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A COMMUNITY PRE-PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE LINKED TO TEACHING IN SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

UNA EXPERIENCIA PRÁCTICA PRE-PROFESIONAL COMUNITARIA VINCULADA CON LA DOCENCIA EN COMUNICACIÓN SOCIAL

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This article is the result of teaching and practical work in the subjects of Communication and Health and Educational Communication, developed by the authors as foreign collaborators at the Polytechnic High School "José Eduardo Dos Santos" Cuito/Bié, in the Republic of Angola.

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ABSTRACT

As an alternative means of communication, community communication is essentially a tool to give voice to historically marginalized social groups, an assumption that needs to be visualized every day as a reference to condition social changes in communities through education. The objective of the paper is to expose some experiences as teachers together with students of the Social Communication career in some neighborhoods of Cuito/Bie, Angola. The experience resulted in shared intercultural learning between students and teachers. It was supported by tools of the Participatory-Action-Research methodology and the postulates of Popular Education. It is not intended to express finished ideas, but to provoke reflexive approaches to a practice that is continually reconstructed. As teachers at the Polytechnic High School of Cuito/Bie, in Angola, they took advantage of the opportunity provided by the coincidence of the delivery in the fifth semester of the career of the subjects of Communication and Health and Educational Communication, with the precedence of having studied Communication for Development and Intercultural Communication in the year, so that the students, integrated into teams, carry out fieldwork in some

neighborhoods of the community, all with the objective that they apply in practice, the knowledge acquired in various subjects. The visit to the community with the preparation of the contents studied consolidated the experiences of the students, allowed them to make observations in the field, and strengthened the process of interaction between theory and practice, using tools of the research methodology. The interviews, observation guides, questionnaires, and almost daily face-to-face interaction gave scientific objectivity to the task performed. It was possible to verify the unhealthy life practices of many of its inhabitants in the interaction with the environment, the non-use of the natural leaders of these communities for their improvement, as well as insufficient communication between the community and the institutions close to them fundamentally. The experience conclusively corroborated the weaknesses that still exist in the extensionist work by the university, that community work is a space almost invisible by the large media and the universities of the territory, it also allowed students to have a different look to the cultural and communicative practices of the environment in question. The photographic evidence illustrates the above.

Keywords: Popular Education; Communication for Development; Investigation-Action; Community Communication; Neighborhoods; Angola; Intercultural Communication.

RESUMEN

Como vía de comunicación alternativa, la comunicación comunitaria es por esencia una herramienta para conferir voz a los grupos sociales vulnerables e históricamente marginados, supuesto que precisa ser visualizado cada día como referente para condicionar cambios sociales en las comunidades mediante la educación. El trabajo tiene como meta exponer algunas experiencias como docentes junto a estudiantes de la carrera de Comunicación Social en algunos barrios de Cuito/Bié, Angola. La experiencia derivó en aprendizajes interculturales compartidos entre alumnos y profesores. Se apoyó en herramientas de la metodología de la Investigación -Acción - Participativa y los postulados de la Educación Popular. No se pretende expresar ideas acabadas, sino provocar acercamientos reflexivos sobre una práctica que se reconstruye continuamente. Como docentes de la Escuela Superior Politécnica de Cuito/Bié, en Angola, se aprovechó la oportunidad que propiciaba la coincidencia de la impartición en el quinto semestre de la carrera, de las asignaturas de Comunicación y Salud y Comunicación Educativa, con la precedencia de haber estudiado Comunicación para el Desarrollo y Comunicación Intercultural en el 2do año, para que los estudiantes, integrados en equipos, realizaran trabajo de campo en algunos barrios de la comunidad, todo ello con el objetivo que aplicaran en la práctica, los conocimientos adquiridos en varias asignaturas. Las visitas a la comunidad con la preparación de los contenidos estudiados, fueron consolidando las vivencias de los estudiantes, permitieron realizar observaciones en el terreno y fortalecer el proceso de interacción entre la teoría y la práctica, utilizando herramientas propias de la metodología de investigación, como entrevistas, guías de observación, cuestionarios y la interacción cara a cara casi diaria con los moradores le dio objetividad científica a la tarea realizada. Se pudo constatar las condiciones de insalubridad de las zonas

