

## **Research section: Journalism teaching and training**

Pieter J. Fourie

### **Journalism studies: The need to think about journalists' thinking**

#### **Abstract**

Journalism trainers and educators (with the emphasis on education) should take the criticism against journalism seriously, including the deep-rooted mistrust of journalism, and use it as a point of departure in their curriculum development. This article paraphrases the early criticism against journalism, after which the two main streams of contemporary criticism, namely critical political economy and professional criticism are briefly discussed. Pierre Bourdieu's views about the *structural limitations* of journalism and the fact that these limitations are not questioned by journalists, as well as Kenneth Minogue's views about *journalistic ideology* and how it has become transparent and forms the basis of the public's mistrust of the media, are emphasised. Against this background, it is argued that, to raise the quality of journalism, journalism studies should adopt a more fundamental approach to the understanding of journalism and the journalist's work. Instead of focussing predominantly on professional skills, there is a need for journalism studies, also in terms of raising its own status as an academic discipline, to focus more on intellectual skills such as reasoning, argumentation, persuasion (rhetoric), contextualisation, the skills of historical thinking, description, interpretation and evaluation. Apart from this, it is argued that South African journalism studies should also focus on the development of an African epistemology for the practice and evaluation of journalism in South Africa.

**Keywords:** Journalism, education, academia, practical skills, intellectual skills, phenomenology, criticism, journalistic ideology, structural limitations, journalistic quality, changed media environment.

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## Introduction

This article should be read in the context of the ongoing debate<sup>1</sup> in South Africa and elsewhere about (i) whether journalism studies should be skills or theory and research orientated, (ii) the role, nature and place of journalism studies in academia, and (iii) whether journalism studies have increased the quality of journalism and its value in and for society. More specifically, it should be read in the context of a recent colloquium<sup>2</sup> on journalism education in South Africa, organised by Rhodes University's Department of Journalism and Media Studies (Rhodes University, 2005).

The skills versus theory debate is usually set against the background of industry demands and turns on how to satisfy the needs and dictates of the industry. In South Africa, the debate has of late also been dominated by how curricula and their teaching should accommodate students from apartheid's disadvantaged communities with a history of inferior primary and secondary education. Furthermore, recent debates in South Africa are characterised by uncertainties created by the adoption of a new tertiary educational system in which the distinction between training colleges, technikons and universities has been abolished. Training colleges have disappeared and technikons are now universities of technology or have been merged with universities. By whom, universities or universities of technology, journalism should be offered and how it should be offered at the different institutions, remains an open question (Gibbon (2005) on the massification and commercialisation of tertiary education and its impact on South Africa).

Addressing these issues has resulted in debates with an emphasis on didactic measures and techniques geared towards industry-related outcomes, the

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<sup>1</sup> In South Africa, the question of journalism education is frequently debated at academic conferences, symposia and workshops. In the industry, the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) plays a key role as far as the debate concerning education is concerned. (See their website: <http://www.sanef.org.za>). Numerous articles on the topic are published in the leading South African academic journal in the field of journalism, *Ecquid Novi*, edited by Prof. Arnold S. de Beer. For example, Volume 23(1) (2002) is devoted to the topic of journalism skills and education. (SA ePublications/*Ecquid Novi* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.journals.co.za> Also see De Beer & Tomaselli, 2000; De Beer, 2002; Deuze, 2004; Steyn & De Beer, 2004; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> In June 2005, the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University, South Africa, hosted a colloquium on journalism education and its place in academia. The three questions the colloquium sought to address were: What is journalism? Why do we teach it? How should it be taught? This colloquium was phase two of a two-part analysis of journalism education in South Africa, sponsored by the Ford Foundation. A first colloquium, organised by the same department, took place in October 2004 and was entitled *Taking Stock of ten years of media training and education at tertiary institutions: Addressing an agenda for the next decade* (see the programme and abstracts of papers presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Colloquium [Online]. Available at: <http://journ.ru.ac.za/colloquium/papers.html>).

introduction of short courses with an emphasis on the *how* of journalism and the *how* of new media technology and on skills-orientated curriculum design. This article argues that these debates are to the detriment of addressing fundamental and critical questions and issues about what journalism is and could be at a time when journalism continues to lose its legitimacy and integrity (Alterman, 2003; Hume, 1995/2005), and when journalism studies itself is seen to have failed in raising the quality and standard of journalism (Minogue, 2005).

