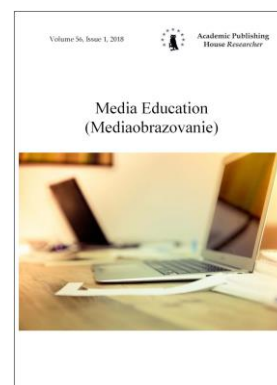


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Interactive Practice-Oriented Techniques in Professional Media Education

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Abstract

The article focuses on the educational techniques, which are conducive to forming the journalist's creative personality. It estimates the degree of their effectiveness as exemplified by teaching experience of such subjects as 'Creative Workshops' and 'Copyediting' at the Institute of Philology, Journalism and Cross-cultural Communication (Southern federal university).

It is obvious that the new social and cultural context as well as new technologies will inevitably change teaching techniques. Nowadays there is an acute necessity 'to immerse the student into hands-on experience' within the context of their university studies to enable them to improve the acquired skills and abilities later on. The aim of the given study is to provide the theoretical and pedagogical analysis of proprietary methods focused on developing skills and competences to create media texts, develop students' potential and form a creative personality.

The authors investigate the transformations of the conceptions, content and methods in journalism education in the light of political and social changes that have occurred in the country. Special attention is paid to one of the acutest problems that has always sparked a storm of controversy within the professional community – the balance between the theoretical input and practice in the learning and teaching process at university. The article analyzes the forms of conducting classes in the role-play format that models the functioning of an editorial office. Students go through the whole process of creating a media product: from conceiving an idea to the final output.

The authors come to the conclusion that the interactive techniques used in teaching media students help the latter to focus on their professional and personal development, work out their own individual plan of action in their future career and widen the range of creative methods in the process of creating media texts.

Keywords: media education, higher education, practice-oriented education, journalism pedagogy, media text.

1. Introduction

The challenges of the modern world make it necessary to transform the present-day educational conceptions at all the levels of teaching a media competent personality in the dynamically developing information-oriented society. The primary importance is attached to teaching future media practitioners, which A.V. Fedorov (Fedorov, 2004) considers to be one of the highest priorities in media education and which A.V. Onkovich (Onkovich, 2015) calls its culmination. This can be explained by the fact that a media product created by professionals is

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basically the object of media education in general. This situation is paradoxical as ‘despite all the developments in the media teaching techniques in a way only one side of this issue gets into the spotlight. Teaching professionals are mainly concerned with the media education of children, the protection of them from harmful information on the Internet. However, it is imperative now to search for new effective approaches and methods in professional media education’ (Guglyuk, 2010: 217).

Unequivocally, the new socio-cultural context and new technologies must result in the change of the educational techniques. This is true for all professions. At the same time one cannot help but take into consideration that training journalists has a number of peculiarities. ‘On the one hand, it [journalism training] along with other subjects is the integral part of the university syllabus, so that it complies with general standards and rules of teaching. On the other hand, this kind of activity is distinguished by such features as publicity, availability for all civic-minded citizens, pluralistic nature of its content, organizational forms, styles, etc. That is why the diversity of opinions on who and how should train journalists is much wider than in other professions that are not so accessible to the world,’ says the famous Russian scholar S.G. Korkonosenko (Korkonosenko, 2015: 6).

One of the perennial problems which has always been under discussion in the professional community is the proper balance between the theoretical input and hands-on experience in the educational process. A great number of media practitioners are worried about the insufficient practice-oriented level of Russian journalism education. In particular, the famous publicist D. Sokolov-Mitrich (Sokolov-Mitrich, 2012) considers theory-based training, a scope of wide but not in-depth knowledge and detachment from real-life working experience to be the obvious drawbacks of media education. In his opinion, practical journalism cannot be taught through a series of theoretical inputs, therefore students should be ‘immersed into hands-on experience’, i.e. sent to the editorial offices.

At present many Russian media educators also take a stand against excessive academic approach traced in the curriculums and conventional forms of teaching typically used at university: ‘They are irrelevant to the aims of professional education, especially journalism training. Lacking practical knowledge and skills acquired in the process of academic education, students inevitably lose interest in studying: their interests switch from the educational sphere to the extra-curriculum one’ (Fateeva, 2008: 91).

