Manual de laboratório de jornalismo na internet

MARCOS PALACIOS AND BEATRIZ RIBAS
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Reviewed by **Jorge Felz**

Teaching manuals have always been part of the bibliographies of the vocational courses, technological, undergraduate and masters degree programs. In the teaching of vocational practices, these works when well prepared perfectly substitute reference works or an absence of recent productions in certain areas.

The term "manual" possesses, in the Portuguese language, multiple definitions. In the Aurélio Dictionary (1986), a manual (from Latin manuale) can be defined as a book that contains essential notions concerning a technique of a science, etc; a summary of techniques. In the English language, we see the use of two terms that approach each other and, at the same time, move apart: manual and textbook - the first, used in the sense of an orientation manual for the utilization of certain products or processes, and the second referring to a summary, collection of texts concerning knowledge of some specific area.

For us, the teaching manual has a dual purpose: (1) it serves as knowledge promoter concerning a certain area or field, presenting concepts, rules for execution and application of certain processes, suggesting exercises and activities, and (2) it can propose specific teaching methodologies, adapted to the different modalities of a professional practice. Evidently these two functions will not always be encountered in a balanced way, but that should not compromise the objectives of the manual which was developed or adopted.

In the area of the so-called social and human sciences (applied or not), manuals were never looked upon favorably. For many, manuals were always seen as traces of funcionalist teaching methods; if adopted, they would just allow a mechanical reproduction of procedures, without the possibility of reflection.

In the specific case of journalism teaching, in which the disciplines

are mostly of a theoretical/technical character, manuals appear to be fundamental for transmitting certain specific contents. In countries with more tradition in the preparation of manuals for use in training and professional development, as is the case in the USA and in Spain, the first manuals of journalism date from the first decades of the XX century, such as the manual *El Arte del Periodista*, edited by Rafael Mainar in Spain, in 1906. In spite of this area being little explored in Brazil, we can mention some important manuals, such as those produced by Luis Beltrão (*Teoria e Técnica do Jornal*, 1964), Nilson Lage (*Estrutura da Notícia*, 1987) and Vera Paternostro (*O texto na TV*, 1987). And despite the prejudice that still endures in the academic area, there is a great demand for this type of publication, especially in the current phase of adaptation and technological revolution.

Although digital technology, based on machine and informational systems, began to be used in the area of journalism in the beginning of the 1980s, this progress has been incorporated slowly into the teaching-learning processes. In many cases, these advanced technologies, despite their availability, have often not been utilized in the teaching processes.

In the case of internet journalism, there is still a long road to travel. The technology is available, access is increasingly easy and fast, but internet journalism teaching still oscillates between two different positions.

On one hand, the teaching is more theoretical and reflexive and it is based on analyses and discussions concerning the field and the products developed for it, and for this reason is more structured. On the other hand, we see courses and programs for professional training, emphasizing daily practice, without many possibilities for theoretical discussion.

It is not appropriate here to discuss which one is the best option. But it is evident that each one of the above positions applies to specific groups, and the manuals should be well drafted for maximum use.

Similarly, the scarce tradition regarding the use of manuals in the classroom underlines the difficulties encountered in the daily work of pedagogic practices which require the new technologies. And that does not happen only in the public universities, and for reasons we all know.

A reflection of that reality appears when we look at the scarce production of reference works on internet journalism. In recent years, less than ten titles can be counted. Among these we should highlight the *Manual de Jornalismo na Internet* (1996) by Marcos Palácios and Elias Machado; *Manual de Estilo Web* (2000), by Luciana Moherdaui; *Journalismo na Internet* (2003), by José Benedito Pinho.

Among the foreign publications, we cannot fail to mention the works by Javier Diaz Nolci and Ramón Salaverria, *Manual of Redaccíon Ciberperiodística* (2003) and *Flash Journalism: How to Create Multimedia News Packages* (2005).

At this point we encounter the Internet Journalism Laboratory Manual, published by professors Marcos Palacios and Beatriz Ribas from the Federal University of Bahia. The work, released in November of 2007, fills a void which has been largely overlooked in a cutting edge area such as internet journalism. Together with *O Ensino do Jornalismo em Redes de Alta Velocidade* (2007), a book organized by professors Elias Machado and Marcos Palácios, the manual fulfills, in a certain way, the yearnings of many professionals, researchers and teachers who work daily in the journalism schools with themes and techniques of the area, but who many times are in doubt whether their actions will be efficient and whether their methods can be perfected.

The manual developed by Palácios and Ribas is interesting because it systematizes a series of actions and of possible interventions accomplished with groups of different knowledge levels. The structure proposed, almost multimedia and hypertext, leads the student to access the support site: http://www.manualjol.com (although it has sometimes been off the air) and to navigate searching for outlines, lists of sources and links to examples. (It should be noted that many links could not be opened when this text was written, which is a pity). This aids the student's learning considerably and makes him familiar with the different tools available for internet journalism production.

The manual is divided into three parts that complement each other, but do not need to be followed in a logical sequence. Each part offers exercises and tasks for reflection on "making journalism" on the internet. All of the exercises were previously tested between 2005 and 2007, during Digital Journalism Workshops in the Communication Faculty of UFBA. In the first part, the exercises and driven studies have an instrumental function: to allow the students to learn techniques and the correct use of some tools that will facilitate the accomplishment of the organized tasks in parts II and III. In these two stages, the exercises, more advanced, involve observation, criticism and reflection on the products and processes. Besides, the incentive is constantly emphasized for the students to develop journalistic products for the internet.

Designed for use in laboratories or workshops, where the activities should never be mere practice, but should be able to add to the instrumental teaching process moments of reflection and critical analysis, the manual

also offers suggestions for readings and discussions of academic texts: books, articles in specialized periodicals, theories, annals of meetings, etc, which should be done in parallel to the practical tasks proposed in the Laboratory.

This manual was developed as part of the experiments carried out together with the Latin-American Network for the development of teaching methodologies in high-speed networks. The Network received support from the Foundation for Aid to Research of Bahia and from the CNPq. (National Council for Scientific Research and Development).

Finally, the importance of this book should again be emphasized for its prominence among the reference works for those who practice, study or teach internet journalism, and it should be an important part of the existing bibliography in this area.