
SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIES IN BUILDING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICAL COMPETENCES OF JOURNALISM STUDENTS - A REVIEW

Simona Fer *

University of Oradea, Romania

Abstract

Practical training for Journalism students in the specialization of Journalism, field of Communication Sciences, is considered an essential component of the curriculum in the educational process, but above all a sustainable priority in their approach from the theory assimilated in school to the professional practice carried out in local media institutions. We will focus, therefore, on the importance of sustainability in students' practical training, with thorough involvement of their coordinating professors. The internship program comprises various stages during which Journalism students are required to have impeccable conduct, too. The COVID-19 pandemic brought many changes in the educational process and forced professors in the dramatic situation of rethinking their role and their function, as well as of re-evaluating their working strategies, methods and pedagogical instruments in unpredictable conditions. The professors in charge with the internship programs for masters and undergraduate students had to carefully navigate what was possible in such unforeseen and unfavorable circumstances. We propose a perspective on how we should view the relevance of the internship, so important in the professional training.

Keywords: sustainability; journalism; theory; practical education; career opportunities

Introduction

Academia is the place where knowledge and character formation take shape and become realities. Responsibility, camaraderie, and professionalism become values the students must cultivate and apply. Through sustainable efforts we annually support the students' practical training. This complements the didactic activity where students learn the fundamental theoretical knowledge. Internships contribute thus to acquiring the professional competencies and skills required for the students' entry on the labor market.

According to the Bologna principles, the European Union's main objective in education is to create a harmonious system, with a special focus on

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to:

* Ph.D., University of Oradea, Department of Political sciences and Communication sciences, Oradea, Romania. Address: Universitatii st., 5, 410087 Oradea, Romania, UE. E-mail: sfer@uoradea.ro

youths, interweaving theory and practice in the educational system (Goudenhoft, 2011).

Intellectual theory acquired in school is integrated into, not separated from the journalism skills. Such a theory practiced by students will also help them enlarge their understanding, test different theories, work out their own solutions to problems in gathering and reporting news as well as developing their own creative skills. Students will also develop important transferable skills which will be useful throughout life, not just in journalism. These include communication, self-assertion and confidence, leadership, co-operation and teamwork (Herbert, 1998).

Complementary to the formative and informative dimension, education also has a relational component which draws on the relationships established between the trainer and the student. The relationships between the professors coordinating the internship, the tutors from the media organizations and the students influence to a great extent the students' reception and assimilation of knowledge conveyed during classes. And then, the activities the students become in charge with in the media institutions represent the groundwork for further professional objectives and goals (Bratu & Rusu, 2014).

Practical training in Journalism or Media sciences aims to equip students with basic media skills and is included as part of their degree. Training is provided by experienced journalists, who yearly take over our groups of students and instruct them creating opportunities for their future careers.

Of course, during the internships, students are trained in activities specific to all media departments, so that they can follow the entire workflow leading to a newspaper/magazine publication, or to a radio or TV show.

If in the past, a career in journalism was seen strictly from a professional point of view, recently other connotations enlarged its scope: personal and community life, courage, visionary spirit, honor, integrity and maturity, teamwork, methodology, energy, and perseverance. Presently, career means holding fundamental values even from the period of internships, when students have the opportunity to apply the techniques of information collection and verification, to use various working methods, to choose and critically assess the events with news potential, to take journalistic photos and process them, to draft the script for radio news, or to assist to the montage and editing of TV news. All these mean challenge, joy of life, as well as a launching pad towards continuous improvement. And we could add time, efficiency, and total commitment.

They can become reality only with sustainable and conscious efforts from all of us involved in the process of transition from academic theory to professional practice.

Literature review

Students are taught that Journalism means news and information. Journalists discover news and report it. This profession consists of gathering facts, deciding how to connect them, making important decisions about which

aspects to include and which to avoid or to omit. Journalism is about analyzing and interpreting events, knowing how government, politics, business, industry and modern society work and being able to make interesting stories out of all kinds of events. Journalism therefore consists of practical skills and a wide intellectual foundation which gives credibility to the reporting.

