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Putting the 'love back in' to journalism: Transforming habitus in Aboriginal affairs student reporting

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Abstract

While journalism scholars have identified a lack of critical reflexivity in journalism, few have identified ways to educate university students for critically reflexive journalism practice. This article reports on a university teaching project that enables such practice as a means to counter exclusions, stereotyping and misrepresentation of Aboriginal people by large-scale Australian media. Using Bourdieu's concept of habitus to track transformations in student dispositions, particularly as they relate to practice, the article shows how participating students became more competent and confident Aboriginal affairs journalists with a strengthened sense of themselves, their practice and the journalistic field. Their investment in the field was strengthened as they sought to tell hidden and disregarded stories, and to include previously excluded voices, perspectives and representations. The article describes and analyses an example of critically reflexive learning, practice and teaching that has the potential to transform students' learning, the journalistic field and relations between Aboriginal non-Aboriginal Australians.

Keywords

Aboriginal affairs reporting; Australia; Bourdieu; journalism; critical reflexivity; habitus; Indigenous perspectives; journalism practice; higher education; SOTL

Introduction

Contemporary journalism education may be seen as caught between two worlds. The first is its position within a modularised curriculum in which distinct units of study are 'ticked off' by students who seek journalistic or related careers upon graduation. The second is a world where student journalists – professionals in the making – develop their sense of self, practice and the journalism field. The study reported here is situated in this latter world. It traces the development of student journalists' habitus during a university-based Aboriginal Community Engagement (ACE) teaching and research project, initiated and run by the authors of this article.

The intention of this article is to describe and analyse a process of learning and teaching through which a small group of student journalists had opportunities to consciously transform their perceptions of journalistic practice. We employ the notion of habitus, developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1989), who Atton and Hamilton (2008: 130) note 'offers a fruitful approach to developing a sociology of alternative journalism'. Bourdieu (1989: 19) describes habitus as akin to a practitioner's sense of place or position, and the position of others in a field of endeavour. Habitus is influenced, and in turn influences, a practitioner's field position, perceptions and practice. Improving students' understanding of their habitus with regard to the journalistic field and in relation to Aboriginal people is central to ACE, and to the analysis in this article, in

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which we offer an alternative, collaborative and critically reflexive practice to orthodox, arm's-length Indigenous affairs journalism.

Following Bourdieu collaborator Loïc Wacquant (2009), this research employs habitus as both a conceptual and a methodological tool, and as a topic, to frame and track transformations in journalism students' knowledge, understandings and practice over the course of a semester. After presenting this method and the conceptual framework for the study, we discuss the findings that emerge from our analysis of student participants' views at the start of the project through to comments made at post-semester interviews. We focus on transformations in the students' journalistic practice and their perspectives on that practice. While this work provides an example of journalism education for critically reflexive practice, we do not claim to generalise from this small study of a unique case (Schön, 1971) within a university student reporting project.

Reflexivity and journalism

As a form of inquiry, journalism might be expected to invoke a reflexive attitude that raises several questions: What is the historical, social, cultural and economic context for the production of this journalistic work, in this place – a particular geographical area, a cultural landscape and/or a newsroom – and at this time? What are the norms, conventions and values shaping this journalistic practice? What historical, social and cultural trajectories, experiences, perceptions, perspectives and realities do story subjects and sources bring to the process of journalistic storytelling? How do these factors interact with what journalists bring to the process? And how do these contexts, influences and factors, and the journalism practices employed within them, shape the form, focus, content and reception of the resulting journalistic work?

Because much journalism produced by large-scale publishers fails to adequately tell many stories about disadvantaged groups (Bacon, 2005: 36), such as Australia's Indigenous peoples, or to accurately represent their experiences and concerns (Kerr and Cox, 2013; Mason, 2012; Meadows and Oldham, 1991), these questions are important for both the individual journalist and the journalistic field. Yet few journalists in large-scale publications perceive that they have the time – even if they have the inclination – to ask themselves such questions (Tuchman, 1972: 660). The lack of critical reflexivity in journalism (Bromley, 2006; Schudson, 2005) is evident in formulaic, routine reporting that defaults to a variety of practices and positions, including story choice, framing, sourcing and representation, that favour the status quo and those interests that benefit from it. This default position represents the journalistic doxa (Swartz, 1997), a Bourdieusian concept that refers to journalism's 'unconscious common ground' (Mason, 2013: 101), collective pre-reflexive thought that expresses itself through perceptions and practices.

