

Media education emphasizes the potential of dialogical expression of technologies¹

Interview with GUILLERMO OROZCO GÓMEZ²

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Guillermo Orozco Gómez, PhD from Harvard University, educator and communicator, with frequent presence and collaboration with researchers and graduate programs from Brazil as the ECA-USP, has granted an exclusive interview to MATRIZes, in which he documented his experience with communication and education. The teacher is firm in his position on the right of expression of broad sectors of society, especially among young people, who still suffer in school from the lack of a pedagogy that is responsive to cultural changes and new ways of learning. He emphasizes the role of the communicator and the role of the media as non-formal educators, whose strategies need to be problematized in the context of formal education, contributing to a critical and protagonist formation.

MATRIZes: Tell us about your career as a scholar and researcher.

OROZCO GÓMEZ – I graduated in Communication Sciences at ITESO, Catholic Jesuit University of Guadalajara. Then, I made a specialization in Pedagogy in Germany, and took a master and a doctor degree at Harvard University. This is the formal part, which does not say much about how I passed through the academic programs. I started facing a challenge when I was graduating. It was about knowing what we could do with the media in the suburbs of Guadalajara, with people arriving from the country and who were accommodating as they could

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MATRIZes

in that suburb. There was a NGO that had a popular education project of social development for these people to help them better integrate in the city. The NGO was looking for a communicator to think what to do with the media in that locality.

I ended up working on it. I think that has marked much of my journey, because with such a concern to meet the social challenges of this area of the city and this organization of popular education, I began reading Paulo Freire, and it changed my perspective on education and on communication. Paulo Freire has been a source of inspiration for everything I have done, and I always remember him, I always return to him, somehow, in my courses. This is because I believe he has discovered something really important to us, Latin Americans, who were the product of colonization and who still have marks of it. This process keeps us from developing more freely and emancipatory, complicating the search for other cognitive and academic references. And above all, it also keeps us from redefining our relationships in the face of life and others. From this perspective, Paulo Freire's work was striking for me. When I started my work on the suburb, I realized how important it was to recover for the people from that place the story of the path they had gone through the countryside to the city. The reason they had to leave the rural area and the reason they came to the big city of Guadalajara. We have done this work using comics and cartoons, because they favored that everyone could discuss and lead this movement, necessary for survival, as we were thinking about the reasons, the political, professional and social situation, the cultural change from one place to another etc. And it seemed to me that there should be recreational spaces for popular and massive expression, opening the possibility of having in the church lobby, every Sunday afternoon, people who could play an instrument, sing, say a poem, go through a ball, show a work, a painting, a picture. We were presenting a song and a guy who played guitar very well and who was always with us was encouraging the others to come on stage. Thus, we created an area that was really esteemed by neighbors, because it was the only place they had to break the routine of the week. At first, I have not completely realized what was happening, I was slowly realizing that things may not always be *serious*, the knowledge may come more relaxed and playful.

I believe these experiences have deeply marked my professional and academic development. The work in this area of Guadalajara and the reading of Paulo Freire have allowed expanding and improving my academic formation, enabling new ideas and new concepts. It became clear that to be a better teacher I should be a better communicator. And in order to improve my pedagogical formation, I was studying in the Harvard Graduate school of Education, where there was the group that created *Sesame Street*. It was possible to better understand how to produce educational programs and how to make educational television.

MATRIZes

When I got there, I saw that *Sesame Street* had a very interesting proposal, but it was not a general solution for Latin America because it is a very expensive production, it costs a lot to produce the program, regardless of the success it achieved as an educational production. It seemed to me that the biggest problem in Latin America was the *other* television. *Sesame Street* is very pretty, very good, but the other television, the TV for most people, what could we do with it? It was necessary to work with the audience, with people, in order to face this other television. That was when I turned my eyes to England, to the cultural studies in Birmingham and to their reflections on media literacy education. I would say that within these theoretical, practical and analytical courses, I could improve and establish an educational intervention proposal in front of the TV, not behind it. Now, with Obitel⁵, we are working a bit with the *behind* – how it has formed, how it is done, who is producing, how the narrative format is done, etc. – and I think this is a bit of the dialectics which the communicators face because we have to see both parts of emission and reception, combining them. Some researchers are more on the emission side, some on the reception side, and that would characterize my career - the dialectic between the distinct components of communication.

