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Review of Business Management

The *Atualidades* Project – a generator of improvement in the teaching-learning process: report of a teaching method carried out in a higher education institution

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ABSTRACT

Objective – Being up-to-date requires reading newspapers and articles concerning issues that are relevant to professional training; the objective of this paper is to present the teaching method *Atualidades* project – a generator of improvement in the teaching-learning process, carried out in a higher education institution.

Design/methodology/approach – This is qualitative, exploratory research, containing testimonies by 50 students, six invited entrepreneurs and professionals, and four teachers, between years 2006 and 2010, using direct observation of students' and guests' presentations, document analysis of project data, and testimonies by those involved. Analytical categories: recognizing the importance of updating, relationship between selected material and subject content, awakening to the interface between theory and practice, discovery of and access to a greater amount of research sources, sharing of ideas and improvement in capacity of working in the classroom.

Theoretical framework – This study considered research on teaching and learning based on systematic, disciplined, reflective and meaningful reading and interpretation of knowledge produced worldwide, which requires professionals who are connected with the world through knowledge, constant appreciation of citizens and their local, regional and international actions, in which reading is considered a promoter of prosperity and social inclusion (Lowman, 2004; Dewey, 1978; Pestalozzi, 1946).

Findings – The results revealed that students, when seeking to update themselves through reading, discovered local reference business practices.

Contributions – The studied teaching method contributes to education concerning teaching and learning and corroborates studies that discuss the formation of critical minds in higher education.

Keywords – Reading; Actualities; Teaching method; Higher Education Institution.

1 INTRODUCTION

The current situation of students who enter university with little reading – a problem which is getting worse every year – has a number of causes. These include the low quality of primary and secondary school education [in Brazil], especially in public schools; the questionable selection process for admission to higher level private education institutions, since the number of vacancies is higher than student demand; and social programs that reach people who are poor in socioeconomic and cultural terms. All this ends up affecting the whole teaching-learning process. (Bertero, Caldas, & Wood, 1999, Paldês, 1998; Veloso, 1999).

As in Barzotto (1999), this research is based on the systematic, disciplined, reflective and meaningful process of reading knowledge that is produced worldwide. Being up-to-date is necessary. The systematic dimension regards the frequency and the period of time devoted to reading. The discipline dimension shows how a reading habit may have an impact on a person's life. The reflective dimension faces individuals with truths that have been constructed and reconstructed by authors concerning the world of things, in confrontation with the reality of the Self. The meaning dimension generates development necessary to understanding why one should read – to grasp contents and their meanings both in personal and professional terms, for example, and above all, to enable individuals to become agents of their own development in the eternal path of establishing their citizenship.

This diagnosis was faced by the reality of a global scenario that requires professionals who are connected with the world by news about all the expertise that has been produced, by constant appreciation of citizens who are a part of this context based on their local, regional and international actions – and, thus, reading is a way of promoting prosperity and social inclusion. (Calderón, 2000; Cardoso & Sampaio, 1994; Colossi, Consentino, & Etty, 2001; Sampaio, 1999). Faced with this pressing need, in this article we present an experience report about an innovative teaching method which – focused on students – is called the *Atualidades* Project, and was first carried out in certain subjects of the Business Administration course, and afterwards in other university courses.

In the courses in which we implemented the method, there were daily reports by teachers and managers about students' difficulty to read and write about basic topics and, hence, to have knowledge of and reflect about current issues – in a limited thinking process, with a degree of apathy as to reality, since a consistent theoretical and practical framework was not established. "How can I think and reflect if I don't read?"; "how can we train engaged professionals, who know how to manage changes?" First and foremost, being up-to-date requires wanting to become up-to-date. Are the complaining voices updated? (Demo, 1994).

The method is designed for students and, thus, for everyone who is involved in teaching and learning. However, we did not observe within the courses, or in the university, any more effective methods seeking to minimize the installed abyss. The professionals in the field seem not to hear each other. It's clear that the problem requires neutralizing actions. This method and other methods were reported on several occasions – in courses' pedagogical meetings, for example. Most professional are interested in these initiatives, but say they need to deal with the syllabus and may not have the time for innovations. So everyone goes back to their isolated work, with the help of a few colleagues who dare to do differently something that should be obvious. (Anastasiou & Alves, 2005).