While new forms of journalism made possible by the internet are challenging many of the old forms, industrial journalism is still the dominant mode of journalistic production (Hirst, 2011: 123), and media silences and exclusions persist. In the accelerated digital and online era, it is arguably more important than ever for journalists to have the capacity to think and act reflexively – for such critical reflexivity to become ingrained in the standard journalistic repertoire. University journalism programs located outside the time constraints, and the commercial and other pressures, of an industrial newsroom are in a good position to assist and support future journalists to develop critically reflexive understandings and skills.

Habitus: Conceptual tool, method and object

Bourdieu's (1977: 4) 'theory of practice and of practical knowledge' – incorporating the concepts of field (and doxa), habitus (and *illusio*) and capital (Swartz, 1997) – provides an overall conceptual framework, but habitus is central among these concepts for our purposes. As 'the past that survives in the present ... perpetuat[ing] itself into the future by making itself

present in practices' (Bourdieu, 1977: 82), habitus operates at both the level of the individual (practitioner) and the social (field of practice and other related fields). It is where individuals and society are constructed in relation to each other as 'two dimensions of the same social reality' (Swartz, 1997: 96). We use these understandings to encourage students to think of themselves and their internalised histories (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 16) in relation to the journalistic field, to broader Aboriginal–non-Aboriginal relations and to related media coverage.

As internalised history and society, the dispositions of habitus develop through primary and secondary socialisation, including family, education and professional and other experiences (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Neveu, 2007; Swartz, 1997). Habitus shapes practice and perceptions of practice because practitioners act in accordance with their dispositions. However, although habitus generates and sets the limits for action (Swartz, 1997: 103) and is durable, it is not fixed: transformations in habitus produce transformations in practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133). An important aspect of this understanding for educators is that 'the socially constituted conative [connected to deciding to act] and cognitive structures that make up habitus are malleable and transmissible because they result from *pedagogical work*' (Wacquant, 2009: 143, emphasis in original) – in our case, pedagogical work in service learning or 'practice-based education' (Boud, cited in Price, 2013: 19).

Following Wacquant's (2009) use of habitus as concept, method and object of study enables us to structure students' reflections, and to identify and analyse their practice- and perception-shaping dispositions, as well as any resulting changes in their practice. The project described here is an attempt to provide a disposition-shaping experience that challenges the pre-reflexive habitus that develops in students' familiar social worlds. Specifically, our work seeks to contribute to improved reporting through the development of critically reflexive journalists with the capacity and confidence to tell stories concerning Aboriginal people and their interests. In this small-scale and local project, we seek to disrupt the orthodox journalistic doxa, reflected in the default position referred to above, and provide opportunities for ACE students to transform the dispositions of their habitus in favour of greater awareness, competence and agency.

Method

Context

Curtin University is in Perth, which is situated on the traditional country of the Wadjuk Noongar people, one of 14 groups of the Noongar nation whose combined traditional country covers the 242,000-square-kilometre south-western corner of Western Australia (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, 2010–12). The Noongar nation is one of approximately 700 Indigenous societies that existed at the time of the European settlement of Australia (Australian Museum, 2013). ACE supports journalism and screen studies students to become critically reflexive practitioners through partnering with community organisations that work with or on behalf of Wadjuk Noongar people. Over the past four years, ACE has explored the centrality of relationship-building, decolonising education, the construction of otherness and how partnerships can transform students' understandings of Australia's First Peoples' cultures (Bartleet et al., 2015).

Sample and recruitment

Participating students undertook a semester-long unit of study during which they worked with their Aboriginal community partners on community-led projects. Once ethical approvals were in place, students were recruited through a call for expressions of interest; prerequisites ensured students had sufficient skills to complete journalistic projects. In this article, we describe the experience of journalism students who participated in the first semester of 2015, ACE's third

year. The students were three young women and two young men of European backgrounds, with varying degrees of previous contact and interaction with Aboriginal people. Four of the five journalism students were in the final year of their undergraduate journalism degree, and one was in his second year.