In this respect, Donald Schon, whose work serves as a reference point for reflective practice in professional education, argues that professionals do not simply maintain an expert body of knowledge, but they constantly engage with their practice, through actions underpinned by intrinsic intellectual processes, creating solutions appropriate to the specific context of a problem. That is why it is hard for a professional to instruct a novice simply by describing or showing any procedures, rules and theories. He considers that practice is highly valued as something that draws deeply on our intelligence, experience and power (Schön, 1987). As in other areas of professional education, there is constant debate about whether and how to make university teaching relevant to the job market. In response, many journalism educators argue that workplace demands are too short term and quickly go out of date: students need thinking skills, awareness of wider choices and preparation for the fact that good practice can be hard to put into effect in the real world. There are tensions between professional and academic approaches and negotiations over the boundaries between theory and practice (Medsker, 1996).

There are definitely contradictory views as concerns the importance of academic studies and the relevance of practical education, S. Greenberg stating that practitioners are likely to be suspicious of academics for criticizing journalists' work without ever having done it themselves. Academics are suspicious of practitioners' relative lack of 'qualifications' for teaching in higher education. The ideal educator is a former practitioner who has spent time in higher education and has done research, but these people are relatively rare. The author also explains that tension between theory and practice tutors is understandable as part of an ongoing and necessary process of change (Greenberg, 2007; Žulec, Merkaš, & Varga, 2023).

Some university professors maintain a strong belief in solutions of pedagogical issues, "In my years as a journalism teacher and high school newspaper adviser, I found nothing more valuable for teaching the craft than showing students how the professionals do it. From interviewing and reporting to photography and page design to making ethical decisions and exerting First Amendment rights, newspapers like *The New York Times* were our models" (Ojalvo, 2009). Another journalism professor expresses no less categorical opinions on the website, speaking about what an aspiring journalist needs to know, "In a nutshell, the best and really the only way to truly learn journalism is by doing it. Lectures and textbooks will only take you so far; right off the bat, I send students out to practice interviewing, reporting and writing. Offering detailed and constructive feedback is particularly important in journalism and it

is a continual process of improvement” (Brown-Smith, 2018; Bardorfer & Dolenc, 2022).

According to professor Z. Khubetsova, training of future specialists should be combined with editorial production, when teaching is carried out in parallel with professional journalistic work. Such modernization will allow education institutes to exercise system monitoring of changes in the world of mass information, shift in technological modes and to involve professional education in the processes of global information changes (Khubetsova, Korkonosenko, & Blokhin, 2015).

Jon Minners, a newspaper editor states that journalism cannot be taught from a book. In this concern he also suggests that “what professors need to do is conduct the classroom as if it was a newsroom”. They must go out and develop relationships and maintain their contacts. They must write stories through real contacts they have made, understanding what it is like to be a real journalist (Minners, 2014).

During the seminars, students reasonably review the curriculum and key methodological documents and offer their projects of lectures or laboratory lessons and analytical presentations on the materials of textbooks (Korkonosenko, 2018). Experts must be able to work in different contexts, possess social and communication skills, and be able to select relevant aspects from the vast flow of information. In this process, experts must continuously construct and re-construct their expertise and motivation is needed to achieve expert-level performance (Chi, Glaser, & Farr, 2014; Szabo & Marian, 2018). Tony Harcup creatively combines the experience and advice of practicing journalists with the theories and insights from the academic study of journalism (Harcup, 2021). A reasonable length and quality of practical experiences is necessary for the development of a high degree of expertise (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). Practical learning can be implicit, reactive or deliberative. Deliberate processes are needed in work. These include decision-making, planning and problem-solving (Eraut, Alderton, Cole, & Senker, 2000).

The list of specialists in Journalism may definitely be extended, but their views are very similar. Professor Korkonosenko concludes that on the educational level, it is obviously seen the increasing competence of students in the evaluation of events and phenomena in the frame of academic practices.

