COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Communication scholar Linje Patrick Manyozo categorised six schools of thought in communication for development: 1) Bretton Woods; 2) Latin American; 3) Indian; 4) African; 5) Los Baños; and the 6) Communication for Development and Social Change (Manyozo, 2006). In this paper I will discuss one of the schools of thought in communication for development: the Los Baños tradition of development communication. I will start by introducing the various schools of thought as Manyozo described them in his article “Communication for Development: A Historical Perspective” published by UNESCO in 2007. Then, I will focus on the Los Baños tradition through which I will try to make the study and practice of development communication come alive for you. I will share with you the development communication curriculum, as well as examples of research and extension activities, at the College of Development Communication, University of the Philippines Los Baños. In conclusion, allow me to describe who the development communicator of the 21st century should be.

Schools of Thought in Communication for Development

Manyozo’s extensive discourse on the historical development of the field of communication for development is remarkable in that it paid critical attention to both Western and non-Western theoretical developments and experiments.

Bretton Woods School

The Bretton Woods School’s concept of communication for development can be described as rooted in post World War II strategies that looked at development as an international ideology for achieving hegemony. Hegemony is, of course, a concept associated with domination, control, supremacy, power. It is interesting to note that one of the School’s major publications was titled Development Communication Report, published by the USAID-funded Clearing House on Development Communication, under the Academy for Educational Development (AED).

The Bretton Woods School was composed of such institutions as the World Bank, UNESCO, FAO, Rockefeller Foundation, and Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom, Ford Foundation, and universities like Michigan State, Texas, Cornell, Ohio, Wisconsin, Leeds, Colombia, Iowa, Southern California, and New Mexico.
Latin American School

The Latin American School had radio as the main medium that started it all, with Radio Sutatenza established in 1947 in Colombia by a Roman Catholic priest. Radio Sutatenza pioneered the practice of las escuelas radiofónicas or radio schools. Bolivia’s Radios Mineras (Miners’ Radio Stations) followed in 1949; it started out as a lone station in 1949, which has grown to 26 radio stations by the 1970s. Gumucio (2001) attributed this success to the fact that the radio stations were “planned and conceived by the miners”, hence were “independent, self sustained, self-managed and faithfully served the interests of their communities.” More importantly, the Latin American School espoused communication approaches that provided the blueprint for participatory community-oriented media that in turn afforded peasants and ordinary people the opportunity to be “full and equal participants in development and the maintenance of just, equitable and democratic societies” (Gumucio, 2001).

Indian School

Communication for development experiments began in India in the 1950s, though listening communities had been established in rural India to listen to broadcasts in three Indian languages. Expansion of the Indian School happened in the 1970s with the introduction of two rural televisions for development projects by the government. Television sets were installed in village schools and the programs were received directly from locally-installed satellite receivers. Our Village Chhatera, a column about village life, was published regularly in the Hindustan Times. Verghese (1976) described this experiment in development journalism as an activity that made reporters extension workers, change agents and public relations officers who were able to serve as catalysts planting new ideas in the villagers’ minds and articulating their aspirations.

Notable among India’s communication for development efforts was its integration into the country’s First Five-Year Plan anchored on the philosophy that a widespread understanding of development priorities enables citizens to embrace a country’s vision of the future.

African School

Rural radio and theater were the main approaches for the African school of communication for development beginning in the 1960s. From being a farm broadcasting medium with state broadcasters reaching out to largely rural audiences, radio has evolved into the concept of local rural stations concerned with such issues related to democratisation, proximity, local circumstances, and community participation in defining content and management. The idea of a local radio station that belongs to the people has come of age (Ilboudo, 2003). Theater for development,
on the other hand, makes the employment of performance theater a communication process, making theater both a discourse and a forum through which local people critically analyse development issues, linking effects to causes, thereby attaining mental liberation or conscientisation in the Freirean praxis (Servaes, 1996; Mda, 1993).

**CFD&SC School**

Central to the work of the Communication for Development and Social Change School is participation in which the media are just tools. Participatory Development Communication or PDC as a communication tool with which to facilitate community involvement in local development was demonstrated by the collaborative project Isang Bagsak initiated by Dr. Guy Bessette in 2004. It brought together research and development institutions from Latin America, South East Asia, Africa, and Canada that used PDC in community-based natural resource management initiatives. The College of Development Communication was an active partner in this project.