In order to help encourage reading of articles and reports on current events and understanding of their relationship with professional training in different fields, two teachers created and – with the agreement of course managers – carried out this method in the various subjects they teach within Business Administration, Nutrition, and Psychology courses, also including experiments in Agribusiness and Civil Engineering courses. Basic

contents are even more meaningful because of the possibility of using them to understand current reality through more attentive and reflective reading. What really led to the continuity of this teaching method is that students "took up" the idea, which is a way of promoting better skills within organizational practices; above all, they felt challenged to develop themselves further.

Based on this premise, this article aims at describing and applying a method of teaching that generates improvements in the process of teaching and learning; which uses research of topics in newspapers and articles, critical reading and opinions concerning current affairs that are relevant to the training of future professionals. This teaching method is used in undergraduate courses in a higher education institution (HEI).

Therefore, this experience report is the result of bringing together the efforts and the integrated work and skills of two teachers who were motivated by the need to do something simple and effective to establish the professional skills required by the market, and who carried out the *Atualidades* Project method in the different subjects they teach, especially in the Business Administrations course in a HEI.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Teaching methods used in Business Administration undergraduate courses

In order to mitigate and overcome the training activity limited to subject contents framed in a schedule, the method aims to facilitate the understanding of emerging issues – be they economic, social, political and environmental – through innovative activities directly referring to the role of higher education institutions, enabling training that is more attuned to global reality. "The attitude of contextualizing and globalizing is a fundamental quality of the human spirit. [...] Knowledge becomes relevant when it is capable of placing all the information in its context [...]." (Morin, 2005, p. 20).

The authors understand that subjects should enable the development of capabilities and breakthroughs in students, helping them in the process of learning and taking advantage of their ideas for further exploration. This quality is inherent to the dynamics of the teaching and learning process, offering the opportunity to enhance the role of knowledge in course curricula (Silva & Fischer, 2008). Corroborating this statement, Lowman (2004) refers to research by Perry in 1987, which emphasizes the development of students over college years: they are initially passive, focused on teachers, and move on to a more independent, critical and collaborative stance towards building their own knowledge. This is a considerable change referring to teaching methods used in university and teachers' roles as mediators of critical thinking and of behaviors that encourage the active involvement of students in different course and extra course activities.

According to Plebane and Domingues (2008, p. 4), "teaching methods are a key point in planning subjects and lessons." The authors also point out that "teachers, and their free choice, can make use of different methods in order to achieve the goals proposed for the subject." In this way, each subject and its syllabus contents should be in line with the chosen teaching method; this is the most suitable for the formation of professional skills. Following this same understanding, Lowman (2004), Teixeira (2001) and Marion (2007) point out that lectures are the most used and the most economical method. However, they promote little interaction with students. Therefore, facing new economic, social and technological dynamics, there is the need to develop and use new teaching methods, without financially burdening the process of teaching and learning.

In order to contribute to the improvement of the teaching-learning process, undergraduate courses are committed to spreading knowledge, in the constant search to find connections between theory and practice, and, according to Demo (1994, p. 14), "[...] it is impossible to reach quality without education, and whatever is not

intended to form critical and creative [and up-to-date] historical subjects is not education."

There are many different teaching methods that can be used in undergraduate courses; choosing one over another depends on the purpose of the desired learning, planned in an innovative and creative way. It requires, first and foremost, teachers' communication skills to encourage students, and real dedication to teaching. The use of various methods is a form of training to teach in different courses. In current teaching, lectures predominate, and they must be interspersed with alternative methods focused on students, providing them with a more critical point of view, so that they take responsibility for their learning. Lowman (2004) lists a number of teaching methods. Noteworthy is the *active learning* method, which is the use of various techniques to make students active participants in challenging and reflective activities, such as registering their learning and critiques in readings, individual or group presentations, seeking to apply content to real-life situations. The classroom thus becomes a teaching space that is used in a creative and enthusiastic manner.

Studies by Dewey (1978) and Pestalozzi (1946) advocate teaching based on experience, freedom, collaboration and learning by doing, as well as on responsibility, autonomy and valuing of education and work. The principles proposed by the authors are critical for students to discover problems and solutions in a particular context, enabling them to draw up arguments grounded on theory and on experiencing this new reality, in order to become agents of change wherever they are.

