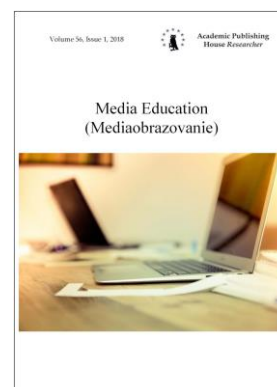


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Methods of teaching journalism as academic course in higher school

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Abstract

The article presents the content and methods of conducting a study course on teaching journalism, which is developed for the master's degree level of education. The author uses his experience as a Professor at *Saint Petersburg State University*. He argues with those colleagues who believe that teaching journalism can be limited to teaching practical instrumental skills. The concept of the described course is based on the model of journalism education as a systemic phenomenon, which includes a comprehensive social and humanitarian background at the university level, the formation of advanced professional ideology and labor technique. Structurally, the article is built in the form of in detail characteristics of the factors that have a decisive influence on the organization and methods of training. The author draws attention to the following factors: normative (officially established standards of education), personnel (team and qualification of teachers), professional and practical (industry requests), audience (characteristics of students), and organizational and methodological (organization of the educational process). None of them can be considered dominant while each one dictates some parameters of teaching that need to be taken into account.

Keywords: teaching journalism, master's degree, study course, concept, methods, influencing factors.

1. Introduction

Experts of the global *Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication* concluded that journalism education “has become one of the fastest growing academic fields in the world” (Goodman, , Steyn, 2017: 254). Russian academic experience gives strong evidence of given statement validity. In this country, there are about 150 organizations that provide higher education in the field of journalism, and regular teaching activity traces its history from at least the *State Institute of Journalism* in early 1920s (Fateeva, 2007: 107). At present, diversity grows, taking into account the three levels of education, including bachelor's, master's and postgraduate studies.

There is no doubt that such a rich experience puts Russia among the world leaders in journalism education (Khubetsova, 2018; Korkonosenko, Bereznaia, Khubetsova, 2018; Vartanova, Lukina, 2017). To be highly developed the university education needs a solid theoretical and methodological basis. Accordingly, there are more and more reasons for forming the branch pedagogy of journalism and appropriate training of the younger generation of teachers.

The aim of this article is to present the content and experience of teaching a discipline designed to students' preliminary preparation for a possible university career. In this discourse, we

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will clarify our understanding of the concept and objectives of journalism education, as well as the most controversial issues that arise in the teaching process.

2. Materials and methods

The main object of analysis undertaken is the course for undergraduates *Methods of teaching journalism discipline in higher school*, including its subjects, corresponding problem situations, and ways to overcome them. In certain variations, the discipline exists during about 20 years at *Saint Petersburg State University*. For so long, the author has accumulated a considerable amount of observations and reflections, which make it possible to draw conclusions on optimal organization and effects of the course. As methodological techniques we use the reconstruction of the training course logic and critical consideration on the audience's behavior and their perception of the teaching in its essential components. Description of the course and its teaching is immersed in the context of the discussion concerning the feasibility of developing journalism education at the university level and the range of knowledge and skills taught.

3. Discussion

As is well known to experts in different countries, a lot of journalists don't accept the idea of university education and are critical of its prospects. What such "remarks do reflect however is a belief that aptitude for the occupation is a singular 'talent' rather than a set of skills and behaviours that can be learned. They reflect a traditional scepticism in industry about the value of academic study and qualifications in journalism and the view that universities are places of "debate" rather than training and development" (Evans, 2014: 68). Meanwhile, unshakable conviction in the universal value of one's personal experience and skepticism of some professionals do not cancel the existence of university education.

In turn, even some university teachers maintain a strong belief that this area of studying does not need any theoretical basis or special methodological support. Therefore, the leading role should belong to the transmitting experience from hand to hand, with a focus on certain print or broadcast media. Here is a typical example of such a solution of pedagogical issues, "In my years as a journalism teacher and high school newspaper adviser, I found nothing more valuable for teaching the craft than showing students how the professionals do it. From interviewing and reporting to photography and page design to making ethical decisions and exerting First Amendment rights, newspapers like *The New York Times* were our models" (Ojalvo, 2009). Another journalism professor expresses no less categorical opinion on the website, which supposedly covers everything an aspiring journalist needs to know, "In a nutshell, the best and really the only way to truly learn journalism is by doing it" (Brown-Smith). The list of such statements can be continued without long searching for. It is no coincidence that in some countries with a developed press system (Britain, Israel, etc.) traditionally, preference is given to the training of journalists in editorial staffs by the "learning by doing" method, and only in recent decades specialized education has come to universities and colleges.

