

Consolidating Journalism Skills using PBL

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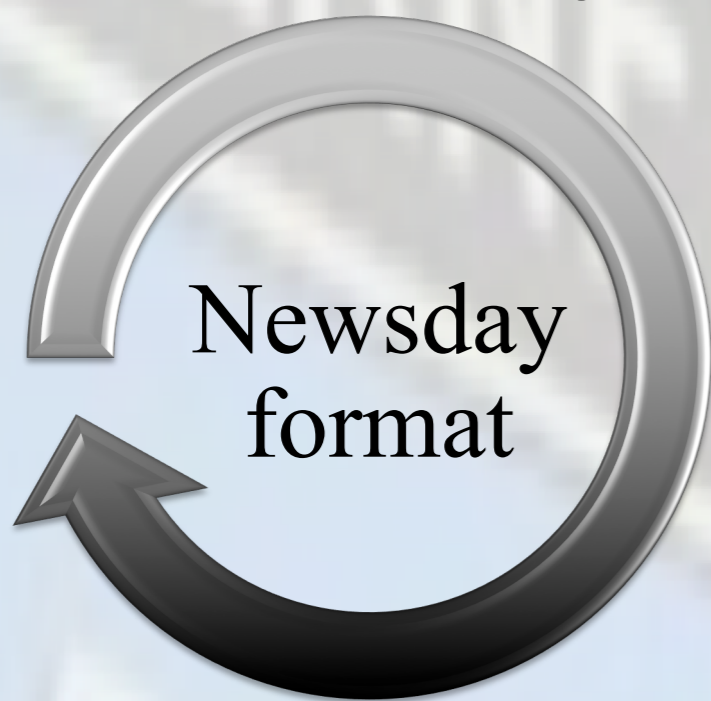
Introduction

My chosen intervention is targeted at second year students studying BA (Hons) Broadcast and Digital Journalism in a move to “boost” professional development & skills through the use of “real world” problems. Up until this point, students have absorbed knowledge and skills in a modular landscape. However, in order to operate in a multi-platform age, journalists need to be self starters directing their own workflow and blending skills acquired seamlessly. Using Problem-based Learning (PBL) principles empowers students to immerse themselves in Journalism Newsdays, which are authentic news generation events delivering “Live News” in a broadcast and/or publishing newsroom environment. The intervention objectives are to:

1. Help the pathway seek industry accreditation
2. To foster and speed up professional practice & self directed learning through real world activity.

Context & Implementation

Newsdays emulate real world activity of a broadcast and/or publishing newsroom to produce “real” industry workflow and original journalism. There is a prescribed accredited format, *see image below*.



- 6 hour working day 9am to 3pm
- Multiple live broadcasts
- Roles must change weekly
- 15 Newsdays across the year

A cohort of thirteen Level 5 students were involved in the group. Students were introduced to Newsdays during Induction Week September 2018 and supported by handouts explaining the prescribed Newsday format (the problem), their responsibilities and the tutor’s role. Students control all elements of the news cycle: editorial decisions, role allocation (Producer, Presenter, Editor, Multimedia Editor, Camera Operator, Reporter,) and production platform (ie..Radio, TV, Social Media or Digital). Deadlines are immovable and 3 Live broadcasts must be delivered. The first Newsday rolled out in mid October 2018 and the last in April 2019. Resources available to the students on Newsdays included BLAST Radio, TV Studio, Video & Mobile Cameras, Zoom Audio recorders and MACLabs. For assessment, students were tasked with keeping a weekly online journal, through BlackBoard, to reflect on highs and lows, job roles, discuss challenges faced both editorially and technically, as well as assessing how they would revise their work in the future.

Final Considerations

A PBL frame has been a useful pedagogical tool to explore and deliver a Journalism-based Newsroom. It is as the literature review revealed a landscape to develop employability skills and foster life long learners in a specific discipline (Barret, T 2006 and Barrow & Tamblin 1980)(NCTJ 2014). PBL, in theory, suggests a “leap” in knowledge will occur, and the results do suggest student knowledge and skill has improved (Boud, D, Feletti, G 2013). Using this model has enabled me to share this experience with colleagues, particularly the difficulties i.e delivering logistics, mastering timetables and ring fencing resources. For the student, the experience has, through the results delivered, been engaging and as the title of *Lennon O, Phelan D, Wallace D, King J, Barrett T, 2019 work says, “The more you did it, the more it made sense”*. In fact, 80% of students also commented in their journals that they feel more prepared for work in Journalism and feel they are more employable due to Newsdays. Feeding forward to next year, I am now looking to create Newsday Peer Mentors and await an accreditation review in the Autumn 2019.

Literature Review

PBL is defined as “the learning that results from the process of working towards the understanding or the resolution of a problem” (*Barrows, H. S., & Tamblin, R. 1980*). Although, the founding fathers of PBL were focused on improving medical curricula and student critical thinking (*Barrows & Tamblin (1980), Freidman (1976) et al*), PBL has synergy with many creative disciplines. The modern broadcast and digital journalist needs to be a critical thinker, be independent, constantly curious and be primed with core technical skills to deliver deadline oriented output (*NCTJ 2014): Emerging Skills for Journalists*). In PBL, the pedagogy is geared toward promoting “*learner-centred, collaborative, contextual, integrated, self-directed, and reflective learning,*” (*Barrett, T. 2006*). Hence the PBL environment should reflect the complexity and messiness of a real world problem targeted at specific disciplines (*Boud, D, Feletti, G, 2013*). In this case a Journalism Newsroom. So, PBL fits nicely as an intervention in the creative skills sector where inquiry, collaboration and communication are fundamental to the delivery of Journalism output. In PBL students are given a problem or trigger to attend to; a product to publicly output; a plan to research, implement and deliver; roles and responsibilities to adopt; the motivation to develop 21st Century skills; the ability to listen to their own voices and make choices (not the tutors); and finally a period of reflection and revision to feed forward to future activities and learning (*Lennon O, Phelan D, Wallace D, King J, Barrett T, 2019*).