Practical training carried out by Journalism students, University of Oradea, Romania. Summary presentation

In order for students to deeply understand the training process in the specialization of Journalism, the University of Oradea has identified a number of general and specific objectives. Among them practical training represents a basic component of the educational process, which aims to connect the University with media local institutions and the job market under the supervision of specialists (Fer, Pop, Popa, & Fer, 2011). This leads to an organized training process and

places it within a serious context, while developing the student's academic and practical training skills.

Practical training aims at improving labor market entry for graduates in Journalism from the University of Oradea. In internships, students acquire the necessary competencies for integration and stability on a modern, flexible and dynamic labor market, and they increase their adaptability being able to adjust to the requirements of their first job in journalism. The internship matches the students' activity as per the study plan; its purpose is to check whether the theoretical knowledge previously acquired at the university can be applied. The trainee is the student who carries out practical activities to consolidate their theoretical knowledge and to meet their academic obligations, as per the curriculum (Voloacă & Sofia, 2011). Broadening students' experience, even if incipient at this stage of the practical training, should not be limited to general knowledge and to the correct usage of grammar and rhetorical effects (Coman, 2005). Journalism students should make efforts to acquire specific professional skills and competencies, easily and successfully applicable in their future profession. During their internship in the media institution, students are trained, if possible, in activities carried out by (almost) all journalistic departments so that they can follow the entire making of a media product and, implicitly, of a publication or show.

There are specific objectives focusing on helping students in Journalism or Communication Science adapt to the new European socio-economic context (Marian et al., 2022), which validates knowledge and skills acquired outside the formal educational system. These objectives are: 1) facilitating students' access to information and to specialized services of career guidance provided both by the training coordinator at the university and by the media institution where the internship takes place. These services support the transition from university to active life; 2) promoting and developing partnerships between the University of Oradea and media institutions in order to facilitate the transition from university to active life; 3) facilitating professional development through internships in partner media institutions in order to improve labor market entry of Journalism graduates; 4) facilitating data exchange between University and Employers; 5) improving students' access to services of career guidance, designing useful tools for career counseling (worksheets, questionnaires, tests). Meeting the specific objectives will certainly generate benefits for Journalism students.

The students had to inform the program coordinator in face-to-face meetings/by email/via the e-learning platform of the University of Oradea on their media institution of choice for the internship. The internships took place in June-July, not overlapping with the weekly timetable of classes. Each year, in September, all students doing a practical training of 50 hours (the students and the partner institution, upon mutual agreement, can extend this period) participate in an internship performance review conducted by the program coordinator.

In the beginning of September, on the date and time established with the program coordinator, the students submit their practical training folder.

Students complete a set of forms throughout the internship and present them at the colloquium.

Conclusions

The sustainable efforts that this branch of the educational process require are crucial: to meet the students' needs, to help them gain self-confidence, to train them and facilitate their entry on the labor market through journalistic skill acquisition at the media institutions from Oradea. The internship program was not easy to implement after an uncertain COVID-19 pandemic period, but not impossible. The results of sustainable commitment from the three categories of stakeholders involved (students, coordinating professor and tutor from the media institution) are satisfactory and optimistic. We consider that further improvements can be made in the future also during the academic year. The students could be accepted for overtime, after their classes during the academic year. We already sent this proposal to a printed media institution and to a TV station, and we got positive answers, being thus able to support the students for their future career as journalists.

If in the past, a career in journalism was seen strictly from a professional point of view, recently other connotations enlarged its scope: personal and community life, courage, visionary spirit, honor, integrity and maturity, teamwork, methodology, energy, and perseverance. During their practical training students had the opportunity to apply the techniques of information collection and verification through the working methods provided by the media institutions. They chose and critically assessed the events having news potential, they took journalistic photos and processed them, they wrote the script for radio news, and assisted to the montage and editing of TV news. All these meant challenge, joy of life, as well as a launching pad towards continuous improvement. And we could add time, efficiency, and total commitment. During their internships, students were able to integrate their theoretical knowledge into their practical activity and they evaluated the significance of theoretical knowledge in general from more numerous viewpoints than before.