The British scholar reasonably said concerning the theory and practice combination in teaching, "As journalism practitioners continue their progress in the Academy, it is important to avoid assumptions about the nature of the framework that will evolve. In addition, while there has been an effort to show how theory can be integrated into the teaching of practice, much less has been done to show how practice might influence theory. The process must work in both directions to be truly reflective" (Greenberg, 2007: 289).

In Russia, a profound academic approach to journalism teaching was initially chosen. Much has already been done in this dimension to present moment, in last decades especially. This is significant that the national library of books on journalism education is intensively growing. In traditions of Russian science, few dissertations for the Doctor of Science degree have been defended (Fateeva, 2008; Raspopova, 2007; Shesterkina, 2011; Vladimirova, 2015). Educational books on teaching journalism have become widely known in the pedagogical community (Korkonosenko, 2004; Korkonosenko, 2015; Lazutina, 2011; Zagidullina, Fateeva, 2007 and others). Special issues of professional journals are devoted to theoretical and pedagogical journalism schools in Russia (Information Age. 2017. No. 3). The country regularly hosts conferences of journalism teachers, including forums under the *EJTA* aegis (Journalism education across borders, 2017). Our pedagogical community tries to correlate both mainstream trends in

higher education, one of which leads to global integration while another is aimed at diversity and supporting specifics of national journalism and educational schools. Not all countries come this way. In particular, the teaching strategy of one of the Arab world universities seems controversial. As its leader writes, “In the course of taking journalism at the Doha campus, the students learn about the roots and roles of journalism as they developed in the United States; the social, cultural, corporate, and political currents that exert great influence on the business and content of media and journalism; standards and ethics for journalists as they developed over time; and even the changes happening in the United States that concern many about the condition of the ‘free press’” (Abusharif, 2014: 203).

Against the whole background described, the following generalization can hardly be recognized correct, “Unfortunately, at present there is very little, or rather no methodical literature on the teaching journalism disciplines in higher education. Therefore, methods as the fundamental basics of training in the specialty should be developed from scratch” (Nurgozhina, , Dudinova, 2014: 5). On the contrary, the availability of literature forms an additional prerequisite for the stable training of teachers. The optimal opportunities for the beginning may be found at the master's and postgraduate levels of education, which provide for cycles of disciplines on education and research (concretely, within academic-oriented model of the master's degree). Not every undergraduate or graduate student will associate his own career with the university, but at the same time this contingent is the most likely a source of replenishment of the higher school staffs.

At *Saint Petersburg State University*, to which the author belongs, the course for undergraduates *Methods of teaching journalism discipline in higher school* (2nd semester) is aimed directly at solving the problems described above. In other Russian universities, it is either arranged differently or absent from the curriculum, and these peculiarities make the St. Petersburg experience original, if not unique. From the beginning, we assumed this kind of introduction to the teaching occupation to be based on fundamental principles, so as not to become a set of organizational and technological recommendations. Good to meet methodical elaborations on separate training courses similar to those published from time to time by the American *Journalism*, *Mass Communication Educator* journal (Blom, 2017; Bradford, , Mathew, 2018; Weber, 2016 and others). But for those who in the future will connect themselves with the university, it is even more necessary to get integral and comprehensive view of teaching. For them are equally important the normative foundations of educational activity, and the structure of the university as a production organization, and the psychology of relationships with other teachers and students, and the qualification requirements to the teacher, and many other professional algorithms that are unknown to an outside observer (and, of course, a strict critic) of pedagogical labor. It is greatly difficult to accommodate all the necessary knowledge into 24 academic hours; that's why in some thematic sections it appears possible only to identify problems, without commentaries in detail, in the hope of awakening students' cognitive interest and excitement.

4. Results

For the determination of a course the choice of the basic concept should be fundamentally important point. Actually, clearly expressed conceptuality predetermines not only the direction of a particular course, but the whole arrangement of journalistic education and the ways of its evolution (Khubetsova, Korkonosenko, , Blokhin, 2015). For example, if we limit the purpose and content of training to giving and getting labor skills, especially in their informational interpretation, the program would be built by the technological axis. Relatively, the priorities would be reflected in the following formulation, “The authors of this report believe that all journalism schools must broaden their curricula to emphasize data and computational practices as foundational skills. To place data journalism in the core of journalism education will mark a crucial advance in what schools can offer their students” (Berret, Phillips, 2016: 9). Certainly, there may appear supporters of other priorities which lay far from the technological conjuncture, such as mastership in literary speech, erudition in the fields of economics and politics, communication skills, etc.

