

# Communication towards Equality in the European Higher Education Area: Building Capacities for Social Change with Spanish Undergraduates

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*Abstract: This paper addresses the process of creation and implementation of the subject “Communication towards Equality” at the University Jaume I in Spain, within the new European Higher Education Area (EHEA) framework. The purpose of the paper is to present this experience of University teaching reform as a potential guideline for the implementation of equality in other programs. The EHEA offered challenges and possibilities for University reforms, which included the implementation of capacity-building for students. At the communication programs of our University, the curriculum has included issues of gender equality, aimed at training future professionals towards citizen empowerment. The paper is organized around three sections. First, we present the legal and epistemological framework that sustains our experience. This includes an overview of legal regulations (EHEA, Spanish and international laws) and a revision of the epistemological and methodological background, mainly based on Critical Theory and Pedagogy on communication for social change. Second, we unfold the subject “Communication towards Equality” with its main contents and methodologies. Finally, we draw some reflections on its two years of implementation and the implications for training undergraduate students in communications for social change.*

*Keywords: Higher Education, Equality, Communication*

## Introduction

This article addresses the recent process of creation and implementation of the subject Communication towards Equality in the undergraduate programs in communication studies at the University Jaume I (UJI) of Castellón in Spain. We aim to analyze this learning experience of curricular reform from a perspective of educational innovation that is based on the need to introduce a participatory, dialogic, innovative, creative and service-oriented teaching, consistent with the contents of equality and social justice that the subject incorporates (Boulding 1999; Eisler 2004; Fraser 1999; Galtung 1990; Marí Sáez 2012, 2013; Santos 2012). The final goal of the subject is to train students as agents of socio-cultural transformation towards a more equal, critical and participatory society.

From this perspective, Communication towards Equality intends to examine the interrelations of audiovisual communication, journalism and advertising with respect to equality in a broad sense. For the purpose of upholding the training in human rights, democratic principles, principles of equality between men and women, and solidarity, the subject deals with communication from a wide perspective which includes Cultural Studies, Peace and Development Studies, and Gender Studies.

In order to comprehend the motives, the complexities and the implementation of this subject, it is necessary to situate our discussion within two contexts. Firstly, we address the legal and social framework that led to create the subject and, secondly, we present the conceptual and pedagogical perspectives of Communication towards Equality as we have implemented it at UJI.

The revision of the background that we present hereunder constitutes the necessary basis for presenting the subject, with its contents and methodologies, and for discussing the experience of introducing a course on equality at UJI as potential guidelines for other educational programs.

## **Legal and Epistemological Framework of Equality at Undergraduate Level**

The recent creation of the subject Communication towards Equality at UJI occurs in a specific social context that also brought concrete legal reforms and educational proposals. In this section we synthesize the main legal and conceptual grounds of the subject, relying on previous analysis (Gámez Fuentes and Nos Aldás 2012). On the one hand, we present the legal and social framework for teaching equality at undergraduate level, which includes national and international laws and the normative scenario of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). On the other hand, we revise the epistemological framework based on critical and participatory methodologies of empowerment and social change that sustains this course on equality.

### ***Legal and Social Framework for Implementing Training in Equality at University Level***

#### **1. Equality and International Commitment against Violence for a Culture of Peace**

The social, legal and educational changes that led to Communication towards Equality intersect with several initiatives towards equality, solidarity and peace that have been deployed at international level and that contribute to enrich the contextualization of the subject.

In 1979 the United Nations approved the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and in 1993 they adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Moreover, in 2009 the UN decided to further elaborate the Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women (DAW 2009). This document focuses on the need for laws to undertake preventive actions and measures, to raise awareness among the population, to sensitize the media and to include content on gender-based violence and women's rights in the curricular designs.

Additionally, the text of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, promoted by the UNESCO, included in its first article “respect for and promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and men” and in its article 15 it stresses the role of the media to promote a Culture of Peace. In this regard, Spain implemented these instructions in the Law on the Promotion of Education and Culture of Peace No. 27/2005, which establishes the promotion of values of culture of peace –nonviolence, tolerance, democracy, solidarity and justice– at all levels of education.

