

Journalism Research

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What do you tell your daughter who wants to be a journalist?

On the future of journalism and journalism education in the United States

By Kenneth Starck

“All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility.” -John Stuart Mill ¹

Abstract: While still living at home, your daughter has completed all of her mandated schooling. She is now seriously thinking about life’s next important step. Enroll at a university? Get a job? Marriage? Not surprisingly she decides to extend her learning by attending university. The next question follows: What to study? She reads a lot and writes well. Surprisingly, perhaps, she actually seeks advice from her father—me, a former journalist (newspapers), former journalism professor and, for more than twenty years, a journalism school administrator. Aware of the massive convulsions occurring in the field of mass communication and, most particularly, journalism, I am hard pressed to offer enthusiastic endorsement to enroll in university to study journalism. This essay is an attempt to formulate a thoughtful and realistic answer to your daughters’ question: Should I study journalism?

First, I will try to make the case for journalism. It is a noble profession (or craft, if you like) that has made and can still make an important contribution to society. More importantly, journalism is vital to the functioning of a successful democracy. Then I will have to explore the advantages and, yes, the disadvantages of planning a career in journalism, a field which has nearly been drowned out by technology and the proliferation of careers that fall under those amorphous labels *mass communication* and *media*. Journalism has to be considered distinct from such career paths as public relations, advertising, marketing, digital specialist, spokesperson and the like. Such professional pathways are honorable. But they are not journalism, which, in a way, is similar to politics in that both journalism and politics serve—let us be clear here, *should serve*—the public interest.

The second part of this essay will address journalism education. Should your daughter concentrate her university studies on journalism? After all, since the early twentieth century, the United States has been the leader in establishing journalism education as part of higher education curriculum.

That curriculum, while evolving into a variety of different approaches, has become a near-universal model, though much of the rest of the world has not embraced the idea with quite as much enthusiasm.

What is journalism for?

“. . . the press and public opinion bring light to the modern world.” —Keane (1991:22)

Many young people want to contribute to the advancement of society. So it was with your daughter. Seeking truth is among the noblest of endeavors. The challenge of searching for the truth is dramatically portrayed in Milton’s apocryphal story in *Areopagitica*:

“Truth indeed once came into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glamorous to look on. But when he ascended, and his apostles after him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who (as that story goes of the Egyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good Osiris) took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down, gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all.” (Bush 1949:190-191)

One scholar wrote a book titled *What Are Journalists For?* It was an attempt to explain a series of newspaper and broadcast projects carried out in the 1980s and 1990s that were called, variously, public journalism, civic journalism, community journalism. The idea was for news organizations to be proactive—as opposed to passive players—in fostering citizen participation in self-governance. The nebulous nature of the idea was reflected in a partial explanation by the author: “By becoming an argument, an experiment, a movement, a debater, and an adventure, public journalism emerged into what architects call ‘built form’.” (Rosen, p. 263) “Built form” seems to have meant filling out the idea with imagination.

At one time newspapers were the communication of the realm. In fact, newspapers came to be synonymous with journalism. De Tocqueville, in his insightful look at America, observed that the population was dispersed over a wide area and “Means must then be found to converse every day without seeing each other, and to take steps in common without having met. Thus, hardly any

democratic association can do without newspapers" (1956:203).

With the onslaught of new communication technology and its applications, the concept of journalism has taken on a muddled meaning. Journalism is not technology. Journalism is not "the media." And while journalism is fact-based, it is even more than that. Consider what the Merriam-Webster dictionary says journalism is ("Journalism" at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/journalism?src=search-dict-hed>):

1a: the collection and editing of news for presentation through the media

1b: the public press

1c: an academic study concerned with the collection and editing of news or the management of a news medium

2 a: writing designed for publication in a newspaper or magazine

2b: writing characterized by a direct presentation of facts or description of events without an attempt at interpretation

2c: writing designed to appeal to current popular taste or public interest

The dictionary definition, as dictionary definitions are prone to do, is devoid of substance. It is sterile. It peripherally touches on the "public" nature of journalism but does not bring up its role in decision-making, least of all in a political sense. Historically, journalism has been the adhesive that has linked the public to the political sphere.

The American Press Institute, a national nonprofit educational organization affiliated with news organizations and dedicated to advancing the cause of journalism, answers the question: What is journalism? this way:

"Journalism can be distinguished from other activities and products by certain identifiable characteristics and practices. These elements not only separate journalism from other forms of communication, they are what make it *indispensable to democratic societies*. *History reveals that the more democratic a society, the more news and information it tends to have.*" (Italics added) (<https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/what-is-journalism/>).

An astute observer of journalism, G. Stuart Adam (2008), points to the distinction between media and journalism. Media, he notes, ". . . pushes technology into the foreground and conceals the fact

that ‘journalism’ is one thing and ‘media’ is another.” Journalism, he continues, is a way of “. . . capturing and representing the world of events and ideas as they occur.” Further, it was newspapers that developed the journalistic method which emerged later in other media, such as broadcast, becoming “a distinctive form of expression on which modern democratic societies depend.”

In the form of twitter and Facebook and a myriad of other electronic applications, the Internet has blurred the distinction between journalism and whatever else pours out of the latest devices. Playwright Arthur Miller has stated what others have reiterated, namely, that “A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself.” Now the entire world seems to be talking to itself. Or given the differences in culture and purposes, it may be said that the whole world has become one of babblers, too often talking past one another. The question is whether that babbling has a journalistic component in order to promote and enhance the democratic conversation.

Freedom of the press as the precondition of journalism

In the United States, freedom of speech and freedom of the press are enshrined in the First Amendment of its Constitution (1791): “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press . . .”

As Keane notes in *The Media and Democracy*, liberty of the press found its birthplace in Great Britain and spread to what was to become the United States and subsequently to Europe. Arguing for the need to have information flow throughout the citizenry, Keane writes, “To some degree, this requirement can be satisfied by intelligent, public-spirited forms of journalism, which have merged in recent years as a separate and specialized branch of the media” (Keane 1991:138).

