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Title: Evaluating a Police and Journalism Joint Training Initiative

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Abstract:

In early 2010 the Edith Cowan University (ECU) journalism program and the Western Australia Police Academy Detective Training School launched a novel collaboration that involves running joint training days, in which a 'media pack' of journalism students interview trainee detectives about mock crimes they have been tasked with investigating. The training improved the trainee journalists' and detectives' understanding about the constraints the other parties face, left them feeling more confident about their ability to elicit and convey accurate information, and more willing to attempt to do so than before the training. This paper presents a description of the training days and the rationale behind them from detective and journalism educator perspectives, including the minimal costs involved in time and resources. It also presents the results of an evaluation, involving before-and-after questionnaires completed by participants. The paper also reviews the scant literature about the dynamics of the relationship between journalists and detectives and suggests that training related to the dynamic is important for journalism students given that police public relations departments and polices are blossoming in Australia and throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

Introduction

In 2008 Australian state-based and federal police forces collectively spend about \$10 million a year on communications, including media liaison and TV programs (O'Brien, 2008), it could well be more now. It has been argued that the aim of this spending is purely to boost their public image (Jiggins, 2007). According to McGovern (2009, p.164), "literature around the PR State (see Deacon & Golding, 1994) tells us that this is a common feature of modern day state institutions, such as the police, as governments look towards public relations professionals and opportunities to ensure that the media carry forward their preferred messages to the public." This phenomenon is spread far beyond Australia's borders. UK-based Dr Rob Mawby has been one of the most prolific researchers of the evolution of police PR work over the past two decades. In 2001 he wrote:

The police service has always practiced image work. However, it took on greater significance as a new policing context emerged during the 1990s, generated by a combination of managerialist government policy and widespread concern with police performance and misconduct. At the same time there existed what appeared to be an insatiable demand for policing services within a climate of 'fear of crime'. These conditions, together with rapidly changing media developments, have compelled the police service to raise the profile of its image work.

(Mawby, 2001, p.44)

He added that police forces employed many 'image workers' engaged in promoting, projecting and protecting the police image, including press officers, marketing professionals, public relations officers and corporate identity specialists. While acknowledging that police forces justify this spending using terms such as 'openness'

and 'transparency', and speak about allowing the media more access to information about policing policy and practice, he raises questions about whether the motives may actually be more sinister. He closed one paper with the line: "Whether, in practice, image work in its future development serves the interests of democratic accountable policing or the restricted interests of the police service remains to be seen." (2001, p.45) John Roskam (cited in O'Brien, 2008) also expressed concern about police PR claiming that it had gone "beyond informing the public, and bordered on a political agenda," especially when police made public calls for specific new legislation or were photographed with politicians. Mark Finnane (2002) also expressed concern about the degree of control police media departments had over the information they shared with media and said it verged on being 'monopolistic'. He also pointed to the growing extent to which police were sidestepping the media and communicating directly with the public via their own websites. This trend has since developed with police now using social media sites such as Facebook to interact with the public (Dawson, 2011).

In the literature about police and media interactions there is a large body of work that critiques media portrayals of police and minorities and claims coverage is either overly sympathetic and/or stigmatising (Reiner, 2007; Van Dijk, 2000; Teo, 2000). Loto *et al's* (2005) critique of the coverage of ethnic minorities in the New Zealand press is a good local example of this type of work. A common feature of many of these critiques is the claim that articles about people from minorities being involved in crimes are not accurately contextualised, and that the provision of more information could counterbalance the otherwise biased reporting. If this is the case, then facilitating better communication between journalists and police sources may to some extent alleviate the problem, if it is coupled with raising awareness among both of the need for contextualising information to be conveyed to the public.

