

Journalism as a way of knowledge: a Brazilian pedagogical experience

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Abstract

This paper describes the new pedagogical experience of teaching Journalism in the Federal University of Santa Catarina. From the concept of Journalism as a way of knowing, different than that produced by the sciences, and utilizing Paulo FREIRE's pedagogical method, that Brazilian school established a new strategy: instead of creating "communicators", as has been proposed traditionally in Journalism Education, the schools should be creating people capable of producing and communicating knowledge.

The concept of Journalism as a way of knowing, different than that produced by the sciences, was developed for the first time in Brazil in 1987 by Adelmo GENRO FILHO, a professor at the University of Santa Cata-

rina, who died the next year. From the philosophical ideas of Hegel, the Brazilian researcher defined Journalism as a way of knowing that is socially produced, and sought the singularity of these subjects, contrary to the sciences, where the conception of knowledge seeks the definition of laws of universal value. Before him, Nilson LAGE, helped define the differences between Journalism and the sciences, from the point-of-view of the logic and linguistics.

From the work realized by these scholars, we began some years ago to study the theme, with the objective of understand the difficulties of communication between theoreticians and technicians who teach Journalism. These difficulties, from our perspective, were caused by the lack of connections between the theory and the practice in teaching these courses, which has come to be a constant complaint of the students.

In 1990, we published the research called "The Knowledge of Journalism: The Missing Link in Communication Studies." This study criticized theoreticians and practitioners of the Journalism schools for their perspectives on teaching the profession, in both cases distorted by their limited points

of view. This proposal, as an alternative, was not a conciliation between the two perspectives, as has been attempted without success, but went beyond them, to the conception of Journalism as a form of knowing different than that of the sciences.

The pedagogical consequences caused by recognizing this concept was a change of attitude by our Journalism school. Instead of creating communicators, as had been proposed, we should be creating people capable of producing and communicating knowledge. The great challenge that springs from this, was to develop a pedagogical method that made possible this formation in a way that was completely different from that of the traditional communication theories and equally had not been reached in strictly practical experiences, but must be developed from a new theoretical conception of this practice.

1 Different ways of knowledge

Because of the different uses and objectives they have had in History until today, Science and Journalism developed their own logic and specific methodologies. The Science became the sciences (JAPIASSU, 1975: 85) and Journalism, although it developed its specializations didn't abandon its generalism. On the contrary, it found in this generalism one of its main social roles: of maintaining the communicability among the physicist, the lawyer, the worker, and the philosopher.

The objective of communicability establishes a fundamental distinction between Journalism and the sciences, not only at the level of language, but also at the level of logic, since logic is unseparable from language. According to LAGE (1985:22-3),

"the universe of the news is the one of the world appearances; the news section does not allow the essential knowledge of things, the subject of the scientific study, of the theoretical practice, except by eventual applications to concrete facts. Behind the news, an infinite net of dialectic relations and subjective paths occur that, by definition, it doesn't encompass."

The fact that Journalism does not work with hypotheses is another important methodological difference relating to the sciences. The hypothesis assume a controlled experiment, that is, an abstract cut of reality by isolating changeable factors, which allows the obtainment of answers to a questioning based on a previous theoretical system. The scientific theory exposes a relation among facts and from this relation new deductions appear through logic. These deductions - the hypotheses - lead scientists to an empirical verification and, if verified, the hypotheses are transformed into new theories, in an infinite accumulating process.

Journalism, on the other hand, doesn't depart from a hypothesis, but from a journalistic agenda (an idea, event, problem, a trend or anything extraordinary). Differently from the hypothesis, the agenda does not appear from a previous theoretical system, but from the non-controlled (from the scientific methodology viewpoint) observation of reality. The journalistic agenda is also different from the hypothesis because of the kind of "epistemological cut" that it proposes. The isolation of the changeable factors is substituted by the ideal of apprehending the fact from all the relevant points of view, that is, in its specificity. This determines the limit of the possible abstraction in the way of

knowing of Journalism and its accumulating possibility.

While the sciences, isolating one aspect of different facts, try to establish the universal laws that rule the relations among them, Journalism, as a way of knowing, has its power in revealing the fact itself, in its singularity, including the aspects forcibly neglected by the scientific way of knowing. Thus, while the sciences become a way of knowing of the explainable world, Journalism comes to be the way of knowing of the sensitive world. Each one of them will have its own way of reflecting and, inevitably, refracting the reality, and the world itself won't be exhausted by either (KOSIK, 1963:25).

Journalism, as a way of knowing, is conditioned by its industrial production as a commodity, by the ideological values of its producers, by the authoritarianism of its shapes, by the arbitrariness of its choices, by the false categories that its tradition and technique have built. However, it has a much larger potentiality than Science to reveal the new. "Because the new always appears as a singularity - points out GENRO FILHO (1987:212) -, and singularity always appears as the new aspect of the phenomenon, the tension of capturing the singular always opens a critical perspective relating to the process. Singularity tends to be critical because it is reality transcending the concept, reality creating itself and differentiating from itself."