In a democracy, there are presumed checks and balances on governing agencies—legislators, judges, executives. The press—the term denotes journalism—is another institution created by society to serve as a check on those who conduct the public’s business. In fact, the press came to be referred to as the Fourth Estate, or the fourth “agency.” The term seems to have disappeared from our lexicon of late. It is deliciously appealing to imagine the following scene as drawn from Scottish author Thomas Carlyle’s reference to the origin of the phrase “Fourth Estate”:

It is 1787. The place is London. Over there. Yes, over there. It is the old Irishman, Edmund Burke. One of those Renaissance persons. Author. Philosopher. Orator. He’s addressing his Parliamentary colleagues. He’s been here in Parliament for nearly two decades—a member of the House of Commons. He points out the obvious to his colleagues: “There are three ‘estates’ in Parliament—the king, the clergy and the commoners.” His gaze suddenly swings upward. He gestures toward the reporters’ gallery. “Yonder,” he exclaims, „there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all.”

Admittedly, this retelling embellishes Carlyle's account. But it is worth noting that Carlyle accentuates the relevance and timelessness of Burke's comment by adding to his account of the episode this sentence: "It is not a figure of speech, or a witty saying; it is a literal fact,—very momentous to us in these times" (Niemeyer 1966: 164).

Later, concerning the French Revolution, Carlyle used the phrase to emphasize the importance of the press in the growth of democracy. In 1842 he wrote: "A Fourth Estate, of Able Editors, springs up; increases and multiplies; irrepressible, incalculable" (Carlyle 1867).

It is instructive to consider how contemporaries address the question: What is journalism for? Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) ask the question in their compact book, *The Elements of Journalism*, and answer, "The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (p. 17). It doesn't get much more direct than that. In another chapter, headed "Who Journalists Work For," the authors acknowledge that news organizations answer to many constituencies (e.g., community institutions, local interest groups, shareholders, advertisers), but there is one allegiance that stands above all others: "Journalism's first loyalty is to citizens" (p. 51).

In 1947 a report in the United States stirred controversy among journalists. Though it preceded much of the tech era, the report presented a broad and plausible approach to the role of the press in a democracy. Titled *A Free and Responsible Press* (known also as the Hutchins Report, after its chairman, Robert M. Hutchins, then chancellor of the University of Chicago), the report was prompted by events leading up to and through the Second World War. The members of what was called the Commission on Freedom of the Press consisted of 17 influential individuals, mostly professors representing a variety of fields, from law to philosophy. The controversy arose over the fact that no journalistic representatives were part of the Commission; thus, the report was largely ignored by the press. Nonetheless, the report clearly articulated the role of the press, and it has carried currency over time. It argued that "the relative power of the press carries with it relatively great obligations" (Leigh 1947: vii). The most enduring part of the report came in the form of five requirements for a free society. These are: (1) a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning; (2) a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism; (3) the projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society; (4) the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society; and (5) full access to the day's intelligence (pp. 20-29).

The digital Tsunami

Over the past two decades a technological tsunami has turned newspapers from an endangered into a disappearing species. Pew Research Center (2014) findings provide part of the epitaph. From 2004 to 2014 the number of daily newspapers in the United States declined from 1,457 to 1,331. In two decades of decline, newspapers have lost close to 40 percent of their daily circulation. In the

past decade advertising revenues have dropped 63 percent. And during the past decade, newsrooms have reduced the number of reporters and editors by 40 percent. According to one analysis of data, in 2005 there were 20 newspaper journalists for every digital-only journalist. Those numbers shifted significantly by 2015 when there were only four newspaper journalists for every digital-only journalist. And while the number of digital journalists has grown, indications are that these numbers have plateaued (Williams 2016).

The news is grim but not all bad. For some the digital component has thrived. For example, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, while sparring over scoops involving the Trump administration, have seen their subscription revenue grow to exceed money taken in by advertising. The *Times* itself reported that it has nearly 2.5 million digital-only subscribers and that it is becoming a business “no longer rooted in newsprint” (Embernov Nov. 1, 2017). These results have been achieved largely through a so-called soft approach to a paywall, that is, allowing limited access and then promoting online subscriptions (“How Leading . . .” 2017). On another front, news organizations appear to be making progress in dealing with social media (e.g., Facebook and Google) which have been making money by offering for free the journalistic output of the news organizations. Efforts include promoting the identity of the news source and restricting the frequency with which social media users can visit news sites free of charge (“Just the two...” 2017).

Regional and local newspapers in the United States have not fared as well. But several lessons seem to emerge: There are ways to sell subscriptions online. Plus, robust, penetrating, truth-seeking journalism told straightforwardly attracts readers and viewers. Hence, journalism is on the decline in our old-fashioned newspapers, but meaningful, that is, consequential, journalism delivered electronically has a future.

Special problems of quality journalism

In a discussion of quality journalism, Jill Abramson, former *New York Times* editorial editor, suggests that quality newspapers—if we still want to call them “newspapers”—will forego paper altogether. Other platforms, such as tablets and devices still in the dream stage, will prevail. But, she argues, journalism will flourish. “My optimism,” she writes, “is based on the fact that there is a human craving for trustworthy information about the world we live in—information that is tested, investigated, sorted, checked again, analyzed, and presented in a cogent form” (Abramson 2010: 43).

Quality journalism, it seems, is always under threat. There’s governmental influence, from exploitation to censorship. There’s manipulation by nearly everyone in the journalistic process. There are legal suits. With the proliferation of social media, fake news has become the latest scourge. But the biggest threat to quality journalism—both from a production and consumption standpoint—is the rapidly changing technology. Technology can desensitize us to the idea that journalism is fundamentally an intellectual endeavor—not a technical one. Let me cite an example of

what I mean with a personal anecdote.

