

Community Communication and Education for Citizenship

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The inter-relationships between communication and education are usually discussed in the context of formal education. In this study, I discuss edu-communication, which is forged in informal communication processes through organizations, popular movements and NGOs. This type of communication is very significant in Brazil and Latin America. This study is based on a literature review, as well as on reflections of my own participant observation in participatory media. I conclude that organizations practicing participatory communication within the subaltern sectors of Brazil have contributed to the broadening of education for exercising citizenship.

Studies on communication and education tend to focus on the relationships and inter-relationships between the two fields of knowledge, especially in relation to teaching and learning mediated by a communicative process; the use of communication media in proximate learning and in educational institutions; the role of media in the educational process; and education for the critical reception of mass media messages, especially television. This is an expanding field of study that has contributed significantly to the comprehension of these phenomena; however, it is not sufficiently understood and valorized by either educators or by communication professionals.

This study is based on a different perspective from those set out above, one that focuses on edu-communication that is forged in the world of informal education. More precisely, this education takes place in the context of the actions of popular movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to guarantee fundamental human rights and/or to discuss wider social themes, such as ecology, peace building and life on the planet itself. This type of civil-society-based communication over the last few decades has grown in the heart of the subaltern sectors of the population or have been organically connected to them. When people participate in an everyday praxis regarding the interests and needs of their own groups, or when they take part in organizations and movements engaged with wider social concerns, they become part of an informal education process which contributes to the making and remaking of popular cultures and citizenship building. This type of organizational-cultural

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manifestation is very strong in Brazil and Latin America, which have long histories of development projects that have excluded the majority of their people as participants but have nevertheless gone through massive social transformations in the last twenty years.¹ This study is founded upon a literature review of the political role of social movements, the reports of popular/participatory communication case studies, as well as my own participant observation of popular movements and a community radio station in the state of Espírito Santo, Brazil.

The Dimensions of Citizenship

To better understand how education for citizenship rises from the involvement of people in community media, we must first briefly define what we understand by “citizenship.”² [...] In the liberal conception, there is an individualization of citizenship, and a separation between the public and private spheres. What matters is the rights of each person individually and the satisfaction of private self-interest. The liberal model “discourages social and political action, based on the understanding that only private economic action can lead to collective well-being. A citizen’s personality was absorbed by the ‘personality’ of the producer and the exchanger of merchandise” (Abranches, 1985, p. 9). [...]

The problem is in who can exercise citizenship and on whose terms it is exercised. The question lies, on the one hand, in citizenship as a right and, on the other, in the political incapacity of citizens, due to the level of command over social resources and the access to them. For example, slaves, women and *metekes* (foreigners) did not take part in the Greek agora. In Brazil, women and illiterate people only achieved the right to vote in 1934 and 1988, respectively. Therefore, depending on the historical period and on the country or place, only a portion of the population can fully exercise citizenship. Achieving citizenship means moving from subject to citizen inside a social framework that requires involvement from people and thus adapting their *citizenship status* to their quality of participation. This is one of its foundations; the other is understanding that its shape depends on the type of society lived in. [...]

In modern societies, citizens are members of a political society based in universal suffrage and in which all are considered equal in the eyes of the law. In practice, this is not always the case. In Brazil and other Latin American countries, for instance, the right to property—which is a given in the capitalist production mode—the right to education and so on, while legally assured, are, in practice, denied to the majority of the Brazilian population.³ [...]

Civil and political rights are called first-generation rights; social rights, second-generation rights. Third-generation rights appeared in the second half of the twentieth century. These have at their core not the individual, but social groups, such as discriminated minorities and ethnic groups, and the right of the people’s self-determination. Human rights, women’s rights, the right to development, the right to peace and the right to environment have been discussed in world conferences.⁴ Amongst these third-generation rights are those of new social movements, with rights relating to diffuse interests, consumer rights, ecology rights, right to quality of life, elderly

rights, children's rights, youth rights etc. Amongst these rights, Brazilians may add the right to popular participation in municipal budgets, the rights to the city, legal pluralism, and the right to difference (Krohling, 1997, p. 118). [...]

