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Community Communication: a subject of sociopolitical formation and social intervention

Rozinaldo Antonio Miani*

Abstract

The Community Communication subject offered to the qualifications of Journalism and Public Relations of the course in Social Communication from the State University of Londrina (UEL/PR) has represented one of the most important spaces of sociopolitical formation to graduate students in the field, as well the possibility of producing a social experience intervention. This article aims to analyze the experience of offering such subject, considering the need to increase spaces where reflection and political discussion about the University role and the professional commitment to society can happen, out of some reflections based on Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci. By means of a brief analysis of the subject's syllabus and the reporting of some experiences, with projects of social intervention being performed in the context of the class, we observe a political qualification of the academic learning process, in the perspective of constitution of a critic and emancipated social subject.

Keywords: Community Communication. State University of Londrina. Sociopolitical formation. Social commitment. Social intervention.

Introduction

Community Communication composes the curriculum of some courses of Social Communication in Brazil. In certain cases, the subject appears as regular course curriculum

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and others as optional supply¹. With the reformulation occurred in State University of Londrina, (UEL/PR) in 1992, the subject became part of the Public Relations and Journalism mandatory curriculums, replacing the hitherto existing subject of Rural Communication (MIANI; DELIBERADOR, 2002).

For some years after its implementation the subject suffered from a lack of an effective political-pedagogical proposal. In the late 1990s, the arrival of teachers with the appropriated profile to work with the theme allowed the construction of an effective project to conduct the subject.

Some attempts to define contents, a program, and more important than that, a theoretical-methodological conception, followed by the Community Communication subject found its space in the context of academic training of undergraduate students in Communication.

The theoretical and practical nature of the subject enabled the establishment of an educational program that aimed building a critical perspective to the study of Communication and of producing a social intervention experience that could enhance to students the opportunity to live a communicative practice of unconventional nature and based on assumptions of counter-hegemony.

All the theoretical and methodological grounding for the design and development of this subject is based on a particular conception of University that breaks with the strictly mercantile (RODRIGUES, 2007) and professionalizing logic prevailing in higher education ². We recognize that the University should indeed be conceived as a space for professional education, but before

¹ The precise mapping of this reality is presented as a pressing need that on another occasion, we intend to take as our task.

² In this respect, among many authors dealing with the issue, it is worth mentioning the analyzes and critiques made by Marilena Chauí regarding “functional university” and even “operating university”. CHAUI, Marilena. *Escritos sobre a universidade*. São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2001.

that, must have the commitment of human and socio-political formation of the individual.

From this perspective, this paper aims to analyze the experience of offering Community Communication subject ³ – marked by a process of socio-political formation and social intervention – in the context of the Public Relations and Journalism qualifications from the State University of Londrina, considering the need of increasing spaces for reflection and political discussion on the professionals political commitment with society.

For this we make a brief reflection concerning the role of University in the socio-political formation process of the student, out of some ideas based on Paulo Freire (1989) and Antonio Gramsci (1979) to present the syllabus of Community Communication, commenting some experiences of social intervention developed over several years offering such subject.

Community Communication and the University's commitment to the formation of the intellectual

It is not an exclusive prerogative of Community Communication to enable Journalism and Public Relations students a critic and emancipative reflection over Communication field, not even regarding to political understanding of society.

However, what is observed is that the hegemonic perspective on the processes of Brazilian academic education leads to the

³ We will not present in this article the questioning around the concepts of Community Communication which, in our view, are permeated by numerous limitations, inaccuracies and even misconceptions. For our part, we advocate the concept of Popular and Community Communication and using the term Community Communication in this text is justified only because it is the name of the subject that occupies the formal curriculum in UEL to discuss a counter-hegemonic perspective in the Communication field. Even in the case of the Public Relations course at UEL, the name of the subject has been changed to Popular and Community Communication since the year 2011 and in the course of journalism, changing the name of subject is expected to happen next reformulation.

universal conception of University as a trainer of skilled labor, intending the subordinate insertion of the professional to market interests. In this sense, what one finds is that such formation is primarily directed to a professionalizing perspective, reinforcing the character of a “functional university” (CHAUÍ, 2001).

