in the 1950's sociological climate of Robert Merton's structural functionalism (Reese and Ballinger 2001: 644-645, 648ff). Breed's study sets out to explain how it is that journalists (ostensibly from different backgrounds) come to conform to a particular newspaper's editorial policy. The process of socialization, or 'learning the ropes', is accomplished "by osmosis" in much the same way that a neophyte gets admitted to the core values and practices of a subculture (Breed 1955: 328). More commonly-speaking, this amounts to *learning by experience,* which half the respondents in the data of this study agreed had been the single most influential way by which they had learned to become journalists.

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[6] There has been more recently an interest among journalists to complete an MBA, causing some concern about how these qualifications may alter the character of newsrooms into a conflict zone between 'green eye-shades' and 'chi-squares'. Among the effects is to see news values shift from journalistic instinct to a marketing strategy designed on reader preferences to increase sales and circulation. The issue is less over whether journalists are reduced to 'copy donkeys' churning out the nearest thing to advertorial than it is an issue of breeching the line between publics and publicity. Journalism as a 'profession of violence' is emasculated to a 'smiling profession' akin to advertising, public relations and marketing communication (Hartley 1992: 119ff).

[7] See Gaye Tuchman's (1973) equally important criticism of Breed's functionalist paradigm, and much more recently Stephanie Craft and Wayne Wanta's (2004) study on the impact of woman editors on gatekeeping and editorial policy. For a copy of the thesis from which Breed's paper derives, see *The Newspaperman, News, and Society* (1980). It is an indication of the significance of Breed's (1955) paper that his 1952 dissertation remained topical enough to warrant its publication in book form in 1980. Furthermore, Breed's paper was reprinted in Daniel Berkowitz's anthology of definitive papers in studies of the news media, *Social Meanings of News* (1979).

The idea that learning is best done 'by experience' is, however, such common sense that one tends to give it little thought beyond simply admitting that experience entails 'learning by doing', 'learning *in situ*', and similar actions. We may even add that this kind of learning is about *praxis*. This might be so for the fact that we entertain this thought while leaving intact dualistic assumptions by which we too easily accept the separations of *abstract*[8] theory and *concrete* world. This assumption is inherent in the belief that we "learn by *experience*" (and gain mental *impressions* of things otherwise), which reinstates the Cartesian subject-world dualism that was quite alien to the Aristotelian root of the term *praxis* (see Bernstein 1983: 40-44). The Marxist and critical pedagogist Paolo Freire (1970) is perhaps best known for his work on *praxis*-based education, which involves action and reflection in contexts of knowing. The problem with this formulation remains how, within a Cartesian legacy, one articulates *praxis*?[9] Mary Breunig (2005) provides a description of praxis that, I think, betrays precisely the problem I have in mind:

> Knowledge has historicity; it is always in the process of being. If absolute knowledge could be attained, the possibility of knowing would disappear for there would no longer be any questions to ask or problems to solve. Praxis, therefore, starts with an abstract idea (theory) or an experience, and incorporates reflection upon that idea or experience and then translates it into purposeful action. Praxis is reflective, active, creative, contextual, purposeful, and socially constructed (Breunig 2005: 111).

There is little if anything to fault Breunig's description of praxis as progressing in a circular motion from reflection to action, where "theory informs practice, while experiential and practical knowledge can be employed as a means to understanding and interpreting that theory" (Breunig 2005: 109). What comes to mind is what Donald Schön (1983) refers to as the *reflective practitioner*, being that individual who reflects upon or tries to make sense of his or her own experience during the course of ordinary living. Effective learning requires *reflection*, writes Marilyn Daudelin (1996) in a paper that includes in its range an interest in how business organizations nowadays embrace learning as a necessary tool to retain their competitive edge. But the kind of 'learning by reflection' that Daudelin refers to remains thoroughly steeped in the Cartesian legacy:

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[8] Theorizing is based on the Greek root *theoria*, meaning *way of seeing*. Abstracting has as one meaning the search for or distillation of essence or structure. Whenever someone utters a generality, they give evidence of abstracting of generalizing, and hence theorizing. What they say tells us as much about their current way of seeing as it does about what they see.

