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Teaching Journalism Ethics in the High School Journalism Classroom Through the Use of Text Sets

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TEACHING JOURNALISM ETHICS IN THE

HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISM CLASSROOM

THROUGH THE USE OF TEXT SETS

by

Megan Erickson

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview of Capstone Inquiry

In a world of "fake news," a 24-hour news cycle, and public access to global publishing platforms, the meaning of media is quickly evolving, and the ethics behind media are becoming increasingly nuanced. Whereas journalists in the pre-digital world grappled with ethical issues of verification of information, impartiality, and gate-keeping, today's journalists must also factor in issues like immediacy of news and post-publication correction (Ward, n.d.). Journalists of all ages and levels of experience find themselves facing old and new types of ethical issues, and they must understand how to identify such issues and how to respond in ways they can stand by professionally. It is crucial for journalists to be able to consider the implications of their work on people around them in order to make sound ethical decisions, and this is an understanding imparted on them by a capable instructor with a strong ethics curriculum.

The intersection of media ethics and journalism education leads to the question: *How can text sets be used in a high school journalism classroom to teach journalism ethics?* My purpose in completing this project is to create a curriculum built around the use of text sets and discussion activities to expose high school journalists to critical issues in the world of media ethics and enable them to not only understand the precedents set by professional journalists but also use that understanding to make ethical decisions they feel confident about through their education. The curriculum is intended for high school journalism teachers but is useful in a variety of other educational contexts as well.

This chapter describes my path towards arriving at a research question as well as the rationale and context for this project. Finally, it names the stakeholders in this project and denotes those who may find use in this curriculum and included text sets in their own classrooms and studies.

Rationale

Though I had long been interested in magazines and other kinds of periodicals, it was not until college that I had my first foray into the world of journalism. Throughout the overwhelming process of applying to colleges, I constantly evaluated various majors and academic programs, questioning which ones would offer me both a solid and desirable career option as well as an academic path applicable to many other potential careers, in case my future would pull me in a different direction than my seventeen-year-old mind could predict.

Journalism felt right to me for many reasons; not only would it give me the skills to be a journalist at any magazine, newspaper, television station, or media entity my heart desired, but the skills I would learn (interviewing people, researching topics, writing text, creating videos and multimedia, and so on) had the potential to further my education or career in case I ever wanted to go into marketing, law, professional writing, or education (the latter of which I eventually settled on). I dove into my first days of study at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications as a journalism major who was not even sure she wanted to be a journalist for a living; as I had hoped, I found increasing value every day in honing the skills it takes to become a competent journalist.

One aspect of journalism education whose significance I had never previously predicted was the field of media ethics. Sure, I knew that a journalist must conduct his or her research, interviews, and writing with the utmost of high-standing intentions, which include presenting the whole, applicable truth to the audience with as little bias as possible. I soon realized media ethics was a much more nuanced study than merely striving to be a truthful reporter.

Not only is media ethics notable for its complexity, but it is also worth stating that it is a required area of study, at least for any accredited postsecondary journalism program, according to the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (Peck, 2003). While no such official accreditation exists at the secondary level, the Journalism Education Association (JEA), along with several states, such as Colorado, Indiana, and Kansas, have drafted sets of standards for high school journalism students and teachers that outline specific expectations for the understanding and fluid use of journalism ethics. Such expectations include the ability to employ ethical conduct when working with, writing, and researching sources, as well as the understanding of how to evaluate assumptions, attitudes, and biases that underlie various types of texts used in the media (Colorado Student Media Association, 2011; Indiana Department of Education, 2007; Kansas State Department of Education, 2017; Journalism Education Association, n.d.). As such, any successful journalism, whether at a high school or university, must include curriculum that examines journalism ethics; it just so happened that I first encountered this subject as a third-year journalism major.

This new side of journalism blew my mind as an undergraduate, but there was one major downside: I knew very little about it before my third year as a student journalist. The seven journalism courses I had taken prior to JOUR 370 Media Law & Ethics touched on a couple of very basic aspects of the field. For instance, we had to gather a full name, phone number, and age for each and every interviewee so that the professors could verify the factual accuracy of our work; as a student, it felt like this had less to do with ethical practice and more to do with the storied "Medill F," an academic regulation of my journalism school that guaranteed a failing grade in the presence of even one factual error, such as a misspelled name or incorrect date. Though important in its own way, this proved to be merely a surface-level nod to the ethics involved in reporting. None of it prepared me for the depth and variety of topics we discussed in JOUR 370, which included the use of anonymous sources, subjects who are minors, defining libel, and many other issues in media coverage.

I never looked at media the same way after taking this course. Having insight into the world of media ethics exposed me to a deeper layer of meaning underlying each and every news story I had ever consumed. No longer was a story only about who did what — I also began to consider what the writer chose to include, what he or she may have omitted, and why the story appeared as it did in its published form.

The advantages I gained by formally studying media ethics in 2014 proved to be priceless in the wake of the 2016 elections and the media surrounding the political candidates. For the first time in my life, I felt like a conscious consumer of the news and began truly analyzing media coverage, questioning the role of media players in the public

consciousness, and comparing reports from multiple entities to gain deeper insight into the reporting of each one. This practice of analyzing the news has continued past the elections and helped me navigate the increasingly complicated media landscape that has emerged in the United States during the past five years.

When it came time for me to consider a career path that would fulfill my goals for the future, I took a couple of turns along the way. My journalism training enabled me to work with several print and online publications during my last two years in school and for upwards of a year after I graduated. I enjoyed the editing, collaborating, deadlines, and seeing the final products of everything I had been working on, but my mind kept wandering back to the many enlightening and useful lessons and skills I learned in my journalism training that I was not making full use of in my own journalism career. Seeing the lack of public media understanding that resulted during and after the 2016 elections made me feel like I could use my training to help other people begin to understand the media landscape and thus the world surrounding them, and I began to consider a career as a teacher who would equip her students with the skills to interpret the many messages they would receive every day for the rest of their lives. I enrolled in a teacher preparation program the summer of 2017, and two years later, I have my teaching license and a position that allows me to bring my two passions, journalism and education, together.

Taking into consideration my goals for teaching journalism, I have had to evaluate the areas of opportunity I see in educating the public, especially youth, about being media creators and media scholars. What stood out to me as being most impactful not only for journalists, but also for any Americans, to understand is the field of media

ethics, the same field I myself did not truly interact with until my third year of journalism school. I found myself questioning why a leading undergraduate journalism program would wait so long to introduce students to media ethics and realizing that the majority of student journalists at the secondary level may have mere superficial exposure to this important field, if their curriculums included it at all.

Initial research into the area of journalism ethics instruction at the secondary level returned very little in the way of appropriate texts outside of general textbooks, which clearly lack the relevance of current research and events in the modern media, so I knew that finding or devising appropriate texts to use for instruction would be a large part of the puzzle of writing journalism ethics curriculum for high school students.

Once I realized media ethics as an impactful area of opportunity for teaching journalism and media literacy, I began to consider *how* to teach it. In my own college-level course, I learned media ethics through a combination of reading articles and legal briefs and participating in classroom Socratic debates surrounding the topics at hand, much like it is taught in many other university programs around the United States, and not far from the way a law school classroom would handle it (Christians & Covert, 1980). Unlike law school, however, high school students are less interested in legal action and more interested in their own courses of action. They want to know what they ought to do in certain situations and how other journalists handle ethical issues properly and with professional grace because they are ultimately adding to their own cache of understanding of the field. Rather than relying on dry legal briefs, then, I knew I would

need to incorporate texts that would better suit their needs and spark greater interest and debate.

