EDUCATING THE EDUCATORS: AN EVALUATION OF THE PREPAREDNESS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN LOS BAÑOS, LAGUNA, PHILIPPINES FOR JOURNALISM INSTRUCTION AND INTERNET-MEDIATED LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Teaching journalism requires an expertise in data-gathering methods (for content), the distinct stylistic attributes of news (for form), and analysis of contemporary issues (for context). With the nuances of journalistic form and the evolving requirements of context, the pedagogy of journalism makes a tricky case especially when the students are as young as elementary pupils learning English as a second language. The challenge becomes more difficult to overcome if the teachers assigned as journalism trainers are not equipped with the mastery of journalistic style and methods. Such is the case in the primary schools in the district of Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines, and possibly in many elementary schools in the country. This study 1) describes how the internet has dramatically transformed the practice and pedagogy of journalism in the Philippines, 2) critically assesses the preparedness of journalism teachers in training elementary students in Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines, and 3) examines the preparedness of teachers for internet-mediated journalism training. It is the first of an ongoing four-part study, which will consist of the following:

1. Assessment of the current pedagogy of journalism in elementary schools in Los Baños and introduction of distance learning as a tool in improving the quality of instruction
2. Development of a more comprehensive and institutionalized e-learning system for elementary journalism
3. Monitoring and evaluation of the e-learning system
4. Multi-location testing of the e-learning system

Based on the 1) responses in the surveys and in-depth interviews with the teachers and 2) evaluation of classroom lectures, the crux of the problem lies not on the teachers’ instructional communication strategies, but on their mastery of journalism as a practice. The dilemma was further aggravated by educational policy on journalism pedagogy. The participation of teachers and the performance of those who are able to participate indicate that the institution of e-learning as a tool in improving the quality of journalism instruction in elementary schools requires strong government support and reconfiguration of educational policy.

KEYWORDS: English as second language, Journalism, Text analysis

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Teaching journalism as both a science and an art requires a distinct set of skills and values from the instructor. The dynamics of form and content are best seen in the practice of journalism; a good journalistic piece, say, a news article, does not rely solely on the presentation (excellent diction and structure). The data has to be compelling, and made more compelling through command of language.

Therefore, a journalism teacher should have expertise in gathering data (for content) and packaging the information (form). The direction of data-gathering and the strategies of packaging the information as a journalistic piece are governed by a third defining attribute: awareness of context. Context is a term used broadly, and even loosely, across fields in language and genres in literature, but the commonalities lie on three ideas: 1) historicizing (what happened before?), 2) illustrating the significance (the "so what"), and 3) understanding the socio-political conditions around the subject of the journalistic text (What are the interests of the audience in this place and at this point in time? Who are the authorities? The underdogs? We are in the middle of what?).

These requisites of journalism instruction signify the nature of journalistic writing (which comprises bulk of journalism as a craft) as process-oriented, concise, accurate, and fair (but can never be perfectly objective). One cannot produce an effective journalistic text in a rush, two-hour sit-down activity; the writer has to go through planning, data-gathering, writing, and revising.

Moreover, writers of journalistic texts, as a genre distinct from academic texts and literary texts, bear the burden of political correctness and strive always to be almost neutral, (an individual cannot be entirely unbiased). For example, a journalist must carefully choose his or her words, such that “said” is preferred over “argued” or “exclaimed”, and loaded words, even if uttered verbatim, are replaced by words that minimize potential damage to persons involved.

With the nuances of language and slippery (and evolving) requirements of context, the pedagogy of journalism gives rise to numerous delicate and problematic tasks, especially in a situation where the learners are as young as elementary students. In this paper, I will discuss 1) how the internet transformed the practice and pedagogy of journalism in the country (instruction in the internet or internet alongside classroom instruction?), 2) the nature of journalism as an extra-curricular field in Philippine elementary education, and 3) the preparedness of teachers in teaching journalism vis-à-vis the educational policy on teaching journalism in public elementary schools.

For a case study, I evaluated the performance of journalism trainers in teaching journalism, particularly journalistic writing in English, to students in the town of Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines. The assessment led to the conclusion that the instructional communication strategies of the teachers are not the problem in terms of effectiveness, but their lack of mastery of journalism as a practice (I will discuss this in depth in the subsequent sections of this paper).

After evaluating the situation of journalism teaching in Los Baños, I arranged online writing tutorials on newswriting, considered a core component of journalism, and observed the development (or lack thereof) in the writing skills of the teachers as the tutorials continue. Through this method, I explored the possible role that e-learning can play in developing the journalistic skills of the teachers and improving their quality of instruction.