Procedure

The students undertook a blend of subject-specific and service-learning (Johnston et al., 2015) tasks, with an emphasis on taking the time to establish relationships with community partners. Partners included Noongar Radio, the Wirrpanda Foundation, Kinship Connections and the Western Australian Deaths in Custody Watch Committee. Workshops with Noongar cultural producers, and a field-trip run by a Noongar Elder and academic, introduced participants to Noongar culture and history. After students met their community partners and collaborative relationships had formed, the students worked on mutually agreed story projects. The process of producing the story was as important as the stories submitted for assessment and publication.

Data collection and analysis

Students attended two semi-structured, face-to-face interviews (Colvin, Fozdar and Volet, 2013), designed to elicit descriptions of and analytical reflections on experience, meaning and understanding (Fontana and Frey, 2000). The initial interview was held at the start of the project; it was designed to discover features of the participating students' dispositions of habitus as they related to Aboriginal people and culture and the journalistic field. To uncover information about possible disposition-forming primary socialisation, questions were asked particularly about family and childhood influences, including school education. They covered the following areas:

- previous direct encounters with Aboriginal people, family attitudes and indirect contact/knowledge through the media
- reasons for participating in ACE
- hopes and/or anxieties about working with Aboriginal people, and
- what students expected to learn and experience.

The post-semester interviews revisited earlier questions and answers about expectations, concerns and media coverage, to mark and assess any potential habitus-shaping changes over the course of the semester in individual student attitudes, knowledge and understandings about Aboriginal people and associated media coverage. The interview questions also retraced each stage of the students' story-production process, from idea, through research and interviewing, to story drafting, editing and production – and explored any developments in their practice and their perceptions of practice. We were interested in their perceptions of the more collaborative journalism practised in ACE compared to their practice in other university journalism units that favour more detached, arms-length reporting. We therefore specifically asked students about journalistic independence and if the more collaborative way of working had led to perceived instances of pressure for journalistically unacceptable compromises in their stories (see Thomson et al., 2016).

The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview data were analysed to identify categories, themes, topics and patterns (Janesick, 2000; Price, 2013). Maton (cited in Colvin, Fozdar and Volet, 2015: 418) argues that the perceptions and perspectives of even small groups of student journalists 'in effect constitute their reality, and have a role in shaping the field'. In this case, we sought to see a microcosm of a small sub-set (ACE) of the sub-field (Swartz, 1997) of university journalism education from the perspective of 'participants at the time, rather than viewed from without or in hindsight' (Colvin, Fozdar and Volet, 2015: 418). As well as framing the questions in the context of the journalistic field and

more heterodox (Swartz 1997: 124) or alternative (Atton and Hamilton, 2008) modes of journalistic production, habitus enables us to contextualise, identify and group students' practice-shaping dispositions, starting with primary socialisation. Participants were assured of anonymity; however, three students opted to have their own first names used. The two pseudonyms are indicated with an asterisk.

From pre-reflexive to reflexive habitus: Putting the 'love back in'

The students' first interview

The first interview gauged students' knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people and culture, principally as a response to their disposition-forming primary socialisation. Responses were mixed; however, as has been observed in student journalism projects with Aboriginal people elsewhere in Australia (Stewart et al., 2013: 55), most students had little first-hand experience of Aboriginal people or culture. In the words of one student, Sarah*, 'It was as different a culture to me as people in Asia or people in Israel might be.'

Here we sketch some of the factors that possibly influenced the personal and practice dispositions that students brought with them into ACE, beginning with individual and collective elements of primary socialisation, including family, friends, schooling and the media. This section, drawn from the first interview, is structured to allow readers to meet the students, individually and as a group. Subsequent analysis and discussion in this section is structured by the subjects or themes that emerged from the initial interviews.