MATRIZes – There is a recurring criticism according to which the experience of young people with new technologies would help to increase their disinterest in traditional institutions such as schools. Is this observation valid?

OROZCO GÓMEZ – Yes, I believe that this assertion makes sense, but is very complex. I don't know where to start. There is a particular situation with formal institutions as school, which continues keeping itself apart not only from the media but also from other cultural, political and economic processes. Increasingly, the schools in Latin America consider themselves as independent institutions from the real processes of various types, including the communicational and technological ones. Regardless of the advancement of communication, the school was already in the process of detachment from real life and was trying to accomplish a mission independent from the relevance it may have to the daily lives of students. So I think it is in this movement, in which the school was historically involved, that the media and new technologies arrive. Because of that, the school did not pursue an elaborated and coherent position, which is not stereotyped or frightened to face the media world. I observe that the

⁵ Observatório Iberoamericano de Ficção Televisiva.

MATRIZes

school is positioned in relation to the media and the communication system in order to complicate the links and dialogues. For example, to school, the media are merely entertainment, information, but it is not education. Or, when the media produce an educational effect, they are criticized and seen as something negative, so they are not interesting to school. Thus, the school has not developed, nor did the academics, an educational positioning which promotes some sort of critical alliance with the media and which is not only instrumental, translated by devices as DVDs or the computer. We must also consider that there is a mistake on this idea that having more equipment is synonymous with modernization and with improvement in quality of educational work. Being modern is to indicate the possession of modern media: computers, TVs, DVDs etc. With some exceptions, this is the dominant perspective in school. In Latin America, many people think that having some gadgets within the institution is enough to achieve a higher level than that existed when the equipment were not present. This is a wrong perspective, but still dominant. This deviation has caused, among many other problems, a difficulty for the school to understand the place of other languages - those which, despite not being directly linked to the didactic and pedagogic discourse, populate the universe of young people in the form of games, images, music etc. Finally, the schools routines have not been able to assimilate such language games, either to improve, guide or problematize them and they are losing the opportunity to educationally influence in the students' learning. Then there is the disappointment and frustration of young people with school, a space that is such present in their lives. It happens that instead of the classrooms allow the students to enjoy what school could potentially offer, incorporating the multiple ranges of communication and their languages, there remains the feeling of incompleteness, the feeling of an experience that was halfway. Looking at the problem from this perspective, formal education has not performed its role, so the students stay released, without understanding the links between their projects, interests and proposals coming from the classrooms.

MATRIZes – At your course in the Graduate Program in Communication Sciences of ECA / USP, you said that young people, using the new technologies outside the classroom, were not only activating ludic dimensions, but preparing themselves for the challenges of the labor market itself. Clarify this point a little more.

OROZCO GÓMEZ - As academics, we shouldn't be too severe on what is happening to young people. The academic's temptation is to understand and to criticize according to the standards that have regulated their own educational backgrounds. I start to see, however, that

