МОНГОЛ УЛСЫН ИХ СУРГУУЛЬ
ЭРДЭМ ШИНЖИЛГЭЭНИЙ БИЧИГ

№18/479 ШУС, НУС 2017

FIVE YEARS OF INTERNATIONAL COURSES TEACHING UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND JOURNALISM STUDENTS FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

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Keywords: work integrated learning, field reporting, foreign correspondents, intercultural communications, international reporting, ABC, BBC, CBC, New Colombo Plan, NCP, The University of Queensland

Abstract

The University of Queensland has conducted seven international field reporting courses in India, Indonesia and Vietnamsince 2012, as well as three more courses based on similar Work Integrated Learning principles on campus at St Lucia in Brisbane during the same period. Two more courses – to Indonesia and India in 2018 – are scheduled.

The 100 or more students who have participated in these courses have unanimously reported high levels of satisfaction. They enjoyed the travel and the experience of working in another country; but they also recognised that they were under greater stress to perform well while overseas than they would have been at home. Overcoming this stress and the obstacles confronting themhas led to higher levels of self-confidence, better reporting skills and greater technical ability, and stronger intercultural communication.

On returning to Australia, the majority also found that employers were keen to consider them for jobs because of their advanced knowledge and skills by offering them full-time or casual positions soon after graduation.

This paper will examine two issues associated with these courses: 1) how effective is the pedagogy known as Work Integrated Learning as a way of teaching these courses?,and 2) can undergraduates really learn how to be foreign correspondents in such a short time, or is this a career that requires many years and possibly decades working as a senior journalist before being posted abroad?

Funding for the overseas courses has been provided by the Australian government through Short Term Mobility Grants from the Department of Education and more recently by the Department of

Foreign Affairs and Trade through the New Colombo Plan.

Introduction

Work Integrated Learning(WIL) courses are intensive, immersive and experiential. In short, these are courses that involve 'learning by doing' where the students are given similar assignments to those they would work on if they were professional reporters. Throughout the courses, they are supported by academics who act as coaches and mentors rather than lecturers and tutors. This means the teachers (usually just two) are on hand constantly throughout the intensive 10-day reporting course in a foreign country. They are able to offer immediate advice and help as needed, and they are able to assist with emergency issues and risk management. But for the most part, the students act independently and work either alone or in small teams to collect their multimedia stories.

In recent courses conducted in India in 2015, 2016 and 2017, and in Indonesia in 2017, the University of Queensland (UQ) students work with 'buddies' from a partner university: Amity University in India and Universitas Indonesia in Jakarta. These 'buddies' help with translations, logistics, local transport, and organising interviews and stories.

The consequence of this has been improved relations between the two universities, friendships among the students from both countries, and greater understanding among the people of the respective nations. These are all primary goals of the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan (NCP), which finances the courses and is an initiative of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The students have their flights, accommodation and other costs paid by NCP. They are responsible only for incidentals and meals which means income is not a factor in choosing candidates.

Selection of student participants and pre-departure training

All final year Bachelor of Journalism (BJ) students are invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) if they wish to take part in the upcoming course.

A selection committee, consisting of the Course Coordinator (the author of this article), the School of Communication and Arts' Student Placements Administrator, and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences' International Engagement Officer, choose 20 successful candidates, largely based on their academic achievements in previous journalism courses.

The students are then enrolled in a full-credit semester-long course.

There are usually six or eight weeks of intensive training prior to departure which happens during the mid-semester break so as not to interfere with their studies in other subjects.

The pre-departure training includes weekly lectures of one hour to develop their editorial skills and knowledge of the country they will be visiting, followed by two hours of technical training covering the use of audio, photography and video recording equipment, editing software, and multimedia sites such as Wordpress, Software.com and Adobe Spark.

The intention is that the students should be as adept as possible prior to arrival in the host country, so that they can

concentrate on the news reporting once they get there and not have to worry about the technical issues.
During the pre-departure training, they are also connecting with their Amity or UI 'buddies' overseas and sharing story ideas, debating challenges, and arranging interviews and news-gathering opportunities.
The trip itself lasts 10 days on average, including at least two days of travelling.
One day is set aside for a bus trip through the city centre where students are able to orient themselves and start collecting video and audio. On the second day, UQ hosts a lunch for the 'buddies' and their academics as a 'get to know you' experience. After that, the students are freed up to begin their reporting for the rest of the week.