Education for Citizenship in Social Movements

[...] Education means educating for society. It is the socialization of an accumulated heritage of knowledge, of understanding about the means to obtain knowledge and of the forms of social co-existence. It is also educating for social co-existence and citizenship, for awareness and for the exercise of rights and duties of the citizen. According to Sergio Luiz do Amaral Moretti (1999, p. 60), besides teaching scientific knowledge and habilitating people for professional life, schools should also have a bigger goal, of preparing people to exercise their rights; their human rights and citizenship rights—civil, social and political rights. Although schools [including universities] are a privileged space for these goals, preparation for the exercise of citizenship is also learnt outside the classroom. Many institutions share in this formative process with families, mass media, churches, unions, social movements and NGOs, as well as all other social relationships that are part of everyday life. Mass media, especially television, have shown their potential and power to influence society. Following from de Barros (1997, p. 28), the shaping of contemporary knowledge happens beyond formal education, in a dynamic of multiple social mediations. An expressive part of the content assimilated by people is absorbed through mass communication media. With the growth of technological infrastructures in big cities, the more intense the presence of communication media becomes in people's lives. In particular, new generations have their values, opinions and attitudes crystallized by media, which are not really interested in their education, do not explicitly assume their pedagogical value, but frequently end up having a more profound influence on youth than the formal school education. In this way, media occupy the space of informal education, which takes place in the social dynamics of day-to-day life through which individuals see themselves interacting with their peers.

Within the world of informal education we [as Brazilian scholars] should focus on the relationships between communication and education in the process of achieving citizenship. However, we are not solely speaking of the role of media contents, but of the communication that arises from the praxis of popular and community movements as well as other organizations that represent collective interests as a strategy. These social movements refer to the set of organizations formed from the subaltern classes with the explicit objective of trying to obtain a better standard of living. This is done through access to individual and collective consumer goods, through the satisfaction of basic survival rights and the rights to political participation in society, such as health care, schools in recently established neighborhoods, housing, land reform and so on. [...].

Brazilian social movements have suffered with recent changes. First, they passed from a phase of public demonstrations to another phase in which they were preoccupied with constituting themselves as legal solidly structured organizations. Then, social

movements felt the need to articulate what some call the “unification” of movements, in order to target joint action at sector, municipal, state and national levels. Lastly, they came to accept partnership with the public sector and private institutions as a way to join forces and to attend the growing demands of society (Peruzzo, 1998a, p. 40–44). Together with sectors of the Catholic church and NGOs, they managed to have many of the demands, proposals and social actions that were initially restricted in the late 1970s and early 1980s taken up by many other social actors and by society as a whole. Even some private companies, through their own programs, or by supporting their employees’ programs or creating foundations, have come to engage with public interest programs. The media, especially television, set themselves to publicize more messages from social movements and NGOs, to produce educational programs and campaigns, even if in very small doses when compared to the time given to conventional entertainment programming. Environmentalist movements grew stronger, more resonant and socially accepted. The *Ação da Cidadania Contra a Fome e pela Vida* (Citizenship Action Against Hunger and For Life) movement was born, which mobilized more than two million people in favor of improving the quality of life of the impoverished sectors of the Brazilian population. “Brazil tops the charts for income concentration and [of its 26 million people] has 15.8% of the population without access to minimal conditions of sanitation, health and education” (País entra no ranking ... , 1999, p. 14), according to data from a United Nations report.⁵ The UN classified Brazil as 79th out of 174 countries in terms of human development in 1999. These are but some of the indicators of historical significance to social movements in terms of their contribution to altering political culture. Social movements expanded the spectrum of political participation, not only at the macro-level of national political power, but also at the micro level of local participation, for popular organizations, and by contributing to the democratic process and the extension of citizenship rights.