Evaluation

Results after 15 Newsdays have been encouraging. These were evaluated through students weekly online Blackboard journals; feedback from my mentor and other senior colleagues; and the quality of the artefacts produced by the students themselves.

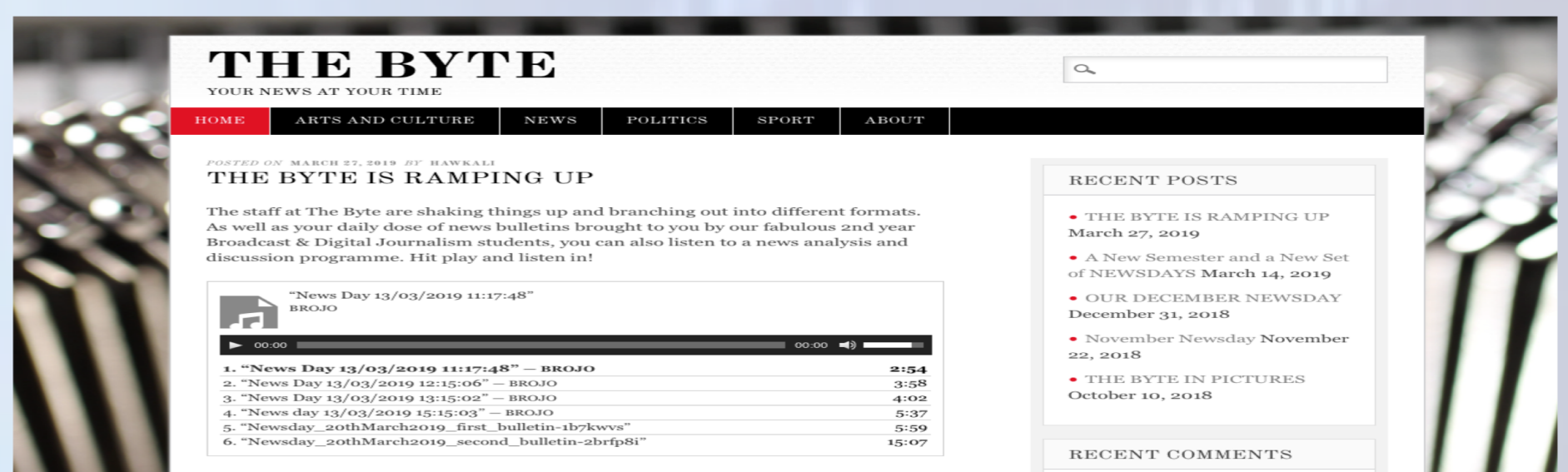
One student Journal says: “I have learnt more about time management and deadlines but even more than that I just love the ability to bring all the pieces together for a bulletin..Newsdays are great.”

Another student journal feeds back: “I am very proud of what I produced and excited to see it all up on the website. It’s hard working with others but the end product makes it worthwhile...”

Another student journal comments: “One important reason to try all kinds of roles at the newsdays is, not only to experience different workflows, but to also understand how other roles work, because then you know how to make other people’s life easier.”

Feeding back to colleagues, many have been impressed with the results, including my mentor: “This is an incredible leap, blending skills from so many other modules in one session;”

The artefacts produced have been equally encouraging, scaling up in quality, complexity and technical ability over the course of the academic year. For example, In Semester 1 Radio News Bulletins started at 2 minutes in length, but ended at 15 minutes in length. See the end product: The Byte at <https://campuspress.uwl.ac.uk/hawkali/>



In Semester 2 students ramped up the challenge again and created a digital newspaper, building a website, blending video from outside broadcasts, print news, original photography and info graphics, averaging three refreshes of new original material over the course of a six hour day. See the Byte Online at <https://brojoanddigital201.wixsite.com/mysite>

The Byte Online

Bringing you byte-sized news analysis and content



References

- Barrett, T. (2006). *Understanding problem-based learning* • Barrows, H. S., & Tamblin, R. (1980). *Problem-based learning*. New York, Springer Publishing Company. Boud, D, Feletti, G (eds) *The Challenge of Problem-Based Learning*, 2nd edn. ... (2013) • Lennon O, Phelan D, Wallace D, King J, Barrett T, April 2019. “The more you did it, the more it made sense”: Problem-based learning to improve early evidence-based practice in an undergraduate physiotherapy professional programme *Physiother Res Int*. 2019 Apr 17:e1774. doi: 10.1002/pr.1774. [Epub ahead of print] [Accessed April 2019] • Nctj.com. (2019). [online]. Available at: <http://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/NCTJ%20Emerging%20Skills%20FINAL.pdf> [Accessed 6 Jun. 2019]. Siuned.edu. (2019). *What is Problem Based Learning (PBL)?* | SIU School of Medicine. [online]. Available at: https://www.siuned.edu/academy/what-problem-based-learning-pbl.html?_ga=2.237814405.440528853.1556393162-1507591658.1556183356 [Accessed 6 Jun. 2019].