

Commentary

All together now: Why the future of Canadian journalism education needs collaboration – and lots of it

Tous ensemble maintenant : Pourquoi le futur de l'enseignement du journalisme canadien a besoin de collaboration – et beaucoup de collaboration

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ABSTRACT

Many journalists were trained in a milieu where competition, often fierce, was the norm. But recently, in the face of urgent technological, economic and existential crises, newsrooms are collaborating with former competitors and other civic organizations in ways they may not have previously considered. Similarly, Canadian journalism educators are leading collaborative efforts on large and small scales. There is no clear road map yet for these partnerships, but there is a growing body of research and practice that suggest collaboration can help with the quality of investigative journalism and connect with communities in new and liberating ways. For educators who wish to incorporate real-world collaboration in their classrooms, there are resources available to help with both the theory and skills needed to work well with others.

RÉSUMÉ

Beaucoup de journalistes ont été formés dans un milieu où la compétition, même féroce, était la norme. Mais récemment, face à des crises technologiques, économiques et existentielles, les salles de presse collaborent avec d'anciens concurrents et d'autres organisations civiques d'une manière qu'elles n'auraient peut-être pas envisagée auparavant. De même, les formateurs canadiens en journalisme mènent des efforts de collaboration à petite et grande échelle. Il n'existe pas encore de feuille de route claire pour ces partenariats, mais de plus en plus de recherches et de pratiques suggèrent que la collaboration peut contribuer à la qualité du journalisme d'enquête et connecter aux communautés de manières nouvelles et libératrices. Pour les formateurs désirant incorporer une collaboration réelle en classe, il y a des ressources disponibles afin d'aider à la fois la théorie et les compétences nécessaires pour travailler bien ensemble.

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Competition is deeply ingrained in the practice of journalism. Getting the big scoop, writing a front-page exclusive, nabbing a sought-after interview are all ideas that have driven reporters' work for decades and remain part of newsroom practice and journalistic culture. However, since the pandemic, newer journalistic values of collaboration, cooperation and innovation are becoming ingrained in newsroom culture, supplementing or

replacing those competitive instincts.

While the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated some negative industry trends such as mistrust in media and industry layoffs, it also had positive effects for journalists, including the widespread use of collaborative technologies such as video conferencing and remote-work. Enabled by technology and pushed by cultural and economic forces, journalists are working together in new and exciting

ways. This commentary seeks to present context for those changes and present some resources for journalism educators who wish to go deeper into their own collaborations, either with traditional news outlets or non-traditional partners such as not-for-profit organizations.

In Canada, aside from a few beats at a few national news outlets, the days of cutthroat competition are gone. Newsrooms are shrinking in the midst of a fast-changing and much-diminished market for news. Most city halls and legislatures have few if any daily reporters and resources are spread thin in every news outlet. Across the country, the number of working journalists has shrunk to 10,500, roughly half the number who were working in 2001 and in Alberta, the current number of journalists is just 750 (Fletcher, 2022). This trend toward fewer reporters and newsroom resources combined with a lack of investment in training, has meant less investigative reporting overall and fewer journalists covering their communities. This ongoing financial and labour crisis has been compounded by an even greater crisis of trust in news media, which has plummeted around the world and prompted an overdue reckoning about journalism's epistemological foundations around who journalists work for, speak for, or what a different future could look like (Callison and Young, 2020; Clark, 2022). Journalism educators, meanwhile, have been forced by these same factors to interrogate long-held pedagogical and journalistic practices. Scholars began looking more closely not just at audiences journalists are serving in their work but also "who journalism isn't serving" (Callison and Young, 2020, p. 4).

The post-pandemic trend toward collaboration is perhaps most clearly seen in health reporting, which often requires specialized science and data journalism skills beyond the expertise of many newsrooms. As we've seen, health reporting also requires trust and an understanding of the community in order to be effective. In Philadelphia, Wenzel and Crittenden (2023) used focus groups to document the work of three community journalism initiatives — *Resolve Philly*, *Germantown Info Hub* and *Kensington Voice* — as they sought to cover the pandemic for their communities, which

are primarily Black and Latinx. All three outlets collaborated with each other as well as other community and public health organizations to provide accurate, trusted, actionable information to their audiences. They found *Resolve*, a city-wide collaborative outlet, was key in linking smaller storytelling networks, at a city-wide level (p. 250). This use of existing collaborative partnerships to cover the pandemic was also seen in South America, where a number of digital outlets used their existing networks of journalists, health experts and scientists to cover the pandemic in new and collaborative ways (Dixon, 2021).

