Teaching trauma-informed journalism

“Are we effectively teaching journalism students to report on trauma and the people touched by it?”

So begins the third episode of the Forced Change podcast, “What does a ‘trauma-informed journalist’ look like?”

These listening party materials are meant to accompany episodes of the Forced Change podcast, providing additional resources for teaching or for offline conversations in local journalism programs.

Enseigner le journalisme conscient des traumatismes

“Enseignons-nous efficacement aux étudiants en journalisme à couvrir les traumatismes et les personnes qui en sont victimes ?”

C’est ainsi que débute le troisième épisode du podcast Changement forcé, intitulé “À quoi ressemble un journaliste qui tient compte des traumatismes” ?

Ces documents d’écoute sont destinés à accompagner les épisodes du podcast Changement forcé, en fournissant des ressources supplémentaires pour l’enseignement ou pour des conversations hors ligne dans les programmes de journalisme locaux.

— Curated by/organisé par Trish Audette-Longo & Nehaa Bimal
Discussion questions among faculty members

**Trauma-informed journalism in your program**

- How can you bring trauma-informed journalism into your classroom?
- How might trauma literacy and trauma-informed journalism training be incorporated in your program?
- Should trauma-informed journalism courses be mandatory in your program? Should they be introduced early in the curriculum, or as specialized reporting courses for upper-year students?

**Next steps**

- How are you differentiating kinds of trauma-informed training? As examples, how do you approach training students to handle “acute” high-stress or traumatic situations? And, how do you think about or engage with students navigating experiences of historical, race-based or intergenerational trauma in their reporting?
- How are students in your program learning about informed consent or making links between how they communicate with their sources and trauma-informed approaches to their reporting?

**Fostering interdisciplinary conversations**

- Is there a place for creating or fostering conversations about trauma-informed journalism, care and trust between programs at your school? How would you do it? What would be the benefits or drawbacks?

How to bring this into your class

In his article “Simulated solutions,” Matthew Pearson shares his experiences in creating an interview simulation exercise for students in a fourth-year journalism course at Carleton University. Actors portrayed survivors, giving students the space to prepare for the ethical, practical and emotional challenges of interviewing people who have experienced trauma. In the article, Pearson breaks down three key exercise phases — preparation, interaction and debriefing — and reflects on how students responded to the exercise.

Invite journalists into classes as guest speakers to share their experiences, with a focus on how they handle traumatic or stressful situations and an openness to discussing mental health. Ask students who they would like to see as guest speakers, or ask them to help coordinate a line-up of in-class or out-of-class speakers.

Work with students to build a self-care plan. The best time for reporters — both emerging and veteran — to start planning for how they might respond to traumatic experiences is not in moments of crisis. Pearson shares a “self-care check-up” you can use in your classes below.

Photo by Vanilla Bear Films on Unsplash
My self-care check-up
An activity created by Matthew Pearson, Carleton University

1. List three self-care activities that you find restorative.

2. List three barriers that prevent you from regularly doing the self-care activities that you find restorative.

3. Write three declarative statements that help you commit to regularly incorporating self-care into your journalistic practice. (A declarative statement begins with, “I will ...”)

4. What is one activity you will do for self-care in the next 24 hours?

Additional Resources

Resources for Journalists
The Canadian Journalism Forum on Violence and Trauma offers a number of resources and research materials: https://www.journalismforum.ca/resources
The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma offers classroom resources: https://dartcenter.org/resources?type%5B0%5D=19

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