With police media units now firmly in existence in Australia and New Zealand, and to a lesser extent across the Pacific, concerns such as those raised by Mawby (2001) and Finnane (2002) tend to be met with comments from police that simply state the importance of public support for the policing and justice systems in the promotion of lawful behaviour, and of, as Police Federation of Australia chief executive Mark Burgess (cited in O'Brien, 2008) said: "making sure police are communicating with the public in an appropriate way, and not to be seen to be spending large amounts of money to massage their own stories." The implication of this is that it is important for journalists dealing with police to be aware of the danger of police messages being laced with spin and to be skilled at communicating with police in a way that meets the needs of the media and the public, without giving undue emphasis to the police promotional messages embedded in all police communications. As Knight (2000, p. 48) put it "Journalists ... have professional and ethical responsibilities to look beyond what they have been told by those in authority."

It was a perceived need to support the development of skills associated with resisting spin and questioning people in positions of authority that led to my acceptance of an invitation from the WA Detective Training School to get involved in a joint training initiative for journalism students and trainee detectives.

Origins of the initiative

Between May 2010 and September 2011, ECU Journalism and the WA Detective Training School (DTS) held nine joint training days on the grounds of the WA Police Academy, where the DTS is based - and more are planned. So far, our enquiries have indicated that this is the only joint training initiative of its kind running in Australia, indicating that there is scope for others in the region to be inspired to initiate similar collaborations.

The initiative was the brainchild of Detective Senior Sergeant Steve Post, former Officer in Charge of the DTS, who inspired Detective Sergeant John Harty, the current Officer in Charge of the DTS, to contact ECU journalism in early 2010.

Prior to establishing the collaboration the DTS used in-house resources for its media training. The trainees did (and still do) receive a lecture on how to handle media enquiries and practical experience was provided through activities in which training staff and peers played the role of journalists. The DTS has simply substituted these former practical activities with the collaboration activities with no need to adjust its scheduling. The inclusion of participation by journalism students, therefore, adds no additional cost in time or staff requirement to the DTS, other than the hour or so of time spent giving each group of journalism students a tour of the academy.

On the other end, ECU journalism undergraduates previously had no supervised practical training in how to interview detectives, or any other figures in positions of authority. Crime reporting was taught as part of the lessons in basic news writing and court reporting. Being day-long events, the training days do not fit conveniently into the semester timetable, as classes are only scheduled for a few hours each day. They were therefore offered as extra activities, only compulsory for students enrolled in our work placement unit. As students are often time-poor, some effort was expended crafting descriptive emails inducing them to attend. The DTS also agreed to provide the participating students with official certificates for use in their portfolios. The resources cost to ECU is the commitment of a journalism lecturer for each training day, to accompany and guide the students. ECU also supplies the audio and video recording equipment that the students use on the training days.

The training days

The following account is based on observations by the author and interviews with Detective Senior Sergeant Steve Post and Detective Sergeant John Harty recorded in June 2011.

The day begins with the six or eight media students nervously testing their recording devices. Most have never visited the police campus before. Asked how they're feeling they say excited, shy and unsure of themselves. They think of the detectives as being intimidating authority figures. Meanwhile, in their briefing room, the 15 or so detectives are telling their trainer that they are nervous about facing the media pack, and worried that they'll either embarrass themselves or compromise their hypothetical investigation. The detectives are sent out one at a time to face the gaggle of journalists. For each detective it is five minutes in the spotlight. For the journalists it's 'groundhog day', the same interview over and over again, giving them the chance to try out different approaches, to polish the wording of their questions and to learn by trial and error how to get a detective onside and talking. Halftime means a lunchbreak in the police academy canteen and a tour of the facilities that expands their understanding of the training police receive and the work they do. And at the end of the day, the trainee journalists and detectives share a debrief session. The most commonly shared new insight is about the basic humanity of each other, who earlier in the day had seemed like hostile 'others' and expressions of greater willingness to work together.