Nearly half a century ago—just as the computer age was dawning—a colleague and I organized a seminar at the University of Iowa on journalism professionalism. We invited prominent journalists and scholars to campus as visiting professionals. One journalist we invited was Jean Schwoebel, a reporter with the highly-respected French daily newspaper *Le Monde*. He was more than a reporter. He was an expert on international affairs, and his work was highly respected. During his visit to Iowa City, I took him to the Mississippi River, about 80 kilometers from our campus, to see what was then a cutting-edge computerized newsroom in Davenport, a city along the river. An editor enthusiastically demonstrated for Schwoebel the use of computers in the newsroom. The editor began, “A reporter types a story into this terminal.” He pointed to a keyboard and a box about the size of a large laundry basket. He continued, “The reporter then can send the story to an editor who can edit it and send it on to the composing room.” He made it sound otherworldly, and it was at that time. Jean Schwoebel listened intently. When the editor finished, Schwoebel said, “Very impressive.” He paused, then went on, “Yes, impressive, indeed. But you know what?” He paused again, “What takes place here”—and he tapped his forehead—“is more important than what takes place here”—and he tapped the computer terminal.

It was a light-bulb moment: Journalism, at its quintessential core, is an intellectual enterprise. This is something we know deep down but all too often forget.

Mitchell Stephens (2014), a longtime chronicler of the concept of news, underscores the intellectual nature of journalism in arguing the traditional idea of news should be transformed into “wisdom journalism.” Forget at least four of the five W’s (who, what, when, where—but not why) since all are readily available online. They should be replaced with the five I’s—informed, intelligent, interesting, insightful and interpretative (p. 166). The notion of “wisdom” might be an overreach for journalism, but the crux of the idea is compelling and lends force to the haunting comment by T. S. Eliot: “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”

To be sure, the press’ role in any society is determined in large part by economic, political and cultural factors. One of several postulates is that quality journalism depends upon its audience for financial support. It also depends on being seen as credible and reliable. Another postulate is that freedom and responsibility are inseparable and are often dueling concepts that highlight the most fundamental of human and social relationships, the relationship of the individual to society.

In the United States freedom and responsibility are core ideas over which the press—and other institutions, for that matter—has been struggling for many years. Obviously historical and cultural considerations are some of the factors at work. A persistent issue has been how to hold the press accountable. Based on self-regulation, the United States has tried several accountability devices, including codes of ethics, press councils, ombudsmen and expanded letters to the editor. No one approach, as one might suspect, is a panacea, yet together the approaches produce a system that is at least modestly successful. Perhaps the best approach is simply transparency—sharing with the audience what goes on behind the scenes in the reporting and editing process.

Back to your daughter's future. What are her prospects for a print newspaper job? Not good. But I want to suggest that there is hope to carry out serious journalism if she is willing to take on the challenge. Can a journalism education help meet that challenge? With a grasp now of the role journalism plays in our society, she also should understand how journalism education came about and how it has contributed to the mission of self-governance. I also want to share with her personal thoughts about how to think about the purpose of education itself.

Why journalism education?

„ . . . the most important things that a university has to give a young journalist are outside the pattern of technical journalism.“ -Wilbur Schramm ²

What, after all, is the mission of education? What is the role of a university? Too often we avoid such fundamental questions, emphasizing, instead, practical knowledge at the expense of failing to educate the whole person. A journalism education blended with a liberal arts curriculum should provide opportunities that prepare men and women for lifetimes of personal and professional growth. Practical is okay. But there should be more. My experience suggests that too often we have not thought through the fundamental assumptions inherent in our beliefs and values, which, in turn, form the basis of our actions. We tend to focus on short term objectives or become preoccupied with the crisis of the day.

John Henry Newman spoke to the core mission of education more than a century ago at the founding of the University of Dublin. He said, „If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society“ (Newman 1976:154). To particularize a core of knowledge that may be artificial in scope or only temporarily useful is to limit the possibilities of students and result in trained incapacity. It is a cliché but it is a valid claim: the greatest gift educators can give to students is that of learning how to learn.

A constant tension exists between those who prepare graduates and those who hire them. This may well apply to all professions. The discourse often highlights different assumptions about education, raising even more questions, such as: Whom does journalism education serve? Whom do journalism educators serve? Failure to come to grips with these questions leaves us carrying out our responsibilities in a vacuum.

To state what already may be obvious, educators serve students who enter the classroom. Students are at the center of the educational process. Educators also serve society. The professional sphere—the third component in this process—serves as the bridge linking the obligations and responsibilities carried out by students, faculty and all those involved. By focusing on the larger community, which in most cases provides the bulk of support for educational programs, we serve students and society and the profession in the most effective manner possible. To put this another

way, education advances civilization by fully developing the intellect and talents of individuals so they may contribute to the overall well-being of society (Starck 2000).

Throughout its history, journalism education has stirred mixed and sometimes hostile reactions among practitioners and those who profess to prepare practitioners. The issues range all the way from whether journalism instruction should be housed in the academy to differences between professors and professionals about curriculum. The fact that journalism education has existed in the United States for more than a century suggests something more than a fad. It suggests that there are certain knowledge and skills required of journalists that are important to a self-governing society and that universities can provide.

The US as a global model

The United States, for better or worse, has provided the model for journalism education for most of the world. This has been due to several factors. One is simply the influential role the United States has played on the world stage. At the end of the Cold War and the emergence of democratic states, the United States aggressively established or reformed journalism and journalism education in many countries through private foundations and government initiatives. *The Media are American* was the title of a book published more than forty years ago by British scholar Jeremy Tunstall (1977). Several decades later Jim Richstad wrote that “journalism education is American” with most of the journalism programs around the world providing a curriculum patterned after those at American universities (Richstad 2000:283).

Despite having established a firm footing in higher education, journalism education in the United States has faced frequent criticism. The strain between practitioners and the academy were present from the beginning and persist to this day. As Jean Folkerts has written in her well-researched history of journalism education in the United States, “The tension between educating reporters and editors to improve the quality of journalism or contribute to a democracy, versus training them to function efficiently in a newspaper office—or any media environment—continues today” (Folkerts 2014:228)

From its beginning journalism education in the United States encountered resistance from practitioners as well as university officials. Here is what one United States editor wrote about teaching journalism before journalism was widely taught in universities:

“The truth is, that the mystery which the professors try to throw round what they call ‘journalism’ is intended simply to supply a decent disguise for the intellectual poverty and nakedness of too many of the young who enter the calling. They keep up their self-respect, or their conceit, in the absence of all other knowledge, by their knowledge of little office tricks, most of them mechanical” (“Schools . . .” 1890:197).

