

**Parallel Session 11: PCST network: an added value for science  
communication training?**

**A NEW CONCEPT OF SCIENCE JOURNALISM ON DEBATE**

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**Abstract**

Science communication not only informs but contributes for making the society aware of and active contributors on the science practice. Therefore, it is necessary that the media considers science as a broader concept that emerged in, influence and is influenced by society. Yet, it still prevails the concept of science as the discoveries, developments and results that are free and independent of social values. What the Brazilian electronic magazine *ComCiência* has practiced is to bring the humanities, history, education, science policy and culture as major elements in its content as a way to broad up the science concept.

**Key-words:** science journalism, interdisciplinary

**Text**

*Science* and *Nature* magazines, the most important science journals in the world, publish discoveries, developments and results of science based on empirical data and theories, all of which are supposed to be free and independent of social values as the concept of science is accepted. Lacey (1998), however, has showed that social values as part of human nature do play an important role and are essential for the scientific activity. That indicates that science is not imune to outside influences and rarely neutral and independent.

As S&T permeates our daily lives and increasingly deals with ethics, safety and environmental issues, they can't be well understood without considering the social values and the background that provides the conditions for them to be

developed. Therefore, human resources, education, investments, science policy, market, culture, and others are part of this making process. Likewise, humanities, education and philosophy experts contribute enormously to contest, comprehend, challenge and improve the science tasks on society.

Although Dijck (2003) has argued that the two cultures (humanities versus natural science) identified by Snow in 1959 has long been dissolved it seems that science communication still keeps them apart. One barely recognizes the voice of agents that differ from or oppose to experts on science news sections. On the contrary, the news is used to picture science as the concept showed in journals like *Nature*, which tend to consider it as the ultimate truth, since the data has been peer reviewed and anchored to undoubted figures.

In Brazil, science communication has developeped significantly since the last decade, which can be partially attributed to the Genome Project, which placed Brazil in the world scenery of science, but also to GMOs, cloning, global warming and others. Therefore, journalists have improved their knowledge and the public got more interested in understanding those subjects. As a result, the country now has at least four important printed science communication magazines.

Yet, what can be verified is that the science news frequently focus on results and conclusions made by scientists in order to improve life quality. No doubt that kind of information is also important, but the public should also get to know the difficulties, interests, impacts, controversies and the long-term process that permeate science and technology. After all, the aims of science communication are not only to inform but also to make the public aware of and active contributors on the science practice, which makes it necessary to consider science as a broader concept. Consequently, subjects like health, climate change, ecology and economy - that directly impacts society and though are often in the spotlight - should be presented as interdisciplinary and multicultural issues that contain political, economical, social, cultural and scientific interests. Other issues as indigenous people, poverty, famine, landless workers movement, arts, politics, education and globalization, that are hardly ever read at science news sections, also concern and involve science and its relationship with society, development and culture.

That is what *ComCiência* ([www.comciencia.br](http://www.comciencia.br)) has practiced since 2000 as an electronic Brazilian magazine published by the Laboratory of Advacement Studies in Journalism of Unicamp and the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science. Created to be a lab for students of the MSc in Science Journalism of Labjor, the magazine is composed by: report of the month and daily science news. The first one includes interviews, book reviews, articles written by experts and reports written by science writers all of which exploring the same subject but by different spectrum. The second one, written by science writers, contributes for raising aspects or issues that did not appear on the great media, which brings the humanities, history, education, science policy and culture as playing a major role

in its content as it has been concluded through the analyses of news published in 2003.

As a comparison, the science news published at three other electronic science communication magazines have been analyzed for three months (from October to December of 2003). *Ciência Hoje* ([www.uol.com.br/cienciahoje](http://www.uol.com.br/cienciahoje)), *Scientific American Brasil* ([www.sciam.com.br](http://www.sciam.com.br)) and *NewsScientist* ([www.newscientist.com](http://www.newscientist.com)) were selected for being traditional printed science communication publications in Brazil (the first one) and worldwide (the last two) that have an electronic version.

*Ciência Hoje* has practiced a multicultural science communication frequently providing to its readers reports that deals with education, politics, economy, science communication, philosophy, anthropology, religion, sociology, history among the traditional fields directly linked to physics, biology, chemistry and medicine. While *Scientific American* and the *NewsScientist* bring topics that mainly describe science as experiments, results and conclusions, without dealing with social influences, therefore the humanities, philosophy and culture, for instance, are not present.

Although the comparison indicates that a multicultural science communication has been practiced among the magazines selected it shows that a broader debate must be motivated in order to change the concept of science that is still reproduced as a reflex of the traditional view of natural sciences.

## References

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