This paper is the first part of an ongoing four-part study, which will consist of the following:
1. Assessment of the current pedagogy of journalism in elementary schools in Los Baños and introduction of distance learning as a tool in improving the quality of instruction
2. Development of a more comprehensive and institutionalized e-learning system for elementary journalism
3. Monitoring and evaluation of the e-learning system
4. Multi-location testing of the e-learning system

The objective of the study is to provide 1) basis for a review and revision of educational policy on journalism teaching in primary education, and 2) grounding for an institutionalized and long-term e-learning system and curriculum for improvement of journalism instruction.

**Review Of Related Literature**

FROM “HOT OFF THE PRESSES” TO REAL-TIME: HOW THE INTERNET CHANGED THE PRACTICE AND PEDAGOGY OF JOURNALISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

Much has been said about the fact that the internet transformed the dimensions of time and space, radically reducing both such that media has become nothing less “pervasive and ubiquitous” (Deuze, 2012). For Harvey (1990), the development of and democratization of access to the internet as a technology, and the hardware or infrastructure that work with it, changed the “human experience of space-time relationships” and even people’s “sense of reality itself” (Harvey, 1990, cited by Deuze, 2012).

**Though beginnings**

The metamorphosis of space-time relationships in journalism (relationships referring to relationships between space and time, relationships between journalist and audience, and relationships among the audience) are apparent in 1) data-gathering for content, and 2) distribution and consumption of content. For instance, in the online newsroom, an article published an hour after the event is already considered late, a feat deemed impossible by the journalists of the ‘80s or even ‘90s. For those who have access to the internet and has the necessary equipment (laptop or smartphone), a civil war in Syria or an airstrike in Gaza happens like it was just around the block.

The transformation of space-time relationships, however, did not happen as swiftly as a mouse click. In fact, it has been 30 years since the internet was introduced in the Philippines, but a significant portion of the population still has no access to the medium. The country was able to acquire a permanent public internet connection only in 1994 (Contreras, Maslog, 2006), lagging behind other countries. At that time, only a privileged few were able to use the internet because the necessary infrastructure was lacking or even non-existent in many areas. For one, only a limited number of telephone lines function in the National Capital Region at the time when internet service is coursured through the landline cables (dial-up). Consequently, online news publishing then was not seen as an “economically viable medium”, and releasing an online edition was done “only at the side” to promote the print version (Contreras and Maslog, 2006).

In 1995, the national daily *The Manila Times* published an online edition, the first broadsheet to
do so. Other newspapers followed suit, and in 1998, a significant number of news publications went online (Contreras, Maslog, 2006). The year was the turning point for the profitability of the online medium, especially after the 1997 economic crisis. Publishers and advertisers shifted to online advertising as the “cheaper alternative” (Datinguinoo, 1999, cited by Contreras, Maslog, 2006) to print and television advertising.

Now, the country has more than 30 online news publications, with some getting as much as 300,000 hits a day on regular days (Contreras, Maslog, 2006).

The new landscape

While the print major dailies and the tabloids still thrive in the country, publishers have installed adaptive measures amid the emergence of web-based news outfits and the popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, which themselves have become venues of news circulation. Broadsheets such as the Philippine Daily Inquirer, which has the biggest circulation among tabloids at 866,000 readers per day (The Nielsen Co., 2011, cited by Inquirer.net, 2012), and major television networks like GMA and ABS-CBN, manage their respective online news sites. An interesting observation is that the online sites of the broadsheets publish news as soon as it happens, but the news articles in the hard copy are uploaded only after the paper was released (so essentially, a degree of sanctity is still accorded to the print version).

Editors of print newspapers now invest in the “angle” and volume of data in their articles, inasmuch as print could not compete with online journalism in terms of speed. Some publishers are exploring the synergy of both the online and print components (A case in point would be the inclusion of a QR code in the print copy; the user scans the code and will be taken to the e-version of the photo published in the newspaper or to the paper as a whole). Journalists of this day and age put premium on the brevity of content and/or the visual presentation of content, thus the popularity of “infographics” in online news, a requirement created by the attributes of the i-gen (internet generation).

Dy (2013) described the learning style and media consumption of the i-gen as “immediate”, “experiential”, and “social”, so the journalist must digest the content and transcode it into a form that can be speedily consumed. This pursuit for “instant gratification” and constant multi-tasking characterize the i-gen, said Lee-Chua (2012). Lee-Chua even cited her students as example; “slow” was the term they used to describe the late Michael Jackson, whose dance movement is already considered as “hyper-energized” in his time.

The electronic trail

Alongside the “hyper-acceleration” in the distribution and consumption of media, internet-based data-gathering methods were also developed. Sheila Coronel, an award-winning Filipino journalist, acknowledged the fact that the internet, “with its vast resources, is a mine of information” (2012). She added that “familiarity with online research techniques is now a prerequisite for investigations”.