There is, therefore, a close relationship between political culture, social movements and citizenship. Political culture is traditionally understood in terms of the relationships between government and the governed, in the behaviors and attitudes of one in relation to the others, especially in the case of elections. “[In the perspective of social movements] the concept is redefined through the relationship that exists between social actors and social order, especially in subject-formation” (Galindo Cáceres, 1987a, p. 7). Political culture is defined by consciousness of the existing relation between the space occupied by a social organization and its place in society. It is the relation between practice, within the place it occurs, and the social totality. Urban political culture is grounded in its specific urban formations. Political culture is defined in terms of praxis, in other words, in the relationship between knowing and doing: the knowledge of practice itself, of the practices of others and on the web of these practices in their reproduction or transformation of society (Galindo Cáceres, 1987b, p. 133).

In a study of a community radio movement in Vila Velha, Espírito Santo, as a collective political praxis, Beatriz S. M. Krohling (1997) shows that the re-democratization process in Brazilian society made “the people” protagonists in the collective and active construction of citizenship rights. Through social movements, they

created space for public recognition of scarcities and necessities produced by the dominant and hegemonic social structures. In this perspective:

[There is] a negation of the authoritarian tradition that permeates our social history, a tradition with values which have stood for the despotism of the elites and for the subservience of the larger parts of society to the designations of a centralizing State. (...) It is undeniable that the contributions of social and political collective subjects, among them urban and rural social movements, have led to the widening of political actions towards re-democratization. In reality there has been a social redefinition of power by the actions of these subjects, whose political values and orientations are sustained by a new sociability, that is permeated by relationships of solidarity, affectivity, and orientations for community life among others. Taken this way, we can identify those movements with meanings that change the traditional political culture despite the authoritarian and clientelist elements still present in our society (pp. 141–143).

What does all this mean if it is not citizen-making? [...]

Communication and Education for Citizenship

It is increasingly accepted that the cultural formation of human beings in contemporary societies goes through the complex intermediations of everyday life. Intermediations happen through interpersonal, group and mass communication, and are intensified with the escalation of new technologies (de Barros, 1997, p. 30). In Brazil, education, among other dimensions, implies self-education. According to Kaplún (1999), self-education is to involve oneself in a process of multiple communicative flows. The richer the web of inter-communicational interactions that the system can open up and make available, the more educational it will be. Educational communication conceived through this pedagogical matrix would mainly function to provide strategies, means, and methods to promote students' communicative competencies. This development presupposes a means for generating horizontal communication (p. 74).

Here we find the heart of the question of education for citizenship through social movements and similar sites. In the process of communicating, people can become subjects of their knowledge. They can educate themselves through engagement in concrete activities and relationships that build a new sociability. All of this refers to a change in posture, from a "culture of silence" within the majority, as Paulo Freire (1981) puts it, or from a culture of submission by absent or voiceless citizens, as Jesús Martín-Barbero (1999) puts it, towards a new citizenship:

The institutions and spaces for forming citizens [after the military regimes in Latin America] were to a large extent diluted. At the moment [there is], on the one hand, a plurality of rather tentative movements that are struggling, to some extent, to overpower silence. That is, there is insubordination, rebellion when faced with the power of the Church, (...) the state, (...) school ... in the face of many powers. This includes everything related to the feminist movement, the ecological movement, the gay movement, ethnic, racial, black movements. (...) There are elements of a new sociability, a new agenda of issues that matter to people. (...) These movements are small, mostly inarticulate, as they articulate themselves and articulate schools and municipal—community—media, they will create networks of citizens who will be very effective

in making these scattered voices begin to take shape in the regional and even in the national space (Martín-Barbero, 1999, p. 78–79, *emphasis added*).

In the context of these political, educational, and media movements, experiences develop what can be called popular or community communication, which show specific characteristics, including the exercise of direct participation. There, it is possible that those receiving media messages should also become media producers, or transmitters towards a participatory communication.