pesquisadas, las prácticas de vida poco saludables de muchos de sus moradores en su interacción con el medio ambiente, el no aprovechamiento de los líderes naturales de esas comunidades para el mejoramiento de las mismas, así como insuficiente comunicación entre la comunidad y las instituciones cercanas a éstas fundamentalmente. La experiencia corrobora de manera concluyente las debilidades que aún existen en el trabajo extensionista por parte de la universidad, que el trabajo comunitario es espacio casi invisibilizado por los grandes medios de comunicación y las universidades del territorio, además permitió a los estudiantes tener una mirada otra de las prácticas culturales y comunicativas del entorno en cuestión. Las evidencias fotográficas ilustran lo anteriormente expuesto.

Palabras clave: Educación Popular; Comunicación para el Desarrollo; Investigación Acción; Comunicación alternativa; Comunicación Comunitaria; Barrios; Angola; Práctica; Comunicación Intercultural.

UMA EXPERIÊNCIA DE PRÁTICA COMUNITÁRIA PRÉ-PROFISSIONAL LIGADA AO ENSINO EM COMUNICAÇÃO SOCIAL

RESUMO

Como meio alternativo de comunicação, a comunicação comunitária é essencialmente uma ferramenta para dar voz a grupos sociais vulneráveis e historicamente marginalizados, claro que precisa ser vista todos os dias como referência para condicionar mudanças sociais nas comunidades por meio da educação. O trabalho tem como objetivo expor algumas experiências como docentes junto a alunos da carreira de Comunicação Social em alguns bairros do Cuito/Bié, Angola. A experiência levou a uma aprendizagem intercultural compartilhada entre alunos e professores. Apoiou-se nas ferramentas da metodologia da Pesquisa-Ação Participativa e nos postulados da Educação Popular. Não se pretende expressar ideias definitivas, mas sim provocar abordagens reflexivas sobre uma prática que se reconstrói continuamente. Enquanto docentes da Escola Superior Politécnica de Cuito/Bié, em Angola, aproveitamos a oportunidade que foram permitidas pela coincidência de que se leciona no quinto semestre da licenciatura, as disciplinas de Comunicação e Saúde e Comunicação Educativa, com o precedente de terem cursado Comunicação para o Desenvolvimento e Comunicação Intercultural no 2º ano, pelo que os alunos, integrados em times, realizaram um trabalho de campo em alguns bairros da comunidade, tudo com o objetivo de aplicar na prática os conhecimentos adquiridos em várias disciplinas. As visitas à comunidade com a preparação dos conteúdos estudados, foram consolidando as experiências dos alunos, permitiram realizar observações em campo e fortalecer o processo de interação entre teoria e prática, utilizando ferramentas típicas da metodologia de pesquisa, como entrevistas, guias de observação, questionários e interação face a face quase diária com os residentes o que deu objetividade científica à tarefa realizada. Foi possível constatar as condições insalubres das áreas pesquisadas, as práticas de vida insalubres de muitos de seus habitantes em sua interação com o meio ambiente, a não utilização dos líderes naturais dessas comunidades para seu melhoramento, bem como a comunicação insuficiente entre a comunidade e as instituições próximas a eles fundamentalmente. A experiência

corroborou conclusivamente as fragilidades que ainda existem no trabalho de extensão por parte da universidade, que o trabalho comunitário é um espaço quase invisível pela grande mídia e pelas universidades do território, também permitiu que os alunos tivessem um olhar diferenciado das práticas culturais e comunicativas do ambiente em questão. A evidência fotográfica ilustra o que foi dito acima.

Palavras chave: educação popular; Comunicação para o desenvolvimento; Ação de investigação; comunicação alternativa; Comunicação Comunitária; Bairros; Angola; Prática; Comunicação intercultural.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In every process in which human beings are involved, there are practices that give meaning to individual and collective life, resulting from life stories; this occurs because of the existence of communication and culture, both exist by man and with man and allow understanding that communication is a sociocultural process where the active subjects carry with them a load of shared symbolic meanings.