The CFD&SC School emphasised institutional collaboration involving development research and training organisations from the five schools of thought. However, to quote Manyozo, “This collaboration has not been smooth, as there seems to be some disagreement on issues of social change, communication process and appropriate theory between the various academic and development institutions.”

**The Los Baños School**

The practice of development communication in the Philippines formally began way back in the early 1950s when a group of visionaries noted that the then College of Agriculture of the University of the Philippines was turning out significant research results that had tremendous impact on the lives of farmers and fisher folks. However, these research results were not being communicated adequately to the rightful beneficiaries. This group was composed of Dr. Nora C. Quebral, Dr. Juan F. Jamias, Dr. Tomas Flores, and a few others I did not have the pleasure of meeting.

Under the Office of Extension and Publications established in 1954 under the College of Agriculture, the group spearheaded the setting up of a publication and radio service through a publication and a community radio station service. These became the forerunners of the community newspaper Sandiwa (One Thought) and Radyo DZLB, which is still operational to this date. (We just have to rehabilitate our ageing tower and in the process contend with cumbersome government rules on procurement.)

It was Dr. Nora C. Quebral who first articulated the concept when she defined development communication in 1971 as the “art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social
equality and the larger fulfillment of the human potential.”

More than four decades later, Dr. Quebral herself revised the definition of development communication as “the science of human communication linked to the transitioning of communities from poverty in all its forms to a dynamic, overall growth that fosters equity and the unfolding of individual potential.” Such definition, she explains, is the product of a great deal more study, experience, and thought.

The powerhouse term that is development communication is a confluence of two dynamic processes: development and communication. “Development could be regarded as the weightier one, it being the progressive improvement of the quality of life that needs to happen. But communication is the vehicle that carries development onward.” As Dr. Quebral viewed it, “Development communication can be a course or a major in a curriculum or the name of an entire college. But it is also a form of communication practice…”

Development communication teaching started out under the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture program in the 1960s as BSA Major in Agricultural Communication. Five years later, the MS Agricultural Communication was offered. The undergraduate degree program distinctly became the Bachelor of Science in Development Communication (BSDC) in 1974.

The four-year BSDC curriculum is considered unique from other communication programmes in that it is a science-based course. Like other communication curricula, the BSDC curriculum offers general education courses (45 units), foundation courses (12 units), and specialised courses (24 units). The required foundation courses are economics, mathematics, computer science, and statistics. Unlike other communication curricula, BSDC affords the student an appreciation of both the context of development through its social science electives (9 units) and the subject matter content that needs to be communicated to the various stakeholders through its technical courses (18 units). Students may choose technical courses from such fields as agriculture, forestry, environment, biotechnology, nutrition, among others.

On the communication side, students chose to hone their skills in one of four areas of specialisation: development journalism; community broadcasting; educational communication; or science communication. The first three are media-based specialisations for print, broadcast, and audio-visual channels. Science communication, instituted only in the 1980s, was more concept-based in that it developed students’ skills in communicating scientific and technical information using any or combinations of the available media.

A closer look at the courses offered reveals that these courses have benefited largely from the outstanding contributions of the various schools of communication for development. Students, using the participatory development communication approaches, work with various stakeholders in communities to produce their communication outputs. Their articles for the community newspaper, their schools-on-the-air, and their learning systems designs are based on problems identified by the communities themselves.

However, research conducted over the years highlighted the fact that the four
major fields of specialisation tended to be media-based rather than process-oriented. Taking courses under one major narrowed down the competency-base of devcom graduates. In this day and age when news and information are being managed through multiple platforms (print and on-line versions of newspapers, tele-radyo programmes, community cable TV programmes, the social media), students should be able to cope with the demands of as many available channels of communication as possible.

In addition, a study among employers and alumni revealed that they expected devcom graduates to be equipped with general development communication competencies. These graduates are well-rounded professionals who: 1) are equipped with the knowledge and skills in various communication approaches integrating both traditional and new media (including information and communication technologies or ICTs); 2) can think critically; and 3) are research-oriented development communicators.

The College has been working steadily these past two years on the revision of the BSDC curriculum to make it even more relevant to the challenges of the 21st century. This new curriculum is outcome-based and it adheres all the more to the salient features of engaged learning.

