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Recipes For Success: Curriculum For Professional Media Education

Media practitioners in many countries remain sceptical about formal education for the media and communication professions. Formal qualifications are not, and never have been, either necessary or sufficient to obtain employment, or to succeed in these professions. Yet, the evident need and widespread demand for better media and communication practice has led variously to the introduction of academic programs in universities and colleges and industry training programs in a range of other settings and institutions. Frequently, however, academic courses have been too abstract to be useful and industry training has been largely bereft of ideas. Both have failed to meet the need fully and have been expensive to provide. Today, media practice is increasingly professionalised, the media industries have been affected by globalisation, privatisation and new technology, and the demand for improvement continues to increase. Meanwhile, the institutional delivery of professional education has first expanded and then been augmented by new options. Individuals now have much greater opportunity to develop their own professional capabilities. In the light of these changes, this paper argues for a new approach to curriculum that would strengthen the professional education of media and communication practitioners by taking due account of what is to be learned, who is to learn it and the context in which they have to do so.

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Curriculum remains one of the most contentious and problematic issues in the preparation and improvement of practitioners for the communication and media professions worldwide. Disagreement and uncertainty abound, even about the field itself. Some people question whether advertising, broadcasting, film and video production, journalism, multimedia, photography, PR, public information, sound and the various forms of “professional” writing are indeed professions. Others question the value of professionalism. That aside, questions persist as to whether successful practitioners in this field are born or made.

And if, as dictionaries put it, breeding is a form of cultivation produced by nurture and training, does success depend on native talent or can anyone learn to excel? More awkwardly, do those who succeed do so because of, or in spite of, what and how and by whom they have been taught?

Having dropped those pebbles in the pond, we find the questions ripple relentlessly outwards. Must communication and media can be learned “from the inside out, not from the outside in” (Carey, 1998) and, if so, what does that mean? Should communication and media practitioners pursue undergraduate studies in a general degree (with or without any professionally related studies) or take one that is professionally focussed (as architects, doctors and lawyers do)? Should they leave the pursuit of professional studies (as many Americans do) until they are graduates, and know something about something else? Or, should they ignore formal study altogether, simply get themselves a job in the field and learn as they go?

Curriculum is heavily contingent on culture, that broad set of knowledge, beliefs and ways of doing things which we humans construct in response to our environments. It is thus also a function of time and place. In many countries currently, this is evident in the assumption that curriculum is an institutional thing – either “a particular course of study...” or “the aggregate of courses of study given in a school, college, university, etc”. It is generally only in the arcane pages of the academic literature on education that we read of the curriculum as the sum total of what has to be done to learn something. And rarer still to see or hear references to curriculum as an individual pursuit.

Yet, each of us has an individual curriculum vitae (CV) which reports what we have done in our professional lives, how we have done it and how well. That curriculum generally includes the planned courses of study that we have completed along the way. It also serves to justify what we have done, laying out our professional track records for critical scrutiny whenever we apply for jobs or promotion or funding.

Artists, writers and film makers, like all media professionals, rely on their CVs far more than formal qualifications or courses of study to help them make their ways in the world. The writer and novelist Paul Theroux (*The Consul's File*, *Mosquito Coast*, *The London Embassy* and *My Other Life*), for example, trained as a teacher in the USA in the early 1960s before joining the Peace Corps and going to teach in Africa, en route to professional success. His compatriot contemporaries Ken Kesey (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) and Larry McMurtry (*Lonesome Dove* and *The Last Picture*

Racetrack Or Obstacle Course?

Show), and the Australian Christopher Koch (*The Year of Living Dangerously* and *Highway to a War*) all went to the Stanford Writing School to study and refine their craft (Koch, 1988). Theroux set out on his professional odyssey directly and alone.

Late in his traveller's tale, *The Great Railway Bazaar*, Theroux tells a story that reflects the extravagant optimism and undue confidence that was vested in curriculum at that time and remains to this day. At the end of a hot, monotonous and tiring afternoon, racketing down through northern Malaysia, on an outside observation deck of the *Golden Arrow Express*, Theroux meets Mr Rahman and Mr Ghosh, two Bangladeshi family planning officers returning home from a conference in Bangkok. When he asks them what is the greatest problem in family planning, Mr Ghosh replies "Without a doubt, communication" and Mr Rahman nods.