Alice

Alice's family migrated from England when she was in primary school. She first heard about Australian Aboriginal people from her grandfather, who had returned to England from Australia speaking of Aboriginal people as 'a big problem'. Her parents resisted racism, sent their children to multicultural schools and encouraged them to 'be really tolerant'. Alice followed their lead, taking what her grandfather said 'with a grain of salt'; she was more 'intrigued' than influenced. Alice described herself as growing up in an idealised 'bubble', not realising the depth of Australia's social problems until, at university, she became more aware of the media coverage of Indigenous people. Although she noticed that the coverage seemed either idealised or negative, it left her curious rather than judgemental: 'I never really attributed [negative media representations] to a fault in [Aboriginal people] themselves, I just thought that what was going on was bad.' The data indicate that Alice's dispositions were shaped by exposure to contrasting perspectives on Aboriginal people, her multicultural schooling and direct contact with Aboriginal students and teachers at her Australian high school. She tended towards openness and inquiry, remained curious and thought that ACE would complement her journalism and anthropology/sociology studies.

Sarah

Sarah had close relatives who made discriminatory jokes about Aboriginal people, women and others. She knew that her relatives' comments were racist because of what she had learned about racism at school, 'so I was just kind of not listening'. When taught about the Stolen Generations (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997) at school, Sarah learned that 'it's in the past' and 'now we're better and everyone's happy'; her Aboriginal education had included just three weeks during a year nine 'Ethnic' class. Although Sarah had little contact with Aboriginal people while growing up, she described a light-skinned, blue-eyed Aboriginal girl who became her friend. She thought her friend would have 'no connection to [Aboriginal] culture', but noticed that racist comments about Aboriginal people upset her. Her friend 'understood a lot more about Aboriginal culture than [Sarah] thought'.

Sarah identified a distinction between how she saw the Aboriginal people close to her and people living more traditional lives in remote places – a distinction made through seeing two feature films, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, about three young Aboriginal girls forcibly removed from their families, who escaped and walked 1900 kilometres home along the rabbit-proof fence; and *Ten Canoes*, set in pre-European contact times, in which 10 men embark on a goose egg hunt as a senior man tells cautionary tales to a younger man about coveting another man's wife, kidnapping and wrongful vengeance. Of these films, Sarah said:

It was interesting to learn about Aboriginal culture, but at the same time I still don't think I made a connection to those Aboriginal people: [that they] are the same Aboriginal people that live in the metro area, or live ... down the road from me.

Rabbit Proof Fence was also important for altering Sarah's views on the position and circumstances of present-day Aboriginal people. She remembered the end of that film, when two elderly women appeared on screen. The women were two of the three stolen children depicted in the film, and for Sarah it was a transformative moment:

At the beginning, it was almost like, 'Oh, this happened; it happened in the past; it didn't happen'. But when I saw that they were still alive, I was like, 'Wow, this wasn't very long ago ... There are people living who still have lived through this – and they're still alive.'

Although Sarah had picked up doxic (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Swartz, 1997) presuppositions about Aboriginal people, she also resisted explicit racism and was able to overturn those presuppositions in the face of evidence to the contrary. She came to the project to 'learn a little bit more'.

Sebastian

Sebastian had no contact with Aboriginal people until he was five or six years old: 'I had no idea they existed.' He formed a close friendship with an Aboriginal boy but, at the time, did not think of his friend as Aboriginal. Sebastian remembered his friend calling members of another local Aboriginal family 'darkies', saying he was not like them. While there were friendships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families in the town, Sebastian remembered stereotypes and 'racist comments, semi-floating in the air'. This sense was made more explicit when Sebastian attended a private high school in another town, where there were only one or two Aboriginal students. He was warned to stay away from suburbs with a high proportion of Aboriginal residents because of a perceived association between Aboriginal people, crime and violence, and to not look an Aboriginal person in the eye. As a result, he recalled, 'I'd keep my head down and not say much.'

Sebastian reported that he learned nothing about Aboriginal people or history at school: 'I didn't even learn about the White Australia policy (National Museum of Australia, 2015) until coming [to university] at 19'. He remembered seeing *Rabbit Proof Fence* and a television series *Bush Mechanics*, featuring Aboriginal men in Central Australia making ingenious use of bush materials to fix dilapidated vehicles. He credited these sources with helping to sow the seeds of his interest in Aboriginal people: 'I just wanted to meet people that had those kinds of skills and had those sorts of stories.' Sebastian therefore came to ACE with an established interest in Aboriginal people, and their perspectives and stories – 'that different narrative that we're given and that alternative viewpoint of Australian history'.