Having been introduced to the concept of text sets in my critical literacy instruction, I realized this would be a fitting tool for media ethics instruction. Rather than relying on prescribed briefs, text sets incorporate many types of texts, from traditional written texts to podcasts, websites, videos, and more, to give students a deeper understanding and provide authentic reading and viewing opportunities related to content at hand (Nichols, 2009). Text sets, in conjunction with traditional Socratic methods of discussion and student inquiry, would give media ethics instruction a secure place in the curriculum of any high school journalism or media class. This led me to the question: *How can text sets be used in a high school journalism classroom to teach media law and ethics?*

Professional Context

For seven years prior to becoming a teacher, I have researched, fact-checked, edited, and written for several media entities. I helped launch two magazines, one on campus at Northwestern University, and one for the greater Chicago wellness community. A selection of topics I have specialized in covering over the years includes small business owners, domestic and international travel, the intersection between theater and politics, and (unsurprisingly) education, namely childhood literacy.

In addition to my reporting and editing experience, I am also a teacher. At the time of this writing, I am in my first year of working with high school publications students at a private school. Adjacent to the English department, the publications

department consists of two teachers who work with 60 students enrolled in publications

classes and who are working on a variety of student-led publications, from a print and

online newspaper to an annual yearbook.

As these students report on topics outside of the school setting and into the wider

urban community, and as many go on to professional journalism themselves, it is my goal

to learn how to present media ethics within the scope of their existing publications

courses. I want to challenge these students to engage with ethical debates and learn from

the texts and each other to think as journalists and understand how to broach challenging

situations. My goal for students is that they use the skills they learn to think for

themselves and evaluate the messages they encounter in the world around them, not only

as journalists but also as consumers of media.

Significance

This project will be of use for high school teachers who lead journalism and

publications classes and for those who oversee student newspapers and other

publications. High school journalists around the United States all face similar questions

of media ethics because of the wider media culture that surrounds the country. Besides

dedicated journalism teachers, other English teachers at the middle and high school levels

can incorporate this curriculum into their existing courses as a media literacy unit,

adapting certain texts and activities as they need to in order to best serve the students.

Also, any secondary teachers can use the ideas and lessons from this project to gain

insight into the use of text sets in their own content areas and classrooms. This project

will model ways to use text sets to encourage debate skills and higher-level thinking in

students. Finally, homeschooling parents and students can use this project for the text sets surrounding the various topics in media ethics; they can use the texts for self-study or to create their own activities and projects surrounding media ethics and media literacy. I envision this project as a living curriculum that I can continue to adapt and develop throughout my teaching career to address ethical questions that arise and noteworthy articles and events in the journalism world, and I encourage others to do the same and adapt this curriculum to fit their purposes.

Overview of Next Chapters

Chapter One provided an overview of this project's research question: *How can text sets be used in a high school journalism classroom to teach journalism ethics?* It also gave rationale behind the question, outlined the project's context, examined the significance of the research question, and named the stakeholders of the project.

Chapter Two will provide a thorough review of the available literature and research behind the project. It will be organized by theme and address information regarding the intersection between journalism and ethics, best practices for teaching journalism ethics, benefits and limitations to teaching journalism ethics, and the use of text sets in the classroom. Chapter Three will describe the details of the project, including the intended audience, context, framework, and timeline used for the project, and it will also give an overview for the resulting product. Finally, Chapter Four will contain a summary of the project as well as my reflections.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

The Internet and the widespread popularity of social media may make it appear as though journalists' roles as gatekeepers of responsible reporting may be over, but it is in fact now more important than ever for journalists to adhere to ethical standards, and it all starts with their education. This chapter will examine the reasons why ethics is so important to the profession of journalism, starting from the elements of journalism ethics and delving into its history and modern importance in journalism education. Next, the chapter will discuss research-based best practices for teaching journalism ethics. This section outlines central objectives for any effective journalism ethics course, formats for its instruction, and curricular components. Following that, this chapter will provide an overview of proven benefits as well as limitations of journalism ethics training. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of text sets, namely what they are, what they include, and how their use benefits the academic study of journalism ethics. The review of literature surrounding these topics will serve to build background to the research question for this project: *How can text sets be used in a high school journalism classroom to teach journalism ethics?*

Journalism Ethics Defined

Journalism, as a concept, has evolved since the founding of the United States. Whereas it was once a signifier of pamphlets and newspapers, journalism has grown to encompass broadcast television, news and talk radio, podcasts, and online media including 24-hour newspapers and magazines. Today's journalism still plays the role of

informing the public about what is happening in their communities and around the world, but it also functions, depending on the media entity, as a watchdog, entertainment source, political commentary medium, and so much more. When discussing the idea of journalism ethics, *journalism* denotes the wide array of professional media sources presenting information to audiences around the country and the world.

The other side of the topic is *ethics*. Ethics is the study of frameworks for moral conduct that takes into consideration propriety, right and wrong, personal schemas, and "notions of virtue and morality" (Coley, 2011, p. 6). With the myriad intricacies underlying the field of ethics, philosophers and theorists have long been studying and attempting to bring meaning to *ethics*, which, according to Fontaine and Hunter, has resulted in the word being frequently misunderstood to bear a simple, overarching meaning (1998). Ethical theory dictates that there is no singular code of ethics that ought to be in use; different cultures around the world have different standards by which they judge right and wrong, and even among members of the same culture, ethical decisions cannot be made without factoring in specific contextual scenarios. Journalists, in particular, have their own professional definitions for ethics as well as a variety of factors to consider when making decisions in the newsroom or out in the field.

Defining journalism ethics. When ethical theory is studied in conjunction with professional domains, including journalism, scientific research, and corporate governance, it is called applied ethics (Dimock & Tucker, 2004). Journalism ethics is a subfield of applied media ethics that examines both the small scale dilemmas of individual journalists' decisions during particular situations as well as the larger scale

questions of what news media entities ought to do, given their wide influence on society (Ward, 2009). Most people, when they consider the topic of journalism ethics, immediately think of dilemmas regarding whether a certain story should be published or not; this is only the tip of the iceberg. The questions journalists grapple with more often tend to revolve around the timing of the information to be published, how much information the journalist and editors need to know before publishing, and how to minimize harm to those involved in a story without compromising the truth (Richardson, 1994).

Besides these overarching questions, there are a number of common situational themes that arise in the field of journalism ethics (Christians & Covert, 1980; Kelley, 2007; Ward, 2009):

Objectivity. Does the journalist exhibit unintended bias in writing the story or in the choosing of an angle for the story?

Sensationalism. Was a story published in the public interest, or was it published because it is scandalous and will sell newspapers or advertisements? When, if ever, is it okay to defame a public figure?

Editorial independence and allegiances. Can the journalist balance independence with an ethical relationship with employers, sources, advertisers, and the public? When is a journalist so close to a source that it could be considered a conflict of interest? What, if anything, can a journalist ethically accept from a source besides pure information?

Accuracy and verification. How much fact checking and written context is required before a story can be ethically published? How will the newsroom handle errors? How much editing is necessary?

Deception. Is it ethical for journalists to misrepresent themselves or lie to get a story? Did a journalist gather information in a legal and respectable manner?

Image manipulation and the use of graphic images. When is it acceptable and within good taste to publish potentially troublesome images? What constitutes a sensationalist or exploitative image? Should journalists be allowed to alter images, and in what way? Has a photograph been composed or staged?