Related to this interlinked relationship of culture and communication, Cordero in 2018 states that culture is the background in which the communicative processes germinate, and serves as a support and that in turn from these same processes, new meanings of the social world are built, which implies that it is also culture. (p. 3)

The above leads us to observe communication as the world of human relationships, established bonds, conflicts, and dialogues, all spaces in which culture is inserted; communication is then the foundation of all interaction and also of the construction of coexistence among social subjects.

(Zalba and Bustos as cited in Cordero, 2018) refer that:

Communication is a fundamental human process, which presides over and frames the life of man, both in its construction as an individual and in its immersion in society. The communicative is at the basis of most social practices and is the process that enables relational life. In this sense, all social practice involves, to varying degrees, a form of communicative practice. (p.3)

These interactions are present throughout the social fabric with its dynamics, its levels, and social groups in more or less visible conflicts that shape civil society with its diverse identities.

2. OBJECTIVES

Understanding how and why these attitudes occur in the community space is a task not only for sociologists, psychologists, and communication professionals but also for social communicators in training. Consequently, the objectives proposed were to **design** a teaching process that would guide professionals in training towards spaces that are less visible in the mass media, such as the community, which influences their

level of participation, and to **raise awareness** of the important role that education plays in the younger generations.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Education and Communication. Interdependent relationships

Education, by nature, has a vanguard role: to create men and women capable of facing the demands of the world, for which it has to be in constant change and transformation. In this regard, Martí expresses, "To educate is... to make each man a summary of the living world, up to the day they live: it is to put them at the level of their time...with which they can emerge: it is to prepare man for life" (as cited in Álvarez, p.115) and it is through education that new generations assimilate and learn the knowledge, standards of conduct, ways of being, and ways of seeing the world of previous generations while creating new ones.

In community spaces, educational learning processes are developed, which should be taken into account by all practicing communicators and by educators responsible for those who are in training in academia, so that they understand their society critically and inclusively.

In this regard, Freire (2004) points out that there is a fundamental moment in teachers and that is the permanent critical reflection on practice (p.34), that is, on what happens in life, thus stimulating the systematic rethinking of the macro and micro world in which one is inserted, an important postulate of his pedagogy, which supports popular education.

3.2. Popular Education. Its importance in the formation of the social communicator

This conception cannot be approached without starting from Paulo Freire, who argued that teaching meant creating possibilities for the production/construction of knowledge, respect for the autonomy of the learner, humility, interpretation of reality to transform it, commitment to a way of being and doing, in essence, being coherent with a conception of the world, of life.

Concerning the last idea, Martín-Barbero (2011) defends the need for:

the communicator to make a qualitative change, from an intermediary communicator to a communicator-mediator, who assumes as the basis of their action the asymmetries and social and cultural inequalities, by participating as an actor in the construction of a democratic society... that makes it possible to value the demands and competences of the majorities, without falling into the populism of vulgarizations or the facile nature of recipes;... that makes it possible to assume the specificity and complexity of culture without making the jargon of specialists the key to information, and that awakens the interest of

the people without falling into paternalistic discourse... by making culture a strategic space for the recognition of the other, of others. (pp. 20-33)

It follows that in the university teaching-learning process, it is essential to provide students with the tools and methods that allow them to perform their specialties, based on a scientific interpretation of their realities and commitment to them. Moreover, community spaces must be coherently conceived in the programs of the Social Communication career.

De Souza Santos (2007) proposes a counter-hegemonic, alternative globalization of the university and advises seeking reforms led by groups, social movements, and local governments that articulate the interests of the university and the society it represents to develop in them multi-university knowledge in contrast to unilateral and excluding knowledge (pp. 53-54).

The above implies giving an ever greater dynamism to community spaces and that within them their identity features are more consolidated, due to the spatial context in which they develop for being historically marginalized social subjects, with certain different cultural and communicative practices, therefore, it is necessary to use alternative media, assuming counter-hegemonic positions. In this regard, Buitrago et al. (2016), point out that alternative media is an option different from traditional and mass media (p.90).

Related to the last idea, it is important to emphasize that there are no absolute recipes in terms of communication and alternative media, everything is subjected to the creativity with which the community subjects assume their reality, but, not only should we talk about the creativity of community actors, we must also count on the creativity of social communication professionals, for which it is necessary to be trained from undergraduate level. Based on these assumptions, activities were conceived for the students of the Social Communication career at the Polytechnic High School of Cuito/Bié.