The anonymity and time-space compression in the internet have offered sources the convenience and the assurance of safety when communicating with journalists. Journalists use e-mail services and even social networking sites to correspond with government functionaries whose work schedules make face-to-face interviews almost impossible. Individuals who prefer anonymity
due to fear of retribution also use the internet to provide crucial information and at the same time mask their identity (it is still the journalist’s duty to confirm the information). Government offices, including the office of the president, and institutions such as the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, are now maintaining Twitter accounts for information dissemination. Journalists “follow” key accounts and “influencers”, or individuals with a huge following in social networking sites, to keep abreast of developments and cover breaking news. To track online developments, they familiarize themselves with the hashtags set by prominent groups or media networks for a particular occasion (e.g. #GlendaPH in the case of the onslaught of Typhoon Rammasun in the Philippines).

The shift to the mobile web

Internet usage is increasingly becoming a necessity in the urban space, and Filipino consumers started to seek 24/7 connection in 2011 (Nielsen, 2014). Internet penetration in the last four years doubled from 27 percent in 2010 to 52 percent in 2014 (Nielsen, 2014). The game changer in the access to the internet is the surge in smartphone usage (smartphones universally defined as a phone with advanced connectivity compared with the earlier units and are able to synchronize with online services). While the use of desktop for internet dwindled significantly from 63 percent in 2013 to 35 percent in the first quarter of 2014, the use of mobile devices for browsing increased to 35 percent.

“As mobile penetration rises and getting online becomes easier than ever, consumers are staying online for increasing lengths of time” said Stuart Jamieson, managing director of Nielsen Philippines (Nielsen, 2014). The revolutionary increase in internet access and mobile web usage led to greater investment in real-time coverage (micro-updates in Twitter released by the minute) and mobile-based platforms (news apps of television networks and other media outfits).

Despite the rise in internet accessibility, one cannot readily label the Philippines as a “wired society”. FREEDOM AND CONSTANCY: THE INTERNET AND THE PEDAGOGY OF JOURNALISM

For Filipino journalist and educator Danilo Arao (2014), the internet has provided “a more convenient way for journalists to communicate with their sources who are “net-savvy”. Arao made a critical qualification: sources who are net-savvy. The presence of this qualification speaks of a truth in Philippine society: not everyone has access to internet and not everyone is computer-literate or “internet-literate”. The medium remains inaccessible to about half of the population, particularly in the far-flung countryside areas (Nielsen, 2014).

However, in some documented cases of internet-mediated journalism teaching (both as supplement to or supplemented by face-to-face meetings and purely online) in the Philippines², participants were mostly college students residing in the urban areas and belonging to the middle to upper class socio-economic classes. Availability of connection or hardware was not so much a problem as curriculum planning, assessment, and plagiarism checking. Premier universities in the Philippines have been offering internet-assisted and online journalism

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² As documented by the Konrad Adenauer Center for Journalism or CFJ of Ateneo de Manila University.
courses as early as 2001. New courses such as Computer-Assisted Reporting and Online Journalism were introduced. “Many journalism courses also adopted a multi-media approach to teaching, realizing that the manner of reportage across different media could differ even if the professional and ethical standards remain the same”, explained Arao.

One of the institutions of journalism teaching in the Philippines, Konrad Adenauer Center for Journalism (CFJ) of Ateneo de Manila University, compiled what it deems as “best practices” in teaching journalism through online courses. The CFJ, an institution offering online masteral programs to professional journalists in Asia, noted that the “obvious challenges” in this mode of teaching include:

1. The difficulty in creating a “mentor-apprentice” bond formed in a one-on-one writing tutorial (King, 2005)
2. Lack of “live feedback” (Wong, 2005), and consequently, the lack of the intensity of face-to-face instruction (King, 2005)
3. More opportunities for online plagiarism
4. Lack of bandwidth for multi-media presentations (Wong, 2005)
5. Cultural diversity in skills-based courses

But the debate on whether or not online learning is as effective as traditional classroom instruction is already cliché because educators are starting to recognize the uniqueness of the medium with all its limitations and potential (Escala, 2005). The discourse has transcended the “virtual classroom vs traditional classroom” debate, and takes off from the fact that online learning fits in the needs of special groups like professionals as students and educators. The discourse now focuses on the exemplary practices that overcome the limitations that have long been identified. A survey of these practices provided me with ideas in designing an e-learning curriculum in journalism for elementary school teachers. One of the instructors in CFJ, Elliot King (2005), observed that communication via asynchronous technologies (e.g. email correspondence) can increase the frequency of interaction between teacher and student, and possibly simulate the mentorship so crucial in teaching journalism. The problem with this method is that it is “labor intensive”.

