

Research and Practice Informed Case Studies: Paul Dunn

About Paul

Paul is a freelance journalist and Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Journalism at City, University of London. He has over forty years of experience as a journalist and has worked at a number of newspapers including *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Observer*, and *The Times*.

Interview

00.07 Who are you and where do you teach?

Hello, I'm Paul Dunn and I'm a visiting lecturer on the MA Journalism programme.

00.15 Can you describe your academic speciality in relation to practice and teaching?

In a sense everything I do is practically based and rooted in my experience. I worked as a journalist on national newspapers, mostly, for forty years. I am interested in the practical aspects of teaching students how to do the job that they're interested in: how to write stories, how to present stories, how to find stories, how to edit copy, and those sorts of things. And those are all rooted in the professional experience I had as a professional journalist.

00.52 Who are your students?

They are postgraduates entirely that I teach – I don't teach on the undergraduate course. They have a variety of first degrees. Some who are interested in things like science will have a science degree, or they will have a good humanities degree, from a variety of universities.

01.17 Where do you practice?

I was a career journalist for nearly forty years. I started off on a local newspaper in Kent and I took what was then the classic route into the industry. I then moved swiftly onto a larger regional evening newspaper and then after about three or four years I got my first job in national newspapers on *The Guardian*. Since then I've also worked on *The Independent* and *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Observer* and for the last fifteen years of my career on *The Times*.

01.51 What do you understand by the term "research and practice informed teaching"?

Practice informed teaching I think means that you have to translate the skills that you have used I hope successfully in your own job to achieve what you have achieved within that career. It's learning how to transfer that knowledge to students.

02.17 What does research and practice informed teaching mean to you?

Things like learning from experience, reviewing and feedback – that circle of explaining how to do something, giving them examples of how to do it, reviewing what they've done – those are things, I think if you're teaching from experience rather than from theory, those are natural things. And also, I think newsrooms/newspapers tend to be places where a lot of discussion goes on and so again, it becomes almost second nature to try and get the students to discuss their own work. And part of what we're doing is obviously trying to teach them to think for themselves, so that discussion of that – through trying something, discussing it, thinking about how they might have done it better, trying it again – that all comes naturally I think from perhaps having learned the job oneself from experience.

03.18 How do you integrate your research and practice with your teaching?

The teaching that I do is basically based around giving them practical exercises so that they know how to write a story, they know how to present a story on a website, they know how to write the headline for it which will attract the reader. They know what sort of illustrations will set it up

properly so that it holds the attention of the people they're reaching out to, their audience. And I think that in a way everything you do drives into that.

03.56 How do you make your students aware of your research and practice?

I think one of the best things you can do for the students is to tell them about the sort of life they will have if they take their qualification and put it into a career: what will they have to expect, what will they have to put up with, what are the up sides, what are the down sides? And because one has done it, you can tell them that and I think that really is for me why it's a very good thing anyway, if you want to teach journalism, to have done it and to have done it at a reasonably high level.

04.35 How do you engage your students with your research and practice?

I try as much as possible to use real life examples in teaching materials. So, for example, one of the things that we do on one of the modules that I teach is called editorial production, which is about presenting a big news story. So I have a lot of material from a real life news story – pictures, stories and so on – which I give to them and say “ok, your task is to make a double page spread, or a front page and a double page spread of a newspaper using this material about this story which has just happened, go away and do it.” And you can show them how it was done in practice, in real life, as it were.

05.27 Can you give an example of how your teaching is informed by your research and practice?

One thing I would say, what I think is important is to try and at least keep your hand in a bit. I still do some text editing professionally and re-writing of copy, and things like that. Mostly for private, commercial clients, but I think it's quite easy to get out, to get rusty, and so I think it is important that you at least keep a toe in the water, as it were.

05.58 What would be your “top tip” for creating research and practice informed teaching?

I think, think what engaged you about the job, about the practice, when you were doing it? What did you like doing?

[End]