Josh

Josh had strongly personal motivations for participating in ACE, and his dispositions developed through both positive and negative experiences. The most powerful of these concerned his older sister's child, whose Aboriginal father left when the baby was born. Josh, then 10, found these

actions hard to understand and said that this, and the fact that his nephew was bullied at his Darwin school, had 'shaped my young mind a little bit too much', negatively affecting his attitudes toward Aboriginal people. But Josh wanted to learn more and he valued positive encounters and stories told by his parents. Josh's father, who worked as an advisor for the first Aboriginal state government minister in Western Australia, told many positive stories from his travels to Aboriginal communities with the minister.

Josh also learned little about Aboriginal people at school. In high school he had taken modern history in the hope of learning more about Aboriginal history and culture, but the subject 'just didn't go there'. He felt this would have been an important time in his life to learn more 'because you're very impressionable at that age. I would've been 15, 16 and that's when you're defining who you are.'

Josh enrolled in ACE because of his lifelong interest and to gain knowledge that would help him better support his nephew, now 12:

He's starting to define who he is and I want him to be proud of the fact that he's Aboriginal ... I want him to know what his elders have gone through. I want him to know where he came from. I want him to be proud of who he is. And I think we need to change, obviously, the media and the perception of Aboriginal people.

While acknowledging the effects of early negative influences on his attitudes – 'I don't think of myself as a racist person, but everyone has those stereotypes that have been driven into their head' – he wanted ACE to help him to open his mind, enable him to grow as a person and help him to put the 'love back in' to his journalism.

Eligia

Eligia* was a journalism exchange student from Canada, who noticed the difference in attitudes to Aboriginal people in her country, where '[for] the most part, it's not "that's them and this is us"', and Australia, where she said the approach to and associations with Aboriginal people were more negative. She attributed Australian attitudes to a lack of learning. Among many educational activities she described in Canada was 'a whole [Grade 3] semester dedicated to learning about the Aborigines. We re-enacted tepees and different events and you just get that personal experience.' In high school, during a week-long immersion, she 'just really got to feel the Aboriginal-ness of it'. She observed, 'I guess that's kind of lacking here.' In contrast, she recalled that a high school teacher who said: "'Okay, Aboriginal stuff, yeah, yeah, yeah, we abused them, it sucked, next chapter'", completely diminished it. That made me angry that there were still people who didn't really appreciate it.'

Eligia participated in ACE to '[learn] about Aboriginals in Australia', possibly because her dispositions formed in Canada – where she perceived that Aboriginal people were an unremarkable part of her community – were in marked contrast to what she found in Australia.

While all participating students had had direct or indirect encounters with Aboriginal people, as a group they brought diverse experiences, perspectives, motivations and skills to their participation. Despite multiple social and media influences on the students' interest in and attitudes towards Aboriginal people, they shared a similar anxiety related to their journalistic practice: that they might inadvertently cause offence or harm. Two students related their concern directly to how they asked questions of sources, and others were motivated by a desire to learn how they could practise journalism differently from the more instrumentalist, orthodox approach typical of news writing.

Another concern expressed in the initial interviews was at the media portrayal of Aboriginal people; three of the five students explicitly mentioned their desire to acquire and practise journalistic skills that would enable them to contribute to improving that portrayal, and

to lending voice to Indigenous people and concerns. All students hoped to become better journalists and storytellers, and most thought it could give them an edge over other journalists with no experience in reporting Aboriginal affairs. They wanted to strengthen their confidence and voices, both professionally and as citizens. One student directly related the goal of improved critical ability to contributing to improved media coverage.