They are expected to file to a dedicated website during their period abroad, just as foreign correspondents would do.

Examples of their work can be found at the website: JACdigital.com.au (then click on 'Projects" to see 'UQ in Jaipur', "UQ in Indonesia' and other courses).

Work Integrated Learning as Pedagogy

Internships are the most familiar form of WIL but some students complain that busy employers are sometimes unable to devote enough time to training them.

Another concern, as a Fair Work Australia study notes, is that "…there is reason to suspect that a growing number of businesses are choosing to engage unpaid interns to perform work that might otherwise be done by paid employees" (Stewart & Owens, 2013, p. xxii).

UQ believes its overseas field reporting courses overcome these concerns because they involve close supervision and coaching by lecturers who are also industry professionals. (In the case of this researcher, I was a journalist for 35 years and a foreign correspondent in Europe for three).
I have written elsewhere about how the modern concept of WIL can be seen as part of a long history of pedagogy going back to Rousseau, through his influence on Tolstoy, to Polyani's(1967) concept of "tacit knowledge", Schon's(1983) "reflective practitioner" and today's WIL courses and internships (Woolley, 2014, pp 161-162).

Here is an excerpt:

Experience tells us - and so do students anecdotally - that "learning by doing" is an effective way to learn.

Tolstoy believed that too, and implemented it in 1859 when he opened a school for 50 peasant children in a single room in his large manor house, YasnayaPolyana.

He did not believe teaching was a "method" but rather an "art". He called it "student-dominated learning". Tolstoy's theories of education were inspired by his reading of Rousseau ('Emile, or On Education' by Rousseau, 1762) and anticipated Dewey's approach to 'learning by doing' 100 years later.

Tolstoy wrote 'On Teaching the Rudiments' (Wiener, 1967): "The best method would be the one which would answer best to all the possible difficulties

incurred by a pupil, that is, not a method but an art and talent."

Skip ahead now to Schon in 1983 who coined the term "The Reflective Practitioner" and also conceived of teaching as an "art".

He examined case studies of "artistry" – by architects, psychologists, and then in science-based professions ranging from medicine to agronomy and engineering.

Schon pointed out that "A practitioner's stance towards inquiry is his attitude toward the reality with which he deals. According to the model of Technical Rationality, there is an objectively knowable word, independent of the practitioner's values and views. In order to exert technical control over it, he must observe it and keep his distance from it … His stance toward inquiry is that of spectator/manipulator."

But Schon argued a "reflective practitioner" engaged in a "conversation with a situation that he treats as unique and uncertain … he functions as an agent/experient."

Schon described that particular conversation this way: "He shapes the situation, in accordance with his initial appreciation of it, the situation 'talks back', and he responds to the situation's back-talk … For on this perspective, research is an activity of practitioners. It is triggered by features of the practicesituation, undertaken on the spot, and immediately linked to an action." (Schon 1983, Pp 308-309)
Schon adopted Polanyi's phrase "tacit knowledge" to show how reflective practitioners "know more than we can tell".

Polanyi first introduced the concept of "tacit knowledge" to philosophy in 1958 in 'Personal Knowledge' and went on to explore it further in 'The Tacit Dimension' (Polanyi, 1967).

Essentially it is knowledge that is difficult to transfer to another person by traditional teaching methods (verbalising or writing it down). Rather, to transfer tacit knowledge effectively usually involves extensive personal contact, regular interaction and trust.
Schon talked about the practitioner's "repertoire of exemplary themes from which, in the subsequent cases of his practice, he may compose new variations." Each new experience of reflection-in-action "enriches his repertoire". (Schon 1983, p 68)
It is this repertoire that the practitioner draws on when he analyses a new situation and "reflects-in-action" on it – coming rapidly to conclusions in a way that can baffle students and novices and even to the practitioner, seems like intuition rather than learning or teaching.
"Perhaps we learn to reflect-in-action by learning first to recognize and apply standard rules, facts and operations; then to reason from general rules to problematic cases in ways characteristic of the profession; and only then to develop and test new forms of understanding and action where familiar categories and ways of thinking fail." (ibid, p 40)

Schon then explores the notions of "apprenticeships" (i.e. "direct exposure to real conditions of practice and patterns of

work …") and "practicums" (i.e. " … a setting designed for the task of learning a practice. In a context that approximates a practice world, students learn by doing, although their doing usually falls short of real-world work. They learn by undertaking projects that simulate and simplify practice; or they take on real-world projects under close supervision." (Schon 1987, p37)

These definitions and descriptions are quite close to those for the modern concept of WIL that can now be seen as the culmination of a centuries-old development of theories of teaching. WIL involves learning-by-doing, tacit knowledge, communities of practice, reflective designing and reflection-in-action as well as a good deal more.

