



## **The study of the social environment as an innovate active methodology in teaching Social Doctrine of the Church in Centro Universitário FEI**

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### **Abstract**

This article is a report of my experience as a Church's Social Doctrine in Centro Universitário FEI (São Paulo, Brazil), using the study of the social environment as active methodology in teaching this discipline. One of the bases is the students doing a social action in a third sector institution, which they have to develop a support project according to social institution needs. The general objective was present an innovative way in how this knowledge of Church's Social Doctrine is explained and communicated of the students mentioning the strategy and achievements results. The study consists in my direct observation about the students' experiences and their testimony. I concluded that the methodology favors the students a social and a personal learning, once it encourages the action using all their set of skills to realize and gratitude experience which brings visible results to benefited entities and personal lives expanding social actions and professional exercise perspective.

Keywords: Teaching. Active methodologies. Social Environment Studies. Social Doctrine of the Church.

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## 1. Introduction

The Centro Universitário FEI<sup>1</sup> has always been characterized by the intention to offer your students a solid humanistic background, fitting the technological and scientific contents of its courses. Due to its catholic identity and Ignatian inspiration, FEI has set its own mission as: “provide our students knowledge through all necessary ways, aiming the construction of a developed human fair society” (Retrieved January 30, 2021, from <https://portal.fei.edu.br/>). Although this is not an exclusive role of any specific institution department (once those concerns should be integrated in any educational task performed) it has been traditionally linked to its Legal and Social Sciences Department. Indeed, is set to this sector a double-faced mission: a) contribute to the professional academic training (which is done through disciplines like Sociology, Law and Ecology); b) contribute to the human and Christian formation (through disciplines like Philosophy, Church’s Social Doctrine and Ethic).

In this context and departing of the conviction that the Church’s Social Doctrine (DSI in Portuguese initials) has the present and pertinent actual inputs, Cemtro Universitário FEI is introducing it as mandatory discipline for all the graduation courses. It is offered twice a year to the students from the third cycle of the course.

This content is introduced to the students through an active methodology, the environment study. For the engineering students of the daytime period, beyond the reflection activity done in the classroom, the methodology also stimulates the social action in a third party entity, in which the students should develop a support project to a social institution needs, with close connection to the content of the course.

According to Berbel (2011, p.29), “the active methodology is based on ways to develop the learning process, using real or simulated experiences, aiming the solving conditions, with success, of the challenges arising the essential activities of the social practice in different contexts”. Fini (2018) defines active learning methodology emphasize the student protagonist. The author also include that it is a broad process in which the main feature is the student insertion as the principal responsible for his/her own learning, committing with its level.

The active didactic, according to Mello, Neto and Petrillo (2019), emphasizes methods and technics as teamwork, cooperative activities, individual study reflection and research methods, both in experience learning organization and methods selection. The student is stimulated to work in a single free way to watch, experience, create and execute, develop reflective and critical capability. Working with college students, learning through problematization and/or problem solving enables the active involvement of the students with their own professional formation process.

Following this model, the professor acts as a learning encourager and advisor, favoring the students' participation. So, it is required the use of innovative strategies which are ruled by theoretical and practical relation and knowledge improvement based on the students' previous experiences, using dialogical and reflexive practice on research teaching, improving the dialogue hall and the classroom learning (Leal, Miranda & Casa Nova, 2017).

Thus, this article aims to show the innovative way of this DSI knowledge is touched and shared to the students by the process of social environment studies, as the methodology assumption which guides my own actions, the strategy and contents of the DSI course turned to Engineering students, also marking the difficulties and reached results.

## **2. The discipline Church's Social Doctrine at Centro Universitário FEI**

The discipline Church's Social Doctrine (DSI in Portuguese initials) aims to promote the reflection about economic, social, political and cultural reality in which we live in Brazil and in the world under the light of Gospel and Magisterium of the Church, using also the contribution of Human Sciences.

The DSI seeks to identify judgment criteria and action principles which enable the actual complex reality facing, whose raised challenges by the cultural and religious pluralism and of moral options, request the personal and collective responsibility questioning the relation of nature, technic and moral. Although the discipline is based on the evangelical message, its goals are far from doctrinal: it's based to propose the free reflection of the students to certain anthropological conceptions and explain its social consequences. Indeed, the Catholic Church understands the principles of its Social

Doctrine has universal value and could also be shared by the non-believer or the ones who are following different religious orientation. As far as it is based on human reason and natural law, one of the DSI basic propositions is precisely the defense of religious and conscience freedom, understood as essential factor to the build a more fraternal and fairer social live.

The discipline of Church's Social Doctrine starts on the unconditional defense of human person, his/her dignity going through all concrete circumstances of life as the conditions of live in family, in education, at work, country and in the world. It proposes equally a reflection about the State and society nature, stating the foundation of human rights, the subsidiarity and solidarity principles, highlighting the role the social entities perform to the fortification of social creative and freedom, as the political activity value in favor of the justice implantation.