When Theroux asks what they will do first when they return home, Ghosh says, "I should say we will start straight away on curriculum. Curriculum is most important. We must build a model – work with a model of aims and objectives. What are we trying to do? What do we aim to achieve? And why? And costings must be considered. All these questions: answers must be found. Do you follow me?" Again, Rahman nods.

Ghosh goes on to explain that the next important area is information. "We must create areas of information so that ordinary people can understand importance of our work". They plan to start their campaign in the universities.

"You're going to get the universities to practise family planning?" asks Theroux.

"No, no, to study the problem" says Mr Ghosh.

Tortuously, they discuss how to plan a campaign to disseminate family planning information to the multitudes of Bangladesh. Theroux wonders whether it matters how many children the family planners have in their own families. Ghosh has four children; Rahman five. They decide it would be cooler and safer if they went inside.

The concept of curriculum, which Theroux found so ludicrous in the mouths of his travelling companions, would have been *de rigueur* in his Boston teachers college. Yet, he ignored it in his own life. A generation later, in Australia (which is more like the US than Bangladesh), a curriculum is not just a formula for success, it is often seen as an automatic panacea for social ills. Youth suicide, the implementation of taxation policies and procedures, occupational health and safety issues, farmland salinity, black deaths in custody, unfair media reporting and the case for a republic are all addressed with curriculum packages.

In ancient Rome, a curriculum was a racetrack for chariots (*curricles*). For many, today, worldwide, it is an obstacle course.

Time And Place

The formal institutionalisation of education, especially for the professions, is now so commonplace that we often forget that mass education, like mass communication and mass production, is little more than a century old (Berger, et al, 1974). In Medieval Europe schools were few and far between. Those in monasteries divided their curricula into two parts, according to what was to be taught: the *trivium* (rhetoric, grammar and logic) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music). The arts and crafts of life and love, trade and commerce, husbandry, farming and war were learned by apprenticeship to masters and mistresses of their practice. Initiation and induction into practice went hand in hand with instruction. Instruction was oral and by example. It was taken for granted that the master knew more than the apprentice and the teacher more than the pupil. That assumption, also, is with us still.

The philosopher Raimond Gaita recently deplored the current fashion for assessing the quality of university teaching in Australia and other Western societies. Students, he argued, could not possibly evaluate what and how they were taught. "Customers typically know what they want and what counts as getting it. Students (however) are initiated into things that they don't understand and that take time to understand, often things of which they had not even dreamed" (Gaita, 2000) Gaita's point is well made in universities where too many academics see their "own work" – research – compromised by their teaching. They cut corners in their teaching to make time to produce and publish ephemera for the few, rather than initiating their students into a life of critical reflection – which, they publicly insist, is the central "idea" of a university.

The development of the idea of universities (Newman, 1960; Coady, 1999) and the establishment of universal schooling, during the second half of the nineteenth century, were responses to the massive industrialisation and social upheavals of the time, both in Europe and in the "New World". Industrialisation subsequently extended to warfare and twice, during the twentieth century, the majority of the world's nations had to mobilise and train their populations for military service. Soldiers, sailors and air force personnel had to learn the skills of killing and surviving, farmers and factory workers had to learn new skills and techniques of production, and the public at large had to learn to believe in the cause. All of them, as a matter of great urgency, had to learn new skills, knowledge and attitudes, and they had to do so in new (and more efficient) ways. Today, technological and economic globalisation portend equally radical change and pose equally radical challenges.

Much of the curriculum theory of the 1950s and 60s, like

the communication theory of the time, was a response to the experience of World War II. Benjamin Bloom et al (1956) articulated educational objectives in precise, measurable, behavioural terms. Others again (Eisner, 1979) sought to show that important objectives, especially in creative, ethical and higher-level conceptual fields could not be precisely prescribed or measured. In another dimension, people such as Gagne et al (1992) linked the acquisition and processing of knowledge to particular methods of instruction.

