Critical to the core: shifting the paradigm to a professional praxis model in an introductory journalism reporting and writing course

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Abbreviated Abstract:

The place of critical theory in North American journalism education remains contested and appears to be largely addressed within the communications and journalism studies' discourses as the "theory-practice gap". On the critical side, it is quite clear that considerable empirical evidence exists to support the claim that professional mainstream journalism regularly fails to deliver upon its democratic mandate. However, few of the calls for media reform make clear what journalism educators might do to rectify the shortfall. While some have called for more critical theory within journalism schools, whose theory, how and where should it appear? Who should claim responsibility for that epistemic component of journalism education and how is it to be further marshaled or disciplined within a largely normative, instrumentalist culture? What might the risks and rewards be of pushing these two worlds within journalism education closer together and how might that be done considering the agencies and identities of the faculty members? What incentives or barriers exist to their intellectual engagement in this process of re-imagination? Finally, if all these things are considered, what might journalism education look like if it were, indeed, critical to the core?

This conceptual paper begins the process of engaging these questions by starting with the last and working backward. Using three iterations of a single course's syllabus as artifacts, this paper engages in a retrospective and reflective analysis of an intentional decision in 2006 by journalist educators in one program to bring theory directly to bear upon an introductory, practical reporting and writing course. The result was a paradigm shift for the educators from one of instrumental technical training to a more intellectual, knowledge-building orientation toward teaching journalism – a shift, I argue, that fomented a culture in which practitioner-scholars worked cooperatively to build a theory of *practice* for journalism. The case addresses some of the practices and pitfalls for educational leadership to consider when asking faculty break with norms in order to begin the process of 'thinking through' critical theory, as academics and journalists (professionals both). As the author reveals, such a shift raised questions about the journalist's identity, location and power as educators within institutions of higher learning.

Introduction:

I once sat at a national meeting of journalism program directors and we were discussing the idea of surveying students within our schools. The possibility of asking about gender, race and class was raised, to which one program head responded "oh, that critical stuff." This paper is about "that critical stuff" – the contemporary 'ways of knowing' that continue to be generated by scholars located throughout the wider

academy in reaction and response to the tenets of modernism and positivism.[1] Specifically, it is about journalism education's relationship to critical theory and postmodernist thought; a relationship embodied and enacted daily by journalist-educators and traditional scholars as they circulate and interact within universities in either embrace of or resistance to knowledge critical of normative journalism practice and its service to democratic society.[2]

This "theory-practice gap," comes into sharp relief for journalism education leaders considering how to advance journalism education on the professional "skills" side of the curriculum. With the industry morphing under economic pressure and technological advancement, how might journalism programs re-orient pedagogical practices and adapt curriculum so that we no longer socialize journalists into replicas of our former selves – trained to do the jobs we'd held before? How do we give them the tools to be a new generation of self-actualizing innovators, capable of maintaining professional relevance in rapidly changing societal, industrial and democratic contexts? Further, how might we begin to evaluate and adapt the practical side of our programs in light of the critiques regarding the effectiveness of our practices, generated by the critical contemporary research scholars? In other words, how do we, as practitioners, move toward generating a theory of our own – a theory of *practice* for journalism?

What is interesting is how little practical journalism training has changed over the years, despite decades of scholarly critique of both practice and product. (Mensing, 2010) Starting in the 1970s with the sociological studies of newswork through to content analyses of increasing analytic sophistication, critical scholars continue to demonstrate, empirically and routinely, how short journalism falls from its declared democratic goals to serve the public and give voice to the powerless. (Zelizer, 2005; Anderson, 2007; Schudson & Anderson, 2009; Jensen, 2009) Journalism as a scholarly field has evolved into rich tributaries of media studies and journalism studies. (Josephi, 2009) Practitioners have asserted from the field a need to re-vitalize journalism's democratic mandate through movements like the Committee of Concerned Journalists and public journalism. (Merritt, 1998; Kovach and Rosensteil, 2001)

How is it that Gans is able to claim that journalism maintains the same news judgement in 2004 as it had a century earlier? (Gans, 2004 as quoted by Anderson, 2007) What to make of Mensing's 2010 assessment that textbooks haven't changed since the late 1930s, students may still expect to be taught a singular 'correct' ways to write and report and that pedagogy remains centred around replicative rehearsal within an industry-focused culture that essentially separates theory from practice? (Mensing, 2010) And what to make of the democratic shortfall staked clearly within critical theoretical perspectives that gaze at our world from a range of standpoints, including race, sex, gender, ethnicity, class, and their many intersectionalities?

Yet, journalism as a professional practice claims to be fundamentally and inextricably tied to the pursuit of the democratic project, such that "whatever else journalism might be or do, it should embody the values that make collective life of free citizens possible." (Adam and Clarke, 2006; p. xviii) Devising ways to *do* that work better seems most logically the bailiwick of those journalists educating future practitioners within the academy. Other professions engaged deeply into self-definition and self-actualization projects in order to better understand how professionals make decisions and evolve practice, in light of theory, over time. (Schon, 1983, 1987; Rolf, 1993; Green, 2009) And this is, in many ways, a public expectation of those who claim a "professional" stance. In the practice of medicine, for example, one anticipates a

professional responsibility to change or halt training in any practice should evidence arise that demonstrates the practice causes a patient harm. But we have not brought this to the core of basic practice, continuing to remain silent about context and subjectivities when techniques are on the table. Basic keyword searches reveal scant scholarly attention has been paid to journalism expertise, compared to expertise in science. (Anderson, 2007)

It raises the possibility of an interpersonal challenge. Is it even possible to raise these issues in the mock newsroom with any safety? Like the old jokes about changing a lightbulb, what good are democratic leadership initiatives within journalism education if journalists themselves don't *want* to change?