In the European Union (EU) context, the Roadmap for Gender Equality for 2006-2010 outlined the elimination of gender stereotypes as one of the priority areas, and it also stressed the role of the media. In the following Roadmap (2010-2015) the EU focused on horizontal issues of gender equality, which include promoting good practices on redefining gender roles in education and culture.

#### **2. Equality in the EHEA**

The concerns for including equality in the university curriculum of European students began to appear in 1998 through the series of European Conferences on Gender Equality in Higher Education. In 2005, the fifth edition of the congress introduced a more concrete debate on the possibilities of teaching equality that were opening up with the process of convergence of the EHEA (known as Bologna Process, upon the city where 30 European countries signed the Declaration of cooperation in higher education in 1999).

In 2003 the Berlin Communiqué established the need of increasing competitiveness by fostering social cohesion and reducing gender inequalities at national and European levels (Weber 2008). The following communiques, Bergen 2005 and London 2007, although lacking a specific reference on gender, stressed the social dimension of higher education and the need for universities to reflect the

diversity of the people, which still allowed the development of initiatives for including gender in the university curriculum.

We cannot ignore that the shift from equality to diversity reflects a wider change from the perspective of redistribution to recognition, which may lead to accept that the social diversity of students is not produced by inequalities (Ariño Villaroya 2010). It is important to acknowledge such a critique and integrate it in the curricular design of learning communication towards equality, where we have to train students to understand the complexities of media consumption on diversity (Díez Medrano 2010). Moreover, in a previous study (Gámez Fuentes and Nos Aldás 2012) we also reviewed several authors who argue that the Bologna Process has not significantly improved the content on gender and equality at university level. Quite the contrary, in certain cases it has undermined the contents previously available, which constitutes a paradox giving the normative endeavors carried out.

Indeed, in the case of Spain, the opportunity opened up by the Bologna Process for capacity-building in equality has not been evenly implemented throughout the country (Gámez Fuentes and Nos Aldás 2012). For instance, at UJI only 10% of the new undergraduate programs comply with the regulations on equality. These are specifically those under the Communication Studies field, but even then the inclusion of Communication towards Equality is the only subject on the topic.

### **3. Equality in the Spanish Legal System: The Role of Higher Education and the Media**

In the Spanish context, equality appears in the 1978 Constitution as a higher value of the legal system, along with freedom, justice and political pluralism. However, it is only in 2004, when the Socialist Party won the national elections, that politics of equality underwent a substantial change and converted Spain into a reference model for other countries (DAW 2009, 16-20). During this period, the Government approved two main laws related to equality: the Organization Act No. 1/2004 on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender-based Violence (hereinafter referred as LOM following its Spanish acronym)<sup>1</sup> and the Organization Act No. 3/2007 on Effective Equality between Men and Women (hereinafter referred as LOI following its Spanish acronym)<sup>2</sup>.

Both Acts established the inclusion of equality at higher education as mandatory, therefore, the following Royal Decree 1393/2007, which establishes the organization of the official university courses, included a specific direction on this subject: “[...] the plans of study will have to take into account that any professional activity must be carried out from the respect for fundamental rights and rights of equality between men and women, by including, in the plans of study where it applies, teaching related to these rights”<sup>3</sup>.

The LOI and LOM also include directions and responsibilities for the media in the matter of equality. Additionally, the National Plan on Awareness and Prevention of Gender-based Violence, which was approved following the LOM, urges media platforms, advertisers and communication agencies to contribute to the transformation of discriminatory stereotypes. Moreover, the General Audiovisual Communication Law No. 7/2010 condemns as subject to be penalized those contents that foster hatred, contempt or discrimination or use the image of women in a vexatious or discriminatory manner.