Ausubel (1967) contrasted “meaningful learning”, in which learners can link their new knowledge with concepts that they already understand, with the rote learning so often inherent in military and industrial training. Seeking to broaden the focus from “instruction” to “education”, Bruner (1965) directed his attention to the ways in which people rearrange and transform what they already know to “discover” new knowledge and additional insights. All variously contributed to the notion of “learning how to learn” (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p255). All of them also applied their efforts, initially, to the development of curricula for children at school. Yet, much of the theory which underpinned their work had been gleaned from the training of adults for military service and industrial production, and would be translated back to the education of adults during the 1980s (Smith, 1987).

Who's Learning Whose Knowledge

Focussing on institutional contexts and theories of learning largely neglects some central questions: What has to be learned? Who has to learn it? Does everyone learn the same way? Does learning require teaching?

Think, for instance, about the way in which most people learn languages, especially their native languages. English speaking radio audiences used once to laugh uproariously at a comedian's joke about all those clever children in France who could speak French, even before they went to school. Likewise, a friend of mine used to wonder who had “taught (his) f***ing kids to swear”. Research into language acquisition could have enlightened him. Children, everywhere, learn their native language (and sometimes one or two more) before they go to school, where they are taught to read and write and study their languages. And the success of that teaching depends on how much they have already learned.

A related question is that of “learning style”, the way in which various people perceive and make sense of their world and attend to different parts of their environment (Joughin, 1992). Some people look at problems globally while others are more interested

in their detail (Flannery, 1993). Their individual styles are sufficiently consistent to be seen as personal characteristics, albeit often too complex to be captured by the available descriptors.

Nevertheless, both individually and as a whole, people change with time. Their concepts of themselves, their experience of the world, their readiness to learn, their preference for “problems” over apparently inconsequential knowledge and their internal motivation all seem to vary with time, and thus alter their ability to learn. Piaget (1972), however, observed that even adults, who have achieved the level of “formal (abstract) operations” in their general thought, revert to “concrete operations” when confronted with unknown situations. Who of us has not had to be shown, very concretely, how to operate a new package of computer software? Nevertheless, since the mid-1960s, Malcolm Knowles (1984) has developed a theory that adults learn differently from children.

Knowles draws, somewhat optimistically, on the humanist learning theories of Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1983). Maslow believed that people are motivated by the need for “self-actualisation” – becoming all that they are capable of becoming – just as much as they are by the need for warmth and food, shelter, safety, love and esteem. Rogers believed that we all desire “significant” learning that will enable us to grow and develop personally, and that this desire is strong enough to drive us past the seductive distractions of credentialism to the altruism of what Cross (1981, p228) called “true learning”.

All curricula reflect the needs and nature of the learners for whom they have been designed, the cultural environment in which those people have to do their learning and what it is that they need to learn. These factors, however, are rarely, if ever, independent of one another. Weaver’s (1998) study of news people around the world, for example, concludes that journalists globally agree on the importance of only two aspects of journalistic practice: being quick to publish and protecting their sources. There is some, slight, agreement on whether or not the public should be allowed a voice in the news media. But there is virtually no agreement on issues such as whether to be entertaining or accurate or objective, whether to analyse complex issues and whether to keep watch on the activities of government or big business or whomever. There is even less on whether to pay for information, pose as someone else, use material without permission, harass sources, or lie and cheat to obtain information. There is thus “no country with a monopoly on professionalism among journalists” (Weaver, 1998, p479). Nor is there any such thing as a single global journalism.

People, Content And Context

Neither could there be a global journalism curriculum. What journalists and other media professionals need to learn depends on the local cultural environment in which they (do or will) work.

There is little point, therefore, attempting globally to impose (say) Western approaches to investigative reporting or notions of “the media as watchdog”. Lao journalists and broadcasters, their government and their people largely agree that the media should “link the party, the state and the masses” and that journalists should “understand clearly what they can and cannot cover” (Morgan and Loo, 2000). Nor do webpage designers in small island nations with limited bandwidth and highly costly telecom capacities need to learn to produce large, high-speed graphics, any more than radio producers in those countries once “had to” learn to edit by cutting tape rather than dubbing to be fully professional.