[9] See Bowers and Apffel-Marglin (2005: 160-161).

> Reflection is a highly personal cognitive process. When a person engages in reflection, he or she takes an experience from the outside world, brings it inside the mind, turns it over, makes connections to other experiences, and filters it through personal biases, if this process results in learning, the individual then develops inferences to approach the external world in a way that is different from the approach that would have been used, had reflection not occurred (Daudelin 1996: 39).

I may be unfair to Breunig, but I suspect that, at base, there is little preventing an alignment between her's and Daudelin's more obviously dualistic description of reflection in learning. By separating mind 'in here' from a world 'out there', both eventually share a common lineage to those intellectualist approaches to learning that separate learning theory from doing practice; and expect one to lead to the other. The Cartesian mould that shapes this perspective has, at least until recently, received intellectual support from cognitive science and cognitive psychology. With cognitive structures seen to be 'inside the head', knowledge becomes a tool 'inside' that may be applied to problems 'outside' (see Zahavi 2005). A way out of this dualistic dilemma is found in *practice theory*.

Situated learning

Dualism, to use the title of William Uttal's (2004) book, is "the original sin of cognitivism;" and to date, as Stephen Billett (2001: 431) points out, "views about expertise have largely been a product of theorising within cognitive psychology." An alternative non-dualist perspective rejects the Western (and Freirean) tradition of locating intelligence in the observing, reflecting individual, that has been gaining ground in educational discourse since at least the late 1980s, has increasingly projected mind *into* social practice (Lave 1990; Lave and Wenger 1991; Scribner 1984). A central claim of *situated cognition* and the approach to (situated) learning that it entails is that all action, including learning, is "grounded in the concrete situation in which it occurs" (Anderson, Reder and Simon 1996: 6). The thinking behind this view generally coheres within the turn to practice in social theory (see Schatzki *et al*. 2001), where the term "practice" is defined more or less as the routine, everyday activities of a group of people who share a common interpretive community (Wenger 1998: 45-49). However, other influences stem significantly from the body of

work by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1962, 1978), and certainly beyond, including the work of Michael Polanyi (see Hung 1999).[10]

The situational learning theory that has followed recent empirical work on the learning of vocational skills in workplaces not only challenges the Cartesian legacy in traditional education theory, but does so by positing a more thorough-going *praxis* approach to learning from experience that advocates learning as situated within communities of practice (Wenger 1989: 137-139), and which is premised on the inseparability of relationships between individuals' largely *tacit* knowing and the social worlds in which they think and act (Brown, Collins and Duguid 1989: 32-33; Brown and Duguid 2001: 203-206). It is imperative to note here, as Jean Lave and Ettiene Wenger (1991: 35) write, that "learning is not merely situated in practice – as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world."

The community of practice construct is one of the most well-known ideas to emerge from the discussion of situated cognition and situated learning. The authors define community of practice as "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger: 1991: 98). A community of practice, accordingly, is a set of relations among persons, activity and world that effectively provides the cultural, historical and linguistic support that makes it possible to "know" the particular heritage that defines knowledgeable practice. Participation in practice is "an epistemological principle of learning" (Lave and Wenger: 1991: 98). In short, both learners and context are inseparable parts of the phenomenon of learning.

There is a range of studies that advocate a practice-based approach to learning (Chaiklin and Lave 1993; Harper and Hughes 1993; Suchman 1988). These studies do vary, but each erases the dichotomy between tertiary learning and the apprenticeship learning that occurs in industry among other places. The 'dichotomy' here refers also to the fundamental inner/outer logic that informs the theory/practice bifurcation that so easily translates as learning and working (see Taylor 2002). Learning from a

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[10] An inkling of the philosophical grounds of this approach is provided towards the start of this paper, and anything more adequate – which ought to consider the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty among other thinkers – would go beyond the bounds of this paper.

practice-based approach is always situated in a particular site of practice such as a newsroom, a tertiary institution, and even at home (Lave and Wenger 1991: 38-39).