Instead of continuing to focus on skills, journalism education should rather move towards a more fundamental investigation of the nature of journalism and of the criticism against it. Although this is often the topic of postgraduate research and scholarly publications (see amongst others Zelizer, 2004), when it comes to undergraduate and lower postgraduate teaching it is usually overlooked. Approaching journalism education from a more fundamental perspective could take as its starting point a critical investigation of the criticism against journalism itself, beginning with the public's or popular criticism. After all, whereas journalists and the media often rely on the argument that they represent the public and the public opinion, the *public* and the *public opinion* about journalism itself, with the exception of some efforts to establish a public or civic journalism (Lichter, 2005), is seldom taken into account in journalism studies or used as a point of departure in thinking about curricula. In this regard, it is almost as if journalism studies, like journalists themselves, "embrace [its] unpopularity as proof of a perverse kind of integrity" (Minogue, 2005:9).

This article should thus be read as a *suggestion* towards a change of emphasis (away from skills) to a more fundamental approach in journalism education. Using the criticism against journalism as its point of departure, this article argues that such criticism needs to be scrutinised in journalism education. Questions such as "What is the criticism?", "Why the critique?", "How could the criticism be addressed in order to raise the quality of journalism and journalistic practices?" should be asked to problematise journalism instead of teaching its practises uncritically and as an institutional given – as a "this is how it is done". A starting point is Kenneth Minogue's (2005:9) view that "no one seriously believes that the academic sophistication that journalists have acquired helps them give a better account of the world. We are no better informed today than we were when reporters told us how it was. Indeed, all shades of opinion regard "the media" with deep suspicion as giving a biased account of reality".

In writing a reflective article of this nature, an author runs the risk of becoming too synoptic and in the process even provocative. The author thus acknowledges that each topic raised in here may be dealt with in more depth and may need contextualisation against the background of work and research that rigorously and empirically deals with the topic of journalism education and journalism as a phenomenon, also in the related fields of communication, media and cultural studies (for example, Froelich & Holtz-Bacha, 2003; Morna & Khan, 2001; Steyn, De Beer & Steyn, 2005). The topics raised and briefly introduced in the article should thus only be read as preliminary support for the argument that journalism education may be approached from the perspective of the criticism against

journalism in order to raise the standard of journalism and of journalism education to a more fundamental level.

## The criticism against journalism

### Popular criticism

A day before his death in December 2004, the highly respected South African journalist and former editor of *Drum* magazine Anthony Sampson complained that what should have been a golden era for journalism in South Africa after 1994 has turned out to be a disappointment. According to him, South African journalism has moved backwards. He asked, for example, where the political analysts and the political columnists are whom politicians cannot ignore (Steenkamp, 2005:4.). Sampson's complaint is just one example of growing concern about the quality of South African media and journalism.

On 5 February 2005, the South African Internet service provider MWeb (2005) published an opinion poll on the following question: "Which source of news do you trust the most?". The results were:

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| • eTV                                    | 15,48% |
| • SABC                                   | 4,94%  |
| • Local internet news sites              | 8,51%  |
| • International news sources             | 21,80% |
| • Regional newspapers                    | 4,34%  |
| • National newspapers                    | 4,44%  |
| • None of them - I don't trust the media | 40,49% |

Despite questions about methodology and the representativeness of MWeb's opinion polls, results like these are troublesome. It supports similar studies in South Africa and elsewhere (Healey, 2005; Jones, 2004; Rosen, 2001) and indicates a deep-rooted mistrust by the public of the media, its journalism and journalists.