American AEJMC course accreditation criteria, which were devised to meet the economic, social and cultural requirements of the US, but are promulgated internationally, are likewise unlikely to be universally applicable. Indeed, they might not be universally acceptable there. Beasley (1998) has questioned whether a mandatory course in history is necessary for US journalism and mass communication students and, even if it is, whether they should learn (about) historical content or (how to pursue) historical method.

George Bernard Shaw’s proposition that “all professions are conspiracies against the laity” has been reiterated and explored by more recent thinkers such as Sarfatti Larsen (1977) and Glasser (1992). Nevertheless, implicit in all their criticisms of professional arrogance and condescension is the very forceful notion that the professions should serve the laity. Professional authority and autonomy rely on public trust and must be earned by subordinating their own interests to those of others and especially the “common good” (Christians, 1999; Freidson, 1994; Gans, 1979; Schon, 1983; Torstendahl and Burrage, 1990).

Communication and media practitioners wishing to establish their credentials as professionals must be able to sustain that trust. On political and moral issues, they must resist succumbing uncritically to dominant ideologies, yet remain aware of and sensitive to the prevailing values of their culture. It becomes a matter of judgement in more ways than one. The tensions between economic efficiency and democracy, and between the authority of the State and a “free media”, are not restricted to the developing world. They have been a live issue in Western journalism throughout the two hundred years since Burke and

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Paine argued over whether to advocate stability or radical activism (Altschull, 1991).

Communication and media practice is professional for several reasons. For one, it is “specialised, esoteric, complex and discretionary, (and) requires theoretical knowledge, skill and judgement that ordinary people do not possess, may not comprehend and cannot readily evaluate” (Freidson, 1994, p200). For another, it requires its practitioners to have the ability continually to confront and “make strategic judgements about individual cases which they have never confronted before and for which there are no exhaustive rules dictating the decisions to be made” (Scheffler, 1965, p103).

Together with authority and autonomy, professionalism brings the inescapable responsibility to make decisions and to act. Not to act is an action – to do nothing. If professional practitioners cannot find (by research) the information needed to decide what to do, they frequently have to invent a solution, using their experience to make “a (more or less) informed best guess”. The specifics will vary from time to time and place to place, but these notions of professionalism begin to sketch what would be required in a curriculum that set out to produce capable practitioners for the communication and media professions. They also demonstrate that professional practice, itself, is inherently a learning activity.

John Dewey (1938, p13) argued that “all genuine education comes through experience”. Which is not to say that all experience leads to education. Some experience “distorts growth” and leaves people “in a deeper rut”. This problem can be found in video production or creative writing classes when students are allowed to “simply do their own thing”. They go on producing the same piece of work over and over in different guises but never develop or grow. Educational experiences lead to the growth of “ever widening and deeper experiences” (Merriam, 1994, p18). Learning means connecting present experience with past experience to lay a foundation for making sense and taking control of the future.

When it comes to considering how we learn from experience, Kolb (1984) suggests that we need:

1. an openness and willingness to undertake new experiences (concrete experience);
 2. observational and reflective skills so these new experiences can be viewed from a variety of perspectives (reflective observation);
 3. analytical abilities so that integrative ideas and concepts can be created from our observations (abstract conceptualisation);
- and;

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Reflective Practice

4. decision-making and problem-solving skills so that our new ideas and concepts can be used in actual practice (active experimentation). Kolb further suggests this is a cyclical process. The actual practice that ends one cycle becomes the concrete experience that begins the next.

In the face of the complex and murky unknowns that defined professional practice for Scheffler, the key to professional capability is clearly something more than abstract theoretical or technical knowledge (Schon, 1983; Cervero, 1988; Peters, 1991). Schon captures this concept brilliantly, at the beginning of his book, with the image of a high, dry and sunlit rock surrounded by a dark, tangled swamp. Compared with the rich, fecund reality of the swamp, the rock of readily applicable theory is relatively sterile and bare. It is also frequently inaccessible to those who work in the swampy reality of professional practice.

