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**Journalism education dilemmas: career-focussed skill set, teamwork or critical thinking?**

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Journalism education dilemmas: career-focussed skill set, teamwork or critical thinking?

Authors’ names removed for blind reviewing.

Abstract
In Australian universities, journalism educators usually come to the academy from the journalism profession and consequently place a high priority on leading students to develop a career-focussed skill set. The changing nature of the technological, political and economic environments and the professional destinations of journalism graduates place demands on journalism curricula and educators alike. The profession is diverse, such that the better description is of many ‘journalisms’ rather than one ‘journalism’ with consequential pressures being placed on curricula to extend beyond the traditional skill set, where practical ‘writing’ and ‘editing’ skills dominate, to the incorporation of critical theory and the social construction of knowledge. A parallel set of challenges faces academic staff operating in a higher education environment where change is the only constant and research takes precedent over curriculum development. In this paper, three educators at separate universities report on their attempts to implement curriculum change to imbue graduates with better skills and attributes such as enhanced team work, problem solving and critical thinking, to operate in the divergent environment of 21st century journalism. The paper uses narrative case study to illustrate the different approaches. Data collected from formal university student evaluations inform the narratives along with rich but less formal qualitative data including anecdotal student comments and student reflective assessment presentations. Comparison of the three approaches illustrates the dilemmas academic staff face when teaching in disciplines that are impacted by rapid changes in technology requiring new pedagogical approaches. Recommendations for future directions are considered against the background or learning purpose.
**Introduction**

Journalists in the Western Liberal democratic paradigm traditionally have been trained to initiate and/or develop existing story ideas, research those ideas, interrogate the often complex material thrown up during the course of that research – including human interviews, data-mining and web-based research – and then present all that in a way that can be understood and acted upon by an identified audience, all within the constraints posed by technology. Journalism product is produced through a quasi-industrial process in which practitioners set agendas, manage the gatekeeping process, identify and interview sources according to those earlier decisions, then manufacture, sell and distribute their news products to the buying/viewing/listening public. Since journalism educators have predominantly been drawn from the ranks of the profession and have generally worked as journalists in one or more of the three dominant media – newspapers, radio and television – for varying periods, the majority of universities in Australia hosting journalism programs have adopted approaches which reflect an instructivist methodology. The curriculum inherent in the instructivist model is enacted primarily through formal lectures and tutorials. However there is no longer a single audience, or a single medium, for journalism and changes to the curriculum have long been called for from the ranks of journalism educators (Carey 2000:14; Quinn 1999:158).

Curriculum change brings ethical and strategic dilemmas within journalism schools and Straw (1985: 3) notes that ways of confronting these are perpetually torn between the supplementing of craft skills by a critical distance (whose relationship to those skills and their use is rarely theorised) and the training of interested students in alternative or oppositional media skills (an activity often ripe with paradox and contradiction). Historically universities are seen as fairly sterile environments in which students are ‘lectured at’ in formal situations, namely lectures and tutorials. While journalism programs have steered away from this model by using workshop and lab-based environments to convey the practical skills required of journalists, the high cost
of equipment, particularly that required for the production of newspapers, radio and television bulletins, has meant that many have been unable to realistically replicate a newsroom environment, necessary for the task of having students rehearse and perform their intended future professions. Recent advances in hardware and software have broken down those barriers and enabled universities to set up newsrooms in which students are introduced to the real world, including the hustle, bustle and noise that comes with producing a news product.

In this paper, the authors report on the dilemmas that have arisen through the implementation of curriculum changes in which each sets out to challenge the instructivist model – in which skill development passes from the expert to the novice – by the provision of authentic learning experiences planned to optimise student learning. Three different approaches based on a constructivist paradigm were employed to align the curriculum more closely to the technological, social and economic changes besetting the social fabric of Australia. At the first university, the academic introduced elements of peer-assisted learning and innovative use of digital technologies to construct a journalism education environment based on collaboration not competition. At the second, the academic sought to challenge and extend student thinking through problem-based scenarios delivered through a WebCT Vista online teaching program. The course experience at the third university emphasised audience studies and peer review.

