

3.4. The use of fanzines as pedagogical tools in the University: fostering DIY cultures and academic research

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A b s t r a c t

This presentation aims to analyze the use and appropriation of fanzines by students in the university in Colombia. I understand fanzines as pedagogical devices that help developing horizontal relations between the professor and the students. This experience has been carried out since January 2018 during the courses of Society and Communication (6th Semester) in the Department of Political Science. Likewise, this presentation is going to talk about punk pedagogies related to three categories: the body, horizontality and social justice. As a university professor, I consider that it is necessary to foster punk pedagogies in the classroom to develop DIY cultures, autonomy and more horizontal relations. In this sense, we promote an alternative evaluation method that encourages the participation and allows the development of the students' academic interests. To summarize, we propose the next questions for the presentation: how can we foster punk pedagogies in the classroom? What does the use of the fanzine imply as an alternative pedagogical tool?

Keywords: *fanzine, punk, pedagogy.*



1. Introduction

This paper arises from a personal concern towards the teaching methodologies I use and the learning methods my students have in my classes at the Department of Political Science in the University. Taking as a basis some of the materials I have been gathering around punk pedagogies (Dines 2015; Kahn-Egan, 1996; Haworth, 2012; Smith, Dines & Parkinson, 2017 and Furness, 2012); I reflect on the possibility of establishing these type of pedagogies in the classroom. Among these texts, I was profoundly motivated by the one written by Tom Parkinson (2017). In my case, I apply the understanding of 'being punk in higher education' through a phenomenological perspective to show some of the findings I have had during my years as a professor in the University with the use of fanzines and punk pedagogies. Therefore, my research questions, or more properly, my personal concerns regarding these topics are: What is the meaning of a 'punk pedagogy'? What is the relation between this pedagogy and the development of a more accessible writing in the class room? How can students foster their creativity while learning?

To answer them I use a phenomenological approach, which consists on focusing on the lived body experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 1975) I have had inside and outside the classroom. As this paper reflects on personal experiences, Cartesian thought and scientific eurocentrism, are left aside. This is why this paper is written in first person, in order to express my process of perception of the punk pedagogies and methodologies developed in the classroom. I am also trying to involve the perspective of phenomenology in the sense of Merleau-Ponty, this is, that our bodies are in the world; lived experiences are part of us, and in this case, it means transcending the dualism of the subject and object of study. I have considered three relevant issues or categories that are fundamental for understanding the punk pedagogies we develop in the classroom: the body, horizontality and social justice.

As I teach in a department of Political Science, I acknowledge that politics are linked to the pedagogy and to the body. This is an epistemological position that is rooted in transmethodology: it calls into question some of the principles of the discipline of Political Science, in order to find new methods, theories and objects of analysis. In my perspective, it also has to do with the question Haworth (2012, p.1) was asking: "was I doing something different in my classroom?" or was I just reinforcing and reproducing the mainstream contents and forms of understanding political science?

2. Punk pedagogies and methodologies

Although alternative pedagogies concerned me since I began teaching, I started thinking about punk pedagogies during the second semester of 2017, when a student came to interview me about what I considered punk was. One of his questions was around the stigmatization of punk and I thought it could be an interesting issue to research in the university. This is how I got to know KISMIF and Punk Scholars Network, and I decided to create a new network in South America that could gather punk scholars and the people of the scene. This is how the Red de Estudios Punk – RedePunk (Punk Studies Network) began in Colombia. I agree with Haenfler (2012, p.38) that "I was naïve about the revolutionary potential of punk so too was I naïve about life in the academy", because punk pedagogies and their revolutionary potential go hand in hand with the questioning of conformity:

Punks question conformity not only by looking and sounding different (which has debatable importance), but by questioning the prevailing modes of thought. Questions about the things that other take for granted related to work, race, sex, and our own selves are not asked by the conformist whose ideas are determined by those around her. The nonconformist does not rely on other to determine her own reality (O'Hara 1999, p. 28).