Sources and confidentiality. When is it okay to use an anonymous source? Is it ever ethical for a journalist to suppress information? Should journalists ever go off the record with a source or promise confidentiality?

Norms of ethics for various types of media. Ought the ethical codes of mainstream print journalism apply to online journalism or to citizen journalists?

Balancing good and bad news. How much violence needs to be covered before it overwhelms the rest of the news? How does a publication balance coverage of good and bad news, or even what the audience wants to hear versus what the audience needs to hear? Would violent events happen less often if the press largely ignored them?

Newsrooms and media organizations use these themes and questions to create professional codes of ethics that seek to guide journalists and editors towards making the right decisions on the job. According to Ward, there are two types of philosophies that shape these codes of ethics: proactive and restraining principles. A code of ethics with a

proactive stance dictates that journalists have both the freedom and the duty to "publish the most accurate and comprehensive truth on matters of public interest, and to report independently without fear or favor" (2009, p. 298). On the other hand, one with a restraining stance calls on journalists to publish responsible content, minimize any potential harm on vulnerable subjects that could result from publishing, and always maintain accountability with the public for the editorial decisions they have made (2009). Between these two schools of thought, it is rare to see only one shaping a newsroom's code of ethics without influence of the other, and in fact, the disparities between the two philosophies can lead to fundamental disagreement on the very idea of the purpose of journalism and its work (Rosen, 1999). Journalists must balance both views and determine their own necessary priorities on a situational basis.

When journalists make ethics-based decisions, they first need to determine whether their "fundamental ethic to inform needs qualifying in a particular case" (Richardson, 1994, p. 112). If so, they must next identify any moral issues at play and examine the relevant facts within the situation to determine their place in the story as a whole and the effects of omitting, including, or modifying the presentation of those facts. Finally, they must evaluate which outcomes maximize the benefits of publishing the story while minimizing any harmful or immoral outcomes (Hodges, 1993). Every journalist has a personal approach to handling these situations, but this framework is a common template for many ethical decisions that are made in the newsroom.

History of journalism ethics. In order to understand the role ethics plays in the profession of journalism, it is important to understand its role in the history of American

news media. Though the earliest iterations of media ethics date back to the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries with the invention of Gutenberg's printing press (Ward, 2009), the

United States did not see a multi-publication written code of ethics until the early

twentieth century. At the time, the liberal theory of the press, a premise in which the

press functions to protect public liberties and promote liberal reform, was challenged by

the takeover of news media by business moguls like William Randolph Hearst (Klaidman

& Beauchamp, 1987; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Ward, 2009).

Journalists and ethicists responded to the threat of potential corporatization of

newspapers by beginning to construct professional codes of ethics that focused primarily

on objectivism by emphasizing impartiality towards economic interests and political

parties, subjects that increasingly found their way to the front pages of newspapers

around the country (Baldasty, 1992; Campbell, 2001). These codes of ethics constituted

social contracts intending to professionalize the profession of journalism while

guaranteeing "responsible coverage of essential public issues" in exchange for the right to

report freely (Darwall, 2003; Scanlon, 1982; Ward, 2009).

The first major professional association to adopt a written code of ethics was the

American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), which published the "Canons of

Journalism" in 1923; in his speech introducing the code, ASNE president Casper Yost

told a room full of newspaper editors that "public confidence is essential to effective

journalism, and confidence in a newspaper, as in an individual must be founded upon

character" (American Society of Newspaper Editors [ASNE], 1923, p. 18). This character

basis for trust justified the adoption of the "Canons of Journalism" and, consequently, a

bevy of similar codes of ethics ensuring that journalists would report nothing but the facts (Mindich, 1998; Schudson, 1978). From that first code of ethics written by ASNE, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) formed its own code in 1926 that became one of the most widely accepted and referenced codes in the journalism profession; this particular code is one of the two codes my research and curriculum will primarily focus on (Peebles, n.d.; Society of Professional Journalists, 2014; Tursky, 2014).

Legitimizing the field of journalism through education. Written codes of ethics help assuage journalists and the public against encroaching corporate interests, but they also carried the benefit of helping to professionalize journalism as a career alongside brand new journalism education programs being enacted at universities around the country. In the early twentieth century, most people who became journalists learned the trade informally by getting a job at a newspaper (Christians & Covert, 1980). Early proponents of formalized journalism education likened the need for public trust in journalists to that of law and medicine, arguing this platform to usher in a similar set of professional qualifications and status for journalism (Christians & Covert, 1980). Media education became important not only for the outward honor of the profession but also as a way to create competent reporters, and the first formal journalism schools began to emerge during this time. Journalist Walter Williams established the world's first school of journalism at the University of Missouri in 1908 (Curators of the University of Missouri, n.d.). Other schools began establishing their own journalism programs, and this shift towards formal instruction added greater legitimacy to the field in addition to that created by the adoption of codes of ethics.

To this day, a primary requirement of programs seeking accreditation through the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication is to teach media ethics throughout the curriculum (Peck, 2003). This is obviously important for the lingering reasons of creating more responsible journalists and setting ethical standards for the profession, but it is also a required component of a successful journalism program because of the often elusive nature of ethical principles and issues. As Howard (2000) argued in *The Ethics of Writing Instruction*, moral issues like plagiarism cannot be considered right or wrong until they are recognized as such. It is for this reason that codes of ethics are so important in newsrooms today; they not only serve to guide journalists in the right direction but to notify them of the existence of ethical dilemmas themselves. This is why it is vital to teach journalism ethics to high school journalists as well; anybody who reports on the world around them and publishes their work can become a more ethical and responsible journalist by learning about press ethics.

Best Practices for Teaching Journalism Ethics

There are as many ways to teach journalism ethics as there are moral issues themselves, but research shows objectives and approaches that consistently prove more successful than others in terms of eliciting student awareness and engagement with journalism ethics.

Objectives to cover. While every newsroom and media organization chooses to adhere to a specific code of ethics, the goal for teaching journalism ethics is not to merely teach students about these codes but to teach them about the process of making ethical decisions so that they may develop their own independent systems of judgment that work

for them (Payne, 1992). When 149 instructors of college-level journalism ethics courses ranked their instructional goals in a 2001 survey, their most highly-ranked objective was that of fostering students' moral reasoning skills that would allow them to apply their knowledge to diverse reporting situations (Lambeth, Christians, Fleming, & Lee, 2004, p. 245). Within the greater realm of developing the skills of moral reasoning in journalists, Christians and Covert, in their 1980 book, *Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education*, denoted five specific objectives of journalism ethics instruction: bringing awareness to the moral dimension of students' lives, identifying potential ethical issues, guiding students toward developing ethical analytical skills, encouraging a "sense of moral obligation and personal responsibility," and tolerating ambiguity and disagreement (p. 50).

Christians and Covert argued that a fundamental goal of journalism ethics instruction is to impart in students the understanding that their decisions and actions carry actual consequences for people around them (1980). In order to get a better understanding of cause and effect, it is important for student journalists to be aware of their audience because better understanding of the audience brings about greater ethical awareness in turn (Coley, 2011). Not only should students begin to understand the potential effects of their own moral decision-making, but they should be able to apply this understanding to the particular needs and cultures of the people who will be their readers and sources.

Next, journalism ethics instruction ought to teach student journalists how to identify potential ethical issues in the field or in the newsroom. Students need to be sensitized to the moral dilemmas inherent in the field of journalism and understand how

to recognize their own and others' biases, competing loyalties, and perhaps opposing value systems (Lee & Padgett, 2000). Awareness of these potential issues is the first step for journalists to move toward making ethically sound decisions.