**Background and literature review**

Policy and funding changes in Australia over the past decade have brought to universities a renewed focus on learning and teaching at the institutional level. Universities have been faced with high attrition rates, excess unmet demand and some concerns have been raised about insufficient attention to equity. Some analysts have argued universities should be closer aligned with training, while others point to the establishment of dual degrees across seemingly disparate disciplinary boundaries as
equipping the graduand with a range of critical skills and scholarly behaviours (Arthur & Tulloch, 2006). Academic staff are being asked for greater productivity – research, teaching, provision of community service – and now feel they operate within a ‘publish or perish’ research dominated framework, that values certain types of research and devalues applied research and teaching.

Changes in student expectations increase this pressure. The current student cohort is more aware (Catts et al 2002: 40, sited in Arthur & Tulloch, 2006) of the components of their courses and the structure and content of their subjects, and their demands challenge the academic and university alike (Arthur & Tulloch, 2006). Students adhering to a traditional learning style view academics as the ‘holders of information’ and themselves as the ‘receivers of information’. New paradigms will increasingly challenge this model. One clear example, relevant in this study, is the growing practice of student peer assessment and review. Despite student concerns, both these practices allow students to rehearse dominant models evident in the journalism industry, and verified in educational research. Carbone (n.d.) notes: ‘Peer review – students commenting on students’ writing – is one of the most beneficial things you can do in any course where there’s writing’. Thomasson (1996) argues, in fact, that newsrooms need more collaboration. He says ‘the dearth of collaborative editors in our business is evidence of a massive blind spot in newsroom management: the failure to examine and think critically about the relation between editors and writers. We need more collaboration.’ Brooks and Sissors (2001) also note an increasing – and beneficial – trend to increased collaboration in newsrooms: ‘Proponents of the team system insist that it improves story content because more people are involved in the story from the outset.’

Sheridan-Burns (2002) notes ‘writers who edit their own copy before giving it over to copy editors increase the likelihood of their work being published unchanged’. Kershner (2005) notes ‘Good stories result from cooperation, not confrontation’ while Glaser (2004) notes ‘Journalism relies on collaboration to build trust’.
In earlier periods of journalism education, students created articles ('copy') alone and submitted them to a tutor for evaluation. The new aim should be to have teaching and learning happen in an environment that more closely mimics a newsroom than a classroom ... whatever form this newsroom might take, in an increasingly technological, virtual world.

Many students also expect to be ‘job ready’ when they graduate but journalists at both ends of the media education continuum – university or college educators at the one end, and full-time reporting and production journalists at the other – are familiar with the dilemma faced by journalism aspirants who, upon leaving the university or college system and acquiring employment in the industry, have to ‘learn the ropes’ (Dombkins 1993:39) to realign with industrial rather than academic requirements. Many publishers have operated their own training courses as a way (they say) to adapt – sometimes even to correct – university and college journalism training, to make it match more closely their own business requirements. If nothing else, this dichotomy highlights the problem of how to align formalised university journalism training more closely with the journalism industry. The educational theorist Biggs (1999:41) highlights the dilemmas between university and industry perspectives: ‘would-be professionals are trained in universities to label, differentiate, elaborate and justify, when what they need out in the field is to execute, apply and prioritise’.

Understandings of ‘surface’ and ‘deep’ approaches to learning (Gibbs 1992) are important in this context. The ‘surface’ approach involves learning to reproduce the subject matter at a later date, and the ‘deep’ approach involves learning ‘to make sense’ of the subject material. The surface approach yields an unstructured outcome and the deep approach produces a structured outcome, and Biggs & Collis (1982) and Biggs (1999) note that structured outcomes are more valuable than unstructured outcomes.

The teacher’s approach can influence the student’s approach to learning, so that a ‘closed’ approach to teaching produces student approaches in line with increasing knowledge, memorising and acquiring facts and procedures (surface learning), and an
‘open’ approach produces student approaches in line with making sense and understanding reality (deep learning).

