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Research on Pathways for Developing Practical Competence in Students: Postprint

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Date: 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

At present, students majoring in journalism and communication are confronted with three major challenges: the intricate trends of media development and convergence, diverse demands for omnimedia competencies, and a severe overall employment landscape. Consequently, the cultivation of students' professional capabilities faces increasingly stringent requirements. The field demands both specialized expertise and broad-ranging knowledge; it requires inheriting and advancing traditions while simultaneously crossing disciplinary boundaries to accommodate other domains. Professional institutions thus encounter unprecedented opportunities and challenges in fostering practical abilities. Adhering to the traditional university "trinity" practical teaching system encompassing "classroom practice, campus practice, and social practice", and implementing the development philosophy of "practice as actual combat", we have transcended the confines of "simulation" in on-campus practice, capitalized on the momentum of media convergence, and leveraged the developmental characteristics of new media. Through practical instruction in the formal curriculum, extracurricular campus practice, and multi-stage social practice during vacation periods, we have developed a three-dimensional "actual combat" practical teaching system for enrolled students that is mutually complementary and supportive.

Full Text

Preamble

Research on the Path of Cultivating Practical Combat Capabilities in Journalism Students

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Abstract: Journalism and communication students currently face three major challenges: the complex trend of media convergence, diverse demands for omnimedia skills, and a severe overall employment situation. Consequently, the cultivation of students' professional capabilities confronts more stringent requirements. Students must achieve both specialization and breadth; they must inherit and carry forward traditions while also crossing boundaries to accommodate other fields. Professional schools thus face unprecedented opportunities and challenges in cultivating practical abilities. Aligning with the traditional university practice teaching system of "classroom practice, campus practice, and social practice" as a trinity, and implementing the development concept of "practice is combat," we have broken through the barriers of "simulation" in on-campus practice. By seizing the momentum of media convergence and relying on the characteristics of new media development, we have explored a three-dimensional "combat-oriented" practice teaching system that is mutually complementary and supportive across first-classroom practice teaching, second-classroom campus practice, and multi-stage social practice during holidays.

Keywords: Journalism and Communication; Media Convergence; Current Students; Practical Combat Capability; Teaching System

Classification Code: G712

Document Code: A

Article ID: 1671-0134(2021)06-035-03

DOI: 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2021.06.007

Citation Format: Zhou Yulan, Wang Jian. Research on the Path of Cultivating Practical Combat Capabilities in Current Students [J]. China Media Technology, 2021(06): 35-37.

Introduction

Practical teaching constitutes a vital component of higher education teaching activities, serving as verification, supplementation, and expansion of theoretical teaching. As the definition of practical teaching indicates, it deepens students' theoretical knowledge, hones their practical operational abilities, and cultivates their innovative consciousness and capabilities. Practical teaching is significant for students to understand actual production, social work, and management methods. It can maximally satisfy and fulfill society's cultivation requirements for high-level talents with comprehensive qualities, innovative spirit, and practical abilities.

The Ministry of Education's primary regulations on university student practical teaching include: experiments, engineering training, engineering internships, production internships, social practice, course design, graduation theses (designs), academic year papers, student extracurricular scientific and technological activity plans, and university student social practice, among others [1]. In universities, consensus on the importance of practical education has long been

reached. “Since the purpose of higher education is to directly cultivate social laborers, and those who receive higher education will directly participate in social production and management after completing their education, the practical teaching component in higher education is indispensable. At a certain level, it is even more important than theoretical teaching” [2].

Challenges in Professional Education

Media Convergence Trends and Challenges to the Foundation of Professional Education

Media convergence represents an overarching trend, with multiple concepts and methods coexisting. This convergence includes integration from the perspective of media organizational structure, where multiple media form departments jointly operate within a single mass medium—particularly in news information collection and distribution. Newspapers, magazines, broadcast audio, television video, and online formats implement corresponding reporting strategies according to their own communication laws and characteristics to maximize reductions in human resources, capital, and equipment investment, thereby lowering news production costs. It also involves developing into diversified digital media that combines inherent advantages with new media strengths, characterized by diversified content, communication channels, receiving terminals, demand types, and consumption models. Media organizations, whether cautiously or boldly, are exploring interactive methods and various possibilities between the internet and traditional media.