The competence-based approach that has become the foundation for the recent Russian educational standards requires a high level of students’ motivation and learner autonomy, a change in the very nature of interactions between all the subjects involved in the educational process and adapting educational content to the requirements of the future career.

How is it possible to ensure practice-oriented professional training at the university in the current context?

In our opinion, the most effective tools for forming practical competencies are the interactive techniques used, in the first place, in teaching subjects aiming at developing the creative potential of future journalists, their involvement into professional reflection. According to A.V. Fedorov, media training routinely ‘implies teaching methods based on problematic, heuristic, learning-through-play and other productive forms of teaching that develop students’ individuality, independent thinking and stimulate their abilities through the direct involvement into creative activity, perception, interpretation and analysis of the media text structure’ (Fedorov, 2004: 12).

The relevance of the given study is defined by the analyzed, systematized and generalized experience of implementing such techniques into practice-oriented courses taught at the Journalism Department at Southern federal university.

The aim of the study is to characterize and identify the degree of effectiveness of the innovative teaching methods focused on developing practical skills, abilities to create media texts, opening up new opportunities for students, forming their creative personalities.

2. Materials and Methods

The primary data were gathered on the basis of the methods that were developed by the tutors of the Journalism department at the Institute of Philology, Journalism and Cross-cultural Communication of Southern federal university and implemented in teaching such courses as ‘Creative Workshops’ and ‘Copyediting’.

The empirical basis for the research was constituted by the curricula and syllabuses of various Russian universities offering degrees in journalism.

The research is based on the complex of both theoretical (the analysis of scientific sources, systematization, generalization, general conclusions) and empirical methods (surveying students and graduates). As the authors have profound experience in teaching the abovementioned courses, they had an opportunity to constantly monitor and estimate the degree of effectiveness of different teaching methods through involved observation and feedback.

3. Discussion

The conceptions, content and methods of journalism training have always been under heated discussion throughout the history of this profession. In Russia the mass media started publishing articles about the peculiarities of training specialists for newspapers and magazine editorial offices as early as the beginning of the 20th century. In particular, the July 1903 issue of the popular scientific journal 'Vestnik Znaniya' ('The Herald of Knowledge' Russian Journal) published a report under the title 'Journalism University Education' devoted to the work of the Public Opinion, Press and Journalism Department which was opened in 1895 at Heidelberg University (Germany). Although there was not any kind of training (at university or anywhere else) for people working in periodicals, the editorial board of the 'Vestnik Znaniya' ('The Herald of Knowledge' Russian Journal) considered the experience of the German colleagues to be invaluable.

A rather detailed description of the curriculum, forms and methods that were applied at the institutes of higher education 120 years ago arises not only historical but also practical interest even now. Even then the authors put forward the idea that the paradigm of journalism training directly correlates with the special role of the press in society, its social functions, i.e. this paradigm is defined by the socio-cultural context. There appeared the triad of the general competencies for those who shape the public opinion by means of public speaking: a wide range of historic and theoretical knowledge; understanding of the law and economic spheres of journalism in general and its separate types; creative abilities of the journalist (Bespalova, 2008).

Although in the Soviet Union there was a number of debates over journalism training, they were focused on minor aspects as not only the overall strategy but also the content of the training schemes which the future members of the party-soviet press were supposed to take were defined by the party-state bodies and conformed to the current ideology.

At the end of the 20th century when Russian society was radically transformed and the mass media started functioning under brand-new political, economic, juridical, socio-cultural conditions, the paradigm of Russian higher journalism education started to change fundamentally as well. A number of studies give a detailed description of the attempts to find a new model and upgrade the curriculum. Among such studies we find it necessary to mention the doctoral thesis by I.A. Fateeva (Fateeva, 2008). De-ideologization and practice-based approach became the leading trends of the transformations.

For a long time, university tutors considered educational and in-service internships to be a universal remedy for detachment from the real-life experience in the editorial office. However, while the 20th- century editorial boards spared much time and attention for their trainees, within the context of newly-formed marketplace psychology and high competition the mass media wanted to employ a mature specialist assuming that his training was not part of the editorial board's responsibilities. Therefore, there appeared a necessity to 'immerse students into the working process' at university to enable them to improve the acquired skills and abilities later on.