As Gibbs (1992) suggests, inappropriate course design, teaching methods and assessment can foster a surface approach. Inappropriate design can include heavy workload, high class-contact hours, an excessive amount of course material, lack of opportunity to pursue subjects in depth, lack of choice over subjects, and lack of choice over the method of study. Gibbs (1992) also suggests that when designing for structured outcomes, teachers should remember:

1. Motivational context [which is now configured as ‘social purpose’]
2. Students need to be active, not passive
3. Students should interact with others, including tutorials, seminars, and peer tutoring
4. Students need to bring with them a well-structured knowledge base.

In the following narratives three academics in the discipline of journalism report on curriculum changes each has implemented to achieve not only the ‘structured outcomes’ indicated by Gibbs (1992) but also the ‘graduate outcomes’ demanded of universities and employers alike.

**The narratives**

The three case studies in this paper provide a comparison of journalism curriculum innovation in three Australian universities in 2006. Two involve final-year undergraduate students and the third, postgraduate students. Curriculum implementation is fraught with risks – some low and some high. Employing constructivist approaches in an environment built on a tradition of instructivism carries the risk of challenging student perceptions of learning beyond their experiences, and indeed two of the narratives report this. Introducing innovation in a scaffolded environment in which students learn traditional journalistic crafts of editing using up-
to-date wiki technology offers less risk in the student-learning environment, and one reports this having occurred.

The first narrative reports on the incorporation of relatively low-risk innovation of online wiki technology to increase learning possibilities. This was part of a university initiative to increase the adoption of information technologies and therefore the curriculum changes had the imprimatur of the university and, more particularly, colleagues. The second reports on the issues faced when a problem-based approach which had previously been successfully implemented in a hard-copy format, is run in an online environment. The third and final narrative reports on the challenges which arose when students with expectations of teaching and learning built on experiences of instructive pedagogy, encountered constructivist-based learning experienced through a student-centred critical pedagogy approach.

**Narrative One: the wiki**

Collaboration is problematic for students. Experience has taught most, if not all, that group work brings with it elements of risk-taking. The complexity of student lives, in which they juggle conflicting work and study commitments, means they want a more defined, perhaps even simplistic, learning experience. Having to carry the load for colleagues who don’t pull their weight, and having to deal with difficult personalities, are complaints that have been observed after group work projects. Yet collaboration is an essential part of journalism and thus an essential skill that journalism educators should be trying to foster in their students.

The challenge was to find a methodology which tested students’ negative perceptions of collaboration and allowed them to experience an environment which mimicked a professional newsroom within the constraints of university budgets. A 2005 grant secured under the university’s *Teaching and Learning Development Large Grants Scheme* provided the opportunity to investigate and implement an innovative collaborative learning initiative. The grant produced an opportunity to set up a
collaborative environment (a wiki) which minimised the face-to-face complexities, minimised the time and space demands on students, but maximised the desired collaboration which the academic sought, mimicking a professional newsroom where a second set of eyes is always cast on material before publication. The wiki provided a space for student peer-editing of news and feature stories enhancing the collaborative, creative and critical literacies of those involved.

The final year practical unit News Production was identified as an ideal subject for the introduction of cutting edge communication tools since it had been designed to sharpen students’ print, broadcast or online journalistic capabilities just before graduation and to assist them to adapt to a newsroom environment. The curriculum aimed to enhance that university’s journalism graduate attributes of self-management, flexibility and independence, collaboration and teamwork, lifelong learning, critical thinking, creativity and innovation by creating virtual newsrooms designed to allow students to rehearse and perform events and processes which take place in a professional newsroom where journalists collaborate to produce and present news for various media. Editing is a major component of the journalistic craft, yet is a challenge for novice writers, such as students. The wiki was chosen because it allowed students to practice and therefore hone that journalistic skill: ‘Wiki is a piece of server software that allows users to freely create and edit Web page content using any Web browser’ (Leuf, 2002).

