

Editorial

A great Brazilian author on Scientific Methodology once stated that there is no such thing as local science. According to professor Volpato¹, Science is universal, follows universal guidelines and has universal applicability. He only concedes to local applications, but resulting from works that are universal in its methods and techniques. Here at our journal, we fully agree with him and believe that this is an important issue that should be discussed.

We agree that the Scientific Method (capitalized) is universal. There is no such thing as a local way to come to the truth. Either you follow the correct procedures, use the correct tools and show the proofs in a correct way, or you are not doing Science. Yes, the correct tool sometimes is a choice between several adequate ones and of course some topics include matters of opinion, but in both cases, you must present solid justifications for each choice you make along the way.

There is no such thing as opinionated Science without corroborating evidence. The place for such a thing is in talk shows, not in scientific journals. It is obvious that the same data can corroborate different conclusions, but still, theses conclusions must be inferable from the data, not something the researcher comes to in spite of the evidence.

So far, we are not saying anything different from professor Volpato. If you want further digressions and explanations, we would urge you to read his marvelous books, if you do not feel impeded by the language barrier (his books are all in Portuguese).

Hence, we come to the necessary discussion and to the point of this editorial. We concede that authors should strive for the higher level journals and try to find the broader conclusions, with the higher meaning in order for the “best” journals to become interested in publishing them. Nevertheless, there are some works that will never achieve the level of a top notch journal, but still contain quality and information enough to deserve communication to the authors’ peers.

Students concluding their dissertations, interesting results from a local application performed by a lesser known professor, intermediate results that are in themselves interesting, advanced works from undergraduate students and other “local” works are important as foundations for their authors to grow. If communicated, properly scrutinized and criticized, they will create a scientific culture.

Nevertheless, these works (and many others) would never be considered by a top journal. As Professor Volpato himself states, the scope of an application and its conclusions will, in a certain way, determine which journal will be more adequate. The top journals will accept only papers whose conclusions are more global, while “local” journals will publish those papers with narrower conclusions. This does not mean that

these local journals will accept anything that does not follow the stricter Scientific Method.

Hence, these local papers need a vehicle that will read them, review them and, eventually, publish them, while following the stricter criteria also followed by the top journals, but concerning themselves with “local results”.

There are two main items that must be understood. First, using the scientific method is a necessary prerequisite, but it is not sufficient. All good journals will only publish papers who make Science (capitalized). There is no Science without the Scientific Method, but the latter can also be used in works of engineering or chemistry, or any other human endeavor, and those technical achievements are not Science per se and do not merit scientific publishing.

The second point is that even though the results are local, this does not mean that there would not be a broader interest in these “local results”. Other authors can use them to try to implement their own results, to use as a foundation to build more global results or merely for bibliographical analysis. The point is that being “local” does not preclude being interesting and relevant.

Hence, we need “local” journals, not only in Brazil, but in all countries that intend to create a local scientific infrastructure. A good journal (as measured by its adherence to the top quality methods) may be the only way a researcher has to come into contact with other researchers and receive criticism so that he can also learn and grow.

Therefore, the quality and relevance of a journal should not be measured solely by the number of citations its papers receive. There is much more to the publication system than a pure bibliometric measure and if we do not understand that, we cannot foster the growth of useful journals that might help your country (wherever you are) develop in scientific ways.

Until now, most of you will be nodding along, because this editorial is a collection of platitudes that are self evident. You might disagree with the importance we give to certain aspects, but the message as a whole is something like saying that the sky is blue or that you should not kill puppies. So, why are we bothering to write this editorial?

The answer to this question is simple: even though most (if not all) people agree that local publishing venues are important (if not fundamental) to the development of science, both the system as a whole and people individually act in opposition to this platitude.

The system is what it is. In Brazil, it is extremely flawed, including some issues that are not understandable (such as CAPES breaking up its own journal database and refusing to fix it for the next 18 months). Nevertheless, we do not want to address the system now. Let us just focus on the people, which act in are three different ways to undermine local journals: aloofness, inability to accept criticism and dismissive behaviors.

The aloofness part consists on the fact that many professors never submit their local results to any publishing venue. This

¹ Volpato, Gilson, “Ciência: da Filosofia à Publicação”, 6th Edition, Ed. Best Writing, São Paulo, Brazil, 2013

could be changed by universities by forcing their masters and doctorate students to publish before getting a degree. Some are already doing it, but this still has to become a norm.

The inability to accept criticism is more common than one would like to believe. Approximately a fourth part of the papers refused by this journal, either because they are not good enough (full rejection) or because they need further work (request from change) elicit a reaction from the authors that is either angry or dismissive (“unfair”, “biased”, etc), even though we never offer a negative review with proper justification. Obviously, this hinders the good effects of the publishing process, which is to offer balanced criticism and allow authors to improve their ventures.

Finally, dismissive behaviors come in different flavors. The first is that “I will not publish in your backwater journal” and the second is “I will not collaborate with your backwater journal”.

The first topic happens often. There are researchers that, when invited to submit, will just ignore the invitation.

We are not stating that all researchers should publish all their papers in “lesser” journals. Obviously, if the paper at hand is good enough for an A1 journal, there is not comprehensible reason to submit it to a B5 one. Nevertheless, do you really believe that everything that you create is A1 bound? Is there nothing that is adequate for a local B3 or B5, or C journal? If you prefer to bury those results instead of “losing your time” with a zero-gain venture, then you are part of the system that you declare to abhor and that kills many promising journals in their infancy.

The second topic is the most common one. Ask a top researcher to review a paper for you and in about 70% of the time you will not even get a reply.

We are not saying that they are not busy or unavailable. Since we are also in academia, we understand the pressures inherent to this life and the need to perform. Nevertheless, if you are part of the group that does that, look yourself in the mirror and give yourself a honest reply: have you really rejected an invitation to review because you are too busy or because you have no interest and will have no gain from doing that?

If you are part of the second group, please consider that your knowledge can “trickle down” through local journals, causing a ripple of quality that will enhance the work of many other researchers.

All these topics allow us to come to the conclusion: we like to blame the system, but we do not properly carry our burden in doing the things we believe should be done.

Local journals will always have a lower classification. By their nature, they are less prone to be cited and most rankings are performed based on bibliometrics². Nevertheless, they are an integral part of the national scientific development.

Hence, next time you want to point a finger at someone for “destroying local papers” or “not stimulating publication from inner cities institutions” or any other local scientific tragedy that might appeal to you, remember that as one finger is pointing forward, four others are point inside.

² In our specific case, we are very proud to state that we have one paper in each of the following citation categories: 26, 13, 10, 9, 6 and 5 citations, three that were referenced thrice and twice, respectively and 9 that were referenced once. Besides, we have one paper that was downloaded more than 10.000 times, two with over 1.000 downloads and 16 with more than 100 downloads. Hence, we are not as backwater as the flawed CAPES classification system might suggest.