This paper seeks to contribute to the literature by reviewing analytically one case in which considerable change did happen. It follows the evolution of a single journalism introductory course in reporting and writing within an undergraduate journalism program in Ontario, Canada housed at a liberal arts campus dedicated to interdisciplinarity. [3] Faculty assigned to "team-teach" the course engaged in a process to re-imagine a critically-contextualized, theoretically-grounded "practical" skills course for journalism. Initially taught in an atheoretical, "technical skills" manner typical of traditional programs, a leadership initiative was informally launched in 2006 to see if we could take up the challenge within the recent journalism education literature to make the course "more scholarly" and bridge the theory-practice gap. (Skinner, Gasher & Compton, 2001; Gasher, 2005)

What resulted prompts me to emphasize a keyword central to retrospective analysis of that experience – *change.* Our initial pedagogical instinct was to draw from the familiar longstanding critiques of media and incorporate theoretical reading material that was addressed in the lecture side of the course's structure. The course met weekly for a two-hour plenary lecture taught by any one of the three faculty, followed by another session in which students were subdivided into three workshops set in a computer lab and assigned one consistent faculty member for lab instruction.

The creation of a space for practitioners to engage in active knowledge-building and exploration has the potential to lead headlong into the long-standing minefields between positivist and contemporary ways of knowing. Reflecting back, I realize our process itself engendered intellectual growth for those practitioners who were attracted to the idea. Such a space has the potential to lead journalists along much of the incremental journey of discovery blazed long before by many in social science and professional fields who also sought the "whys" and "hows" of more honest and effective practice. But doing the journey with a democratic imperative in mind leads journalism directly around the "turn" to gaze back through the lenses provided by post-modernist critical theoretical standpoints. (Clarke, 2005) Like it or not, the course was now "critical" to the core.

To recount this experience, I summarize three course syllabi from the first, second and fifth iterations of the course in question, treating them as institutional 'texts' subject to analysis. I chose these three iterations because I participated in the creation of these documents as team member on the second and fifth iterations of the course and sole instructor on the first. Critical theories of democratic education, professional practice, qualitative sociological methods, and the sociology of science provide useful analytic lenses beyond the journalism literature for interpretation. I conclude by arguing that our case suggests it is possible within journalism education to initiate change that brings theory and practice

together on the "professional practice" side of the curriculum. It can be, however, a complex philosophical undertaking. The process revealed many institutional, cultural, epistemological and pedagogical questions along the way that bear further study. This paper offers an initial broad overview.

Theoretical Assumptions:

First, it should be stated that I bring two assumptions to bear. First, I assume that Western journalism (and, by extension, journalism education) needs to change its practices at this point in history if it is to remain relevant and useful in its service to democratic society. For decades, scholars have been suggesting journalism education needs to be enriched, usually framed as a call to bring journalism more in line with the wider academy (Raudsepp, 1989; Adam, 1988, 2001, 2007; Deuze, 2001; Gasher, 2005; Zelizer, 2005, 2009; Dates, 2007; Jensen, 2009). The debate is also often constructed in binary, adversarial terms, between "skills" and "theory." (Deuze, 2001; Skinner, Gasher & Compton, 2001; Parisi, Zelizer, 2009) And while I believe firmly that this is, in reality, experienced as a blend in differing proportions by people teaching journalism, creating a continuum rather than a binary along which most practitioner-scholars can fall in, I will set that aside and presume practitioners to be on "one side" and scholars to be on the "other".

Second, I assume that the work that journalists do in professional practice includes intellectual (rather than strictly technical) labour with an explicit orientation to public service. This brings journalism in keeping with the literature surrounding training and education for the professions, although I do not argue whether it is a *bona fide* profession itself, nor do I elaborate upon the practice literature here. Much of journalism labour in mainstream settings was found to be highly routinized intellectually (Tuchman, 1978), and most journalism programs organize "skills" of practice in instrumental terms (platforms and formats) (Deuze, 2001). Practical teaching, therefore, has not been historically reflexive or deliberative about the choices journalists make and why, and training is not seen as academic or intellectual work as much as preparation for a 'trade' or 'craft'. (Raudsepp, 1989; Medsger, 2009; Adam and Clarke, 2006) Where it is seen as more intellectual, journalism practice has been framed as a creative "art" (Adam and Clarke, 2006; p.346), where a talent for writing or having a "nose for news" makes it discursively possible to step aside deeper scrutiny of why or how one develops these gifts.

Lastly, I note my own theoretical approach is coming from critical perspectives within the higher education literature on critical democratic leadership. Critical educators are particularly interested in democracy and civic engagement, making this literature of particular relevance to journalists seeking means by which to address our practice in times of change. (Kincheloe, 1999) Theories of practice that use a critical analytic lens typically identify professional intellectual labour as reflexive praxis. (Guba and Lincoln, 2005) This orientation goes beyond the more common concept of reflective practice (as defined by Schon, 1983) that did advance professional work to thinking and learning in action. Reflexive praxis goes further by engaging the researcher in action, often declared ethical and political commitments to make systemic improvements based upon professional knowledge and the power of one's location. For public-centred professions, this could mean taking action, where possible, to correct for injustices or inequities caused by one's professional work structures and systems toward the betterment of pluralist/multicultural societies. (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; p. 201; Friere, 1998; Heaney, 1995)

Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Clarke (2005) note that it is common across the academy for individuals to struggle across incommensurate intellectual paradigms. Yet the clash of ideology is not commonly raised within journalism education. (Josephi, 2009) One's paradigm is the basic set of beliefs that will determine what questions, methods, knowledge, and ethics one legitimates in disciplined inquiry. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; p. 183) It is fair to claim that journalism practice adheres to norms drawn from modernist and positivist worldviews. (Schudson and Anderson, 2009)

Evidence of a clash might be diagnosed by the efforts journalists use to keep critical scholars and thought at bay. This boundary-making (Gieryn, 1983) is seen as the means by which scholars delineate to others where they lie by making claims about what they are not. Perhaps comments like "that critical stuff" signals a firm location on the "other side". And that side has its own norms and expectations regarding teaching.