MATRIZes

the young people are self-taught, they learn outside of the school, especially concerning those issues related to new technologies and the media. Indeed, this learning often is instrumental in managing these technologies, in using the potential of cell phones, Ipod, chat, Facebook. It seems to me that they are giving to young people a range of technological skills to interact with information, with knowledge and with other people. They don't see it, on this perspective, they are not necessarily aware of it, that they are forming skills and alphabetizing themselves in different combinations of languages. So when they get a job, they already have some abilities, practices and experiences in moving into the world of technology, which is increasingly required by the market. When they arrive at the university, the students have already had a prior learning in dealing with media communication, with media languages; in many cases, this learning is sufficient to face various needs and professional challenges, performing tasks that teachers themselves do not perform. For example, if I have to handle various things on the computer, it is possible that I lose the job for someone younger, who does not have all my academic formation, but will perform more satisfactorily in the instrumental requests demanded at work. Therefore, I am in disadvantage because I don't have certain skills. This is a real situation that exists and that not even young people fully realize the value they have to the labor market, and neither the school realizes that the group of friends and the communities interacting in digital networks have educational function. When this dimension is recognized, the school could intensify it by improving their own bonds with the students, with the student's demands. And then I think it should promote an effort to determine what students are actually learning. The hypothesis is that young people are learning and developing skills, analytical, psychomotor, instrumental and technical competences and developing thought. They are practicing the expression, the intercommunication – although it is a very fast communication - but they are in constant change: they need to take pictures, make videos, record programs and send emails. And the school tends not to consider such things as part of the educational process and as a part of the openness to different alphabetizations managed by distinct languages, often considering the exercise of such diversity a waste of time.

MATRIZes - Can we apply the term “education for interactivity”, used by you in the course, to these considerations?

OROZCO GÓMEZ - Yes, I think there is an educational vacuum to be filled with some type of education proposal for interactivity. When I mentioned it, I haven't said minutely that young

MATRIZes

people live in a state of continuous, simultaneous and convergent interactivity, that nobody had experienced until recently. In this interaction there is a new way of being in everyday life. Some people criticize that connectivity does not mean communication because there is no reflection, because it is very stimulus-response; they also say that it is a mundane aspect of interchange, that there is profound change, that it lets you hide the identity and do things that are unethical; that one can take advantage of the little power to issue and disseminate information. Yes, it is relevant, but the point is that there is a new way of existing in the world. Interactivity helps to activate the links which surrounds us. This is a new phenomenon, a fundamental transformation, because it is a change on something that is essential to everyone's life. How do we stay in relation to everyone else? Before, we were much less connected, we stood in the position in which a few diffused everything and the others simply give or refuse, but we could not represent active role in this process. Someone once asked me: "You're communicologist, that's why you think that communication has become the key of the moment, of the present". Perhaps so, but whether I am a communicologist, more than ever being communicative is what defines the modification in our way of *existing* in society. The big question that would fit in this context is: the *existing* leads us to the modification of *being*? In Spanish, unlike in English, we are able to differentiate between *existing* and *being*. I guess we are lucky to have this verbal nuance because it allows us to see that we *exist* in a way, but it means that we *are* like this? The change of *existing* causes a positive change in *being*? Being human, young, worker, teacher? No. This is the great land which we have to discuss in communication. How is this step from *existing* to *being*.

MATRIZes - Joining this, a more general issue. In one of your books⁶, you mention the dilemma promoted by the "media *asunción*." Hence it derives asymmetrical mechanisms of power and social fragility. The new information and communication technologies have the capacity to redefine the growth of the media?

OROZCO GÓMEZ - I do think so, but not naturally, necessarily or totally. It is necessary to verify that the traditional school has not exercised, has not practiced the role of emitter and communicator. That made us feel ourselves and position ourselves in the role of *boxes* to shelter