Thus, we consider that the possibilities to break with this “functionality” of the University to the interests of capitalist reigning logic pervade to sensibility and social and political commitment of the educators themselves and the potential of their areas of academic action with students, either in teaching, research or extension.

In the case of course in Social Communication from the State University of Londrina, we emphasize the contribution of Community Communication in the context of teaching as one privileged space for tensioning conceptions and social or political values geared towards a perspective of critical and emancipative formation of the social subject.

Before going to the analysis of the specific “content” of the subject, and their respective developments, we emphasize that the commitment taken in that context is, first of all, with the socio-political formation of the student. The appropriation of the knowledge produced seeks to provide an improvement in understanding the dialectic of society and if that knowledge, by any chance, pragmatically present compatible with the designs of professional experience, the better.

We are not saying that professional training should not be considered or should even be taken as a fundamental objective of the academic-university education process. Rather, we recognize that the University must fulfill this task competently. However, we think that the University should, before that, take as its main task to contribute decisively to a human critical formation and politically committed to humanization, based on the appreciation of creativity and autonomy of the learner.

The theoretical and methodological basis of this concept is based on Paulo Freire (1989), when the author states that the human being is a being of commitment and that their professional status is, only, an attributive. For Paulo Freire, the commitment is, by itself, the very essence of the human being and, therefore, “the first condition for one to be able to take a committed act is in being able to act and reflect” (FREIRE, 1989, p.16).

Assuming this conception, we recognize that the University should take on the task of explaining to oneself its condition of “being of commitment” and that, for that reason, needs to be able to know its existence in the world, be aware of it, and understand it to commit inexorably to “humanization”.

Regarding the professional condition of the committed human being, Paulo Freire (1979) recognizes that the prerogatives of professional practice not necessarily are compatible with the condition of its “real commitment with the world and with men”. Hereupon, Freire asserts:

Its commitment as a professional, no doubt, can dichotomize from its original commitment to man. Commitment, as a radical and totaled endeavor, repels rationalizations. I cannot take commitment on Mondays as a man so on Tuesdays take it as a professional. Since “professional” is an attribute of man, I cannot, when I perform an attributive endeavor, deny the profound meaning of the substantial original endeavor. The more I qualify as a professional, the more organize my experiences, the more I use cultural patrimony, which is the patrimony of all and to which all must serve, the greater is my responsibility with men. I cannot, therefore, bureaucratize my commitment as a professional, serving in a painful reversal of values, more the means than the end of men. I cannot let myself be seduced by the mythical temptations, among them my bondage to techniques, in which case being prepared by men, are their slaves and not their mistresses (FREIRE, 1989, p.20).

This “ontological lesson” about the nature of human beings, capable of commitment, presents itself as the starting point for any and all subsequent discussions in the Community Communication subject political-pedagogical proposal.

Not that it was needed – by the philosophical strength we attribute to this ontological conception of Freire – but there is another intensification to do in terms of understanding the political role accepted by the individual in the context of a class society and that is potentiated by the University. It is the reflection on the intellectual condition, which is proper of individuals, and that is an issue that we developed continuously and reflexively during the realization of Community Communication subject. According to the concept proposed here, the University is assuming, through its commitment to the production and dissemination of knowledge, a privileged space for promotion and establishment of critical and committed social subject. In this way, an explanation of the intellectual condition that every individual accepts in society will be discussed during the classes of this subject.

In the logic of a society that intends to be functionalist and pragmatic⁴, the University participates importantly in the “intellectual formation” process, after all, is the responsibility of the University to provide the individual with access to the universal knowledge produced and also offer possibilities for building “new knowledge”.

For Antonio Gramsci (1979), the process of formation and constitution of the intellectual is not necessarily the prerogative of a particular institution. For that author, in practice, every man participates in one way or another in the changes of the real world and the creation of new lifestyles, implementation of new beliefs, and actively participates in political activities in their community through their intellect that conducts its visible actions; this ability that every man has of think and think himself and, from that, take action and modify the environment that qualifies itself, according to Gramsci, as an intellectual. Gramsci (1979, p.7-8) also argues:

⁴ We conceive society as a class society, but the “bourgeois ideologists on duty” sell the idea of “single thought” and argue that society is an organic whole that seeks to balance the most diverse functions, seeking to contain the possible “dysfunctions” in view of their ongoing feedback.