The current situation of multiple concepts and manifestations in media convergence poses tremendous challenges to university professional education. From fundamental educational design to the enumeration of typical classroom teaching cases, the shifting benchmarks in the industry severely impact the foothold and focus of professional education.

The Rise of Omnimedia and Challenges to Professional Capability Demands

From the perspective of media demand for journalism and communication university students in recent years, the “all-round journalist” has become the primary requirement for high-level talent. Currently, media news production is no longer an independent media reporting model but has evolved into an independent, complete-process, and standardized news production model. News reporting has transformed from traditional newspaper, broadcast, and television news into website news, mobile client news, RSS-based aggregated news, WEB2.0-based blogs (including video blogs or VLOGs), social media-based WeChat, and socially-oriented short videos, among others. These developments pose special requirements and employment demands for cultivating “all-round journalists.”

University education models have evolved from “elite education” to “mass education” and are now developing toward an “all-round individual soldier” model

based on social media. The traditional “master-apprentice” method of cultivating journalism students can no longer adapt to the current situation. Within schools, a significant gap exists between mass communication-based practical education and the urgent needs of social media-based practical education. Issues related to ideological concepts, communication mechanisms, and skills at the educational level are ubiquitous, and professional capability demands face substantial challenges.

Flexible Employment Conditions and Challenges to Job Market Demands

Against a severe social backdrop, the media industry also faces its own “micro-environment” that is not 宽松 (relaxed), characterized by intense development competition and frequent restructuring. Employment conditions have changed, and the employment situation is “not optimistic.” Universities bear the heavy responsibility of cultivating applicable and practical talent for employers. They must find a practical ability cultivation model that adapts to development trends, aligns with graduate characteristics, and is acceptable to employers, creating a “win-win-win” situation.

A survey by Zhejiang University of Media and Communications indicates that although university student employment faces difficulties due to various structural factors, employers still have strong hiring needs. However, compared with previous years, these needs have become more flexible and mobile. Media organizations no longer consistently formulate annual personnel demand plans like typical government agencies. Instead, hiring based on program adjustment needs, development factors, and other market-driven considerations has become a major characteristic of media recruitment of graduates. This characteristic has become more practical, applicable, and flexible as media marketization deepens.

Graduate recruitment is influenced by factors such as “student comprehensive quality,” “major relevance,” “education requirements,” and “school reputation.” Unlike in the past, “recruitment examinations” have become the most important employment channel. Just as universities continuously seek teaching and practical method transformations to better adapt to social and media employment changes, media organizations themselves are also transforming their employment systems, recruitment standards, and sustainable talent development to ensure competitive vitality and long-term viability.

The “Practical Combat” Capability Cultivation Approach

Practical teaching in universities pursues “combat” characteristics because combat offers the strongest relevance and simulation. Journalism schools have long used “combat” to strengthen practical education features. However, in the pre-media convergence era, on-campus practice could only maximize simulation or imitation. In the omnimedia era, student practical works have three distribution channels: traditional media, institutional media, and self-media. Regardless of media format, “practice is combat” rather than simulation for professional

practical education. Why is practice combat rather than simulation? Media convergence has created this possibility, and the widespread dissemination of social media and mobile terminals have fundamentally changed the quality and influence of on-campus practice.

Internally, the meaning of “practice is combat” indicates that the purpose of practice remains unchanged, but students have changed, practical means have changed, and the focus and evaluation indicators of practice have changed. Externally, the background of “practice is combat” indicates that the cultivation purpose remains unchanged, but the times have changed, the media landscape has changed, and the elite cultivation status of professional schools has changed.