King (2005) and Wong (2005) emphasized that collaborative learning among students is a prerequisite in simulating classroom discussion. Students can post comments on materials and more important, on the outputs of their classmates in a discussion board or forum. Mangahas (2005) believed that “constancy” is key to successful online learning; teachers should constantly observe and evaluate the feedback of students (and stimulate the discussion when students are not yet sharing their insights). Although there are no regular face-to-face meetings, the e-learning instructor has to allot more time and effort for consultations and evaluation in a more intensive pace (Wong, 2005).

Aside from the challenge to simulate mentorship, online instructors bear the burden of creating an alternation of feedback and revision through workshops. Workshops are an indispensable pedagogical method in writing because skills are strengthened through practice. Sunico (2005), for example, conducted a writing workshop online with his students, but only after he studied the background of the participants through survey questionnaires. Based on the data from the
questionnaires, he created a tailor-fit online writing curriculum. The practices highlighted one of the distinct attributes of online learning: student-centered. Online learning caters best to the working professionals who do not have the means and the time for regular face-to-face class meetings. The set-up gives them the freedom to accomplish academic tasks without interfering in their work schedules. However, although the primary problem in teaching journalism online is the difficulty of establishing the bond between teacher and student (the bond that is crucial in skills development), hardware-based limitations still pose a dilemma even in online universities in the country. According to Wong (2005), bandwidth limitations and internet speed are often the obstacles in the presentation of content. In online learning, content is shared mostly as texts (discussion board posts, comments on outputs, soft copy of reading materials, among others) because multi-media content and videos or mini-lectures require more than optimal bandwidth and internet speed. In this case, if enough preparation is devoted to the course, mini-lectures and other multi-media content can be stored in a CD for the student’s offline use (provided the student receives the CD).

In the case of many primary schools and even tertiary schools in the countryside, the problem remains to be infrastructure limitations (the lack of computers for instance) and the lack of reliable internet connection, both primarily due to insufficient funding. The Department of Education (DepEd), the government agency overseeing the affairs of Philippine basic education, developed the five-year Information and Communication Technology for Education (ICT4E) Strategy Plan with the aim to “integrate information and communication technology into every school’s curricula, develop programs, establish infrastructure” and increase teachers’ computer and internet literacy (Martinez-Castillo, 2011). However, the student-computer and teacher-computer ratios and teachers’ computer and internet literacy still pose challenges to the program (Martinez-Castillo, 2011). Computer and internet literacy is not a requirement for a teacher’s license. The journalism teachers in Los Baños face the very same problem. However, I chose online learning as a tool in improving the journalism teachers’ skills and quality of instruction because their 40-hours-a-week work schedule (from 7 a.m. or 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. or 5 p.m.) does not allow frequent classroom meetings. Moreover, these meetings require financial resources and time investment that teachers find it difficult to afford. Hence, distance learning is a reasonable option, provided there is accurate analysis of the status quo and background of participants. This analysis, which covers an assessment of the teachers’ knowledge and skills in teaching elementary journalism, determined the choice of online learning practices that I employed in the evaluation of teachers’ preparedness for internet-mediated learning. Based on the results of the skills assessment (I will discuss this in the later part of this paper, under the discussion of findings) in the pre-online classes, majority of the teachers could not write a news article, an alarming situation because news writing is a core component of journalism. Many of them could not construct an English composition with little to no grammatical error. Their understanding of journalism as a practice remains at the rudimentary level.

Given the skills level and infrastructure limitations, I chose to design the short e-training course as a workshop (teachers produce their own texts, I provide feedback, and they revise their texts according to my comments until they create an acceptable news article in English) facilitated via email. The teachers’ access to the internet was a primary factor to consider; I had to pick an internet medium which they can access despite very limited bandwidth, limited hours for
usage, and limited internet literacy, so I conducted the workshop through email correspondence. However, venues for peer education (chat boards, for instance) will be given emphasis in the second part of the study (development of a more comprehensive and institutionalized e-training curriculum). At this point, many of the teachers are lacking even at the knowledge level objectives (i.e. What is news? What are the characteristics of an effective news lead?), and their feedback on their colleagues’ outputs need to be more substantial.

This study focuses on the 1) evaluation of skills, and 2) preparedness for e-learning as measured partly through the introduction of online journalism workshop. The results of this evaluation will guide the development of the comprehensive e-training course for elementary journalism teachers.

**BAPTISMAL OF FIRE: JOURNALISM AS A FIELD IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION**

The Philippine government institutionalized journalism competitions in the elementary and high school levels in 1991, by virtue of Republic Act (RA) 7079 or “Campus Journalism Act of 1991”. According to RA 7079, the DepEd “shall sponsor periodic competitions, press conferences and training seminars in which student-editors/writers and teacher-adviser of student publications in the elementary, secondary and tertiary levels shall participate”. These competitions begin at the institutional levels and “[culminates] with the holding of the annual national elementary, secondary or tertiary School Press Conferences”.

