Journalism students and intergenerational change in journalism

Penny O'Donnell

Abstract

This article presents a response to the question: "Is there more to journalism education than workforce reproduction through socialisation to the profession and, if so, what is it?" The response is developed in two parts. The first presents the findings of a 2001 study of University of Technology, Sydney journalism students, their career trajectories and approaches to professional journalism practice. That study provided the means to identify different types of students and career aspirations. It found "confident practice" was a highly prized yet previously unexplored educational outcome. This finding, in turn, pointed to the need to reconsider the nature of the relationship between the university system and the news media. The second part of the article canvasses existing Australian ideas about professional education in journalism before introducing new theoretical resources that offer a more robust means of considering the purpose and significance of the educational endeavour in relation to both reproduction and change in journalism. The article argues that the discussion of intergenerational change in journalism needs to include the viewpoints of journalism students as key stakeholders in journalism's future, and be mindful of the full gamut of their career aspirations, the wide range of innovative and critical educational initiatives found in the journalism curricula they study, and the educational outcomes they prize most highly.

Introduction

Journalism Studies as an area of scholarship is still finding its feet in Australia. Yet, as Bromley (2005, p. 228) suggested in the previous edition of this journal, it may well come to "supplant mass communication as a primary organising idea" of news media research because it is more international, multidisciplinary (or "post-disciplinary") and alert to questions of culture than its precursor. This, then, is an opportune moment to put the subject of journalism students on to the Australian Journalism Studies research agenda and to open up the issue of intergenerational change in journalism for renewed discussion. One key question here concerns the purpose and significance of professional education in journalism: Is there more to journalism education than workforce reproduction through socialisation to the profession and, if so, what is it? This article presents a response to that question. It argues that the discussion of intergenerational change in journalism needs to include the viewpoints of journalism students, a group that can be seen as a key stakeholder in journalism's future. The article asserts that interesting new insights into reproduction *and* change in Australian journalism can emerge from empirical research on journalism students that is framed and accompanied by the development of theoretical ideas about the purpose and significance of professional education in journalism.

Those who aspire to become journalists merit more serious consideration, as do those who make it into the industry with a journalism degree and those new entrants who make it their business to review, extend, improve or challenge prevailing professional practices and journalistic conventions. Unfortunately, journalism students have attracted research attention to date only in relation to the well-rehearsed debate over whether a journalism degree should be an entry-level requirement for the industry. A pioneering international investigation of journalism students (Splichal & Sparks, 1994) provides some insight into this gap in the scholarship. It suggests research on journalism students is scarce because "usually nobody feels anxious about the interests and expectations of students who want to be journalists when they graduate" (Splichal & Sparks, 1994, p. 2). However, this neglect may be shortsighted.

The traditional lack of scholarly interest in journalism students has meant, in part, that at least three significant differences between the current generation of Australian journalists and their predecessors have been under-researched. First, although the extensive development of university-level teaching and research programs in journalism since 1987 points to the professionalisation of Australian journalism (Henningham, 1989; Splichal & Sparks, 1994; Ricketson, 2001), few efforts have been made to map out or critically appraise the academic trend or its industry significance. Second, it is still not clear whether the 1990s shift in Australian journalism education has proven to be educationally or professionally successful. This shift involved a move away from vocationalism and towards more integrated approaches to critical intellectual *and* technical skills training in journalism (Meadows, 1997; Bacon, 1999; Pearson, 1999; Sheridan Burns, 2002). Third, despite accelerated growth in the numbers of journalism graduates over the past 20 years (Molloy, 1990; Patching, 1997; Putnis et al, 2002), little is known about their impact on the news media apart from a limited number of graduate destination surveys (for example, Alysen, 1999, 2001; Green & McIlwaine, 1999; O'Donnell, 1999).

This article points to the need to turn our thinking towards journalism students. Interesting issues about intergenerational reproduction and change in journalism come into focus when we do so.