The curriculum of any Journalism Department always included, in one form or another, courses aiming at nurturing professional skills but their effectiveness posed many questions and censures both from students and employers. Since the mid-90s, when it became possible to exploit Western (in particular American) experience within Russian higher education, coaching methods have become widespread. Significantly more active contacts between educators from different countries, publications of coursebooks by foreign (Handbook, 1993) and later Russian specialists (Vassilieva, 2002) contributed to that process.

At present in Russia, as everywhere else in the world, the curriculums of specialized faculties and institutes inevitably include courses aiming at teaching a correspondent, a specialist in news reporting and much time is allocated for coaching. Through a series of drills students learn how to

write leads, master the art of delivering facts, attribute quotes, experiment with compositional structure of the text based on the principle of the inverted pyramid, hourglass, etc.

Although we admit the significance of the news-processing coaching techniques, their role in competitive professional education cannot be overstated. In the digital era news reporting is changing very rapidly. Due to the swift development of the social media that have become the main source of information for a considerable number of people, the mass media have to form a new information policy: change topic priorities, take a critical view in defining the criteria of importance and/or public interest to various events, etc. The content created by users is becoming a matter of greater importance for the news production. These tendencies identified by the English researchers T. Harcup and D. O'Neill (Harcup, O'Neill, 2017) on the basis of the analysis of 10 leading newspapers are universal and relevant for all the countries.

It is noteworthy that digital technologies influence journalism not segmentarily but systematically. At the beginning of the 21st century the American scholar D. Pavlik (Pavlik, 2000), wrote that it is possible to distinguish at least 4 main fields of such influence: job characteristics, news content, organization and structure of editorial offices, correlation between press services, journalists and the audience. It is also important to emphasize that these transformations can be manifested in concrete national contexts with their specific journalistic culture, history and professional practice in different ways but they are identical in their core. Consequently, the problems journalism education is faced with today are similar. As a result, Mark Deuze, a professor from the Netherlands, identified 10 categories, starting with philosophical notions of motivation and mission, ending with more “down-to-earth” concepts like curriculum and pedagogy, which have a global approach in journalism education (Deuze, 2006).

Recently the world's media community has been faced with such a new phenomenon as ‘robot writers’ — special computer software (algorithms) creating a media product. ‘Only in the Associated Press agency algorithms write more than 3500 articles on financial results of different companies every quarter! Moreover, during the Rio Olympics robots participated in covering the Games and wrote articles. But there is more. The most astonishing fact is that the research showed that the articles written by robots are of such high quality that people cannot tell them from the stories written by human journalists!’ (Plec, 2017). According to some experts (Carlson, 2015), robot writing is potentially more destructive for journalism. It cannot be denied as computers noticeably exceed human productive capabilities.

It is obvious that new challenges must result in significant transformations of the system of professional media education.

In the modern world the question ‘What should a state-of-the-art model of journalism education look like?’ is a burning issue (Gillmor, 2016). Furthermore, the emphasis is placed on the correlation between education and professional practice (Cushion, 2007; Opgenhaffen, 2013). And, as a rule, unsatisfactory conclusions are reached: “Like many news organizations, journalism education programs are distinctly unprepared to respond to such deeply structural changes in the environment” (Mensing, 2010:511).

N. Drok, President of the European Journalism Training Association states the same. In his opinion, educational paradigms that were efficient in the previous century prove to be useless in the future. It is necessary to change the approach to the competences that form the basis of the journalism curriculums. “It is not easy to establish which qualifications will need more attention in future education provision or — because of the limited time budget of students and schools — which qualifications will have to manage with less attention as a result” (Drok, 2013: 145). That is the very reason why it is crucial to take into account the opinion of both — the present-day media scholars/practitioners and future journalists, while compiling new curriculums.

Russia is currently in active search for new conceptions and forms of training media specialists as well. The emphasis on technical training of ‘news collectors’ is not as considerable as it has been perceived over the recent decades. The technology of the job that students become proficient in at the university is not the aim but the means that is supposed to help a journalist to fulfil his basic tasks: to give an in-depth analysis, to objectively interpret the reality, and to envision social changes. That means that a socially responsible, thoughtful, creative journalist seeking constant professional development should be placed into the centre of the higher education concept.