It seems that, at this popular level, it is possible to observe the practical implementation of the principles of horizontal communication proposed by thinkers in the *Escola Latino-Americana de Comunicação* (Latin American School of Communication). Scholars such as Luís Ramiro Beltrán and Mário Kaplún inspired communication studies between the social movement organizers from the subaltern classes. Here, it should be noted, enters their proposal for democratic communication policies for Latin America, those which emerged from the heated studies and debates of the New World Information and Communication Order, in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶

Participatory communication is a mechanism that facilitates the expansion of citizenship. It allows people to become subjects of community activities and the media they forge, resulting in an educational process without being formally enrolled in school. People taking part in this process tend to change their way of seeing and relating to the world, thus adding new elements into their culture. Community and popular media—though obviously not all of it⁷—has the potential of being simultaneously a part of a popular organizational process and a channel filled with informational and cultural content that enables direct participation in planning, production and management. Therefore, these media contribute doubly to the construction of citizenship. They offer a potential education through the production process and the content they convey. The contents can ignite people's socialization to a historical legacy of knowledge, facilitating an understanding of social relations, the mechanisms of the power structure, the national government, the rights of the individual and discussions of local problems. The existence of radio programs made by residents of *favelas* is well known. These provide an educational process for children and young people about the dangers of drug use and trafficking. They can facilitate the appreciation of cultural identities and roots, making room for social movements based on the population's knowledge and culture: from the history of their ancestors to the folk stories and natural remedies that cure diseases. They can serve as a channel for the expression of local artists, who might otherwise have a hard time appearing on regional and national mass media. Finally, they can provide information on how to prevent diseases, to know consumer rights, to access free public services and documents (such as obtaining one's birth certificates), and so on. The participation of everyday people in the production and transmission of media messages, in the planning mechanisms, and in community media management helps them become *subjects*, to make what they usually receive readymade, to be the protagonists of the means of communication, and not only the receivers.

Communication media produced by—or organically connected to—organized groups from marginalized social classes come to create a space that is amenable to

the development of citizenship education. The relationships between education and communication are made explicit, as the people involved in those processes develop their knowledge and change the way they see and relate to society and the actual systems of mass communication. They develop the techniques and learn the technical instruments for mass communication; they acquire more critical perspectives through the information they receive as well as through what they learn from new lived experiences, in their practices. For example, the decisions people must make about news stories when putting together a newscast for community radio, as well as the other decisions involved in the process of the production and transmission require that they learn about mass media strategies and ways that they may manipulate messages. Each person comes to know the possibilities for defining the news through the conflict of interest that condition information or programming, through the dynamics of the advertising market, as well as through the power of the medium such as the radio, newspaper, television, and so on. When it comes to taking part in wider social activities, community media production is about such activities as engaging with movements and organizations of public interest (for example mass litter campaigns), participating in the neighborhood community centre, taking care of underprivileged children, and professional training courses.

The insertion of local dynamics into the content of messages and participation in all stages of the communicative process usually happens in an interconnected fashion. They represent the ideal in terms of edu-communication action in community movements. It is clear that people's active participation in the many phases of a community communication process is still impossible.⁸ Nevertheless, even community projects without this mass interconnectedness must also be recognized. The media content, even in isolation, has a certain degree of educational potential. A television or radio program, for example, even if not produced with the active participation of the population through their representatives, but through a team of local residents or even the employees of an NGO or a union, can have the potential to contribute to the formation of critical consciousness and the widening of mutual knowledge between senders and receivers. The educational potential implicit in communication media, whether local or mass, is significant. Because of this potential, they are public and not private properties. They represent human achievement as instruments capable of democratizing information, culture and knowledge, from common sense to science, in an agile, interesting and reliable way.