Investigating journalism students

This section introduces an empirical study undertaken in 2001 into the educational and employment experiences of 20 journalism students and graduates from the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) (O'Donnell, 2005).

The 2001 project was an explorative, qualitative study. It evolved from an initial pilot survey of UTS journalism graduates undertaken in 1997 using quantitative instruments, that is, a modified version of the Graduate Career Council of Australia's Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) and Course Evaluation Questionnaire (CEQ) (O'Donnell, 1999). The move to a qualitative method was motivated, in part, by the results from the pilot survey, which were both noteworthy *and* confusing. On the one hand, the survey established very strong graduate outcomes, with nine out of 10 UTS journalism graduates in the workforce and earning higher than average incomes. Yet, on the other hand, only one in three of the working graduates had a job in a newsroom; those earning the highest salaries were not employed as journalists; and the majority of those surveyed expressed dissatisfaction that they were not doing what they had expected to be doing after finishing a university degree in journalism (O'Donnell, 1999). The survey results begged the question of whether the graduates' outcomes were successful or not. Furthermore, the high level of graduate discontent suggested the student experience of professional education in journalism needed further consideration.

Quantitative data collection was seen as inappropriate to the task of further investigating the student experience of journalism education for three reasons. First, statistical analysis was of limited value given the logistical difficulties of organising a large research sample of journalism graduates. Second, the standardised categories and timeframes used in questionnaires were not flexible enough to capture the non-sequential and/or non-discrete nature of the experiences under study. The pilot study indicated that students took jobs in journalism whenever and wherever the opportunity arose; they neither waited for graduation to commence work nor automatically left the education system once they got a job. Hence, the decision to expand the data sample to include journalism students as well as graduates. And, third, the graduate destination survey instruments took it for granted that there was a direct link between graduate qualifications and labour market success in the target occupation; a premise that was not confirmed in relation to journalism graduates and the news media (O'Donnell, 1999).

The exploratory technique chosen as most suited to the task of investigating the student experience of journalism education was "individual focus sessions" (Green, 1999). This method reproduces the open, free-ranging structure of the focus group, but in more controlled one-to-one encounters. Focus group method was originally used in media research in the United States in the 1940s to garner audience views of radio programs; its central technique of non-directive interviewing has taken on many different forms since then (Lewis, 2000), including the shift from group to individual sessions. It is also associated with the kind of action research on journalism students' learning undertaken by Thomas (2001). The main benefit of non-directive interviewing is that it produces high-quality data or what has been termed "genuine discussion" (Smith, in Lewis, 2000); conversely, it requires a significant time investment in setting up and conducting the interviews as well as in data transcription and analysis.

The focus sessions for this investigation were conducted on campus but not in the classroom. The interview schedule of open-ended questions covered three main areas of interest: first, the interviewees' understanding of journalism and their expectations about a career in journalism; second, their ideas about the core skills of journalism, helpful and unhelpful learning experiences and the relevance of journalism education in workforce preparation; and, third, perceptions of the job market and employer attitudes to graduates.

Talking with students and graduates

Three aspects of the findings from the 2001 study will be canvassed in this section. In the first instance, the study addressed the traditional neglect of student viewpoints by drawing attention to the ways journalism students and graduates think about and experience journalism education. Some of these viewpoints will be presented. Second, the investigation provided the means for identifying various types of journalism students, the different stakes that can be attached to a journalism career and the resulting experiences of professional education. Three types of journalism students will be described. Third, the study pointed to "confident practice" as a highly prized yet previously unexplored educational outcome that some journalism graduates achieved during their time at university. This capacity to confidently assert "I'm a journalist" will be briefly explored.

Careers in journalism: In talking to UTS journalism students, it became clear that a singular notion of a journalism career did not apply to everyone, even in the limited sample of interviewees. Career outlooks varied according to career stage, as did expectations and experiences of professional education. Career entry, career change and career development were the three main outlooks identified among journalism students. These will be explained using examples of student viewpoints.