Noting the students' reactions, we can say that their practical training managed to complement efficiently their academic activity. They certainly understood that the two essential branches of journalism (theoretical and practical) are interwoven, and they realized that the fundamental theoretical notions of journalism represent a sine qua non condition for a successful practice. They appreciated the sustainable efforts and advice provided by the media institutions and the opportunity to work with professional journalists, all these opening perspectives towards the students' access to a dynamic media market.

Ethics statement

Not applicable.

Conflicts of interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

Author contribution

Not Applicable.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

References

- Bardorfer, A., & Dolenc, P. (2022). Teacher-student rapport as predictor of learning motivation within higher education: the self-determination theory perspective. *Journal of Psychological and Educational Research*, 30(2), 115-133.
- Bratu, V., & Rusu, P. (2014). *Învățământul românesc între tradiție și modernism* [Romanian Education between Tradition and Modernism]. Deva: Sindicatul Învățământ Preuniversitar Județul Hunedoara.
- Brown-Smith, C. (2018). Journalism teaching. *CubReporters.org*. Available online: <http://journalism-teaching.cubreporters.org/> (accessed on September 3, 2022)
- Chi, M. T., Glaser, R., & Farr, M. J. (Eds.). (2014). *The nature of expertise*. Psychology Press.
- Coman, M. (2005). *Manual de jurnalism* [Journalism Manual]. vol. I, pp. 77-89. Iași, Ro.: Polirom.
- Dreyfus, H. L., & Dreyfus, S. E. (1986). *Mind Over Machine. The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of Computer*. New York: Blackwell.
- Eraut, M., Alderton, J., Cole, G., & Senker, P. (2000). Development of knowledge and skills at work. In F. Coffield (Ed.), *Differing Visions of a Learning Society*, pp. 231-262. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Fer, S., Fer, D., Popa, V., & Pop L. (2011). *De la politicile educaționale la realitățile educației* [From Education Policies to Education Realities], pp. 128-129. Oradea, Ro.: Editura Universității din Oradea.
- Goudenhoft, G. (2011). *EU Educational Policy and Student-Centered Learning*. Available at SSRN 2574552.
- Greenberg, S. (2007). Theory and practice in journalism education. *Journal of Media Practice*, 8(3), 289-303.
- Harcup, T. (2021). Journalism: principles and practice. *Journalism*, 1-100.

- Herbert, J. (1998). Working towards a practical theory of journalism. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 1(5), 137-143.
- Khubetsova, Z. F., Korkonosenko, S. G., & Blokhin, I. N. (2015). Journalistic education: Conceptualization and media competences. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(3 S3), 107-114.
- Korkonosenko, S. G. (2018). Methods of teaching journalism as academic course in higher school. *Academic Publishing House Researcher*, 58(3), 80-88.
- Marian, M., Darabaneanu, D., Chirodea, F., & Toca, C. (2022). Analysis of social support as an argument for the sustainable construction of the European Community space. *Sustainability*, 14(12), 7448.
- Medsger, B. (1996). Is Journalism Different? Where journalism education went wrong. *Conference paper for Journalism Education, the First Amendment Imperative, and the Changing*.
- Minners, J. (2014) Tips in Journalism. Available on journalism-teaching.cubreporters.org (accessed on September 7, 2022).
- Ojalvo, H. E. (2009). Teaching and learning about journalism, Learning Network. *Teaching and Learning with the New York Times*.
- Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. Jossey-Bass.
- Szabo, Z., & Marian, M. (2018). Exams time: the influence of short term stressful events. *Journal of Psychological and Educational Research*, 26(1), 106-120.
- Voloacă, I. D., & Sofia, B. (2011). *Manual de practică-Specializarea comunicare și relații publice* [Practice Manual - Communication and Public Relations Specialisation], p. 18. București, Ro.: Editura Fundației România de mâine.
- Žulec, A., Merkaš, M., & Varga, V. (2023). Screen-based activities among children in Croatia: a media diary approach. *Journal of Psychological & Educational Research*, 31(1), 63-83.

Received March 29, 2023

Revision April 29, 2023

Accepted September 15, 2023