This does not deny or diminish the inherently theoretical nature of professional practice. Rather, it confirms it. Professional practitioners are not very good at putting their knowledge into words (Schon, 1983, p49-51; Torstendahl and Burrage, 1990, p70; Glasser, 1991). It is therefore probably pointless to try to write down that knowledge in precise and meaningful learning objectives, let alone seek to apply those objectives globally. Professionals have to learn to reflect and respond locally and specifically.

Nevertheless, there are always ideas that, in retrospect, explain why one way of doing things is better or worse than another. The catch is that these ideas generally only become evident after the event and the unforeseeable nature of the future denies them much predictive power. Which simply underlines the inadequacy of both traditional industry training and academic studies of communication and media as ways of preparing prospective practitioners.

There is clearly a need for procedural knowledge (or knowing how) and propositional knowledge (knowing that). But they are not sufficient, either separately or together. Capability requires a further range of personal qualities, including persistence, flexibility, ingenuity, inventiveness, imagination and worldly wisdom (Scheffler, 1965; Ryle, 1990; Morgan, 1995), all of which are epitomised in Schon's notion of reflective practice (Schon, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1996; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999).

Writing about the professional education of historians, Denning (1999) argues that "the humanities are the great unsilencing art" and that one key to breaking the silence is to fine-tune students' imagination. Building on Paul Valéry's proposition

that “silence is the active presence of absent things”, Denning says.

“We catch the contingency of silence in our imagination. Not our fantasies. Our imagination. Imagination is the ability to see the fine-lined and faint webs of significance. Imagination is hearing the silence because we have heard some of the sounds. Imagination is seeing the absent things because we have seen so much else. That is its dream-like quality. It is built on re-arranged experience.” (Denning, 1999, p441)

To enable his students to do this, he taught them the past by first requiring them to describe their own present. They learned not to reject history but how difficult it is to describe the present. They also found that everything they discovered was already the subject of someone else’s reflective discourse. The more they claimed the novelty of their own personal experience, the more they were confronted by the plagiarism of their thinking. The parallels for journalists, film makers and other media professionals are clear.

Reflective practice embodies both the largely analytical process of “reflection-on-action”, which involves thinking through a situation after it has happened to see what could have been done more successfully, and “reflection-in-action” which entails “keeping your wits about you”, “thinking on your feet” and “trimming your sails” as you go. For Schon, reflection-in-action among professional practitioners is triggered by the surprise of the unknown. We realise that old knowledge and old techniques will not work, or are not working. We reflect critically and urgently on how we have got into our present situation, and how we might resolve it. Some call this “the adrenalin theory of inspiration”. “Reflection gives rise to on-the-spot experiment” (Schon, 1987, p28).

Schon’s insight is doubly fertile for professional media educators. It recognises the professional nature of both media practice and media education, and provides a vitally important problem-solving strategy for the learner and the teacher (or curriculum designer) alike. It makes three assumptions:

1. that those involved are committed to both problem finding and problem solving. Problems encountered in practice are often murky and ill defined. We therefore need to be open to discovering new problems or different ways of looking at old problems.

2. that we will make judgements about what action to take in particular situations. Because these actions involve change in ourselves, others or systems, there is always an ethical dimension to reflective practice.

Reflecting On And In Action

3. that we will take action, even if that action is a deliberate choice not to change practice. Without a commitment to action, reflective practice slumps into a frustrating and unproductive futility.

Recalling Knowles' observation that adults are self-directed learners, ready to learn what they believe they need to improve their own professional performances, a crucial question arises in the conception of curriculum activities. That is the question of authenticity. Problem-based learning can fall into the trap of "simulated" or "pretending" problems. Reflective practice initiates learners into "authentic practices" that "embody activity and social interaction in a way similar to that evident – and evidently successful – in craft apprenticeship" (Brown et al, 1989, p37). On that basis, it would be better for students to produce programmes for public broadcasting stations rather than student stations, and to write for wider publics than those reached by student papers. Not least because the media are already all too susceptible to "talking to themselves".

Authentic activities can, nevertheless, be playful and fun. Young adult Australians at the end of the twentieth century demonstrably take their play very seriously and prefer to address serious issues playfully. Witness their preference for radio stations like the impudent, irreverent but serious-minded *Triple-J* and television programmes such as the satirical "*Frontline*" and "*Good News Week*". Thus, they manifest Huizinga's (1970) notion of "*Homo Ludens*" – that human beings are essentially more playful than rational ("Sapiens") and that play is therefore central to human learning.