We start the training course with the justification of the systemic nature of journalism education. This quality is manifested in the unity of enlightenment (knowledge giving), skills acquisition (training) and upbringing. As a result, the graduate must acquire a solid amount of social and humanitarian knowledge, combined with multi sided skills and advanced professional ideology. In fact, in this context we are not talking about concepts and terms as such, but about the

choice of a model of professional practice, which teaching staff considers as a target area. Thus a versatile personality is being formed, ready to perform responsible functions and duties in actual industrial environment. In this regard, the journalist is not inferior to the students of other humanities faculties of the university, where instrumental training does not prevail. A good deal of the master's audience consists of people with diplomas of philologists, economists, political scientists, etc., and they readily perceive the proposed concept. Accordingly, the system is manifested in the close interrelationship of dozens of academic disciplines. Outwardly, they may look like disparate fragments, but they enter in the student's consciousness as an integral complex, and this overall unity encourages teachers to accurately coordinating the elements of a common curriculum.

At last, consistency finds itself in the interaction of several factors affecting the program construction and training methods. For students, we indicate such factors as normative (officially established standards of education), personnel (team and qualification of teachers), professional and practical (industry requests), audience (characteristics of students) and organizational and methodological (organization of the educational process). None of them can be considered dominant; each one sets some parameters of teaching that need to be taken into account. Such dialectical understanding of this composition helps to avoid unilateralism and to balance the requests while working with the audience.

For example, a certain audience for some reasons is poorly prepared for acquiring academic and professional competencies, but the requirements of educational standards are not subject to revision, and the level of teaching cannot be lowered on subjective grounds. In turn, employers' requests and recommendations should be reflected in training, but they are often dictated by momentary changes in the media industry, while education products are designed for long-term use, and therefore the school needs stability in the basic components. From time to time, the university scholars make attempts to find out the attitude of media practitioners to the system of journalism education and their recommendations for improving the quality of journalists' training system. One of the surveys showed the following suggestions on the most efficient measures for improving: invitation of authoritative practicing journalists for delivering lectures and practical training; creation of conditions for journalistic practice in all types of media (print, TV, radio, Internet); increasing the period of students' practical training, etc. (Shesterkina, Marfitsyna, 2017: 32-33). It is easy to see that, firstly, the proposals are directed exclusively towards interaction with practitioners (that is, the survey participants themselves) and do not relate to the comprehensive nature of the university program; secondly, they do not contain radical and innovative ideas; and thirdly, cooperation with the real industry and its representatives is already incorporated in journalistic education as one of the mandatory components.

Further the course will be built as a stepwise review how each of the above mentioned factors acts.

Normative factor. The basis of regulatory requirements is included in the Federal Law *"On education in the Russian Federation"*. Working with this document provides an opportunity to abandon the approximate wordings in favor of strict categories and concepts. At the same time, the central ideas on which the Law is based also become the subject of serious reflection. For the development of journalists' professional consciousness and their self-determination in the university environment, it is crucial thing to draw students' attention to the definition of the goals of education: it is a socially significant good and is carried out in the interests of the individual, family, society and the state, for human development, to meet his educational needs and interests. Bringing the personality to the fore (not the state, schools, industrial organizations) stimulates students to understanding the humanitarian orientation of the education they get and helps them from this position to realize their own role as active subjects of educational activities. It is in this way that the discussions of the Law develop in the classroom, including in relation to the real conditions of educational processes at the university.

Similar approaches are used in the analysis of *Federal State Educational Standards (FSES)*. Once again, such acts have their own hard data, which undergraduates should be able to operate with, in instance, the methodology of credits calculation. At the same time, equal requirements for the organization of educational activities in all universities as well as equal criteria for its evaluation deserve close attention. Otherwise, it would not be possible to guarantee a sufficiently high qualification of graduates, regardless of the place of study. Unlike many other countries, in

Russia, journalism diplomas are mainly issued by state Universities that makes the issue of standards and guarantees extremely relevant. Not all regions of the country have enough resources (primarily staff resources) to meet high standards, in particular with regard to the magistracy. The flow of talented and ambitious bachelors to the largest universities in capitals becomes direct consequence of this order of things. This argumentation meets an understanding audience's reaction, as it is usually more than half consists of such migrants from the province.

In strong connection with the normativity contained in official acts there exist standards and norms that were developed in science. Knowledge of them brings obvious utilitarian effects, as undergraduates are deeply engaged in writing their dissertations. In the long term, without knowledge of the classification of scientific disciplines and schools it will be impossible to conduct pedagogical activities. Meanwhile, the bachelor's level of education provides very little teaching space for obtaining proper research qualification. In fact, the lessons of science in the magistracy begin with a zero cycle. They are even more valuable for the part of the audience that has a different educational background, not in journalism. In the most difficult situation are foreign students, such as Chinese, who are forced to plunge into a completely unfamiliar sphere of academic activity. If a young man enters on the path of a researcher without a deep exploration of the predecessors' experience, theoretical roots and traditions, in the future, he will always be a dilettante and a loser in his scientific work.

