



DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IN A BORDERLESS WORLD

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A curriculum is not a random patchwork of courses. It is the representation of a worldview that the curriculum developers think their intended learners should have. We are here today to dialogue on the development communication worldview. Reciprocity of thought is the very essence of communication, and its practice is central to genuine human development. Development communicators would not be true to a principle of their profession were they to insulate themselves and others from give-and-take with other minds. Development communication would not stay development communication were it cut off from ideas coming from various sources and disciplines –and by which it is nourished.

As it now stands, the concept embodies the distilled wisdom of many minds, past and present. Human development and human communication are not constructs invented only in our century. Separately they have engaged the energies of visionaries, scholars, scientists, artists and doers of deeds since the beginning of human history. Joined as a field of learning, they each bring to the union a rich lode of thought into which students of development communication may tap. The field was never meant to stay in place. It is expected to branch out, to reinvent itself from time to time, even to lead the way as we grow in wisdom. My definition of development communication has itself undergone a nip and tuck here and there after 30 years of jostling with reality. I now say it is the art and science of human communication linked to a society's planned transformation from a state of poverty to one of dynamic socio-economic growth that makes for greater equity and the larger unfolding of individual potential [1]. As you can see, I have become less ambitious with age.

You have come across other definitions or you may have your own. We each see reality from where we stand. We welcome your exploring its other facets, seen from your own background and special circumstance. Our touchstone, the unifier in our variety, would be the philosophy that powers our development communication program. In this session, let us once again revisit that philosophy, using the Los Baños curricular version of it as example because it is what I know best. The temper of the times doubly urges us to re-examine our reason for being in a world which, in

ISSUE 3
February 2006

the aftermath of September 11, seems suddenly unmoored.

DEVELOPMENT AS A PRINCIPLE

Let us begin with goals –both of development communication as a concept and as a curriculum. Whether they be greater social equality or equity, larger fulfillment of human potential or unfolding of individual potential, it is clear that we are talking about the kind of development we are aiming for. It has also become clear through time that the processes by which these goals are achieved are just as important for the outcome as the goals themselves. And so we have changed the qualifier to development from “economic” to others like “another”, “participatory”, “sustainable” and “equitable”. At the core of our altered perception is the lesson learned that we cannot really change others; we can only help them change themselves –from where they are and at their own enlightened pace.

Because in the academic scheme development communication is classed as a branch of communication, we teach our students that communication derives from sociology, psychology, linguistics and other social sciences and we try to steer them to the study of those basics. But what do we tell them about the substance of development and to whom do we send them to learn that? We tried the economics faculty when development was seen as economic, but when the shortcomings of a purely economic approach surfaced, to whom did we pass on instruction on what development is in our society? And it is a society buffeted by powerful forces that have upended our notions about development. So I remind you, let us never forget development. In the development communication partnership, it remains the weightier of the two. It sets the goal and provides the message. It distinguishes development communication from other types of information exchange.

In past UPLB workshops, we have looked at the major components of our curriculum: its block of communication courses, its technical course requirement, and its general education base. The fourth component consists of social science electives. They include courses in development meant to give the student a basic grasp of the issues and problems of development in general. These four components roughly correspond to the objectives of the Los Baños undergraduate curriculum [2].

The social science electives are normally taken in other colleges of UPLB. But as a social science college in its own right, the College of Development Communication could now institute some social development courses that are better slanted to the needs of its own and other interested students. Then, perhaps, the faculty will feel just as much ownership over the development part of development communication as it does over the communication part. And, perhaps, we will think beyond the compartments into which others have boxed development and that we, by and large, have accepted in our teaching and research.

THE SPECIFICS OF DEVELOPMENT

In the old UPLB curriculum, the technical courses signified particular development areas like agriculture, forestry or home technology. These are basic needs areas which rightfully warrant priority and which happen to be within UPLB expertise. Agriculture, for example, impacts on food security and livelihood for the many in poor countries; both address the stubborn problem of material poverty. There are other technical fields not represented on the UPLB campus. They are legitimate subjects for development communication for which others schools might have the capability. There are also non-technical problems like violence, organized crime, cultural conflicts, moral and spiritual poverty which admittedly are not exclusive to developing societies but do affect them more seriously because they have fewer resources to muster. The old wisdom was that they could wait until a certain level of material development, but events have scuttled that argument. Experience has taught us that development cannot be sequential. It must be pursued on all fronts simultaneously whenever possible. That makes those who help make life better along those other planes development communicators as well. More importantly, it brings those non-technical problems within the domain of development communication curricula too, if they are to stay attuned to the needs of society in which the students they are training will perform.