### **3. The social work as a teaching tool at the University**

To promote a reflection about the Church's Social Doctrine content and your application in the same moment, the discipline encourages the students to do a solidarity action project in the third sector. This practical work is developed in stages that happen during all semester.

It is important emphasize the understanding of how a social institution works and realize an action project to support this institution, it is an important part of the discipline Church's Social Doctrine. This is not a complementary action or just an illustrative action about some topics covered in the discipline, as human rights or solidarity, but one of the stages that support the course.

As already mentioned, this action is part of the active methodology of the social environment studies. The social environment studies are an interdisciplinary strategy applied to the teaching of several areas, such as Geography, History, Law, Medicine, Social Sciences, among others, in a perspective that works with concepts and skills to perceive situations and make decisions. The methodology inserts the student in the face of a situation in which their must acts as a professional. And it allows them know, get information and analyze various aspects of a specific environment and "shows a logically structured sequence: situations that lead students to problematize their reality;

strategies for the collection and analysis of acquired data from this reality; and development intervention actions in the studied context". (Lopes & Pontuschka, 2009, p.43). The social environment study has as a fundamental step the fieldwork, through which it is possible to realize a movement of plural apprehension and embracing of the physical environmental, historical, cultural, environmental and economic. (Sutil, Freitas, Luciano & Bitencourt, 2017).

These same authors still emphasize that the objectives of using the social environment studies as a didactic strategy are: to create conditions for the student get in touch with the surrounding reality, promoting the study of various aspects in a direct way, objective and orderly; provide the acquisition of knowledge, historical, economic, social, political, scientific, artistic, in a direct way through the lived experience; develop skills to observe, research, interview, collect, organize and systematize the collected data; analyze and get conclusions; use different ways to expression to describe what was observed; favor the integration of the various curricular components, make the student understand, in an integrated way, the physical, economic, social, political and artistic facts, as they appear in reality. The social environment studies involve the exploration of the collected materials, from these data it is realize a synthesis and exposure of the results involving the systematization of the information obtained and recorded as well as the impressions and reflections of the participants.

So, in the first class of the course, the students are invited to split into small groups (from 4 to 6 students) and receive the activity script, with the objectives, instructions and deadlines.

Each group must identify and freely choose a third sector institution<sup>2</sup>. Initially the groups must visit the chosen institution and do a field research (see appendix A) - and this is one of the fundamental stages of the social environment studies. With this research it is intended to know more systematically the way how men and women in a determinate space and time organize their experience, understand their needs, their desires and their struggles with victories and failures. Thus, during fieldwork, the students must immerse themselves in the entity's daily life.

To facilitate the field research, the groups receive a form with the main information to be obtained. The initial objective is to know the institution, how it works, the service provided, its service capacity, daily life, history, values, the revenue, its

relationship with the State, and its main needs. It should be noted that although the students have to obtain some information through this set of questions, there is an opportunity for students ask questions about other points during the conversation, bringing some spontaneity and creativity of both interviewers and interviewees. The students are also encouraged to collect this data through photographic records, filming, possibly documents in different formats and notes.

Besides, it is part of this step not only to ask the person responsible of the entity about the main problems but observe carefully what is ahead of them. Collected all data and identified the main problems of the entity, the group must need to discuss internally and choose which difficulty it would like to act in order to try to solve it.

Then, the students must to prepare and formalize a project - which answers fully or partially the problem or need identified - with objectives, justification, material and human resources necessary and timelines. After submitted and approved by the teacher, the group of students presents the proposal to the institution and, being also approved by it, set a date to start the implementation of the project. The students have about 3 months to put their ideas into practice.

The solidarity action projects are developed in two steps: service provision external to the entity and within the entity itself. Some examples of initiatives that students take: participation in events, bazaars, furniture renovation, painting of rooms, collection campaigns of cleaning products and food, organization of events or cultural and recreational activities for children, teenagers, elderly, etc.

After the 3 months to implement the project, each group presents to the other colleagues, in class, the institution that choose - with the data get in the field research - , the needs focused, the project developed, and the results achieved. In this presentation, created by audiovisual resources, usually the groups also tell about their difficulties, attempts, show empirical data, photos and videos, if the result was satisfactory or not, what could be improved, if they would do something different, some important difficulty during the project etc. It is also the moment where each one tells about the project and their personal experience.