At the career-entry level, that is, school-leavers or non-school-leavers doing undergraduate degrees, knowledge or educational goals included learning about the specific nature of Australian journalism and about journalistic work in the Sydney news media; employment goals included gaining access to employers, preparing for entry-level positions and testing out eligibility for a newsroom job. One entry-level student described his journalism education in the following way:

> I think it's taking away a lot of the misconceptions I might have had about journalism in the workforce as well as educating me on what is possible, so I don't go in blind. I didn't really have much of an idea of what journalism would involve before coming to UTS. I think that if I wanted to be a journalist, which I'm not one hundred per cent sure that I do want to be, but I know I want an education, getting a degree was not a choice; it was a necessity in this day and age. I think with a university you get more of an education, it's more open, we do everything about globalisation and the internet and I think that a lot of the people working in journalism don't respect that for what it is, because they never had it. And they think that all you need to know is how to meet a deadline and get that interview and everything else, which is necessary but, you know, you can learn a lot more about your world if you do it through university. (Student One, undergraduate, 18 years old)

There was a marked difference between the outlooks and goals of these career-entry journalism students and those doing a postgraduate degree with the aim of making a career change. In the second group, which included students enrolled in the Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma and Master of Journalism degree programs, goals included obtaining access to a form of vocational training with strong job prospects, affirming a life option/lifestyle choice rather than "just having a job", and finding out the short cuts to a place in the journalistic pecking order. The demand for education that produced immediate employment results was most intense among this group, as the following extract from a Graduate Certificate student illustrates.

> I was thinking that I might like to get into TV journalism and, um, I have no idea, from what I've done so far what that would be like. ... Um, I see people who are doing the Grad. Cert. course who are dissatisfied with the job that they're doing, and they're looking for a career change, maybe some of them want to freelance, but it's not what I want to do.
>
> – *Why not? Tell me about that ...*
>
> Oh, well, as far as I've gathered, a lot of people have finished the course and sort of you know, submitted articles to magazines or papers as a way of making a living, but it sounds too scary to me. And I don't think I would have the motivation to

> do it. It would be working from home for a start, and that would be miserable to me. I want to be employed. I don't want to be self-employed, maybe later on in life, but not just now ... (Student Three, B.Sc., Graduate Certificate, 23 years old)

The last group of journalism students was also enrolled in postgraduate degree courses but, unlike the group above, they had worked or were working in the news media and had decided on further education as a means of career development. Their goals included professional refreshment, networking and an interest in a sustained opportunity to review and evaluate their professional practice and experiment with "new and different kinds" of news stories. It was among this group of students that discussion emerged about practical ways of changing journalistic conventions and raising standards of practice, as indicated in the following example:

> As a reporter, it's more often the case that you'll be passed something that you have to work on. You might have to call a couple of people and get the odd quote here or there but, for the most part, by the time the story reaches your desk, a good deal of the work has usually been done. So you're following up and embellishing and all that kind of thing. But to actually [study investigative journalism and then] start from scratch and do an investigative piece is a really good practical exercise. (Student Five, 20 years' journalism experience, Graduate Certificate, 36 years old)

This brief summary of findings reveals the multiple characteristics of journalism students, their different notions of a journalism career, and their different needs and expectations when it comes to professional education. The findings suggest there is something to be gained from disaggregating the generic category of "journalism students" and explicitly acknowledging that not all those who aspire to work in journalism seek entry-level employment in a newsroom, a general level of competence across a broad range of news gathering and reporting skills, or a life-long career in journalism. In this 2001 UTS sample, some were prepared to try freelancing, others wanted to develop their specialist reporting skills, and most believed their journalism degree would secure them a mid-range (rather than entry-level) job of some kind, whether in a newsroom or elsewhere.