Other recent examples illustrating this negative perception, even by journalist themselves, were the concerns raised about the standard of journalism at the conference of the International Press Institute in Nairobi in May 2005 (Nieuwoudt, 2005), concerns in the Afrikaans community about the sensationalist nature of the media (Froneman, 2005; *Die Kerkbode*, 2005), and a South African campaign called "A One Month Media Fast" announced in June 2005 (*Radio Sonder Grense*, 2005).

Critical reports, letters and articles about the media flourish in the media itself. In South Africa, there is an almost regular stream of complaints from politicians, corporate and institutional managers, academics and ordinary citizens who blame the media and its reporting for almost everything they disagree with, or argue that they have been misrepresented, misinterpreted, judged and found guilty by the media. The criticism of South African State President Thabo Mbeki of the media and the quality of journalism is known and almost characteristic of the ruling African National Congress' weekly online newsletter *ANC Today* (see Fourie

(2002) for a more in-depth treatment of the government's criticism against the media).

Although such criticism is inherent to freedom of expression and part of the open debate between the media and the public, it also contributes to suspicion mongering about the trustworthiness of the media and its integrity, and towards a strengthening of the public's generally negative view of the media. This view is, for example, often expressed in the dialogue between characters in soap operas and situation comedies when they refer to journalists and the media as follows: "count your words in front of a journalist"; "who can believe the media?"; "don't trust a journalist"; "be careful of journalists", and so forth. Phrases like these are indicative of the negative stereotypes that continue to be associated with journalists, journalism and the media. Complex as it may be in terms of its efforts to penetrate the *real* interaction between the media and the media user, audience studies indicate that *when questioned about the media*, people often see and experience it as a non-essential product and mainly as a form of entertainment and diversion. (Cf. Ang's (1998) and Jacka's (2003) views about the media in its postmodern context and form. They argue, for example, that media production is more often than not a matter of "show business", driven not by the intent of meaningful communication, but by spectacle and display.) Entertainment and diversion, and not information and education, are then seen as the reasons for the growth of the media industry and its increasing omnipresence in the lives of people, and thus for its general popularity. This indicates that the media (and journalism) have lost their status as being primarily sources of information and enlightenment, and are becoming entertainment and little else.

In the USA, the mistrust and criticism of the media (Jones, 2004) have reached such proportions that it is referred to as "the war on journalism" (Healey, 2005). Against the background of the media's coverage of 9/11 and the consequent war in Iraq, American audiences increasingly see and experience journalism as an instrument to nudge people towards some version of "right thinking". Journalism, it is argued, is sliding back into blatant propaganda (Herman & Chomsky, 2002).

Obviously, criticism such as the above needs to be seen in context. A problem is that generalisations flourish. Distinctions are seldom made between different media, between different journalistic genres and different journalists. The exceptional is seldom recognised. The benefits gained from daily and on-going information provided by journalists are disregarded and the cardinal role of the media in democracy is overlooked until it is threatened.

However, this should not deter academics in the field of journalism to ask the critical question: What has all the teaching of journalism helped if the criticism against the quality and nature thereof is more or less the same as it was when journalism studies started in the late nineteenth century? Have all the teaching and education failed journalism and, if so, why? How can this criticism form the basis of journalism education?

### **Early academic criticism**

The criticism above is, however, nothing new. In Grecian and Roman times it revolved around the ability (or not) of “messengers” to master the art of persuasion (rhetoric and logic) through language and the ability to relate a theme or idea in an effort to convince the audience. Early “journalists” who did not master this art were seen to be second class citizens (Schramm, 1988).

In the Middle Ages, criticism was directed at the so-called “bard” (poet, singer), and in the case of journalism at the messenger. Such a messenger had to translate daily events and political and diplomatic developments accurately, communicating them in spoken form in the town squares to the public and in person to the landowners and rulers. Those, often the majority of the messengers, who were found by the rulers and landowners to be misleading and not masters of the word, were branded as vagabonds. For this reason, the concept “bard” developed a contemptuous connotation leading to, for example, a Scottish ordinance (ca. 1500) that “All vagabundis, fulis, bardis, scudlaris, and siclike idill pepill, sall be brint on the cheek”(Wikipedia, 2005:online).