Ultimately, the revision of the social and legal context of equality in Spain requires to highlight that the eradication of inequality become a fundamental goal of political and media agendas only after cases of gender-based crimes occupied front pages thanks to the feminist groups lobbying (Gámez Fuentes 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> LOM is the acronym of the original title of the law in Spanish: “Ley Orgánica de Medidas de protección integral contra la violencia de género.”

<sup>2</sup> LOI is the acronym of the original title of the law in Spanish: “Ley Orgánica de Igualdad efectiva entre hombres y mujeres.”

<sup>3</sup> All quotes of Spanish laws are authors’ own translation from the original texts in Spanish.

## ***Epistemological Framework: Critical Theory and Pedagogy on Communication for Social Change***

Within this complex social and normative context, the curricular design of Communication towards Equality entails several challenges. On the one hand, we need to address communication for the key role it plays in social change and transformation towards an equal, critical and participative society and, on the other hand, the Bologna Process demands a change in the teaching-learning process, shifting from an educational model based on the transmission of content to a model based on the acquisition of competencies by students.

These premises led us to review the more recent developments in Critical Theory and Pedagogy of communication for social change in order to design Communication towards Equality as a course that addresses content related to violence, human rights, citizenship, communication and networks, and that is based on participatory methodologies that enable students to provide communication products that represent citizens, and women in particular, as subjects of change and transformation.

We go beyond traditional political and educational programs that reduce gender issues to mere descriptions or denounces of gender-based crimes or sexism in the media and that portray women as aestheticized objects, because this approach is necessary, but not sufficient. Conversely, we inscribe gender within the discourse on the eradication of inequalities and the promotion of social justice and peace, with the ultimate goal of enabling future professionals in communication to configure public discourses towards equal and nonkilling societies (Gámez Fuentes 2013 a; Nos Aldás 2013). Consistent with this goal, from a pedagogical perspective we endorse a nonviolent approach to social justice that seeks to dissolve “the very mechanism of control and domination that leads to violence while not enacting another form of imposition or coercion” (Wang 2013, 486).

Settled in the specific area of Communication Studies, our subject starts with the need of unveiling the interrelations among images, visibility, devices, institutions, discourses and bodies; therefore, it merges studies on image with studies on the visual construction of society in order to develop a methodology of visual literacy for training students to be aware of the relation between audiovisual products and identity (Brea 2005). In this sense, we address media consumption as a process of representation of political subjects and as a process of control over gender and other identities embedded in audiovisual narratives (Butler 1990; 2010).

Based on the concept of performativity (Austin 1976) of the discourses and their communicative action (Habermas 1984), we aim to both denounce cultural violence (Galtung 1990) and transform symbolic frames through social practices (Butler 2004) with the goal of training students as future agents of social change. We propose an approach based on developing students' competence of moral sensitivity (Pinazo and Nos Aldás 2013), as we understand it from a political, communicative, and pedagogical perspective in dialogue with studies on indignation and hope (Freire 1994; 2008; Hessel 2010). We conceive moral sensitivity as the activation of a moral feeling that fosters awareness of social justice within people and, consequently, empowers them as political agents to seek transformation and social change (Nos Aldás and Pinazo 2010; 2013).

From a methodological perspective, we apply moral sensitivity to train students also technologically so that they are able to generate communicative actions and products that interpellate and grant recognition to different others in their ethical dimension (Butler 2005). Relying on the concept of “ethical witnessing” (Oliver 2004) to provide ethical and political value to the spectatorship process, we understand the technical training as the possibility of serving as witness of what we see as well as of what we do not see. By shifting from models of representations that deepen the distance with the represented subjects (Chouliaraki 2006; Maldonado Rivera 2010) to models of “journalism of proximity”, as proposed by Bell (in Fingeschou 2011, 247), the media should offer narratives whose characters are embodied as active and sovereign subjects provided

with agency and that reflect and act upon their experience. Examples of these can be found in movies such as *The Brave One* (Neil Jordan, 2007), *Brave* (Mark Andrews & Brenda Chapman, 2012) and *Death Proof* (Quentin Tarantino, 2007) among many others or the cultural products encountered in web pages such as *Women Make Movies* ([www.wmm.com](http://www.wmm.com)).