There are nine categories in each competition, with each category divided into two: English and Filipino, the national language (except the collaborative desktop publishing, in which the school publication group releases a newspaper as a collective entry). All in all, there are 14 categories, and the top seven participants are awarded on stage. The categories are as follows:

- News writing
- Editorial writing
- Copyreading and headline writing
- Feature writing
- Sports writing
- Photojournalism
- Cartooning
- Radio broadcasting
- Collaborative desktop publishing

Each school fields only one student per category, with the exception of radio broadcasting and collaborative desktop publishing (team entry). A student can participate in more than one category.

The top five (four in other areas) winners in each category in the district competition can advance to the higher level, the regional contest. In the journalism competitions, however, the district does not strictly refer to the congressional districts. For instance, all schools in the town of Los Baños compete in the district level, making the town in itself a district.

The top four winners in the regionals are the only ones allowed to proceed to the nationals, such that the last level is a battle among representatives from each of the 17 regions of the Philippines.
The journalism competitions are “a source of prestige” (Pingad, 2014) for school administrators, so much so that teachers earn promotion points when their students land a place in the competition. Under the Results-based Performance Management System of DepEd, teachers fill out the Individual Performance Commitment and Review form, in which they set goals under an indicated time period and performance indicators. The individual goals are patterned after institutional goals and according to the position of the teacher in the school (e.g. school publication adviser). The school principal evaluates the performance of the teacher based on actual results, under which the results of inter-school competitions are indicated as outcomes. Despite the 22 years of the institutionalized competitions, many teachers who were assigned as school publication advisers are left to their own devices (without ample training) in teaching journalism principles. There is no journalism elective in the Basic Education Curriculum, and most teachers rely on seasonal seminars sponsored by the DepEd and non-government organizations. Furthermore, the teachers have to juggle the journalism training with the rest of their academic duties. More often than not, teachers are assigned (they did not volunteer) to handle the school publication (composed of 10 to 30 handpicked students). In many schools, only one teacher handles the entire publication, while in other schools, two to four advisers are assigned.

**Methodology and Framework**

This study is an ongoing project that explores the potential of distance learning (e-learning) in 1) the development of the journalism skills, particularly in writing journalistic articles in English, of elementary teachers in the town of Los Baños, and 2) the improvement of their quality of instruction.

The development of the study is illustrated through the P-Process map:
The P-Process (Health Communication Partnership, 2003) as an operational framework is “systematic and adaptive to changes”. The developers of this framework, which begins with a grounded analysis of the situation, aim to provide communication professionals with a step-by-step guide through which they can design a campaign or a curriculum with measurable impact. The P-Process is in fact a pro-active cycle in which the evaluation of a project or a campaign goes back to the analysis and development of design.

The steps in the P-Process are as follows:

1. Analysis
2. Strategic Design
3. Development and Testing
4. Implementation and Monitoring
5. Evaluation and Re-planning

This part of the study covers the first two steps (analysis and strategic design) and part of the third step (development and testing). I chose to limit my study to the journalism trainers in Los Baños, Laguna, because of the performance of the district representatives in the journalism competitions in the last few years. Teachers reported difficulty in securing a spot in the competition. Last year, for instance, student representatives from Los Baños were able to secure less than 10 spots (out of 98 or seven spots in each of the 14 categories). Based on the number of secured spots, Los Baños is lagging behind the other districts of Laguna.

According to the P-Process, a rigorous study on the situation and the stakeholders should be the
first step (Analysis) in strategic communication. I analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers’ journalism skills through the methods indicated in the process map below:

![Figure 2. Process map](image)

I evaluated the teachers’ outputs (news articles in English) in the pre-online classes and in the duration of the e-training using the three-dimensional grammar framework shown below:

![Figure 3. Three-dimensional grammar framework (Larsen-Freeman, 2006)](image)

In Larsen-Freeman’s three-dimensional view on grammar, the form that the author chooses is a reflection of his or her purpose. The three dimensions (form, meaning, and function) are represented as wedges of a pie, therefore suggesting that the dimensions are not hierarchically arranged. A change in one dimension inevitably leads to a change in the other two. Larsen-
Freeman (2006) posed the progressive notion the act of writing is the act of making choices. For instance, the simple fact of choosing the passive construction of the sentence presupposes a purpose that could possibly be “to conceal the agent of the action”.

The analysis of form is guided by the three-level approach of Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (2008), which consists of the sub-sentential, sentential, and supra-sentential analyses. To comprehensively analyze form, one has to examine the three levels by which grammar operates: choice of words of the author (sub-sentential level), the structure of the sentence (sentential), and the organization and register of the text as a whole (supra-sentential).

In this study, I assessed the preliminary outputs of the participating teachers using the guide question “Were the teachers able to communicate the main idea or the thesis statement through command of language (form)? Why or why not?”