The role of the attending lecturer

The role of the attending journalism lecturer has been to brief the journalism students and, to initially lead the questioning, teaching via demonstration. This models appropriate behaviour, which the students quickly pick up and emulate in the following interviews. For the remaining interviews I stand the periphery of the media pack, and take photos of the students and detectives. In the breaks between interviews I use my camera's preview function to show these images to the students, allowing them to consider their facial expressions and by extension, their general demeanour and tone of voice and to experiment with adjustments to increase their

efficacy. The photos, footage and audio recordings of the detectives have been sent to the DTS after the training days to promote similar reflective learning, to evaluating their teaching and as raw materials for the development of new teaching materials. While at this stage the ECU students have made no further use of the footage, there is scope for it to be used in audio and video editing classes. The hypothetical nature of the crime scenarios makes it inappropriate to publish the students' stories, but they are asked, during the lunchbreak, to write a news article on the crime, to prompt them to consider whether they are asking appropriate questions. They email polished versions of these draft articles to me before the following morning (learning deadline pressure) and I correct and return them. While the students have all been taught the dos and don'ts of crime reporting in class the number of errors made in these articles (assumption of guilt, identifying victims etc) prompted a rethink of the way we were teaching crime reporting.

Authentic Learning

Framing the initiative in terms of education theory, it falls firmly within the camp of 'authentic learning', as described by Herrington and Herrington (2006). The Herringtons state that the benefits of authentic learning environments are well supported by the literature, but not yet used as widely as they could be for a variety of reasons, including inertia within academic systems. Reeves (2006) concurred and pointed out that the need to adopt more student-centred and problem-based learning environments has been recognised by education theorists for many years, but he lamented that "few academics seem able to comprehend what it means to teach and learn in fundamentally different ways" (p. viii). He suggested that academics need strong rationales and practical examples to change their mental models of teaching and it is hoped that this paper will provide some ideas and inspiration for journalism educators.

There are a number of elements of the initiative that resonate with features of best-practice authentic learning scenarios. These include the modelling, not only of what questions to ask the detectives and how to answer them but also, of behaviour in what Herrington & Herrington (2006) call the "social periphery" of the relevant tasks. In this case, the social periphery is experienced through the tour of the academy, lunch in the canteen and the shared debrief. In addition, the act, by the lecturer, of taking photos of the student journalists in action, and the provision of footage of the detectives back to the DTS, gives both kind of students an opportunity to engage in 'social reflection'. Knight (1985) stated that this kind of 'active reflection' fostered 'aware attention' towards others, and more successful interactions.

In requiring the students and trainees to interact with each other, the initiative requires them to articulate in a manner consistent with the values of their chosen professions. The value of this as a learning process was described by Vygotsky, who argued that speech is not merely the vehicle for the expression of the learner's beliefs, but that the act of creating the speech profoundly influences the learning process (Herrington & Herrington, 2006). Vygotsky (cited in Lee 1985, p.79), said: "Thought undergoes many changes as it turns into speech. It does not merely find expression in speech; it finds reality and form." The implication of this is that the act of finding the right words for asking and answering questions helps the students become the professionals they are training to be.

In addition to the benefits gained by the students who actively took part in the training days, another benefit to the journalism program was that it allowed the lecturer to see what the journalism students were doing well and not so well. While the specifics of this would vary for different universities depending on the focus and content of in-class training, in this case it showed that students needed more practise at articulating questions about legal details, and at filtering/attributing what the detectives said in order to exclude from their articles details that could endanger a court case because they presuppose guilt or identify victims. Once observed during the training day as shortcomings, these skills were incorporated into in-class training for all students in the journalism major. This primarily took the form of the development of new scenario-based

teaching materials which present more information than can be reported and ask students to consider (and discuss in class) what they can and can't report without risking interference with judicial processes.

Evaluating the initiative - methodology

While anecdotal feedback on the first few training days was overwhelmingly positive, in order to quantitatively assess the value of the initiative to the journalism and detective students all participants in two of the 2011 training days were invited to complete before and after questionnaires.