These four case studies, supported by pedagogical literature through decades, indicate that 'WIL works'. Neil Moreland's definition of WIL (although he calls it work-related learning) is useful:

Work-related learning involved students learning about themselves and the world-of-work in order to empower them to enter and succeed in the world of work and their wider lives. Work-related learning involves:

- *learning about oneself;*
- *learning and practising skills and personal attributes of value in the world-of-work;*
- *experiencing the world of work in order to provide insights and learning into the world-of-work associated with one's university studies; and*
- *experiencing and learning how to learn and manage oneself in a range of situations, including those found at work. (2005, p.4, cited in McIllveen et al, 2011)*

As Duffield argues: "…while practice focuses the mind on essential communication tasks, practice in … unfamiliar setting[s] intensifies the experience." (Duffield, 2008, p. 102). That applies especially to journalism students who are working on real world stories, destined for real world publications and broadcast outlets, under real time pressures. To quote Duffield again: "It replicates journalistic practice of overseas correspondents encountering 'high risk and high returns': more difficulty, more headlines and colour" (ibid, p. 102).

The G20 Summit course in November 2014 was developed along the same lines as the three Vietnam programs, and produced as many positive results for the students and the university. It benefitted from lessons learned as a result of the Vietnam experiences. A concerted effort was made to create a course that bore the same hallmarks: students working under realistic deadline pressures, learning to use the latest technology, in order to create content of true professional quality.

Student Reflections

Students on all these courses were asked to provide a reflection of their experiences within two weeks of returning home.

Reflections are recognised as a vital part of the process of converting 'experiences' into 'learning' (Boud, Keogh andWalker, 1985) and students attending the overseas courses are given an hour-long lecture prior to departure on the subject of 'Reflection and Employability' by UQ Work Integrated Learning and Employability Coordinator Anna Richards.

Her advice is:

- *Self-reflection is a vital skill for understanding and evaluating experiences.*
- *The main purpose of self-reflection is to consider **your reactions and responses** to situations and how you use them to determine your**actions** (and reactions) in the future to affect a positive outcome or achieve set goals.*
- *The key to good self-reflective practice isto **move beyond just describing** what happened. You also need to consider why things happened, what the consequences were, and what you have learned from a particular experience. Ask yourself 'so what?'*

UQ has developed its own self-reflection process known as SEAL which the students are encouraged to follow:

***S = situation** What happened during the event, incident, activity, or task*

***E = effect**What were the new experiences you had to deal with or the challenges you faced, and what impact did they have on you?*

***A = action** What action did you take or strategies did you employ to deal with the challenge/s? And why did you take the actions you took?*

***L = learning** What did you learn from it? – what can you now do as a result and what do you need to do to handle a similar situation again in the future? How has the experience added to the ones you have already had in terms of your development? What particular skills or attributes have you drawn on?*

While it is impossible to be comprehendsive about the reflections offered by 100 ormore students over five years, here is a brief selection of responses, based on themes that emerged:

1. "The work integrated style of learning is definitely invaluable and this experience has honestly been one of the most interesting, most challenging and most worthwhile of my life". "The speed at which we all learned as a group on this trip was evidence *that a practical approach to learning is incredibly valuable*". "Whenever I had something to learn, a staff member or student was there to teach me how. This is where the practicality of a field trip is far superior to a one-hour weekly tutorial. We never stopped learning".
2. "Having to do so many [foreign language interviews *using a translator*] in a short amount of time helped me to know exactly what information I needed from my talent and how to get it". "I did have problems interviewing sources … [but] we all learnt how to circumvent problem areas. This involved adopting a very concise, very direct interviewing style."
3. "I know how to take an idea and make it into a story worth listening to and I know how to choose the correct platform through which to tell it best". "I think across the board, the *unplanned stories tended to be the most interesting*, and I think there's a kind of fervour in being somewhere that looks and smells so different to what we know as normal that certainly translates into these pieces".
4. "Some of the *setbacks* I encountered in organising interviews for stories were *distrust for journalism* and publications on the internet". "I found working in another language

extremely difficult … it also made editing together my video difficult".