As aid to evaluation, I also used the standards specific to newswriting in English as prescribed by Strunk and White (1979) and Metz (1979), as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-sentential</td>
<td>• Appropriate usage of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Appropriate choice of words (appropriate to news as a text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Political correctness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Economy of words (conciseness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Subject-verb agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Correct tense of the verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentential</td>
<td>• Appropriate (as opposed to grammatically incorrect or awkward) phrasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Completeness of the sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Appropriate choice of sentence structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supra-sentential</td>
<td>• The structure (fluid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Establishing the register of the text as a news article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Presence of necessary data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identifying the “news” in a set of events (angle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conciseness and impact of the lead (first paragraph)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the written output is the ultimate measure of learning in a field such as journalism, I noted the strengths and weaknesses of their outputs as measure of their journalistic writing skills. Their appreciation of journalism (how do they view journalism as a process-oriented and context-based discipline?), meanwhile, was evaluated mostly through in-depth interviews.

As for their methods of evaluation and instruction, I observed their lecture strategies in the district-wide competitions and also asked them to accomplish survey questionnaires. In the questionnaires, they were asked to quantify the importance of the stated criteria in evaluating news articles (5 being “very important” and 1 being “not important at all”). They also indicated their methods of teaching journalism (e.g. lectures or workshops), choosing students to train (e.g. entrance exams), and described their difficulty in teaching.

Also, from the interviews and the questionnaires, I gathered data on the frequency and quality of their internet usage. The evaluation of their outputs and appreciation of journalism as a field
(method to diagnose their skills and knowledge levels) and collection of data on frequency and quality of internet usage were used to construct the e-learning curriculum (pacing and activities). Before planning a more comprehensive e-learning curriculum (in which funding should be taken into account), I conducted writing tutorial sessions through email. Based on the information from interviews and questionnaires, I crafted a schedule with their workload and skill levels taken into consideration, as explained in the previous section. I adopted a workshop style of instruction (alternation of feedback and revision) and observed their development in news writing. This is the development and testing stage.

The tutorial program, which I packaged as “Journalism e-training program for teachers”, followed this schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of days</th>
<th>Purpose and/or activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRE-ONLINE SESSIONS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Day 1 (eight hours) | Pre-online learning sessions  
|                  | Diagnostic measures  
|                  | 1. Newswriting exercise  
|                  | 2. Classroom lecture and discussion on news writing  
|                  | 3. Sharing of teaching experience  |
| Day 2 (eight hours) | Extension of diagnostic measures  
|                  | Announcement of e-training program (engaging teachers to participate in the program)  |
|                | ONLINE TUTORIALS        |
| Day 3 (three weeks after Day 2; start of e-training program) | Distribution of readings materials (for knowledge)  |
| Day 4 (one day after Day 3) | Submission of newswriting output of teacher and student  
|                  | Returning of news outputs with embedded comments  |
| Day 6 (two days after Day 4) | Deadline for revised output  
|                  | Returning of outputs with embedded comments  |
| Day 8 (two days after Day 6) | Deadline for revised outputs/final draft  
|                  | Returning of outputs with embedded comments, summary of feedback, and debriefing  |

Questions regarding the feedback can be coursed through email and SMS (I send them text messages for reminders). I used email correspondence to create an impression that the program is a personalized, mentor-apprentice learning relationship.

As I explained in the previous section of this study, I developed a pre-testing material that addressed the following conditions:

1. teachers’ heavy workload  
2. teachers’ low computer and internet literacy  
3. infrastructure limitations and teachers’ access to the internet  
4. lack of budget and endorsement for the e-training program as of the time of implementation

Venues for peer education are limited as the internet media and practices used depend on the abovementioned limitations. Many of the teachers started as a blank slate, with little knowledge and skills in newswriting and other practices in journalism, so I decided to design the short
course as a mentorship experience based on each learner’s level of capability. However, I plan to include collaborative learning venues in the development of the more comprehensive e-learning curriculum (second part of the study).

My primary purpose in this pre-testing is to determine the viability of such an online learning schedule and to determine the capability of the teachers to cope with the deadlines. The results will serve as ground for re-planning.

**Discussion Of Findings**

In discussing the findings, I find it helpful to divide the points of analysis into two major parts: 1) preparedness of trainers in teaching journalism, and 2) preparedness for online journalism training and results of pre-testing.

**Preparedness of Journalism Teachers**

Out of the 19 journalism teachers or school publication advisers (There are 15 schools in the district of Los Baños, but some schools have more than one adviser), 11 reported that they were “assigned” to teach journalism and had “no choice”. Seven others were assigned by their respective school principals and were willing to take the task. Only one said she volunteered for the position.

