



UNIVERSITY  
OF WOLLONGONG  
AUSTRALIA

12-1-2006

# An independent student press: Three case studies for Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Aotearoa/New Zealand

D. Robie

*AUT University, New Zealand*

---

### Recommended Citation

Robie, D., An independent student press: Three case studies for Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Aotearoa/New Zealand, *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 17, 2006, 20-40.

Available at:<http://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss17/4>

# An Independent Student Press: Three Case Studies from Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Aotearoa/New Zealand

**David Robie**

*School of Communication Studies*

*AUT University*

*Aotearoa/New Zealand*

---

In spite of a relatively small but vibrant news media base, two South Pacific countries have been regional leaders in convergent publishing with both newspapers and online media as educational outcomes for student journalists. Universities in Fiji and Papua New Guinea have pioneered with various versions of an entrepreneurial and socially activist student press for three decades, including titles such as *Uni Tavur* (founded in 1975), *Wansolwara* (1996) and *Liklik Diwai* (1998). All three papers have strongly identified with a national development role. In 2003, Aotearoa/New Zealand's AUT University began publishing *Te Waha Nui* as a regular professional course publishing venture. It quickly established a niche with indigenous and diversity affairs coverage as an important strength. Using a problem-based learning (PBL) context, this article compares and contrasts the pedagogical challenges faced in all three countries in Oceania and outlines a media educational case for independent journalism school publishing.

---

## Introduction

*Wansolwara*, *Lilik Diwai* and *Uni Tavor* have produced many editors and senior journalists in the contemporary Pacific press. *Uni Tavor* was the first Pacific newspaper to develop a news website, establishing it in 1995. *Wansolwara* also established a news website, *Pacific Journalism Online*, which distinguished itself with coverage of the attempted coup in Fiji in 2000. In November 2003, AUT University began publishing *Te Waha Nui* as a regular professional course publication – the first regular paper of its kind produced by a New Zealand journalism school. It quickly established a niche with indigenous and diversity affairs coverage – particularly of Maori and Pasifika issues – as an important strength. Using a problem-based learning (PBL) context, this article compares and contrasts the pedagogical challenges faced in all three countries in Oceania and outlines a media educational case for independent journalism school publishing.

---

## Problem-based learning as a basis for publishing

The “live” experience provided by PBL learning environments develops confidence and a sense of competence among student journalists (Abercrombie, 1979; Green, 1991; Meadows, 1997; Sheridan Burns, 1997; Sheridan Burns & Hazell, 1999; Tanner, 2005). As a concept, it is regarded as a method of “learning by discovery” developed by Plato and in modern times became widely adopted by health sciences in the 1950s in the United States (Meadows, p. 98). It was later adapted as a methodology by other disciplines, including architecture, engineering and geography. Several journalism schools in Australia adopted it in the mid-1990s, especially related to covering issues such as cross-cultural reporting and youth suicides. Teaching and learning based on the “real world” of structured problems faced by newsroom professionals is a highly suited framework for journalism school publishing. As Sheridan Burns and Hazell have described it:

Valuing process over product and learning over teaching, it aims to develop life-long learning skills so that graduates can apply their knowledge and understanding to new situations. (p. 58)

Problem-based learning – active, constructive and reflective – is probably the closest tertiary students can get to real life experience after graduation. It involves greater realism and free inquiry and develops decision-making skills. It also calls on students making greater use of their existing knowledge to gain new knowledge, skills and insight. Abercrombie (1979) argued that PBL broadened learning opportunities beyond the transfer of factual knowledge and generalisations.

As a pedagogical tool, PBL typically includes a framework of

- (a) student-centred learning;
- (b) the use of small groups;
- (c) tutors/lecturers as facilitators; and
- (d) the introduction of “authentic” problems at the start of the course; and
- (e) the development of problem-solving skills (Barrows, as cited by Tanner, 2005, p. 92).

Often the PBL process is designed to produce students who will take up a challenge with initiative and enthusiasm; reason reflectively, accurately and creatively from an integrated and flexible knowledge base; monitor and assess their own progress; and collaborate effectively as a team to achieve a common goal – in this case the newspaper.

While all three newspapers assessed in this article contrast in their structure and style, use of PBL as a learning experience has been a common thread relating to each publication. The production of the papers has been by small editorial groups (ranging between nine and 15 students in any semester) who are given a problem task list at the start of the course involving both the publishing objectives and individual job descriptions within the team. The problem-solving areas, in the case of the Pacific papers, also involved advertising and fund-raising for printing costs as well as editorial decision-making. All three newspapers involved continuous self-reflection and negotiation – a sort of publishing-by-committee process – with lecturers merely providing the framework and guidance.

In the 1970s, at a time when journalism schools in New Zealand did not publish regular newspapers (and when there were very few such schools), *Uni Tavur* was launched at the University of Papua New Guinea with New Zealand development aid funds (Table 1). It became a self-funded publication through advertising support that spanned almost three decades. At the University of the South Pacific, French aid assisted the establishment of *Wansolwara* newspaper in 1996. Likewise advertising has supported this newspaper as an educational outcome and in November 2006 it celebrated a decade of successful publishing in Fiji. In New Zealand, *Te Waha Nui* began publishing in 2003 and is fully funded and supported by AUT University's School of Communication Studies.