By undertaking authentic assessment tasks with ‘real-world’ applications, the students’ learning is enhanced. But such tasks are not without difficulties for academic staff. One of the dilemmas which the academic faced in this case was balancing the competing needs of using possibly under-developed student work critiqued by their peers, with the commercial requirements introduced by the participation of commercial sponsors and public distribution. This dilemma (especially public distribution) was also faced by the academic in Narrative Three. The online, wiki student newsroom did not have an online output but rather resulted in a new glossy printed news and lifestyle
magazine called *kuRB*. The magazine was launched by the university journalism school in 1995 as a free publication distributed through letterboxes in houses and businesses in the surrounding 1km radius. In 2006, adjacent property developers provided funding of $10,000 to launch the new product. Professional standard editing – the least practiced and therefore weakest journalism skill among students – was thus demanded.

Because the collaborative wiki allowed students access to the ‘newsroom’ at any time and place of their choosing, students could more easily identify and ‘fix’ mistakes in the work of others. This built an understanding among the class which created a system where peer feedback was able to play a greater part in the learning and teaching process than in a possibly confrontational ‘face-to-face’ situation. Additionally, the use of the wiki allowed *kuRB* writers to incorporate a student review component in the writing process – an activity previously impossible until students had mastered specialist newspaper technologies. The wiki provided a space for student peer editing of news and feature stories enhancing the collaborative, creative and critical literacies of those involved.

While it could be argued that a very similar process of peer review could easily happen without wiki technology (it could be done with old-fashioned pen and paper) there were real advantages in using an online collaborative space such as a wiki. The first was convenience of access, as mentioned above. The second was that a wiki keeps a virtual paper trail and it is easy to see what changes have been suggested and by whom. When a sub-editor (and at university, the academic) finally receives the copy for publication, he or she is easily able to see the process through which the final draft has travelled, useful both for checking facts and observing the development of graduate attributes.

Students were required to edit work at both a micro and macro level. At the micro level, they were required to identify and correct errors in spelling and grammar and suggest improvements to expression. The history function made it very easy to see
what changes had been made at this level and made it easier for authors to learn from their mistakes. The history function offered a line-by-line graphic display of how copy was changed. Even if the changes were numerous, the wiki’s functionality allowed them to be made without the changes raising problems for either editor or writer. But the editing process is about more than just cosmetic changes. It is also about improving the content of a story by identifying areas where the story could have been improved by including new material or sources, updating, reordering or changing the priority of information.

The discussion function of the wiki provided a platform where this macro level reviewing process could happen. The following post by one student to her colleague about how to improve a story about a local café (that allows patrons to dine with their dogs at their feet) shows the level of thought students put into their suggestions:

I really like your story idea for this one. I think the quotes from the customer – Stephanie – should be higher in the story, just so the idea of being against doggy dining is given as much emphasis as the ideas for it. Also, maybe you need a few more quotes from other sources – perhaps another diner, or even a café who doesn’t allow dogs. What are the council laws on doggy dining? Maybe you need a comment from a council representative. I know that Pandemonium in Paddington doesn’t allow dogs in their courtyard because the council won’t permit it – against health regulations or something. So why is the Spring Hill café allowing them? Interesting angle, maybe? One last thing, you mention the name of the café and the suburb Spring Hill a bit, just be careful it doesn’t read like an advertorial. I hope my comments help. Happy Regards.

The innovation described in this case study appeared to be a success, based on evidence gathered through a survey administered to students at the end of the first semester trial of the project. All of the students who responded either agreed or
strongly agreed with the statement ‘It was useful having peer review of my stories’. A total of 94% agreed or strongly agreed with the statements ‘Reviewing the stories of one of my peers will help me with my own writing’ and ‘The wiki was a useful device for peer review of work’.

Students were also asked to nominate the best and the worst aspects about using the wiki. Simplicity was identified as the key advantage: ‘Not having to compare hard copies of stories; it was easy to see what was changed,’ one student said. ‘Saved time having to do group work,’ said a second, while a third student noted: ‘the edit function was a great tool’.

Aspects of the collaborative process also received favourable comment from the students. When asked about the best aspect of using the wiki one student responded: ‘Receiving feedback from peers and tutor’.

However, accepting peer feedback was not universally accepted. One student noted ‘Knowing others were being critical of my work’ when asked about the worst aspect of using the wiki. There were also issues about the functionality of the wiki which attracted student comment. Feedback included ‘Technology is scary’ and ‘Complicated – don’t like computer systems’ were among those submitted by the students. The innovation of wiki in this subject was adopted and continued in 2007.