Organised efforts to instill learning are not privileged in any way, and stand only as one instance of learning equal to all others.[11] The assumption is that all learning is situated irrespective of whether this occurs in formal or informal settings (Lave 1988: 25ff). For Lave, "learning is ubiquitous in ongoing activity" as "situated activity always involves changes in knowledge and action" (Lave 1993: 5). All learning is social at its base, and involves a dialectical production of individual and group identities.

A central idea of the situated learning perspective is the way in which individuals form identities as members of communities of practice. The concept of *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave and Wenger 1991) most cogently expresses this connection. Lave and Wenger (1991) use the term to characterize the "member's methods" (or ethnomethods) by which people in sites of practice participate in increasingly knowledgeable ways that mutually transform both individual identities and the organizations to which they belong. The concept draws attention to the process of moving from being a newcomer among a group of other practitioners "toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29). The term does not necessarily imply that the members are co-present or even are an easily identifiable group. It does not even imply that participation happens without conflict (Lave 1993: 116; Linehan and McCarthy 2001). What it does imply, for Lave and Wenger, is that participation in a common 'complex system' of activity in which participants recognize their shared understandings (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98).

Newcomers to the group – such as cub reporters joining a newsroom – would eventually become old-timers by virtue of the fact that they are permitted *by access to practice* to participate in the actual practices of the group. The eventual transformation in identity that arises in the individual participant occurs in an outward change of perspective as he or she moves from legitimately doing and learning on the

[11] In some respects, tertiary learning, where it is coupled with mass teaching and an institutionally-prescribed pass rate can render as its only outcome the technique of cramming and writing tests. Autopoetically-speaking, learning how to ingest and to regurgitate upon command abstract details in the context of an exam venue is more likely to develop selves inclined towards 'answering questions' than towards solving problems. It is a form of flea training that has almost no currency in the workplace.

fringes of the community, and eventually moving towards the centre and playing an increasingly central role in its purposes.

> Learning is viewed, in this perspective, as the ongoing and evolving creation of identity and the production and reproduction of social practices both in school and out that permit social groups, and the individuals in these groups, to maintain commensal relations that promote the life of the group (Henning 2004: 143).

It is important to emphasise – as opposed to the one-way transformation inferred in Warren Breed's (1955) study – that the formation of individual identity by the process of ever increasing participation in a community of practice is a *dialectical* process of change that occurs also in the organization as a whole as the new generation of members joins the community of practice. This idea is not foreign to the field of experiential education: "Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had" (Dewey 1938: 39). Implicit in this 'changing of the guard' is the introduction of new ideas and practices that change the collective identity of the community of practice. The relation between increasing individual participation and changes in the community as a whole involves a dynamic interaction between individuals and community (Linehan and McCarthy 2001).

This view of learning may, to the Western Cartesian mindset, come across as refreshingly new. But it was from research among West African apprentice tailors that Jean Lave (1977) discovered it. This practice of situated learning is certainly not limited to that locale.

> For example, in Zen instruction, students may spend long periods of apprenticeship apparently doing irrelevant or menial tasks in the presence of the master, only to find much later that they have actually integrated certain awarenesses into their being without being aware of the process (Mason 1993: 124).

Conclusion

What are the consequences are of pursuing a social theory of learning rather than an individual and (cognitive) psychological theory that has been the norm in educational and psychological research? Rather than focusing on an acquisition of knowledge as 'knowing that', a social practice approach to learning pays attention to the ways in which learners, members, employees and others become full-fledged participants in their communities of practice. It also pays attention to the ways in which they change and the ways in which their communities of practice change as a

result. Peter Senge's (1990) work on "learning organizations" has brought this second part of the linkage to a level where it has become a current imaginary of progressive management. But the value of this viewpoint is not limited to workplace organizations. Situated cognition is not specific to learning in industry. It is an aspect of *all learning*.