In summary, for the pedagogical foundation of Communication towards Equality, we combine an epistemological revision of how representations both subject and activate political agency along with innovative methodologies that raises students' awareness and engagement. Specifically, we adopt methodologies that contribute to train future professionals in the communication sector and are able to provide alternatives to the objectification sustained by mainstream and hegemonic media. We suggest that one possible way to subvert these kinds of representations could be strengthening their future role as ethical and inconvenient witnesses (Haraway 1991; Preciado 2005), that implies "adding political value to the act of spectatorship and holding the witness responsible towards the other" (Gámez Fuentes, 2013b: 404). We argue that a methodology rooted in moral sensitivity and ethical witnessing enables students to develop a critical thinking from the perspective of inequality that may result in communicative products that infuse new approaches to communication in order to effectively empower people for social change (Gámez Fuentes 2013 b; Nos Aldás et al. 2012).

## **The Subject Communication Towards Equality at University Jaume I**

Within the study programs at UJI, Communication towards Equality is a course of the new undergraduate degrees that comply with the new regulations of the EHEA. It is a compulsory subject that is taught in the fourth –and last– year in each of the three undergraduate programs of the communication area: Audiovisual Communication, Journalism, and Advertising and Public Relations.

The course constitutes a subject of 6 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), distributed in 3 credits of theory and 3 credits of practical training. Following the ECTS method for calculating credits, where each credit corresponds to 25 hours of total workload for students, the course is structured in 60 hours of in-class learning (40%) and 90 hours of distance learning (60%). As for the proposed activities, in-class learning includes theory and practice sessions (on case studies, problem-solving and pre-production processes), seminars, tutorship and evaluation, while distance learning includes student's personal work and preparation for exams.

The general contents of the subject address the interrelations of communication –television, cinema, journalism, and advertising– with equality in a broad sense. Therefore, it deals with critical issues related to the representation of identities (in terms of gender, social class, race, etc.) and awareness-raising campaigns in contemporary media, film and journalist discourses, and the web. The purpose of the subject is to strengthen training and learning in human rights, democratic principles, principles of equality between men and women, and solidarity for future communication professionals.

In order to achieve these goals, the course outline revolves around six main units, which are further organized in sub-topics:

1. Why Communication towards equality? Context and legal framework; Initial approach (observation and case study); Terminology and methodology review.
2. Theoretical foundation: Language performativity; Communication Sciences in dialogue with Cultural Studies, Peace, Conflict and Development Studies, and Gender Studies; Cultural consequences of discourses; Review of cultural efficacy/responsibility of communication.
3. Gender, equality and sexual diversity: Representation of the body as a problem (audiovisual standardization of sexuality); Femininity, masculinity, and representation (the case of gender-based violence); Representations of sexual diversity.

4. Construction of diversity and cultural identity: Cultural difference as a threat; Mediations of identity; Conflicts and communication for peace and solidarity.
5. Cyber-equality (networks and citizenship): Participation, citizenship and power; New tendencies in (cyber)activism and equality.
6. Final project: Research and argumentation of the project; Design and development; Presentation of results.

In relation to the reading materials that students have to prepare over the course, we combine a series of bibliographical references (books, books chapters, journal articles) with more interactive audiovisual resources, such as web sites of institutions, organizations, media, projects, movements, etc. related to communication, gender and social change, along with social media profiles and art centers.

Based on the methodological reflections that we have outlined in the previous section, the pedagogical foundation of this course seeks a two-track cooperative and progressive learning where we all learn from all. Therefore, professor-students and students-students learning relations are involved. To this end, classes adopt an active methodology that combines seminars with debates on texts or other materials provided both by professor and students, professor's lectures and explanations, and viewing of examples related to the course contents.