COLLABORATION AS KEY

These emerging news organizations support a growing body of literature that suggests collaboration and partnerships show a way forward for many news organizations, in terms of reporting resources, raising money, engaging communities and building trust. Definitions of collaborative journalism have changed over time with emerging practice and theory. One study of multimedia convergence in formerly-siloed newsrooms sought to place collaborations on a continuum, with a state of "coopetition," in which newsrooms both cooperate and compete with each other at the centre of the scale (Dailey et al., 2005, p. 152-153).

Anderson (2013) meanwhile distilled newsroom collaboration into three categories: sharing resources for production and distribution; collaborating to produce content; and hyperlinking (p. 108). Based on observations at not-for-profit newsrooms in Wisconsin and Minnesota, Konieczna (2018) built on this typology, outlining four categories of "sharing behavior" which manifested themselves in journalistic partnerships. These were: sharing though distribution; collaboration; commenting in other outlets' stories; and being "mentioned," similar to hyperlinking (p. 118-153). The Centre for Collaborative Media at Montclair State University in New Jersey, defines collaborative journalism more broadly on their website as the practice of "executing journalistic endeavors using a cross-entity approach," which leaves more room for non-traditional partnerships, such

as sharing data, technology or fundraising. This paper focuses more on traditional partnerships between journalism students and news organizations, but there is a range of both typologies and practices that frame this discussion.

Whatever the definition, collaborative journalism is growing around the world, with more than 900 collaborative projects documented since 2018 (Montclair State University n.d.). Many of these have been investigative series and indeed research has shown that pooling resources and expertise among formerly competitive or siloed newsrooms can provide benefits for in-depth, public interest reporting (Sambrook, 2018). Most prominent among these collaborations is perhaps the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists' publication of the leaked Panama papers in 2016 or collaborative investigative journalism done by ProPublica and its partners in the United States. Recently, two Canadian investigative startups — the Investigative Journalism Bureau based out of the University of Toronto and the non-profit Investigative Journalism Foundation — launched with collaboration and partnerships as prominent parts of their missions. Other news organizations like the *Green Line*, in Toronto, are collaborating with community partners to cover issues in new, more collaborative ways.

But more than just reporting, collaboration has also proven effective for other parts of the news business, including fundraising (Lenfest Institute for Journalism, 2022) and increasing audience engagement and reach (Murray, 2022). This collaboration beyond content has been less explored in Canada, but may offer opportunities for embattled local news publishers and others. This overall openness to cooperating extends to collaboration with other newsrooms but also to other non-traditional partners such as NGOs and civil society organizations (Stonbely & Siemaszko, 2022), which are growing in number.

JOURNALISM EDUCATORS LEADING THE WAY

Just as newsrooms have been pushed into more and deeper partnerships, so have Canadi-

an journalism educators, who have long sought to link their teaching to the outside world and to explore different pedagogical approaches (Gasher et al., 2016). Collaboration has an extensive history in Canadian journalism education, but the pandemic (as with many trends) sped up those efforts.

In 2022, three of the four nominees in the Canadian Association of Journalists Student Award of Excellence were published as part of editorial partnerships, with the *Globe and Mail*, *Maison-neuve* and *the Tyee* respectively. The previous year's winner was also a collaboration between UBC and *Ricochet* as was the 2012 winner, published with the *Toronto Star*.