5. *"Technology* is probably the area I was most concerned about and *by the end of the trip I felt confident* that I could do what I needed to do without any problems". "UQ in Vietnam really has made us all a 'one stop shop' media professional, who can not only be confident in front of the camera, but in every element from planning to post production".

These comments reveal that student hada higher level of self-confidence after their experiences abroad; they were also struck by intercultural differences and the difficulties of conducting interviews through a translator/interpreter; but that they were capable of dealing with unplanned situations and stories to create something even better than they initially envisaged. These are all indications of personal and professional growth.

Skills and qualities of Foreign Correspondents

To answer the second research question posited earlier (can undergraduate journalism students be taught Foreign Correspondence?), I asked 12 current and former foreign correspondents about "the skills a foreign correspondent needs". For reasons of confidentiality, their names will not be used here. The participants included current and former foreign correspondents:

1) Visnews (now Reuters TV) Bureau Chief in Saigon, Hong Kong, New York and London for over 40 years including the Vietnam War
2) BBC correspondent in Pakistan and Afghanistan in 1990s
3) ABC London bureau chief in 2000s
4) ABC Washington bureau chief in 2000s
5) ABC Moscow correspondent in 2000s
6) ABC Bangkok correspondent in 2000s
7) ABC Jakarta and North Asia correspondent in 1990s-2000s
8) ABC Bureau Chief in London, Hong Kong and Washington for over 20 years including the Vietnam War
9) ABC South-East Asia correspondent in 1970s including the Vietnam War
10) ABC Middle East, ABC North Asia in 2000s
11) CBC Washington, CBC London, CBC Moscow correspondent in 1980s and 1990s
12) CBC Washington bureau chief in 1990s

One term that most frequently appeared was "**resilience**". A London bureau chief wrote:

> "…it's probably not something I would have said was necessary when I first started out overseas. But I've now spent 10 years in postings around the world and I would put it at the top of the list. You need it because of the workload, the hours and trauma that you often see. … You also need it because you're often a long way from families and friends while doing a pretty touch job."

A former Jakarta correspondent described it this way:

> "…it does take a high level of personal resilience and 'rat cunning' to make it through each day. … Not every journalist can saddle up for this kind of wild ride. How for instance can you break free of feeding the hungry beast to strike out to investigate and gather original stories?"

A former Middle East and North Asia correspondent calls it **“stamina and fitness”**.

> “I realize foreign correspon-dents aren’t supposed to be endurance athletes. But in my experience, one of the biggest challenges facing correspondents is the relentless filing demands.”

The same point is made by several of the older correspondents with experience of covering wars.

> “You need good health in order to maintain endurance while covering big running stories.”

A former correspondent of the Afghan conflict says:

> “A sense of adventure is an asset, obviously. Flying in Pakistani and Indian military aircraft over sensitive border areas and going to interview Taliban and other military leaders … takes something more than courage. And I don’t claim to have much of that. What I do have is a love of adventure, an appreciation for discomfort in the name of the story and a … unique sense of satisfaction that comes from getting the narrative out. I DON’T see myself however as an adrenaline junky.”

A Washington bureau chief lists these personal attributes as well:

> “Empathy, Tenacity, Curiosity, Problem solving skills, Organisation, Adaptability, Ingenuity, Courage (by that I mean the ability to be afraid and still keep going, not some mythical ability to never be frightened), Stamina, Love or people and the ability to listen, … Enough confidence to be able to question the most important people as if they were not the most important people, A love of culture, new places and the outdoors, A willingness to get dirty and tired for the sake of a story, Above all, impeccable ethics.”

Two of the respondents claimed it was **not possible to teach undergraduate journalism students many of these personal and practical skills and attributes**.

A former Bangkok correspondent wrote:

> “I think it’s commendable that you’re taking students on these kinds of trips, but I worry they are NOTHING like what real overseas assignments are like.”