As the semester progressed, students began to face any fears and anxieties through the collaborative relationships of trust forming between them and their partners, and through their work on journalistic stories. They began to encounter and understand differences between features of more orthodox practice in previous journalism units and what they now practised. In ACE, student story ideas emerge from within the context of the relationship with community partners; much of the research material also arises through this relationship (but is still subject to verification); interviewing takes place after relationships of trust have formed, and often takes an open and conversational form; and story drafts are shared with community partner organisations, significant story sources and subjects. While content is negotiated, students produce accurate, fair and credible journalism that includes Aboriginal stories, perspectives and voices. These stories are published on the Curtin University Journalism website, *Western Independent* (<https://inkwirenews.com.au/ace-2015>); since 2016, ACE student stories have also been published on the new ACE website (<https://www.communityyarns.com>).

We next explore the practice dispositions and themes, expressed as concerns, hopes, attitudes and perceptions, and examine the extent to which these had transformed by the end of semester.

Critical transformations in student habitus: Dispositions and practice

The second interview, conducted within six weeks of the end of classes, revisited questions in the first interview, and particularly sought to understand whether students' journalistic practice and their perceptions of practice had changed and, if so, in what ways. Analysis revealed interview data in three interrelated themes: cross-cultural anxieties and fears, strategies and confidence; media coverage and developing critical perspectives; and transforming dispositions, habitus and practice through practice. This article focuses on the third of these themes: transformations in habitus through the collaborative process of producing journalistic stories in ACE. This section covers the processes and practices of story ideas generation, research, interviewing, drafting, and editing and publication. Students continuously returned to their community partners, checking in and revisiting research, interviewing and drafting processes. The following discussion reflects this more circular, relational story process.

Because of the requirement that the students' stories emerge from their developing relationships with Aboriginal community partners, trust was established first and the stories came later. Josh and Alice spoke of their story ideas arising more 'organically' than they usually would. For Sarah and Sebastian's death-in-custody story, Sebastian observed that, 'rather than the usual approach of telling the story source, "this is the story we're doing", we asked for permission':

[W]e gave all of that power and decision over to someone else who ... [got] that information for us ... [A] lot of the communication with the family was done through a third person. I'd never really done that before.

This approach, of handing over some of the power of the story, especially in situations of trauma or distress, is advocated by Bruce Shapiro (2005) of the US-based Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma. Eligia's project, which touched on the separation of children from their families, also required a negotiated approach that, she said, allowed her to 'evaluate the situation as a whole' and come to see 'a bigger picture'.

When it came to research, students found they needed more context to appreciate what their sources were telling them – for Alice, this involved doing ‘lots and lots of research on Aboriginal culture and tradition ... [so] I can apply what I learnt in my research to understanding more what they were saying and [to] their stories’. Context was also important to Eligia, who initially approached the story in the more orthodox what-do-I-need-to-tell-the-story-I-have-in-my-head method, which changed to something less directed and deeper:

Here I thought we were just going to learn about the kids and that’s about it, but then you learn about the White [Australia] policy ... and then you learn about just what’s happening still today – just about the alcoholism, the ripple effect of the stolen generation – and there’s so much more depth than we originally expected.

Sebastian and Sarah similarly discovered that their research was more comprehensive and collaborative than they had expected. As Sebastian remarked:

Meeting ... every week and slowly building a rapport, slowly learning more about what they know about the case itself, going home and looking into it more; calling different people ... asking them questions and saying, ‘Oh I’ve just noticed this. Do you guys know anything about that?’ ... And then sharing information with them.

The collaborative relationship with Aboriginal sources changed the way in which some students undertook their research. Josh, Sarah and Eligia reported that, proportionally, less of their research came from the usual (mostly internet) document-based sources and more came from conversations or interviews with community partners. The journalist–source relationship also proceeded differently from that envisaged by the orthodoxy in the journalistic field. Many differences related to the nature and processes of interviewing. Alice noticed a difference in the way she was interviewing in ACE:

From other units it’s kind of like you’re just going in, you’re getting an interview, ask your questions and you’re not using them, but in a way you are. They’re an interview, they’re information to you. But these people weren’t just information to me. You know, they are people telling their stories. I think that’s something that I’m going to apply definitely to the rest of my journalism career – so I think of people not just as a source of information, but as people that have something to say.