Once they are able to identify a moral dilemma, students should be able to use the analytical skills they developed through their journalism ethics training to rationally explore the implications of the decisions they may potentially make. According to Christians and Covert, giving student journalists an explicit system of steps towards making a decision will make it more likely that they come to a successful conclusion (1980). Besides these steps, students need to know how to discuss, argue, and analyze their own and others' ethical decisions. For this reason, conversation is a vital part of journalism ethics training, as it allows students to develop their skills and processes for analyzing the effects of their decisions in a deliberate and carefully planned fashion.

Just as student journalists must become aware of their audience and the effect their reporting can potentially have, they need to take that awareness to the next level and cultivate a sense of personal responsibility and moral obligation towards anybody whose lives may be affected by the information they present. Not only does this call for the habit of considering the timing of actions they may take in conjunction with the potential short- and long-term consequences, but it also requires that they engage in ongoing reflection of their professional responsibilities toward their audience and sources (Black, 2004; Christians & Covert, 1980).

Finally, journalism ethics instruction must teach students how to tolerate ambiguity in the world and disagreement with those around them. It is rare for

professionals in any career to always make decisions that result in everybody being

pleased, and journalism is no exception. Student journalists need to understand how to

find sources of disagreement in order to take others' viewpoints into consideration, but

they must also be equipped to resist the notion that they will always make the right

decisions. Due to the ambiguous nature of moral reasoning, even the most experienced

journalists can make mistakes; by engaging in reflection and critical questioning,

journalists are better able to handle and respond to disagreements they have over ethical

decision-making (Coley, 2011). Whether they choose to defend their own choices or take

the advice of those around them, a journalist trained in ethics can always own up to the

decisions he or she has made and will make.

Models for instruction. In addition to the objectives of an effective journalism

ethics course, the format of instruction is also important to consider when designing

curriculum.

As previously mentioned, the explicit teaching of media ethics is a requirement

for journalism programs to be accredited through the Accrediting Council on Education

in Journalism and Mass Communication (Peck, 2003). Within that requirement is the

debate over how, exactly, to teach media ethics: via the saturation method (exposing

students to the study as an adjunct focus alongside newsroom activity) or through a

specific course in the curriculum.

The saturation method of teaching journalism ethics incorporates moral

decision-making instruction starting at the very beginning of one's journalism education

and weaves it in through every subsequent course. Stating the benefits of this method,

Payne held that "ethics is simply too important a component of journalism education to be set aside from the daily business of reporting" (1992, p. 83). She went on to describe the faults of this approach, however, saying that this method does not organically result in "deep and intentional" discussions of ethical dilemmas, and, at the worst, that this format of teaching journalism ethics may actually result in students' beliefs that this component of journalism is not important enough to warrant its own course of study, and therefore it is of lesser concern in their educational paths (Payne, 1992, p. 86). With specific efforts to create discussion around journalism ethics in every course, this outcome may be avoided, but it would likely require collaboration among all instructional professionals within the journalism program to do so.

Another potential downside of the saturation method is that, given the concrete, project-based format of a regular reporting course in which journalism ethics would be built in, there is usually less time to discuss the nuances of certain ethical questions and moral decision-making analysis, so instructors tend to favor the approach of discussing specific cases over theory or principles in general (Payne, 1992). This leaves little time for students to explore the potential impact of their decisions and those of other journalists and, instead, offers a prescribed instance of cause and effect that leads to very little analysis and learning. Without careful planning, attempting to bring theory into the standard reporting class may feel jarring to the otherwise concrete makeup of the class and may have the unintended result of students feeling that ethics is separate from reporting, despite their existence in the same course (Payne, 1992).

On the other hand, some instructors of journalism ethics advocate for a full course in ethics and ethical theory alone, which is the format in which I myself learned journalism ethics in my undergraduate education. Many of the benefits of this approach revolve around the sheer time that can be spent in discussion of the complexity of ethics and decision-making. Although a surface-level discussion of a subject in morality may supply students with the basis of making a decision on the spot, it does not give them the analysis, questioning, and process they need to confidently handle other situations in their future careers. Also, as Payne argued, keeping discussions of journalism ethics within a dedicated course sets them apart from the grind of tight deadlines that characterizes most other journalism and reporting courses, and this is a benefit because it gives them the extra time and space to practice the art of ethical decision-making without the existence of tangential deadlines that may suppress their analysis (1992). Another benefit of this style of teaching journalism ethics is that its theoretical concentration may make students' discussions of ethical issues in non-ethics-related environments more informed (Christians & Covert, 1980). With these upsides to enacting a full course in journalism ethics, it is easy to see why most university programs choose this approach.

When examining the use of a full course in journalism ethics in a high school journalism program, however, the costs outweigh the benefits. High school journalists are more concerned with doing the work of reporting and seeing their name and work published than they are with the gravity of the decisions they make. A complete semester spent solely examining ethical theory would not align with most high schoolers' intentions for learning about journalism, and, frankly, getting them to enroll in such a

class at this stage in their journalism career would be challenging and quite unlikely. For this reason, I intend to design a journalism ethics curriculum that attempts to bring the depth and analytical benefits of a full course in media ethics to the format of an ethics-saturated reporting course, which is far more likely to benefit students at the high school level than any other approach.

Further, many lessons, units, and courses in journalism ethics also lump in media law, as did the course I took as an undergraduate. While it is important for student journalists to develop an understanding of media law, I am choosing not to include law as part of my curriculum for a couple of specific reasons. One, law is black and white and therefore far less in need of discussion and understanding than ethics; a survey course or unit of journalism in today's world would likely cover the facets of law that students would need to know. Also, bringing discussions of journalism law together with those of journalism ethics may result in students confusing decisions of ethically acceptable behavior with behavior that is *legally* acceptable (Payne, 1992). Or, as Christians and Covert (1980) explained, this may result in students confusing the "philosophical distinction between the necessary and the sufficient" (p. 24). Rather than going through the more challenging process of weighing outcomes based on various moral frameworks, students may, as a result, more quickly choose the path they know is legal without taking the time to meditate on the ethical impacts of their decisions. For these reasons, I am choosing to consciously discuss journalism ethics and not law in this curriculum and keep the subjects distinct, at least until students have a greater understanding of journalism ethics.

Recommended best practices according to research. There are various

approaches to teaching journalism ethics, ranging from discussing specific case studies

and telling stories, to teaching students how to navigate specific codes of ethics written

by media entities, to focusing on ethical theory and applied ethics (Peck, 2003). Each of

these approaches has its perks, but research shows that perhaps the most effective

journalism ethics curricula incorporate major theories of moral behavior, logical fallacies

in reasoning, Socratic-method discussion formats, real-world examples, and a deliberate

style of teaching in order to guide students toward developing a framework for their own

ethical decision-making (Payne, 1992).

Ethical theory and the psychology of behavior and reasoning ought to play a

central role in journalism ethics instruction. Some philosophy-based courses choose to

examine a set of central theories: those of Aristotle (Golden Mean), John Stuart Mill

(Principle of Utility), Immanuel Kant (Categorical Imperative), and John Rawls (Theory

of Justice; Veil of Ignorance) (Lee & Padgett, 2000; Payne, 1992). Other relevant

theories include ethical egoism versus utilitarianism, as well as the Potter Box model for

making decisions, attributed to Ralph B. Potter, Jr., Harvard Divinity School professor of

social ethics (Lee & Padgett, 2000). Many journalism ethics courses centered around

philosophy apply these aforementioned ideas to common moral dilemmas in the field of

journalism.