The thorny question of critical thought in journalism appears to have been dropped at the feet of the liberal arts. Reflecting upon journalism education, Mitchell Stephens specifically suggests that "critique and practice can be combined in journalism courses" and "journalism students, even in practical courses, should read more" (Stephens, 2006). Both he and Stephen Reese (1999) advance arguments in favour of greater interdisciplinarity in journalism education, since "journalism inevitably finds itself discussing issues studied by other disciplines in the university." (Stephens, 2006; p. 151). But specifics about what might be read are few. Critically-oriented advocates of reflexive praxis out of the Marxist tradition of political economy suggest students be engaged in questioning the influence of a for-profit orientation to their craft (Skinner, et al., 2001) but Macdonald notes the challenge this poses to liberal-pluralist assumptions that tend to dominate mainstream journalism culture. (Macdonald, 2006) Rare is a deliberate attempt to address the issue at the macro level of disciplines and paradigms and map out where people "are coming from"—what skills are coming from what perspective and why or why not that might matter.

Clarke notes that while many fields and disciplines across the academy and in the arts have taken the "turn", many of these same advances within social science and professional field knowledge tend to be resisted by those unable/unwilling to leave the familiar confines of positivist/modernist approaches to scientific inquiry for these more inclusive, complex forms and ways of knowing. Reviewed from that lens, it becomes possible to suggest the stubborn recalcitrance within journalism education, represented by the "theory-practice gap" discourse, may be evidence of longstanding avoidance of the paradigmatic clash. This might explain, in the end, why journalist-educators get cast as being on the defensive within the contemporary academy, "fighting on two fronts: arguing with theory-based colleagues for more practical course content, and making the case to industry for more contextual study". (Greenburg, 2007)

This framing of journalism's resistance to theory as evidence of a paradigmatic clash should not suggest that the engagement of journalists in "thinking through" a theory of practice is a hopeless endeavour, or one accessible only through the "safe lenses" of modernist, liberal-pluralist, uncritical thought. Rather, those initiating this sort of leadership should consider the efforts within education, a field particularly concerned with democratic values.

Thus, the building of a journalism theory of practice appears to be dependent upon an institutional setting supportive of journalist-educators and scholars seeking to engage in such effort in a manner by which

those who experience the initiative as threatening are able to work with the team rather than work around to undermine it. There's little point in academics engaging individuals in a practice without making it clear that this is *an institutionally-supported* orientation toward openness and that beliefs change through experience. Woods (2005) argues that values and norms "are not so much 'applied' as continually explored through 'creative and risky performances in action.' " (p. 54) and that advancing understanding is an ongoing and collaborative process for both students and teachers. Paradigms espousing centralized or "top-down" leadership models are being replaced by distributive models that create environments that empower and entrust others such that they might freely participate in efforts working toward offsetting distributive injustices. (Woods, 2005) The educational role, therefore, of democratic leadership lies in this open willingness to engage people in dialogue with each other to share their views, information and expertise and creatively apply what they've tentatively decided ("new" knowledge) in practical ways:

> That understanding and knowledge develop through a continual dialectical movement between a rationalist epistemology (which views certain truths as known and posits fixed parameters of knowledge) and a critical epistemology (which considers that nothing can be taken as true and that all conceptions – all facts, theories, values, social codes and norms – are perpetually open to critique). (Woods, 2005; p. 55)

Thus, Woods draws a useful theoretical model by which to bring the positivistic (the known, fixed approaches to journalism) together with the critical as a means to collaboratively produce and test innovative changes in practice.

Many journalists enter the university to teach in journalism education programs by virtue of the strength of their experience in the field over their academic qualifications. (Medsger, 2005; Reese, 1999) It is challenging to maintain allegiance to conventional standards and norms of professional practice in the face of demands to contribute intellectually to the academy when that culture of inquiry may be embedded within an incommensurable paradigm of inquiry. (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005) Positivism's hegemonic ideology becomes a particularly important barrier to change, closing journalists off to relevant knowledge within other disciplines that have moved into "post-positivist" and critical "turns".

Practitioners who pit theory against practice create barriers to collegial collaboration. Not only does this mischaracterize a long history of interdisciplinarity and hybridity within journalism education (Reese, 1999), it perpetuates the stereotype of practitioners, placing them squarely on the "wrong side" of the scholarship-practice fence as those who do not "think" but "do". It has led to comments of frustration that suggest journalism education is a training in "how not to think". (Parisi, 1992) These are harsh words volleyed from the "scholarly" side of the fence but this isn't a productive orientation for dialogue.