Eligia also found the collaboration to be valuable, allowing her to better ‘see why it’s such an important story to tell’, as was being more personally involved in the sense of the story subjects and sources getting to know her. Sarah and Sebastian found that getting closer to sources led to stronger stories, but also brought them up against newsroom culture:

We were happy to really get to know them and I think that helped us but, for other journos, that was really big ... One of them mentioned their editor, they were like, ‘I can’t do that because my editor would absolutely freak out.’ (Sarah)

Sarah came to the view that journalists ‘can still be objective and know someone’. What she meant by objective was apparent in what she said next:

I guess we got more honest answers and we could represent what they meant more truly. It wasn’t just guesswork based on the words they said, but based on their gestures and based on what we know about them in the past and based on much, much more than just the words of their quote. We could understand the context through knowing them ... I just feel it was a better – I mean journalism is meant to be about accurately telling a story, but I feel like when you bring in this idea of independence it’s often at the cost of accuracy because you don’t know someone very well at all.

The students valued being more cross-culturally proficient: ‘knowing how to interact ... culturally ... and being able to listen’ (Eligia). And, while Sarah and Sebastian found the more collaborative and intensive editing process exhausting, both reported that their story was ‘a lot better’ because of it. After Sarah posted her and Sebastian’s death-in-custody story on Facebook,

she said she received positive messages from people who 'I didn't think would care about Aboriginal affairs at all, and people that I didn't think would care about the story'.

Overall, the students reported professional and personal growth that they felt would make them more confident and competent journalists, and stated that their work and ways of practising were now more legitimate. Competence, confidence, a belief and investment in the possibilities of journalism, and legitimacy and recognition are all linked. Through ACE, the students' sense of agency and possibility was expanded, in accordance with the transforming dispositions of their habitus. This was encountered in different but overlapping ways by different students, including in some of the developments in practice during ACE; a willingness to continue trying unorthodox ways of practising post-ACE; and the values and understandings that informed their practice. For some students, in this and previous versions of ACE, these transformations had restored their belief in journalism. For example, Alice said she had felt removed from journalism. In Bourdieusian terms, she had little sense of journalism's symbolic power (Benson and Neveu, 2005; Swartz, 1997). Through ACE, she became more confident that she could practise a type of journalism that she found meaningful:

This has made me realise that I can be a journalist if I want to. I didn't really have much confidence with journalism before ... But then I realise that you don't have to be the kind of journalist that everyone wants you to be. You know, it's not just one kind of journalist ... I can combine both my love of telling stories in journalism and anthropology and sociology.

Josh had described himself as a 'city boy', but after ACE his view of the stories he could cover and of the world had expanded. He said he might work in regional locations because of the many untold Aboriginal stories outside the cities. 'So, I just think, yeah, now I have more confidence to approach the[se stories] and tackle them and cover them ... going out into the real world.'

At the time of the second interviews, at least two of the 2015 ACE participants had gone out into the 'real world' of reporting. In an example of transformed habitus in post-ACE practice, Sarah reported new thinking about how to build relationships with sources:

I've found even today, when I was doing my interviews ... I gave them a call and I introduced myself. Then I went and met them in person and was like, 'I'll interview you in a week's time but I just wanted to put a face to the name', and that changed their response so much.

Since completing his degree and becoming a journalist on a Western Australian regional newspaper, Sebastian has continued to develop more reflexive, collaborative practices. For example, since ACE he is now more likely to call sources before a story is published and, while not giving a veto or a right to change the story, 'just reading particular things to them, their quotes for instance and saying, "Is that accurate?"' He said ACE taught him he could 'be a very decent journalist ... [and] build these kinds of relationships' if given enough time. Sebastian was concerned about being swallowed up by a 'deadline culture': 'I think the main lesson from ACE has been [that] steering away from that kind of culture can lead to some really incredible stories.' Eligia, who aspired to be an international journalist, felt that ACE had deepened her journalistic approach from 'tourist' to something much more informed, critical and empathic. She thought about her practice in more social terms:

I feel like with ACE I've been able to look at the world again and just see that there's a lot more issues than we originally think ... that there are stories in almost every single person that you meet and that, in every part of the world, there's something happening that needs recognition.