Institution	UPNG	USP	AUT
Name of newspaper	<i>Uni Tavur</i>	<i>Wansolwara</i>	<i>Te Waha Nui</i>
Founded	1975	1996	2002
Circulation	3000	2000	2000
Teaching staff	1	1	2
Contact hours	16	8	10 + 10 = 20
Support staff	0	0	0
Project/paper	News Production	Print & Online Journalism	News Production
No of pages	16 to 24	16	32 (sem 1) + 24 (sem 2)
No of editions	12 a year (6 + 6)	4 (2 + 2) + daily webnews	5 a year (1 + 4)
Revenue (edition)	NZ\$1000 (adverts)	NZ\$1500 (adverts)	0
Total prod. cost	Printed by <i>Post-Courier</i>	NZ\$6000	NZ\$9000

**Table 1: Three Fiji, PNG and New Zealand training newspapers**

As well as PBL experiential learning, the papers have at times served as “alternative” or “progressive” voices in media markets dominated by few but powerful players – primarily Murdoch in the case of Fiji and Papua New Guinea (controlling the leading dailies in both countries, the *PNG Post-Courier* and *The Fiji Times*) and Fairfax Media and Australian Provincial Press (APN) in New Zealand. According to Kyan Tomaselli, writing about the role of the alternative press in the post-apartheid era in South Africa and the ways progressive media can question and challenge, it is alternative

[n]ot only because it contests overtly but because it can advocate and exemplify a vision of democratic goals, of community and interaction, that are radically different from the hegemonic mainstream one. (Tomaselli, 1991, cited by Lewis, 2004, p. 44)

Dick Rooney et al have lamented the “failure” of Papua New Guinea media as “agencies of information for empowerment” (2004, p. 3) and have looked to independent publications such as *Uni Tavor*, *Liklik Diwai* and *Wantok* to provide the needed incentive. Their concerns that journalists ought to take a more active role in representing *grasruts* people echo views expressed in the United States by media commentators and advocates, such as John Merrill, and in Australia by Frank Morgan, who have argued that tensions between state authority and a “free media” are not restricted to the developing world.

Pointing to past journalism stalwarts such as I. F. Stone and Tom Wicker, Merrill wrote about “existential journalism” and the importance of the freedom of the individual journalist against the “media system” (Merrill, 1996). A prolific author writing about global journalism issues, Merrill acknowledged that his book, which argued for freedom, courage, action and the acceptance of responsibility, had “struck a responsive note” with students.

It is a time when societal pressures still tend to depreciate individual autonomy and mould journalists into smooth-functioning robots. It is my belief that journalists must rebel against this growing conformism, must push back the encroaching bonds of institutionalisation and professionalisation, and determine to exercise maximum freedom in their daily endeavours. (p. 5)

---

## Uni Tavor (Papua New Guinea)

### Context

The University of Papua New Guinea’s training publication *Uni Tavor* played an important role in the formation of journalists for more than two decades. *Uni Tavor* was launched on 24 July 1975 by the late New Zealand television journalist and media educator Ross Stevens. *Tavor* means “conch shell” in the Tolai language of the Gazelle Peninsula, East New Britain. The shell was the paper’s masthead logo. Journalism student Robert Elowo, who died tragically the following year in a car accident while working for the National Broadcasting Commission’s Radio Kundiawa, designed the original version. Uni is derived from the university. The first newsroom was set up in “the dungeon” – as the students dubbed the bunker style classroom near the Michael Somare Library (cited in Robie, 2004, p. 128).

The first edition carried news items, including social and sports events. It consisted of four A4 size pages and had a circulation of 200 copies. Student reporters were assigned rounds with a brief to cover anything of news values for their readers. Recalled former Vice-Chancellor Joseph Sukwianomb:

*Uni Tavor* came [...] to play a significant role in the university scene in terms of changing ideas [...] generally about that period from independence [...] the campus was very vibrant, very active. The students were well aware of what was happening. This was the time of student demonstrations and strikes. They were all reported from student angles by student journalists. (Cited in Robie, 2004, p. 129)

Over the following 25 years, *Uni Tavor* experienced many changes but persisted with a vigorous and “gutsy” reporting style. “Whether it was life on campus, life on the

borderline, the political scene or anything of national interest, the students sweated to get the paper going,” wrote first-year journalism student Jessie Waibauru in the 20th anniversary issue (2004, p. 10). In a retrospective survey of *Uni Tavur*, she captured the essence of a lively publication and a snapshot of post-independence history. Starting in 1975, reports focused on Sir Michael Somare leading the country to independence on September 16, and the selection and swearing in of the first PNG Governor-General, Sir John Guise (Robie, 2004, p. 130).

In 1978, reports described moves by Papua New Guinea to support the “Kanak Liberation Movement”, as *Uni Tavur* described it, fighting for independence for New Caledonia from France. During the same year, an arts student wrote that marijuana should be legalised in Papua New Guinea because it was “not as bad as beer”. In 1979, a second-year student in social work said he had found a frog’s head in his plate of food. When the mess manager was asked about it, he reportedly said it was “an oyster”. In 1981, Student Representative Council (SRC) president Gabriel Ramoi criticised the lecturers’ dress standards, while a commerce student alleged the government had wasted millions of kina by recruiting overseas specialists to improve accounting systems (Waibauru, 1994, p. 11). Ramoi later became a controversial PNG cabinet minister. He was notorious for introducing an unsuccessful draft bill designed to gag the media.

Ross Stevens was among many journalists and community leaders who sent messages of congratulations to *Uni Tavur* to mark its “two decades old” special edition. His message arrived late so it was published in the edition of 19 August 1994. He appealed to the Papua New Guinean news media to continue valuing a good tertiary education for the “most important profession of all. The one that ‘keeps the bastards honest’” (Stevens, 1994, p. 9). Vice-Chancellor Joseph Sukwianomb described two decades of publishing *Uni Tavur* as a “remarkable feat” for a small newspaper and university.