In addition, in June 2011, I recorded interviews about the initiative with two crime journalists to provide a contextualising framework for the training initiative and the findings of the questionnaire. The two were Grant Wynne, an ECU 2008 graduate now employed by ABC TV in Perth as a crime reporter; and Rex Haw, a former crime reporter of many years who is now Special Projects Officer for Media and Public Affairs with the WA Police. These interviews provide a lived experience' perspective that contextualises the questionnaire data. They were included in the study because, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.5) wrote, "qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus". Explaining in more depth they added:

the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. ... The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry

Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.5)

Ethics approval for the questionnaire and interview research was sought and received from both ECU and the WA Police.

Results

Questionnaires

Before and after two of the 2011 training days, the trainee detectives and journalism students were invited to complete a seven question questionnaire aimed at evaluating the initiative. It was made clear that completing the questionnaires was voluntary and unrelated to any other DTS or ECU assessment. All of the 36 trainee detectives completed the before questionnaires and 20 completed after questionnaires, this drop off in numbers is because not all of them stayed until the end of the day. All of the 13 journalism students completed the before and 12 completed the after, again because one left early.

The questionnaires used a four-point ordinal Likert scale asking participants to select from options such as high; fairly high; fairly low; low; and no; not much; a little; yes. The responses of the four groups (detectives before; detectives after; journalists before; journalists after) were operationalised for statistical analysis by assigning numerical values (0, 5, 10 and 15) to the four points of the ordinal scales and determining the group score by multiplying these values by the number (proportion) of respondents who ticked each box. (To balance uneven numbers in the before and after groups the raw data was converted to percentages of the respondents in each group, as a preliminary step). The four (value x proportion) figures for each question were then added together to give the before and after groups a score for each question.

Once these group scores were established Chi Square tests were performed to determine the significance of the difference between the before and after group scores. A limitation of this type of analysis is that the assignment of numerical values to categories in ordinal scales is inherently arbitrary (Wright, 1976), and it

assumes a linear relationship between the values of: high; fairly high; fairly low; and low. These measures of statistical significance are therefore contentious and inappropriate for incorporation into meta-analysis, but they are meaningful within the context of this study because they have internal consistency and they show specifically which aspects of the joint training days the trainee detectives and journalism students thought were most and least useful.

The questions the detectives and journalists were asked were:

Journalists:

- Q1 – How much do you know about the way journalists and detectives interact in press conference situations
- Q2 – Are you familiar with what detectives can and cannot comment on during police press conferences?
- Q3 – Are you confident that in a press conference situation you would be able to get all of the relevant details you need to report on a crime story?
- Q4 - What are the chances that you would feel pressured and accidentally not get as much information as you should?
- Q5 – Do you know how to ask questions in a way that helps detectives feel confident and trusting about sharing information?
- Q6 – Are you confident that you can get quality sound and video recordings while also concentrating on asking good questions during a press conference?
- Q7 - Are you familiar with what journalists can and cannot report on about crime stories?

Detectives:

- Q1 – How much do you know about the way journalists and detectives interact in press conference situations?
- Q2 – Are you familiar with what detectives can and cannot comment on during police press conferences?
- Q3 – Are you confident that in a press conference situation you would release all relevant facts and keep quiet about details that should not be disclosed?
- Q4 – What are the chances that you would feel pressured and accidentally say more than you should?
- Q5 – What are the chances that you would feel pressured and accidentally say less than you should?
- Q6 – Will the presence of cameras and audio recorders make you more nervous about speaking to a group of journalists?
- Q7 - Are you familiar with what journalists can and cannot report on about crime stories?

Figure 1 shows the relative significance of the difference between the before and after group scores for each question, with lines indicating a 0.05 level of significance and a 0.2 level of significance.