Such findings suggest the need not only for more research on journalism students but also for closer scrutiny of the premises and categories that have been used in the past to discuss educational outcomes and graduate destinations in this domain. To date, journalism graduate destination research has tended to reproduce the idea of a journalism career based on work in a large metropolitan daily newspaper, that is, a model in which young journalists start at the bottom (as copypersons, cadets, interns or trainees) and work their way up the newsroom ladder. Yet this kind of career path does not necessarily apply in broadcast, magazine or online news media, much less in what Pearson and Johnston (1998, pp. 82-89) describe as the newer areas of journalistic work such as "corporate journalism" and "multi-media journalism". In a sense, then, this kind of research has been misleading because it has concentrated on a limited type of graduate outcome (entry-level newsroom jobs) despite the growing evidence of its declining importance as a form of newsroom recruitment (see, for example, Alysen, 1999, 2001). This in turn has deflected analytical attention from the range of career paths and possibilities now available in journalism and more accessible to the majority of journalism students. The narrow focus on entry-level newsroom jobs as the primary indicator of successful journalism education may also have skewed curricular and teaching priorities to address the expectations of a particular group of potential employers (metropolitan daily newspapers) at the expense of others (see also Green, 2005).

The confidence to say "I'm a journalist!": How, then, might new ideas and ways of talking about successful journalism education emerge? In the 2001 empirical study of UTS journalism students and graduates, the interviewees were encouraged to talk about the pros and cons of studying journalism in their own terms. One of the most interesting observations in this respect was that journalism education was repeatedly linked to gaining the confidence to be a journalist. One graduate expressed the process in the following terms:

> If I'm pressed to say what was the most valuable thing about the course, personally, it would be that it projected me into a space that I didn't feel comfortable in. [Before that] I felt like a fraud. I felt like a fake. I kept telling myself, "What are you doing? This is ridiculous, you know this isn't part of your experience." ... It wasn't one thing in particular, it was just, "Oh yes, I am doing this [now]" ... it just went in tandem because when I was doing the first year of the Masters, I took a job editing a magazine, and I just don't think I would have had the confidence to do it, and to learn the things I didn't know, the practical things, if I wasn't at the same time affirming my choice through education. I can't be more specific than that. (Graduate Two, BA, MA (Journalism), 33 years old)

"Confidence" or "confident practice" is an interesting educational outcome. The term is neither typically associated with academic learning, nor a topic normally canvassed in the banter of a newsroom – unless in reference to keeping the confidence of sources (Bolton, 1999). On the contrary, confidence is more typically thought of as an attractive, albeit elusive, human quality. Yet, in the interviews with UTS journalism graduates, it emerged as a shorthand term for describing the achievement of a sense of ease in thinking and acting like a journalist.

This sense of ease, as indicated in the extract above, did not depend on degree completion *or* getting a journalistic job. Instead, it was about claiming a professional identity for oneself, feeling part of a collective occupational enterprise and being able to communicate that sense of identity to others (for example, colleagues, employers, family, peers). Confident practice drew on innate personal characteristics but also acquired abilities; it was associated not only with feelings of individual empowerment but also with a capacity to deal with the institutionalised hierarchies and power dynamics found in the news media.

So, for example, a second graduate talked of overcoming his fear of dealing with news editors. This young man had enrolled in a postgraduate journalism degree because he wanted a job at a metropolitan newspaper, but found himself overwhelmed by the monoculturalism, corporate demands and even the dress codes of the newsrooms that he visited in search of freelance job opportunities. He explained his fear both in terms of personal traits (for example, nervousness, feeling intimidated) and institutional pressures to fit in (for example, to speak, write and look a certain way). However, during his time at university, he started writing features for online news sites, including a major business magazine. He was paid "good money", his stories were commissioned and delivered via email and, most significantly, his employers valued his postgraduate studies in journalism – a fact that encouraged him to complete his degree. This in turn helped him to deal with news editors and feel more self-assured when negotiating with them over story ideas and pay rates.