*Narrative Two: problem-based learning online*

Embedding graduate attributes into the curriculum has been a major focus in Australian universities for some time. However, as most of the attributes apply to real-world professional placements, the challenge that faces the academic curriculum developer is to align student experiences with actuality. The attributes that graduates are expected to have when leaving this second university have a particular synergy with investigative journalism, which is the central focus of the subject discussed in this narrative. The attributes include: *commitment to continued and independent learning, intellectual development, critical analysis and creativity, coherent and extensive*
knowledge in a discipline, appropriate ethical standards and defined professional skills; ability to logically analyse issues, evaluate different options and viewpoints, and implement decisions; appreciation and valuing of cultural and intellectual diversity and the ability to function in a multi-cultural or global environment; understanding of information literacy and specific skills in acquiring, organising and presenting information, particularly through computer-based activity.

The academic in this case identified the synergy between the graduate attributes and the curriculum content for a final-year journalism subject which aimed to help students develop high-level ‘investigative’ research skills. He chose problem-based learning (PBL) strategies as a means for students to develop these skills through realistic scenarios. The subject was first developed for students in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and deployed in small-group focused workshop situations. The initial participants indicated sufficient support for the format that the approach has since been developed and tested with more PNG journalists and students, a group of Indonesian journalists and editors, and three cohorts of Australian university students, both undergraduate and postgraduate. The latest iteration (the present case study) was further modified for both on-shore and off-shore teaching, either as a web-based and internet dependent option or as a pull-apart more-traditional teaching option.

Although the strategy of the original course had worked well in hard copy and in an all ‘face-to-face’ environment, dilemmas emerged when he implemented the problem-based elements in an online, virtual scenario-based teaching strategy. Due to the success of the previous iterations, he had thought the adaptation to online would be relatively risk-free and in fact add to the student learning experience. The university, in a major regional city, prides itself on being at the forefront of elearning strategies.

Each week, students were required to attend a formal one-hour lecture and a two-hour workshop built around a hypothetical situation which the students had to investigate. The hypothetical included a ‘realistic’ inquiry-based scenario: a smuggling
ring involving the PNG-based Bird of Paradise, *Paradisaea raggiana*. Bird smuggling is often reported by journalists and thus offered authenticity to students. Students entered the online hypothetical via *WebCT Vista* and immediately begin playing the role of a journalist in a newsroom on a quiet news day. The role-play exercise was to extend over the 13 weeks of the semester and guide the student through a set range of tasks. Each week students were given access to new data. Some of this information was made available on a time-release basis, other information was accessible only once students had completed set tasks, including multiple-choice quizzes, story plans, research tasks, or even reflective reports. Once self-directed tasks were completed, students were required to bring their material to workshops where additional tasks were undertaken, sometimes by themselves, but often in small groups.

To mimic real-time production constraints, students were expected to have tackled each pre-class task before they attended the weekly workshop, including deciding whether they had sufficient information to publish. Students were expected to produce several stories throughout the semester: in week 2, week 3, another later in the semester, and finally, at the end of semester they were required to write a series of wrap-up stories (news and feature).

As part of the academic’s curriculum research, the students were required to make regular diary entries in an online dossier, which also called for a reflective essay on the students’ experiences during the semester. This item had been included by the instructional designer for research purposes. As with the study in Narrative One, the hypothetical *WebCT* site deployed a wiki and students regularly posted their assignments to a shared site where they could be viewed by other students.

Throughout the running of the subject in 2006 student dissatisfaction with the subject increasingly became apparent. Some students reported technological problems relating to university hardware. Some students also questioned the inclusion of the reflective essay which sought to tie in their experience with the university’s graduate attributes. This requirement was ultimately abandoned after week 4 when students
threatened to revolt at the amount of work expected. Once the technical problems were rectified, most of the students engaged with the hypothetical said they appreciated the authentic engagement it offered.