The editor was E. L. Godkin, chief editor of the *New York Evening Post*, and he was writing more than 100 years ago.

Meanwhile, university administrators, pressured by press organizations to create journalism programs, addressed the issue of offering journalism preparation from their own perspectives: it is not really an academic subject; it leans toward the vocational; student-run media might criticize and interfere with institutional messaging; it is expensive to maintain, especially with accelerating change in technology. On the positive side, there was keen interest not only from press groups but also from students. Some universities even found that growing enrollments in journalism programs could produce a net financial gain.

The debate over the value of journalism education has continued over the years. That has been constructive because it suggests that while some practices are worth preserving, re-evaluation and even reinvention are always to be considered. Indicative of change is the recent rebranding of academic programs, often, unfortunately, relegating journalism to a lesser overall role. There are many examples, including my own program at the University of Iowa. The Iowa program was established in 1924 as a School of Journalism. Colleagues in other disciplines occasionally scoffed that we were a “school of newspaper training.” In the 1980s, along with many other programs in the United States, we added “Mass Communication” to our name. That expanded our professional reach. We not only attracted more students, but, truth be known, it was a means of protecting academic territory.

New communication technology has accelerated name changes. Indiana’s well-known School of Journalism in 2013 was merged with telecommunications and communication and culture and became the Media School (<http://mediaschool.indiana.edu/>). Two years earlier Northwestern University, which boasted another highly-respected journalism program, expanded its name, confoundingly, to Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications (<http://www.medill.northwestern.edu/>). In 2015 the University of Colorado opened its College of Media, Communication and Information. The new college absorbed what had been known as the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, which had been closed in 2011. The Colorado dean explains the rationale for a new academic unit on its website. “It was created to match the times we live in—times of revolutionary change in the way people communicate, the tools they use to do it and the impact that change has on society” (<https://www.colorado.edu/cmci/>) .

The changes illustrate how universities are attempting to adapt to the seismic shift in the media landscape. The changes probably make economic sense. The danger is that journalism becomes a subsidiary of other communication interests. And the result could be a real obstacle to achieving quality journalism and to the health of society at large. A 2015 survey notes decreases over the past few years in the numbers of undergraduate and master’s levels students enrolled in journalism/communication programs. The trend, according to the authors, “is clearly concerning for the field of journalism and mass communication as a whole.” They add that the “findings are most

alarming for journalism, where there was a substantial drop in the number of undergraduate students enrolled in journalism sequences, including journalism (undifferentiated), news editorial/print journalism, and broadcast news/broadcast journalism” (Gotlieb, et al 2017). Whether the number of journalism students is declining due to less visibility within communication programs is at least an open question.

Brief history of academic journalism education

A brief historical perspective on how journalism education entered the academy may help explain events as they have unfolded in the United States.

The culprit was a new technology—movable type. *The new system* of printing and typography ushered in rapid and economical publishing. Driven by commercial interests, publishing gave rise to task specialization ranging from generating messages to setting them in type and distributing the results to a mass audience. Work-related groups sprang up based on the variety of tasks to be performed. Among the first such occupational groups to strive for status were journalists. One goal of these groups was to elevate the work to the level deemed professional. In the United States, this is where education fits in. Education could confer status.

The nation’s particular socio-political-economic arrangement bestowed upon the press a special task in society and in relation to government. That task was to keep citizens informed and government officials honest. Thus, the press, though a privately-held entity, carried out an important public function. The result produced a joint public/private enterprise which in the final analysis was private yet not public despite a generally subscribed to public mission. It was a conundrum of sorts. Journalists took on the role of social custodian of the truth in much the same way physicians staked a claim to health and lawyers to justice.

Journalistic work in the United States in the late nineteenth century split into essentially three functions, the work of the printer, the reporter and the publisher (Sobel 1976). High-speed presses and the growth of urban centers began ushering in the era of the reporter. These reporters cum journalists left the print shop and managerial responsibilities to form a new entity. They produced something—news, information, stories, etc.—with their intellect. It was not long before journalists began invoking the notion of professionalism even though there existed no agreed-upon code of ethics or a recognized means of entry into the field or a journalistic philosophy. Professionalization, notes Folkerts, enabled journalists to “legitimize” their work and “to distinguish themselves from the public as experts in the news” (Folkerts 2014:228).

For social legitimization reporter-journalists eventually looked in the same direction that most occupational groups have looked: the university (Sobel 1976). After the Civil War (1861 - 1865) and early in the twentieth century, the university was becoming a major authority in society. As the generator and repository of knowledge, universities had the power to confer professional status.

Press associations and several prominent journalistic figures, notably Joseph Pulitzer, promoted the idea of journalism education. In the late 1800s several United States institutions offered journalism courses, and in 1908 the University of Missouri established the first journalism school (and incidentally has maintained its original designation, School of Journalism). Soon other programs began appearing. The initial thrust was career preparation. Before long efforts were being made to install journalism education as a discipline at research institutions. The first doctorate degree in journalism was awarded at the University of Wisconsin under the leadership of Willard G. Bleyer in 1929, and the first doctorate in mass communication was conceived by Wilbur Schramm and conferred by the University of Iowa in 1948 (Rogers 1994:21-26).

The approach to educating journalists differed markedly among institutions. Folkerts points toward the early development of three models of journalism instruction. The University of Missouri emphasized extensive hands-on instruction which came to be referred to the "Missouri Method." Columbia University concentrated on professional graduate studies (masters) and in its instruction capitalized on New York City's media-rich environment. The University of Wisconsin at Madison, meanwhile, stressed the academic side of the educational enterprise with an emphasis on the social sciences. Of courses, many changes have occurred over the past century, but these programs, Folkerts writes, "still represented distinct models." (Folkerts 278)

From the time of its inception, journalism education sparked a debate over curriculum. Never wholly resolved was the precise professional/academic nature of such curricula. Professionalism tended to prevail (Dingwall and Lewis 1983). Journalism took its lead from medicine and law, but operationally the pattern for educating (future) journalists came from news organizations.