When the first copy of the first edition of *Uni Tavur* ran off the press, the pioneers of that historical epoch perhaps did not think that there would be many more copies, and 20 years to live on ...Survival of a project such as *Uni Tavur* has also symbolised the growth of specialised training for journalists in this country. (Sukwianomb, 1994, p. 17)

The following year, 1995, during my five-year period at UPNG, *Uni Tavur* became a tabloid, introduced four-colour printing, and boosted its circulation to 3000. It began printing fortnightly editions on newsprint with the *Post-Courier*, the country’s largest daily newspaper, and introduced a liftout investigative reports section called “Insight”. The paper went on to win the 1995 Ossie Award from the Journalism Education Association (JEA) for best regular publication in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. Judge Max Suich, editor-in-chief of Sydney’s *The Independent Monthly*, said: “By far the most impressive was the University of PNG newspaper, which had a level of maturity in its writing, and a concern with national issues, that made it stand head and shoulders above the others” (*Uni Tavur* takes out top award, 1996). In 1997, the newspaper’s student journalists covered the Sandline mercenary crisis and also reported on the country’s general election that year:

**Election 1997 special:**

Shot guard recovers from bank raid [at UPNG]  
‘Lie down,’ say gunmen

Students defiant on NGO arrests  
UN hails PNG human rights charter  
Bougainville solution? Promises and lies  
Don't blame us after the poll, warn key women  
(Headlines from *Uni Tavour*, 16 May 1997 – last edition before the 1997 general election). (Figure 1)



**Figure 1: A *Uni Tavour* front page reporting a bank raid at UPNG, 16 May 1997.**

Two young women journalism students wrote evocative articles about the shooting of three UPNG students during a 2001 protest march on the National Parliament at Waigani (Cheung, 2001; Wakus, 2001). Sadly this was among the last of the newspaper's finer moments as *Uni Tavour* slipped into decline after 26 years of publication.

*Lik Lik Diwai*, a publication at Divine Word University in Madang, has emerged and filled the void left by *Uni Tavour*. It has also forged a reputation for robustly covering social and development issues in Papua New Guinea. In a sense both student publications had matched the early lead of the weekly *Independent* (formerly the *Times of Papua New Guinea*), which had reported the nation until its demise in mid-2003 (“*The Independent* weekly to close after 23 years,” 2003).

## Pedagogy

Production of the newspaper was carried out by third and fourth year subeditors, drawn from the Print Media Production I paper and editors from the more advanced Print Media Production II. Both these courses were taught concurrently in the newsroom and were worth double credit points compared with theoretically based courses. Print Media I involved 10 contact hours a week plus a weekly editorial conference while Print Media II involved 20 contact hours a week (and assessment

included an individual print publication such as designing and editing a newspaper or magazine for an NGO). In practice, the student editors met constantly for self-reflection and problem-solving planning.

Reporters were drawn from first year students in Practical Reporting I and II, taught in both semesters. They were required to provide a constant supply of news stories for the newspaper, many assigned by the editors. This meant that the newspaper always had a pool of experienced old hands – including some industry journalists who returned to university to complete papers and degrees – along with first-year reporters. The accumulative experience contributed to a committed team spirit and a reasonably good standard. Editors worked on the newspaper before they joined news media organisations on a 12-week internship. The course prescripitor for Print Media Production II:

Advanced editing and desktop publishing skills. Students taking this course take the senior role of editor, chief-of-staff or chief subeditor on the Journalism newspaper *Uni Tavur*. Among their tasks are writing editorials, conducting the editorial conference and assigning the subeditors and reporters their tasks under supervision by the lecturer. They will also undertake responsibility for a desktop publishing project such as a community paper, a newsletter or sport publication. (UPNG Journalism Studies 1995 Handbook, p. 11).

## Production

In the mid-1990s, when *Uni Tavur* was in its prime, the newspaper published 12 times a year – six editions in each semester (Table 1). The 16-page page was designed and proofed as a tabloid on PageMaker software and a content zip disk was delivered to the *PNG Post-Courier* daily newspaper office on Thursday evenings every fortnight where images were processed and stripped into the pages before platemaking. The cost of image processing and printing of the newspaper was covered by the *Post-Courier* – the entire edition of 3000 copies was printed off in about 10 minutes using a half reel during stoppage time for the printing of the next day's daily newspaper. Covering the cost was a contribution to newspaper training in Papua New Guinea by the Murdoch-owned publication.

Other production costs for the newspaper were covered by the sale of advertising space in *Uni Tavur* – about 700 kina (NZ\$1000) an edition. Major advertisers included the national airline, Air Niugini; the largest national bank, PNG Banking Corporation; Nau FM radio and Pepsi. The newspaper was distributed throughout the country by mail and enjoyed a significant readership throughout the South Pacific. In the early stages of its tabloid era, the newspaper used spot colour but in the final years of publication it used four colour on the front and back pages.

## Summary

Publishing from 1975, *Uni Tavur* was a bold Papua New Guinea newspaper project published years before its time, when journalism school newspapers were relatively rare in Australia and New Zealand. It was one of the oldest training newspapers in the region and published continuously for a quarter of a century. Its role was vitally important in training and educating a generation of journalists in Papua New Guinea,



and several in other Pacific countries too. The learning mode was PBL, at least in the latter years of the paper's existence. The printing of the newspaper was sponsored by Murdoch's *Post-Courier* while the newspaper also sold advertising to cover other production costs. *Uni Tavaru* also established the first website (in 1996) produced by any South Pacific island newspaper

## Wansolwara (Fiji Islands)

### Context

The University of the South Pacific is a regional university with 12 member countries with main campuses in Suva, Port Vila and Apia<sup>1</sup>. The first journalism course established at USP was a Certificate in Journalism programme. It was founded by New Zealander Dr Murray Masterton (on loan from Deakin University, Geelong) with support from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) in 1987, coinciding with Sitiveni Rabuka's two military *coup d'état*. After a successful start, this course eventually wound down in 1991. Situated within the then Department of Literature and Language at USP, a completely separate journalism degree course was established in the same department with post-coup French Government aid. François Turmel, a specialist radio journalist who had spent many years based in London with the BBC World Service, took early retirement and took up appointment as the senior lecturer and founder of the course.