Conversely, confident practice proved an elusive quest for a third graduate despite the experience of holding a job as an editorial assistant in a major national newsroom since her first year as an undergraduate journalism student. This young woman did not feel she could describe herself as a journalist; on the contrary, she believed her journalistic career would only get under way once she obtained a traineeship. To use her words: "I want to get a traineeship and once I have that, then I'll think, 'Yes, I *am* a journalist'." In this case, a legitimate professional identity depended on following a traditional journalistic career path, starting in a junior post in a daily newspaper and learning their way of keeping deadlines and writing stories under pressure. There could be no shortcuts for this newcomer. Tertiary journalism studies had been useful, and working alongside some of Sydney's top-ranking journalists had provided invaluable insights, but she believed there was no substitute for career entry via industry-based training.

These journalism graduates talk about confidence in multi-faceted ways. Their views point to the complexities of claiming a professional identity in contemporary journalism and the difficulties of working without one. In addition, these views stand in contrast to the more one-dimensional approach to the notion of confidence that appears in a recent article on the future of journalism education. British journalism scholar Hugo de Burgh (2003) argues that "intellectual confidence" is the missing link in the educative process, and that the problem needs to be addressed by increasing the disciplinary studies content in journalism curricula. De Burgh describes "intellectual confidence" as follows:

> One of the university's main tasks is to free young people from the limitations of such socialisations that confine their past and present worlds. This is not merely academic idealism; there is a utilitarian argument too. ... In order to perform their functions, journalists need an education which enables them to put themselves and their society in perspective, find out anything and question everything. Motor skills, yes, but also the intellectual confidence which comes from knowledge. (de Burgh, 2003, pp. 109-110)

In this view, journalism education is distinguished from – and seen as preferable to – workplace socialisation because it can deliver intellectual confidence (knowledge) rather than just practical competence ("motor skills"). However, de Burgh's division between skills and knowledge in journalism is not so clear-cut in the UTS journalism graduates' definitions of confident practice. Their viewpoints highlight the complex interplay of competence and confidence that underpins professional identity in this field of work. They also point to the importance of being able to assert the sense of identity by stating "I'm a journalist". In other words, the public communication of this sense of identity to others appears to be something of a litmus test of confident practice in journalism.

It seems reasonable, therefore, to suggest, on the basis of these findings, that the idea of "confident practice" merits more consideration as a successful educational outcome. The category arises from talking to journalism graduates and students, key stakeholders in both journalism education and the future of journalism. It stands outside traditional, industry-oriented ways of judging journalism education in terms of employment outcomes; it is also outside those educational approaches that focus on the nature and quality of students' learning experiences (see Thomas, 2001; de Burgh, 2003). Instead, the category draws attention to the interdependent relationship between education and employment experiences in journalism; it also serves as a reminder that professional identity in journalism can develop independently of workplace affiliation. Furthermore, this kind of educational outcome calls into question the relationship between the university system and the news media that underpins professional education, a topic that will be explored in the next section.

Professional education

The second part of this paper looks briefly at formal accounts of the relationship between the university system and the news media, and takes up the tricky issue of intergenerational change in journalism.

Professional education is understood primarily in terms of initiating students into the existing knowledge and practices of a specific occupation (McGuire, 1992). The academic process is expected to reproduce occupational definitions and work routines. In relation to journalism, Becker and his colleagues (1987) summarise this fundamental aspect of professional education as follows:

> The goal of journalism education, whether implicitly or explicitly stated, is socialization to the profession. In other words, the intent of the curriculum, including the internships and laboratory experiences and the areas of study outside journalism, is to produce an individual who can effectively and efficiently function in the occupations of journalism and mass communications. (Becker, Fruit & Caudill, 1987, p. 19)

However, this theoretical approach to professional education can be seen to obscure as much as it reveals. After all, journalism is not a traditional, learned profession (Splichal & Sparks, 1994); attempts to describe or analyse it as such are contested (Henningham, 1979; Lloyd, 1985; Meadows, 1998) and there is little agreement on the core skills or knowledge domains that should be taught in university programs (Henningham, 1994; Pearson, 1994; Flew & Sternberg, 1999; Green, 2005). The pace of technological, commercial *and* cultural change in journalism further complicates curricular design and delivery. The additional empirical problem with this conventional professional education paradigm arises because many first-rate journalists do not have journalism degrees.