The essential elements in implementing these "cognitive apprenticeships" are selecting appropriate real-world situations or tasks that are grounded in the learners' needs, finding the right person or persons to do the modelling and facilitating the learning process (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p243-5). Facilitation includes having both the models and the learners "express the essence of what they are thinking as they perform the task", regulating the difficulty of the task (not throwing learners in "at the deep end") and coaching the learners. All of which provides a constructive framework for the design of production projects and professional internships. It also puts a new perspective on the old question of whether the teacher has to "know more than the learner".

Experience as a professional practitioner is essential for a media educator, provided that it is well-considered experience. The issue of x-years' experience versus one year's experience x-times, was well disposed of by Dewey (1938). Too often, in professionally focussed institutions, former stars have dazzled their

students with their brilliance rather than illuminating their pathway to comparable achievement. Cognitive apprenticeship requires teachers to accept that their students' futures are more important than their own pasts.

While coaching is central to the notion of cognitive apprenticeship and the application of reflective practice in curriculum, it is also a salutary concept. World champions run faster, jump higher, throw further, swim more swiftly and are generally stronger, smarter, more skilful and more stylish at what they do than anyone else, including their own coaches. Nevertheless, few would dispute that these stars have something to learn from the lesser lights who coach them. Again, this is a reassurance to media educators and curriculum developers. They do not have to be (or have been) outstanding practitioners themselves but they do have to be professionally capable. Above all, they have to be professionally capable educators. Which means having a reflective approach to experience and a grounded understanding of, and sympathy for, capable professional media practice.

Coaches also understand and thrive on the realisation that human progress depends on people doing what none has done before, going where none has gone before and learning what none has known before. The communication and media professions too have voracious appetites for originality and innovation. As does research.

Old fashioned curricula, which focussed on subject content and ignored how or by whom it was to be learned, saw research only as a way to identify the most appropriate subject-matter content for courses – the syllabus. Learners were expected to value what was taught (as a canon); what was taught was what was valued most highly (by the teachers). It was often a closed loop. Curricula that are designed around reflective practice, on the other hand, are themselves more open research projects. Just as professional practice is essentially all about dealing with the murky unknown, learning to be a capable practitioner necessarily means learning how to explore and see through that murk. The notions of “learning by doing” (Dewey, 1938), “reflective practice” (Schon, 1983) and “cognitive apprenticeship” (Brown et al, 1989) all provide strong reasons for building curricula around “real-world” problems and the pursuit of real-world projects. And for publishing the products of these endeavours.

Equally, it is important that media educators maintain

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themselves as media practitioners, not only continually exploring the actualities of current professional practice but also documenting them for others. That is what I have tried to do in this article. I have taught both undergraduates and graduates, supervised postgraduate research, conducted professional development workshops in a number of countries, consulted on policy formation, and continued to work as a writer, broadcaster and film maker. It has been through trying to explain that experience, first to myself and then to others, that I have glimpsed most of the insights discussed here.

Curriculum As Recipe

Educators continue to argue about whether a curriculum is the course itself (as a lived experience in all its subtlety and intricacy) or its plan or design. What is important is to realise that a curriculum cannot, like a computer program, predict the actuality of a course precisely to the last digit. Nor is it like a chemical formula. It has more in common with a road map that shows where places are and alternative routes for getting there. Most apt of all, however, is Stenhouse's (1975) image of curriculum as recipe. "Like a recipe in cookery, a curriculum is first imagined as a possibility, then as a subject for experiment; it is always practical; and within limits, it can be varied according to taste and the availability of ingredients" (Stenhouse, 1975, pp4-5). It can even be varied according to the number to be served. Also like a recipe, a curriculum is both prescriptive (a plan of what will happen) and descriptive (a report of what does happen). And, finally, because cooking is as much about pleasing as it is about feeding, it not only predicts what is to come, it promises that it will be delightful. It is meant to persuade.