Under these conditions it is important to focus on the principles of general pedagogy in higher education while developing innovative proprietary methods of teaching journalism courses. In our case these are the studies on interactive education techniques (Gushchin, 2015; Stupina, 2009) that enable us to use experience accumulated while preparing specialists in different professional fields for the purposes of developing a creative personality of a future journalist.

4. Results

Practice-based courses ‘Creative Workshops’ (‘Professional Training’, ‘Laboratory of Journalistic Skills’, etc.) make up the core of the curriculums at almost all Journalism faculties and departments at Russian universities and they presuppose the development of a creative personality with highly developed professional reflection. The basic university subjects include the course on ‘Copyediting’ (‘Stylistics and Copyediting’) which focuses on developing a sense of publicistic form, mastering writing skills. In our opinion, these courses supplement each other well. They give the maximum effect in case future journalists are consistent in mastering them.

In our experience they turn out to be the most effective after the 3rd year of studying when students have obtained enough historic and theoretical knowledge and practical working skills in media text production. As the individuality of an author is vividly seen through his publicistic works, an educator should use the personality-oriented teaching approach. Hence the optimal number of people in a group is 10-12.

While mastering the subjects, students improve almost all universal competencies established by the 2017 Federal standard of the RF: systemic and critical thinking, design and realization of projects, teamwork and leadership, communication, intercultural interaction, self-organization and self-development. However, in our opinion, the general professional competencies connected with the ability to create a professional product (OPK-1), interact with the audience (OPK-4) and take sequences of professional work into account (OPK-7) (FSES, 2017) are of the paramount importance.

It is impossible to outline the total number of competencies necessary for writing publicistic works. The process of media product making consists not only of certain procedures (collecting factual information, its verification, analysis, summary, etc.) but also intuition, insight and inspiration. Despite the multifaceted nature of the creative process there are some algorithms that ensure the required quality of media texts.

We believe that the main aim of the ‘Creative Workshops’ course is to develop students’ consistent skills and abilities to create media texts that fulfill the informative needs of different media’s audience on the basis of the knowledge about journalistic work, its essence, principles, methods and tasks. Achieving such goal involves critical reflection, which according to M. Kronstad, must be formed during the student-teacher interaction. He sees “as a key asset in journalism and a key process in bringing together practice and knowledge, thus closing the gap between theory and practice” (Kronstad, 2016:123).

All the classes in creative workshops have an interactive form, i.e. students interact more with each other than with a teacher. During the whole semester the role-play method is used: an editorial briefing is modelled where students discuss all the stories which they are working on. The procedure of the role-play is as similar as it could be to the real-life editorial meetings in a newspaper or a magazine.

The roles of the participants (a journalist-writer, a member of the editorial board, an editor-in-chief) change every meeting. As during the semester all the students should prepare two stories both in analytical or literary-journalistic genres they perform the role of a journalist-writer many times.

The process of text preparation is divided into two stages. During the first one students should find a topic for their performance and think its concept through. The significance of this process in journalism is hard to overestimate. ‘Incubation, ‘carrying’, ‘raising’ an idea, a theme of mass-communication work, its structural vision, an image about its form, genre, language, etc. are no less important for a creative personality than it being realized on some physical medium’ (Oleshko, 2003: 78–79).

This complicated groundwork is finished with sending an application in the written form that becomes a matter of discussion in the editorial board meeting. One should briefly formulate the topic, state the problem, explain its relevance and significance to the audience, show the novelty of

the author's approach, characterise the main sources of information (experts), state the genre, size and deadline in the application.

By creating and discussing a concept of the future literary-journalistic or analytical story students acquire skills in advanced planning of their work (personal time-management), form an ability to defend their own opinion and develop arguments to defend it as well as properly accept criticism and find functional potential in it. After the application is approved by 'the editorial board', which often happens only after the second or third attempt, a student proceeds to the major stage in his or her work on the story – collecting facts, talking to experts, moulding the text into the literary form. As a rule, the second stage causes the least difficulties among future journalists due to their experience gained from in-service internships: it takes no more than 40 % of the whole time spent on preparing the publicistic performance.