Practical methods have changed, evaluation standards have changed, practical effects have changed, practical connotations have changed, and the media landscape being faced has also changed. It is no longer about the proximity (to media) and simulation (of media) in on-campus practice, but rather about the flattened, direct-to-public nature of Douyin, Kuaishou, and Xuexi Qiangguo (Learning Power). Students produce numerous practical works with market influence.

Faced with these phenomena, what should schools do? What should professional teachers do? Schools’ practical ability cultivation paths must change, the overall design thinking about practice must change, professional teachers’ ideological concepts must change, students’ practical methods must change, and the entire evaluation system must change—that is, teaching according to students’ aptitude, according to students’ needs, and according to employment demands. Taking traditional media professional capability cultivation as the foundation and the “all-round journalist” training model as the wing, we have clearly proposed three progressive and complementary paths to change students’ practical ability cultivation: classroom practice for strong foundation, campus practice for cultivating literacy, and holiday practice for actual combat.

Three Implementation Paths

Classroom Practice: Building Strong Foundations

Classroom practice focuses on strengthening the foundational aspects of practical teaching. Building strong foundations means continuously strengthening the cultivation and extension of media communication skills during classroom instruction, emphasizing diverse skills training in news gathering, filming, writing, editing, broadcasting, producing, and transmitting under media convergence. Simply put, it involves creating a basic skills training cluster for journalism students, enabling them to quickly complete concentrated and intensive professional foundation building.

Taking the 2017 cohort as an example, we designed three video reporting assignments of increasing complexity: festival scene reporting (National Day/Labor Day, etc.), in-depth investigative reporting, and in-depth character reporting.

Students conducted solid training in groups, producing numerous practical works with good performance in gathering, filming, recording, writing, editing, and post-production. According to their tailored syllabus, they seriously discussed topics, collected background materials, completed post-production editing and dubbing, and underwent highly effective professional training.

Digital, miniaturized, and simplified equipment, massive background materials and resources on the internet, and various social exchange and award activities have all provided platforms for student practice. Through preparation and practice, students created quality news works such as *Street Interviews on the 19th Party Congress*, *Vanishing Newsstands*, *Difficulties in Installing Elevators in Old Residential Areas*, *Accessible Cervical Cancer Vaccines*, *Civilian Hero Wang Kunsen*, and *The Pork-Selling Street Dance Teenager*. Through these practices, students received solid training in news sensitivity, topic selection, and news literacy.

Campus Practice: Cultivating Literacy

Campus practice represents special cultivation in “cultivating literacy.” This means strengthening students’ broad media literacy, industry literacy, and awareness of national conditions, cultivating them into media professionals adapted to social development and the omnimedia environment. In topic discussions, we always emphasize student agency, fully mobilizing students’ enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity. We teach according to students’ aptitude based on their characteristics and interests, identifying the intersection between news topics and student interests, and training students’ ability to select angles from major current affairs reporting.

The campus practice literacy cultivation plan is also reflected in various student work competitions and social practice activities. Participation in university, provincial, and national DV contests, data journalism contests, microfilm contests, and documentary contests has already achieved excellent expected results. Award-winning works such as the first-prize winner at the Zhejiang University Student DV Contest, *Canal Households—Red Tomb Guardians—Graduation Season—Navigating Your Fourth University Year*, and first-prize winners at the Zhejiang University Student News Festival, *Red Boat Spirit—The Long Elevator Road—Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance: Pure and Deep Origins*, are typical cases. Through these award-winning works, we have found that students’ creative abilities have improved, their new media awareness and practical operational abilities have been solidly enhanced, and their literacy for adapting to social development has also been simultaneously elevated.