With the basis of ethical theory, Payne cautioned that philosophy should only

serve to enrich and add depth to questions of morality in journalism, not replace these

questions (1992). There should be no theory without application, otherwise students may

view it as a waste of time. One way to apply this theory, according to Kelley, is to have students learn the main tenets of ethical theory and then use that knowledge to write their own personal codes of ethics which they may then compare with those of professional media entities (2007). In addition to ethical theory, it can also be helpful for students to understand Kohlberg's and Gilligan's theories of moral development and psychological perceptions of bias, especially in regards to the development of their own ethical frameworks (as cited in Plaisance, 2006). Though research shows the importance of a philosophy-based journalism ethics curriculum, an instructor must be able to apply these ethical theories in a way that makes them relevant and memorable for students.

Socratic discussions are another component of an effective journalism ethics curriculum. Rather than lecturing and moralizing in front of a class, an instructor engaging in a Socratic discussion will instead pose deliberately worded and sequenced questions to students and lead them through the process of analytical reasoning so that they can learn from each other (Plaisance, 2006). The intended outcome is for students to provide each other with morally acceptable decisions regarding quandaries they will encounter as journalists, as well as critically question each other (Christians & Covert, 1980). This method of discussion furthers the development of students' analytical skills, tasks them with recognizing ethical issues, and models the emphasis of reasoning over right answers, as any moral decision can be considered valid with the right amount of reasoning and justification. Instructors should still emphasize that while well-supported decisions can be considered valid, there are certain decisions that are purely *better* decisions than others.

Next, an effective journalism ethics curriculum should incorporate an appropriate amount of real-life examples and case studies. If there is too much emphasis on case studies, the discussions become geared toward merely the lessons that can be learned, which largely ignores the more impactful discussions to be had regarding journalism ethics (Payne, 1992). Case studies are not a solid basis for a journalism ethics curriculum, however they are still useful in other ways. They force students to apply their knowledge of ethical decision-making in the context of real life, factoring outside elements like loyalties and deadlines. These examples can be used to engage students in identifying stakeholders in a decision, competing values and principles, and possible consequences of their actions (Lambeth et al., 2004). Since students may recognize certain case studies and already know the outcome, Richardson recommended fictionalizing certain details enough to eliminate any outside understanding of a case and its results and bring the focus back to ethics (1994). Case studies should be a tool for students to apply their ethical frameworks and gain practice with analysis and reasoning.

Finally, Richardson purported that the tone of instruction is also important to the curriculum. The instructor must strive to use affirmative language, describing what journalists should do rather than what they ought not do, because, in its essence, "journalism is about informing, not withholding" (Richardson, 1994, p. 110; Clark, 1990, p. 5). Also, even though ethics can be ambiguous, a journalism ethics course needs to be systematic, offering a sound and defensible process by which to make morally-just decisions. Lastly, it should be integrative, establishing ethics as "inseparable" from journalism (Richardson, 1994, p. 110). With the inclusion of these major elements, a

journalism ethics curriculum is more likely to leave a positive educational impact on students who take part in it.

Non-Academic Outcomes of Journalism Ethics Training

Instructors of journalism ethics classes want students to emerge from their studies with a solid understanding of ethical principles and how to make their own sound moral decisions, but what does this look like? Specifically, this understanding manifests as confidence in one's decision-making skills (Peck, 2003). An effective journalism ethics curriculum cultivates students who feel courageous standing up to those around them in situations of moral dilemmas, and they will also have the courage to effectively defend their own decisions when necessary (Peck, 2003). This confidence is a central result of journalism ethics training for students, and there are several other outcomes in addition to the aforementioned academic ones.

Effect on students' perceptions of morals. Studying journalism ethics has been shown to decrease students' personal degrees of idealism and relativism — they develop a better appreciation and understanding of the gray areas of morality. Students are better able to acknowledge the complexity that exists around them and judge their actions by the results they have on other people instead of the effects they have on themselves (Plaisance, 2006). Students who participated in a study conducted by Lee and Padgett credited a five-week journalism ethics unit with giving them the tools to reason with more complexity and examine "how, rather than what, to think" (2000, p. 38). Especially for high school journalists who are still developing their overall moral frameworks and worldviews, these skills are unparalleled in their use for self-understanding.

Benefits outside of the newsroom. Even for students who do not choose to embark on a career in journalism, understanding journalism ethics carries the benefit of creating better citizens and consumers of media. At the very least, the ongoing discussions of ethical dilemmas have been proven to make students aware of such dilemmas, even as they exist outside of journalism. With this understanding, students are more capable of avoiding decisions made purely out of ignorance, even if they are not immediately sure what to do about them (Lee & Padgett, 2000). Ethics training opens their eyes to the existence of morally ambiguous situations and helps them better identify them as they arise. Another study shows that students who completed a journalism ethics course were more aware of the welfare of those around them, more open-minded, and better equipped to make independent decisions (Surlin, 1987). These are important skills for anybody to become a better person, regardless of career.

Additionally, because the media has become such a pervasive, commonplace fixture of our society, journalism ethics training equips people with the understanding of the ways, good and bad, in which media affects their lives and those of other people. Social media enables anybody to be considered an amateur producer of content and that knowledge of journalism ethics helps people understand the impact their attitudes and behavior will have, as well as giving them the power to support and consume responsible, ethical sources of media (Owens, 2017). Understanding journalism ethics grants an important gatekeeping power to people as citizens and as media consumers.

Limitations to the effects of journalism ethics training. Though there are several benefits to journalism ethics training, there are some things it cannot accomplish.

A common misunderstanding is that someone who completes ethics training has, by consequence of the training, developed a set of moral values that will guide their behavior. Lee and Padgett (2000) found that, though this training imparts in students a better appreciation for moral ambiguity, it does not change their moral values; this is because a journalism ethics curriculum emphasizes *how* to think, not *what* to think.

Further, the effects of journalism ethics training may be limited by students' stages of psychological and moral development. Because of the fact that many questions in this realm do not have right answers, students may feel uncomfortable, depending on their maturity level; this training cannot overcome the fact that, especially for adolescents in high school journalism programs, their psyches have not yet evolved in a way to help them accept the nonexistence of a correct answer (Black, 2004). Appreciation of ambiguity is a main benefit of journalism ethics training, but it will likely not happen for students who have not matured enough to accept it. Also, students at the highest stages of moral development are the only ones likely to benefit from the "sense of commitment and principled behavior" that results from journalism ethics training (Black, 2004). Ethics instructors of younger journalism students must understand that their efforts may not have the exact same results as with more mature students due to these limitations.

Journalism ethics training results in qualities that make both better students and better citizens, and this, along with the benefits it brings to the professional field of journalism, make it an important focus for curricula whether the students are in high school or graduate school.

Text Sets

With all the discussion on what journalism ethics is, how to teach it, and its intended outcomes, it becomes important to explain how text sets relate to the field. This section will define text sets, describe their uses in the classroom, and indicate the ways in which they complement journalism ethics training.

