

Media literacy and the Cartographic Method: media literacy as a research methodology

Taisa Maria Laviani da Silva

Master's degree in Interdisciplinary Arts, Urban Studies and Sustainability from the Federal University of São João del-Rei and Social Scientist from FFC – Campus de Marília/UNESP. Member of the Study & Research Group in Educommunication at UFSJ (GEPEducomufsj). E-mail: taisalaviani@gmail.com. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5410-759X>.

Filomena Maria Avelina Bomfim

Professor in the Social Communication course and the Interdepartmental Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Program in Arts, Urbanities and Sustainability at UFSJ. Post-Doctorate in Humanities, Rights and Other Legitimacies from USP. Leader of GEPEducomufsj. E-mail: fmaabomfim@ufsj.edu.br. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8168-9967>.

José Rodrigues de Alvarenga Filho

Professor in the Psychology Department at the Federal University of São João del-Rei. Post-Doctorate in Psychology from the Federal Fluminense University. E-mail: joserodrigues@ufsj.edu.br. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6145-8491>.

Abstract: This article explores the methodological intersection between educommunication and the cartographic method through research conducted in zine-creation workshops with incarcerated women. Cartography, used as an intervention method, prioritized experiences and relationships in the research territory. It is concluded that the methodological union between educommunication and the cartographic method has transformative potential, promoting communicative ecosystems and advances in collective knowledge, in addition to solutions to contemporary challenges in academic and social research. Furthermore, it contributed to the recognition of educommunication as a research methodology.

Keywords: research methodology; educommunication; cartographic method; fanzine; women imprisonment.

Resumo: O presente artigo explora a interseção metodológica entre a educomunicação e o método da cartografia, a partir de oficinas de criação de zines realizadas com mulheres em situação prisional. A cartografia, empregada como método interventivo, priorizou vivências e relações no território de pesquisa. Conclui-se que a união metodológica entre a educomunicação e o método cartográfico tem potencial transformador, promovendo ecossistemas comunicativos e avanços no conhecimento coletivo, além de soluções para desafios contemporâneos na pesquisa acadêmica e social. Ademais, contribuiu para o reconhecimento da educomunicação enquanto metodologia de pesquisa.

Palavras-chaves: metodologia de pesquisa; educomunicação; método da cartografia; fanzine; mulheres em situação prisional.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to broaden the reflection on the methodological character of educommunication, exploring its potential as a research methodology and its intersections with the Cartographic Method. The work is based on the dissertation entitled *Ofizines entre muros: An Educommunicative Practice at the APAC Women's Unit in São João del-Rei.*, developed by Taisa Silva (2023) and under the guidance of Professor Dr. Filomena Bomfim in the Interdepartmental Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Program in Arts, Urbanities and Sustainability (PIPAUS), at the Federal University of São João del-Rei (UFSJ).

The research analyzed zine-making workshops conducted with incarcerated women, highlighting educommunicative action as a research methodology. During the process, it became clear that the movements articulated by the clues of the cartographic method (Passos; Kastrup; Escóssia, 2009; Passos; Kastrup; Tedesco, 2016)¹ dialogue with the relational foundations of educommunication, resulting in theoretical, practical, and methodological potential. Both cartography and educommunication share characteristics such as participation, inclusion, and intervention, strengthening communicative ecosystems in investigative processes.

Although the classical paradigm of the scientific method has historically contributed to the consolidation of modern science, its rigid structure would not support the procedural and relational nature of the research presented here. The methodological experience—influenced by educommunication and cartography—demanded openness to the unpredictability and singularity of the experiences that emerge from the territory. The cartographic method encourages the researcher's active participation and sensitive listening, allowing them to follow the ecosystem of relationships and symbolic productions that are configured in the investigative act itself. Similarly, educommunication, as a dialogical and counter-hegemonic practice, challenges the traditional parameters of neutrality and universality by valuing collectively produced knowledge. Thus, the investigative process described in this article demonstrates that open and interventional methodologies are more suitable for research that seeks to follow the complexity of lived processes and that are constructed in the interrelation between subjects, territories, and experiences.

This text—structured in four sections—initially presents the concept of educommunication developed in Silva's research (2023). Next, it addresses the perspective of the Cartographic Method and its application. The third part describes the practice of workshops, where these methodological fields intersect. Finally, the concluding remarks evaluate the relationship between educommunication and cartography, reflecting on the methodological contributions of this intersection and on the theoretical and practical advancement of educommunication as a research methodology.