According to Anastasiou and Alves (2005), the world of uncertainty and unpredictability permeates the dimensions of new professionals graduated from higher education institutions. Faced with this demand, it is necessary to adopt renewed teaching strategies, now focused on students, that challenge the traditional logic,

enabling the development of special skills, in a constant process of appropriation and reflection. Therefore, the objective is to explore all philosophies and actions that respect the promotion of students as apprentices inserted in this dynamic and changing environment. However, academic reality reinforces traditional teaching methods – and students end up requesting that teachers continue to present subject contents.

Studies by the author corroborate reality presented in the HEI. In this sense, the challenge presented was that some teachers started the changes, in pairs or in small groups, given the teaching autonomy that enables the implementation of different strategies. Initially resistant, students adhere little by little and become mobilizing elements for real change and establishment of knowledge.

Another method that is also used is academic research by professors in business schools. This method is criticized for its lack of relevance and value to real activities. In contrast, teachers who use it believe that this method is relevant and valuable in that it contributes to what is undoubtedly the most critical metric of relevance to students, that is, the economic value, where students benefit in terms of better wages, that is, a benefit resulting from their education. (O'Brien, Drnevich, Crook, & Armstrong, 2010).

There are restrictions in higher education in terms of the difficulty of making oneself heard by students, teachers and managers in the context of university; of schedules focused on contents; of students who work and have less time to devote to studying etc. However, it is possible to carry out better work with students, according to research referring to a growing number of teachers who use nontraditional methods. There is focus on students as soon as potentially significant and transformative learning is facilitated. Student-centered teaching aims to provide necessary means for their active participation in their academic

lives, becoming responsible for their own learning, personal and professional development, through effective and systematic changes. (Guedes, 1981; Rogers, 1973).

2.2 The importance of reading

Students are entering higher education with very little reading, and this also affects their writing. This contrasts with what Borges (1996) said about the importance of reading as a promoter of imagination and revelation of human nature. Here we are not talking only about reading books, but also newspapers, magazines and other sources of printed and electronic media.

Currently, the world of reading is available whether concerning trivial or important events in local communities or distant places on the map; for comments on economic, social and political conditions; for scientific discoveries; and for the job market, among so many other topics discussed worldwide. What we observed is a lack of interest in all this – and this reality requires multiple skills in individuals, so that they may enter impacting relationship networks, in the world of highly competitive corporate jobs. Thus, individuals are called upon to assume prominent positions in society, to be agents that promote growth and development.

We know what the general right direction is. However, we are also walking in two opposite directions. The higher education process is one of the directions provided for the pursuit of development that is not only cognitive, as well as of the empowerment of skills to operate in social, professional and scientific life. One of the directions refers to the context of instability and sudden changes in the lives of individuals and organizations that require constant adjustments in order to attain survival and better insertion in the competitive world. For this to happen, it is essential to be always up-to-date as to current facts and life in general, not only through

television and other related media, but also by reading books, newspapers, technical and non-technical magazines, and other sources that are currently available. (Orlandi, 1996). We must also remember that all environments are globalized: the behavior of individuals, organizations and countries are interconnected, one affecting the other. The expression of our time is the certainty of uncertainties. The other direction concerns the reality of higher education, when observing the behavior of students who do not seek to catch up through reading in the abovementioned sources. Along their academic lives, they end up not building a basic framework capable of providing them with appropriate skills required for their roles as citizens in different and constantly changing contexts, despite possessing a college degree in their specialties.

Reading can bring about changes in the world and in people's most intimate experiences, and is characterized as critical, reflective and meaningful. Considering the current situation, reading falls into three basic categories: information, knowledge and pleasure. It is crucial to combat alienation, ignorance and apathy in a constant struggle for survival and updating in a globalized market. (Freire, 1993; Manguel, 1997; Silva, 1986).

Research reveals even more worrying data regarding reading, re-examining the myth that it is school that effectively fosters reading, just because it is there that people learn how to read and write. Students end up associating reading with something that is part of the school routine. The message that remains is that reading is boring, tiresome and uninteresting. However, on closer examination, we find that reading is part of the cultural patterns of a nation, of a community, and that it begins within the family. Formal education contributes to consolidate its importance. However, it isn't by itself incorporated as something meaningful, impactful and transformative to students' lives. (Barzotto, 1999).