After writing the course papers and accepting the first six regional students on the course, Turmel was joined in 1995 by a Papua New Guinea-born Australian, Philip Cass. He encouraged the creation of *Wansolwara* newspaper at USP because there was "no real outlet for journalism students' work or any way for them to show what they could do, short of actually working for the media or finding a rare work experience slot" (cited in Robie, 2004, p. 179). Funding was difficult and even selecting a title was a headache. Recalled Cass:

However, it occurred to me that an expression I had heard in Papua New Guinea might be appropriate – *Wansolwara*. '*Wansolwara*' expresses the idea that all of us who are born or live in the Pacific are bound together by the ocean, whether our home is Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tahiti, the Marianas – or even Australia and New Zealand! USP is home to students and staff from all over the great ocean, so *Wansolwara* seemed a perfect name. (p. 180)

Five of the first six editions of *Wansolwara* featured a distinctive vertical blue reverse masthead for the title on the lefthand of the front page while the early issues relied on voluntary work by founding editor Stanley Simpson and his student team. The paper was not actually funded by the university. But when I arrived at USP in 1998 from the University of PNG to head the journalism studies programme, the department integrated the newspaper into a formal course assessment structure and set up an advertising regime to recover printing and production costs. *Wansolwara* has been arguably the most successful economic model for a training newspaper in the South Pacific region because it has been able to self-fund publication for the past decade and consolidate its publishing structure. The newspaper has also published

concurrently, with its sister publication *Wansolwara Online*, a daily news digest at *Pacific Journalism Online* and has won a string of awards.

During the attempted coup by George Speight in May 2000, the newspaper published a special edition and also maintained daily website reports on what was described as an “internet coup” (Robie, 2004). Already having won a human rights prize in Fiji and a runner-up award in the annual Journalism Education Association (JEA) Ossie Awards for student journalism the previous year, *Wansolwara* journalists dominated the awards in 2000. Judge Mike van Niekerk, deputy editor of *The Age Online*, noted that the students “rose to the challenge of providing high quality reports of a dramatic international event on their doorstep. [...] Taken as a body of work it is very impressive” (Pearson, 2001, p. 19).

## Pedagogy

Editors were drawn from the third year News Production course, subeditors were enrolled on the second-year Print and Online Journalism paper and reporters recruited from the first year Introductory Journalism and Media Law and Ethics papers. All reporters turned up the newsroom to be briefed and were assigned by their student editors to report news stories/features and take pictures, or offered their own stories. Some editors were in charge for a complete semester, others worked in split semesters (This usually depended on whether students were on six-week internships with news organisations). Course prescriptor for Print and Online Journalism:

Topics include pagemaking and layout, photography, photo-editing and captioning, internet publishing and work on projects. Lecture topics will include texts and images, the history and development of press photography, photography as information, composing and cropping the photograph, image processing, computing, internet publishing, media and government, media and public trust, propaganda and the media, press councils and trade unions and subediting work on *Wansolwara*. (USP 2004 Calendar, p. 190)

Senior editors were drawn from a final year paper, Journalism Production, which also included six-week internships. The prescriptor:

In journalism production, students are expected to demonstrate their ability to take responsibility as journalists and to professionally put into practice their journalism skills developed during the double major. This practical knowledge will be demonstrated in two ways: Part 1, major project: satisfactorily complete an equivalent to four weeks full-time on *Wansolwara* or *Radio Pasifik*, or other publication [produced] by the journalism programmes during the year in the role of editor/chief-of-staff or other senior task as negotiated with the lecturers, or complete a total of four weeks on full-time work with a local media organisation as approved by lecturers (this provision can be undertaken with news media in home countries, eg Vanuatu). This will be assessed through a portfolio and by joint monitoring by lecturers/news media editors, or complete a major journalism project as negotiated with the lecturers. Part 2, attachment: spend six weeks on full-time attachment with a major news media organisation (such as Fiji) where the student will be required to fulfil normal reporting duties as assigned by the chief-of-staff,

news director or editor. A portfolio of news stories and/or feature articles or video clips/broadcast tapes must be submitted to the lecturers. The lecturers/editors will jointly assess the student's progress. (p.196)

Reports in *Wansolwara* covered major resource developments in Fiji and the South Pacific, environmental issues, national and regional politics, police and court cases, campus news, and social issues (Figure 2). Covering the 2001 post-coup general election in Fiji, the website reported daily news and even a provisional results monitoring service, while the newspaper focused on issues. Examples:

- Fijians 'confused between legal, traditional chiefs'
- Fiji's politics of race 'wins' out again
- 'You voted bro? – a last-minute dash
- Boat rides and criss-crossings for the vote
- USP's election coverage goes online
- Samoa probes study slump

(Headlines from the *Wansolwara* edition of September 2001 covering that year's general election).



Figure 2: The Speight coup edition of *Wansolwara*, issue 5(2), June 2000.

## Production

*Wansolwara* was published at the Star printery in Suva with sheet-fed flatbed printing of both four-colour and monochrome pages on 80gm bond white stock – a far higher quality printing than either *Uni Tavor* or *Te Waha Nui*, which were both printed on rotary offset presses and newsprint. The paper was entirely funded by the sale of advertising: the students sold and handled the adverts, and the university billed clients with a special

account for the newspaper. The print run was 2000 copies and the newspaper was distributed on all three campuses and at 12 centres and through an international mailing list to media offices, journalists, politicians and community leaders.

## Summary

*Wansolwara* newspaper in Fiji began publishing more than a decade after comparable newspapers were established in Papua New Guinea. It did not enjoy the media industry patronage offered to *Uni Tavor* in PNG, but developed a more robust advertising regime that covered the long-term production costs of the newspaper. Student-based learning was a feature of the newspaper and the production course became the core of the journalism course. A sister web publication, *Wansolwara Online*, was developed by this author to handle daily news and to archive information not readily available in mainstream publications.

---

## Te Waha Nui (Aotearoa/New Zealand)

### Context

Newspaper publishing is relatively new to journalism schools in New Zealand, although it has been traditional for student associations at universities to publish vigorous and challenging newspapers and magazines that have stirred controversy and catapulted many editors into careers in journalism. Cartoonist and author Tom Scott remembers a time when he was threatened with blasphemous libel while a staff reporter with Massey University's student magazine *Chaff* in 1969 (McKenzie, 2006, p. 10).

