

PRACTICE-BASED LEARNING AND TOMORROW'S JOURNALISTS

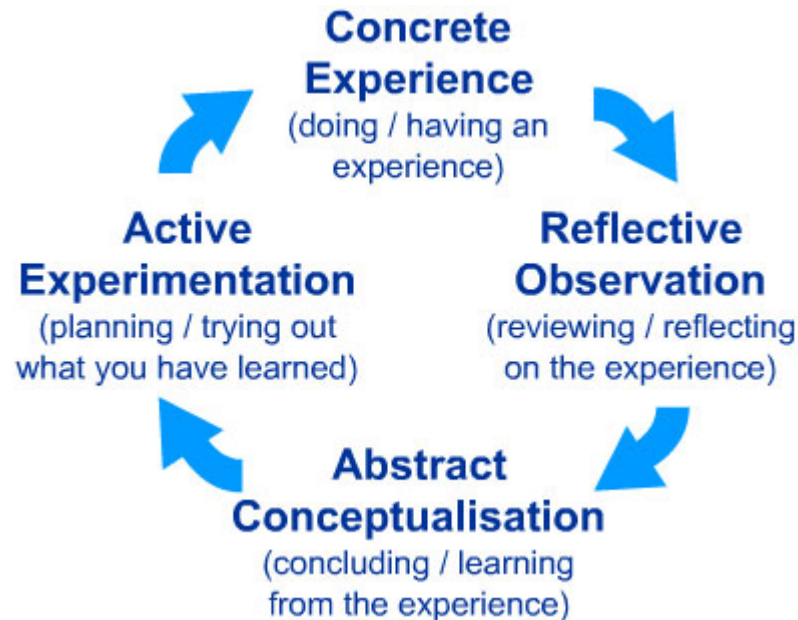
By Myra Evans


Aims:

- Notion that news days prepare students for a career in industry – but no research has been done into how students perceive it.
- BJTC require 15 news days per year at each level. Undertaken by 70 courses at 40 institutions in the UK.
- But academics have asked how valuable this is in the changing world of journalism (Mensing, 2010 and 2011)
- But what do the students think?

Background:

□ Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984)



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- Brandon (2002): Experiential learning could open new areas of knowledge for journalism education as well as helping to improve the courses for students.
 - Steel et al (2007): Called for further research into the “practice of teaching journalism in all its aspects”. Also further empirical research into experiential learning in journalism.

Methods:

- Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with students of journalism at the University of the West of England and Coventry University
- Semi-structured group interview with former journalism students at UWE now working in the journalism industry

Results: Doing it for Real

- “...it represents what it would be like in the real world, like if you were to be on ITV, BBC or any of those outlets. So I think it’s a great experience and a great practice for us to do beforehand. So, when we do go out there we’ve really got the experience and we’ve got the techniques and all of that.”

- “I think definitely going out into the city and doing news gathering and filming and making all the mistakes that you need to at that point.”
- “...we obviously had time before we went on air here [refers to place of work] to sort of hone things a little bit more and get used to the work-load a bit, but having that platform is vital.”

Results: Lecturer involvement

- “ I think one of the nice things about being very autonomous is that you do figure out more stuff on your own than you think you would. Because I think the hands-off approach is nice because I make a lot of mistakes that are really stupid, and once I’ve made them once I’m like “Okay, that was really stupid”. I’m aware that’s really stupid and I’m probably never going to do it again. If a tutor had caught that earlier and told me not to do it, it might not have sunk in in the same way.”

Repetition and reflection

- “I think the first few weeks was, like personally I did panic. Like, “how am I going to find a story? one a week?” And then when you actually think about all the other journalists who are actually working, they have to find one a day. And then once you get the hang of it, it was really easy, like we were finding three or four ideas a week, and then like, it’s up to you to decide “Oh which one do I want to put up on [name of website]?”

- “I know it’s difficult when you’ve got a deadline breathing down your neck, but feedback throughout, because if I’ve got an interview in the morning, do the interview in the morning, get it edited by say one o’clock and then I’ve got another interview at five o’clock and I get feedback on that interview in between, that will tell you where you can go right or wrong and prepare you for the next interview. “

Results: Preparation for industry

- “...the practical side was really beneficial because it helped me to get a placement in [name of place]. I went to [name of place] last summer and I worked in a TV station called [name of company]. To be honest it was really useful.”
- “I just feel like I know what to do pretty much, the nice thing is that even though I don’t consider myself particularly talented on the TV or the broadcast side, I feel like I could go into a broadcast newsroom and know what to do.”

- “...everything that we’ve been taught on our news days is pretty much everything that we do every single day. So, like, news days alone are probably one of the most beneficial things for us because it’s more practical. And obviously we’re out and about doing practical things every day that, to be honest with you, news days have probably been the one thing that’s really done it for me, anyway.”

Summary

- Benefits of “doing it for real” are widespread (work experience and industry skills)
- Incremental autonomy that comes with the scaffolded learning employed on news days creates a deeper level of learning.
- News days are a “safe place” to make mistakes.
- Surprising amount of self-reflection.

What next?...

- How do students who are less engaged with the news day pedagogy perceive news days?
- Are the skills they learn on these days transferable into other professions?
- Do employers value the news day skills and experiences when employing journalism graduates?

Thank you:

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