**Narrative Three: audience**

At the third university, the academic had observed that journalism courses paid too little attention to how journalists should deal with audience communities in the emerging technological world, where digital delivery allowed both increased segmentation and targeting of large heterogenous populations, as well as the aggregation into viable markets of small, tightly integrated but widely-distributed audiences. The academic decided to explore an approach to curriculum influenced by social networking theory and placed a high emphasis on audience and context, leaving journalistic craft skills implicit rather than explicit. The approach had been implemented successfully in various iterations at two other universities among post-graduate students since 2000 (Cokley et al, 2000; Cokley & Eeles 2003) and was operating as a relatively low-risk small-groups course for post-graduates. At the start of 2006 it was decided to offer the course to an undergraduate class of about 70 students.

The course introduction identified the students’ task as ‘to engage with audience groups and then step outside the highly thematic structure of news to develop key aspects of stories for particular audiences in a more reflective way’. The pedagogical focus aimed to reduce some of the elements which most demotivated students and which tended to lead to surface learning approaches (Gibbs 1992). The academic mapped the problematic elements of the enacted curriculum and identified ‘solutions’. These are presented below in Table 1.
Table 1 Pedagogical dilemmas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pedagogical element identified as problem</th>
<th>Solution adopted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heavy workload</td>
<td>Reduction of assessment items from weekly/fortnightly to four per semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High class contact hours</td>
<td>Two hours per week with option of another two hours of computer software and technology demonstrations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive amount of course material</td>
<td>Readings from one text, containing targeted material directly relevant to the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of opportunity to pursue topics in depth</td>
<td>Students able/required to choose topics from a wide range of opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of choice over topics</td>
<td>Students able/required to choose topics from a wide range of opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of choice over the method of study</td>
<td>Students able/required to choose the method of approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally the curriculum was designed with student learning at the centre based on Gibbs’ (1992) ‘structured outcomes’.

Table 2 Student-centred pedagogy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Outcome Focus</th>
<th>Pedagogical Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivational context</td>
<td>Students presented with content identifying how their learning related to audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students need to be active, not passive.</td>
<td>Action (inquiry-based) learning, in which assessment is based on real-life experiences and interactions with audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should interact with others, including tutorials, seminars, and peer tutoring</td>
<td>Assignments 1 and 3 designed as group work and peer-assessment implemented; Assignment 2 individual work, assessed by lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students need to bring with them a well-structured knowledge base</td>
<td>Expectations that built on students’ technological knowledge and skills, and knowledge of journalism at work developed through previous subjects.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Students were guided through the process of identifying viable ways of completing the assessment task which was central to the subject focus on audience. Audience groups could be chosen from (a) around Brisbane (Australia), (b) outside Brisbane but within Australia, or (c) outside Australia. This wide choice was allowed to
enable students from outside Brisbane to deal with audiences from their home areas (and in their home languages), a strategy which many quickly adopted. Students were offered a template method of interrogating their audience of choice, using a sample demographic and qualitative survey. Peer assessment was deployed for the presentation of audience studies, facilitating group learning by experience during weeks 5-8 of the 13-week semester.

Students were then guided through the process of self-reflection by the deployment of a set of reflective questions about their tasks during the semester and their strategies for completing those tasks. This self-reflection was designed to be presented along the lines of the *Big Brother Diary Room*, as a scripted and edited video which each student would produce and present to the whole class.

For some of the undergraduate students in the large class, the above approach was new and appealing. For others it was new and disconcerting. Some students reacted negatively to the combination of critical media theory and assessment requirements that demanded technical skills and peer assessment. It is suggested this combination challenged some students’ understanding of the nature of journalism education.

Whilst 59% of students overall rated the subject as ‘satisfactory or better’ on the end-of-semester student evaluation survey, other items on the survey indicate students were less satisfied with clarity of course objectives (38%), and helpfulness of course resources (29%). Qualitative responses provided some insights to the student perspective of the ‘lived’ curriculum. Some focused on the technical/rational tasks such as editing and skills they said they ‘ought to have been taught’. Others reflected somewhat typical student time-management issues such as ‘Time frames and deadlines were tight’. However the ownership of the solution for this was identified by one who said: ‘I didn’t allow enough time ... pushed me to do something different, realised (my) need to re-examine ideas’.
Students’ understandings about journalism were challenged through the subject and self-learning was apparent for many, as evidenced by these comments: ‘Medium and production as important as content’, ‘Forced to think differently’, ‘Challenged conceptions of news’, ‘Learned appreciation for news audience’, ‘Learned something different to what I knew’, ‘Learning importance of needs of community group’.