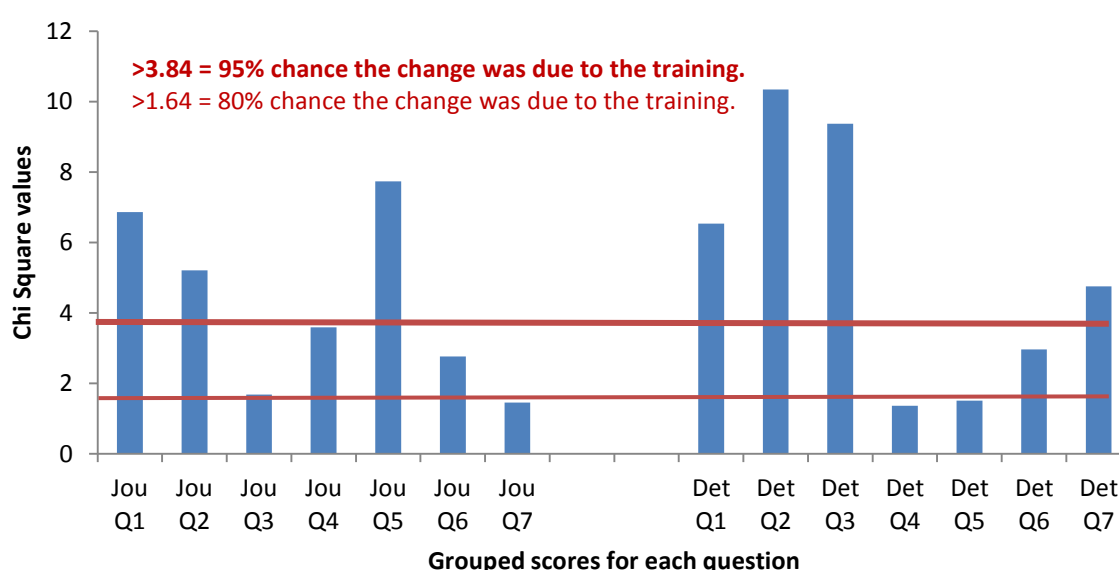


Figure 1: Significance of difference between grouped before and after scores for each question.

While the collective answers to every question indicated some gain in understanding not all group scores achieved a level of significance. The analysis showed that both the journalism students and the trainee detectives claimed significant improvement in their knowledge about the nature of the way journalists and detectives interact in press conference situations. While what they witnessed may be a slightly idealised version of reality, given the collegiality of the collaborating educators, it is the point of the activity to model professional co-operative behaviour with an emphasis on serving the public good.

In addition, journalism students most significantly learnt about the limitations on what detectives can say and how to earn their trust. The trainee detectives also gained a better understanding of what they can and can't say, confidence that they would say enough to enable a journalist to cover the story and an understanding about what journalists can and can't report. The jump in the detectives' understanding of what they can and can't say was bigger than the journalists' learning improvement about what they can and can't report, but this could be because the detectives received feedback from their trainer on their interviews before they completed the after questionnaire, while the journalists had been taught about reporting restrictions in class weeks prior to the training day, and received feedback on their articles after completing the after questionnaire.

Questionnaire written responses

The before questionnaire invited participants to add more information about what they hoped to get out of the training days and the after questionnaire invited them to add comments about what they had got from the training days. None of the written feedback was critical of the initiative.

Ten trainee detectives made comments on the before questionnaires. Five of them mentioned wanting to feel more confident with one saying she felt "way out her depth at present"; and five mentioned wanting more knowledge and understanding about what they should or shouldn't say.

Nine trainee detectives made comments on the after questionnaires. They used the words, 'helpful', 'valuable', 'good', 'beneficial', 'worth doing' and 'worthwhile'.

Nine journalism students made comments on the before questionnaires. Two mentioned wanting to gain confidence; two said they wanted to learn how to be more assertive; and five said they wanted to know what questions to ask. One wanted insight into how journalists and police interact.