The concept of legitimate peripheral participation provides a way of interpreting the dominant perception among participants in the survey conducted for this paper that they learned more about journalism by observing a more accomplished peer than they did through abstract and decontextualized instruction. Certainly the rewards and outcomes of such learning are more immediate than one would expect to gain in a tertiary learning context. Also, the belief that all learning occurs *in experience* gains some purchase in Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of learning in practice. But perhaps the most appealing part of the concept is the way it provides an imaginary of learning in context, and more so provides a "way of seeing" (or theory) of many journalists' experience of how they learned their craft.

The statements drawn up in the questionnaire presented to the journalists in the news firm surveyed for this paper were distilled from lengthy interviews between senior journalists at the same site. Certainly one could question the accuracy, or selective memory, behind the claims in those interviews that the junior reporters among them are 'worse' than they were when they first started. It is difficult to tell. What did come across, however, was the sincere appreciation of the mentorship they had received as newcomers to the practice. Whether or not there were proportionately as many senior reporters fifteen or twenty years ago than there are in newsrooms today – as more than one interviewee claimed – could be a reflection of the sheer pressure of *having to learn fast* in a community of practice such as one traditionally finds in journalism. Many recalled 'doing the beats' during their early years; getting told what to do, and being told at least what they doing wrong if not 'doing right'. In short, they *participated legitimately on the periphery* of their communities of practice. As each one progressed, he or she moved towards the centre of the community, taking on more demanding and responsible tasks. Together with each one's promotion up the order came an inevitable change in identity. Eventually, they too were to become mentors to the new generation of reporters in their midst. That, at least, was the

tradition in which they had learned their craft. It is a pity that each one agreed this practice was a 'thing of the past'.

Finally, what has *legitimate peripheral participation* really got to offer journalism education and training? Fortunately I do not have to 'invent the wheel' here; and I am not about to reinvent it either. There is much journalism research that supports the general thrust of this paper. I shall limit myself to two papers by two Australian academics, Beate Josephi (1999) and Lynette Sheridan Burns (2004), whose work overlaps considerably with this paper.

Josephi's study of young journalism graduates entering the workplace shows that their professional education did not "stop at the college gate;" nor did it begin at the doorway of the newsroom. The questions Josephi (1999: 78) asked her sample were much more pointed than the statements used in this paper, though in many respects interlock with them. One thing the sample agreed on was the utter difference between the newsroom and journalism school (79); but what is heartening is reading how these newcomers were systematically introduced to the practice, meeting the world according to *The West Australian*, "meeting the major players and institutions … from leaders of the Aboriginal community to major industries" (79). *Legitimate peripheral participation*, like a newspaper itself, is not restricted to within the walls of a newsroom. Journalism is not only *about* the world, but *in* and *of* it. Journalism training ought to be similar.

Burns's (2004) paper shadows my own more closely (at least, vice versa). "When journalists engage in 'shop talk about a colleague's great story, they are actually critically reflecting on what makes that story so admirable," she writes (2004: 6), adding with reference to Lave and Wenger (1991) the note that "this dialogue [is] a feature of the 'community of practice' to which journalists belong" (2004: 6). But what kind of being would 'naturally' or more easily take part in such a community? Burns's response is one trained in problem-based learning, "based on the view that for active learning to promote life-long learning skills, students must develop, in a structured way, a process for understanding and evaluating what they do and why they do it in certain ways" (2004: 7). Adding to this an autopoetic twist, it is the whole person and not his or her intellectual faculties alone that learn the dispositions that favour a life in journalism. This, if anything, is probably more the purpose of journalism training than it is to impart techniques that might be useful in a newsroom.

More importantly, if *situational cognition* is taken seriously, it is in journalism school as a community of practice that the neophyte begins, first peripherally, eventually centrally, to develop the expertise in participation that makes life-long learning more than mere imitation.

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