4. METHODOLOGY

From the qualitative perspective, the participatory methodology was used and observation, documentary analysis, and discussion groups were used as methods and techniques. The bibliographic-documentary review of the study plans included normative and curricular documents. The discussion groups with students were developed throughout the process. The visits to the community with the preparation of the courses studied consolidated the experiences of the students of the Social Communication specialty, of the Polytechnic Superior School of Bié, José Eduardo Dos Santos University. The observations in the field constituted a principle related to the interaction between theory and practice.

The study plan for this specialty includes the set of core disciplines and specialties. The discipline of Communication for Development is composed of six subjects, some of which begin to be taught during the first and second semesters of the second year of the specialty. These are integrated by: Communication for Development,

Intercultural Communication, Educational Communication, Communication and Health, as well as Communication and Environment, and Political Communication.

According to the document, this discipline offers students the possibility of knowing and interpreting the complexities of the communicative processes that take place in social spaces in which diverse cultural interactions and actions of an educational nature are produced, which contribute to comprehensive development and social transformation.

Part of its object of study is the knowledge of the interrelationship established between the system of ideas, values, principles, customs, and rites, with political, scientific, cultural, educational, community, and other institutions, through communicative practices and production.

The plan emphasizes that the discipline provides students with theoretical and practical foundations from which they can diagnose, conceptualize, plan, develop, and evaluate these practices and production for the benefit of human and social growth and improvement.

It emphasizes that this discipline, through the set of subjects that integrate it, contributes especially with modes of action closely linked to inclusive and dialogic communicative practices and productions, which support the activity of sociocultural transformation and citizen participation in the various social spaces and environments (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014).

As part of the work developed as teachers at the Polytechnic High School of Cuito/Bié, in Angola, we took advantage of the opportunity provided by the coincidence of teaching in the 5th Semester of the career, third year, the subjects of Communication and Health and Educational Communication, with the precedence of having studied Communication for Development and Intercultural Communication in the 2nd year, so that the students, formed in teams, carried out fieldwork in some neighborhoods of the community, to apply in practice the knowledge they had been acquiring in the discipline, through several of their subjects.

Based on the theoretical approach that the students had been overcoming through the lectures given, integration of the contents of the aforementioned subjects was carried out through practical classes in the form of round table work, for which ideas were exchanged with the students, concrete orientations were given, namely:

1. Forming work teams with a team leader in each one of them.
2. Selection of the neighborhoods to be surveyed.
3. Elaboration of the participatory diagnosis (content that they receive in the second year in the subject Communication for Development in the class of Management of Community Projects and Communication Strategies). This action included researching the history of the selected neighborhoods, as well as visiting them at different times of the day to obtain the most accurate

information possible. Emphasis was placed on identifying formal and non-formal leaders in these areas.

4. Elaboration by the students of an action proposal as part of a strategy based on the results obtained from the diagnosis and application of practical action in the field.
5. Collection of graphic evidence of the work carried out in the field.
6. Delivery of the Integrating Final Work, by teams.

The development of the research lasted one semester; at the end of which the results were presented and discussed to be evaluated as an integrative theoretical-practical exam in the subject of Educational Communication, in which contents of Communication and Health, Intercultural Communication, and Communication and Development were systematized, some overdue in the previous semester and others in the semester itself.

To achieve the above, it was necessary to observe the community as a multidimensional scenario and look for those central axes on which to articulate the most holistic work possible. The central axis was health, understood in the broad sense of the concept, i.e., physical, emotional, economic, and social well-being since these are communities with social disadvantages, so a global analysis of the communities had to be carried out. In this sense, we took advantage of the joint work with professors and students of the Nursing career.

The natural environment is highlighted as a direct form of data collection, due to the meanings that people give to the events of their lives. Ethnographic method tools were used to understand the phenomenon in all its dimension in its physical field of action and together with the techniques of in-depth interview and participant observation, it was possible to interact with the actors at the center of the research.

It was an approach from a discipline to communication research, where communicative angles were evaluated within a context to diagnose all the signs that the subjects use to interrelate. It also obeys exploratory research to achieve greater familiarity with the problem and make it more visible.