She and other ACE students began to challenge the journalistic field orthodoxy and, through their more reflexive habitus, connect that challenge to broader societal power relations. Because

capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) – as both assets and power relations – is expressed through the dispositions of habitus (Swartz, 1997: 74–5), dispositions (especially those below the level of consciousness) and position correspond; they are ‘complicit’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 136). Making the dispositions of habitus more conscious enabled students to more critically theorise their positions within their field of practice, and in relation to the positions of others – individuals, groups and institutional hierarchies. Students identified the connection between their positions as future journalists, journalism practice, media coverage and power relations that reproduce across fields and society; they came to read individual stories more critically, and began to identify unequal positions and representations within the media; some saw it as their role to counter relations of domination through their journalism. The data indicate that they had expanded their critical practice dispositions.

Conclusions

In the mode of Bourdieu collaborator, Wacquant (2009), this article has used habitus as both tool and topic, or object, of investigation. At the beginning of the article, we set out what we hoped to achieve and demonstrate through the project. These intentions included supporting students to become critically reflexive practitioners in the journalistic field, capable and confident enough to tell cross-cultural stories – particularly in the area of Aboriginal–non-Aboriginal relations, as a way of countering misrecognised (Swartz, 1997) relations of dominance in the journalistic field, and beyond to other fields and the broader society.

The first interviews supported the contention that habitus produces practice and the perceptions of practice, by which it is also shaped. The second interviews served to illustrate that habitus is not fixed: that transformations in habitus produce transformations in practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133). These transformations in practice and habitus were also evident in the 2013 and 2014 versions of ACE (see Thomson et al., 2016). Recognising the limitations of this small-scale study, we nonetheless believe that these students, through changing their habitus, can change their own practice and that of others, and expand the range of stories heard, seen and read. While students were self-selecting and tended to be already engaged and thoughtful, based on the data presented here we conclude that ACE supports student participants to become more critically reflexive practitioners. Working in a mutually beneficial collaboration with Aboriginal people, groups and causes that often struggle for media attention was a transformative experience for students, which expanded their repertoire of journalistic practices beyond the extractive methods generally employed in news reporting by large-scale media (Thomson et al., 2015).

The final interviews highlighted students’ ability to more critically read the media, and to critique their own practice in relation to the orthodoxy in the journalistic field, demonstrating their growth as reflexive practitioners who have developed their journalistic practices and strategies accordingly. When asked if they thought their participation in ACE would help them personally, and about the values underpinning journalism, two of the students responded in reflexive terms. Sarah said one of the things she gained from ACE was ‘respect for culture’, which raised questions for her about her position in the journalistic field:

When you take on an article you’ve really got to look at it as in, ‘What position am I saying this from? Am I really saying this from a Caucasian Christian background kind of culture, or am I saying this as far removed from a set group as possible?’ I guess I just appreciate other cultures a lot more ... I realise differences and I realise when I’m hearing something what position I’m hearing it from and how other people might hear that differently.

Rather than keeping their distance, as the journalistic orthodoxy dictates, students spoke positively about their presence in the stories as a force for ‘good’. Importantly, students found they produced better, more satisfying and meaningful stories when working more collaboratively.

Following Wacquant's (2009: 143) realisation that the 'theory of action encapsulated by the notion of habitus' can become 'an empirical experiment', we found it 'both feasible and fruitful' to convert the theory of action within habitus into empirical work with critically reflexive student journalists who are now much more likely to become confident and capable Aboriginal affairs reporters. Although this project is limited in scope – both time and study size – the importance of this lies in the process and results of the practice – in the experiences of the students and their community partners, and in the power relations and individual and collective dispositions that constrain and enable certain stories to be told and certain voices to be heard. We give the final word to Sebastian, who synthesised the project's impact:

[ACE] made me question a lot of the things that we consider normal in journalism ... It's made me wonder why we are so reluctant to do a story that requires a bit of relationship building and a little bit of time that goes into it ... [T]here ... seems to be a kind of cloud in front of a lot of the eyes of mainstream journalism, where they're not really able to see too far into the future and understand why working on a sort of story like something that's produced in ACE would be worthwhile; how what's presented through our journalism impacts on the lives of minority groups and why the inclusion of the voices of minority groups is so important.

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