Defining text sets. Text sets are deliberately chosen resources from differing genres, reading levels, and media that offer different perspectives centering around a specific theme (Danticat, Na, & Yep, 2016; Tschida & Buchanan, 2015). Though the term *text sets* gives the impression that the resources involved are all in written form, such as books and periodicals, they typically incorporate various alternative forms of text such as photographs, podcasts, songs, brochures, and the like alongside traditional written texts. They are meant to supplement and add depth to the topic, theme, or concept of study, not be the focal point in and of themselves (Cappiello & Dawes, 2013). Instructors teaching any subject can use text sets, but their use has become especially popular in the fields of writing, English language arts, and social studies.

Text sets take on various formats, depending on their intended use. A common format is to choose an anchor text that all students are to read, and then supplement that anchor text with additional texts among which students can choose to read or not to read (Batchelor, 2019). In literacy-focused classes, this format is especially useful because the anchor text is chosen as a challenging grade-level (or slightly higher-level) text, and the supplementary texts are intended to build background understanding and increase

motivation for reading the anchor text (Lewis & Walpole, 2016). Other categories of texts within the text set structure are:

- Companion sets to be read as collection or series;

- Complementary sets centering around a singular topic;

- Synoptic sets that offer varying perspectives of a single story, illustrating a larger snapshot of a community;

- Conflicting sets that explore differing opinions or ideas around one theme, providing a basis for discussion (Hartman & Hartman, 1994; Pinar, 1995; Smith & Zygouris-Coe, 2006).

With the many different formats and purposes of text sets, the element that each of these sets has in common is the opportunities they provide for students to learn from many texts instead of just one.

Using text sets in the journalism ethics classroom. Text sets have become popular choices for instructional material because of their many benefits of use. The widespread adoption of Common Core State Standards has led to an increased importance in cultivating students' abilities to work with complex informational texts to learn and use academic language and build background knowledge (Doolittle, 2016). This can be accomplished with the use of text sets to help scaffold challenging language and information, including ethical theory, through the variety of available formats and functions of a set.

Building background knowledge is a particularly strong benefit of text sets. When a teacher chooses texts and instructional methods to help students build background, he

or she is influencing which particular details of the reading that students decide is relevant, according to the schema theory of building background knowledge (Anderson, 2013). This theory posits that the use of text sets highlights the relevance of certain information that may be common to more than one text within the set. By making connections among the texts, not only do students form more relevant background schemas, but they construct new meaning that can only be made from the use of these texts alongside one another (Pytash, Batchelor, Kist, & Srsen, 2014). This process aids in the kind of higher-level thinking and analysis patterns that allow student journalists to ponder ethical dilemmas, and the background they build through the use of text sets is more likely to be tangible and memorable as a result of the schemas they create.

Another benefit of the juxtaposition of several texts is that it pushes students to synthesize across the texts, discovering opposing interpretations and differing information that steers them toward asking fundamental questions about the overall relationships between texts, and the use and worth of individual texts (Shanahan, 2013). With a single text, students are accustomed to taking the information within that text at face value; text sets give students the power to question the information presented and test texts against each other, creating a more student-centered classroom (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Ness, 2016). This process complements the process of questioning that student journalists embark on when they examine a moral dilemma, reinforcing the notion that students are *supposed* to be questioning the material they are given. Additionally, the varying interpretations students encounter when synthesizing a text set

recalls the diversity of positions and interpretations they encounter when analyzing the conflicting values inherent in an ethical situation and the potential courses of action.

Finally, text sets create the basis for better classroom discussions and activities. Mathis (2002) described the most impactful aspect of preparing to use text sets in the classroom not as identifying the texts but rather planning ways to engage the class in "critical thinking, intertextual comparisons and multiple means of response" with the assistance of the text set (p. 127). Instructors can use text sets to cultivate large- and small-group discussions calling for students to compare and contrast among texts and share new insights they have gleaned about the central topic by reading additional texts (Batchelor, 2019). In a journalism ethics curriculum that emphasizes Socratic discussion as a central element of instruction, the variety of discussions that can result from the use of text sets is invaluable to students' learning and analysis.

With the ways that text sets promote higher-level thinking, facilitate the building of background knowledge, encourage students to question the information they are presented, and nurture crucial classroom discussion, they have great potential for use within the journalism ethics curriculum.

Summary

This chapter reviewed existing literature in conjunction with the themes that drive the research question of this capstone project: *How can text sets be used in a high school journalism classroom to teach journalism ethics?* First, the chapter explored the meaning of journalism ethics, a selection of common ethical quandaries, and the history and relevance of ethics to the field of journalism. It then discussed research-based best

practices of teaching journalism ethics, covering key curricular objectives, models for instruction, and topics and tone for an effective ethics curriculum. Next, the chapter examined some benefits journalism ethics carries for students outside of the field of journalism as well as a few central limitations to teaching journalism ethics. Finally, it explained text sets, what they are, what they include, and how their use complements journalism ethics instruction. In Chapter Three, the capstone project will be explained in further detail with a summary of the project, the setting for the project, a timeline for its completion, a potential budget, and an overview of the stakeholders for this project.

CHAPTER THREE

Completing the Project

Introduction

Chapter Three provides an explanation about the details of this particular capstone

project and how it will answer the research question, *How can text sets be used in a high*

school journalism classroom to teach journalism ethics? This project involves

investigating the use of a text set to teach a journalism ethics curriculum in a high school

classroom that emphasizes inquiry and high-level thinking. The goal of the resulting unit

is to give students an understanding of how to evaluate the messages they encounter

every day in the media and empower them to hold themselves and each other accountable

for the choices they make that can potentially be helpful or hurtful to others.

The first section of this chapter provides an overview of the capstone project as

well as some major research upon which it is based. After that, this chapter details the

intended setting for the project, describes the final product and the budget for collecting

the necessary text set resources, and outlines the timeline for this project's creation. The

goal of this chapter is to provide a detailed explanation of how this project will come

together and how each component will address the question, *How can text sets be used in*

a high school journalism classroom to teach journalism ethics?

Overview of Project

This project is a unit of curriculum aligned with the Minnesota ninth and tenth

grade English standards. The unit contains 8 lessons, each of which is 45 minutes in

length but can easily be adjusted longer depending on the instructor's intended use of the

accompanying text set. The text set includes a list of texts and their descriptions, and the curriculum includes several ways to use the text set to accompany lessons and activities. This unit is designed to be integrated into an introductory journalism classroom that is simultaneously learning the basics of newswriting and reporting; for this reason, the lessons are intended to be taught once per week, for a total of 8 weeks.

The focus of the unit is journalism ethics. Using the National Scholastic Press Association's Model Code of Ethics for High School Students as a guide, the unit takes students on a journey through many of the ethical facets of being a high school journalist. The goal of this unit is to give students an understanding of how to evaluate the messages they encounter every day in the media and empower them to hold themselves and each other accountable for the choices they make that can potentially be helpful or hurtful to others. It provides students with a framework for making moral decisions in the newsroom, an appreciation for ambiguity, and the confidence to argue on behalf of their ideas. The accompanying text set includes various types of texts meant to bring ethical dilemmas to life for students, engage them in debates, and teach them to think like journalists. At the end of the unit, students use what they have learned about journalism ethics to create a classroom code of ethics, which not only demonstrates their understanding of the subject matter and guides their future reporting for the year, but also serves as a benchmark for the effectiveness of the unit and the texts used to guide it.

Research

The research framework behind this capstone project and its resulting curriculum is Understanding by Design (UbD), popularized by Wiggins and McTighe (2011). This

framework describes the process of designing curriculum backwards, starting with

identifying the long-term goals of a lesson, unit, or course, then deciding what evidence

students ought to show to display mastery, and finally developing the learning plan

(Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). By following these steps in this particular order, an

instructor is better able to develop focused, successful classroom content without leaning

too heavily on a textbook to guide the way and without including any lessons that distract

from the main objectives.