In 2000, Auckland University's *Craccum* was publicly vilified for a "how-to-guide" to suicide published next to an opinion article arguing that some people "deserve to kill themselves". Five years later, Otago University's *Critic* stirred widespread condemnation for "printing a fictionalised insider's account on date rape, detailing the psychology and methods of a rapist" (McKenzie).

Also in 2005, Victoria University's *Salient* clashed with its own administration when the magazine published leaked documents indicating that the institution's management was considering across-the-board course fee increases of between five and 10 percent (Brown, 2005, p. 48). When the magazine went to press, the university served an injunction in a bid to prevent distribution. But the story had already been circulated via the Aotearoa Student Press Association (ASPA) to other campus publications and was picked up by the metropolitan news media. The dispute was eventually settled out of court with the university administration getting their documents back and the magazine being allowed to circulate.

Thus did a scoop principally of student interest become a national news story. The lesson for Victoria [University of Wellington] is that it must not regard the student press as any more biddable than the rest of the media, and that an injunction against a publication is not an instrument to be lightly used. If *Salient*'s editorial staff go on to become career journalists – and some of them surely will – this is precisely the kind of story they will be bound to professionally report. (Brown, p. 49)

AUT University's student union was already producing a magazine, *Debate*, which published some news stories written by student journalists. However, in November 2003 the School of Communication Studies decided to launch its own tabloid training newspaper to meet the journalism programme's growing demand for more media outlets for students (Boyd-Bell, 2002, 2003). Curriculum leader Susan Boyd-Bell reflected that the paper was planned to address what seven journalism staff members "perceived to be an unsatisfactory level of student interest and achievement in the practical aspects of our two journalism courses" (2002, p. 3). She was referring to two streams of students, one group numbering about 25, who were studying for a one-year Graduate Diploma in Journalism, and another group of about 35 students doing their final year of a three-year journalism major within the Bachelor of Communication Studies degree. As Boyd-Bell noted, both groups were expected to achieve identical outcomes for practical assignments. A major problem was the growing difficulty of finding internship and news outlets for 60 odd final-year journalism students.

This means some inappropriate outlets have to be used and there has also been a reduction in the number of published stories overall. Another adverse factor is a growing need for the students to devote much of their out-of-class time to paid employment, allowing less time and a reduced motivation to write news stories for publication. (p. 3)



Figure 3: *Te Waha Nui*, issue No 11, October 21, 2005.

With my previous experience of producing several newspapers in Papua New Guinea and the Fiji Islands, and a colleague, Allan Lee, leader of AUT's long-established Editing and Design paper, I founded *Te Waha Nui* with an inaugural group of E & D student editors in November 2003. Boyd-Bell researched differences between the newspaper which I supervised at the University of the South Pacific and Massey University's student-run *Magneto*. The slightly edgy title, *Te Waha Nui* – 'The Loud Mouth', was chosen by the student editors in a naming competition and was a

popular choice (Figure 3). A student artist designed an unorthodox newspaper logo in indigenous Maori colours of black and red.

Although not explicit, the newspaper rapidly gained a reputation for publishing “diversity” style articles as part of the mix along with more mainstream news stories and features. For example, the newspaper carried strong articles about Maori, Pasifika and other ethnic issues. In the inaugural edition, the front page lead featured a pointed criticism of mainstream media in covering “brown” issues in the country, written by *New Zealand Herald* columnist Tapu Misa. The paper also ran a fullpage profile about her. The second edition in June 2003 featured a striking centrespread on the famous peaceful *hikoi* (march) on Parliament protesting over the Labour-led coalition Government’s foreshore and seabed legislation. The *hikoi* led to the historic formation of the Maori Party that wrested four Maori seats out of the traditional grasp of the Labour Party in the 2005 general election. On the eve of the election, *Te Waha Nui* featured graphic pictures of rival Maori politicians John Tamihere and Dr Pita Sharples on the front page and in a head-to-head centrespread about the contenders.

Coverage of the general election won *Te Waha Nui* the Wallace Award that year for electoral reporting. It also led to the paper scoring the JEA’s best regular student publication award for 2005, the first time that any New Zealand publication had been successful in the annual awards. Yet political and social issues content nevertheless remained fairly low key, certainly in comparison with the Pacific newspapers.

## Student evaluations

Student evaluations of the News Production paper producing *Te Waha Nui* in 2005 were enthusiastic about the significant pedagogical achievements in “real world” publishing but they were less complimentary about the long hours and workload involved: More than triple compared to other papers with the same 15 course credits – a contact hour load of more than 13 hours a week). Examples:

I enjoyed working together to produce something – it was extremely valuable for learning, developing news sense and getting an idea about how a newspaper works. The tutors were excellent, giving good feedback and support, bringing their experience to play. One of the best [courses] I have ever done.

NP2005/1

The chance to be involved in a working newspaper was excellent. Nothing can beat the experience gained by this. I think it helped prepare us for the real world more than other [journalism] courses.

NP2005/6

Many students appreciated the deadline pressure, the commitment of staff working long into the night and the high expectations in the course of both staff and their peers:

The commitment of lecturers was exceptional and frequently above and beyond the call of duty. The real world, real time pressure of producing a publication and the high standards that were expected of us.

NP2005/10

This is by far the best paper that I have done at any level of tertiary education because it puts you in the frontline of the daily operation of a newspaper. The rotating roles mean you are exposed to all manner of different elements.  
NP2005/11

## Pedagogy

Problem-based learning structures were put in place as a pedagogical framework for the paper. A team of a dozen students was confronted with the “problem” of producing four fortnightly editions of the newspaper in the second semester, according to a tight production schedule with a local printer specialising in printing about 70 titles in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the South Pacific, Horton Media. Their previous experience was limited to producing a one-off edition according to the lecturers’ requirements as the final Editing and Design assignment in the previous semester.