Some students reported insufficient knowledge of film editing, a ‘steep learning process’ and that they were ‘not tech savvy’. But others reported they easily familiarised themselves with equipment, took their own steps to learn, made mistakes and learned, and the course ‘tested me’. Some reported increased learning about the production elements of journalism: ‘(Now I) understand how vision and words come together’, ‘Easy but not ambitious’, ‘Fun to learn’, ‘(we can) do it ourselves’, whereas for others, technical issues (equipment and software) dominated: ‘Difficult to use/operate equipment’, ‘Issues with audio’, ‘Haven’t done it in tutorials’.

Based on the Gibbs (1992) model above, it is suggested that the key expectation that ‘Students need to bring with them a well-structured knowledge base’ was overly ambitious in this case, and more attention to ‘bringing the students along’ into the course would have been beneficial.

**Discussion**

Today’s journalism student – like today’s journalist – is operating in an increasingly complex media environment requiring an understanding of, and ability to operate across, multiple production platforms using multiple communication technologies. To prepare students to work effectively in this environment, this study illustrates the difficulty of the task that journalism educators face in employing an increasingly sophisticated array of information communication technologies. The data show that modern communication technologies have the potential to engage and inspire students but also at the same time to disengage and demotivate them ... and staff.
The 24/7 nature of the access to learning accommodates increasingly fractured student availability, democratises resources allowing students to participate fully regardless of where they live, and mirrors what is becoming the typical student and working journalist experience. However, the skills level of students remains varied and their willingness to engage in online-centred learning activities varies.

The wiki experience best exemplifies this double-edge sword. It supported Lamb’s finding (2004) that ‘Wikis are already making their mark in higher education and being applied to just about every task imaginable’. As a result of the success of the trial reported in Narrative One, the innovation of wiki is being embedded in the unit. Further modifications – including a comparative trial evaluating a preparatory wiki with a wysiwyg editing function to the freeware version used in the initial study – are being evaluated. There can be no question that a wiki can provide a vital tool in the student editors’ learning environment but exactly which form that wiki may end up taking will continue to be reviewed.

The concerns about the amount of work expected in the online scenario from Narrative Two, and the division of tasks between home and class, have been addressed and will be incorporated into a later iteration, as will the problems with the transportability of information.

The 2007 iteration of the course in Narrative Three addressed student assessment concerns by providing more explicit and student-centred information about the use and value of peer assessment, assessable output was reduced from four to three for the semester, specific lecture times were devoted ideas for working in sound and vision, and a more structured approach was implemented to technical demonstration workshops (incidentally, without dramatically increasing the financial outlays for demonstrator/tutors). A revised structure for lecture/workshops was introduced, made possible by the provision (by the university) of newer and better equipped seminar rooms and an interactive lecture theatre.
The studies and this whole research project suggest that collaborative on-line tools such as the wiki have an obvious part to play in educating aspirant journalists in this environment. Care must be taken however, when designing tools to meet student demands, that more burdens are not placed on already stretched academic staff. Stephen Segrave, one of the academics behind the innovative computer-based journalism training resource *Hotcopy*, notes that e-learning tools and blended learning can be important training tools for aspiring journalists (2003). He notes: ‘Journalism programs in universities across Australia encounter large student numbers combined with relatively few staff and limited work placement opportunities for students’. Care needs to be taken to ensure the staff burden in not increased.

**Summary**

If university-based journalism courses are to deliver professional graduates into the current working environment, then developing and challenging student thinking is an essential element. However, students must be ‘brought along’ with their educators, and the fit of ‘purpose’ and ‘process’ in learning environments is essential. The question remains of how the notion of ‘career-focussed’ can be constructively aligned with the pedagogical concept of ‘social purpose’.

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