The feedback on the manuscript presented at the 'editorial board' meeting stimulates the development of professional reflection – a trait without which a journalist does not exist. Liaison with fellow students makes up for the lack of students' involvement into the professional environment, prepares them to work in a real editorial team. 'The use of the dialogue-based approach in the educational process is a great opportunity for forming future journalists' professional qualities and developing their personal ones. A dialogue is an interaction of subjects, and to become a subject of the, first, educational and, then, professional activity means to master not only the technology of work but to hover over the technology and demonstrate your uniqueness. The atmosphere of freedom from judgments, trust, responsibility, cooperation and art can contribute to that' (Raspopova, 2007).

At the early stage the teacher performs the role of an editor-in-chief, who leads the discussion, sums up all the suggested ideas and makes a final decision. It is the teacher who sets a tone to the debate, establishes the main rules and creates the atmosphere of mutual involvement in creative work. Students should learn first-hand that initiative is encouraged and criticism is welcomed, if it is constructive and justified and if it is targeted not at a person but at a journalistic product. As a rule, a lot of stereotypes in students' behaviour vanish after the second or third meeting: they stop being afraid of critical judgement and even insist on it, ask for advice on improving their own story. From this moment, students can perform a role of the editor-in-chief themselves and the teacher becomes a member of the 'editorial board' as any other participant of the workshop.

If students do not demonstrate initiative in role redistribution, it is effective to use elements of case-technologies to activate their self-sufficiency, in particular, creating an incident (an unexpected situation) when they have to perform functions that the teacher used to perform. For example, the teacher can say at the beginning of the workshop that he or she takes a vow of silence for an hour and that he or she can be engaged into the polylogue only at the final stage. The teacher is basically reduced to the role of an observer. Brainstorming, encouraging others to talk, evaluating and summarizing the suggested ideas falls on the students' shoulders.

As a rule, self-regulation of a group occurs afterwards and during the semester each student tries the role of a formal leader. Thanks to that a young journalist forms such important competences as an ability to organise the process of collective creative work, an ability to take into account different points of view, willingness to make responsible decisions.

Participants of the workshop may perform the roles of an editor-in-chief or a journalist-writer just from time to time while the role of a member of the editorial board is mandatory for them. During the classes when students discuss the applications or ready-made texts the 'brainstorm' method is used. It is crucial that students use the acquired knowledge and their own practical experience to generate ideas and to seek better means of their realisation not for themselves but for other writers. This is a collective creative process that enriches every member.

Immersion in the story and fascination with the topic make it difficult for the writer to reasonably appraise the result of his or her work. Mistakes and errors in judgement, unused resources – all these things are clearly seen from the outside, in other people's work but eventually a student should learn to see weak points in his or her own work. Understanding of what went completely or almost wrong makes one move forward to self-perfection.

The members of the 'editorial board' develop the ability to see a journalistic potential of various topics, identify the degree of novelty of the story, quality of the sources and collected facts, undertake the analysis of the methods that will work best for its presentation. All the members of

the workshop perfect their skills in searching for current social problems that will get coverage in the mass media and also they broaden their mind on the variety of creative approaches and genres. From class to class students develop their paradoxical thinking and heuristic technique which is an ability to see the concealed, use unconventional methods, create new cognitive structures and senses.

It is generally recognised that one of the most important conditions for the evolutionary development of society is diversity of opinions in it. Objectivity cannot be reached without presenting various points of view on one and the same problem, without describing various evaluations of facts and phenomena indispensable to social reality. Thus tolerance towards various cultures, values, ideological positions become for a young journalist not just a sign of proper upbringing but a criterion of professionalism. Communication during creative workshops allows students to accept and respect disagreement with their point of view in real-life situations. The experience of building productive dialogue-based relationships in a small group helps creating effective communication with a wide audience in the future career.

The role of the teacher in conducting creative workshops is drastically different from traditional academic roles of teachers in higher education. The teacher may act as a lecturer from time to time if he or she is faced with the situation when students have limited knowledge of theoretical material or struggle with understanding it. In particular, students often struggle with identifying the genre of their future or already prepared text. They eagerly cite the definitions given in the books but have difficulties in distinguishing between analytical correspondence and an article or between an article and an essay. Participants of the workshop struggle even more when they face convergence media text, for example, longreads. In this situation it is necessary to revise the theory of genres in a form of a problem-solving lecture. The theory connected with solving a concrete problem is mastered by students more successfully.