⁶ *Televisión, audiencias y educación*. Bogotá, Norma, 2005

MATRIZes

information and, occasionally, some knowledge. The family also made us a depository of the values and the cosmovision constituted by it. That's why we continue reproducing perspectives so that we can be recognized as parts of groups, communities, etc. The potential I see in new technologies, especially the one that places us as emitters, communicators and broadcasters of our own expression and other's expression also resides in this element of possible interactions. The point to be stressed here is that the scope of our communicative emission and production does not have the same dimension and reach of a TV channel, a radio station or a widely known newspaper. The range is more in the interpersonal and network level, it reaches a page, a website and a blog; a discussion is opened, but it is more limited than massive, even the massive is also reducing and losing *rating*. The Mexican telenovelas are moving backwards into its rating because there is this division of interests and screens where you see the products originally made for television or with which it competes. The core of the transformation is given by this power of being communicators. We must follow how far will lead this process and what will be its implications. Due to the impact that there will have with the formation of new networks and new virtual spaces where we can generate different knowledge and different things, including games, will come the possibility of effecting the changes placed above. I do not know the meanings that will derive from these possibilities, but certainly they will be very expressive. At this point, we cannot compare it with the impact the traditional media and traditional communicators stations still have. And not everyone is able to be emitters, although they are placed in contact with the technologies, because there is a need of a minimum training process to take advantage of the potential of expression that technology opens to us in order to unlock the dialogical circuits. We refers to 30%, 35% of young people in Latin America which have permanent and systematic access to computers and cell phones. And how about the others, what happens? Those who are not in this dynamics have no access to these new technologies, or when they are attending such circuits fail to assume their role as communicators. In this case, the school would have to help them, someone would have to do it, in order to promote greater attendance of the young people, encouraging them to exercise their expressivity, not only participating as receptors. I hope someday the school will take the initiative. Unfortunately we have seen the opposite. It would have to produce another type of educational project, one which promotes social integration through the neighborhood, other institutions, public funds that are committed to highlighting the cultural issues. The channel 22 in Mexico, which is cultural, would have been changed, leaving this feature. We, academics, signed a huge petition to the channel so it continued a cultural channel, then the President agreed. But what they did with the programming of the channel? They show cinema, but only European movies and the ones by

MATRIZes

directors which nobody understand. Latin America has never been showed on the screen of the cultural canal. They show concerts and European museums, interviews with important people, and Mexican culture is ignored. Telenovela? It was never aired. They presented the BBC series, but the most visible of these was one about Napoleon's lovers. The others were so elitist! And Channel 22 was very proud to be a channel that broadcasts the great culture and not the telenovela from Televisa. And I believe that in 1996 Unesco gave 22 the award for best cultural channel. It had an international award for best cultural channel! It's a bit absurd. I think we can take advantage of the culture and public channels, of the radio and much more to make a new interpellation to recipients, inviting them and calling them to continue the production, to not be contemplative in the face of the huge painting of the Sistine Chapel. We need to do otherwise. The challenge here is great because there is no institution that does that, we must perform it in other ways, with different sources, because it is important to follow this new status of emitter and communicator the young people have.

MATRIZes - Considering what you said, we have two types of institutionalizations: in one hand, the school, as a space enclosed for a set of social demands and in the other hand the media, with the major public and private media, the new realities of digital communication. There are between them disconnection, lack of dialogic syntony. How does the school can or should be located within this tension, especially considering the type of teacher formation, which is still too bound to traditional, encyclopedic, diagnostic and propaedeutic standards?

OROZCO GÓMEZ – This is a big challenge, because the current teachers have no instrumental preparation, nor are they asked to think according to elements given by digital culture, the widespread media coverage. There is also much resistance, much fear that new technologies will take them out of school, make them unnecessary. What we need to do is to get the pedagogical intervention that seems important to me. It is to start in the global level of society, because it believes, as does the school, unless specific sectors which “extra-curricular” procedures are a waste of time. We must change the mentality of society that assigns the educational topics only to school. We must show, clearly, that learning outside of school is something valuable. We can also learn with television, without having an explicitly proposal, in other words, there is a communicative ecosystem present in the lives of young people.

MATRIZes

Clarifying this point is very important, although it presents the natural difficulties to be apprehended. The transformations in culture take time, but if we don't fight for it, we will stagnate. At the same time, we should review the formation programs for teachers so they can understand and manage new technologies, but doing it creatively, because it is not just about instrumental domain or instrumental understanding of new realities imposed by communication to the world of education. The problem is that there is a distinct epistemology to produce knowledge. And teachers should recognize such evidence, changing habits and routines, treating otherwise the media cultures and losing their fear of handling the equipment available to educational work. And this is not easy within the current situation for teaching formation. It is hard, even for us academics to do a power point presentation, to understand the presence of social networks in the world of our students. As noticed, we talk about a cultural, mental, extremely complicated change. It is necessary, however, to begin the process of transformation in teaching and pedagogy dynamics. A doctoral student in education at the University of Guadalajara is doing participatory research with groups of young people to see what they do with new technologies. She will follow them for a period of time, trying to understand how they are progressing in an empirical and self-taught way with the new technologies. With that, she will organize a proposal for a school to introduce in the learning process. There is a book – *New alphabetization* – by two Canadians, which has not yet been translated into Spanish, in which they assure that the way to promote interaction is verifying what the young people start doing with the technology, instead of simply saying what they should do. Once you know how they use it, I put a challenge, a question. As Paulo Freire proposed, we present a limit-situation, and then we perform one step seeking another level, another limit-situation, and then it is started a process of problem posing. This pedagogical procedure works in the perspective that young people, at the beginning, tend to repeat things they already know. Therefore, creativity is not instantaneous, it occurs much repetition, which requires problem-solving shocks that come from outside. Here is an important contributory plan from educators: to confront the young people to have a greater progression in their formation process.