Students no longer have to choose courses from one of the four majors; instead, they take courses under the following domains: 1) reportage; 2) media-based learning systems; 3) multi-media design, production, and management; and 4) management and communication of scientific and technical information.

Competency in the above-mentioned domains is envisioned to bolster CDC’s efforts to achieve its vision, thus: To be a globally relevant academic institution proactively promoting sustainable development using communication as a process for attaining empowerment and equity in the pursuit of distinctive excellence in food, agriculture, biotechnology, and environment.

The past two years have also witnessed a dramatic revision in the CDC’s postgraduate programs. Competencies have been clearly delineated to conform with the outcome-based characterisation of 21st century education.

The Master of Science in Development Communication is designed to produce graduates who are able to:
• Compare and contrast theories, schools of thought, principles, and strategies of communication in the context of development.
• Analyse issues and challenges in development that may be addressed by education and training in development communication.
• Conduct research and evaluation in development communication.
• Apply development communication concepts and skills in the design and management of systems, programs, and projects in development.

The PhD in Development Communication is designed to produce graduates who are able to:
• Explain the process of theory construction and critiquing towards theory
formulation in development communication.

• Analyse the research and research management process in development communication programs.
• Conduct development communication research.
• Examine issues and challenges towards setting directions in development communication education and practice.
• Formulate development communication policies for development programs.

In more than five decades, CDC has grown from a mere service unit into the sole academic institution in the world that offers Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, and Doctor of Philosophy programmes in Development Communication. CDC also collaborates with the University of the Philippines Open University in developing development communication programmes offered via distance learning. The first programme offered in early 2000 was the Master of Professional Studies in Development Communication. To date, the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies of UPOU offers the Doctor of Communication, Master of Development Communication, and Bachelor of Arts in Multimedia Studies.

The College has been recognised by the Philippines’ Commission on Higher Education as its lone Center of Excellence in Development Communication for 2012-2015. A large part of our strength as an academic institution also lies in our research and extension involvements with various community-based programs carried out in partnership with international and national government and non-government organisations. Our recent R&E undertakings include:

• Radyo DZLB 116 kHz, a community radio station that we manage alongside cooperators from within and outside the University.
• Dito sa Laguna, a discussion program aired via the Community Cable Vision, Corp.
• The Los Baños Times (www.lbtimes.phl), a community newspaper that serves Los Baños and nearby communities.
• Adopt-a School, where we design facilitative and interactive learning materials and conduct information, education, and communication activities in public elementary schools.
• Strengthening Local Nutrition and Education Programmes through Communication for Behavior Change and Community Empowerment Initiatives, a partnership with UNICEF and three local government units in two provinces south of Manila.

Who is the Development Communication Practitioner of the 21st Century?

In conclusion, I wish to quote Dr. Nora C. Quebral (2012) once again. “…there is no one profession whose members are known as development communicators.”
Any communication practitioner who helps disadvantaged people better their lives so that they can realise their potential is a development communicator.” However, it won’t hurt if we describe the attributes – values and skills – that a development communication practitioner in the 21st century possesses. He/she is working in an environment that is getting to be increasingly complex, challenging, and demanding.

Several cross-cultural studies (Jerald, 2009; Chiru, et al., 2012) involving various sectors, including employers, reveal work readiness credentials expected among this generation’s graduates:

- Communication skills: Speak so others can understand, listen actively, read with understanding, and observe critically.
- Interpersonal skills: Cooperate with others, resolve conflict, and negotiate.
- Decision making skills: Solve problems and make decisions, use math to solve problems and communicate.
- Lifelong learning skills: Take responsibility for learning, use information and communications technology.

Synthesising the above competencies, work readiness credentials, and values, this paper puts forward the following set of characteristics for the development communication practitioner of the 21st century. He/she:

- Understands the process of development, the process of communication, and the environment in which the two processes interact.
- Is not only knowledgeable in communication skills and techniques but is also proficient in the subject matter to be communicated.
- Has commendable media, information literacy, and information and communication technology (ICT) skills to wade through the mountain of information towards, in turn, helping people make informed decisions.
- Practices critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making skills applied in community engagement, among other tasks.
- Possesses collaboration and networking skills to bring together stakeholder groups engaged in a development issue.
- Has a sense of commitment, the acceptance of individual responsibility for serving communities and advancing human development.
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