All men are intellectuals, it may be said then; but not all men play in society the function of intellectuals. When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, a reference is made, in fact, merely to the immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals, namely, it takes into account the direction to which focuses the greater weight of the specific professional activity, if in intellectual elaboration or in the muscular-nervous effort. This means that if one can speak of intellectuals, it is impossible to speak of non-intellectuals, because there are no non-intellectuals. But the very relation between the effort of intellectual brain elaboration and nervous muscular effort is not always equal: so there are varying degrees of intellectual specific activity. There is no human activity from which you can delete all intellectual intervention, you cannot separate the *homo faber* from *homo sapiens*. In brief, every man out of his profession develops any intellectual activity, that is to say, is a “philosopher”, an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, thereby contributes to maintain or to change a world view, that is, to promote new ways of thinking.

More specifically, Gramsci recognizes that every human being, regardless of its professional activity, uses his intellect to act, create and produce, even when this work is essentially physical. The author further states that “in any physical work, even the most degraded and mechanical, there are minimum technical qualification, namely, a minimum of creative intellectual activity” (GRAMSCI, 1979, p.7). From this perspective, which we corroborate, every human being is an intellectual, not just those who “specialize”.

However, Gramsci (1979) himself admits that although every human being an intellectual, not all play the role of the intellectual in society. In this sense, the Italian thinker concerned with the process of formation of intellectuals committed to society transformation, so that they were not mere intellectual strengthen the capitalist ruling class; thereunto, he developed the concept of organic intellectual ⁵ over the called traditional intellectual.

⁵ Can be termed organic intellectual the social group that, within their own ranks, produces intellectual organizers and leaders of society, which is fundamental in the pursuit of a new standing order for society from one social class.

For Gramsci (1979), the formation of the social subject is seen as a strategic function of policy, as part of implementing the project of a class in expectation to become hegemonic, in an attempt to create more advanced forms of civility. In this process of formation, “school is the tool to process various levels of intellectuals” (GRAMSCI, 1979, p.9).

From this understanding, we believe that the formation of the individual to the exercise of intellectual function in the context of the University, is in dispute and it is up to the teacher/educator the commitment of controvert this process of socio-political formation for a more critical perspective and aimed to emancipation of the social subject.

The sociopolitical formation per Community Communication class

In addition to being based (and reflect with students) in the political-philosophical assumptions and the dialectic methodological concept presented, Community Communication presents a syllabus proposal that establishes the deepening a set of themes and concepts that favors a more comprehensive reflection about the field of Communication and society itself, from the perspective of socio-political formation.

Discussions about the concepts of community, participation, power, exclusion, citizenship, third sector, social movements, voluntary, social responsibility (concepts that are the basis of the constitution and/or misunderstandings of some conceptions of Community Communication), subjected to a particular understanding of language philosophy derived from studies of Mikhail Bakhtin (1997), subsidize the discussion around the understanding of Community Communication (and here we must reassert our claim around the expression Popular and Community Communication), in general, and Community journalism and public relations, in particular.

The theoretical discussion provided in the content of the subject begins with a questioning about the concept of “community”, based on the studies of Raquel Paiva (1998; 2008). The routing of the debate is conducted with the prospect of presenting a new conceptual proposition, in a process of sense dispute of the term “community”, like “a concrete political space, of resistance, which enables the critical awakening of its members, a process that we might call ‘disalienation’, facing the mechanisms of individual cancellation promoted by the metabolism of capitalism” (MIANI, 2011, p.227). This theoretical understanding about the concept of community is directly applied in the reconfiguration of the concept and practices of Community Communication.

Another key theme provided in the syllabus is the concept of participation. The contributions presented by Cicilia Peruzzo (1998) and Pedro Demo (1996). We believe that “the ongoing search for a participation that behaves like an power exercise in a democratic or shared form is imperative condition for the establishment and consolidation of a community” (MIANI, 2011, p.228).

In the following discussions of the discipline, critical analyzes of the concepts of exclusion and citizenship is conducted. Regarding this latter issue, we take for granted the polysemy of the concept and present the view of some reference authors as José Murilo de Carvalho (2001) and Maria Victoria Benevides (1991). To encourage greater criticality and politicization in the debates, the discussion is conducted in order to understand the discourse of citizenship in the wider socio-political and ideological context, bounded by Ivo Tonet assertion that “modern citizenship is inseparable from the capitalist sociability entification” (TONET, 2012, p.3).