A comprehensive examination of the successes and failures of collaborations in Canadian journalism education is beyond the scope of this commentary, but offers opportunities for future research and discussion. In particular, a better understanding of non-traditional partnerships and their intricacies would be useful. But even a brief survey of projects, both large and small, is inspiring. Some recent examples, most of which started after the pandemic, include (listed here in alphabetical order),

- **Carleton University:** [They Were Loved](#) was a pandemic collaboration coordinated by Carleton University's Future of Journalism Initiative and Maclean's. Journalism students from across the country worked virtually to tell stories of people who died in the first wave COVID. In total, the project published hundreds of short obituaries produced by students across the country.
- **Concordia University:** Researchers and students at Concordia University have partnered with key members of the Kiashe Zaaging Anishinaabek-Gull Bay First Nation to explore "methods of slow, collaborative journalism as a response to Call to Action 86" (Salas & Stevens, 2021, p. 57). Some of the resulting work has been broadcast and published on [CTV News Montreal](#). As well, Concordia University's former Institute for Investigative Journalism coordinated a number of im-

portant collaborative projects, including Tainted Water, which was nominated for a Michener Award in 2019 and [Broken Promises](#) about drinking water quality in Indigenous communities.

- **Humber College:** [Surviving Hate](#) is a collaborative project coordinated by Humber College's StoryLab that seeks to document hate crimes and incidents across the country with a focus on anti-Indigenous racism. Partners include a number of academic institutions, as well as media partners such as Canada's *National Observer*, the *Toronto Star*, TVOntario and *J-Source*.
- **Toronto Metropolitan University:** [The Local News Data Hub](#) is a newly launched startup at Toronto Metropolitan University that brings together students, journalists, faculty and industry partners. The lab provides data journalism resources and stories to local newsrooms while also teaching students new skills.
- **UBC:** [UBC's Global Reporting Centre](#) tells stories by working with local journalists and international media partners including NBC News and the *Globe and Mail*. The school's [Reporting in Indigenous Communities](#) course has partnered with Indigenous communities and broadcast their work in partnership with the CBC.
- **University of Victoria:** The Climate Disaster Project is an ongoing collaboration based at the University of Victoria that helps climate survivors share their stories and better train journalists to cover these stories. Work from the project has been published in [the Tyee](#), among other outlets.

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS AND COLLABORATORS


Partnerships all have their challenges, including the cultural and practical differences between newsrooms, classrooms and boardrooms. As these collaborations push beyond traditional partners,

educators and students will need to navigate new relationships and practices. Thankfully, that work has already begun and in addition to the projects listed above, there is a growing body of practical tips and tools for collaborators (listed in alphabetical order below). Many of these tools can help educators who may be partnering for the first time and are unsure where to begin.

- **The Center for Collaborative Journalism** remains the best place to find resources, tools and community. Along with their [database](#) of global projects, they host an annual [conference](#) and publish [regular research reports](#) and panels. They also have a number of useful [tip sheets and guides](#).
- **The Citizen's Agenda** isn't a collaborative guide, but rather a [step-by-step recipe](#) for using community and partner engagement to better inform campaign coverage. The tool was developed in the United States by Jay Rosen and partners, but the principles apply elsewhere.
- **Decolonizing Journalism: A Guide to Reporting in Indigenous Communities** (McCue, 2022) is an indispensable resource for educators and journalists reporting in Indigenous communities, or more accurately with Indigenous communities.
- **International Journalists' Network** has an excellent [Collaborative Journalism Toolkit](#) which includes case studies and guides for journalists and educators.
- **Facet** offers a [workbook](#), available in English, French and Spanish, for planning and managing the details and logistics of editorial collaborations.
- **ProPublica** is one of the original investigative collaborators and still an outstanding resource for this kind of work. They describe their collaborative [Data Journalism Guide](#) as their way of "giving away all of our secrets" (Glickhouse, 2019).

CONCLUSION

In his 2010 article, *Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable*, media theorist Clay Shirky observed the end of print media and predicted the next few decades of journalism would be marked by experimentation, of new models forming and failing and moving forward. He argued, “No one experiment is going to replace what we are now losing but over time, the collection of news experiments that do work might give us the journalism we need” (p. 104).

Indeed, journalists and educators must continue to explore partnerships with a spirit of urgency, experimentation and good humour if we wish to create better journalism. Educators have a key role to play in teaching the theory and background, but also by modeling these positive partnerships in the classroom and beyond. These partnerships also offer opportunities for deeper study particularly in areas related to classroom management, process and student engagement. Practices and ethics around these collaborations will continue to evolve, but they offer hope that journalism can find its way through its current crises by linking arms with people and groups that share our values. 

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