Punk, as proposed by David Vila (2017), can be understood as an object of study or as a series of practices. I understand punk pedagogies as both of them, as a pedagogical exercise inside and outside the university, and also as an object of study. Concretely, I believe as Freire (1996) that education has to be liberating and that it constitutes a space for the transformation of the practices. Punk is much more than looking different or dressing with certain type of aesthetics, it has much more to do with non-conformity; or as Vila (2017) puts it, it means criticism towards authority. It is "more than torn up clothes and abrasive music (...) especially the question everything mentality" (Haenfler, 2012, p. 38). This reflection also leads me to another question Haworth (2012, p.1) asked: "If I do not have a certain punk aesthetic and work as a teacher in the public school, is that considered selling out?". In my case, the answer is more complex, I work in a private institution. Can we find spaces of resistance in the private universities? I do not think there is an easy answer to this. Anyway, I think neither public nor private institutions can be considered punk. In this sense, I do not claim the university as a punk space as *Punkademics* do, because universities are institutions. In spite of that, people who work or study in universities can develop punk pedagogies, methodologies and contribute to punk in many ways.

For Miner and Torrez (2012, p.28) the space of the university can be a punk space; they take up the example of the Chicano activism of the Santa Barbara Plan, "we do not come to work for the university, but to demand that the university work for our people". I agree with both of them that we cannot leave the institutions in the hands of the right-wing individuals, because punk knowledge systems also have to penetrate the structures of capitalism to transform the universities. In what ways? 1) Including punk epistemologies, 2) infiltrating the university with punk students and professors, 3) discussing about power and privilege, 4) comparing the academic curricula with the neoliberal logic of capitalism and subverting it, 5) considering ourselves as agents of change, 6) considering each social situation as a potential revolutionary act (Miner and Torrez 2012, p.34). Although these are useful proposals and serve *Punkademics* as guidelines, I do not think institutions can be claimed as punk spaces, in fact, punk has to be outside the institutions in order to be punk.

As I mentioned before, I understand the exercise of punk pedagogies from a phenomenological perspective and specially, from the experience of the lived body inside and outside the classroom. In this case, it is related on the one hand, to the concept of *decolonial aesthetics* (Mignolo 2010), the way of feeling and living my own perception. And on the other hand, it is related to the lived body experience as explained by Merleau-Ponty (1975). The phenomenological method contributes to a better understanding of school environments, especially through the lived experiences of the actors

of the formative process (Aguirre-García, 2012). Considering this method, and specially the importance of politics, the body and pedagogy, it seems relevant the consideration of transmethodologies. These are not procedures, nor direct ways of knowledge, but the foundations to think a new way of capturing and opening the imagination towards the creative process. This will allow other methods to emerge; other epistemological conceptions of the production of knowledge to arise (Pérez Luna, Moya and Curcu 2018, p. 16-17).

3. Punk pedagogies and the use of zines in the classroom

As Susan Thomas (2018) points out zines' most conservative definition is a "self-published, black-and-white photocopied booklet", normally made by hand, then reproduced on a photocopier. Nowadays, other kinds of zine making exist and zinesters still work on analogical but also in digital contexts. I have been using zines as pedagogical tools in higher education since the first semester of 2018. Our zines have been developed by students of 6th semester in a subject called "Society and Communication". Normally that course has around 30 to 35 students. The contents we study during the course are related to Media Studies and Communication theories (Functionalism, Critical theory, Structuralism, Palo Alto, Cultural Studies, and Communicology for liberation, Communication for Development, and Communication for Social Change, Communication and Good Living).

Until this semester, the students connected the theories with their own experiences or with practical examples that explained those theories. On the contrary, this first semester of 2019, we are doing a macro project that links Music and Resistance. The students have chosen their favourite musical genre (punk, salsa, reggae and so on) and they will write about its relation to resistance from the race/gender/class debate. The use of zines in the classroom is related to new ways of creating and doing beyond the Cartesian epistemological foundation. This practice has to do with the combination of labour, creativity and material to foster the individual and collective work for community building (Honma, 2016). It also allows the students to have the authority to talk in a space normally subjugated by adult voices and dominant narratives that may not represent the interests or concerns of all students (Lonsdale, 2015).