5. DISCUSSION

This step was conceived as a process that started from the conception of the methodology since a weekly session in the classroom was always used to discuss, dialogue, and clarify doubts about what was observed in the field by each team each week, and in this way gradually shape the final report that was defended as a final exam where the unhealthy conditions of the surveyed areas, the unhealthy living practices of many of its inhabitants in their interaction with the environment, the lack of use of the natural leaders of these communities for their improvement, as well as insufficient communication between the community and the institutions close to them were exposed.

In the face of this panorama, proposals arose such as carrying out awareness workshops with community dwellers, with formal and natural leaders, and nearby

institutions, focusing on church leaders, both Catholic and Protestant, small business owners, traditional authorities such as the sobas, and authorities such as zone delegates, and school teachers.

It was important the conclusion reached by the students in their analysis referred to the complexity (although not impossibility) of the work to be done because it implied changing mentalities since the habits of the inhabitants aggravate their living conditions.

6. RESULTS

One of the results that in our opinion was obtained was the theory-practice integration that, at a basic level, the students achieved, as well as obtaining knowledge of an environment that, although close, was foreign to them, and that contributed to the fact that from that moment on the community for them acquired another nuance; likewise, they were able to verify problems that until that moment were not perceived as such, proving how complex and enriching community work is.

The students were able to establish contacts with traditional leaders (soba), which made it possible to get closer to a part of the history of the locality; this element can undoubtedly contribute to the strengthening of cultural identity and sense of belonging.

The young people reflected and exchanged on daily practices not perceived as such in the routines of daily life, through the apprehension of theoretical contents studied in the discipline of Communication for Development and applying them through the analysis made to the community dynamics.

Another significant result was the practical integration of some aspects of the methodology of research in social communication, the use of diagnosis, in-depth interviews, field observation, and the proposal of concrete actions to the problems detected reflect this.

The placebo effect generated in the members of these communities by feeling that, in some way, somewhat distant social groups were interacting with them cannot be ignored, which became a profitable experience, since at an undergraduate level, the participation of subjects in the experience as informal and formal leaders was achieved, which led to a greater insertion of community members in the activities described above.

Despite the benefits of the practical experience in the field, there was resistance on the part of some students to participate in the research, which implied that at times the evaluation was used as an element of coercion and not as a process, which shows that the work carried out in the relationship with the community is still insufficient.

It stimulated in some students the incentive to conceive topics for future Diploma Works.

As teachers, it was a profitable experience of work and intercultural communication, because as evidenced in the annexes, practices and rites of the Umbundu ethnic group

were manifested, from the presentation ceremony with the soba as the leader to the use by some students of the language of this ethnic group, which facilitated better communication and an atmosphere of inclusion was achieved.

It was an experience where the interdisciplinary view was present, not only because of the application of the research methodology but also because of the possibility of integrating students and professors of the Nursing career in such a way that the students could understand from practical experience why health is a concept that encompasses all orders of human life.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Today's world needs a social communication professional who critically studies their society and recognizes diversities to respond to social needs present in community spaces, which can only be achieved if inclusive educational processes are coherently designed, and assumed as a work philosophy so that educators and students develop other creative ways of generating alternative communication for social change.

The experience of working in the communities allowed the students to have another look at the cultural and communicative practices of the environment in question and at the same time exposed the weaknesses that still exist in the community extension work; a space almost invisibilized by the mass media and the universities of the territory.

Figure 1

When visiting Soba, a gift is offered as a sign of respect. In this case, Professor Margarita is giving him a bottle of wine.



Source: Photo taken by one of the students in the group.

Figure 2

The initial moment of exchange with the Soba (traditional authority) of the Cantiflas neighborhood.



Source: Photo taken by one of the students in the group.

Figure 3

María de los Ángeles, the career coordinator at the time, explains to Soba the purpose of the meeting.



Source: Photo taken by one of the students in the group.

Figure 4.

Social Communication students in dialogue with young people of the Cantiflas neighborhood



Source: Photo taken by one of the students in the group.

Figure 5

Exchange of Nursing and Social Communication students with residents.



Source: Photo taken by one of the students in the group.

Figure 6

Professors and students of Nursing and Social Communication before starting the tour, at the Medical Post in the Cantiflas neighborhood.



Source: Photo taken by one of the students in the group.

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