MATRIZes - At the moment, we witness a struggle, especially from Argentina, about a new ownership relation of communication vehicles. The Argentine case, moreover, is accompanied by similar ones in Latin America. How do you think about the problem of media ownership, the decentralization of this ownership, the intersection of business, which after all dominate large

MATRIZes

segments of communication, detaining radio stations, television channels, newspapers, magazines? Even the Mexican case is quite revealing in this situation.

OROZCO GÓMEZ - What is happening in Argentina, about the constitutional reform of media ownership, in which the State wants to maintain control over the companies and try to distribute the little power they have and so the Clarin group does not get everything, I think this is very important and necessary. In Mexico, we have already lost the battle. In Mexico, I do not think there is a rebuilding that is a little more democratic. Televisa has all the power. This is not free and it occurred in a very specific historical process. There was a negotiation with the power of that time. First, with PRI⁷ which is now back and which stayed for 71 years in power. And this would not have happened without the help of Televisa. Both channels have built such hegemony, not for 71 years, because Televisa is from 1952, so it was 57 years old.

It was up to Televisa to provide to the audience the activities of government, and so it received a number of benefits, thus, it has never criticized the authority. As Jesús Martín-Barbero said, the conception of nation has never gone through Televisa's telenovelas. The telenovelas are dramas, the country has never been there with their problems, unlike the telenovelas from Globo. This is not just aesthetic, it is not style, it is not free, it is the result of the historical alliance between political power and media power. The media power does not show to the audience what the political power does not want. So the Mexican case is lost, since there remained only a time of 11% to the State, a margin that should be obeyed by the various private media. And the State has misused this time they had. The president of Fox channel put everything to lose, as a consequence of the provocation by Televisa. It happened that we would have in Mexico a board of Iberoamerican Presidents and Fox channel invited Fidel Castro. As Bush would participate, he warned that he didn't want to meet Fidel, so he had to be disinvited. Fox called Fidel and said he was only invited to the inaugural session and then he should go away. The subject came under discussion in public. The Mexican President assured that he had invited Castro, but he had declined. Fox announced that to all Mexicans. But then Castro, with righteous indignation, sent to Televisa the phone recording he had received from Fox. The channel immediately made public the speech of our president telling Castro "Yes, come, take breakfast and then walk away, because Bush is coming". So Fox looked ridiculous in front of Mexicans, they passed as a liar, because they had said and swore they did not say. Thereafter, the 11% of the time of the State were lost and more channel concessions were given to Televisa,