Twelve journalism students made comments on the after questionnaires. They used the phrases: an amazing day; a worthwhile experience; a really valuable experience; brilliant day; helpful and informative; extremely helpful; fantastic idea; great experience; and great day. Four mentioned gaining confidence, six mentioned the value of practical experience, four described the day as informative and two specifically mentioned learning how to "think on your feet". The comments included: "I learnt they are more nervous than us and building a rapport and making them feel comfortable is crucial in gaining as much information as possible." And "It was excellent to experience how you need to think on your feet in those situations, as well as a great insight into the police perspective."

Interviews with crime journalists

The need for communication between police and journalists is as old as journalism itself, but the dynamic between the two has changed as communication technology and media awareness have evolved over recent decades. The following description of the dynamic, and changes in it, was drawn from interviews with Rex Haw and Grant Wynne. Haw started his career as a TV news cameraman and journalist in the 1960s. He has worked in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth and is now a Strategic Projects Officer for the WA Police. Wynne studied journalism at ECU and is now Perth's ABC TV crime reporter.

Asked whether their journalism training had taught them how to communicate with detectives, Haw said:

In the '60s early '70s journalists were not trained about what to ask detectives about crimes, it was something they just learned on the job ... the old doyens of the trade would sometimes give the odd good tip to a young reporter.

Wynne said that most 'round-specific' aspects of crime reporting were still learnt on the job. He said his first editor had often criticised him for using phrases such as "the person of interest decamped on foot", urging him instead to write, "the robber ran away". He also said he learn how to foster good relations with detectives by starting his career in small towns. He said:

In small town the police and their families are also a part of the community and so you'll see them around town, at the shops, and these are all opportunities to build on the relationship. Icebreaker conversations before press conferences and the off-the-record chat at the end are also really important because you can glean information that can help you frame what questions you might use in the press conference ... so it always pays to form a more trusting relationship.

Both Haw and Wynne mentioned the importance of journalists understanding why police sometimes hold back some information. Haw said:

Understanding police/legal procedures is what it basically boils down to. Sadly many of these things are not actually taught at J-Schools. After a while journos learn what they can report and what they can't, and SOME even reach an understanding of why there's certain things police cannot tell them.

Discussing the flow of information, Wynne said:

They are always going to control what information they give out because if they are looking for an offender they know there are aspects of a crime only they will know and they will keep them quiet for what they call 'operational reasons' and that's legitimate for them to do that, so I don't think that this kind of training will influence what they hold back and what they don't. What it will do is give them a good practice run at speaking to the media and it can break down some of the barriers that come with speaking to the media because it can be a very daunting, if not intimidating experience for detectives to front to a media pack and have to give a statement and answer questions with journos firing questions from all over the place.

Commenting on the way journalists behave in packs as opposed to individually, and the potential for a group of journalists to be intimidating, Haw said:

They tend to be more aggressive and impolite when they feel there's safety in numbers. And they tend to search each other out and stay in a pack when attending a crime scene, mainly because they are scared that someone else might get something more than they do.

On the flip side, Wynne pointed out that new detectives are not alone in finding the encounter intimidating. He said

As a young journalist ... you can be quite nervous because you are dealing with someone in a position of authority. To deal with that I just try to remind myself that we are the conveyers of information and so to get that information to the public we have to ask these questions, so they shouldn't get stroppy or annoyed with me for asking questions.

Asked if it's common for young journalists to be afraid of asking bad or wrong questions, he said:

There is no such thing as a wrong question but experience teaches you what there is no point in asking, because it's not the sort of question they can answer. There is nothing wrong with you asking though, and they can say that they can't give you that information, and then you can ask

why they can't and it goes like that, bouncing between them and you to negotiate what you can and can't say. I've found that they don't mind you asking and repeatedly asking because they would rather you get it right, than report something wrong.