UbD largely focuses on the idea that students are more likely to develop

long-term mastery of an objective when "teachers teach for understanding of transferable

concepts and processes while giving learners multiple opportunities to apply their

learning in meaningful (i.e., authentic) contexts" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011, p. 4). The

idea of teaching transferable concepts is also central to teaching journalism ethics, as

teachers cannot possibly prepare journalism students for every moral dilemma they may

face, but they are able to teach them a system for addressing such dilemmas. With a

curriculum design framework that also focuses on transferability, this project will not

only be better organized from start to finish, but it will align better with the overall goals

of teachers and their students.

Setting

The setting for this project is a private, secular, college-preparatory high school in

an urban area of the Midwest. There is an enrollment of about 420 students in the high

school. Class sizes at this level are an average of 14 students, and there are eight students

for every one faculty member. In this school, 25 percent of students are students of color.

Since this is a private school, there is a mix of students who live nearby in the city and who come from neighboring suburbs; a few bus routes service these suburban students, picking them up at central points. Though families pay tuition, 23 percent of students receive a financial aid award, covering an average of half the tuition cost. The curriculum created for this capstone was created with the idea of a journalism class size of about 15 students who come to school with a variety of backgrounds and lifestyles upon which their worldviews may be based.

This school has a particularly celebrated journalism tradition. With a print and online student newspaper, yearbook, and other publications, the journalism program is quite established and attracts students who are interested in future studies of journalism, media, and communications as well as those who have outside interests and are merely interested in being part of the student-run publications. In order to write, report, or edit for these publications, students must be enrolled in a journalism elective course; there is a beginner course and a more advanced course, and I see this curriculum fitting best within the framework of the more advanced journalism elective course. One instructor oversees the entirety of publications, with an assistant instructor to help manage the variety of tasks and assist students throughout the school year.

This capstone project was designed for use by high school teachers, whether they teach high school journalism or English courses that focus on media topics. Additionally, homeschooling parents can also use this curriculum to teach journalism ethics to their students, however they must keep in mind the importance of relevant, authentic discussion opportunities in conjunction with these topics. Students themselves may also

be interested in the text set for their own personal enrichment, especially if they are planning to embark on careers in journalism and media.

Budget

One complete version of the text set for this curriculum would cost between $0 and $20, depending on the instructor's intended use of texts. The cost may rise if the teacher or school decides to purchase any additional copies of the materials, or it may fall if they decide to omit some of the texts. Most of the texts included in the text set can be acquired for free besides a feature film and any potential news articles behind a paywall, so the only potential costs may be making copies of these texts and activity handouts for students.

Timeline

I began this capstone project in June 2019 when I wrote and developed the research question, *How can text sets be used in a high school journalism classroom to teach journalism ethics?* Between June and August, I researched, wrote, and revised Chapters One, Two, and Three. Much of this time was spent researching best practices of teaching journalism ethics and compiling this research into usable points that could be incorporated into a high school journalism ethics curriculum. I used a variety of resources available online and through Hamline University's library and research database collection to locate content that would help me answer my research question.

Between late August and January 2020, I focused on my time spent in a journalism classroom and observed students' needs and understandings related to journalism ethics. During this time, I started collecting materials for text sets. I continued

using library resources, current events, and online searches to find these texts, keeping in mind their potential for use and relevance for high school journalists. Throughout these months, I continued to revise Chapters One, Two, and Three to fit any new insights I had for this project.

In March 2020, I began writing Chapter Four, finalizing the text set, and writing lesson plans to complete this project. During this time, I worked closely with my content editor, peer editors, and other advisors to make final additions and revisions for the curriculum and text set. The final project and all of its components were completed in early May 2020.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a detailed explanation of the capstone project. I presented an overview of the project and its resulting unit and text set. After that, I talked about some research theories underlying the project and how these theories factored into the project's creation. I specified demographic information for the school I taught at during the time I completed this project. Next, I covered my intentions for presenting the information within the capstone project to the intended audience. Finally, I gave a budget and timeline for the completion of this capstone project.

Chapter Four will revisit the overall research question behind the project as well as reflect on the final product. This reflection will also address the process I used in creating the project and the major lessons I have learned from completing it. Finally, Chapter Four will examine the next steps for this project, any potential limitations for the project, and how the project may evolve in the future.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Chapter Overview

The goal of this capstone project was to answer the research question, *How can text sets be used in a high school journalism classroom to teach journalism ethics?* I created an 8-lesson unit that dives into journalism ethics with the guidance of the National Scholastic Press Association's Model Code of Ethics for High School Students (Swikle, 2009) and other texts. These lessons, designed to be taught weekly alongside other curricula, inform students about the ethical dilemmas journalists face every day and the moral criteria they must use to make decisions. They also empower students to both challenge and advocate for their own ideas and those of their peers at school and in the wider scope of media.

Chapter 4 reflects on the capstone project and the process I used to complete it. First, I address how I completed the project and what I learned as a researcher, writer, and teacher. Next, I revisit the literature and reflect on how it helped me shape the journalism ethics unit. After that, I discuss the major implications and limitations to this project. Finally, I share how this project will be of benefit to myself and other educators in the future.

Major Learnings

Throughout the process of completing this capstone project, I learned important lessons as a researcher, writer, teacher and journalist.

As a new teacher and as someone who naturally loves research, I spent a great deal of time poring through all the resources I could get my hands on, hoping to distill all of the best resources into this project and, as a result, into a unit that will benefit my students more than anything else I had yet created. In researching for this project, I learned that there is such a thing as too much research. When I did not have a writing deadline to keep me in line, I found that I would fall into the trap of researching without resulting action. This came as a surprise to me because I knew the entire time that the research was all in the name of completing a project, not for the sake of research itself. The ease with which I could abandon a tangible outcome and keep searching and reading showed me that I use research as a means for procrastination and that I need to set real deadlines for myself in order to avoid falling into the trap of inertia in writing.

Once I was writing, I quickly realized the importance of having clear organization and a wide berth of background information, especially in completing Chapter 2 of this project. I am a licensed educator in the field of Communication Arts and Literature, and within that field, my specialty is in journalism education. I realize that most other teachers with the same teaching license as mine are comparatively unfamiliar with journalism as a subset of English teaching. In order to make my understanding of journalism ethics clear to teachers who are not as knowledgeable about the subject as I am yet who may want to incorporate this unit into their own teaching, I prioritized clarity in the information I presented about journalism and its ethics. Part of that meant my literature review was lengthy and thorough, since I did not want to assume my reader knows anything about journalism outside of what he or she learned in a general

communications class. From this project, I learned that my specialization within teaching may mean I need to work harder to communicate my knowledge, but that ensures my findings have potential use for a broader range of educators and greater success in implementing the resulting unit.

The lesson I learned as a teacher is that student-centered lessons, as effective as they are for promoting real learning, can be challenging to create. Backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011) helped me create the flow of the unit and its lessons and assessments, but I felt like I faced a great deal of challenge in creating the lessons themselves in terms of basing them around inquiry, especially when I first learned the subject material in a college lecture setting. With so much more than inquiry to focus on in this project, like creating lesson materials, citing sources, and assembling texts, this became a draining task at times. What helped me in the creativity department was reading through other inquiry-based lesson plans, for journalism and other topics, and incorporating some of those ideas into my own work. This showed me that, as a teacher, one person cannot do all the work alone, and a strong community of teachers and their resources is vital to staying sane while planning engaging and memorable educational experiences for students.