¹ The "clues of the cartographic method" were systematized in two works organized by Passos, Kastrup, and collaborators, published by Sulina in 2009 (vol. 1) and 2016 (vol. 2).

2. EDUCOMMUNICATION

The conceptual construction of educommunication was developed based on the reflections of Rosane Rosa (2014; 2020), Sátira Machado (2016), Donizete Soares (2006), and Ismar de Oliveira Soares (2000; 2002), who engage deeply with the thought of Paulo Freire (1976; 1983; 1987). These authors highlight the proactive, interventionist, and dialogical nature of educommunication, whose emphasis is on promoting communicative relationships that encourage the autonomy of individuals.

According to Donizete Soares (2006, p. 1, our translation), educommunication constitutes “a field of research, reflection, and social intervention,” centered on dialogical processes. This perspective understands communication not as transmission, but as the collective construction of discourses. In Ismar Soares’s view (2002), educommunication is organized as a “field of mediations,” which is structured in a relational and transdisciplinary manner, promoting communicative ecosystems that expand the possibilities of expression and learning.

Rosane Rosa (2014) develops a theoretical-methodological reflection in which she conceives of educommunication as an area capable of triggering emancipatory education and communication processes that can strengthen resistance in the peripheries of the world and expand the democratic experience. Furthermore, as Sátira Machado (2016) observes, it acts as a strategy to break the “monocultural logic” (Santos, 2006) that silences certain cultures.

Consistent with this pragmatic, dialogical, interventionist, and emancipatory perspective of doing science in a counter-hegemonic way, Educommunication, following in Freire’s footsteps, aims for subjects to critically exercise the right to learn to read, to pronounce, and to edit and re-edit their own world as shaped by the media and other social institutions (Rosa, 2020, p. 25, our translation).

Educommunicative praxis also aligns with dialogical communicative management, valuing collaboration and respect for singularities. As Freire (1987, p. 51, our translation) reminds us, “how can I dialogue if I alienate ignorance, that is, if I always see it in the other, never in myself?”. This dialogical vision is based on non-hierarchical relationships, creating spaces for emancipation and breaking the “culture of silence” (Freire, 1976).

Educommunication is understood as “a space for questioning, for seeking knowledge and constructing knowledge,” constituted “precisely by the multiple relationships it fosters” (Soares, 2006, p. 4, our translation). It carries objectives, content, and methodologies that diverge from traditional ideas proposed by technical and instrumental rationality. Following these thinkers, we can understand educommunication as an emancipatory and counter-hegemonic field of research, reflection, and intervention, which offers the possibility of exploring different paths in the practice of interventional research. In other words, educommunication is assimilated not only as a field of knowledge but also as a methodological-dialogical process, since it focuses on subjects and their communicative organization within the context of lived experiences.

Conducting research from an educommunication perspective invokes the word that emerges from dialogue—the word spoken collectively—and places the researcher not only in a field of research, but also in a communicative ecosystem. As Freire (1987, p. 50, our translation) elucidates:

It is not in silence that men are made, but in the word, in work, in action-reflection. But, if speaking the true word, which is work, which is praxis, is transforming the world, then speaking the word is not the privilege of some men, but the right of all men. Precisely for this reason, no one can speak the true word alone, or speak it for others, in an act of prescription, with which he steals the word from others.

In this direction, Silva's dissertation (2023) examined the educommunicative character of zine-making workshops, presenting the zine as an educommunicative tool capable of providing spaces for free expression and the sharing of stories, feelings, and positions. Especially for women in prison, zines opened up the possibility of expressing their anxieties, difficulties, dreams, and other issues that can contribute to the formulation of public policies that guarantee their dignity. The educommunicative experience —provided by the workshops —also encouraged participants to create stories and reinvent their identities while sharing life experiences and learning processes, strengthening affective bonds between them and with the researcher/educommunicator.

3. CARTOGRAPHIC METHOD

The research project “Zine Workshops Between Walls: An Educommunicative Practice at the Women's APAC in São João del-Rei” investigated the premise that zine workshops, as educommunicative practices, fostered the exercise of autonomy among women in prison through the exchange and creation of narratives. To this end, it relied on the Cartographic Method (Passos; Kastrup; Escóssia, 2009; Passos; Kastrup; Tedesco, 2016) as inspiration for creating at the research and intervention levels, following clues proposed by the method itself and listed according to the needs that arose during the investigation process.

The Cartographic Method proposes the monitoring of ongoing processes, prioritizing the researcher's experience and involvement. Unlike approaches that seek to represent objects of study, cartography emphasizes active participation and the joint creation of knowledge. Silva's research (2023) used this method to investigate workshops, characterizing them as existential territories that emerge from the relationships between participants.