Splichal and Sparks (1994) help unpack some of the social expectations attached to this view of professional education in journalism. They point out that many proposals for news media reform are premised on the need for a better-educated and more autonomous journalistic workforce. Indeed, they suggest that critical studies of news media have reached something of a stalemate because they have failed to provide a theoretically sustained explanation of how and why journalists would participate in reform processes. These authors indicate that their own international study of journalism students is motivated by an interest in moving beyond this impasse. They explore the professional orientation of first-year journalism students as a way of testing out the premise that higher education encourages better journalistic practices. In their words:

> The first-year students we studied are the journalists of tomorrow. By the time this book appears, many of them will actually be journalists. Their ideas and beliefs will inform an important element of journalistic activity in the coming decades. They, and people very like them, are the raw material upon which schemes to improve the nature of journalism through education and training will have to work. (Splichal & Sparks, 1994, p. 5)

Their problem definition involves a theoretical reframing of the issue of news media reform in terms of the issue of professionalising journalism. It is an interesting strategic move because it suggests that theories of professional education (McGuire, 1992), rather than the sociology of news production (Schudson, 2000), provide the intellectual resources for thinking about change in journalism. This theoretical re-focus is justified in some ways. Education and training activities are treated as negligible in much news media research, including both macro-social and microanalytical approaches. Macro-social analyses tend to posit change as a systemic problem that requires structural reform and the intervention of regulators to achieve greater diversity in the ownership and control of news organisations (see, for example, Armstrong & Molnar, 1996; Barr, 2000; Hirst, 2001). In the second case, microanalyses of news organisations tend to be more interested in analysing existing work practices than in addressing change in the news media (see, for example, Putnis, 1996; Dunn, 1998; Josephi, 1999).

The "professionalisation of journalism" (Henningham, 1979, 1989, 1998), on the other hand, is conceived of as a transformative process in which education and training activities are directed *at the very least* towards incremental improvements in the educational qualifications and, hence, the professional standards of new generations of journalists (Henningham, 1993, 1995, 1998; Schultz, 1994; Breen, 1996; Patching, 1997; Ricketson, 2001). Nonetheless, as the 1990s "Media Wars" debate demonstrated, even this kind of minimal claim about the transformative capacity of journalism education is highly controversial and has been rejected outright by a range of academics (Hartley, 1995; Windschuttle, 1998; Flew & Sternberg, 1999; Turner, 2000). Their argument centres on the perceived inability of journalism education to offer anything more than newsroom training, with a bit of media theory added in to satisfy academic requirements.

However, it became evident during this debate that many claims were being made about Australian journalism education without the benefit of either reference to theoretical resources from the sociology of education or empirical research into the growth and development of this field of study in Australian universities. In particular, there was little recognition of the range of innovative educational initiatives that emerged after the 1987 introduction of the Unified National System of higher education (Putnis et al, 2002), in what Stuart (1997) termed the "third wave" of journalism education (O'Donnell, 2002, 2005).