The News Production paper has a flexible newsroom structural and assessment framework for participants to work within, but they are free to set their editorial policies, priorities and targets within the projected outcomes (Figure 4). The position of editor is advertised and applicants are required to submit a publication plan and CV and undergo interviews with the course lecturers. As well as selecting the editor for the entire semester, another objective of the interviews was to provide a safe environment for students to present their talents and qualifications as job-hunters. All other positions on the newspaper, including production editor, chief reporters (two, including one who is working on content for the following edition), features editor, reviews editor and political editor (one, plus other section editors as needed, such as business, health, sport and *taha Maori*) with a cartoonist and distribution coordinators, were selected on a rotation basis. Their work on four editions of the paper (20 percent) was assessed against the job descriptions but the precise interpretation of these guidelines was developed by newsroom negotiation by the students as part of the PBL framework.

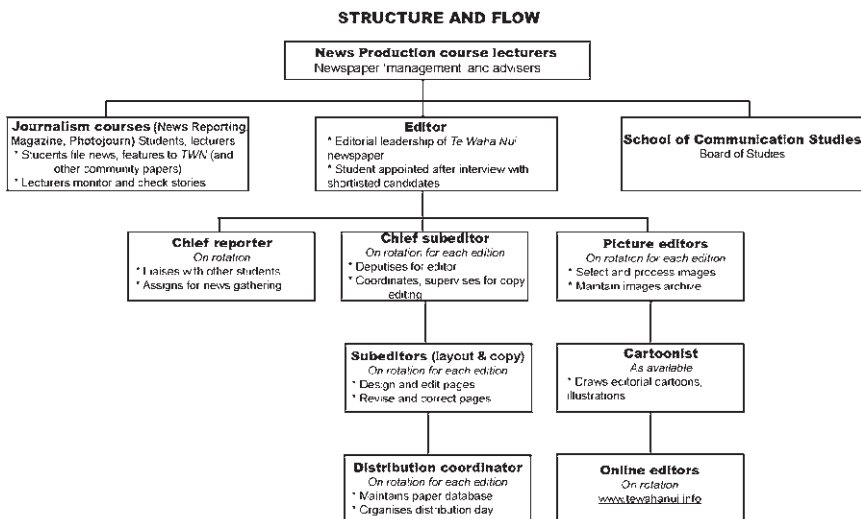


Figure 4: Rotating editorial roles for *Te Waha Nui*

Production of the newspaper accounts for 80 percent of the paper assessment. The final 20 percent is allocated to a critical self-reflection assignment or research on a contemporary publication issue drawn from the experience gained on the paper. The course prescriptor:

Provides advanced newspaper editing and design skills through the regular production of a training newspaper, *Te Waha Nui*. Emphasises teamwork, professional newsroom practice and organisation, copy editing, layout, picture editing and news selection. Involves shared editorial roles (usually rotated) and a high degree of self-directed responsibility. Provides experience of tight deadlines in producing multiple editions of the newspaper. (AUT University Calendar 2006, p. 494)

*Te Waha Nui* reports have included general news, profiles, features, book and performance reviews, political news, business, health, media and sport. After covering the Auckland local body elections in 2004, The *Te Waha Nui* reporters tackled the 2005 general election:

Election 2005 special:  
Personal touch pays off  
Sorry, nice try but no cigar  
'Big loan' students to gain under Labour  
Alliance vision fails at the polls  
Dropping Maori seats 'may cause racial strife'

(Headlines from the 23 September 2005 edition of *Te Waha Nui* covering the 2005 general election in New Zealand.)

## Production

*Te Waha Nui* was published by Horton Media with web offset presses printing on newsprint. The extent of the publication is usually 24 pages, including eight in four colour. The university funds printing of the newspaper, about USD\$5,600 (NZD\$8000) for four editions in a semester. Advertising has been a problematic issue as the founding News Production team was opposed to publishing any significant advertising content and – unlike at the South Pacific newspapers – the school funded all printing costs so there was no pressure to accept advertising. However, pressure grew from small local businesses and high quality and award-winning advertisements produced by the school's creative advertising students for actual clients led to the paper accepting about 10-15 percent advertising. Some of the advertisements had been produced for Newspaper Advertising Bureau (NAB) campaigns so were thus good for the media industry.

During 2005, the editorial team gained a better insight into the relationship with advertising when the newspaper became a "client" for a class of creative advertising students which produced several campaign packages of advertising for print, radio and ambient outlets. Some advertisements were published in *Te Waha Nui* itself, the "official" AUT student magazine *Debate* and broadcast on Radio Static (Figure 5). One ambient advert involved students chalking the outline of a body on inner city street pavements with a teaser line about what was published in that day's edition of the paper. These adverts promoted the newspaper along with posters produced



by the editorial team. The format for the paper has settled from a 32-page inaugural edition to a regular 24-page tabloid with a minimum of eight pages in four-colour. A print run of 2000 copies is produced and a quarter of the papers are sent to a national mailing list comprising media industry offices, journalism schools, leading libraries and a cross-section of community, NGO and other readers. The paper has an eclectic mix of news, features, columns – including one or two regular staff contributors such as professor Paul Moon, of AUT’s Te Ara Poutama, who is an authority and author on the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand’s founding document – and special sections including Pasifika media, taha Maori assignments, ethics and sport.



**Figure 5: An advertisement promoting *Te Waha Nui* by creative advertising students at AUT, using a “big mouth” metaphor with a shark, snake and crocodile.**

## Legal safety

Ironically, the only time that *Te Waha Nui* has ever encountered any threat of legal action (in 16 editions published to date) was from another news organisation – one of the two largest print media groups in the country. While student editors make their own editorial decisions and proofread their own pages, lecturers also have a final eye on stories and page proofs. The only story to stir a serious threat with a legal letter related to a fullpage profile on Malcolm Evans, twice New Zealand’s cartoonist of the year and a contract cartoonist for the *New Zealand Herald* for the previous 14 years. The profile was published in the very first edition along with three controversial cartoons (Evans, 2004; Manning, 2005). Evans was dumped by the daily newspaper, part of the Australian-based APN publishing group, over a dispute over editorial independence. He claimed he was axed over tough cartoons about the

Palestinian-Israeli conflict and that the newspaper was being pressured by the Zionist lobby group in New Zealand. This allegation was denied by the newspaper.