The possibility of the emergence of the new, given by the way of knowing of Journalism, creates a fundamental contradiction in its practice, seldom perceived by theory: because it is, formally, so positivistic as the most positivistic of the sciences, Journalism is always loaded with negativity. The dif-

ficulty to perceive this paradox lies in that it isn't apparent neither in the analysis of a journalistic product, nor in the analysis of the manuals that define it, both traditionally subject to the critics of the theorists. This paradox is only perceivable from the viewpoint of its very production, from the process and its movement, its periodicity, in the aphorism that "there is nothing older than yesterday's newspaper". The contradiction between a periodical and its periodicity is the same as between the synchronic and the diachronic in the comprehension of Historical movement.

The movement of Journalism is the same false movement of the sciences, a succession of immobilized pictures. But the speed of this movement in Journalism is so much faster that there is a qualitative change in the result. It reinforces its crystallization in the singular and destroys any lasting possibility of systematizing the produced knowledge. In this process, the velocity of the emergence of the new does not allow the stability and the regularity of the positive order.

A second aspect to be considered in this velocity, one that has once lead Journalism to be called "point-blank written history", is the peculiar way in which its statements participate in the social dialogue. Given the nearness to the facts, to its agents and to the ones hit by them, the subjectivity of the news is hardly hidden by its formal objectivity. It is this critical potential relating to the hermetic concepts that distinguishes and makes Journalism necessary as a social form of knowing.

2 Pedagogical Consequences

The importance of the journalistic practice in the schools that teach this profession in

Brazil had been denied in many ways that, although contradictory among themselves, lead all to the same fatalism of denying man as subject. The first of these ways was the theoreticalism, an idealistic form of seeing the indissoluble relation between human activity and consciousness in which only one pole was considered. The same distortion, but now centered on the inverse pole - the one of the activity - was made by the pragmatism, which would rebound in the same fatalistic result (SÁNCHEZ-VÁSQUEZ, 1967:213-4). A third path of this negation had been the loss of meaning of the word praxis, that originally intended exactly to negate the negation, but that was emptied of its content when it was disconnected from the problematic that originated it, transforming itself into a kind of a halfway between theory and practice (KOSIK, 1963:198).

The experts on theories and the experts on practices that intended to reach the highest level of the praxis by adding the efforts of their specialties thought of praxis as a joining of the reflection of the first with the action of the last. However, they did not ask themselves why praxis is action plus reflection and, by not answering this question, they passed far from the comprehension of what is the essence of this action-reflection and of what gives meaning to it.

The thing that defines the human practice is not the action plus the reflection, although these two elements can be found in it. What defines it is the relation of man with a historically given situation. As a creative subject, man perceives, knows and transforms the given historical situation, and in this process he transforms himself (KOSIK, 1963:201-20).

The action that negates the subject is not real action, it is, at most, occupation; the reflection that denies him is deception; and the lame praxis that is extracted from the union of one with another can not be effective beyond the speech under penalty of exposing its frailty. And this frailty is exactly its non-achievement, it is the lost link between theory and practice.

The lost link between theory and practice in the teaching of Journalism determined its chronic deficiency, because it blocked the possibility of the true knowing of Journalism through this teaching. Without a radical critique of the attitude that suppressed the subject of the practice and the practice of the subject, the traditional pedagogy did not surpass the inefficiency because it did not find the lost link.

By disassociating the practice from the subjects of the practice, the traditional pedagogy did not understand the specificity of Journalism as a social form of knowing - did not perceive that Journalism is an activity of knowing - and reduced it to a technical occupation. Following the same path, it deceived the profession's technique and did not comprehend it at all: it became technologically incapable. As a result, the traditional pedagogy could not make an appropriate relation between Journalism and reality; it could not know it, and because the learning concerning Journalism was blocked, it would not be able to teach it in an efficient way.

The recent progress of Journalism Theory in Brazil, differentiating it from the sciences at the level of language, logic and the nature of knowledge that it produces, created a new challenge to the Journalism schools. Besides the scientific ("theoretical") and technical ("practical") approach of the profession

that the courses had so far tried to transmit to the students, they should make them capable of a journalistic approach to reality, differently than how science does. It was what we tried to introduce in the Federal University of Santa Catarina's pedagogical experience.

Making one capable of a journalistic approach of reality - a gap left aside by "theorists" and "pragmatists" in the traditional Journalism schools- required a learning of how to read reality. It was vain to pretend that this could be achieved through the basic part of the courses, which offered to the students balanced portions of concepts from the various human sciences, in a real TV-dinner pedagogy.