Several fundamental principles of cartography were listed to guide and analyze the development of the research:

- 1) *Cartography as a research-intervention method* (Passos; Kastrup; Escóssia, 2009) constituted the main methodological strategy for investigating the proposed educommunicative practice, in which the participating individuals are not restricted to the position of object, but are recognized as subjects, maintaining

an active researcher-group interaction. The research, as an intervention, “brings forth realities that were not “given”, waiting for observation” (Passos; Kastrup; Tedesco, 2016, p. 175);

2) *The habitation of the territory* allowed for the monitoring of the educational communication practices of the workshops, as it adheres to the process without predetermining all the methodological procedures to be used, enabling the research path to be constructed at each encounter and from the habitation of the territory. According to the cartographic method, the idea of territory is not only linked to the geographical sense, but also to the creation of existential territories. Therefore, the territory is given in the relationships that constitute it, configuring itself as a collective research territory, based on the participation of those involved (Passos; Kastrup; Escóssia, 2009). The habitation of the research territory raises reflection on the functioning of the researcher’s attention, which is characterized by a concentration without focusing and open to the acceptance of the unexpected. Cartographic research implies an “attention on the lookout” capable of “deactivating or inhibiting selective attention, which usually dominates our cognitive functioning,” avoiding both passive relaxation and controlled rigidity; both subjectivism and objectivism (Passos; Kastrup; Escóssia, 2009, p. 48, our translation). Thus, it becomes possible to access elements originating from the inhabited territory that indicate an ongoing process. In this investigation, the poles become diluted, and the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity is the selection factor for the data collected for analysis;

3) *“Data harvesting”* is the term used by the cartographic method, due to the methodological inversion and interventionist character it proposes, where it is necessary to rearrange the meanings attributed to methodological procedures (Passos; Kastrup; Tedesco, 2016). The term “data harvesting”—instead of the commonly used “data collection”—aims to “affirm the character of production rather than representation of the known world,” since cartographic research “not only describes, but, above all, accompanies the production processes of the investigated reality” (Passos; Kastrup; Tedesco, 2016, p. 210, our translation). In cartographic research, “data is harvested because reality is cultivated in the act of knowing it” (Passos; Kastrup; Tedesco, 2016, p. 210, our translation). In line with this perspective, Silva’s research (2023) used participant observation and recording methods—such as recordings, transcripts, and a logbook—as well as zines created by the participants during the workshops, as data collection instruments.

Regarding the methods listed for data collection, participant observation is understood as “a commitment to learning by doing, similar to that of the apprentice” (Ingold, 2015, p. 13), from a constructivist perspective of knowledge that seeks to establish itself “with people, instead of doing studies about them” (Ingold, 2015, p. 13, our translation), as well as helping to undertake a dialogical construction of knowledge. The records follow what the clues of cartography suggest, where “the work of research should always be accompanied by the recording not only of what is researched, but also of the research process

itself.” (Passos; Kastrup; Escóssia, 2009, p. 172, our translation). Records of the meetings and educommunicative experiences were used as a technique for process analysis, complementing the act of restitution of the research process. Thus, participant observation — combined with records such as field diaries and artistic productions — allowed capturing the complexity of the territories investigated;

4) “*Process analysis*” is the term presented in the clues of the Cartographic Method and corresponds to the monitoring of processes—since analysis in cartography is also in the procedural order—, being less concerned with establishing a distance from the object and more with highlighting the plane of collective experience (Passos; Kastrup; Tedesco, 2016).

Process analysis depends on a retreat from the “given” character of meaning in research, as if it were self-evident or necessary. Process analysis aligns itself with experience, which is quite different from claiming that it relies on evidence. Indeed, to assert that experience presents us with what is evident would only reveal the irrelevance of the analysis itself (Passos; Kastrup; Tedesco, 2016, p. 198, our translation).

In the analysis phase carried out by Silva (2023), data collected from interventions through workshops are gathered—evidence of lived reality that serves to problematize the configuration of the inhabited research territory—which includes: the speeches; the recorded narratives; the zines produced; the relationship with the institution, among others. These singular events—fragments of a reality in motion—connect and allow for mapping the territory and its mode of functioning, considering the objectives of the research in question.