In more modern times, Søren Kierkegaard continued the criticism when he proclaimed in 1835 (i) that journalism was run by a few talented persons and many incompetent ones; (ii) that despite its claims to liberate people, the opposite is achieved; (iii) that journalism, in its drive to level and expose people, is nothing but chattering, superficial, formless philandering; (iv) that journalists’ so-called reflection (in-depth and interpretive reporting) is caricaturist, periodic, taking and leaving issues without any historical reflection; and, (v) that journalism creates a society in which true knowledge is sacrificed to what was increasingly becoming a society of how-to-do-manuals (Satoshi, 2001). One can argue that Kierkegaard’s five points of criticism are still the essence of contemporary criticism against journalism, including academic criticism (see above)

Kierkegaard was among those philosophers and social critics, such as John Stuart Mill, de Tocqueville and Ortega y Gasset, who laid the foundation for late nineteenth and early twentieth century criticism of mass society and mass culture, and the role of journalism and the media therein. They shared a concern that, under the guise of liberating the masses and the privilege of freedom of expression, journalists were contributing to a mass society in which a majority would gain power without having the necessary intellectual, social and cultural skills to lead the masses. They saw the media as a threat to democratic institutions, to elite cultural values and as contributing to the reduction of the autonomy of the “best people” (Ortega, 1930).

Other examples of this kind of criticism include F. R. Leavis’s reference to films, newspapers and publicity in all its forms as “offering satisfaction at the lowest level”, and Friedrich Nietzsche’s view that “the rabble vomit their bile and call it a newspaper” (Carey, 1996).

Although more analytically and theoretically grounded, this kind of criticism continued during the previous century and continues today. It has developed into, amongst others, the structured and systematic critical media theories of Marxist and neo-Marxist orientation, and the cultural theories of the Frankfurt and

Birmingham schools, with their major focus on how the media are used to shape identities, dictate what is eventually accepted as true, normal or acceptable within a culture, and how it offers privileges to some while marginalising others.

### **Contemporary criticism**

There are currently two main streams of criticism, namely (i) critical political economy, in which the emphasis is on what is perceived to be a conspiracy between the media, politics and capital, and (ii) professional criticism, which focuses on institutional and professional practices.

#### *The criticism of critical political economy*

In critical political economy (Garnham, 1979; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Mattellart, 1992; McChesney & Nichols, 2002, to mention but a few key authors in the field), it is argued that corporate ownership of media production and distribution affects society negatively. Journalistic practices and media policy (including ownership policy) can be seen as a deliberate and ideological misuse of economic and political power to create a false consciousness and awareness, and thus deterring true democracy. The underlying proposition in political economy is that the economic and political control of the media determine the content and thus the ideological power of the media. In order to understand such power, one should start with a concrete description and analysis of media ownership. From thereon one can prove how such ownership impacts on media content. It is argued that, despite their claim of being objective messengers and providers of “innocent entertainment”, media owners and their workers (journalists) are primarily interested in financial profits, and the emphasis is therefore on maximising audiences and revenues. The primary interest is to uphold the principles of the capitalist mode of production in order to guarantee profit.

Critical political economy thus argues that the media and the way media markets and workers operate are part of the capitalist economic system, with close links to the political system in a country. The predominant character of what the media as a cultural industry produce (information, entertainment and advertisements) can be accounted for by the exchange value of different kinds of content under conditions of pressure to expand markets, and by the underlying economic interest of media owners and decision-makers.

From a more philosophical communication perspective, but in support of the criticism of the political economy paradigm, the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1979) and a school of Habermasian theorists argue that the modern market-oriented media undermine the idea and ideal of the public sphere as a place for rational debate, where consensus can be reached on the basis of which rational decision and action can be taken. As a public communication medium, the media and journalism tend to disrupt instead of contribute constructively to social development.

A rather gloomy picture unfolds as author after author questions the quality and value of the information and knowledge provided by the media, especially under the pressure of corporatisation, marketisation and, eventually, commercialisation.