Although the primary parameters of the classification in sciences are the same for all branches of social and humanitarian knowledge, in relation to journalism they acquire specific characteristics from the theoretical, methodological and methodical point of view. In journalism studies one can clearly see the division into the main scientific approaches to the objects of analysis, namely history, theory and criticism. Starting discussions of this division, the audience comes to the natural conclusion that their research experiments mostly relate to scientific criticism with elements of theoretical generalizations. Such self-determination occurs once again when considering the classification of science by the level of abstraction, from general theories and universal categories towards theories and categories of the middle level and further to specific empirical studies, observations, measurements, etc. Students correlate discussion of the topic with their research projects and find out the importance of a harmonious combination of theoretical postulates with the competent constructing of empirical segments. It is also extremely useful to remind them of the subject and branch differentiation of scientific cognition. Closed in narrow profiles of thematic specialization, undergraduates usually have little interest in the state of affairs in related branches. So, specialization in speech communication does not entail penetration into the territory of the history of journalism or sociology of journalism, and vice versa. However, in reality, the teacher and the researcher have to work in a team, where interdisciplinary cooperation is the norm and the key to the productivity of intellectual working.

Teaching personnel factor. Undoubtedly, the qualification requirements for the teacher and the criteria for assessing his achievements will always cause increased interest among students at all levels. Undergraduates have a rich personal experience of interaction with numerous representatives of the pedagogical community; they have got a lot of material for comparison and have created their stable preferences. For those of them who will work at the university, the issues of teacher qualification are also of obvious career importance. However the observations of teachers from the classroom often draw a subjective picture and do not provide reliable knowledge on the essence and regulations of teaching.

It would seem that everyday communication with teachers helps to understand the official statuses of the university employees, their positions and roles in the structure of the organization. Actually, students are very poorly versed in the university hierarchy. Many of them have a vague representation on the differences between Assistant, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor in terms of duties and responsibility. Even less they know about the academic titles of Docent and Professor, while variative combinations of positions and titles with academic degrees cause a slight cognitive dissonance. However, the procedure for obtaining academic degrees deserves a description with as many details as possible. Magistracy gives the right to apply for admission to graduate school, which in the optimal cases ends with the defense of the thesis of the Candidate of Sciences. Students know, more or less, the traditional procedure for defending and awarding a degree by a decision of the Federal Ministry. However, in recent years, *St. Petersburg State University* and *Lomonosov Moscow State University* have begun to award their own PhD,

Candidate and Doctor of Science degrees under very unusual rules for Russia, and it is likely that other educational institutions will follow the two leading universities.

To the characteristic of positions and titles the description of official duties of the teacher which, according to the legislation and educational standards, include regular research and scientific and methodical working should be added. In the aggregate, students shape a representation on how broad is the functional profile of the person whom they are used to associate mainly with the classroom, and how high the requirements for his professional competence are. In this context, it is appropriate to emphasize the difference between the Russian tradition and personnel policy at many foreign universities, where each teacher normally is called a Professor and where scientific activity is not necessarily included in the scope of responsibilities. On the website offering a short-term training for certified journalism teachers (U.S.) one of the sections is entitled "What do journalism teachers have to know?" The answer proves very different from the complex set of qualities that are typical for Russian higher education, "Prospective teachers must be able to engage students in activities in and out of the classroom that challenges their abilities to gather and process information to produce journalistic pieces such as articles, photojournals, and broadcast reports" ([Journalism teacher certification](#)).

In fact, we come back to the question on the place of instrumental training in education which was raised at the beginning of the article, but now from the formation of the teaching staff viewpoint. Considerable professional experience gives us the right to argue that at all times the ratio of so-called theorists and practitioners was one of the most debatable topics for students. For journalism, this is a particularly sensitive issue, because education is aimed primarily at work in the media industry. The younger generation is characterized by desiring to start an independent professional life as early as possible, being fascinated by the lessons of practicing masters and underestimating the importance of the knowledge possessed by "theorists". Meantime, extensive professional experience shows that in the long term, intellectual and cultural capital acquired during the university years have real high value, while instrumental skills are quickly gained and updated in the routine industrial daily life.