In a provocative doctoral dissertation, Birkhead sharply criticized the role of journalism schools. He wrote, "The ideological captivity of professionalism extended in real terms to constitute a dependence of journalism schools on the industry they professed to regulate. Notwithstanding their motives, journalism educators helped to make professionalism an instrument of exploitation" (1982:280). He further insists that universities gave credence to the notion that the press functioned as a public utility. What is clear is that universities helped to legitimize journalism as a profession. In its early development and even continuing to the present, journalism education tended to assimilate the work procedures of the newsroom. Journalism education came to sanction the standards and values invoked by journalism practitioners, including, for example, objectivity and neutrality.

For most of its history, journalism education has been preoccupied by the question of how to balance the practical and the theoretical, which reverts to the old struggle of the academic vs. the professional. Should there be a balance between the conceptual and the application? If so, what should it be? Inevitably, the pros and the cons disagree. Personally I find the distinction between practical and theoretical artificial since, following the dictum that nothing is so practical as a good theory, they inevitably go together.

Self-regulation of journalism education and accrediting bodies

The critical question is who controls professional education, that is, who or what body determines standards and sets acceptable norms. The United States follows the path of self-regulation. The educational establishment turns to accrediting bodies, independent agencies that set and evaluate standards of performance according to purpose and criteria and determine whether those criteria are met. For journalism and media education in the United States, that assessment has come to be carried out by a group of professionals and educators. Formed originally in 1945, the agency is known as the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). This is the organization that the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the U.S. Department of Education recognize as the accrediting body for journalism and mass communication in colleges and universities (the ACEJMC website is at <http://www.ukans.edu/~acejmc/>).

The current Council has 26 members representing professional and educational organizations. The Council can have up to three public members. According to the ACEJMC website, "Membership on the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications is open to all membership associations of educators or professionals (including foundations related to such associations) that are involved with the professional education of students for careers in journalism, mass communications, telecommunications and other media. Admission to the Council is subject to approval by a majority of the Accrediting Council."

ACEJMC now accredits 113 programs. In recent years the process has been taken to other countries and now includes eight international programs: three in the United Arab Emirates, two in Mexico and one each in Chile, New Zealand and Qatar. Some have questioned the appropriateness of evaluation of programs in places where the press is distinctly not free, but ACEJMC asserts that the process takes into account "Institutional Uniqueness."

Nine criteria are used to evaluate programs:

- (1) Mission, governance and administration;
- (2) Curriculum and instruction;
- (3) Diversity and inclusiveness;
- (4) Full-time and part-time faculty;
- (5) Scholarship: Research, creative and professional activity;
- (6) Student services;
- (7) Resources, facilities and equipment;
- (8) Professional and public service; and

(9) Assessment of learning outcomes.

The accreditation, which is strictly voluntary, has been relatively successful, although a number of institutions, including Northwestern, The Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin at Madison, have opted out of the process claiming that it stifles innovation or that the program wants to concentrate on graduate students. Still, accreditation has at least two important positive features. One is that the organization has both professional and academic representatives. Together they define and interpret accreditation standards. The second is that while not measuring or ranking performance the agency's assessments do assure minimum standards are being met.

Attesting to the vitality of media education—not just journalism—is the growth of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (<http://www.aejmc.org/>). Tracing its founding to 1912, the organization promotes higher professional standards and academic scholarship. It has nearly 4,000 members from all over the world. Educators make up the bulk of members which also include students and professionals.

At Iowa, my approach to journalism education was partly formed by pollster and scholar George H. Gallup. He had majored in journalism at Iowa, served as editor of the student newspaper and later taught at Iowa. In 1926 at a meeting of journalism educators in Ohio, he said the teaching of journalism “must place less emphasis upon technique and practice and more and more upon theory. It must deal with the reasons which underlie the practices and less with the practices as such” (1927:17).

In fact, from its founding the Iowa program, first accredited in 1945, has endorsed a strong liberal arts orientation. Perhaps underscoring the point was the appointment of its first director, Charles H. Weller, a professor of Greek and archaeology. He outlined three fundamental objectives of the School that have withstood the test of time amazingly well: (1) journalists should have broad backgrounds; (2) journalists should possess sound knowledge of the theory and technique of the profession, including its history and problems; and (3) student journalists should have ample opportunity to put into practice in a laboratory principles learned in the classroom (Starck no date).

Journalism education goes beyond preparing young people for meaningful careers. It helps to educate young people who do not plan to become journalists on the role of journalism. Such informed future readers and viewers will demand high standards, and news media will have to respond. Journalism education's institutional presence also helps educate the public about the importance of journalism in a democracy. In addition, many journalism programs offer continuing education for working journalists, such as the Shorenstein Center (<https://shorensteincenter.org/>) and Nieman journalism program (<http://nieman.harvard.edu/>), both at Harvard, and Knight-Bagehot Fellowship in Economics and Business Journalism at Columbia (<https://journalism.columbia.edu/kb>), as well as dozens of others in institutions across the country.

Foundations also have played a role in the development of journalism education. Among the earlier supporters of journalism education were the Gannett Foundation and the Freedom Forum. Occasionally such support has been problematic because of efforts to influence academic content. Among the dozens of active supporters of journalism are the Knight Foundation (<https://knightfoundation.org/>), the Scripps Howard Foundation (<http://www.scripps.com/foundation/>), the Alicia Patterson Foundation (<http://aliciapatterson.org/>) and the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation (<http://inasmuchfoundation.org/journalism-foundation/>).