The move away from vocationalism

Interestingly, many Australian journalism educators have taken up the issue of the transformative potential of professional education in the development, design and delivery of their own journalism programs, or as part of collective endeavours to provide new resources for extending and improving journalistic practices. The 1990s saw the development of various new pedagogical approaches in journalism education (Loo, 1994; Meadows, 1997; Bacon, 1999; Pearson, 1999; Sheridan Burns, 2002; Tanner, 2002), as well as curriculum packages (Boreland & Smith, 1996; Lawe Davies, 1998; Sheridan Burns & Hazell, 1998) and training resources (Stockwell & Scott, 2000; Castillo & Hirst, 2001). These resources deal with areas such as the representation of Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities; youth suicide and youth crime; self-reflexive and ethical professional practices and public journalism, as well as information gathering and story research using new technologies.

All of these initiatives aim in one way or another at reviewing, extending, improving or challenging existing professional practices and journalistic conventions. In some of these cases, the notion of professionalism has been explicitly rejected, along with the premise that journalism should be seen as a specialist skill and therefore an elite or exclusive domain of expertise and power (Meadows, 1998, 1999; Bacon, 1999). In other cases, the term "professional education" has simply been expanded by journalism academics to incorporate new definitions and standards of high-quality, self-reflexive, culturally aware, ethical or community-oriented journalism. Critiques of journalism and critical educational theory – notably Donald Schön's (1983) concept of "reflective practice" – support these endeavours (see, in particular, Sheridan Burns, 2002). Taken together, these innovative approaches to journalism education represent a significant, practical move away from the vocationalism that has historically characterised professional education in journalism in Australia (Coleman, 1992; Stuart, 1996; O'Donnell, 2005).

Yet this practical shift has not been accompanied by the development of thinking at the theoretical level about the rationale for professional education in journalism, or the relationship between the university system and the news media that underpins it. In that sense, the question raised by Splichal and Sparks (1994) of how and why new journalists might make it their business to introduce innovative practices into newsrooms or participate in news media reform processes, remains open.

The university system and the news media

Against this background, it is worth examining another, more recent approach to news media research. Journalism "field theory" (Benson & Neveu, 2005) is a critical paradigm that is being developed by a group of European and US scholars. An overview of the paradigm is contained in a recent book, *Bourdieu and the journalistic field* (2005), edited by Rodney Benson from the Communication and Culture program in the Steinhardt School of Education at New York University and Erik Neveu from the Institute of Political Studies in Rennes. The paradigm's central concept of "field" is borrowed from reflexive sociology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992); it refers to a network of institutions and social agents engaged in a specialised kind of social activity. The journalistic field therefore comprises "the entire universe of journalists and media organizations acting and reacting in relation to one another" (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 11). The underlying logic, dynamics and significance of the work done by journalists as they produce news is the main concern of research undertaken at what is termed this *mezzo-level* of analysis (Benson, 1998, p. 479). The major benefit of pursuing this kind of research is that it enables detailed discussion of the intellectual work of journalism, its social contribution, and the significance of academic initiation into this mode of thinking. Field theory thus offers intellectual resources not only for the task of analysing intergenerational reproduction and change in the journalism field (Benson, 1998, 2005), but also for developing a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between the university system and the news media (Bourdieu, 2005).

It has to be said from the outset that field theorists are typically dubious about the likelihood of newcomers transforming the internal dynamics of any field, particularly in the absence of other significant pressures for change (Bourdieu, 1993; Benson, 1998, 2005). Scholars working within this perspective therefore tend to approach journalism as just one of various fields of cultural production that suffer from an overproduction of university graduates (Bourdieu, 2005). This problem is seen to arise from government policies aimed at increasing social access to higher education; in that sense, the "professionalisation" of journalism has almost nothing to do with the labour market requirements of the news industry (for Australian discussion of the "oversupply" issue see also Stuart, 1996; Patching, 1997; O'Donnell, 1999). In creating an oversupply of journalism graduates (or "cultural reserve army"), the universities may well "professionalise" journalism, but they do not necessarily facilitate change in terms of innovative or higher standards of journalistic practice. On the contrary, universities might well be encouraging precarious employment policies in the media, *and* market-oriented work practices such as self-censorship in journalism. The reasoning here is that when jobs are scarce, newcomers are more likely to do anything that employers demand in order to get a foot in the door (Bourdieu, 2005, pp. 42-43). In this view, then, counteracting structural dynamics may well neutralise the benefits of raising the educational qualifications of new generations of journalists through tertiary studies. Indeed, Benson indicates that "field theory largely emphasizes how the social and educational attributes of new journalists primarily serve to reproduce the field" (Benson, 2005, p. 101). Elsewhere, he goes further and expresses outright scepticism about the possibility of US journalism graduates taking critical stances or questioning the status quo (Benson, 1998, p. 468). As a result, to date, more attention has been given in journalism field theory to documenting the overall size and demographic profile of journalistic workforces than to the in-depth study of professional education issues.