Innovation teams have also explored the latest media presentation modes such as WeChat public accounts, VLOG, H5, interactive video, and creative short videos, producing a batch of converged media works. These innovative achievements are reflected not only on the team’ s exclusive WeChat public account (Huzhou Media Convergence Innovation Team’ s Intangible Cultural Heritage

Guide in Rural Revitalization Strategy) but also on the “Love Huzhou” news client and various other screens. Content based on this project has also applied for the Ali Geek Project, Zhejiang University Student News Festival, and other competitions, providing excellent annotation for the cultivation of professional combat capabilities in university students.

Social Practice: Real-World Combat

Large-scale social practice interview activities constitute the core content of “combat-type” practical ability cultivation. During the summer of 2018 and winter of 2019, we organized large-scale news campaigns in collaboration with media organizations and sister institutions, allowing student teams to experience genuine media “combat” through publishing and pushing their works on media platforms.

The initial combat news campaign began in 2018. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of reform and opening up and the 15th anniversary of the “Eight-Eight Strategy” implementation, Zhejiang University of Media and Communications and Zhejiang Radio & Television Group jointly organized the large-scale news activity “Celebrating 40 Years of Reform and Opening Up: National College Students’ Zhejiang Search.” After the campaign launch, six selected search teams visited 11 prefecture-level cities in Zhejiang, focusing on various themes based on local development characteristics: innovation and entrepreneurship, digital economy, bay area construction, beautiful rural construction, cultural Zhejiang construction, Belt and Road Initiative, all-for-one tourism, and “maximum one trip” government service reform. They observed and recorded development paths with contemporary features, Chinese characteristics, and Zhejiang attributes. The search teams demonstrated distinctive features and creative ideas, successively producing a large number of quality news works that generated tremendous response through dissemination on Xinlan Net and multiple mainstream media platforms.

Against the backdrop of celebrating the 40th anniversary of reform and opening up, this news activity, with college students as the main body and their reporting activities as the main storyline, featured unique creativity within and even beyond the province. Xinlan Net and China Blue News Client created special pages for this news activity, pushing and broadcasting works produced by teacher-student teams with different thematic meanings. To adapt to new media communication needs and activate college students’ creative interest, diverse expression forms were encouraged. The searching students fully leveraged new media communication model strengths, using data journalism, H5, animated shorts, long images, VLOG, MV, and other forms to represent fresh people and fresh events in various Zhejiang locations. By August 9, 2018, the news activity had published 70 works of various types. The China Blue News Client special page had 325,000 views, with mobile terminal clicks exceeding 1.15 million. Works with over 10,000 clicks accounted for 73%, with the highest-clicked work reaching 114,000 views and the lowest also reaching 6,724 views.

In addition, industry-university cooperative horizontal projects provide excellent supplements for cultivating combat capabilities in students. The author's horizontal project with Huzhou Radio & Television Station (renamed Huzhou Media Convergence Center after media convergence) and its omnimedia center is dedicated to exploring and producing media innovation products adapted to the internet background and training media practitioners. By fully utilizing universities' convenient information advantages for media convergence development, we have conducted related media convergence innovation practice activities with Huzhou Radio & Television Station's omnimedia center, forming a mechanism for building converged media branding projects and exploring paths for advancing converged media branding projects. This has explored concepts, cognition, and practical innovation for current converged news reporting innovation, providing excellent annotation for cultivating professional combat capabilities in university students.

Conclusion

The cultivation of students' "combat" capabilities in school is necessarily a gradual and accumulative process. This process faces both challenges and opportunities amid the momentum of media convergence, the capabilities required of all-round individual journalists, and complex and changeable employment demands. Relying on years of beneficial experience in practical teaching at journalism schools, this paper has seized upon three progressive paths for cultivating practical combat capabilities: classroom teaching to consolidate foundations, campus practice to cultivate literacy, and holiday practice for project-based combat. Through professional curriculum teaching reforms and summaries of typical cases of personalized cultivation according to students' aptitude, this study has completed its explanatory task.

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Responsible Editor: Li Jing

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv –Machine translation. Verify with original.