The learning of how to read reality required studies where its object was reality itself, and not the concepts that the sciences developed about it. This did not mean abandoning the concepts, but a displacement. They became tools to be used to unveil the reality, which was the object of study, the concepts not being the objects themselves any more. This new pedagogy of the basic part of the course of Journalism proposed that we reach the human sciences concepts beginning with the analysis of the concrete reality, starting by following what happens day by day. Thus, the economy classes, for instance, began with the discussion of the economy section of the newspapers. The concepts would only be introduced according as they can be of help to understand the facts of the everyday life of the ones involved in the pedagogical process.

Although seemingly simple, this procedure was very difficult in fact, because it deal with three levels of reality apprehension: the direct experiencing of the everyday life, the way Journalism represents it, and the search

of its essence in Science. That was why it found a great resistance on the part of the teachers graduated in the traditional school.

The generalism that characterizes Journalism as social production of knowledge does not apply to Science nor to Technique, which tend to specialize themselves. In this aspect, an apparent paradox appeared: to make good generalist professionals it was necessary to specialize the theoretical and the practical formation. The necessary specialization was that around the object Journalism, without losing sight of its dialectic relation with the wider human processes, but equally without getting lost in them. One might expect that, under this perspective, a professional who controls theoretically the journalistic activity would be in better conditions to be a more good journalist and to refine his practice.

If this professional could also understand the theories of economy, psychology, and sociology, then this was undoubtedly profitable. But what he needed to know before that was how to read the concrete reality on the move, which would be the material he would work with. The never stopping movement of reality usually runs over the theories, but could not run over the journalist who works exactly with the source of new aspects of reality. In this sense, what he needs was to be prepared to make a journalistic approach to reality, which was different from the scientific approaches that other schools could offer.

This did not imply abandoning the sciences. On the contrary, the specialization of our theory sought more serious studies of Journalism. But always keeping in mind that this search was not intended to transform journalists into scientists, but to assert on a scientific and dialectic basis the comprehension of the difference between one

and another, in a way to permit the refinement of our pedagogy and, consequently, of the professionals that it might produce.

3 Knowing the Practice

In the same way that happened to the theory taught in the courses, the “practical” part, or the teaching of the journalistic techniques, strayed from its concrete object. For many years the Brazilian universities could not count on resources and equipment to offer practicing classes that could be appropriately called that way, and even today most of them continue with the poorest working conditions. Only the schools which had the necessary equipments for the journalistic practices and that allowed their students to use them (something that is becoming easier every day thanks to the technological evolution) were able to overcome the prejudice according to which the teaching must follow a standardized form, represented by the teacher in front of the blackboard, applying a test to his passive students. There was nothing more foreign to the reality of Journalism, nor more distant from its effective learning.

To learn the practice of Journalism in formal classes, dividing this practice in a rigid schedule of weekly fifty minutes, was the same as trying to understand a song listening to a record playing in the wrong rotation. It was not Journalism that had to adapt to the classes rhythm, but the other way around. A technical class chosen at random - radiojournalism, for instance - must seek its starting point in the routine of the exercise of this technique. To make a news section - in the real rhythm and speed in which they are made - must not be seen as a distant goal to be achieved at the end of the learning process, but

as a starting point of any valid reflection on this activity.

Beginning with the restructuring of the practicing classes, in a way to respect the shape and the timing of the journalistic activity, it was necessary to go further: to make viable the paths for this practice - that would necessarily be accelerated - to provide a theoretical reflection about itself. Let us start with a commonplace example: the teaching broadcast writing, to show how it could allow the introduction of concepts that were normally firmly kept away in the theoretical compartments of the courses. In our radio-journalism classes, we discussed the thought and the language in the radio text, allowing to discover the usefulness of philosophical concepts of language and theory of knowledge, something that, if done differently, probably wouldn't mean nothing to the students even if it was included in the curriculum.

In the same way, when one spoke of technology like computers, printing techniques, video and audio, and all the paraphernalia involved, it was necessary to open the “black boxes” which hide the secrets. These devices were not magical, they just fulfilled the same purposes more efficiently than the rudimental rattletraps of the mechanical era. To observe how a linotype machine from the beginning of the century worked could be a very good way to demolish the hoax that an electronic composer was magical.

If we wanted to make real knowledge producers, it was necessary to invert the logic, pointed out by BRAVERMAN (1974:377-8), where the more the machine became a sophisticated intellectual product, the less the worker was able to control and understand it. In the words of Paulo FREIRE

(1979:81), the education that renounces to be an authentic gnosiological situation in order to be a verbalist narrative of knowledge accumulated elsewhere, does not allow the overcoming of the domain of the mere *doxa* and the access to the domain of the *logos*. “And if the students achieve it, it is because they did it despite the education itself”. The Brazilian experience of teaching Journalism developed at the Federal University of Santa Catarina is trying to change it.

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