*Te Waha Nui* published a profile based on interviews with the cartoonist and several leading media and cartooning personalities, including the newspaper staff (Cumming, 2003). But the newspaper, embarrassed by criticism on the *Media Watch* national radio programme and in other sources over a perceived assault on media freedom, condemned *Te Waha Nui*. The *Herald* despatched a threatening legal letter in which barrister Bruce Gray (2003) claimed the newspaper had defamed the *Herald* and its editor-in-chief.

[Cartoonist Evans] was a contributor. He was not, and could not have been “sacked”... In the end there was such a breakdown between *The New Zealand Herald* and Mr Evans that it was sensible for him to seek to publish his work elsewhere.

The editorial management found nothing wrong with the article and backed the student journalist. The issue was forgotten as far as it related to *Te Waha Nui*, but the Evans affair has become a celebrated case involving cartoonists and editorial freedom (Evans, 2004; Manning & Phiddian, 2005). In general, both staff and students have maintained a high standard of legal safety on the paper.

---

## Summary

*Te Waha Nui* is the first New Zealand journalism school newspaper to have a sustained publishing longevity, having published 16 editions over four years. Like the Pacific journalism newspapers, its editorial process is an example of PBL. The learning is student-centred; a small editorial group is involved in the production, with smaller groups involved in specific assignments involving a “problem”; tutors/lecturers provide facilitation; and problem-solving skills are developed throughout the course. The newspaper has a strong relationship with Horton Media, the independent printers established by the Horton family after selling the *New Zealand Herald* to APN. It is also possibly the most vulnerable among the three case studies to economic changes that could restrict publishing through budget cuts. Unlike the other two newspapers, it is entirely dependent on university funding.

---

## Conclusion

Few genuinely independent newspapers exist in New Zealand and the South Pacific, in spite of thriving media markets – especially in Fiji and Papua New Guinea. For journalism education, this makes it difficult for course facilitators to point to successful alternative publishing models. Most New Zealand and Pacific journalism schools tend to mirror the kinds of existing newsroom practices of the media themselves rather than encouraging a more critical studies framework where students can feel free to make their own judgments. Alternative models are important to a free media learning environment. Problem-based learning is a vital education tool for the small-group and diverse learning involved in journalism school publications.

Ideally, PBL through group work encourages peer learning. In all three case study newspapers, small editorial teams were involved in producing the newspaper,

typically involving a dozen editors, subeditors and writers. A larger pool of up to 60 students also provided stories through other course papers feeding into the production cycle. Regular rotation of key editorial roles was also a common feature. Understanding develops out of the student journalists' exploration and testing of each other's ideas. This enables student journalists to develop negotiating skills and provides a supportive environment for peer-learning and problem-solving to take place. Weekly and daily editorial planning meetings when ideas are bounced off staff as well as team members and post-publication postmortems also contribute to this environment.

Initial one-hour PBL tutorials are usually followed by two or three-hour workshops and self-directed learning when student journalists can self-reflect over issues identified in formal sessions. Finally, at the end of the semester, after producing multiple editions of the newspaper, the students produce a reflective assessment of newspaper publishing or a new publication drawing on their own research and PBL experience.

For most students involved in producing regular newspapers such as *Uni Tavur*, *Wansolwara* and *Te Waha Nui*, the course experience is overwhelmingly positive, and this is strongly reflected in paper reviews by students. Among typical comments was: "By far the best paper that I have done at any level of tertiary education because it puts you in the frontline of the daily operation of a newspaper" (NP2005/11). The view of most student journalists producing such a newspaper is that they embark on a steep learning curve, but whatever they absorb overwhelmingly surpasses what is learned on other journalism papers. Yet in reality, courses involved in newspaper production have a symbiotic and challenging relationship with all other journalism courses. The newspapers could not survive, develop and prosper without the "cross-paper" contributions. Meticulous planning is critical to the successful outcomes of such a course.

---

### Endnote:

- <sup>1</sup> The 12 member countries of the University of the South Pacific are the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

---

### Links:

- AUT News Production course link [artsweb.aut.ac.nz/communicate/journalism/newsprod](http://artsweb.aut.ac.nz/communicate/journalism/newsprod)
- Divine Word University journalism publications [www.dwu.ac.pg/publicat.html](http://www.dwu.ac.pg/publicat.html)
- Horton Media [www.horton.co.nz](http://www.horton.co.nz)
- Te Waha Nui Online [www.tewahanui.info](http://www.tewahanui.info)
- Uni Tavur Online (now defunct) [www.journ.upng.ac.pg](http://www.journ.upng.ac.pg)
- Wallace Award [www.tewahanui.info/news/award.shtml](http://www.tewahanui.info/news/award.shtml)
- Wansolwara Online [www.usp.ac.fj/journ](http://www.usp.ac.fj/journ)