Despite technological advances (increased access and interactivity, amongst others), the question remains whether journalism as a political force is independent enough, not only of political but also of commercial pressure, to achieve the journalistic ideals of political debate, namely representation, exposure and the mobilisation of citizens to participate in public life (McNair & Hibberd, 2003:272-283).

As far as the provision of entertainment and education are concerned, it is acknowledged that the supply of popular and popularised knowledge via a variety of popular print and broadcast genres is an important constituting and formative element of the public sphere (Fourie, 2001:277-288; Thomass, 2003:33). Yet, it is questioned whether journalism can achieve this when it has to sacrifice its integrity under the pressure of increased competition and commercialisation.

### *Criticism against the profession*

The second branch of contemporary criticism, namely professional criticism, sees the shortcomings of journalism as being intrinsic to the ways in which journalism is produced. The criticism involves concerns about professional codes and practices. Numerous authors concern themselves with this issue. Here, only aspects of the criticism of the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1993; 1998) and the British political scientist Kenneth Minogue (2005) are cited as examples. Bourdieu argued that the shortcomings of the profession stem from *structural limitations*, such as (i) economic “censorship” (the fact that journalism is practised as a business with questions about costs and profits dictating content); (ii) the limitations of time, space and format; and (iii) pace, work routines and conditions of labour. These structural limitations dictate how and why news events are covered (Galtung & Rouge, 1965).

Bourdieu argued that the media and journalists, being increasingly heterogeneous in nature, are losing control from within and are subject to external forces, especially the commercial pressures in a consolidating globalising industry. This, according to **him**, causes “symbolic violence”, which occurs internally as journalists become involved in self-censorship without realising it and also externally as the news industries produce conditions of what Bourdieu considers to be demagoguery (Barnhurst, 2005:1). The biggest problem is that journalists have no system of internal control (such as peer review), or they have lost it under the pressure of the economically determined structural limitations of the profession. Structural limitations, he concludes, do not induce moral, ethical and thoughtful reflection. According to Bourdieu, the structure of the news business/news *as a business* is contrary to moral and ethical conduct.

What concerns him most is that these limitations appear to journalists as common sense or as the unquestioned rules of the profession. These rules or professional codes give rise to self-censorship and underlie journalists’ assumptions about what is in the public’s so-called, but untested, interest (Barnhurst, 2005).

With the publication of his lectures on journalism in 1996, Bourdieu caused a stir amongst European journalists. He summarised decades of intellectual



complaints about how the structural limitations of the profession have lowered journalistic standards and quality, and claimed that it will continue to do so unless journalists themselves question the structures and practices of their profession. He argued that, “while journalists pride themselves on isolating the truth that hides behind the rhetoric of governments and the business elite, in the end it accomplishes the exact opposite. Instead of exposing the way things work, journalism mystifies them further. Because it claims to be showing us the truth, it manages to transform its myths into reality” (Szeman, 2005a:1-2).

Turning the focus on journalists themselves, Kenneth Minogue (2005) refers to the structural limitations of the profession as the “corrupting devices of journalism”. The structural limitations cause journalists to (i) become hopelessly addicted to pointless puns (especially in headlines); (ii) treat politics as if it were a sports contest; and (iii) turn rivalries into “rows” by talking up competition into conflict and hatred.

Minogue argues that, since journalism has moved from reporting to interpreting, from simply reflecting events to creating events, it has become something to be *constructed*. Construction primarily depends on the prior selection of the reporter. Selection and the power to select “transformed the life of your humble journalist. He, or she, became no longer a mere agent of transmission, transferring facts to print. The journalist became an actual creator of news” (Minogue, 2005:7).

From this position of power, journalists adopted a stance of blind and unquestioned oppositionality, negativity and a universal scepticism towards everything else that is powerful, established and superior. At the same time, they adopted a kind of meta-moralistic addiction to tolerance, secularism and anti-discrimination (Minogue, 2005:12), turning journalism into outright liberal advocacy. This has become an ideology in itself, the so-called “journalistic ideology”. However, journalistic ideology has become so transparent, predictable and repellent that it has caused journalism to lose its integrity and legitimacy as an independent and objective window on the world in the eyes of the public. In short, people “see through” the media and read “between the lines”.