3 RESEARCH METHOD AND TECHNIQUES

This work is characterized as longitudinal research with a qualitative approach, of an exploratory nature, since it describes a different teaching method, based on the scientific curiosity of students and on updating knowledge. According to Gil (2002) and Richardson (1999), the combination of research techniques, when used properly, can complement data, allowing greater approximation to the reality that is being investigated. Considering this possibility, this article – that deals with the report of a teaching method called the *Atualidades* Project – uses three research techniques, namely: document analysis, direct observation and evidence analysis.

The sample used in the study that resulted in this article was randomly selected, consisting of students, teachers and entrepreneurs who participated in the *Atualidades* Project. The research population consists of 1,330 students, 15 entrepreneurs, two directly involved teachers, and 8 teachers participating in different semesters within the study period. In this total, 50 students, six entrepreneurs and four teachers were selected for this study, participating in the process and publicly and/or individually expressing their opinions about it.

The data collection technique used in this study was direct observation of presentations made by students and their guests, project documents, including written material (according to the project model and to data presentation in PowerPoint), and written testimonies by research participants, that is, by those involved, being characterized as a longitudinal cut of the 2006-2010 period.

Data analysis involved the study of students' socioeconomic data, such as: profile of the studied subject, gender, age, profession, origin, average income, market segment, and study period. The study also included the following categories: recognition of the importance of updating, relationship between the selected material and subject contents, awakening to the

interface between theory and practice, discovery of and access to a greater amount of research sources, sharing of ideas, and improvement in classroom skills, allowing us to find our main results. The analysis also took into account the contents of the testimonies, categorized by: oral presentation, analysis and criticism power, relationship with other subjects, work experience, business characteristics, trends and new theoretical concepts.

In the data analysis, an important issue of the presented method of teaching is the constant record of activities carried out by the teachers involved, often discussed in method review meetings. This record is also part of the analysis of collected information.

In this systematic process of reporting the teaching method based on the news presented in scientific and non-scientific newspapers, by printed and digital media, we have the perception of the main participants of the discussed project as a general line of analysis. This means that qualitative evaluation permeated and sustained the *Atualidades* Project report.

4 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 The *Atualidades* Project – a teaching method

The creation and constant review of the *Atualidades* Project began from year 2006 on, with the sharing of teaching plans by the two teachers who taught Entrepreneurship in different semesters (8th in Business Administration, 2nd in Nutrition, 10th in Psychology). It eventually extended to other subjects that they also taught: Project Development and Analysis (7th in Business Administration), Trading (8th in Business Administration), History of Administrative Theory and Economics Fundamentals (1st in Business Administration). The idea was to encourage reading of newspapers with current

issues and to contextualize as to business practices and professional performance.

4.1.1 Creation

Initially, the *Atualidades* Project was the study of topics based on scientific and non-scientific articles, on reports referring to the fields of each course, selected in magazines, local, regional, state or national newspapers, the internet, papers and thesis. At every meeting in the classroom, 10 minutes were set aside for presentations of topics researched individually or in groups, depending on the number of students enrolled in the course. Once a month, after a presentation, the other students wrote an essay presenting their understanding and learning. This quickly proved to be extremely laborious for teachers, despite the considerable improvement in the writing process. This activity was strictly informative, and helped add to assessment grades.

4.1.2 Adjustments

Following successive assessments and adjustments with students and teachers, the activity began to grow and thus demand to be made formal. Through an empirical approach, motivated by a spirit of innovation and achievement combined with positive results, we discovered and enhanced the initial idea called the *Atualidades* Project to the point that we believe it to be another activity, now called the *Atualidades* Project teaching method.

By students' initiative, they brought and recorded interviews with entrepreneurs and professionals working in the market within the article topic. The presence of professionals and their testimonials led to a significant leap in the topic presented. Interaction between theory and practice was made evident. All professionals strongly addressed the value of the study and of being in higher education, as well as the commitment of training professionals by seeking

to be updated. The testimony was incorporated to improve the method, since students' need to listen to the market was a pressing need.