Majority of those who were assigned but would have refused if given a choice said they already have their hands full with the classes they teach each day for five days a week. Some of them said they needed more preparation for the task before being assigned as the school paper adviser. Eleven (11) teachers felt their knowledge and skills in journalism are “highly inadequate” while eight (8) felt their skills are “inadequate”.

A considerable number (7) of the advisers are first-time journalism trainers. Five have been teaching journalism for less than five years. Two started in 2006, and one for each of the following years: 2005, 2007, 2008, and 2009. The veteran in the trade started teaching journalism in 2002.

While majority (13) of the advisers managed to field award-winning students, the teachers’ outputs suggest a glaring lack of mastery in what is considered as the core component of journalism: news writing.

In the pre-online classes, I observed that those who were able to write a news article under two hours (the rest were not able to submit an output) need intensive training because the weaknesses lie on the suprasentential level rather than the subsentential. All of them were not able to identify the news in the given set of facts. For example, in the exercise on a seminar about climate change, the teachers all thought that the newsworthy fact is the holding of a seminar, not what was said in the seminar. Almost everyone do not know how to write an effective lead, as most of them write “police blotter” type leads that are too long and cluttered.

Due to the inability to correctly identify the news, the subsequent paragraphs also lack direction. Some are still unable to build a clean or fluid structure.

All, except two, are not aware of the register (which includes the tone of the text in relation to the context). I classified the fidelity to the register as a suprasentential criterion, but register is the totality of the attributes of word choice, sentence structure, and text organization as a whole. The
choice of words, for one, should match the nature of the text, which is the reason journalists are trained to avoid adjectives and highfalutin words in newswriting. However, the teachers still use vague words that are not appropriate to the register of the text as a news article. The writing lacks precision, as adjectives are not substantiated by the proper facts (e.g. “The seminar was very helpful”. How helpful? Helpful because? The author did not expound on the “helpfulness” of the seminar).

At the subsentential and sentential levels, I noted the lack of English proficiency. Some words were incorrectly used and quite a number of sentences were awkwardly phrased. Awkward phrasing and choice of words signifies the difficulty that non-native learners of the English language experience. Naturally, they think in their native language, which in this case is Filipino. They directly translate their thoughts to English. This is problematic because the two are clearly two different languages with differences in grammar and lexicon. Direct and careless translation from one to another inevitably leads to grammatical errors or awkward phrasing (e.g. One of the teachers wrote “He was complained of corruption”. The word “complain”, however, is used as a verb, not a predicate adjective or subjective complement as in the case of what the teacher wrote).

The weaknesses of the teachers’ writing stretch gravely from the small technical errors (e.g. spelling and subject-verb agreement) to the overarching principles of newswriting. Many of them know only the basic of the basics (the knowledge-level learning objectives). It is not surprising, therefore, that landing a place in the division-wide competitions proved to be a daunting task. In their journalism lectures, seven of the teachers exhibited mastery of speech communication strategies for instruction. All of them used strategies of proxemics, particularly kinesics, in trying to engage the audience. They knew how to get their points across using theatrical techniques and story-telling. The problem, however, is that the depth of the lesson is limited because they lack mastery of the material. For this reason, I chose to focus on skills-building first in the online learning sessions.

Based on my interviews, their understanding of journalism as a discipline remains to be in the level of echoing platitudes or clichés such as “Journalism should be unbiased” or “Journalism aims to uncover the truth”. The appreciation is only at the surface level, as most of them did not know (before the pre-online sessions) that journalism is actually the art and science of manipulating language forms to achieve a particular purpose.

However, the teachers cannot be blamed entirely for the weaknesses, in the same sense that a teacher cannot blame a student for having difficulty in understanding the lesson. Journalism is not part of the Basic Education Curriculum. There was no journalism elective and in the case of the Laguna province, journalism is not integrated into Filipino or English. Journalism trainers meet their students outside class hours, sometimes stealing time from their rest day.

The findings of this evaluation, if anything, call for a review of educational policy regarding journalism as a field in elementary school. Measures such as inclusion of journalism in the basic education curriculum or institutionalization of distance learning support for journalism trainers should be in place.
PREPAREDNESS FOR ONLINE LEARNING AND RESULTS OF PRE-TESTING

Of the 19 journalism teachers, only six reported that they have reliable internet access at home (two with digital subscriber line or DSL, three with wireless fidelity or Wifi connection, and one dial-up). DSL connection provides access to the internet by sending data through the public telephone network. DSL connection speed in Filipino homes ranges from 50 kilobytes of digital data per second to 10 megabytes per second, depending on the subscription fee. With this speed, a subscriber can perform a variety of internet functions such as browsing and playing internet videos. Wifi connections run with speeds similar to those of DSL (in many households, the DSL cable is connected to a Wifi router device).

