Communication and Interculturality: An Experience on Intercultural Training for Journalists

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ABSTRACT

Citizenship as status implies the acknowledgment of individual rights as well as social ones. This very acceptance requires the consideration of all citizens as equal despite any personal difference and it represents an aim that is mostly dependent on the mass-media social function. The formal acknowledgment of the citizenship would be scarcely important if identity stereotypes and prejudice-based discrimination occurred during citizen’s vital happenings. Today, citizenship must include the communicative dimension as part of the social integration project. Societies are every day more intercultural, and media play an essential role in representing the other. As part of a Grundtvig project on intercultural education, the author conducted an experience with journalistic ethics students of the Communication School at the University of Seville. From this experience, the author reflects on multiculturalism as a necessary tool in the training of future journalists.

Keywords: Citizenship, Communication, Discrimination, Identity Stereotypes, Intercultural, Journalistic Ethics, Media, Multiculturalism, Social Integration

1. INTRODUCTION

While nowadays, thanks to a growing worldwide diffusion of internet, it is possible to access a previously unimaginable quantity of information from a highly differentiated amount of sources (from blogs to mobile videos), the definition of mass-media as fourth power is still very pertinent. As the fourth power, a great responsibility in shaping our perception of reality, including the actual concept of citizenship, which at the same time is deeply affected by its culture-specific component and by how this specificity is transmitted to society by mass-media. Because of this reason, depending on how this component is perceived by society, it can act as a promoter of interculturality or as its detractor. There is a set of relationships that links mass-media to citizenship, and interculturality; and for these relationships to be positive for society, we propound the need of having an intercultural competent mass-media. Thus the objects of this paper are 1) to try to clarify the complex relationship that nowadays links citizenship and mass-media; 2) to propose interculturality as one of the key factors of this relationship, and intercultural competence as a positive mediator; 3) to elucidate the mean-

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ing of intercultural competence; and 4) based on our experience in an international project aimed to promote interculturality, to suggest how to improve intercultural competences among mass-media operators - in particular, and citizens - in general.

2. AN ETHICAL CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship as status implies the acknowledgment of individual rights as well as social ones. This very acceptance requires the consideration of all citizens as equal despite any personal difference and it represents an aim that is mostly dependent on the mass-media social function. The formal acknowledgment of the citizenship would be scarcely important if identity stereotypes and prejudices based discrimination in society because the media discourses. Nowadays citizenship must include the communicative dimension as part of the social integration project.

We are living in societies that are more and more atomized, where the mass-media’s high throughput and its communication capacity supported by technique are in contrast with a decrease in direct human inter-communication, resulting in considering our close neighbors as strangers. Too often we feel and connect to their lives through mass-media, leaving our humanity mediated and making our reality occur as an appendage of media representations and education that we receive daily.

Communication allows us a more global knowledge of the world, but it interferes with the understanding of our closer reality, producing an informative equidistance that may confuse it. We could actually speak of a possible citizenship polarization at global level, in which the provenience of each individual, the belonging to the so-called “North” or “South” as symbolic values, is a determining factor on the citizens’ fate: his or her origin will last as a break in his or her social integration, because it might represent a stigma that devalues his or her citizen identity.

For this reason, mass-media must work harder to contribute towards a citizenship model based on being a member of the same communal project that integrate, on a variety of cultural backgrounds, values based on the respect of personal dignity, freedom of speech and, at the same time, the same informational treatment under the same circumstances. This is something that has recently generated several initiatives at different educational levels, such as those promoted by the UNESCO-UNAOC (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Communication Organization, and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations) and the UNI-TWIN Cooperation Programme on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue (Carlsson & Culver, 2013).

To achieve these goals, mass-media has to adopt positive actions focused on reflecting the value of the other cultures, so that mutual respect can be based on knowledge instead of indifference, and promoting a multiethnic and intercultural cast during broadcasting, as well as protecting minority rights. A special attention should be paid to the Internet which could be a great opportunity for promoting intercultural dialogues, as observed by Pfister and Soliz (2011): “the internet, by reducing cost and access barriers, albeit unevenly, produces a range of fora from websites to blogs to social networking sites and microblogs that host intercultural dialogues” (p. 247).

Feelings of belonging should not come from legal channels, but from the acknowledgment of our identity by the rest of the citizens. This commitment, besides the effective coexistence in the whole range of social spaces, depends on its public representation by mass-media as symbolic value.

Western societies have some of the highest degrees of cultural difference as a product of the migration phenomenon. It is no longer a return migration, as it used to be yesteryear when immigrants bore their conditions simply waiting to return to their homeland as soon as possible with a saved capital. Now, most of the immigrants arrive to Northern countries with the intention of staying, to become members
Virtual Learning Communities: Interaction in Blended Learning Using Web 2.0 Tools
www.igi-global.com/chapter/virtual-learning-communities/107749?camid=4v1a