In the specific case of the course final project, students can chose between two options. The first option is based on Service Learning, a methodology that combines classroom content with meaningful community service. It requires creating communicative pieces, materials and actions towards equality that imply a practical intervention and transformation in the community. Students work with a specific social agent (public institution, association, foundation, NGO, cultural or educational center, etc.) and both of them collaborate to adapt the course final project so that it constitutes a social benefit for the agent (a specific group) or, within a wider focus, for society. The second option for the course final project is the creation of a prototype of communication towards equality. This methodology requires creating pieces, materials or audiovisual products of communication towards equality.

Our endeavors of pedagogical innovation also apply to the assessment criteria of the subject. Students' final grade is based on an ongoing assessment of several assignments throughout the course. We discuss the syllabus proposal with them the first weeks (explaining to what extent it is fixed by the Spanish educational Law), but the specific contents and activities are collaboratively delimited. Although the specific organization and weighting system may vary upon the characteristics and dynamics of each group of students, the subject establishes five main assignments, which may be structured in sub-assignments: academic papers (conceptual maps, paper on seminars, theoretical-critical contributions in class); resolution of case studies; oral presentations; final project; and exam. As for this latter assignment, it is not conceived as a traditional exam. Students are informed at least with a three weeks' notice of the question they have to develop, thus the so called exam becomes a sort of final paper.

Overall, the contents, activities and methodologies integrated in the curriculum of Communication towards Equality are designed to guide students in the acquisition of several competences. Along with some general competences, such as teamwork, creativity, information management and critical thinking, the subject also aims to work on some specific competences: recognition of diversity and multiculturalism; capacity to understand the interrelations between Communication Sciences and equality-inequality; capacity to recognize and assess non-egalitarian messages and contents in the audiovisual sector; capacity to provide values based on equality when producing messages in advertising, journalism and the audiovisual sector; capacity to create communicative products and discourses based on equality in advertising, journalism and the audiovisual sector.

## **Discussion on the Experience**

The subject Communication towards Equality has been introduced at UJI in the academic year 2012-2013 as part of the new undergraduate degrees established under the EHEA framework. It has already been taught for two years<sup>4</sup>, which allow us for presenting the subject not just with its curriculum design and rationale behind it, but also in light of the experience with students over these first two editions. Hereafter we revise the main challenges we have faced, and measures we have adopted to overcome them, as well as the positive results and successful strategies of the subject.

As a preliminary consideration on this experience in higher education, it is imperative to highlight that in the Spanish university system, and specifically at the UJI, we operate with a current average of 70 students per class, which represents a conditioning factor and a continuous additional hurdle to the kind of education proposed by the Bologna process, where the focus on the learning process (rather than on the teaching activity) is more likely to be achieved with small groups of students. In order to make these given situations work to our advantage we reorganize the furniture and use several small/big groups dynamics that allow students to first work in small groups and then come together as a large group again for a class discussion.

### ***Students' Perceptions on the Relevance of the Course***

In the specific case of Communication towards Equality, the first challenge we faced is that students initially do not see the relevance of being exposed to curricular content and learning process that they consider previously tackled. This is because during the first three years of their undergraduate training, students take courses that may seem to have already dealt with some issues related to equality such as Foundations of Communication Theory, Structure of Communication Systems, Contemporary Social Structure, Catalan for Communicators with a module on “linguistic sexism”, and, especially, Ethics and Professional Deontology. However, as the subject develops, students realize that the epistemological approach adopted in the module (based, as we said, on the combination of Communication with Cultural, Gender, and Peace and Development Studies traditions) constitutes a turning point in their learning process. Indeed, once students finish Communication towards Equality, they admit having changed their view over every single audiovisual product they come across. For instance, in the teaching appraisals students note: “It shouldn’t matter the sex of the person taking this test. This is what we have learned in this course”, “Friends are the siblings that we have been able to choose with equality” or “This content should be taught from primary and secondary school”. Moreover, the results of the appraisals offer a high level of satisfaction, the grades awarded to teachers being above 4.5/5 during the two academic years considered here.