Knight has been especially active in journalism education supporting the work of the World Journalism Education Council (<https://wjec.net/home/>) and other educational organizations in taking a global approach to journalism. The Knight Center at the University of Texas at Austin recently published *Global Journalism Education in the 21st Century: Challenges and Innovations*, an outgrowth of four international conferences. The publication, which is free on line, explores journalism education on a global scale. The editors dedicate the publication “To educators and trainers worldwide who teach journalism according to the highest professional standards possible and to the students who carry their torches.” (Goodman and Steyn).

In all probability, journalism will continue to look to universities for a trained, comparatively inexpensive labor supply. But while being sensitive to professional interests, educators also must keep in mind the larger mission of serving society and providing opportunities for the maximum development of individual intellect and talent. Objectives of educators and professionals overlap, but they have different missions and roles. While recognizing their common goals, professionals and educators have to respect these different roles.

Conclusions

Your daughter is becoming impatient. What’s your answer? she persists. What’s your advice about studying journalism in university? Perhaps she’s expecting a yes-or-no response. Unfortunately it is more complicated. Here is what I tell her:

If you continue to be interested in writing and committed to contribute to whatever community you are a part of, then by all means take advantage of what a good journalism program has to offer. There are some caveats.

- Be sure the curriculum offers a blend of theoretical and practical courses with emphasis on the theoretical.
- Pursue courses supplementing your journalism studies—sociology, economics, politics, psychology, philosophy, history and at least one language other than English. You may want to major in one of these disciplines and regard the journalism courses as secondary. Majoring in more than one discipline also makes sense.
- Live or study for a semester or year in another culture.

- Seek experience in working in several media platforms, e.g., online, video, print, etc.
- Remember that technology is a tool, the means not the end.
- Stimulate your entrepreneurial instincts by being innovative and learn how to capitalize on a good idea.
- Learn inside and outside the classroom and commit yourself to continue learning the rest of your life.

Finally, dear daughter, your future will be different from my past, but it promises to be just as exhilarating.

About the author

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Footnotes

¹ Mill, John Stuart (1978; originally published 1859). *On Liberty*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, p. 17.

² Starck, Kenneth (no date). History/Traditions (of the University School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Unpublished paper. Schramm made the comment in 1943.

Contribute more, broadcast less

On the role of feedback and articulation in a model of “elevated journalism”

By Sebastian Köhler

Abstract: The paper discusses the extent to which journalism needs to take its function of articulation more seriously and fulfil it more effectively as part of the profession’s public role. To do this, the paper develops aspects of a model of “elevated journalism” – an approach that also includes dialectic criticism of key tendencies in established journalism. Working with feedback from users, be it actual or anticipated, is expected to gain importance in future if journalism is still to maintain a place in societies that are constantly modernizing in so many ways.

1 An elevation?

An important distinction to start: As an achievement of modern civilization, journalism should be elevated rather than out of touch (cf. Jarren 2015: 114ff.). Elevated in what sense? To decide, we need to assume that continuity and discontinuity in social developments are interdependent (cf. Fuchs 2017: 262f.). A new phase of social development would elevate previous phases in such a way that existing features could be 1.) retained, 2.) eliminated or 3.) supplemented with new qualities to a certain extent. The degree to which this occurs can be determined by coincidence and necessity; by structures and actions; by crises and social conflict. One example is the debate in Switzerland and Germany in spring 2018 about the future of public broadcasting. In line with the proposals outlined here, one solution would be to elevate it: An open, public debate would be held and decisions made on which areas should be retained, shut down or raised to a new level, and to what extent.

2 Who is in which “filter bubble”?

One key aspect, not least of the debates about the future of SRF, ARD, ZDF etc. seems to be the fact that, for a while now, many people have criticized modern journalism in the Western world as an elitist project – from both a practical and, increasingly, a theoretical point of view. It is indeed hard to deny that journalism was and is shaped by an elite (Jarren 2015:113ff., cf. Steindl 2017: 403). This is the result of its links to economic elites (formerly the upwardly-mobile property-owning

bourgeoisie as owners), political elites (the emerging capitalist states and today those who profit from globalization, for example) and cultural elites (not least the once social-liberal and now “green” educated middle class that produces more than its fair share of young journalists in Germany (ibid.[1])).

I therefore hope that my thoughts will contribute to models of journalism and journalism studies that help to foster successful communication in society (cf. Dath: 2012: 427). That is the logic behind my proposals for reflection and practical application: more varied and open contributions, rather than one-sided broadcasts.

After all, journalism can be understood as a social field in which society’s knowledge is (re)constructed based on relevant contributions. In this sense, the word ‘contribution’ is used normatively to mean something made on an equal footing between those involved, and as such different from more one-sided broadcasts with a certain sense of mission. Journalistic contributions can thus be determined as interactive communication between producers and the public that is ideally informative for everyone involved (cf. Köhler 2009: 10ff.).

3 Elevated in terms of information?

So how can we define information more closely in this direction? According to Dietmar Dath and Barbara Kirchner, information is not a property of physical objects, but a relationship between such properties and our options for interacting with these objects. Both need to exist - we can never know objects other than in the form of the relationships we have with them (Dath 2012: 806). Material and its transformations can be systematized at body level between structures and materials, and at field level between energies and information (Schlegel 1996: 105ff.).

If we look at the tribal history of humans, a four-tiered historic sequence of change can be seen.

In a layered model like this, the older formation in each case is elevated by the subsequent formations. ‘Structure transformation’ (Stone Age/ancient civilization) and ‘material transformation’ (Metal Ages to Middle Ages) thus complement one another at the ‘body’ level, while the same can be said for ‘energy transformation’ ((pre-/post-)modern industrial age) and ‘information transformation’ (historically open) at the ‘field’ level.

We can therefore pinpoint two key roles for such elevated journalism:

1. Journalismus as a relatively self-sufficient factor in societal communication (“engine”) in its co-focus of attention that is open to criticism (both in the form of journalism that is accelerating all the time and in the deliberately slower form);
2. Journalism as a special medium (“mouthpiece”) in its feedback-rich co-moderation of debates in society (cf. Meier 2013: 63).

