

# EDUCATOR 1: JOURNALISM

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## CONTEXT (16 STUDENTS)

The intervention took place during the Spring 2017 session of Entrepreneurial Journalism, a Master of Advanced Journalism subject at the University of Technology Sydney. The aim of the subject was to equip students with the skills to develop and launch their own journalism start-up and, more broadly, the entrepreneurial skills to navigate the profound disruption of journalism as an industry. The subject was delivered in a weekly two hour class on Friday evenings. Over twelve weeks, the class of 16 students worked individually to research consumer and community needs, ideate and test solutions, and develop a plan to bring their offers to market.

It was the first time that the subject had been offered in the degree, so while there was a teaching plan, the curriculum was unfolding and adapting to students' needs and responses. The teaching of Entrepreneurial Journalism is relatively new, as is teaching of entrepreneurship more generally in universities, thus good practice in teaching in this area is also unfolding.

I taught the course with Professor Peter Fray. Prior to teaching this subject, I had taught adult education, digital media, innovation and entrepreneurship in multiple faculties and units across the university.

## Approaches and resources

The intervention was scheduled for Weeks 9-10 with a pre-test survey in Weeks 7-8 and a matched survey post-intervention that was available after the Week 10 class. We had some limitations on what we could focus on for the intervention as we needed to have enough time to design and test the survey instruments. Hence, we needed to choose a topic that occurred later in the semester. We also had to choose a topic that could be taught discretely so that we could administer a pre-test prior to the intervention. We ended up choosing "project management" as the topic focus for the intervention, which mapped onto the digital capability of "internal communication". This topic had been planned for late in the subject to support students when they were ready to start planning implementation.



We used the digital capability framework based on affordance theory to design the intervention, with the aim of supporting the development of functional, perceptual and adaptive capabilities. We developed a scaffold for:

- Communication and management principles
- Collaboration and project management tools
- Practices
- Security tools.

We then made a list of concepts, actions and tools for the descriptors. We chose a small number of key tools that were currently leading industry practice to focus on: Trello for workflow management, Slack for chat and Google Drive for document collaboration.

The plan was to deliver the intervention spread over two weeks. The first week (Week 9) was to have about 30 minutes allocated at the end to give an overview of project management and useful tools in lecture format. Students would then be asked to create accounts on Trello, Slack and Google Drive after class and try using these three tools before the next class. Then the following week's class (Week 10) would focus on project management, with students being asked to bring their laptops or tablets (if they had them) so they could complete exercises using the tools in class. If students weren't able to bring in a suitable device, they would be paired with another student with a device. The planned format of the second class would be a mix of slides to introduce concepts and tools, with discussion of concepts and applications, followed by a practical exercise and then reflective discussion.

### **What happened: implementation**

The intervention took place over one week, instead of the intended two, due to unforeseen changes in the course schedule, so the introduction to project management was delivered in the same session as the practical exercises. The other topics covered in the task included workflow tools, goal setting, reflective practice, communication tools, specialist workflow tools such as editorial calendar tools, integrations and automations, security tools, and an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of common tools. This was then applied back to creating their individual project roadmap and considering what tools and workflows they would use to manage the implementation of their projects.



Categories of tools would be introduced first with a list of common tools, then a small selection of the most common tools would receive a little more time, then one tool would be chosen to walkthrough and practice using. For example, for project management, seven common tools were listed on one slide and then the three most popular tools had a slide each, and then we looked at Trello in much more depth.

Students were emailed prior to the class a reminder to bring in their devices (if they had something suitable), with less than a third of them doing so. This made it more difficult to run practical exercises than if we had the pairs we had anticipated, so I had to improvise. Instead, I walked through the set up and use of the tools on the projected computer so that all the class could see. Instead of doing the perceptual capability exercises in pairs as we had planned, we did it as a class discussion. We walked through a number of example scenarios and the class discussed what they would use and how, along with the strengths, weaknesses and alternatives of each workflow. Critique of the tools was encouraged. They then had to consider their own projects and identify what might be their most important workflows to deliver their offering. The class discussed a few volunteered examples, with the rest of the class being set the homework to choose their most important workflow and set up a Trello board for it.

### **Reflection and recommendations**

It took some time (and practice) to be able to understand the framework and feel comfortable using it. I found some of the labels a little confusing – so while “functional” is clear enough, I found “perceptual” and “contextual” were not particularly intuitive to how they were intended to be used. [Others agreed and we changed the third label to “adaptive” instead of “contextual”.] Instead it was more helpful to focus on the short explanations provided that described what was involved in each capability and develop my own working understanding based on that. Unsurprisingly, I found it easier to understand the terms once I had actually applied them a few times in practice to working with the descriptors, the pre- and post-survey tests, the plan of the intervention and implementation of the intervention. Thus my resulting understanding of these layers as applied to learning new tools in this case was that functional capability was being able to understand how the tool functions, the perceptual layer was being able to appropriately apply the tool and the adaptive layer was being able to adapt and merge the use of the tool with other tools.

Once better understood, the framework of functional, perceptual and adaptive levels provided a helpful conceptual structure for how to scaffold the development of digital capabilities. It served as a checklist to systemise the considerations of the different levels and order in which to scaffold the teaching. I could also see that it would be helpful for assessment design. Although we did not use the framework for the formal assessment of the course, it was used for designing the intervention testing and



provided a structure to test more than knowledge repetition but instead allowed a more authentic test of real life use. It is a framework that I would use again, especially when looking at supporting the teaching of tools.

The intervention itself was less than ideal. There was a lot to cover in a short period of time, which could be overwhelming, and while there was time for discussion, there was no substantial opportunity for the students to use the tools and play with them. The intervention felt ‘bolted on’, when a much better approach would be to have interwoven the tools into the students’ emerging practice. It would have been better to have introduced the tools at the beginning and to have it embedded in how we delivered the course (for example, using Slack to communicate) so students could spend time using the tools and be able to experiment with them. We could then have time to share the different ways students were using the tools, encouraged “hacking” them to create new uses, and critically reflected on those uses. As such, we didn’t really get to the adaptive level of capability development – and having this framework made this realisation explicit.

## Key take-away

My key take-away is to recognise the levels of capability development and that they should not all be delivered – or can be – at once. It’s overwhelming and there needs to be sufficient opportunity to practice, play, feedback and for reflection to develop the perceptual and adaptive layers. Because this takes time, the more that this teaching can be embedded across the curriculum rather than isolated in discrete topics taught, the better.