Zines offer many positive experiences in the classroom. They offer a sense of ownership and authority, and they foster creativity because they are created by multigender composing. Students can create new meanings of their lived experiences, so the zines serve "as a bridge between the writing skills we emphasize in the classroom and the writing they do in their everyday lives" (Lonsdale, 2015). In relation to the previous ideas, I consider these three categories: the body, horizontality and social justice; to develop a punk pedagogy and methodology for our zine-making project

3.1 The body

First of all, it is important to understand that everything crosses our bodies; our daily lives, the way in which we see ourselves and the way others see us. This means that our bodies are politicized and that they are established according to different social hierarchies. Me, my body, myself; I am going to be seen, read

and categorized whether I am tall, short, a woman, black, indigenous, this is, everything crosses our bodies.

According to Barrera Sanchez (2011) there are different approaches towards the body: it can be understood as domination (Marx and Foucault) or as the structures reflected by the *habitus* (Bourdieu). Nevertheless, the body has specially been analysed by feminist studies: body for other by Basaglia (1983); the lived experience by Simone de Beauvoir (1981) and in South America, by the concept of territory (Cruz et al. 2017). The ways other perceive our bodies and the way we interact with them is related to standpoint epistemology. In this sense, people who suffer oppression in their own bodies have the epistemological privilege to narrate that experience. For example, myself, as a white, urban, European woman, I am not going to be able to see *through the eyes*, or *live through the body* of an indigenous peasant, because both of our experiences are totally different. At most, I could have some empathy towards the ways she feels oppression, but I am never going to be able to understand her completely; as her *ways of being* are given by the social position she has.

The acknowledgement of the body is very useful to work with colonial subjects and to link subjectivity with Political Science. In this case, to avoid students feeling uncomfortable with the making of the zine project, the task will never be the creation of a perzine. Mayorga (2013) already pointed out these difficulties. The objective of the zine is to foster creativity, discover students' research interests and specially to develop a "peer- driven content into the classroom, [so that] students benefit when voices that resemble their own are seen, read, and valued (Lonsdale, 2015). To put it in de Certeau's (1995) terms, it serves to "free the imprisoned speech"; and it is particularly important for the youth to develop their own voice and projects.

Zines are often used in the classroom to promote alternative pedagogies and forms of creative self-expression that are unencumbered by the need for technological skill or pressures to conform to particular aesthetics or abilities. Because of their do-it-yourself ethos, zines are often embraced by those from marginalized backgrounds because of their freedom to experiment with different modes of writing, expression, and presentation (Honma, 2016, p. 34).

Zines connect students with DIY experiences to foster creativity and research in alternative ways. Fostering these speeches is an act of poetic and creative experience, and it makes our writing less pretentious and more accessible to other people that are not in academic spaces. As Parkinson (2016) notes the lack of creative capacity brings the lack of spontaneity, and specially, the schooling system provokes it through the Mcdonalization of education (Haenfler, 2012, p. 43). Zines tackle with people's forms of oppression and they address social issues. This means they are not only useful against alienation but also to connect with the humanity (Haenfler, 2012, p. 47).

Zine creation allows students to think outside of the box about social issues. It fosters engagement with material that is beyond textbook learning. It breaks down barriers of the "right" way to think

about a social problem for my students. They got personal and shared their struggles and triumphs in their zines. It was an empowering experience for both my students and myself (Thomas 2018, p. 747).

3.2 Horizontality

Our second category has to do with horizontality and creating more solid collaboration relationships between students and professors. In this sense, it is important to share spaces inside and outside the academy. We mainly identify two spaces outside our classes: the *semillero* punk and the field trips with the class where we write our zines. On the one hand, the *semillero* is a research group mainly formed by grade students, a couple of professors and people involved with arts and the promotion of culture. We meet weekly. In this space, we have the possibility to know each other, develop our research skills and organise workshops or other events. On the other, we have already been to one field trip with our course of Society and Communication, to a village near Bogotá, which name is Facativá. We spent the day with the students of our class and the students from the *semillero* sharing youth experiences and fanzine practices (RedePunk, 2018). We also developed some workshops with local Youth and Human Rights organisation, and they appeared in the regional television (Canal13, 2018).