### ***Early Defensive Attitude: Personal and Professional Identities***

During the weekly four contact hours, a crucial challenge that we face is to override the defensive attitude that may arise among (specially but not only) male students when tackling, as far as representational legacy is concerned, the oppression and discrimination that society has exerted on women throughout history. In order to prevent this situation, the debate is approached from a structural perspective (Butler 1990), for example we discuss patriarchy and heteronormativity avoiding putting blame on individual subjects. In this way, we leave aside the danger of individualizing responsibility on concrete male subjects. This does not imply, though, to avoid acknowledging the legacy of a way of seeing, narrating and reporting produced historically mainly by male producers, directors, advertisers etc.

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<sup>4</sup> At the time when we submitted the paper.

A further layer of complexity in this respect is the particular context of feminism in Spain. Recently, due to the social debate raised by the implementation of LOM and LOI, certain reactionary journalist and political sectors coined the impossible term *hembrismo* (“*hembra*” means “female” in Spanish). Apparently, this term, lacking any sociological basis, would serve to name the discrimination carried out by women over men. Thus, it is intended to be the opposite of *machismo*, the historically proved discrimination carried out by men over women. In such a context, the need to demystify and deconstruct the usual demonization of feminism in Spain (and the fallacy of the mere possibility of *hembrismo*) springs, so that students’ possible conflation of feminism with control over men or female privileges is dismantled. In this respect, our experience coincides with others (Guckenheimer and Schmidt 2013) in finding helpful to avoid dichotomies of “men vs. women” and introduce, instead, concepts of new masculinities and sexual and gender diversity so that a more heterogeneous idea of identity stirs the discussion.

In addition to the problems arising from students’ defensive attitude regarding their personal identity, another important challenge of the course has to do with students’ identity as professionals, which is already quite strong as the class is taught in their fourth year of studies. In the process of dissecting mainstream and hegemonic communication, it is important to show sensitivity to students’ future profession and, therefore, use examples of malpractices not to discredit the profession, but rather to invite students to employ their creativity to find room for improvements. In the case of their professional identities, we found that it was necessary to adjust the subject to each of the three undergraduate programs in order to adapt the learning process and the training to the different career profiles. For the Audiovisual Communication undergraduate program we start with modes of representations to emphasize the narrative power (De Lauretis 1984) that leads to frames of intelligibility and recognition (Butler 1990) constituting violence. In the Advertising and Public Relations program we rely on the cultural effects of communication (Kaplún 1998), and, specifically, we put it in dialogue with the socially based communication theory strategy (Pérez González 2003; Vargas Sánchez 2012) and cultural efficacy (Nos Aldás 2013), so that they acknowledge alternative trends of communication models that promote citizen empowerment (Chaparro 2009). Finally, in the case of Journalism, concepts of communication and power (Castells 2009) help to strengthen students’ awareness of their future role in configuring public opinion.

### ***Methodological Remarks: Engagement and Dialogism***

In order to build a progressive methodology that would integrate students previous knowledge, we start the first class with an initial survey and brainstorming, where we ask students about certain words and concepts they may be familiar with. This allows us to gauge the general understanding that students may have regarding previous content related to the course and, therefore, to adapt the following sessions to students needs and interests. Moreover, this approach has proved to be an effective and engaging starting point, since the first activity in class is listening to the students and not to the professor. In fact, this approach has helped to overcome students’ initial distrust on the level of interactivity that the class debates would actually have. Unfortunately, due to the high number of students per class, that we already mentioned, students are accustomed to being promised interaction but receiving the usual taking notes format with only a few possibilities for oral interventions. However, in *Communication towards Equality* we design the four weekly class hours as open and ongoing discussions where students have to take responsibility in activating real debates based on materials previously discussed with the professor. In the case of guest speakers, students are in charge of promoting debate online prior, during and after the session. After the experience, students express that they are positively surprised by the fact that debates are a real forum for discussion and, in this sense, we consider that class debates represent a pedagogical case for engagement based on dialogism.