Both of these authors concern themselves with journalism’s mundane and ephemeral character and thus its lack of intellectual depth. Minogue argues that real scholarship implies the exploration of reality or an aspect thereof in a focussed, in-depth and analytical way. This is opposed to journalists’ “popularisation of a subject and their thinking that they can master the subject in question without a lengthy apprenticeship. From this follows the true intellectual’s deeply entrenched disdain for journalism and journalists” (Minogue, 2005:4).

To create the impression of intellectualism and balanced representation of information, journalists often try to address this lack of intellectual depth by relying on the opinions of intellectuals and academics (closely selected and often preferred in terms of their support of the views and ideology of a journalist). In the case of television, Bourdieu (1998) refers to this as the “talking heads with PhDs” used by the media to provide so-called context and historicity. In the long term, he argues, this has a negative effect on the intellectual endeavour itself, in the sense that for intellectuals visibility in the media has become equally important to score

quick points - points that would normally have required years of patient labour and peer review to accumulate insight (Barnhurst, 2005). Critical in-depth analysis has been replaced by “fast thinking”, which is a trademark of journalists but not of the intellectual. Media critics such as Postman (1993) refer to “fast thinking” academics as the new branch of “media professors” and another example of how the “fast thinking” of the media has infiltrated even contemporary intellectual life.

If all is so bad, then why should intellectuals concern themselves with journalism at all, as many philosopher throughout history, from Adorno to Derrida (to mention two modern philosophers who have concerned themselves in one way or another with the media), have done? Bourdieu argues that it is because they acknowledge the power of journalism in present-day society. Journalism is, after all, contemporary man’s main lens on the social world. Through news, humans understand their social space and get information essential to navigate it (Szeman, 2005a). Yet, under the guise of objectivity, the daily news offers a limited, highly suspect view of the world brought about by three articulations of meaning: the choice or selection of topics, the treatment of topics and the (re)presentation of topics, all against the background of preferred ideological understandings (Fourie, 2001). Furthermore, journalism focuses on “breaking events”, taking and leaving it in bits and pieces. Often, events are even created. The main aim is to capture audiences’ interest. Events seem to have no antecedents or consequences, no links to larger and more persistent histories and structures (Szeman, 2005a). For the intellectual mind, this is unacceptable and stands proof of journalism’s lack of intellectual depth. Instead of depending on “talking PhDs” for contexts and historicity, journalists themselves should provide the intellectual context and depth. Journalists who are able to do so are rare and often are not the products of journalism studies, but rather of political science, history, philosophy and literature studies.

The criticism referred to above lends itself ideally as a point of departure in journalism studies. Probing this criticism could be done in much the same way that a litterateur would analyse the work of an author, an oeuvre, or a genre by describing, interpreting and evaluating the work from a given perspective. For example, political-economic criticism could be analysed to cast light on how mainstream market-oriented journalism could be turned back into a cultural form of expression.

If the criticism that journalism lacks intellectual depth has its origin in the entrenched structural limitations of (market-oriented) professional practices, then the question that needs to be asked and researched in journalism studies should be, How can future journalists be equipped with the necessary knowledge to challenge entrenched professional practices in order to raise the intellectual standard of journalism? A possible way of doing this and of using the criticism against journalism as a point of departure is suggested in the next section.

## Adopting a more fundamental approach

Journalism schools and journalists themselves are aware of the criticism referred to above and respond to it in a number of ways. Various research articles on curriculum development published over a lengthy period of time in key research journals such as *Journalism Gazette*, *Journalism Studies*, *Journalism Studies Review* and, in South Africa, *Ecquid Novi* can be cited as proof of this awareness.