Especially in its uses, with its practical value for the individual, the community and society, journalism could gain a new type of social relevance, not least given the blurring of boundaries that is currently underway (hybridization e.g. towards citizens' journalism and data journalism). In their not only passive, but also in terms of possibilities diversely participative appropriations, journalistic services as contributions might become "building blocks of societal self-understanding" (Lüneborg 2012: 453) – elements of social and public self-criticism, self-limitation and self-regulation.

Suggestions from Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology allow journalism to be defined as "doing journalism" that is open to involvement, and as public, communicative forms of intercourse in the broader sense of social practice between expert and layperson cultures that could lose all distinction here (Wiedemann 2014: 83ff.; Lüneborg 2012: 454f.). Journalism studies as a laboratory of change in journalism should therefore both describe and analyze the production of journalistic processes of interpretation and develop changed communicative practices experimentally. When it comes to questions of journalism, democracy and participation, forms of participative communication in and between changing societal and communal public (sub-)spheres are of interest, with a view to established and newer power structures in the social and journalistic field (Lüneborg 2012: 456).

The journalism studies laboratory focuses less on providing training in established journalistic forms and more on experimentally designing, testing and evaluating – i.e. also 'elevating' new types of contribution in more participative forms than previously, with corresponding feedback. Diversity in editorial offices should increase in many respects, for example through the employment of more migrants in the field of journalism (cf. Pöttker 2016: 11ff.). There might then be justification to hope for the development of experimental content and forms that appeal more and better to classes and groups that have been underprivileged in terms of journalism up to now, in order to open up discussion with them on an equal footing. These groups include women and girls, the unemployed, people with experience or fear of losing social status, those with little formal education, young people from low-income backgrounds, people with a background of migration, and people with certain sexual or gender orientations.

After all, it appears that the articulative role of journalistic media is still underestimated as an important part of its public function (see German state press laws). In a study (Steindl 2017: 420), just 46.9 percent of the journalists in Germany questioned stated that they found it extremely or very important to "give people the opportunity to articulate their views." 48.9 percent of women questioned gave this response, while the figure for freelance journalists was just 37.5 percent. This indicates that editorial offices certainly tend to need more resources for a style of working that is open to feedback. Those working in newsrooms today have the chance to hear more than ever before, with feedback (including negative and critical feedback) an integral part of the ever more dynamic editorial routine. However, there is clearly a need for change if we are to prevent mainstream journalism from becoming potentially the most powerful of all filter bubbles (as described by Norbert Bolz, among others, see Klöckner 2017). It is therefore vital that forums and comment functions are not closed – even though their maintenance is sometimes hard work and may not increase the output per se. However, the at least cultural and technical opportunities for

participatory communication (cf. Köhler 2015:13ff.) beyond traditional and new elites could become a central moment for renewing and developing journalism as a resource for successful communication within society and thus for social self-design.

Despite the risks for its traditional practices, journalism would thus gain important opportunities for fundamental renewal, as long as it did not remain a primary means for other purposes – for example to create an audience for consumption of advertising messages or to shape loyal citizens. Much more than in the past, it can become a purpose in itself (cf. Kiefer 2011 & 2011a): towards global, intergenerational, social and environmental democratization. Journalists should therefore shift their attention away from contributions that determine facts to more open contributions: away from complaining about what journalism has lost, such as range, credibility and status, and towards processes of emergence, change and passing in which journalism itself plays a role, i.e. processes of ‘elevation’ of participatory public spheres.

4 Journalism as interaction - indications and links in media economics

Today, it is almost impossible to maintain a strict distinction between communicators and recipients (Kiefer 2017: 682ff.). As a result, many media economists are trying to model journalism as more of a service and less of a typical property. They argue that “collaborative value creation” (Kiefer 2017: 688) should play a greater role and that recipients are therefore strengthened. Kiefer argues that, just like a university professor who acts as a producer of information when conducting research and a service provider when teaching, journalists today are both information producers and functional service providers for the users of their contributions at the same time. These services should “expand, change or improve” users’ knowledge of the researched topic “in interaction” with the users and factors they contribute (ibid.: 688). According to Kiefer, the focus is no longer merely on the mere “transfer of services from the journalist to the recipient” (ibid.: 689), but on interaction between the players in a spirit of informational sociality, with the co-productive aspects of cognition, communication and cooperation (cf. Fuchs 2017a). This means that, without collaboration from the users, journalists can neither provide their service nor create any other individual or social value (Kiefer 2017: 689) – they are simply reliant on collaboration from the users. Only by working together do the two sides have the resources needed to produce journalistic services. The logical consequence of this is that, ultimately, the final decision on the benefits of this in terms of the exchange and utility value lies with the users.

This could be regretted as a restriction on the (myth of) journalistic autonomy, but it can also be interpreted as a potential gain in terms of participation and democratization. If the users are taken more seriously than in many previous models – not least from a media economics point of view – this also means that the kind of cooperation needed for communication within society could often be rife with conflict or even doomed to fail (see ibid.) due to the structural asymmetries between the players in journalism. However, this model appears to offer a more useful explanation, both practically and theoretically, than naïve claims of the ‘independence’ of journalists. From a dialectic

point of view, the restrictions of production and usage processes mean that everyone involved shares responsibility for public information and the formation of opinions (Kiefer 2017: 690). Journalists should base their work on the needs and problems of those who use it – which is not the same as populistically giving the audience what they want to hear (Kiefer 2017: 696). It is important to pay attention to their interests and especially to feedback – in the context of social forms of interaction in individual, shared and societal communication (cf. Köhler 2001).