Due to factors addressed during the assessments, several adjustments were made, listed below:

a) class size: according to students enrolled in the course, work is presented individually or in small groups, given that training is more focused on individuals, in line with Rogerian theory;

b) standard presentation time: to make available a total period of time for the project, that does not affect the planning of the course's focus content and other activities along the semester. Thirty minutes were estimated for classes of up to 24 students, with a maximum of eight presentations, and ten minutes for bigger classes, preferably in pairs or in trios;

c) presentation topics: emerging issues, always referring to the contents of subjects and courses;

d) semesters: for the first semester, propose certain topics that are currently in the spotlight; in other semesters, students help list subjects that have greater impact for them;

e) written material: a model report was provided;

f) name: currently, carried out by two professors from the Business Administration, Psychology and Nutrition courses. In each course, specific names are used, abd specific focus is given, as follows: *Atualidades* Project in Business Administration (Projeto Atualidades em Administração – P.A.A.), *Atualidades* Project in Psychology (Projeto Atualidades em Psicologia – P.A.P.), *Atualidades* Project in Nutrition (Projeto Atualidades em Nutrição – P.A.N.).

4.1.3 Justification

The project is important because around 30% of the content of assessment tests in HEI,

as well as in public contests and work selections carried out in Brazil, refer to current affairs. As well as updates concerning environmental management strategies, people management and innovation management and interface areas. (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira [INEP], 2010).

Moreover, the project significantly improves students' oral presentations, as well as improving their essays, power of analysis and synthesis of studied material.

4.1.4 Objectives

The teaching method includes the following objectives:

a) to trigger a process that stimulates reading;
b) to discover the topics of research and articles concerning the field;
c) to contextualize theory and organizational practice;
d) to identify successful agents in the reality in which we live;
e) to develop analysis, synthesis and resignification of knowledge;
f) to develop oral and written arguments;
g) to strive for students' constant updating.

4.1.5 Systematization of the activity

a) At the beginning of each semester, teachers present the proposal of the *Atualidades* Project with an already planned schedule. The groups are assembled depending on the number of students. A draw is made to set up the presentation schedule.
b) Students, in groups/individually, select the article containing the relevant topic, preferably referring to their field. It can also contain general issues, which will actually contribute to the formation of the citizen/entrepreneur, always referring to the course content.
c) They identify local or regional professionals whose success refers to the material's topic, so as to interview them, record videos,

invite them to participate in class and thus contribute with their testimony and life experience.

d) Students should prepare an oral presentation of the topic, using adequate materials and tools.
e) On the scheduled date, according to the schedule, students will make the presentation. When the participation of a professional or entrepreneur is expected, first they present their topic, which will then be completed by the testimony of the guests.
f) In the week immediately following the presentation, students must submit a written and printed report, typed in the available project model:
• the report is made up of four parts: identification header, understanding, learning and references. In the header are included the course, the subject and the names of students, date and topic proposed, with the title. When writing the understanding of the studied material, preserve the author's idea. In the part corresponding to learning, do carry out analysis, critiques and personal and professional considerations. In references, include the source of research.
• attach to the report a copy of the selected material, if it not in electronic form.
• send work electronically and attachments to the teacher and all colleagues.
g) The cycle of presentations will take place over the semester, according to the schedule. The time allotted for the presentation is ten minutes or thirty minutes, depending on the four factors already presented.

4.1.6 Assessment

The *Atualidades* Project is part of the semester grades. The issues assessed are:

1) presentation: oral assessment occurs shortly after the completion of the activity,

using the following criteria: knowledge of presented content; creativity in the presentation; complexity and relevance of the chosen material in prominent newspapers, especially scientific; quality of the material presented; proper use of funds used, whiteboard, overhead projector, data show, video, sound etc; clarity and objectivity in presenting the content; argumentation and learning; attitude during presentation; respect to time limits;

2) written work: in compliance with the model; consistent with the article's content; relevance of comments; if they really understood the content presented; writing within grammatical rules and the Brazilian Association of Technical Standards (Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas –ABNT).

Following are the main results obtained using the *Atualidades* Project teaching method over the 2006-2010 period.

4.2 Data analysis and interpretation: method validation

Next, results will be presented from the point of view of the students, the teachers involved and entrepreneurs and professionals invited.