Asked if his view of the police/media dynamic had changed since he switched from being a reporter to being a police employee, Haw - affirming Mawby's (2001) claims about the evolution of police PR - said:

My view of the dynamic HAS changed, mainly because the dynamic itself has ... police now see the media as an integral part of any newsworthy police activity, and actually use the media and foster an ongoing, symbiotic, relationship. Information given to the media is carefully considered, and controlled as a strategic element of an investigation. Police now receive media training ongoing throughout their careers. They 'workshop' scheduled news conferences beforehand to ensure they are prepared for the unexpected. They usually appoint just one media spokesperson for a specific case, who is then the only person authorised to speak publicly about the issue. This is designed to maintain public confidence in the police, and protect the integrity of investigations.

Wynne expressed understanding of this perspective while answering a question about detectives who view journalists as hostile or dangerous. He said:

When I'm confronted with the perspective that journalists are just out for sensationalism, I talk about why it's important not to paint everyone with the same brush. Some people may have been burnt by the media and developed that view through a bad experience, but overall mostly what happens is that as they move up through the police ranks they start to see the value of the media and the importance of the media to police and they realise that they don't want to just not talk to us, they know that there are times when they need us. Police media train them to deal with the worst journalists, and that's a good thing, but that's why developing good relationships is so important. The better the relationship, the better quality the information is going to be, and the better the information exchange is going to be.

Discussion

Shpayer-Makov (2009) pointed out that while journalism and detective work are supposedly different professions, they have much in common in the way they are practiced and in the parallel way they evolved. Looking at 19th century Britain she outlines the ways that the two occupations "were instrumental to each other in the performance of tasks and the elevations of their status" (p. 963). Despite objections to police PR spin and to representations of criminals in the media, this co-dependent relationship still exists and need has been clearly articulated by the trainee detectives and journalists in this study for more training to make negotiating the relationship less stressful and more effective.

Further confirmation about the nature of negotiations between police and the media were revealed in early November 2011 via the Melbourne Magistrates Court hearing into the publication by *The Australian* of details of the Australian Federal Police's Operation Neath prior to the execution of a search warrant. Simons (2011) reported that the negotiations included discussion about how many people might be killed as a result of the publication, and that *The Australian* went ahead with the publication despite the police's concerns about fatalities and although publication restricted the scope of the investigation. This serves to illustrate the gravity of the issue and the importance of the establishment of relationships in which media and police can trust each other to speak honestly and to act in the public interest.

The evaluation of the ECU/DTS training initiative has shown that the joint training days serve to break down barriers between detectives and journalists, enabling more open and trusting discourse, which, in most cases,

has resulted in the provision of more information by police, and in fruitful collegial discussion between the journalists and detectives about the appropriateness of releasing sensitive information that could jeopardise the prosecution of cases, or invade the privacy of individuals involved. Both journalism students and trainee detective reported feeling less intimidated by each other as a result of the training, and to have learnt more about the ethics and laws guiding each other's professions.

Joint training days like these are likely to be easy to establish in cities in Australian and New Zealand with both university journalism programs and police academies with detective training schools. It is hoped that this paper will inspire journalism academics to initiate conversations that will lead to collaborations. In addition, there is scope for collaborations to arise in places without university journalism classes. Across the Pacific a higher proportion of journalists receive solely 'on the job training', or have degrees in fields other than journalism, but training initiatives involving cadet journalists and police academies could still be established. As the collaboration helps foster understanding among police personnel of the motivations behind journalistic enquiry, it may help alleviate antagonism and wariness of journalists, in places where relationships between police officers and the media are less trusting and more fragile. As police forces in most Pacific nations are poorly resourced compared with the Australian and New Zealand forces, most spend less on media relations, but this may be out of necessity rather than desire and input from the media may be appreciated. In Pacific nations, interactions in many cases are limited to brief press releases and press conferences in which little or no extra detail is given. Deliberate efforts to build good relationships between police and journalists therefore have potential to encourage police to be more trusting of journalists and forthcoming with information and to improve the public image of police, and public co-operation with investigations and to discourage unlawful behaviour. In addition, it could contribute to the evolution of the culture of police forces in areas where service of the public is given less priority than service of political or corporate parties.

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