Finally, the discussions around the concept of the Third Sector and its aftermath deserve attention. Based on reviews made by Carlos Montaña (2002), one considers that the Third Sector is the most appropriate sociopolitical environment for the production of experiences in Community Communication because beyond

recognition of their functionality condition to the neoliberal logic, its promoters try to convince society that social actions developed in its constituent organizations (especially NGOs) should be preferably carried out with a view to volunteering, which favors or enhances precarious, including professional, social and political relations of the agents involved in various social practices developed by such organizations.

Lastly, these and other topics that make up the Community Communication subject syllabus are discussed with the perspective of providing ability of criticism to students so that they understand the complexity of contemporary social issues surrounding the field of Communication, and Community Communication, and which may establish criteria for a more qualified world reading, based on values of humanization.

The experience of social intervention as formative process

Concurrently with the discussion of the basic concepts for understanding and questioning the concepts of Community Communication, such subject offers students the opportunity to experience a concrete experience that presents itself as another moment in the sociopolitical formation process.

After a few lessons devoted to the philosophical and methodological reflection, followed by many other lessons of conceptual insights, the dynamics of the subject leads to the internal organization of students into groups with a view to defining projects of social intervention from the assumptions of the Community Communication.

Similarly as with the historical process of effective construction of the subjects program and content, the definition of a rationale for the implementation of the dynamics of the empirical and practical moment of that academic work has also gone through some trials until it reached its maturity.

At first, and for several years, conducting the realization process of practical projects in Community Communication was based on the free choice of themes and social groups, from stu-

dents. This “spontaneity” was justified because, supposedly, it stood impracticable the prior determination of projects to be developed, because it would imply a necessary accompaniment of teachers in each of the environments in which they would perform the experiments. That would mean follow, concomitantly, between 12 and 15 separate projects.

During this period, several works have been conducted, some with great emphasis and others with limitations and implementation issues that came to derail the completion of several of them.

These successful and remarkable experiences, include the project that was conducted by the Londrina Interdisciplinary AIDS Association (Alia), which resulted in the production of a radio vignettes set, that circulated, in 2001, at various radio stations across the city, on the occasion of the International day against AIDS, celebrated on 1st December. The vignettes participated in at least seven local radio stations programming and remained in the air in some of them for over a week. Today, the material composes the cultural heritage of that association.

The success of some experiences made one still believe that the best way to drive that process was indeed the student choice and initiative. But as the years went by, the problems have been accentuated and effective change of course was necessary.

In this moment, it is necessary to differentiate the processes of referral in practical projects realization of Community Communication classes for Public Relations and journalism.

In Public Relations, the referral followed a perspective of integration among different subjects of the course. A partnership between Community Communication and the subjects of Research Theory and Method in Communication and Technical of Directed Approximative and Oral Communication (Events) was established and became the predominant dynamics to realize projects of social intervention in Community Communication.

In the Research Theory and Method in Communication, students had the task of preparing and applying a public opinion

survey on a subject of interest of a particular social group. In agreement among teachers, it was decided that student groups should develop research themes with social scope, necessarily linked to a particular social or community group and that, finding a problem or difficulty checked by the search result, would develop in Community Communication subject, a Communication project of intervention from the perspective of solution or minimization of the problem identified. If the proposition of action was the realization of some event, so partnership with the subject of Communication and Technical of Directed Approximative and Oral Communication (Events) would also be established.

Among the various experiments conducted as part of this dynamic, we highlight the fulfillment, in 2010, of a newspaper wall project with the theme "World Cup", developed with the interns from the Londrina Social Education Center (Cense I) and that potentiated the creative involvement of adolescents who have committed illegal acts in a production communicative as a *resocialization* educational activity. Students related to Community Communication subject made some preparatory workshops with a selected group of adolescents from the institution and followed the entire process of defining and mounting the newspaper wall. The result of the work was so significant that social educators and pedagogues of Cense I decided to continue the project with the same participants, even with the prospect of involving other adolescents in the process and would count with the monitoring and support of these students as a social commitment, which were not necessarily related to any regular academic activity.