The point of this paper is to use these three assertions (that journalism must change, that journalists engage in professional practice and that journalists need to be engaged by leadership into further learning) as a starting point to explore the questions that follow next; if, indeed, journalism education must change, then how might it do so within the cultural context of the academy as a ruling institution? And, as facilitators of that change, what questions should leaders in journalism education place at the feet of those practitioners on their faculty and under what conditions? What should journalists, in their dual professional roles (as members of the field of journalism and as members of the professoriate) need to

ask – of themselves, institutions, administrators, and professional counterparts in practice – in order to move forward as change agents while still maintaining legitimacy and credibility in all contexts? Finally, if and when we make change happen, what can we expect?

The case study:

The course in question was created as one entry within a journalism curriculum I designed for an interdisciplinary liberal arts campus in the Ontario city of Brantford in Canada that launched in 2005. I then taught the first iteration on my own, and then continued as a member of a team collaborating on four instances out of five taught to date.

In 2006, I led an effort to intentionally subject JN101 – Reporting and Writing I (a traditional introductory reporting and writing "skills" course) to the call to make practical journalism education "more critical". The first offering in 2005 was "traditional" in all but its lecture and lab format (weekly plenary lecture with labs of up to 30 per section).

Methodologically, I review three of these syllabi and draw from the investigative tools of institutional ethnography to provide an accessible means by which to capture and organize the experience in order to reflect (and retrospectively analyse) the effects and outcomes of this process of course design. These methodological guidelines, developed by Canadian Dorothy Smith, are 'distinctive among sociologies in its commitment to discovering 'how things are actually put together'". (Smith, 2006: p. 1) IE researchers utilize the textual analysis of institutionally-generated documents (such as syllabi) and accounts and experiences gathered through participant-observation as tools to determine "how things work" within institutions, viewing such processes as an interrelationship between professional practices and norms, the sites and situations of everyday life in which professional practice is enacted, and policy making. (Smith, 2006)

Faculty initiated the process engaged in collaborative deliberation to determine what critical knowledge should be contained within an introductory core course in journalism practice. Engaging that question produced an impetus for faculty to leave our epistemological comfort zones and breach disciplinary boundaries and fields in order to mine other regions of the academy for knowledge of relevance to the professional practice of journalism. Different combinations of faculty on the team each year required fresh negotiation and reflected an opportunity to engage new perspectives and learn from old experience on the question at hand – how to bring theory into practice.

The annual negotiation represents a space structured into a journalism curriculum for intellectual engagement and reflection by faculty as part of the course design process. In deliberation, new elements were added, others eliminated, with faculty bearing in mind the course's central place within the curricula as both introduction to the program and key site of practical skills basics. The syllabus serves as a textual representation of institutional processes that coordinate "the diversities of people's subjectivities." (Smith, 2006: p. 65)   The syllabi froze in time a record of the team's annual consensus and, comparatively, represent evidence of change over time. The syllabi serve as the ruling institutional documents governing students and faculty for that year.

The three syllabi selected, 2005, 2006 and 2009, contained the most distinctive representations of

change. I will comparatively review them in turn.

The 2005 iteration

JN101 – Reporting and Writing I, was conceived as having a plenary weekly lecture and a series of subdivided workshops or labs in a computer room. The original decision to bring students together for a weekly plenary stemmed from consideration of a relevant space in which to addressing the calls available at the time to somehow bridge the 'theory-practice gap' within journalism education. The practical aspects of the course focused on a print platform context, with a second course in the following semester offering a continuation of the theme (Reporting and Writing II) but from a broadcast (radio) perspective. The course was taught by the author as sole instructor.

A review of the first iteration in 2005 suggests a very traditional, "skills-based" approach was used. Students were required to purchase a traditional, commercial reporting textbook, as well as Canadian newspaper style guides. Weekly topics followed the traditional chapter headings associated with normative journalism training and the weekly labs followed exercises on topics such as lead writing, quote handling and traditional story forms for print journalism. Assignments included two in-class guests and one outside panel lecture that the students used as opportunities to learn to write basic reports on speeches and question thereafter. The invited guests included a local city councillor who spoke about municipal politics , a member of the local student government and a representative from the Canadian Association of Journalists. The class also was required to attend a university session on student study and academic expectations. The most significant effort to incorporate new advances was platform-based; students were required to produce a personal reflective blog upon which the "stories" from the guests and event were published. Final group projects also utilized existing shareware to publish to the web. No additional expectations regarding the content of their stories were offered, nor any critical contextualization expected.

The 2006 iteration:

Beginning in 2006, the program added two additional tenure-track faculty and planned for an intake of 90 students (three sections of 30 for JN101). The fall iteration of JN101 was undertaken as a team-teaching effort. Each section was assigned as a full course to each professor, with divided responsibility for the weekly plenary lecture. The syllabus creation was collaborative with a sense that the team should endeavour to engage the contemporary call to add more literature – particularly critical – to the curriculum.

The biggest changes in this iteration resulted in changes to the weekly topics. Rather than follow a traditional textbook, faculty assigned web-based contemporary perspectives from sources such as the Poynter Institute and Jay Rosen's public journalism blog, PressThink. A final exam was scheduled to ensure students had been attending lecture and completing assigned readings.

The critical components most apparent were those added by the one PhD in the team. She is a critical political theorist and had worked as a national magazine writer and research department manager before coming to the program. (All three faculty were "hybrids" with history in professional practice and scholarly "potential", but we only had one faculty member at that point with full training in critical

political science). Students were introduced to more scholarly discourses on framing, power in society and democracy, including concepts of hegemony and ideology. The course also took advantage of the scheduled municipal election as its major field exercise. Weekly assignments continued to be drawn from existing traditional practical training and style quizzes and news monitoring quizzes were used to ensure students became familiarized with these aspects of journalism knowledge.