Since debates are such enriching experiences, they usually engender plenty, unexpected and compelling topics that, due to time constraints, are impossible to tackle all in class. When students show particular interest in some issue, we encourage them to use the final project assignment to dig into their concerns and unanswered questions. In this way, for the project, most students chose to create a prototype through which they could explore topics not fully dealt with in the course, such as the video documentary “Blood and femininity” on art and media, “Sexuality and disability”, or “Raiders of the lost man” on representations of masculinity in audiovisual products. In the case of the service learning project, few students chose this option and yet they deployed some striking activity such as the case of a community outreach video for “Esnetik”, a cooperative of producers and consumers that advocates for food sovereignty, or the Christmas non-sexist toys campaign for a local feminist organization “Casa de la dona”.

## Conclusions

Communication towards Equality has been designed to strengthen students’ training on equality in the undergraduate programs of the communication field. After two years of implementation, our experience is highly positive. Students’ final projects and grades are to a great extent high and the experience of Service-Learning results in useful practices for society. Moreover, once graduated, students contact us to share good or related practices that can be useful for current or future ones. However, we also faced some challenges that we have tried to overcome. Hereafter we present our conclusions and offer some insight that may serve as guidelines for other programs interested in implementing courses or content related to equality and communication.

In order to gain students perspective on the experience, in the final weeks of the course we focused the debates on revising content, concepts and topics, and we also invited students to give their feedback on the subject. Overall, students were satisfied with the course and they reported that Communication towards Equality was the subject with the highest attendance throughout their undergraduate years. This reinforces the positive evaluation of the pedagogical strategy for engagement that we deploy.

The usual comment students provide at the end of our course is that they have acquired what they call “the glasses of equality” and they cannot take them off. This, in turn, implies that the learning they have gone through has “spoiled” the usual gratifying consumption of audiovisual entertainment, advertising, news, films and programs, while it has strengthened their awareness on narrative power and the role they play as future professionals.

Students’ final view of the course is that it is helpful and they would like to have studied it early in the first year. We have reflected on this suggestion, and we believe that the subject could be moved forward in the curriculum, perhaps in the third year, but not in the first year. In fact, the subject deals with complex concepts that are better understood if students have already tackled some basic content on communication that is usually planned in the first year.

In this framework, a further layer of complexity to reflect upon is the relation of the subject with other courses, professors and their respective (and, therefore, different) methodologies and academic traditions. In fact, the content and pedagogical approach we propose in Communication towards Equality generates new questions, interests, concerns and expectations among students, which inevitably affect other subjects and may constitute unexpected challenges for other professors. For example, colleagues report that when inviting professionals in their own subjects to share experiences with students, the latter displayed a high level of criticism regarding the too often celebrated equality articulated through everyday corporate social responsibility communication strategies. In this sense, it would be desirable to design the subject along with all faculty involved in the undergraduate program where it is taught, in order to plan a pedagogical approach to the total curriculum in accordance.

Another interesting observation refers to the positive appreciation students had on the subject for dealing with contemporary issues and for being profoundly linked with recent research. In this sense, we acknowledge that the long tradition and ongoing research on peace, social change, and communication for peace that we carry on from the Institute for Social Development and Peace (through which we articulate our research) constitutes an asset for the design and constant update of the subject.

In summary, from our experience we could focus our recommendations for other programs around three main crucial issues: firstly, any course and undergraduate program in communication needs to integrate content and training on equality, human rights, peace and social change; secondly, any course that addresses topics such those of Communication towards Equality will inevitably raise questions and debate on the socio-political context and historical memory of the country or region where it is taught, and the teaching staff needs to provide space and tools to tackle marginalized identities within those frames; and thirdly, the course needs to be contextualized and adapted to the specific students profiles of every environment. These core guidelines will contribute to capitalize students learning and training in transformative communication towards equality based on principles of cultures of peace and social change and will desirably turn them into inconvenient witnesses.

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