

JEANZ 2025 Conference presentation

Giving it a go: How and why journalism students went live on Breakfast

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Background to a presentation given to the 2025 conference of the Journalism Education Association of New Zealand; Massey University, Wellington.

Comfort zones. Journalism education regularly demands students leave their so-called 'comfort zone' in technological, personal or socio-political terms, as they pursue the skills, values and knowledge required for entry to the journalism industry. Journalists are encouraged to be courageous individuals, and successful forays beyond an almost mythical zone of comfort during experiential journalism education are seen to extend personal boundaries and mirror the so-called realities of the job.

This presentation considers the impacts when, along with its students, a journalism programme is itself also required to challenge long established and arguably comfortable pedagogical and technological boundaries. It looks at the power of open-minded partnership across the industry-university line and celebrates unprecedented levels of industry involvement by students possible during such collaboration.

Case study. As a case study, the presentation reflects on an industry-education partnership project at Auckland University of Technology journalism programme. As part of attempts to build a wider partnership between AUT and the state-owned broadcaster TVNZ, journalists and journalism educators were quick to find common ground and shared expectations of the relationship. Under careful stewardship from both sides, a project grew that would see final-year journalism students research, produce and then present four television stories on TVNZ's morning current-affairs show *Breakfast*, followed by appearing in a live cross from the TVNZ studio to discuss the story. Students found each story, and then pitched it and developed it with the support of both lecturers and senior TVNZ journalists, including a central role by the show's executive producer Carol Hirschfeld. This mentorship was invaluable and student aspirations clearly rose as they sensed belief in the project from senior journalists.



AUT journalism students go live on Breakfast.

The stories. The stories were robust pieces of journalism: rising dog attacks in Auckland, transport costs hurting students in our biggest city, debates about the proposed social media ban, and the question of whether Auckland truly functions as a student-centred city. These were not only student concerns but also issues with relevance to the wider public.

Students were arranged into a team of four for each story – two reporter/presenters, a producer and a camera operator. Close editorial guidance from both TVNZ journalists and university lecturers, as well as some technical studio support, were required. TVNZ's treatment of the live cross as effectively an outside broadcast using its own camera and operator, lightened the technical load for the school. Students were relieved of other portfolio obligations in video journalism and accorded flexibility in hand-in dates for other assignments.

Reflection. Students later reflected on the transformative nature of their experience on the Breakfast project; it added work and more challenges to an already demanding and practical course of study, but it was hugely beneficial, helping them improve their writing-to-pictures and visual sequencing skills, as well as skills in structuring a news story for television. Along the way, they learned about vox-pops, pieces to camera (rarely approved!), autofocus and audio capture, and got to practise their video operating and

interviewing techniques. Rough cuts of the stories were completed by the students, after which a TVNZ producer or reporter would advise on and help with the finer editing processes. Once complete, the story was filed, TVNZ added the titles and it was aired between 8am and 9am on a Thursday or Friday. After the story ran, *Breakfast* hosts crossed live to the AUT journalism studio to talk to the students about the story, using question lines provided by the student journalists.

A strong sense of pride once the live cross completed was clearly evident among students. Student aspirations shifted visibly and television journalism stopped being an abstract career goal and became something concrete and difficult, but achievable. There was strong affirmation for the project from all quarters, with students and staff congratulated on their success. News of the project and its success was deployed vigorously by the school in promotional contexts, and the project won a faculty teaching-and-learning award in late 2025.

There are other stories to emerge from the project also worth reflecting on. From the relative security of publishing their work on the programme's student-journalism website, Te Waha Nui, students involved in the project (n=15) were faced with going live to a television audience of more than 150,000 New Zealanders. They were given studio and on-camera training beforehand by both lecturers and TVNZ producers and journalists, including a sense of what it would feel and sound like on air and multiple dummy-runs of their question line under lit studio conditions. But it was only a week or two later that some expressed just how nervous they had been in the minutes before going live. None expressed regret and all were highly competent and professional in their on-camera performances, despite those nerves. Journalism education in Aotearoa New Zealand has for many decades had a proud tradition of immersive and experiential learning. Hence, learning by doing is key to educating journalists. Going live on television was the point of the project. But it is worth considering in any future iteration of this or similar projects how student preparedness might be improved, or at least the likelihood of stagefright even better communicated to participating reporters. Learning about the tough truths of the newsroom is still part of journalism education but they are no longer valorised by journalism educators as they once were and it is important to consider these issues for the benefit of our students.

The journalism programme at AUT has its origins in print journalism, though it developed optional courses in television and radio journalism in the late 1990s; over the years it has morphed into a multimedia and transmedia journalism programme. To challenge the now-standardised convergence model and produce four television stories to national broadcast standard was outside the norms of everyday teaching. Another side to the story is the workload for lecturers when an adhoc project such as this is initiated. Nevertheless, it is important to make the most of appropriate and value-adding opportunities for students,

industry and the school. As a result, flexibility from both the school and its teachers was required to work on such a project at short notice. For this and other reasons, future projects might be incorporated formally into course contexts. Some financial support from the school's external engagement fund was also valuable.

In sum. Students are capable of far more than we sometimes assume. Opportunities like this can be genuinely life-changing, offering self-belief, clarity and momentum at a critical point in a student's development. The project required extra editorial support – filming, scripting and editing – cannot be left to chance but the industry, despite its own severe pressures, is still willing to take risks on emerging journalists when trust and support are in place. Importantly, this has been an example of the ties between journalism educators and the industry in Aotearoa New Zealand remaining strong.