⁷ Institutional Revolutionary Party

MATRIZes

delivering all that remained. In return, Televisa should not return to do what they had done. They changed the time for a "positive coverage, favorable to me and to my government," according to their own words. I see no way out to Mexico, I hope that Argentina, Brazil and other countries have alternatives. The problem lies in the fact that the media have the power to do what Televisa did. When Chávez cut a television channel in Venezuela, when it happens in Bolivia and now in Ecuador, the president is putting limits, but immediately the scandal is that the freedom of expression is over. For me it is not that because there is too much power of expression for some and not for others. The people, the government and the institutions have no power of expression, only the media power has. This is deception for the general audience, isn't it? That does not realize the existence of moments when, for reasons of State - supposing we could use this term - and assuming that this is good for most people, we should cut the grant and tell to the channels: "you can't continue operating in this way, you can't buy it here, we have to distribute it more equitably ". I would be favourable to this procedure, which is respectful to individual rights and to the rights of the company and the market. That the networks transcend the mercantilist vision and ensure, in fact, freedom of expression. It is very difficult to confront Televisa, not even the Mexican president can do it. I think we have a system of means entirely unfavorable to education and to the critical awareness. But there is another scenario of educational intervention which is converting it into something less directed. It would have to incorporate the information of one day and to look in the classroom with a problematizing perspective; to use the telenovela to see the kind of values, behavior and which agenda appears in it. In other words, it opens a universe constructed by the news, but also by fiction and which would greatly contribute to the improvement of the dynamics of school and of the general formation of the students. There is a lot of "didactic" material spread by the media presented inclusively by TV commercials.

MATRIZes - In a communication journal that you know, *Famecos*⁸, it was published a paper by a colleague with critics to the mediating theories, as practiced in Latin America and fairly disseminated by names as Canclini, Martín-Barbero and Guillermo Orozco. At one point the paper says: "or the telenovela has captured me or the theatrical performance has involved me and moved me, or the movie makes me think or not. I do not lately retrieve that communication did not pass me". Comment on the statement, since it opposes to the idea advocated by you that

⁸ Journal of Graduate Program in Social Communication of PUCRS.

MATRIZes

the television appropriations, or other media appropriation, are never final, suffering intervention of mediatory instances.

OROZCO GÓMEZ - Certainly no appropriation is conclusive, although some seem so, because there was no opportunity to confront them or use them otherwise. If we think we can't change something, then we don't have the possibility to indicate any strategy to do so. The statement that no appropriation is conclusive derives from an epistemological feature that allows me to propose things and try to change them, because otherwise I would be doing another work. Epistemologically I consider important to think so because that allows stopping the determinism that accompanies certain social actions. For example, teachers say that television is a familiar matter, not a scholar one. It is a very primary perspective. Children carry the television in mind, there is an appropriation and they carry it wherever they go: school, street, park etc, and they come back to interact with it and with others about their first ownership. So it is clear that in any other real-life scenario the television can interfere, because television travels with the subjects, the appropriations travel with the subjects. If this is the widespread perspective, I think there would be no reason or excuse for not working and thinking at school, for not discussing the television in the classroom or playing with it, but taking it seriously. As this perspective does not exist, they believe that it is a family matter, and the family does not have time to assume this responsibility; on the contrary, television seems to be the salvation of the family, because it is turned on to children and the parents go work and become more relaxed knowing that their children are watching television, closed at home. In other words, it is important to think our object of analysis and of intervention. On this will depend the type of strategy we will employ to address the numerous questions proposed by the media. And in the case of the assertion of the paper, I believe that no appropriation is conclusive, it is always possible to change it. What makes you think some are conclusive is because we are not in a scenario where there is opportunity to confront these assertions. And then they stay there, because no one tries to change. If there is a situation in which it is challenged, of course you can change.

MATRIZes - What seems to be at stake is what is the moment when in fact the communication occurs. On the one side is the idea that it happens (or not) at the time of the event, in phenomenal sequences. On the other hand, it is the understanding that to happen communication it is required the construction of mediator instances.

OROZCO GÓMEZ - I believe that communication occurs all the time. That is, a type of communication occurs when there is direct contact with the referent, but that does not necessarily end there, there are other processes provided by mediation, which also breaks the communication. What was said: "I see the movie and I have an impact", I agree with it, there was an indirect communication; the mistake is thinking that it is direct. The communicative apprehension goes through the cognitive and rational plan, but also by the affective, emotional one. This has to do with the history of the subject, his dialogues with the culture, society etc. It breaks out the communication at every moment of appropriation, be it near, immediate, distant, mediate. That is my position. There is a kind of communication that sometimes reinforces the first appropriation, sometimes it questions it, modifies it, being possible to resist or even reject it. The communication occurs at all the time.

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