She argues;

> “it takes senior, seasoned reporters to do well for a sustained period of time. … so make some mistakes at home first, so you know how to recover and what’s at stake. That goes for the journalism – what you write, how you write it, getting things right, building up trust with sources etc – as well as technology. Mastering the audio/video/digital editing skills with real-life reporting work is crucial because once you arrive in a foreign place there’s rarely anyone to assist. You need to be tour own technician, IT specialist, and duct-tape supplier!”

Another former Vietnam correspondent and London bureau chief agrees:

> “Correspondent is just a fancy name for reporter. If you’re not already an experienced and professional news reporter, you’ll never become a successful foreign correspondent. Reporting from overseas is a specialist role. A foreign

correspondent has to specialise in not only the skills and perspective of reporting from abroad but develop wide knowledge of the culture, history, politics, language, geography and demography of the country or region he or she is assigned. This is an ongoing task."

Researcher's Reflections

As a former foreign correspondent, I agree with the sentiments of the professionals quote above.

I believe it is possible to teach specific skills that will make it easier for journalism graduates to perform well in the role of a Foreign Correspondent when the time comes. This is an important reason for conducting these courses as part of the UQ journalism undergraduate program. Graduates need to know what challenges might confront them as professional journalists and how they can deal with those challenges.

However, I also agree with experienced foreign correspondents who argue that it is imperative to gain high-level experience in senior reporting roles before being considered for an overseas posting as a foreign correspondent.

They are in fact, describing what Schon called the 'Reflective Practitioner' who writes:

Competent practitioners usually know more than they can say.They exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit. … Indeed, practitioners themselves often reveal a capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice. (Schon, 1983, p. viii)

This skill is something that can only develop through experience over time, if it is to develop at all; it cannot be taught.

Conclusion

The overseas courses conducted by The University of Queensland's School of Communication and Atrts support the widely accepted notion that WIL is "valid padagogy" (Patrick et al, 2008).

An argument can be made that they effectively teach many of the specific skills and personal attributes recommended by those foreign correspondents.

However, content analysis of the student's editorial output (Woolley, 2014, 2015, 2017) does not indicate a consistently high level of quality equivalent to that of a professional foreign correspondent. This supports the contention that 10 or 15 years of working as a national reporter at a high level is an important prerequisite to performing well as a foreign correspondent.

It is encouraging to see students reflecting that they learnt the importance of thorough research, and interrogating the motives and biases of sources. They had also begun to develop a deeper understanding of the country and the culture they were reporting on while abroad, just as the foreign correspondents demanded.

These attributes, along with improved technical, editorial and writing skills, puts them on the right path if they do choose to become foreign correspondents in their future careers.

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Товч агуулга

Австралийн Квийнсландын Их Сургууль нь 2012 оноос хойш “Field Study - Journalism & Communication (JOUR3122)”хичээлээр оюутнуудаа долоон удаа гадаадад (Энэтхэг, Индонез, Вьетнам улсуудад) сургажээ. Гадаадын улс орноос мэдээ, сурвалжлага бэлдэх тэдгээр хичээлүүдэд хамрагдсан 100 гаруй оюутан “олон улсын сэтгүүл зүй хичээлийг судалсан шилдэг туршлага” хэмээн санал бодлоо хуваалцжээ.Тэд өөр улсад ажиллах, аялангаа хичээлийн тодорхой даалгаврыг биелүүлснээр өөртөө итгэлтэй байх, сурвалжлага хийх болон техник эзэмших ур чадвар мөн соёл, харилцааны ур чадварт суралцсан гэж үзжээ. Энэхүү өгүүлэлд эдгээр хичээлтэй холбогдуулан 2 асуултад хариулахыг эрмэлзэв. Нэгдүгээрт, олон улсын сэтгүүл зүй хичээлийг дадлагад суурилсан сургалтаар заах нь хэр үр дүнтэй вэ?, хоёрдугаарт, бакалаврын түвшний оюутнууд богино хугацаанд үнэхээр олон улсын сурвалжлагч шиг ажиллахыг сурч чадах уу эсвэл олон улсын сурвалжлагч нь олон жил ажиллаж, туршлага хуримтлуулж байж л хийж болдог ажил уу?. Гадаадад зорчих сургалтыг Австралийн Засгийн газрын Боловсролын болон Гадаад харилцаа, Худалдааны Яамнаас санхүүжүүлсэн.