The 2009 iteration:

In this most recent iteration, the three sections of the course were shared by only two faculty (the author taking two sections and the PhD the third). This iteration did not include a traditional textbook and we had enough readings from disparate sources that we built a "reader" course-pack that was published by the institution. Most of the technical skills and platform-related aspects remained the same. Students were still required to blog and do labs working on lede-writing, style points, quote handling and basic story forms. However, what had shifted was the context in which this was approached – students were intentionally situated outside what could be perceived as the 'dominant' paradigm and firmly located in a variety of critical standpoints.

This had stemmed from my own experience of learning. Following the PhD's inclusion of the critical concepts of ideology and hegemony, I was also running across literature about social difference that built from that first step. In the three years from the 2006 iteration and 2009, I had become increasingly engaged in reading from the lenses that experienced marginalization and engaged in many discussions with the PhD on my own faculty, as well as many other critical scholars on our interdisciplinary campus. Teaching demands outside of traditional journalism skills duties and in service to our campus's "core "program in interdisciplinary studies enabled me to further explore and engage critical readings from media, journalism and communications studies. By the fifth iteration, I was able to bring a lot of contemporary knowledge to the deliberation, and since it was only the two of us and we had a very strong and collegial sense of mutual support, we were able to go even further.

In the fifth year, we guided students through a series of readings drawn from a variety of disciplines and critical perspectives including feminist theory, critical race theory, political economy, critical discourse analysis and communications theory, as well as more normative perspectives from within the professional literature. The focus of these readings was broadened beyond journalism to the social world itself – how groups interact, human perception, social movements and identity theories, among others.

Practically, we reinforced this learning through the assignments, always shifting our focus from what is known to what we do. We also constructed intentional means by which to create cognitive dissonance in the students for exploration in lab later. For example, the first routine effort to "cover an event" was usually done in a controlled manner through an invited guest to lecture. This year, we intentionally sought a guest from First Nations – a staff member on campus who regularly speaks publicly about Indigenous awareness. He was presented in our usual framework as a typical "meeting coverage" event that had a special guest speaker. In lab, the student copy from the event raised issues on balance and fairness as students attempted to "make sense" of knowledge many had never heard before. Some even felt the need to look up dominant perspectives from government websites to "balance" what they viewed as the speaker's "biased" view on history. We were able to talk about knowledge and experience from an

indigenous perspective in a manner that was "real" and not "abstract theory". Students were able to see how "gut instinct" might perpetuate stereotypes and hear how their internalized stereotypes were making it "hard to hear" the facts as facts during the event itself.

Students also explored issues of subjective expertise and the value of personal experience to knowledge in the blogging assignment. This time, students were told to pick a topic in which they felt particularly expert and build an aggregate blog on the topic. The majority of students were particularly engaged in this project. The sports fans generated popular blogs on their favourite teams and (due to the societal popularity of sport) had strong response rates (as evidenced by "hit" counters), which was discussed as a class relative to the much smaller response rates for blogs focused on more intellectual or marginalized topics. While entries were graded on their adherence to journalistic and grammatical norms and standards, the experience of becoming an aggregator from an "expert" position of what they already knew became a way to engage the idea of knowledge and journalism's relationship to it.

Students were also consistently oriented toward examinations of the self by engaging in a meta-narrative for the course of "stranger in a strange land". The point of the journey was to take students from a place where they felt "expert" (the blogs) through cycles of exposure to knowledges and cultures that we predicted would be highly unfamiliar (such as the Indigenous history of First Nations people in Canada). A second "required" event directed the students to cover a conference on critical pedagogy on campus, selecting between either a keynote lecture by critical education scholar Dr. Michael Apple or a panel of academics discussing alternative education models. Debriefing in class and lab engaged discussion about the cognitive and affective experience of "not knowing" and "feeling lost" when doing journalism, which helped lead to lectures about identity, prejudice, stereotyping and other "shortcuts" human beings apply to "make sense" of the world around them. Readings were drawn from contemporary social psychology, critical race theory, feminist theory and included with readings from critical perspectives within political science, communications studies, and media studies. Parallels were drawn to "normative" readings concerned with "ideal" forms of journalism practice. The faculty repeatedly revisited the concept of how people use prior knowledge to make sense of new information, as well as the challenges posed by journalistic habits and routines that help journalists navigate the unfamiliar.

Each week in lab addressed similar skills to all iterations taught in the past – lede writing, story forms, quote handling, finding a central point, interviewing, and so on. However, the key difference was fundamental – a paradigmatic shift in the context of how we taught the skills we'd taught before. But, in this case, students foregrounded issues of content creation over instrumental skills mastery and the readings and lectures precipitated discussions in lab about the "why" of story and source choices, fact ordering and other subjective and creative decisions central to journalism practice.

The final lecture of the fifth iteration summarized for students (to help them prepare for the final exam) what the course had "delivered" in the following way: we'd covered 1) story mechanics (ledes, central points, fact gathering, forms and formats and style elements); 2) field mechanics (starting their reporting in controlled conditions and known contexts and moving to the field, including moving from known facts/voices to generating stories from those unknown to the group; and 3) context, the socio-cultural and psychological considerations of making and transmitting meaning, including issues of intent that require journalists to know themselves and their surrounding cultures, as well as those of their story sources and

the intended audience. I explained that the outcome was that they could generate stories but could also explain why a story was a story, and who should be speaking (sources) to whom (audiences) and in what context (frame and formats).