Within prevailing social dynamics, those communicative movements were initially called *popular* (connected to the people, or that come from the people) or *alternative* (in the sense that they are an option in relation to big media) with respect to their content and channels, such as bulletins, pamphlets, loudspeakers, and so on (see Peruzzo, 1998a, 1998b). Large mass media, at the time, was subject to rigid censorship and self-censorship. Their political and economic connections with the dominant classes and with the government meant those did not reflect what was happening in society (Peruzzo, 1998b, p. 144). In response, the popular classes created their own channels of expression. They opened space through traditional information channels to publicize their messages. In this way, they took part in the national debate about

problems and the re-elaboration of ideologies, values and views of the world, contributing to citizenship education. In this they joined the many NGOs, churches, universities, foundation, and autonomous social educators in short and long term collaborations and mediations.

Considering the regime change in Brazil, these communicative movements, on the one hand, caused social change, and on the other, were changed. [...] What occurred, in a certain way, was the transformation of popular/alternative communication media that were introduced during the 1980s but were not openly accessible to society, to changes that were marking a new historical moment and that sought to avoid class conflict.⁹ However, around the middle of the 1990s, community media projects emerged that transcended the previous difficulties, becoming more pluralistic, both in their content and management.

In Brazil, most recent projects make wider use of communication technologies (radio, television, internet) with community organizations and NGOs. They reflect the growing democratization of mass media. The pressure from organized popular groups contributed to the media's decision to open additional space for the transmission of their messages, as well as the transmission of programs produced by well-structured non-profit organizations. However, the democratization of society also provoked changes within the national communication system. Audience interest for themes more connected to local realities compelled even the big media conglomerates to attempt to meet this demand, offering programs or sections directed to local or segmented audiences. There was also an increase in television channels that have their programming strategy set along informational, cultural and educational lines. This is the case of channels such as *TV Futura*, *TV Senac*, *Canal Universitário* (University Channel), *Canal Comunitário* (Community Channel) and the legislative stations, among others, as well as the already existing cultural and educational networks connected to state governments.

There has also been an explosion of community radio stations (to around 10,000) from local organizing. These represent a society saying "enough" to the absolute concentration of mass media in the hands of large groups with economic and political power; while also declaring, "we need radio programs focused on the development of our communities." Associations, community groups and other non-profit collective entities¹⁰ have created radio stations under the banner of free community radio. With a lot of pressure and lobbying, regulation for low-power broadcasting was achieved through the Communications Law 9.612/98 and the Decree 2.615/98. The struggle was not and is still not easy, as the Ministry of Communications insists on closing stations without the official authorization to operate, while it is itself responsible for holding these authorizations back. Many communities have found legal support to remain on the air through judicial injunctions.

Other innovations have included community, university, legislative and educational-cultural channels on cable television. These were enabled through the Communications Law 8.977/95 and regulated through the Decree 2.206/97, laws which initially responded to a bidding competition but then resulted in consensus between the national media owners and public officials with the *Fórum Nacional*

pela Democratização da Comunicação (National Forum for the Democratization of Communication). Social segments which had hitherto been excluded from the power over media transmission and media management now have had these rights. Although the laws caught the corporations by surprise, they were an important step in the democratization of the power to communicate.

Therefore, popular/community communication movements, though initially focused on using simple, small-scale and artisanal instruments, slowly came to motivate the popular appropriation of all communication technologies, especially radio, television, and more recently, the Internet. Just as important as it was for these movements to access modern technology, however, they learned how to adapt to the conjuncture of the 1990s. They did this by creating a plural space for participation and for respect for the demands of their audiences. All of these democratization experiences with communication media developed new forms of production and transmission for the active participation of under-represented segments of the population. It is within this praxis—this practice and the theorization/reflection upon it—that the educational process for citizenship is developed. To understand praxis as an educational tool in the achievement of citizenship, we would have to find it nested in broader organizational and popular action processes: in other words, in the context of organizations and social movements that shaped a new political culture.