It is also useful to draw students' attention to the personnel composition of the teachers team whom they actually deal with. Not every aspect of training necessarily requires teachers to have a close personal connection with the current industrial environment. Within this discourse, it will be enough to refer to examples of experts in media linguistics, history of journalism, media law, etc. On the other hand, well-chosen teaching staff necessarily includes acting practitioners, who are assigned to the applied profile training. This is the task of the administration in a particular institution.

Audience factor. It is quite clear that within analysis of the audience factor it is necessary to talk about differentiated approaches to various training contingents, depending on the learning objectives, personal characteristics of students, the level of their preliminary training, etc. At the same time, in this section there are topics which have controversial nature and may be treated differently according to individual's points of view. Such set of topics includes the relationship between teachers and students. There should be reliable guidelines and criteria that are known and understandable to all sides of communication. As analysis of the status and ethical documents of educational institutions shows that a business style of relationship serve as a basis for considering and estimation. In other words, both university staff and students have a set of rights and responsibilities due to their role in the educational process. Precisely matching to rights and obligations will be the criterion for determining whether one's behavior is right or wrong, acceptable or not in the university environment.

If following this rule, it solves the problem of the so-called kind teacher, who arbitrarily lowers the level of demands to the student below the state educational standard and thus evades the performance of his duties. Another area of concern relates to attitude to the working student. It often happens that a young person is not only just forced to make money for living, but also achieves some success in the professional field. However, resources are no longer sufficient for academic success. It is unlikely that he has the right for these or those indulgences, because he forms the budget of time independently and should be responsible to the educational institution – as full as to his employer.

For the audience, such typical situations become a kind of cases, for which the criterion of business relations appears a key to understanding and decision making. As a rule, this approach

coincides with the expectations of students. We can refer to the study among the American public relations students targeted at testing whether an instructor's gender or professional background influenced the students' perceptions. The findings from the study suggest that students evaluate professors on professional criteria and the professors' ability to connect classroom experience and theory to actual practice (Tindall, Waters, 2017: 52). It is important that business relations criterion not only helps to solve discrete tasks, but also identifies the contours of the university ethics as a broad phenomenon that regulates numerous and diverse contacts and interactions. The second reference point is respect to the individual, his or her interests, needs and merits. This is a good reason to switch the conversation to the university etiquette, including the forms of personal communication between students and teachers, style of clothes, manners of behavior in the business environment adopted in higher school.

Organizational and methodical factor. In connection with this factor, students get acquainted with the management system of the educational process, planning, preparation of educational and methodical documentation. Their attention is drawn to the comparison of types of educational work in terms of tasks and specificity of methodical providing for lessons; the content of educational and methodical complexes also should be revealed and the genres of educational literature characterized, such as textbooks, manuals, guidelines, and workshops. Special consideration should be given to the intricate question of the industrial practicing purposes and role in academic life. Finally, here there is also place to touch on the distribution of teaching assignments depending on the employee's official position and qualification.

5. Conclusion

Of course, we should not exaggerate the importance of master's degree as a pass to the professional pedagogical future. Certainly, the relationship between education and teaching is not direct and not natural; most masters go into practical journalism or related areas of business activities. But at a minimum level, the educational effect proves already evident in the students' understanding better the environment in which they stay for many years, and in general, they discover pedagogical work as a very peculiar and exciting activity. For a journalist, this is another possible area of thematic specialization in the coverage of social life.

Directly on the educational level, it is obviously seen the increasing competence of students in the evaluation of events and phenomena in the frame of academic practices. So, during the seminars, they reasonably review the curriculum and key methodological documents and offer their projects of lectures or laboratory lessons and analytical presentations on the materials of textbooks. All this is not scholastic exercises, but the approach to implementing tasks of the pedagogical practice, which is provided by the master's program and takes place in real university classrooms. It should be added that the course we describe is closely related to the course *University Psychology and Pedagogy* from the cycle of compulsory master's disciplines.

At the maximum level, the course gives useful toolkit for those who have made his life choice in favor of teaching. We mean not only a university career, because pedagogical self-realization is possible (and often happens in reality) in mass media education. Clubs and courses of journalism for teenagers, secondary school lessons on media literacy need experts who not only discovered the secrets of journalism mastership, but also have had initial pedagogical training, and the shortage of such professionals for many years exists as an urgent problem.

Returning to the starting thesis of the article, we would like to confirm that the named and other useful effects of the *Methods of Teaching Journalism in Higher School* course may be produced under some obligatory conditions. Maybe main thing among them is that the course should comprehensively cover the pedagogy of journalism, in the interrelationship of its different sides and components, including complex psychological and ethical issues. The course is taught in a dialogue and discussion mode, the students discover the unfamiliar in the familiar routine of everyday studying life, and for many of them it becomes an attractive occupation.

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