Finally, the ritual and experience of knowledge-seeking, including discussion about the feeling of "strangeness" that can occur when exploring beyond one's boundaries of knowledge, was a central message revisited regularly in the course. The last class, which invited two guests currently working in industry, invited the journalists to talk about being a stranger to knowledges and cultures when they approached a story for the first time. The guests expressed enthusiasm for the frame, recounting stories of interacting with celebrities, war zones and other challenges to "sense making" on deadline.

Resistance: Critical social justice scholars speak of emancipatory quests, but also note the challenges of coping with resistance. (Friere, 1989; Muzzin, 2005) During the 2009 iteration, I became sensitized ((Clarke, 2005, quoting Blumer; p. 29) to what I would call "rumblings" from outside the course. While I consider myself to be open to deliberation over knowledge, it became clear to me that boundaries were being crossed. I noted it by the way critiques would be framed – rather than a direct query seeking personal understanding about what was happening or why, it became an uttered "fact" that the students "couldn't write, but they sure know how to be critical!" This wasn't a claim in evidence anywhere and seemingly presented as a gut, anecdotal experience. It also made no sense in reference to the course under discussion here. The volume of writing done by the students was actually higher and at a higher level of expectation regarding the nature of the content than the way I'd taught it in the first instance, as well as the first team iteration in 2006. Also, collegial relations in the past for the program had always had a sense of forgiveness and fluidity for all faculty in terms of assignments or expectations for each others' courses. This was the first instance in which we, as a program, were experiencing a sense within that all was not well. The fundamental claim was, in essence, that we'd gone "too far" – the "basics" were being overlooked in favour of too much "theory".

In fairness and gratitude to the colleague who felt safe enough to make that perspective plain, I won't go into heavy detail as to the value of claim itself. Perhaps many reading this would agree and I'm very much open to the sense that success or failure must be considered in terms of degree, not absolutes. But the experience of having such a culture into which such utterances could be made plain sensitized me – I could now "hear" similar claims throughout the campus in general, made in other contexts and settings. The divide over the value and legitimacy over critical theory is not the sole purview of journalism – those who adhered to traditional and classical orientations seem to have the most "trouble" with those who raised issues from critical perspectives in various campus settings. (Muzzin, 2005) As a journalist and someone who is normatively privileged and was socialized in traditional journalism practice, I had been "deaf" to this before and it now strikes me how important this awareness might be to doing democratic journalism – how you can "hear" how people in power use the levers of it to shift frames and conditions that "work around" people rather than "work with" those that seek to "challenge" their values and views on democratic terms. Scholars investigating this sort of interaction from the lenses of gender, race and sexual orientation call these discursive moments "microaggressions", noting the "damaging consequences of everyday prejudice, bias and discrimination upon marginalized groups in society." (Sue, 2010; p. xv) It is a fascinating, if depressing, literature worthy of deep consideration from a journalistic lens.

My own shift in perspective also helped bring into relief a pattern to the types of comments I'd heard anecdotally as I'd circulated at conferences and other fora in conversation over the past half-dozen years. Arguments supporting a negative reaction to the "scholars" seemed to recall past experience (previous "failed" attempts of trying X but it "not working"), often note student resistance (rather than faculty, as in "but the students hated it!") or get framed in defense of what students "really need" (rather than what some faculty may actually prefer). These claims tend to be oriented toward a restoration of order, simplicity and "basics", suggesting life is that ordered, simple and basic. Perhaps for some, it remains important to believe that life is so. Sadly, it is difficult to rationalize that view in light of the perspectives of others – something the critical scientist brings to bear. Those in journalism leadership respecting the difference may do well to recognize the need to intervene. One must manage the very real and very personal challenge faced by those who are having pieties slain such that their perspective is valued and acknowledged in a manner that doesn't cause harm to those thriving in the exploratory or innovative space. Power balances shift in these circumstances and respect and collegiality are difficult to afford when one's prior power position feels diminished. The feeling that people are "taking over" and that something is being "lost" are very real and need to be addressed, not dismissed.

To that end, a sense of recalcitrance can also be signalled by a sense there is no "time for this", and this may, in fact, be very true. A person might claim they haven't time for the deliberations that are required amongst faculty as they learn from each other and this sort of learning does take a tremendous amount of energy and focus – the time to learn through what can be difficult deliberative processes. Expecting practitioners to "catch up" isn't realistic if the institution structures out the key incentives to engagement. Teaching-only contracts that overload them or demands to publish at rates equivalent to fully trained PhDs can keep people contained to what they know now with little to push them to risk the time to immerse themselves in the unfamiliar. Such structures breed cultures of replication, not innovation.

In terms of our own outcomes, I've also come to learn the importance of formalizing criteria under which such exploration is engaged. While something may seem quite collegial and loose at the outset, engaging in the "minefields" may result in a later need justify efforts using empirical evidence. Thus, leaders supportive of such initiatives by individual practitioner faculty might be wise to quietly recommend some basic baseline statistical measures be gathered and more formalized "action research" experimental rubrics followed from the outset. Collaborative projects with critical scholars well-versed and well-placed may also provide a means by which practitioners might protect themselves from practitioner colleagues who may grow to find the work threatening or a "waste" of resources.