More often the teacher who conducts a creative workshop performs the role of a discussion moderator. As mentioned above the role of a leader who helps the discussion to become productive is very important at the beginning of the workshop. Before we move to discussing a quality of journalistic text it is necessary to set parameters of analysis and criteria of its evaluation. Paradoxically, this task is not easy for 3-4-year students and for the question 'What do you like/dislike about this material?' the most frequent answer would be 'It is written in a good/bad language'. This means that future media practitioners lack skills and abilities in media critique, the point of which is quick understanding, interpretation and evaluation of media practice (Korochensky, 2006). Although media critics (here we mean professional overview) is a separate journalistic specialisation, its components could be found in the work of any mass media professional who corrects his or her own texts, edits stories prepared by professional writers, makes reviews on new issues, argues with colleagues about their performances, etc. When faced with the lack of knowledge about the basics of competent analysis of the journalistic product, the teacher starts a discussion devoted to the basics of media critique.

The course 'Copyediting' is aimed at forming a solid idea about the principles of creating and processing a journalistic text, mastering the method of its analysis. It is necessary for future journalists to develop the ability to achieve the best congruence between content and form, improve compositional structure, logical accuracy and style of the story.

From our point of view, it is crucial to give a student an idea about multidimensionality of the text (topic, facts, logic, structure, language), to teach him or her to put these various parts together with accordance to the aim set by the writer.

Although the course is aimed at working with another person's story ('editor-writer' relation), we believe it also presupposes acquiring skills in working with one's own text ('writer-text' relation). Skills acquired while analysing peers' stories help to form professional reflection on one's own texts, overcome to some extent notorious dependence of the writer on his or her text.

Aside from the planned lectures where some theoretical questions are specified and worked on (knowledge which students already obtained needs to be properly arranged) the curriculum includes some tutorials (18/36 hours respectively).

'Defective' stories published in the local mass media become the material for such tutorials. It enables students to work on elaboration of tasks for semantical and factual analysis more effectively as students are familiar with peculiarities of the region and its business of the day. Specialists also say that it is necessary to devise tasks using the interactive teaching techniques

based on the local stories (Stupina, 2009). During the tutorials on 'Copyediting' students master a technique of text analysis in accordance with the parameters of its evaluation; get used to structuring their own analytical efforts in accordance with the goals of actions; master the editor's working practices when analysing various aspects of the story (establishing relations between parts of the story; devising a plan; anticipation; connecting content to the reality out of the story; visualisation; techniques of checking factual material – concretisation, fact correlation, etc.); learn how to find effective methods of arranging their thoughts; formulate questions for the writer and choose convincing, based on the theory but not on one's own tastes, and intuitive arguments for proving their point.

For achieving the aims of the course it is sensible to use the interactive teaching techniques during the tutorials. It is the only way to form the ability to hear and listen, work in a team, activate thinking, boost everyone's activity.

The first classes are devoted to working on skills in editorial analysis which are connected with concrete aspects of the story – logic, topic and subject of the story, composition, factual knowledge. (Language and style analysis comes into the spotlight during the course on Stylistics which precedes 'Copyediting' thus special classes on this aspect of the story are not included in the curriculum; this type of analysis is included into classes on other topics and into complex evaluation of the story). Both active and interactive teaching techniques are used during tutorials. When active techniques are used a student completes creative, problem-solving tasks becoming the subject of the learning activity, building a dialogue with the teacher.

Interactive forms such as 'brainstorming' give excellent results during such classes. Gushchin says that this method is 'the freest form of discussion, a good means of engaging all members of the group into work as students freely express their thoughts on the topic' (Gushchin, 2012: 4). With the help of this method students make decisions, for example, about forming preferable compositional text techniques or selecting content which contributes to developing the topic. Thus, selection and critical review of the students' ideas about efficient ways to solve the problem take place.

After practising skills in action-taking goals students move to complex text evaluation (the editor's remarks) and further to the writer's suggestions how to correct the story. At this stage it is reasonable to conduct case-study tutorials in micro groups. By 'a case' we mean a situation in which an editor and a writer are involved in the interaction aiming at evaluating a 'defective' text. The case-study is done in the form of a role-play. The task of an 'editor' is to analyse the text, evaluate it and to ask the writer questions. The task of a 'writer' is to prove his or her point of view or agree with the editor, to suggest his or her own way of correcting the story. In case the 'writer' has some difficulties he or she agrees with the 'editor's' suggestions or they come to the mutual decision how to correct the story. In any case this stimulates students to search for necessary arguments, prove their point, and make a mutual decision.