According to Alfaro Moreno (1998, p. 61), when analyzing participatory media in the 1970s and 1980s, the educational aims of popular communication are undeniable. “Participatory” was not just an adjective, but a proposal to transform subjects through contact and action, in the spirit of Paulo Freire’s lifetime of work and writings. Intimately connected to communication as a process in which people confront themselves and their reality, Freire promoted liberation theology processes in pedagogy. His idea of education was a practice of transformation. His ideas signaled that communication receivers could recoup some educational value through their contact with each other via mass and alternative media. This was not a matter of formal instruction, but of learning processes. In this sense, edu-communication cannot be left to its own spontaneous rhythms, but it should be integrated into a whole educational system. However, Carlos Catalán (1998) adds, social movements have not been always majoritarian. Among the challenges for the twenty-first century, we can include those set out by Catalán: *to create, establish and develop capacities to produce, access and use new communication technologies*. [...] This is why culture—or the contexts for learning—becomes a central component in communication development strategies. Not only does the amplification and deepening of our communicative webs depend on participatory media, but also alongside it, our own democracies are solidified and made more dynamic through their participatory processes (p. 54).

At the heart of the processes discussed here is a learning experience that will help bolster citizenship in its individual dimensions (through strengthening individual freedoms and individual rights), its political dimensions (through greater awareness and participation in local or national representative bodies), and its social dimensions (through access to resources that lead to a better life). In this way, the exercise of rights

and duties central to the citizenship dynamic is achieved through a slow but transcendent process that will spread the people's values and hopes.

Final Considerations

Altering Freire's notion that in the classroom every educational act is a political act and every political act is an educational act, it seems to me that the idea that *communication is a pedagogical act and education is a communicative act* synthesizes the complexity and the interrelatedness of communication and education. This relationship between the two fields extends beyond teaching institutions to the field of mass media, but also to the communication that occurs within the context of local community practices. The school is no longer the primary space for education. Media has a share in this power, although not always in a way that is beneficial to the common good.

When produced by progressive civil society organizations, media adopt clearer educational roles, not only through the content of their messages, but also through the popular participation processes involved in content production, planning and management. Popular participation is constructed within a dynamic of broader social engagement to promote social development and it has the potential, once accomplished, to further cultural change, to build and rebuild values, to contribute to greater awareness of fundamental human and citizens' rights, and to better understand the world and the operation of mass media. From these perspectives, community and participatory media are a learning space for people to exercise their rights and for the expansion of citizenship.

Notes

1. Trans. Note: This refers to the proliferation of slums throughout Latin America despite the emergence of new middle-class neighborhoods.
2. Part of what follows here about citizenship was reprinted, with minor corrections, from Peruzzo (1998a, p. 283–286).
3. Trans. Note: This is evidenced by the high rates of poverty and illiteracy throughout the region.
4. Trans Note: These include the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, which led to the United Nation's Vienna Declaration and Program of Action.
5. The poorest 20% represent 2.5% of the country's net income, while the richest 20% represent 63.4%. The remaining 60% represent 34.1% of Brazil's national income.
6. Trans. Note: The emergence of a uniquely Latin American or Brazilian communication scholarship—the Latin American School of Communication—was in conjunction with calls throughout the Third World to decolonize the production of news and entertainment by reversing media flows. Focused on the redemocratization of communication, this scholarship sparked media activism around communication policy, especially in Brazil.
7. Many of these media outlets reproduce, either at the local or the community level, the structure and market objectives of large private media or serve as outlets for political or religious proselytism.
8. Active and broad popular participation is something constructed slowly due to both the social conditions people face and their commitment to the notion of citizenship itself.
9. See Alfaro Moreno's (1998) analysis on the distortions that happen in popular communication, as well as her recommendations for citizen communication to build a fair and just society.

10. In reality it was not only non-profit entities that created community radio stations, but also isolated individuals and groups that had commercial and political objectives. There are also a great number of stations connected to churches and religious denominations.

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