In our own case, there was never really a formal structure to assess what we'd done or how it had "worked", thus I don't have such quantifiable baselines to utilize here. Quantitatively, I can claim that change was possible and can be done in a very collegial, dialogical and deliberative manner as long as participants have a strong sense of trust amongst themselves and a sense of institutional support for the endeavour. I personally found that a culture open to innovation for journalism engendered a rapid trajectory of intellectual growth in my own case and I now contribute from critical disciplinary lenses that interest me and bring new "knowledge" to bear on our faculty as a whole. Other faculty more recently hired note enthusiasm for engagement in such a culture and we've become more sensitive to the need to hire scholars who have had practical work experience and practitioners who are also open and aware of critical theory. It is easier to do this work if the agents within arrive having internalized the cognitive

dissonance rather than externalized it in denial or blame.

As for the students, we see "good things" (a biased view, of course). However, other observers have remarked anecdotally that the students seemed to have a really good "nose for news" and another unsolicited comment from a English faculty member wrote a note this year thanking the journalism professors, for she had found that she could always tell if an essay in the pile came from a student in our program because they wrote so well! Students surveyed at the end of the course in one of the sections in 2009 rated the course positively and this is to be expected. They have no basis for comparison, unlike seasoned faculty. And it occurs to me that this is the crux of the concerns raised of late. Without the initial indoctrination in the "right" way, students had no prior cognitive scaffolding that would put these new ideas firmly into the "alternative" journalism framework. I can only guess, but perhaps the students themselves are bringing forth the arguments in other classes, invading the space of those who might have enjoyed teaching in more instrumental and didactic ways. I cannot be sure of this. But perhaps, I reflected, this is why the business of faculty in one course might seem so threatening to those outside of it. If students learn that journalism "is" open to critique from the very first day, we've torn down the "last bastion" for those who were happy with conducting business as usual.

Discussion:

The comparison demonstrates how much a course can change when faculty are given opportunity and intellectual space to begin exploring alternative ways to frame, engage and teach students to the practice of journalism. The students were writing as much as they ever had and were given the same expectations of performance for basic skills and conventions. What was different was the intellectual framework in which students were asked to approach the tasks. The content choices were suddenly visible and negotiable, the prior histories and knowledges of the students was made valuable and its diversity visible, and this made their tentativeness regarding their lack of expertise and ignorance seem situated and surmountable. These changes reflect contemporary scholarship on higher education that encourages disciplines to develop structures and processes that recognize students are unfamiliar with disciplinary processes, discourses and expectations, have a variety of goals and prior experiences and need to be oriented toward the profession. (Haggis, 2007) It also reflects learning environments that are student-centred and "safe places" by which individuals may bring their diversity to bear and create a heterogenous outcome that also brings growth to the instructor. (Friere, 1998) But this approach does turn journalism practice teaching on its "head".

In instrumental terms, I found tremendous value in this approach for the age-old conundrum of how to "find" a real "story". By teaching in critical, rather than normative, context, it became natural in lab discussions to "bring up" critical perspectives on particular examples to guide and model practical decision-making (e.g., "what do the mayor's "facts" suggest about his point of view on the big box store project? How does that relate to the claims of the "opposing side" that doesn't want the store in the county? What other lenses or frames of reference might draw additional voices into the story?) Those three questions become very clear when students understand contemporary concepts about power, identity and representation. I found myself modeling a form of dialectical deliberation in lab discussions, demonstrating how stories and sources can arise almost mechanically from the act of deliberately shifting from one epistemological lens to another for multiple perspectives on the same event. This may have

been a rather gross instrumentalization of critical or dialogical thinking well outside the intent of critical scholars, but its use in this practical applied context generated its acceptance as a tool to break down for students the sorts of decision-making processes journalists must develop and how additional information (experience) hones that skill over time.

This seemed a vast improvement over my own experience with that particular skill of journalism and I never found it to be met well by traditional skills instruction and textbooks that seem to leave questions about quality and value of ideas aside (yet would seem to be the heart of the matter of ideology in journalism practice). Another benefit to this type of teaching was the way in which it brings ethics to bear on any situation, countering the traditional model that leaves such questions to a single course.

Finally, I would note that I did not include our reading list from this last iteration in this course because I didn't want to direct the exploration of others. It didn't seem to matter "what" ideas or situations were presented within the knowledge as much as "how" that knowledge might infuse the "way" in which the practical course material was taught. Exposure to literature from other disciplines wasn't comprehensive and I would advocate tweaking it every year as new ideas, faculty perspectives and other variables come into play. This sort of pedagogy can be highly tailored by any faculty in any context who might have experience in both practical and critical fields.

What becomes "routine" is something different. I came to appreciate that the repetitive process of engaging in a new perspective, week after week, created a bit of a roadmap and a habit of mind for students and me – excellent "critical thinking" skills to deliver in a first-year reporting and writing class. My goal became bifurcated – the "techniques" basic to journalism production (interviewing, writing to basic formats and grammar/style standards, research to generate and source stories); plus the second "technique" of reflexive praxis. The second, I believe, primes students to engage more deeply into the liberal arts imperative within our wider context. It teaches them not only why they should study other courses but also how to seek out other knowledges and relate the content of other courses to journalism. They were encouraged (and, by the fifth iteration, explicitly told) of the "backpack" they now had from first year, into which they should actively place anything and everything they thought might come in handy to their chosen profession. What we stopped doing was delivering a "hidden" curriculum that the critiques were not worthy – a message particularly important to consider for those students who are not of dominant or normative identity or experience. (Friere, 1998)

What's key to remember is that the students were not exposed to fewer traditional skills in lieu of theory. They were performing skills in a more complex context --- complexed by knowledge (theory) from a paradigmatic, critical distance to normative paradigms. This cognitive tension immediately foregrounded content over the technical and naturally lent itself to more time spent talking about what the journalist does and how from a variety of lenses and perspectives. This modeled an attitude or habit of practice that reinforced critical thinking, knowledge-seeking and basic logical argumentation – the hallmarks of quality liberal arts education.