This form of tutorials when students are immersed in the real atmosphere of productive cooperation demonstrates the experience of active absorption of the educational material and direct use of the acquired knowledge. When the atmosphere of constant creative search, mutual respect and trust is established, the teacher keeps himself/herself low key, so to speak, he or she is perceived by the students not as a mentor but as an experienced colleague, a senior partner whose help they can always count on but without overindulgence. The more independent the students become, the more noticeable their professional self-esteem and eagerness to solve difficult tasks become.

No doubt that modelling the interactive activities presupposes that the teacher not only knows well but also has a good command of certain techniques. Cooperative work in the classroom goes in a very dynamic way, with frequent improvisations as it is uneasy to foresee every turn the discussion may take. With that both professional and personal assets of the teacher are constantly exploited, which requires his or her full devotion and a lot of time to prepare for the classes.

The overwhelming majority of students rate high practice-based course involving with interactive techniques. The results of the anonymous poll held by us in the social network 'VKontakte' (vk.com) prove this statement right. We surveyed the students who have already attended 'Copyediting' and 'Creative workshops' courses and the students who have already graduated from Southern federal university and got a degree in journalism. The total number of respondents among the current students is 50 people; among the graduates – 45 people.

The questions were as follows: 'Do you see any benefit in using the interactive techniques? If yes, then what kind of benefit do you see? If no, then why?' Any person could give more than one answer.

The results are:

92 % of the respondents noted that the interactive form of studying has advantages over the conventional one.

Usefulness of the skills acquired during interactive studying was defined by the respondents in the following way:

Interactive classes

- give a clearer understanding how a text is created – 80 %;
- help to acquire practical skills – 72 %;
- make the learning process exciting – 61 %;
- teach to be active – 35 %;
- teach how to communicate, interact with other people in a proper way – 21 %;
- help not to be afraid of working in an editorial office – 15 %;
- help to boost the cognitive process – 12 %;
- facilitate reflection – 10 %.

The effectiveness of such classes based on the methods which were developed by the authors of the research is also proved by the respondents' emotional feedback: "Creative Workshops' is one of the most useful courses"; "Creative Workshops' is the best thing that happened to me at the university"; '(I should give a credit (to the 'Copyediting' teacher) as she turned these tutorials on the boring course which requires a great deal of concentration into an engaging activity'.

Those who responded negatively to the interactive techniques (5 % of respondents) noted that they do not like such classes due to:

- various reasons (difficult to prove one's point of view, social awkwardness) – 67 %;
- the fact that a lot of work should be done individually – 38 %;
- the fact that the role-play seems entertaining and does not correspond to the academic traditions – 9 %.

3 % of the respondents said that they are indifferent to the choice of techniques used in the class.

Thus, the overwhelming majority of students found practice-based classes with the use of the interactive technologies useful, contributing to acquiring professional and communication skills. The effectiveness of such classes is also proved by the fact that when students started grading the teaching staff at Southern federal university (anonymous central survey in which all the students take part), the teachers who use the above described techniques always get 9–10 points out of 10.

5. Conclusion

Modern infosphere sets much higher standards for a media product and consequently for those who enter the employment market. Media education is now going through a series of transformations as it is taking a more practice-based approach.

The most effective tool of forming practical competences is the interactive technologies, primarily in teaching courses aimed at developing creative potential of a future journalist, his or her involvement into professional reflection. They stimulate professional growth and self-perfection, forming an individual algorithm of journalistic work, widening the toolkit of creative techniques when creating a media text. The use of these techniques activates the development of the qualities that are inherent in a creative personality of a journalist.

The results of the undertaken empirical research show a high demand for these techniques among students; they also demonstrate a need in adapting these techniques to real-life conditions (performance level; motivation; cognitive interests, students' personality). However, even highly effective technologies, which have already been piloted should be worked on, their application must be considered useful not only for achieving classroom aims, but also for developing the overall teaching methodology in journalism.

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