4.2.1 *Student characterization*

The data collected from the 50 students, selected from a population of 1,330 students, demonstrates that:

TABLE 1 – Student characterization

Description	Results
Courses of origin	80% Business Administration. 16% Nutrition. 4% Psychology. Most of them are taking their first graduation course, that is, 99,6%.
Study period	Most of the students study at night.
Gender	56 % male in Business Administration. 92 % female in Nutrition and Psychology.
Age group	Most of them between ages 18 and 25 in Business Administration and Psychology. 17 to 19 in Nutrition.
Profession	Predominantly in commerce (60%), followed by administrative assistants from small and medium companies, in the case of the Business Administration course (40%). Most are not in the labor market in the case of the Nutrition course (80%) and part of the Psychology students (60%). While taking their graduation course, 96% of students in Business Administration work, and in the other course percentage is close to 75%. Thus, they are students who already work, but a part of them do not do so in their graduation field, reaching 45% in Business Administration, 50% in Psychology and 70% in Nutrition.
Origin	96% of the researched students are from AMUREL – Laguna region municipality association.
Field of work	Basically commerce (60%), factories (20%) and agribusiness (20%).
Income	Students' incomes follow the local average, but in the Vale do Braço do Norte, an industrial region, income is higher, but follows regional income. The average salary us R$ 1.000,00.

There were positive results over those four years of implementation of the *Atualidades* Project teaching method. First of all, highlights were the results achieved with students. Given students' difficulty and the fact that they were initially even unaware regarding the lack of familiarity with the habit of reading newspapers, we emphasize awakening to this type of reading.

We also emphasize the stimulus to studying newspapers that address issues that are relevant to the formation of professionals in emerging topics that are not directly in the syllabus of the subjects. Some initial testimonies were recurring, confirming studies by Calderón (2000), Cardoso (1994), Colossi et al. (2001) and Sampaio (1999):

a) "Teacher, we didn't find anything interesting. Can I bring in news from my home town?"

b) "We don't have time to research. Can it be something from a book, from things we are studying?"

c) "Do we have to present a summary? Do we have to present it before the class?"

According to studies by Barzotto (1999), in the first presentations, the little importance given by some students to the activity was evident, because they had not yet realized its relevance, and the project had only a small score in the overall assessment grades. Following successive feedback, teachers resorted to the criteria established as a way of explaining and bringing awareness, as well as seeking the active participation of students. They were even taken to the library on several occasions, to carry out research on the internet together. They sent in materials for preliminary assessment. Here are some of their questions:

a) "We didn't know there were so many magazines in the library. It's hard to choose. I saw so much interesting material. I just have to find out if there's anyone to take it to the classroom for me."

b) "Are we on the right path? Is this material good?"

After researching the topic in newspapers and searching for a professional/ entrepreneur linked to the topic that was being presented, there was intense mobilization of logistics and even negotiation between teams to ensure the presence of this person in the presentation on a day that was suitable for both parties. Entrepreneurs who participated in the project have been in the market for over a decade and are business leaders in the community.

For some presentations, 30 minutes proved to be insufficient, considering that the students were impacted by the subject and the guest professional. Here are some testimonies: "Our guest wants to talk about his company's products, and says he will bring the market manager to help him. And he wants us to try out his product."

To the source of research, previously limited to newspapers, other references on the same topic were incorporated.

The presence of the guest professional gave meaning by bringing together theory and organizational practice. Moreover, there was strength of their testimonies regarding the value and importance of college education in students' lives, so as to succeed in their future professional career.

Students come into contact with innovative management practices, and knowledge of the proper use of technologies, according to the following testimony: "I only knew the company's products, but I didn't know it was so cool. I don't know if I could create so many things and take care of everything. It seemed so easy when we were studying. Now I see that this needs a lot of dedication."

By researching topics, they found the trend and expertise of publishing issues in different newspapers, and developed critical thinking regarding the quality of some materials, as shown by Manguel (1997) and Silva (1986).

Students argued that this method should be adopted by all teachers because they felt challenged to integrate theory and practice, something they previously thought to be largely confined to teachers' initiatives. They found stories about the success of people who had

little formal education, who, by giving their testimonies, greatly impressed the students. (Plebane & Domingues, 2009).