## References:

- Abercrombie, M. L. A. (1979). *Aims and Purpose of Small Group Teaching*; Society for Research into Higher Education, London. *AUT University Calendar* (2006). Auckland: AUT University.
- Barrows, H. S. (1996). "Problem-based learning in medicine and beyond" In L. Wilkerson and W. H. Gijselaers (Eds.), *New Directions for Teaching and Learning; Vol 68. Bringing problem-based learning to higher education: Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey Boss, pp. 3-13.
- Boyd-Bell, S. (2005). "Experiential learning in journalism: A student view." Paper presented at the Journalism Education Association (JEA) conference, Gold Coast, Qld, November 29-December 3.
- Boyd-Bell, S. (2002). "Improving learning outcomes for journalism students – a tutor's perspective." Unpublished masters research paper. Auckland: School of Education, Auckland University of Technology.
- Brown, R. (2005, October 22). "The story that wouldn't die: Freedom of the press applies to students too." *New Zealand Listener*, No. 3415. Accessed 31 December 2006 at [www.listener.co.nz/issue/3415/columnists/4883/the\\_story\\_that\\_wouldnt\\_die.html](http://www.listener.co.nz/issue/3415/columnists/4883/the_story_that_wouldnt_die.html)
- Burns, L. S. (1997). "Problem-based Learning (PBL) and journalism education: Is it new jargon for something familiar?" *Australian Journalism Review*, 19(2), pp. 59-72.
- Burns, L. S., and T. Hazell (1999). "Problem-Based Learning, Youth Suicide and Media's Response ... Ability." *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, No 6: pp. 56-71.
- Cheung, E. (2001). "Dear mum and dad," *Pacific Journalism Review*. 7(1), pp. 134-139.
- Cumming, M. (2003, November). "Dumped cartoonist speaks out," *Te Waha Nui*, No 1, p. 8.
- Evans, M. (2004). "The political cartoonist's right to freedom of expression," *Pacific Journalism Review*. 10(1), pp. 71-80.
- Green, K. (1991). "Computer-aided newswriting promotes 'master' approach to teaching," *Australian Journalism Review*, 13(1), pp. 89-99.
- Hester, A. L. and Wai Lan J. To (1987). *Handbook for third world journalists*. Athens, Georgia: Centre for International Mass Communication Training and Research, University of Georgia.
- Lewis, D. (2004). "Encouraging the subversive spirit," *Rhodes Journalism Review*. 24, pp. 44-45.
- McKenzie, H. (2006, March 11). "Shock! Horror! School's in," *New Zealand Herald Canvas*.
- Manning, H., and R. Phiddian. (2005). "The political cartoonist and the editor," *Pacific Journalism Review*. 11(2), pp. 127-150.
- Meadows, M. (1997). "Taking a Problem-based Learning Approach to Journalism Education." *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, No 3, pp. 89-107.
- Merrill, J. (1996). *Existential Journalism*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press.
- Morgan, F. (2000). "Recipes for Success: Curriculum for Professional Media Education." *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, No 8, pp. 22-33.
- Pearson, M. (2001). "Ossies recognise promising talent of the future," *PANPA Bulletin*, February, p. 19.
- Pearson, M. (2000). "Reflective Practice in Action: Preparing Samoan Journalists to Cover Court Cases." *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, No 8, pp. 4-33.
- Robie, D. and Singh, S. (2004). From campus to newsroom in the South Pacific: Governance and the quest for a professional journalism ethos. *Fijian Studies: A Journal of Contemporary Fiji*, 2(2), 245-268.
- Robie, D. (2004). *Mekim Nius: South Pacific media, politics and education*. Suva: University of the South Pacific Book Centre.
- Robie, D. (2003). "Wansolwara, convergence and culture: A South Pacific communication case study," *Communication Journal of New Zealand*. 4(1), pp. 3-15.
- Robie, D. (2002). "Cyberspace News on Campus: The South Pacific Experience," *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, No. 12/13, pp. 203-219.
- Robie, D. (2000). "*SPICOL Daily*: A Pacific Media Partnership Case Study." *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, No. 8, pp. 34-41.
- Robie, D. (1995). "*Uni Tavur*: the evolution of a student press," *Australian Journalism Review*, 17(2), pp. 95-101.

- Rooney, D., Papoutsaki, E. and Pamba, K. (2004). "A country failed by its media: a case study from Papua New Guinea." Paper presented at the 13th Asian Media and Information Centre (AMIC) conference, Bangkok, Thailand, 1-3 July.
- Stevens, R. (1994, August 19). "Tales of Olympus days to Apple," *Uni Tavur*, p. 9.
- Sukwianomb, J. (1994, July 22). "Training journalists pays big dividends for PNG," *Uni Tavur*, p. 17.
- Tanner, S. (2005). "Investigating the Hypothetical: Building Journalism Skills via Online Challenges," *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, No 16, pp. 89-102.
- "The Independent weekly to close after 23 years." (2003, June 2). Pacific Media Watch. Accessed 31 December 2006 at [www.pmw.c2o.org/2003/png4074.html](http://www.pmw.c2o.org/2003/png4074.html)
- Tomaselli, K. (1991). "The progressive press: Extending the struggle, 1980-1986." In Tomaselli, K., and E. Louw (Eds.), *The alternative press in South Africa*. London: James Currey.
- "Uni Tavur takes out top award." (1996, May 3). *Post-Courier*. Port Moresby, PNG. *UPNG Journalism Studies 1995 Handbook*. Port Moresby: University of Papua New Guinea. *USP 2004 Calendar*. Suva: The University of the South Pacific.
- Venables, D. (n.d.). "Running a newspaper for journalism students. New Zealand Journalism Online. Accessed 9 July 2006 at [www.jeanz.org.nz](http://www.jeanz.org.nz)
- Waibauru, J. (1994, July 22). "Frog's heads, old ashtrays and politics," *Uni Tavur*, pp. 9-10.
- Wakus, W. (2001). "I couldn't stop crying," *Pacific Journalism Review*. 7(1), pp. 127-128.

---

DAVID ROBIE, PhD, is Associate Professor and Diversity and Publications Coordinator with AUT University's School of Communication Studies. He was coordinator of both the journalism programmes at the University of Papua New Guinea and University of the South Pacific for a decade until 2002. He has published student newspapers for more than 12 years. He is the editor of *Pacific Journalism Review* and author of *Mekim Nius: South Pacific Media, Politics and Education* (2004), *The Pacific Journalist* (2001) and *Nius Bilong Pasifik: Mass Media in the Pacific* (1995). Email: [david.robie@aut.ac.nz](mailto:david.robie@aut.ac.nz) Visit: [www.asiapac.org.fj](http://www.asiapac.org.fj)