Dial-up connection is slower than DSL and Wifi (at most 50 kilobytes), while broadband sticks offer as slow as 20 kilobytes per second to seven megabytes per second depending on the location and subscription fee. Subscribers plug in the broadband sticks to their computers to access the internet with speeds depending on their location and subscription fee (mostly prepaid).

Not all of the teachers, however, regularly use the internet because of time constraints (only two get to check their online accounts every day). Six of them rely on internet at their workplace, while seven use broadband sticks.

The figures above show the limitations of internet usage among teachers. Internet via broadband sticks are relatively slower than Wifi or cable DSL, and in most of the time, users have to wait for a long period of time just for pages to load. Mentorship through online chat sessions, therefore, cannot be an option as connectivity limitations may prevent live feedback.

Those who have internet at home only get to browse the web after work hours (after 6 p.m.), while some can only use the internet during free hours at school.

Despite the limitations of schedule, most of them expressed willingness in participating in the e-training program. I prepared the schedule in such a way that they are given one to two days to revise their outputs. The amount of time allotted is not overly generous and is in fact justified given that writing should be a reflective practice. Online learning is student-centered, so the participants should be given the freedom to study the feedback at their own pace, to reflect on their strong and weak points, and to rewrite their output at their own free time.

However, out of the 19 that signed up in the program, only four were able to send their outputs via email on the set deadline. Three were two days late, citing lack of internet access at home as reason for failing to meet the deadline. The others did not respond to my reminders.

Only three of the four participants submitted revised outputs, but were not able to meet the deadlines. During the duration of the online workshop, I embedded highly illustrative comments indicating the error, the reason it is considered as an error, and ways through which the student can solve the problem (Error identification, explanation of error vis-à-vis standards and comparison with the right form, and possible remedies). Due to the lack of immediate feedback, I strived to make the comments stand by themselves without needing additional support.

The comments are patterned after the three-level and three-dimensional grammar framework, discussing suprasentential concerns such as faulty structure, missing thesis statement, and ineffective leads, as well as subsentential and sentential concerns like brevity in phrasing and simplicity in choice of words.

In all three of the outputs, I observed improvements not only in form, but also in content. At first,
the outputs are highly problematic because the writers are not familiar with the journalistic style and do not know how to organize thoughts. I explained the nature of newswriting style and even directed them to the readings materials that were earlier distributed. I also wrote comments on the subsentential and sentential levels (e.g. the right verb should be singular because the subject is singular).

The revised outputs contain slightly better leads and structures. Much work remains to be done though, as grammatical errors in phrasing and even subject-verb agreement can still be found in the articles. The writers still have difficulty in executing expository techniques like narration or description.

The final output shows considerable improvement in the different levels of grammar, but still needs a lot of improvement. It should be noted that the time for the online workshop and the number of revisions were not enough to process the output into a clean copy.

**Summary and Recommendations**

The proposal to explore the potential of e-learning as a tool in the improvement of skills and instruction of elementary journalism trainers in Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines, stem from the problems in the preparedness of teachers in teaching journalism. Clearly, the teachers are not prepared in terms of skills, knowledge, and appreciation levels. This study pointed out the primary factors that account for this status quo, which include 1) lack of formal training for both teachers and students, as journalism is not incorporated in the Basic Education Curriculum, and 2) the teachers’ volume of work each day in a week. Further complicating the situation is the struggle in learning English as a second language in a developing country such as the Philippines.

Teaching journalism online, however, is not something new in the Philippines. Premier universities like the University of the Philippines and the Ateneo de Manila University have been recalibrating their courses and using the online medium for pedagogy. Since 1998, the internet has been re-shaping space-time relationships as well as the gathering, distribution, and consumption of media in the country. While the ethics and basic principles remain the same, the students are now being trained to use the internet wisely, with all its limitations and potential.

Yet, the challenges in teaching journalism online in the premier universities are not the same as those in the schools at the countryside. In this study, the problems are infrastructure-based (lack of computers and reliable connection), literacy-based (not all can use the internet to its utmost potential), and appreciation-based (not all welcome the internet as a venue for learning). The confluence of these factors and those that affect the preparedness of teachers constitute huge impediments in the development of teachers’ skills in journalism and instruction.

The results of the pre-testing prove the following (and these will be included in the preparation of a more comprehensive e-learning curriculum):

1. The need for grammar refreshers as supplementary support in writing
2. The need for constant reminders through other channels such as SMS
3. The need for institutional support e.g. a memorandum for participation
4. The need for restricting the curriculum in which more time will be given for revision (not
5. The need for blended learning (internet alongside instruction) for beginners who do not have constant access to the internet

While e-learning can indeed provide the assistance that journalism trainers need, its success can be amplified through revision of educational policy in journalism teaching in the elementary level. Although new technology can open new possibilities in learning, the decision-making in the key agencies of the state are always, as history has proven, a matter of immediate and powerful consequence.


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