As mentioned previously, since 2011 the Community Communication subject for Public Relations course has been called Popular and Community Communication. In the new configuration of the subject, it ceased having a timetable for development of practical activity. However, in the same curriculum, Public Relations Community, Human Rights and the Third Sector subject was created, as essentially practical activity. In negotiation with the

teachers responsible for the subject, a partnership that included the projects of social intervention in community public relations contemplating the assumptions of Community Communication for its realization was established.

Regarding classes of Journalism, the process was established in a different form. The spontaneity gave way to a more organic and articulated process of constructing projects of social intervention, mainly due to a prior definition of topics, products and/or communicative practices and social groups to be monitored.

To prevent student groups from creating an expectation along a particular social group and then produce frustration by the lack of continuity, we previously established definition of projects and forward the groups of students to carry out the activities, following the assumptions of Community Communication.

The projects do not have a predetermined time to perform; this is set according to the routing established during negotiations with coordinators, managers and/or representatives of each group or social organization contacted. We had projects that were followed for only one year, others were accompanied by students during four years.

For three years, we conducted works of Community Communication with the Community Radio of Jataizinho/PR, a city in the metropolitan region of Londrina. The most significant experience has resulted in the creation of a regular program, entitled “Radio Moleca” (Kids Radio), aired on community station weekly, under the responsibility of the Guardian Council of the county.

In “Sinal Verde” (Green Light) program, which integrates the Policy of Special Social Protection of Londrina, we conducted activities during the last two years of the management of the then mayor Nedson Micheletti ⁶. Radio production depicting the life story of the assisted and organization of an institutional video with

⁶ Nedson Micheletti was mayor of Londrina for two terms: 2001-2004 and 2005-2008.

the activities offered by the program were part of the objectives referred to groups of students who worked in the “Sinal Verde”.

At the Center for Integrated Service for Children (CAIC) Dolly Jess Torresin, located in the Garden District União da Vitória, in the south of the city of Londrina, communicative activities conducted by such educational organization were accompanied by students of the subject for four years. The CAIC has a very significant Communication infrastructure and the participation of Community Communication students by the Communication Workshop (which is a regular activity offered to CAIC students in counter shift) contributed to the realization of communicative actions developed mainly through workshops for radio and print production.

Since 2012, in response to a request presented by the director of the State School Benedita Rosa Rezende, situated in the east of the city of Londrina, we are organizing and monitoring the communicative production of school students, toward their own needs and interests. And recently we initiated contacts with local representatives of the National Movement of Street Population (MNPR) to enable the production of communicative materials geared to meet the needs of the movement in the region of Londrina.

As you can see, the constitution form of the projects depends on the reality of social groups. Some communicative activities carried by students related to the subject suit projects developed within the organization itself; others are proposed or made by students to be taken over by the organizations; and there are others who have just been constituted as university extension projects or meet their goals.

Despite also facing various difficulties in routing the experiences in Community Communication in these social groups and organizations, the continuity that was established in the monitoring of development projects has ensured the possibility of review and renewal of the actions, with a view to providing effective

consolidation of a political culture in Community Communication in these spaces and social movements.

At the end of each offer of the Community Communication subject, we verified, in the students reviews, that the realization of practical experiences ensures a better understanding of political and methodological principles of Community Communication and enable to live difficulties in developing a communicative practice based on principles of participation in the realization and management of projects in Communication, as well as the political commitment of the students with their social groups, with a view to its sociopolitical formation.

Final thoughts

We can assert that the space for discussion and theoretical-methodological deepening of Community Communication in graduate courses of Journalism and Public Relations from the State University of Londrina (UEL/PR) is definitively consolidated. More than that, offering a specialization course in Popular and Community Communication in said University, in activity for over ten years and that is sought after by graduates in various fields of knowledge, further reinforces this conviction.

Regarding the perspective developed in Community Communication subject, being a space of socio-political formation and social intervention, we believe it is an inalienable certainty that sustains a conception of University focused on human development and social emancipation of the social subject.

Concerning to empirical and practical experience developed in the context of the subject, we believe they also constitute an important moment in the socio-political formation of students and we intend, as a task to be fulfilled later, to conduct a wide systematization of such practices.

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