These conditions also created a tremendous opportunity for me as a practitioner "first". I expanded my own knowledge and understanding of journalism. The process did engender very collegial and dialogical deliberation between students and faculty which was a qualitative difference compared to my years

teaching in normative contexts. Over time, this opportunity gave me the chance to struggle with my own lack of understanding (something that took years) and in a very supportive, intercollegial culture. I found growing increasingly more able to navigate critical discourses, becoming increasingly fluent in them. But my location as a "skills" professor didn't force me all the way over the "fence". At least, not yet. I also note that this was not an opportunity taken up by all of those who taught on the team over the years. In some cases, practitioner faculty "warmed up" to the challenge and, like me, began to "move" through the conflicting literatures. Much of our mutual learning came informally – in the hallways, offices and other moments in which we felt able to bring something new to bear. This culture wasn't for everyone, and the way critique came up struck me that these projects could well be an irritant that grows to become perceived as dangerous to those embedded heavily in the traditional ideological framework.

Conclusion:

This paper argues that progress toward a theory of journalism practice is possible, but is a complex process that includes variables ranging from the interpersonal to institutional. Any number of things can get in the way of a good idea. In other words, the act of theoretically recommending change in academic research – an act of scholarly research production about journalism – is not the same as enacting that knowledge in practice – an act of professional practice in journalism and education. The theory proving journalism to have democratic deficiencies does not tell journalists what to do about it. Journalists have to invent that – discover that – for themselves. And this becomes an issue of leadership and vision toward innovation. Fomenting a culture of practice training that is open to critique is one thing. Making that same culture open to putting forth and testing new ideas is another. That latter is a culture committed to change – which makes it, by definition, a culture of instability and uncertainty. And that is bound to be challenging to those currently embedded in a culture infused with the modernist tradition. As Kincheloe writes:

> Teachers who are conversant with critical theory are never certain of the exact path of action they will take as a result of their analysis. This can be quite frustrating to those raised in a modernist tradition that values scientifically validated certainty. Often practitioners educated in this modernist context grow accustomed to expert-produced sets of official procedures designed to direct their actions. (Kincheloe, 1999; p 72)

The decision to evolve toward a reflexive praxis model of journalism education for the program as a whole remains somewhat contested within my own institution, and the recalcitrance to date appears to follow along the classic epistemological divide between modernist and post/critical perspectives. But we have been fortunate to survive challenge structurally and bring it to the foreground where it can be deliberated democratically. In general, faculty remain committed to the idea of blending theory with practice where possible, but I haven't found a means yet by which we can manage the tensions and concerns of those most challenged by such shifts in thinking.

So far, all we have managed to do is develop a structure and culture that puts ideological questions on the table right at the core of curriculum *for those who are comfortable and willing* to engage in that sort of work. We appear to have found a way to respond to questions of the balance between theory and practice by replacing it with a question of synthesis – an integrated, inseparable process of bringing knowledge into action. But further, formalized research needs to be brought to bear to determine the

extent to which, if at all, the barriers between "theory" and "practice" mark the means by which individuals manage crises of cognitive dissonance afforded by life in the academy and perpetuate the "closed shop" mentality that creates a "them" out of some of "us".

Notes:

[1]For a full review of the history of science paradigms and critical theory, refer to Lincoln and Guba; 2005 and Kincheloe and McLaren; 2005.

[2]A full review of these 'calls' is beyond the scope of this paper and not all calls stem directly from empirical analyses, either within the journalism literature or reflect deep engagement by journalism scholars with professions literature from other disciplines. But roughly, the 'theory practice gap' has been conceptualized from the one side of the positivist/post-positivist 'firewall' as reflective practice (Schon, 1987) and is roughly conceptualized within critical, constructivist or participatory paradigms as engagement in reflexive praxis (Lincoln and Guba: 2005). Other journalism practice literature might be categorized as 'critical' and 'reflexive' without explicitly identifying itself as such. For example, Merritt (1998, p. 87) recounts in his defence of public journalism an instance in which journalists broke the boundaries of impartiality and objectivity (journalism's positivist markers) by participating in an electoral process rather than just covering it.

[3] It is important to remember that this syllabus would not have resulted at all without institutional support of such collaborative and iterative processes. First, the embeddedness of the journalism program within an institution dedicated to furthering interdisciplinarity created attractive possibilities for individuals with doctorates and histories of journalism practice in that it was possible within this campus to teach 'outside' of one's home program. Journalists without PhDs but holding scholarly trajectories were also advantaged by the opportunity to build their knowledge by teaching within the campus core interdisciplinary liberal arts program called Contemporary Studies. In this program, individual courses are cast as problems to be parsed by a variety of disciplinary lenses – students learn to think across disciplines rather than within a single field. The practical impact of an interdisciplinary campus was the possibility for journalists to leave the confines of the j-school and teach (alongside the historians, psychologists and geographers) Interdisciplinary courses in the core Contemporary Studies program. In such a setting, all scholars are, to some degree, 'inexpert' in the knowledges necessary to form the course but are challenged to cross boundaries as a matter of routine. Adam (2006, p. 345) notes the limitations of traditional liberal arts to journalism curricula, so it could be argued that many of the benefits we accrued were a result of our location within this atypical liberal arts culture that has a wider openness to the journalist-practitioner as an exploratory interdisciplinarian despite our lack of "expert" status afforded by the PhD designation.

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