In the USA, some of the measures being taken are, for example, referred to in a “manifesto” published in 2000 by New York University’s Mitchell Stephens (2005) in the *Columbia Journalism Review*. According to him, this “manifesto” has caused a revolution in thinking about journalism education in the United States and has contributed, amongst other initiatives, to the introduction of the following:

- portfolio approaches
- partnerships between journalism schools and professional news organisations
- experimentation with methods of expanding the focus and stylistic range of journalism
- in-depth study by students of subjects upon which they report
- a move beyond teaching the basics of journalism
- a growing acknowledgement by journalism lecturers themselves that journalism programmes are too professionally orientated
- research towards the development of criteria for the qualitative assessment of journalistic output and for a peer review system by journalists and editorial boards, instead of relying only on quantitative circulation and rating figures which measure popularity and nothing else
- an increased focus on alternative media and genres such as “civic journalism”

Similar developments are taking place in journalism departments at South African universities and were referred to at the Rhodes colloquium.

However, the question remains whether measures such as these go far and deep enough in terms of addressing the bottom-line of the criticism that journalism lacks intellectual depth, that it is still too focused on skills and techniques, and that it is too much under the corporate pressure of content providers (the media itself), instead of giving future journalists the intellectual skills that will allow them to question, revise and experiment with the skills and techniques, and to address the criticism against journalism.

The challenge for journalism studies is thus to turn its focus on the thinking of journalists - to train and educate the journalistic mind towards a critical understanding of the profession and its role in the world and as a part of humanity. If this could become the focus of journalism studies, then it will be in line with the idea and ideals of a liberal education. The aim of such an education is to provide knowledge about a subject and the intellectual skills to understand the subject, rather than solely occupational or professional skills. In the sense of the Enlightenment, its ideal is to liberate the mind by freeing it from prejudices and unjustified assumptions. For Bourdieu (1998), as referred to above, intellectual

skills should precede professional skills, and will provide the means to challenge the structural limitations of the profession from a moral and ethical point of view.

In the debates on whether journalism studies should focus on intellectual skills rather than on professional skills, an argument often raised is that, apart from their journalism studies, journalism students usually have the opportunity to study liberal arts subjects such as philosophy, history, languages and literature in addition to, but simultaneous with, journalism studies as part of their undergraduate curriculum. It is then assumed that the intellectual skills necessary for a journalist would be acquired through those “other” subjects. Another argument is that journalism is frequently offered only at a postgraduate level to students who have already been exposed to liberal arts subjects at undergraduate level. The problem with these arguments is that students are often not able to make the necessary links between their subjects at undergraduate level and between undergraduate and postgraduate levels. What exacerbates the problem is that traditional liberal arts subjects are themselves under the pressure of the massification and marketisation of higher education, and are thus often accused of having lost their focus on intellectual skills (Bloom, 1988; Gibbon, 2005).

Even though students may have contact with liberal arts subjects, the argument here is nevertheless that journalism subjects should themselves be more focused on those intellectual skills necessary to question, from a critical, evaluative and analytical perspective, journalistic practices and their impact on the world and on humanity, even if it implies the introduction of new journalism topics. The intellectual skills acquired through these topics could then be applied to those topics in journalism studies that focus on practical skills.

Depending on how they are taught, topics that lend them well to the teaching of intellectual skills and to a critical analysis of the criticism against journalism are, for example, the following:

- the philosophy and ethics of journalism *based* on an understanding of philosophical matters, such as what is reality, truth, knowledge and meaning, and the *relevance* of this for understanding journalism and journalistic practices;
- journalistic logic, with the emphasis on reasoning, argumentation and validity of inference, and the *relevance* of such an understanding for journalism and journalistic practice;
- journalistic discourse, with an emphasis on an understanding of the power of language, language as a symbolic form, language as metaphor, language and ideology, and the *relevance* of such an understanding for journalism and journalists;
- journalistic rhetoric, with an emphasis on rhetorical skills and journalism’s power or lack of power to inform, educate, convince and persuade;
- the history of journalism, with an emphasis on the intellectual skills of contextualisation and historical thinking;
- the psychology of journalism, including a study of the behaviour of the journalist and the mental processes that underlie journalistic behaviour,

perception, memory, attention, knowledge representation, reasoning, creativity and problem solving;

- critical practice, using the hermeneutic skills of description, interpretation and evaluation for the reading and analysis of seminal examples of good journalism and the work of renowned journalists; and
- media institutional analysis, using the critical and empirical methods of sociology and communication, media and cultural studies towards not only a critique of the media as an institution, but also towards a better understanding of the media as an institution, the reasons for its practices and policies, and how these practices and policies can be changed in favour of an improved institution.