5) “Mapping is connecting affects that surprise us” (Passos; Kastrup; Tedesco, 2016, p. 63); this is the clue that contributes to listing and problematizing the indications of the researched reality, called by Silva (2023, p. 84, our translation) “problematizing indications”. These indications represent the attention of the researcher-cartographer provoked by something that affects him within the territory of analysis, which is constituted by the workshops. The research was conducted at the Women’s Unit of the Association for the Protection and Assistance of Convicts in São João del-Rei, with women in prison. However, when analyzing the evidence in the cartographic research, “the aim is not to provide an explanation for the event,” but rather to “restore to the data its character as an event” (Passos; Kastrup; Tedesco, 2016, p. 196, our translation) and to interrogate the dynamics of the territory’s functioning. “What drives analysis in cartography, therefore, are problems” (Passos; Kastrup; Tedesco, 2016, p. 177, our translation), and each piece of evidence traces the immersion in the process and the emergence of the collective of forces (Passos; Kastrup; Escóssia, 2009), as well as the effects produced by the proposed intervention.

The convergence points between cartographic and educommunicative methodology allowed for a more dialogical investigative and analytical process, based on experience and the blurring of the hierarchy between researcher and research object. Similarly, it contributed to the articulation of a communicative

ecosystem, which favored the conditions for people's expression and enhanced the actions of an intervention-research project. The consolidation of a communicative ecosystem reaffirms—within the educommunicative methodology—the openness to the possibility of diversification and decentralization of knowledge and indicates—just as the cartographic method does—a methodological inversion along with an emphasis on process monitoring. Therefore, communicative ecosystems configure a space outside the banking and monocultural logic, contributing both to the consolidation of an educommunicative methodology and to the approach adopted by the cartographic method, favoring dialogicity, interactions, the inhabitation of the research territory, and the consideration of different narratives and knowledge.

4. ZINE WORKSHOPS: SPACES OF METHODOLOGICAL INTERSECTION

As Celina Muniz (2010, p. 16) states, “fanzines act as links in social ties and convey particular affections and aesthetics,” and therefore, their creation can be conceived as a “practice of self-invention, through which individuals constitute themselves and recognize themselves as subjects by experiencing the function of authorship” (p. 19, our translation). By materializing an intention as resistance to the discourses echoed by institutions and hegemonic media, zines become an appeal for the survival of an identity that does not want to be erased, while not wishing to be part of a homogeneous public without its own identity.

Workshops for creating zines, on the other hand, constitute a collective space focused on the manual production of individual and/or group zines. To this end, themes are chosen and several artistic techniques are developed—such as collage, manual interventions on photographs, handmade bookbinding, among other possibilities—that can be used in the production of zines. In the research in focus, they were conceived as collective spaces of expression and creativity, in which women in prison could share stories and experiences. Inspired by Freire's (1983) “circles of culture,” the workshops followed a dialogical structure, promoting active participation and the exchange of knowledge. Therefore, the stages, the themes addressed, the organization of the workshops, and other decisions were subject to discussion among those involved and, consequently, subject to modifications.

The practice of zine workshops described by Silva (2023)—although open to changes—was organized as follows: 1) investigation of the students' universe and identification of generating themes; 2) presentation of the concept of fanzine; 3) sensitization to the exercise of writing and provocation for the construction of narratives; 4) creation of individual and collective zines as an exercise in writing and collage; 5) debate on the process of creation and sharing of the zines produced; 6) publication of the zines in

a digital column of the UFSJ extension program “Vertentes news agency: educommunication and regional journalism in Campo da Vertentes – MG State” (Vertentes Agência de Notícias [VAN], 2023), under the coordination of the dissertation advisor discussed in this article.

What emerged from the research presented is that these spaces of affection opened up by the media—in this case, zines—constitute forums in which educational communication can take place. The practice of zine workshops showed evidence that the techniques and methods used are closely aligned with the educational communication methodology, both by fostering a dialogical process and by prioritizing the creation and circulation of new discourses, which were constructed during the communicative process itself.

Connected to the zine workshops, educommunication has proven to be an interventional research methodology capable of promoting reflection and intervening in the context in which it is embedded. Furthermore, it has shown effectiveness in consolidating a communicative ecosystem, helping to delineate and inhabit the research territory. The production of zines, in turn, was used as a strategy for “data collection”—in this case, different perspectives on the reality of Brazilian female prisons were gathered, directly from narratives recorded by women who experience the contradictions and complexities of deprivation of liberty. These products—in addition to being objects of art and communication—can guide and direct changes in the prison environment, considering the voices of the subjects directly affected by this structure.



Figure 1: Female students producing a collective zine at the APAC Feminina in São João del-Rei

Source: Authors' personal collection (2022).