Confirming Fischer's research (2003), the subjects that really contributed to the formation of the students were highlighted, as well as those in which they felt vulnerable because they had not learned enough, and even questioned the hours allocated to some of them.

4.2.2   *Professor characterization*

Regarding the testimonies of teachers – the four who participated in the intentional sample are experienced and have been at the university for over 10 years –, we observed the enthusiasm and positive surprises accumulated over the years. Mainly due to the sharing of ideas and joint efforts by the two teachers, we emphasize the complementarity of skills and common learning, systematically improved at each new semester. To contribute to the improvement of teaching, they sought to disseminate the method among colleagues, who were receptive; however, it has not yet been carried out. The intention is that teachers may own and disseminate the teaching method, so as to improve the process of teaching and learning, constantly seeking the improvement of higher education, as evidenced by Paldês (1998), Veloso (1999) and Wood (2000).

A special highlight was the sense of commitment and responsibility of students based on the schedule taken on. At each presentation, a competitive process to pick the topic and the professional who was most prominent in the region began to emerge – while also seeking to distribute company products as gifts. The material presented (the logical order, the objectivity, the clarity and the writing) was improved while the presentations were made, throughout the semester. Therefore, the stance in the presentation and responsibility facing the activity acted as a training course for real professional performance, according to studies by Anastasiou and Alves (2005), Rogers (1973) and Guedes (1981). Below, a few testimonials:

a) "Faced by my great initial difficulty, I thought of carrying out this activity in a different way, mainly because of the major limitations of the students. It seemed very strange to them. And for me, I had a considerable number of essays to correct, taking up a lot of my time. But I observed that, for many students, it was proving significant. So I said to the other teacher that we will have to review the project for the next semester."

b) "I have many classes, other activities. Correcting these essays is a lot of work and some people are not giving this into account. Now, the presentations have been surprising me with their quality and with the commitment of the students. This is motivating."

c) "This is giving students a chance, and they surprise us. Since they are creative, they're getting dressed up when it's time for their presentation. It looks like a contest."

d) "I was very touched by the affection with which the family business was presented. The free gifts offered say a lot about the business. It was clear to me how much the people in this company are respected, which, as you know, is not the rule in our region."

Since initially the proposed method was to allow reading newspapers to update students, we were surprised by the progression the method took on. It ended up becoming more complex, while students interacted and sought to introduce new details, negotiating topics, submission dates, wanting more time to present the activity, inviting other teachers and students to watch their *Atualidades* Project. They believed the guest was more than special. The students gave a special scope to something simple that arose from the need to learn. This reminds us of Morin (2005), Lowman (2004) and Demo (1994). All this involvement created a buzz in the other course subjects, according to the following testimony:

a) "The other day, a teacher from the 2nd semester told me that students are better

prepared when they arrive, presenting better work. They looked like professionals. And that they had been talking about our project."

b) "With the possibility of changing the curriculum, the course coordinators wanted to keep my discipline in the 2nd semester, because then the girls are much smarter when they get to the 3rd semester. And that she, as a teacher, could demand more from them as to the quality of activities."

c) "It's priceless: students motivated to do their best. This is what I believe in: students looking for information, innovation and seeking to present the best of themselves. They say it is a lot of work, but feel satisfied with the results. They learned."

4.2.3 *Characterization of invited entrepreneurs and professionals*

As for the six guests, local professionals and entrepreneurs, most of them (four) come from small and medium-sized companies concerning the fields of software, commerce, factories of cleaning products, ceramics, food – dairy, preserves, fish, pasta, beverages, who did not possess university graduation, and liberal professionals – a psychologist, a social worker, an architect, a nutritionist. They discussed issues referring to environmental issues, social responsibility, business management, training, innovations, strategies and technologies adopted, and other matters considered urgent. Below, we present a few testimonials:

a) "I'm glad to have been able to speak to a college audience, I felt valued. At the same time, I felt kind of insecure, since they have studied more than me. I noticed that they paid attention. I wish I had studied more, but had to work."

b) "There should be more initiatives like this, because they are leaving university and out there they'll have a hard time getting a

good job. I see in this the lack of bringing theory and practice together."

c) "On a daily basis, we work together, they need to know that one sector depends on the other. When they come to the company they don't seem to understand that."

d) "I was surprised when I read in the local paper about all the companies that participated in the project and felt very happy to see my name and my company in the article, I felt very proud to contribute to the students' formation, to pass on a little of my experience and of the company's life."