According to Kiefer, the discipline of cultural studies is particularly likely to employ service theory models of users as co-producers, as long as their studies describe interactive connections between media production, media text and reception behavior on the part of the audience (Kiefer 2017: 690). This is an effective starting point for a model of elevated journalism, as long as this specific economic perspective also engenders a move towards journalism and journalism studies that are “humbler” (Kiefer 2017: 693) and more self-critical. Journalism could therefore be modelled in a new way, as a public and especially expectation-oriented service provider. The specific public value it provides is the production of public spheres that enable and develop freedom of information and speech for all citizens of democratic societies. And, where journalism is understood in this way, its structure is based on “collaboration” (Kiefer 2017: 695f.). Journalists should therefore look for and promote collaboration from users in a very different way and more than before (Kiefer 2017: 696). Not least, it is about communicating and dialectically ‘elevating’ mutual expectations (Kiefer 2017: 697). According to Marie Luise Kiefer, this kind of perspective also enables “potential disruption” to be identified more easily, while the amalgamation of journalists’ roles as information producers (researchers) and service providers (communicators) can also be interpreted and criticized as another ambivalent aspect of convergence in the field of journalism (Kiefer 2017: 698f.)

5 Fake news and feedback

“Fake news” was named Word of the Year 2017 by the Collins English Dictionary, while “alternative facts” became Germany’s “ugliest word of the year” (cf. Fuchs 2018). It is not a new phenomenon, but the internet has inexorably increased its spread. But dealing with fake news should not be left to states and laws, nor to companies and algorithms. Instead, in order to promote social and environmental democratization, it should be addressed permanently by tiered public spheres with active users at every level. This would mean intermediaries like Google and Facebook doing their own part to help the formation of these kinds of more varied public spheres. One approach would be for them to pay people appropriately for curating this professional content and moderating the resultant debates on the large platforms. Christian Fuchs rightly highlights the fact that, as they are focused on economic concerns, intermediary corporations prioritize automation and big data over human practitioners. In contrast, he argues, as many people as possible should be involved much more to prevent the establishment of (even more) “profit over democracy.” According to Fuchs (2018), this interplay between journalists and users could create something totally new here: Laws should force media corporations around the world to employ journalists as fact checkers, for an appropriate salary. This would mean that, if enough or sufficiently qualified users triggered a certain

interaction, it would be much easier to help decide what was and was not appropriate democratically (not based on profit or power). Public or public service internet platforms appear a sensible alternative to intermediaries here. They should be free from advertising and slowed down as much as possible, in order to enable political debate and democratization in a new way.

6 Moving towards societies with more feedback

According to this approach, the focus would be on brokering the human exchange of information (both with other people and with nature) and the human exchange of energy (also with others and with nature). "Information relations and energy relations are the abstract (...) template for that which Marx calls the "means of production" and "productive forces" (Dath 2012-807). Back then, industrialization (productive forces) and capitalism (means of production) formed the historical frame of reference. But looking back, in terms of dialectics, it was also about "pedigree collapse relations between energy and information attributes," which Dath and Kirchner use to determine "the mutual emergence from one another of the different moments of the become, the becoming and the possible" (ibid.).

The normative point of reference in terms of enlightenment here is a political program that moves towards a "just self-production and self-regulation [of the species society] that are responsible in terms of energy and information". In economic terms, achieving this would mean that both distribution and production were socialized in such a way that people were not and could not be blackmailed, but could play a part in shaping society (Dath 2012-808). The common channels of public participation do not appear suitable for making politics "feedback richer" and thus more democratic (Dath 2012-427). Dath and Kirchner argue that, when protests and conflicts of societal relevance occur - be it for example surrounding the Castor transports in Germany, in the US town of Ferguson, Missouri in summer 2014 following the shooting of the black teenager Michael Brown by the police, or in connection with the G20 summit in Hamburg in 2017 - it is clear that "destruction and uncoordinated protest are very telegenic, sexy on the one hand and demoralizing on the other." Situations in which justified anger gets violently out of hand are the ideal place for the common mass media to demonstrate the two central aspects that make up their being. The authors describe these two "souls" as marketable sensationalism and the system-supporting propaganda function of many mass media. According to Dath and Kirchner, this sensationalism is less a product of the fact that information is a commodity in capitalism and more because news of natural disasters or large technical accidents serves to intensify existing fears of a loss of competitive advantage, unemployment and homelessness - in short, to update latent threats that the community constantly holds ready for the individual.

Those who are not as fearful about their position among people are more flexible in discussion and not as quick to panic or be mobilized in a mob (Dath 2012-809f.).

As a result, people can develop into creatures and creators of their own energy and information

possibilities (Dath 2012-808). Progress could then be redefined in terms of information, with the yardstick of the speed of development being the extent to which one no longer learns how things are or were, but instead learns how to learn how things are not yet and how this can be extracted from the way things are or were (Dath 2012-809).

A traditional “public sphere” would need to be reformulated and elevated in this direction, including as “production public spheres” (in the sense of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge), i.e. to be pluralized and improved. It would also be vital to establish and protect the access of as many people who are not and cannot be blackmailed to machines that can produce, save, transmit, encrypt or explicate energy and information, and that can calibrate, determine and change the proportions of transformation, implicate and explication between energy and information (Dath 2012-811f.). Elevated journalism should find and play its (proven and new) roles there. Cuts in social services, the destruction of the environment, violence and similar general signs of crisis and the increasingly authoritarian tendencies on display in such contexts show that, if these problems are not to be seized upon for authoritarian or fascist purposes, journalists still have a lot of work to do in terms of the cultural role of public media in the modern democratization of societies (Krüger 1992-220).

Bertolt Brecht made two clever suggestions. One was the proposal - much quoted and more topical today than ever - to transform broadcasting from an apparatus of distribution to one of communication, i.e. with a diverse range of changing perspectives and feedback at a whole new level. The less well-known of Brecht’s two ideas is to see popular sovereignty as sovereignty of arguments. In my view, this means modelling democracy as a form of intercourse for society as a whole, enlightened by information, whose cognitions, communications and cooperations reach an argumentative level, i.e. one that is convincing with as little force as possible.

About the Author

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Footnote

[1] See also the study by Siegfried Weischenberg et al. "Journalismus in Deutschland 2005", overview published in Media Perspektiven, issue 7/2006, p. 346-361; see <https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/sowi/journalistik/kvvarchiv/KvvArchiv/jouridmp.pdf>, accessed on 24.9.2017, 19.33)

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