Figure 2: Reproduction of an excerpt from the zine “Love in Prison” by Nicole

Source: Authors’ personal collection (2022).



Figure 3: Reproduction of the zine by Raisa, Naiane, Carla and Roberta

Source: Authors’ personal collection (2022).

Thus, zines—beyond being works of art—became methodological tools, enabling the “harvesting” of narratives that revealed the contradictions and challenges of the prison system. Additionally, the publication of these productions in digital columns broadened the reach of the participants’ voices, promoting dialogue with the external public and reinforcing the interventionist dimension of Silva’s (2023) research. Beyond academic contributions, the zines highlighted the importance of art as a tool for cultural and social mediation with potential to contribute to the discussion on public policies for social inclusion. The creation of zines boosted the self-esteem of the participating women, demonstrating that artistic creation is also a political practice of resistance. These productions engage with broader issues—such as gender, identity, and human rights—reinforcing the relevance of the interaction between the Cartographic Method and the educommunicative methodology to increase the visibility of these demands. In this way, the intersectional nature of interdisciplinary research becomes apparent.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: THE POTENTIAL OF EDUCOMMUNICATION AS A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The workshops presented here demonstrate how dialogical practices can transform contexts of exclusion into spaces of resistance and expression. Their potential for action has also been expanded by establishing—not only intuitively, but also rationally—interfaces with educommunication, showing that media literacy transcends the theoretical field by promoting active participation, autonomy, and dialogue as the basis for knowledge construction.

The study developed contributed to the understanding of educommunication as a methodological approach and strengthened the assumption that it is from the relationships between subjects in the inhabited territory that the production of knowledge occurs and is re-signified, considering not only the educommunicative practice proposed by the research, but also the path taken by the educommunicator-researcher. The analyzed research reaffirms the importance of participatory and dialogical methodologies in academic research, as a strategy to overcome the methodological rigidity common in the universe of disciplinary academic research.

The relationship established at the education-communication interface implies a theoretical-methodological perspective that surpasses the technocratic bias of traditional and closed knowledge structures, leading us to a set of categories and actions within the research field aimed at strengthening a communicative ecosystem and guaranteeing the exercise of freedom of expression for participating individuals. In this way, the methodological principle of research as a “doing with” and not merely a “study about” (Ingold, 2015) is emphasized, based on a constructivist perspective of knowledge. This methodological movement implies the participation and involvement of the educommunicative study

objects, requiring a dialectical relationship between participation and distancing (Citelli; Soares; Lopes, 2019), subjectivism and objectivism.

The integration between educommunication and the Cartographic Method has proven to be a powerful and innovative intersectional methodological approach. The territorial dwelling proposed by cartography reinforces the dialogical and dialectical stance required of the researcher-media literacy educator. This stance allows us to analyze the process, highlighting the plane of collective experience and, within this processual plane—cultivated collectively—to gather data, that is, to connect the affects that surprise us within the territory of analysis, considering the dynamics of the territory’s own functioning. Finally, the interrelation of educommunication with the Cartographic Method has contributed to highlighting the potential of educommunication as a research methodology that allows for a more dialogical investigative and analytical process, based on experience and the blurring of the hierarchy between “researcher” and “research object.”

In turn, the cartographic method enhanced the procedural and relational nature of the research, reinforcing the idea that knowledge emerges from collective interactions. Thus, the interrelation between these fields contributes to theoretical and practical advances in the understanding of educommunication as a research methodology. By valuing human relationships, dialogue, and collective creation, this approach presents itself as a robust and transformative alternative to the contemporary challenges of academic and social research.

Future research could expand the use of zines and other educational communication practices in different contexts of vulnerability, as well as contribute to exploring other paths—considering the academic research process itself and the relationship between participants, the researcher, and the inhabited territory—instead of trying to fit the research into a predetermined path. Thus, the dialogue between the cartographic method and educommunication can continue to produce theoretical and practical advances, reinforcing the relevance of these methodologies in the field of Human and Social Sciences.

Furthermore, the reflection promoted in this article seeks to contribute to the consolidation of educommunication as a research methodology—given that this is a recent area of knowledge and still has few investigations in this sense. The study presented in this article records evidence in academia that media literacy methodology—aligned with other methodologies (or not)—can contribute to research in the field of Human Rights and related areas to develop and/or strengthen the elaboration of public policies for incarcerated people or those subject to other social vulnerabilities, in order to value the experiences and perspectives of individuals directly involved in processes of this nature.

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