Yet, arguably, something is missing from this picture of an army of uncritical journalism graduates advancing on the news media in desperate search of work. In formal terms, journalism field theory can be seen to err in favour of systemic explanations of intergenerational change in journalism without taking proper account of the agency of key stakeholders in the process, such as journalism students and journalism educators. A theoretical analysis of the current systemic bias in journalism field theory – and its neglect of other core reflexive sociological concepts such as "capital" (or the forms of power at stake in different fields) and "habitus" (or the mode of thinking that is produced by and guides practice in fields) (Bourdieu, 1986, 2000; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) – is beyond the scope of this article.

The empirical research on journalism students outlined above, however, identifies at least three points on which this negative assessment of the likely impact of professional education can be challenged. In all three cases, the activities of stakeholders can be seen to open up possibilities for change in journalism, rather than simply reproducing the status quo. First, it seems important to dispel the idea that all newcomers share the same backgrounds or the same aim of a stable lifetime career in journalism. Instead, there are multiple ways that newcomers can either make a place or reposition themselves in the news media, a fact that becomes more readily apparent when various categories of journalism students and a wide range of career goals are explored. Second, the Australian experience of journalism education in the 1990s provides the means for at least questioning the premise that professional education in this area is anti-intellectual or acritical. Many Australian journalism educators are involved in innovative educational initiatives and seek to develop a more creative, dialogical relationship between the universities and the news media. Although the educational and professional impact of these efforts has yet to be evaluated in a systematic way, it seems reasonable to suggest that the possibilities for change in journalism are enhanced when newcomers enter the field with some practical experiences and rationales for reviewing, extending, improving or challenging journalistic conventions. The third, related, point concerns the limited usefulness of judging graduate outcomes in journalism in terms of newsroom employment. Without in any way trying to underrate the importance of newsroom recruitment of journalism graduates, there is also something to be said for looking at the achievement of confident practice (professional identity) independent of workplace affiliation. It seems reasonable to suggest that once achieved, this sense of ease in thinking and acting like a journalist will endure and enable journalism graduates to act strategically when faced with the various employment and editorial opportunities that arise in the news media.

Conclusion

In short, this analysis not only suggests there is more to professional education in journalism than workforce reproduction through socialisation to the profession, but also indicates some lines of inquiry that might be pursued in order to test out claims that there can be a more creative and dialogical relationship between universities and news media, academics and practitioners, newcomers to journalism and top-ranking journalists.

Journalism field theory is a work-in-progress, and scholars have been urged by its proponents to explore and systematically test out its main claims, rather than passively adopting its theoretical assumptions (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 19). There are many advantages to drawing on this paradigm in developing further research on journalism students. Field theory notices journalism students not just when they start work in newsrooms, but also because the mere presence of quantities of newcomers aspiring to and competing for positions in the news media may well affect the internal dynamics of the news media (for example, recruitment practices, job security, readiness to innovate). In contrast to graduate destination research, it enables a broader view of the relationship between the university system and the news media to emerge, and provides the means for raising and exploring the complex process of intergenerational change in journalism.

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Author

Penny O'Donnell is a senior lecturer in journalism at the University of Technology, Sydney.