In South Africa, there is the additional need and challenge to focus on journalism from an African epistemological perspective. This could become a core module, research focus and an intellectual foundation of South African journalism studies. It implies an increased focus on the history, philosophy, symbolic forms, culture(s), achievements and needs of Africa, but also a “decolonising of the mind” (Maluleke, 2005; Mangu, 2005), a questioning of Western epistemology(ies) as the foundation of thinking about reality or an aspect thereof.

South African journalism studies is still firmly grounded in a Western epistemology influenced by the Enlightenment with its emphasis on cause and effects, on observable and measurable facts, and on individualism. Such thinking and theories do not necessarily provide for an understanding of the deep-rooted spirituality of African culture(s) and ethics. The rethinking of journalism from an African perspective could take, for example, the notion of *ubuntu* as an African worldview and life orientation as a point of departure (Christians, 2004; Nussbaum, 2003).

*Ubuntuism*, with its emphasis on collectivism, sharing, community, participation in a collective life and on collective morality, may therefore be investigated as a foundation for an African conceptualisation of key journalistic topics and concepts in normative media theory and ethics. Key questions that could be addressed are, for example, (i) How can concepts such as “freedom of expression”, “public”, “publicity”, “representation”, “objectivity”, “news values”, “newsworthiness” and “ethics” be reinterpreted in terms of *ubuntuism*? (ii) How can such interpretations be further researched to form, if at all possible, the foundation of African-conceptualised media and journalistic practices? In short, “decolonising” the mind is in itself an intellectual activity through which both journalism educators, researchers and students can gain intellectually.

## Conclusion

The above overview makes no pretension to being comprehensive, complete or an in-depth analysis of the criticism. The purpose of the overview is to suggest how criticism could be used as a point of departure in journalism education and how, by focussing on the criticism, students could be equipped with intellectual skills similar to those in traditional liberal arts subjects. In this regard, journalism studies need not differ in its approach from history of art, literature, drama and film

studies, which are all symbolic forms of expression, with journalism being probably the most popular in that it presents us with a structured and coded representation of the world and its people. Focussing on the criticism and on intellectual skills will have the further advantage of raising the academic standing of journalism studies as a critical, evaluative, interpretative and inquisitive discipline.

The article also does not provide a comprehensive list of all the topics that lend themselves to the approach suggested above. An elaboration is needed and remains the task of further research, which will probably involve the development of new courses based on extensive research. What the list tries to show is that journalism topics can be offered in such a way as to focus on the development of intellectual skills and a thorough understanding of journalism and the journalist's work. Although such an approach may already be in practice at certain institutions, the literature on journalism education and the thrust of discussions at symposia and colloquiums still centre too much around skills and are still too occupied with the dos and don'ts of the profession as dictated by journalism practice without probing these practices from a critical perspective. Suffice it to say that an education focused on the development of intellectual skills such as reasoning, argumentation, rhetoric, contextualisation, historical thinking, description, interpretation and evaluation would contribute to understanding and discrediting the negative stereotypes associated with journalism, to engaging with and redressing the criticism against journalism and journalists, and to raising the intellectual depth of journalism studies. The focus on professional skills such as writing, interviewing, editing and so on could follow on that.

The new media environment - characterised by the convergence of media technologies, new channels of communication that emphasise a multi-media approach and interactivity, the rise of niche markets and new genres that blur the traditional distinction between information and entertainment and between traditional journalism and popular genres, which together constitute a new politics of popular culture - calls for a new approach to journalism studies. In such an overpowering and constantly changing and challenging environment in which the emphasis is too often on quantity to the detriment of quality, the need to think about journalists' thinking and to equip future journalists with thinking skills rather than with how-to-do-it skills, has become a prerequisite for future quality journalism.

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