Since the beginning of our zine-making project, I noticed the students were not aware of the purpose of this task, so we designed a workshop together with a colleague about fanzines, creative commons and copyright (La Facultad-Casa Itinerante, 2019). This semester (first of 2019), we are planning to go to Medellín to develop the project of Music and Resistance. These spaces outside the university help sharing bonds and other kind of networks that transcend the academy. In the classroom, there is also a horizontal construction of the evaluation process of the subject Society and Communication. At the beginning of the course, we discuss the percentages of the evaluation methods and the contents of the course. We also evaluate our homework and zines collectively, so everybody reads everybody's zine and gives a qualitative and quantitative evaluation. Finally, some of our classes are taught in the street.

3.3 Social Justice

Our third category is about social justice and the ethics of education. As Castro-Gomez (2007) notes when talking about Lyotard, university education has two purposes: the education of the people and the moral progress of humanity. I consider zines work for both of them. They help learning to do research and they focus on social justice. According to Chu (1997, p. 83): "zines attest to the importance of looking at youth-initiated media as realms of meaning and agency, particularly as they serve to illuminate young people's own perceptions of what is wrong with their larger social environments".

When talking about social justice, we consider it in terms of the appropriation, the sustainability and the circulation of the fanzine. On the first place, the students learn the theories of communication and apply them with practical examples. When looking at the contents of the fanzines, I find that students tend to write about political issues regarding Colombia (the elections, the murder of social leaders, *uribismo*, *castrochavismo*), they are

normally “left” zines, they talk about territoriality, peasants and rurality; and use critical and decolonial theories. In terms of circulation, we try to make our writing more accessible to discover circuits that are different from the ones in the academy. The first and second semesters of 2018, we shared the zines in the streets of Bogota, in la La Valija de Fuego (bookshop) and the *Fanzinoteca* of the National Library of Bogotá. The second semester we also went on a field trip to Facatativá to present the zines.

Finally, the sustainability of the zine has some difficulties because it is attached to the classroom evaluation. Only one group has expressed the interest to continue doing and printing the zine, once the course has finished. Although the zine-making project promotes creativity and fosters their research interests, it is difficult to maintain it during time.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed about the punk pedagogies used in the classroom, understanding them through three fundamental categories for the zine-making project: the body, horizontality and social justice. I have carried out this exercise using a phenomenological perspective and considering the lived body experience.

In the first place, the body is important to understand standpoint epistemology. We consider that lived experiences are what make us unique. We see *the world* from our social and epistemological position. When students write about their own interests, they foster creativity and discover what moves them. In this sense, students of the subject Society and Communication tend to write their zines about political issues regarding Colombia from a critical perspective. Likewise, they understand this project as an exercise to foster their own ideas and discover their research interests. The aforementioned issues are also linked to the necessity of writing a zine with social purposes. This is why the zine, as a pedagogical device, raises the awareness towards our social contexts.

Concerning the development of horizontal relations between the students and the professor, we have to mention the collective zine-making project evaluation in qualitative and quantitative terms, and the field trips we make to circulate our zines outside the University. This semester (first of 2019), we are planning to go to Medellin to develop the project of Music and Resistance. These spaces help sharing bonds and other kind of networks that transcend the academy.

However, there are also some limitations. For example, when we think about the aforementioned question: how can we develop our writing more accessible in the classroom? The students' zines are still too academic and too difficult to understand in non-academic spaces. Another limitation I have found and that I am trying to solve during this semester is that many students do not understand the aim of the zine. Some zines of the course, for example, have bibliography citations and some others use images from the Internet without regard whether they have copyright or not. To avoid these I have organised with a colleague a workshop to talk about fanzines, copyright and Creative Commons.

Finally, and beyond these limitations, zines connect students with DIY experiences and other circuits outside the academy; it makes them write about social issues and encourages them to make their writing more accessible.

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