As a journalist, I witnessed the ways in which ethical dilemmas do not exist in their own subcategories but usually overlap with several others. I designated each day of my journalism ethics unit by theme, from independence to accuracy, and in creating activities and sourcing materials that best added to each lesson plan, I found that they could easily inform the ethical messages of another lesson in the unit. For example, the

Lesson 6 activity on separating editorial bias from objective reporting could easily fit into a lesson aligning with factual accuracy, the theme of Lesson 5. Just as my unit seeks to teach students to appreciate ambiguity, I had to embrace the gray areas of my lesson planning while keeping such separate-but-related ideas distinct for ease of learning. This lesson will undoubtedly inform the ways I handle journalism ethics in the future as a journalist and as a teacher working with students.

The lessons I learned in completing this capstone project will lead me through my developmental years as a teacher and continue to pave the way for future insights in my field.

Revisiting the Literature

After finishing the capstone project, I found it especially interesting to review the literature about teaching journalism ethics, which proved to be most vital for my capstone. In reviewing some of the common situational themes that arise in the field of journalism ethics, such as objectivity, sensationalism, editorial independence, and so on (Christians & Covert, 1980; Kelley, 2007; Ward, 2009), I found that my choice to develop a unit centered around the NSPA Model Code of Ethics for High School Students (Swikle, 2009) solidly covered these points in a way that students are most likely to relate with in terms of their own emerging careers as journalists. Prior to designing a unit around these topics, I thought I would have a tough time linking them together in any meaningful way, but by organizing my unit around a real code of ethics, I was able to make them cohesive and memorable.

In the research I conducted on various structures for journalism ethics courses, I found that journalism courses that include reporting often leave less time for discussing general questions of ethics due to the deadline-driven, project-based nature of these courses; instead, they often incorporate ethics as dilemmas arise or on a case-by-case basis (Payne, 1992). In fact, attempting to include ethical theory into a typical news reporting class may have the unintended effect of students feeling that the field of ethics is adjunct to reporting, but that the two are not inextricably linked (Payne, 1992). This literature heavily influenced my choice to design my unit as an integrated part of the class and not as an 8-day standalone component that students could complete and leave behind. By presenting each topic of ethics as a once-per-week module that lasts for 8 weeks, I ask students to keep revisiting these situations to model how journalism itself continues to bring involved parties into nuanced situations like those students learn about through the unit.

The literature also influenced my choice to separate journalism ethics from journalism law, since Payne argued that merging journalism law and ethics into one field of study may result in students being unable to differentiate between actions that are legally acceptable and those that are morally acceptable (1992). I chose to focus on ethics for this reason, and because it is a more ambiguous field to learn about than law, which I have found to consist of social sciences topics like Supreme Court cases and discussions of pioneering figures in journalism.

Finally, the research I conducted helped me link the understandings of this unit with those that students will hopefully bring into the greater world outside of the

classroom. Christians and Covert asserted the idea that journalism ethics instruction ought to ultimately bring students closer to the understanding that their decisions and actions lead to actual consequences for the people who surround them (1980). In this way, their studies aim to expose them to greater awareness of ethics in their world (Coley, 2011). In designing the unit, I focused on these overall takeaways and hope that, even if students do not go on to a career in journalism or the media, they will be able to apply the lessons they learned to their own fields of work, study, and life.

Implications

A significant implication of my project is for journalism educators to emphasize the role of ethical consideration inside and outside of the newsroom. Journalism ethics and law are not the same thing, though many people, teachers and students, lump them together because there is only so much time in a class period, and many people would prefer to use that time to report the news and write stories. That work is, of course, essential for proper journalism, but so is the understanding of why a journalist should not do something he or she legally *can* do. By bringing light to the role of ethics in journalism, educators are further legitimizing the field, especially in a time like now, when there is rampant misinformation and widespread imagined misinformation. There are ethical and unethical journalists out there, but by educating students at the beginning of their journalism careers about the importance of one's own actions and decisions in regards to reporting and storytelling, educators are paving the way for the most honest, upstanding journalists to take over the duty of recording and writing our history from those whom we should not trust with such an important task.

Limitations

The only consistent thing about media from year to year, or even from day to day, is that it is always changing. There are always more current news stories and discussions, which means there are always newer texts available for students. One limitation of my project is that, depending on when and where a teacher chooses to teach this unit, he or she may prefer to exchange certain texts for others. One may also see this as an advantage, as the teacher can make the unit fresh every time she teaches it, however if the teacher is relatively new to teaching journalism ethics or is not confident locating fresh materials to bring in, it could become challenging to find the right kinds of sources displaying ethical practices in journalism. That being said, these texts do not significantly date themselves in any way that makes it necessary to incorporate newer ones in their place, unless the guiding texts or codes of ethics become outdated.

With the growing popularity and, often, necessity of online schooling and distance learning, there may be teachers who want to teach journalism ethics in such a setting and may want to use this unit plan to do so. This journalism ethics unit needs certain adaptations to become suitable for online and distance learning, yet with video technology that seeks to bring the face-to-face nature of a traditional journalism classroom to these online spaces, it would be possible to lead students through most key activities in the unit.

Benefit

My hope is that this capstone project and resulting unit plan helps journalism and media educators understand how to bring journalism ethics to their high school students.

Whether they use this plan as written or adapt parts of it to their existing curricula, I want them to understand how important it is that students are exposed to these ideas.

As a member of the Journalism Education Association (JEA), I plan to use this vast network to share my project with other journalism teachers around the United States. I have explored the vast array of curricula available to members of JEA, and I have not encountered an ethics-centered unit with quite the scope and focus as mine, so I trust other members will find it useful for even that reason. Hopefully those who use it and adapt it will communicate their changes and results using this unit and, in turn, help me continue to refine my lessons, teaching method, and journalism knowledge.

Beyond this capstone, I would like to continue developing my skills in unit design. Using my growing experience as a teacher and learner, I hope to expose other important yet often overlooked areas of journalism education and other related fields and investigate how I can best illuminate those facets to students. I especially hope to hone my ability to create inquiry-based journalism workshop lessons and units and share them with other teachers and their students. Being a journalist is all about investigating the facts and assembling them into a trustworthy and accurate material for others to learn from, and I feel like, as a teacher, I am doing the same thing but with students as my audience. Units like this are my way of doing investigative reporting, and I will continue to investigate things I feel are important to share with my classes.

Conclusion

This chapter reflected on the process of creating a capstone project that answered the research question, *How can text sets be used in a high school journalism classroom to*

teach journalism ethics? In this chapter, I shared some takeaways I had from the capstone process. I revisited the literature review and the research that helped to shape my project. I discussed key implications and limitations of the unit and the research I did to create it. Finally, I addressed some of the potential benefits this project will provide to myself and to other educators in the future.

By completing this capstone project, I became a better researcher, student, and teacher. Completing such an intensive investigation of unit planning and curriculum design has made me more confident in my craft. It has reaffirmed not only my belief in the importance of journalism and media literacy, but also my passion for education and respect for the positive impacts of dedicated teachers around the country and the world. Though completing this project was challenging at times, it showed me that I am capable of creating work that I am proud of as a teacher, and I will undoubtedly remember the joy of completion before the mental drain when I seek to complete another project of this scope in the future. I hope this capstone project becomes a tool for high school teachers far and wide to bring ethical awareness and media literacy together in their own classrooms.

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