A paradox was presented: by encouraging students to pursue knowledge, time available for the *Atualidades* Project, facing the scale that students gave the activity, proved insufficient; and, at the same time, there are the contents of the subjects to be taught. All this limited to the subject's planning. At each presentation, students recognized that teachers' initiative was valid, and teachers felt challenged to try to do their best.

We found that the method developed by teachers could contribute to improving the academic life and the formation of entrepreneurial skills to solve local problems. However, we came upon traditional academic management's disregard, by not prioritizing different practices. We feel sure that other methods are in practice in the courses with no real monitoring, according to a study by Fischer (2003).

6   FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Despite initial resistance from students because of the difficulty or even the lack of the habit of reading newspapers to provide a learning experience for the professional world through updating, we believe the method is in full development due to the commitment of teachers and students to the improvement of higher education. Meanwhile, this gives rise to

an improvement in the performance of courses, through insertion in the market of professionals who are most prepared for the new reality.

A very significant gain concerns interdisciplinarity, considering that students brought subjects and guests involved in more than one field, highlighting the ideas of Morin (2005). Some cases are presented below:

a) For the Business Administration course:

• A cooperation network, called Blue Network Neighborhood Markets (Rede Azul de Mercados de Bairro): an administrator and a social worker; recyclable raw material products: an artisan and an administrator; a career plan: a psychologist; luxury ceramics: a designer and an administrator; a software company: management of scarce intellectual capital; technological innovation in manufacturing sustainable products.

b) For the Psychology course:

• Social responsibility: an administrator from the field of human resources; eating disorders versus psychological disorders: a nutritionist; coaching: a social worker. female entrepreneurship: an economist; environmental psychology: two architects and a social worker.

c) For the Nutrition course:

• Eating disorders: a psychologist; food waste: an agronomist; medicinal herbs as a business: a pharmacist.

The article's goal – which was to present an innovative teaching method not yet referenced in articles and scientific publications – was achieved. The results showed that students began reading newspapers, through analysis, synthesis and critical thinking about highlighted issues, both regionally and locally. Even more evident was the participation of professionals and entrepreneurs directly involved with the chosen topics, demonstrating local management practices, products and noteworthy services.

The contents of the subjects involved have gained new meaning. The project led to an

awakening as to the appreciation of local initiatives and professionals, based on the knowledge of a globalized reality.

The contribution of this paper lies in its demonstration that it is possible to contribute to the improvement of higher education, particularly in Business Administration courses, through innovation in teaching methods. Given the fragility displayed by students as to reading, teachers must join forces in order to awaken the creative potential of students and in the transforming power of environments that are considered discouraging, in realities where knowledge and skills are highlighted. It is the case of giving necessary momentum to educational projects highlighted in the curriculum guidelines issued by the Brazilian Law of Guidelines (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases). To this end, we present the challenge for teachers and students, who should constantly update themselves by reading and in initiatives, so as to be connected and in tune with the global context.

Since the method grew out of an urgent need to update reading about emerging issues and enable students to become a part of the labor market, as well as in the formation of entrepreneurial skills, the focus was on essentially empirical questions. Initially, its conception was not concerned with the scientific side of the process, in order to investigate studies and research as in this article. To this end, suggestions of necessary improvements to perfect the method are welcome.

Data analysis was based on the similarity of answers and testimonies, respecting the documentary records, so it is clear that the teaching method is in line with the educational pillars that form citizens, in terms of fostering research, scenario interpretation, writing, oral communication, criticism and entrepreneurial vision. Both data and experience indicate that it is an efficient and complementary method within academic education, respecting political, economic and social ideologies.

While students incorporated the method, contributing to its improvement every semester,

and highlighting it as an improvement to their formation, limitations concern the difficulty of making it legitimate to all courses. We believe further research is needed as to new teaching methods, effective ways of disseminating the initiatives of teachers, and the impact of the method presented on the behavior of students who have become active in the labor market, as well as constant revision and updating of the presented method, since it can also contribute to other fields of knowledge.

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