FORCES FOR CHANGE

A development communication curriculum responds to changes in the concept of development and of communication and in the environment that embraces both. Since the last years of the last century, those who make it their business to track world happenings speak of globalization as the dominant force reshaping every area of our lives. More goods and services, cheaper prices, richer opportunities and lifestyles for everyone sum up the expected benefits from globalization (Weaver, 2001; Friedman, 2000; Mittelman, 2000). They are not automatic, however, and come at a price. The Asian crisis which began in 1997 and the global explosion that was ignited in New York this year are two of its negative manifestations. The irony of September 11 is that it succeeded in shoving in our face the harsh proof of our interconnectedness as no treatise or street protest ever could.

Globalization got a big boost with the coming of the microchip, fiber optics, miniaturization and digitization. These advances in information technology have added new meaning to the word “information”, making it the point of intersection of the computer and communication sciences. How much of information technology should get into an undergraduate development communication curriculum is for each of us to decide, but enter the curriculum it must if we are to stay current.

Coupled with advances in transportation and telecommunications, information technology has made possible instantaneous communication and fast shifting around of information. As a result, the world has virtually

shrunk, state boundaries have become permeable or erased altogether, communities have telescoped into each other so that they are forced, willy-nilly, to interact with each other. Despite its high visibility in the idiom of today's dominant global system, however, information technology per se is not the moving force behind globalization. Some say free-market capitalism is; some say the nation states; others say both. Whichever it is, information technology remains a tool –used by economic, political, military or cultural institutions to serve their ends. Like communication technology, it has been touted as having the potential to advance development, but its record has been just as spotty in benefiting those who are still largely bypassed by planned development –the poor and marginalized.

If we go with Friedman's analysis, it should be globalization, not information technology that should be re-aligned to democratize development. This is a many-sided issue whose totality cannot be taken up today. We have only focused on the implications of globalization for the undergraduate development communication curriculum. Here are some of them:

1. It has further complicated the development process, worsening the divide in goods and power between the elite and the mass while diluting the authority of states to put in safety nets. Development communicators need to know how globalization impacts on local communities before they can use it for their clients' benefit.
2. It has made the cultural dimension of development more critical and worthier of attention. Osama bin Laden's jihad against the West has cultural, no less than economic, roots. The overpowering flow of US artifacts across its borders has long been perceived as a threat to indigenous cultures by practically all countries which find themselves at the receiving end.
3. Peace within a community and across communities is a prerequisite to development. Porous borders and instant communication seem to have heightened rather than calmed intra- and inter-community disagreements. Can a curriculum on communication for human development make room for instruction on diminishing conflict at all levels? Not to be left out is the nurturing of inner peace in individuals as an element in their personal growth and as the ultimate key to lasting peace in their communities.
4. Neo-liberalism, which bred globalization, upholds free markets and the primacy of the individual. Yet sustaining globalization requires communitarian values like cooperation in problem-solving and tolerance for diversity, values which may then need to be added to those deliberately instilled not only in development communication students but in all other students as well. Globalization pushes the individual into an ever-widening nest of regional and world societies, in each of which he or she must learn to co-exist with others peacefully and productively.

To conclude, let me recapitulate the characteristics of a model

development communication curriculum explicit in what I have said:

1. It is open to diverse ideas coming from many sources of knowledge.
2. It combines wisdom from both the study and practice of development and of communication.
3. It is ever-evolving, never static, as it responds to changes in development, in communication and in the environment surrounding both.
4. It is animated by a philosophy that spells out the goals of development desired and the ideal procedures by which they are to be attained.
5. It grounds students in the basics of development in general and on the particulars of economic, social, political, cultural, moral or spiritual development, taught in integrative courses.
6. It teaches students the principles, values and skills that will prepare them for a profession of service, of helping others –especially the poor and the disadvantaged- to develop their potential.
7. It integrates information technology into its program as an added tool in the preparation of future development communicators.

Thank you.

Slightly condensed version of the paper presented at the national conference-workshop on the undergraduate communication curriculum, "New Dimensions, Bold Decisions", November 23, 2001, Continuing Education Center, UP Los Baños.

For a presentation of Nora Quebral's professional background and trajectory, see Maria Celeste Cadiz's article in this issue. Dr. Quebral can be contacted at nora_quebral@yahoo.com

[1] The original definition was “the art and science of 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”.

[2] 1. Acquire a theoretical and ethical base in the sciences and arts that underlie the study of human communication. 2. Learn practical communication skills and values in mediated and interpersonal communication. 3. Gain a basic grasp of the issues and problems of development in general and of a development area in particular. 4. Apply the concepts, principles and skills of development communication to help solve the problems of a developing country.