We eat in all sorts of settings, sometimes cooking for ourselves, sometimes being cooked for individually, sometimes at restaurants, sometimes at fast-food outlets. We also learn in various settings. Houle (1996, p57) has categorised eleven types of setting, ranging from that where an individual designs a learning activity for him or her self, through various group and individual settings, to that in which an individual, group or institution designs an activity for a mass audience. As communication technology proliferates and becomes more accessible globally, and traditional universities seek to establish strategic alliances with media corporations, the opportunities for (and threats to) curriculum development for the communication and media professions can only expand.

The globalisation of communication and media has contributed to strengthening the place of the local (Appadurai, 1996; Morgan, 1994, 1999). It has, likewise, increased the demand

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for high quality professional practice at the local and national level (Gaunt, 1992; Morgan, 1995; Weaver 1998). The demand for high quality curriculum to prepare and refresh professional practitioners must therefore be met locally and nationally. The challenge to global projects, like *jourNet* (the global network for professional education in journalism and media, launched by UNESCO in 1999), is to provide the recipes and ingredients with which local and national agencies (even individuals) can create their own courses.

If there are any universal conclusions to be drawn, they seem to be that curricula for practitioners in the communication and media professions need to be grounded in:

1. a complete and thorough understanding of the economic, social, political, technological and cultural environment in which they are to be offered (best, if not only, achievable in consultation with the locals);
2. a clear identification and understanding of the people who will undertake this curriculum (again only possible by consultation);
3. a clear identification of the content to be learned, expressed not in terms of "abstract knowledge and technical skill" but in terms of professional capability.

Serious attention needs to be given to increasing the provision of curricula that will enable more individuals to plot their own courses toward professional practice in this field, for which formal academic qualifications are neither necessary nor sufficient. Meanwhile, university-based curricula need to provide (in roughly equal measures):

1. contextual studies of communication and media;
2. professional studies in communication and media;
3. substantial studies in a field of content such as science, economics, law, politics or whatever.

Professionally focussed degrees are preferable to the provision of media and communication majors in otherwise general undergraduate programs. Especially when those programs consist largely of subjects whose content is cognitive knowledge rather than intellectual skill. Traditional subject disciplines are inadequate and inappropriate (Grossberg, et al, 1998). Likewise, professional degrees should be located in schools or faculties which share the ethos of professional capability, the construction of meaning and value in material form, and service to clients. For similar reasons, there is a strong case for basing professional communication and media programs in graduate schools, open to the graduates from the full range of undergraduate degrees.

When it comes to what is to be learned, the key to success lies more in the method than in the content of a course. All stories, be they fact or fiction and regardless of their intent – to inform, to

entertain, to educate or to persuade – rely on the portrayal of character(s), the depiction of process and the establishment of a space-time frame. Thus, valuable learning projects can be developed out of such exercises as a 100-word character sketch, photographic portraiture and the 60-second radio or video portrait. Likewise, the depiction of a process, be it beating an egg for a television cooking program, pruning a bush or defusing a bomb for an action thriller has value for journalists, documentarists and fiction-tellers alike. As do exercises that explore the representation of time and space. To explore the relationship between journalism and the persuasive arts of propaganda, advertising and public relations, projects can be developed, such as the production of media releases that are then exchanged and treated journalistically. The possibilities are infinite. Subsequent analysis and critique can then explain and justify what the students have done. Which is where the actuality of their cultural, ethical, social, economic and political context is brought to bear on their work.

Conclusion

When UNESCO was established, in the aftermath of World War II, its founders recognised that the seeds of that devastating conflict had grown in the hearts of ordinary men and women, as much as in those of their political leaders, and been communicated (largely if not solely) by the media. They therefore concluded that communication was central to the project of ensuring lasting peace and the improvement of human life. For most of humankind, that ideal remains a pipe dream. There is clearly no magic solution to the worldwide problems of inequity, injustice, illness, hunger, poverty and war. Nevertheless, more capable communication and media practitioners would help to solve them (Christians, 1999). Better curricula for communication and media professionals would help those practitioners “become more reflective about their own individual actions” (Cervero, 1991, p29). Such curricula would then be recipes for success. ■

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