The analyses about the social environment studies involves the production of reports used for discussion in a seminar way, photographs exhibition, videos exhibition taken at the institution, presentation about the subject seen during the lived experience,

photographic exhibition reflecting the situations experienced the environment studied, among other ways of assessment. Because of that, each group must deliver a written report regarding the procedures of the steps realized and a reflective text about the place visited. In this report, there should be an introduction, contextualizing the entity's subject in that reality<sup>3</sup>, the project itself, exploring the most significant points of the visit and the observations containing the photos taken by the students, and the conclusions, reflecting about questions that making the association between what they could observe in the experience of studying the environment with the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church (human dignity, subsidiarity, solidarity and common good).

It is the teacher's role, during social action, to guide and coordinate planning, execution and evaluation, suggest problems for study, stimulate research, guide students in proposing hypotheses and to help them get conclusions from their observations and research.

#### **4. What is possible to learn from those experience: Testimonials**

In the second half of 2019<sup>4</sup>, many groups choose to participate of events to fund raising which guarantee, in many ways, the partial budget of the entity (e.g.: APAE<sup>5</sup>, Lar São Vicente de Paulo<sup>6</sup> e Lar da Mamãe Clory<sup>7</sup>, in the city of São Bernardo do Campo). Other groups work in internal improvements of the chosen institutions, as the organization of the used books, cloths and furniture selling, which become also revenue to the entities. Other groups also work on food, cleaning and hygiene products, and toys collection campaigns.

There were numerous leisure activities for the elderly (bingos and afternoon teas) and for the kids (scavenger hunts and **thematical** parties). One of the most tangible results of the developed activity in the second half 2019 is that the Instituição Criança Vida Nova<sup>8</sup> has now its own library built by FEI students.

Besides that, other group of students strengthened the school reinforcement in the Instituto Meninos de São Judas<sup>9</sup>, with math classes. Other group joined the project to support math teachers of São Paulo State school system coordinated by Instituto Fernand Braudel<sup>10</sup>, which allows the group to check the deficiencies of public education.

The type of work is chosen accordingly to the entity needs but also to the willing and creative of the group. The work starting point is in the entity, which, being watched carefully, suggests ways of intervention and moves the students. This is a hard work period and occasion to see unknown individual skills. When looking solutions to the arose problems during the project, many times the students face obstacles created by the entity or circumstances which go further the group capable role (e.g.: budget or knowledge about education, marketing, fund raising or engineering issues).

The fieldwork presents challenges, raises new ideas and require chances in the initial project, which needs to be rethought several times. Cleaning tables, prepare pizzas, serve snacks, cut the grass, organize leisure activities with kids or being a partner to a small talk to elderly are not overlooked activities by students once their respond to the entity needs, that is why those activities are valuable.

However, it is necessary determination and effort to overcome the obstacles that arise to realize the action, as told by the student K. who prepare with her colleagues an special activity to the elderly of Lar São Vicente de Paulo: a tour to Santos Aquarium<sup>11</sup>, a snack and a walk on the beach.

“In the very first visit we could notice that, although all the support they receive in asylum, the elderlies are attention needy, mainly that ones who has no more family or do not receive frequent visits. In this moment the tour idea came up which would be aimed at improving self-esteem and quality of life of those people. I admit that I thought it would be easy to realize the tour, but during the process I realized it was not that easy. Many problems and unforeseen arose but were overcome. Although all the effort the reward was much bigger because there is no way to describe the happiness I felt to see each smile on their face. That is a feeling I have never felt, the satisfaction of overcome the obstacles and reach the goal: create a moment of joy to the ones who need it the most” (K., engineering student).

To help children and teenagers with math tutoring at Instituto Meninos de São Judas Tadeu was also a challenge to a group of students who, with creativity and commitment, sought ways to respond to the local needs.

“When we initiated our visits in the Instituto, I realized the children have aversion and disinterest by the work we were proposing. But, after some visits, I realized the aversion and disinterest was actually the fear that the activity would



be one or two days long and they were afraid to look silly exposing their school doubts. After some visits and an individual follow-up focused on their doubts, I realized the aversion and disinterest became will and empathy. This change was clear when children could see us in the hall and they say: 'You are back!' or the times they came running to me with a notebook, a pencil and the eyes full of doubts asking 'how can I make accounts with fraction? Do I need to simplify it?' This children behavior change made me understand and experience the 'fuel' which moves the Institution crew to help them. Facing that, we decided to give them something bigger than the school reinforcement and we created the 'Science Day', which was a very funny and didactic day for them, where each single scientific experience they act in they asked if that was 'witchcraft'" (L., engineering student).

The social work is based on personal learning because it is always an opportunity to each one of the students to enlarge the knowledge about the world and about themselves, creating their personality, values and principles.

"I should confess in the beginning it was not convenient to work voluntary, I did not like this kind of activity, I have always hate working for free. Well, why should I offer my effort for nothing if I could be resting at home? But I did not know that was growing inside me silently the welfare sensation, a sensation of accomplished I will never be able to describe exactly. This feeling fed me and still makes me wish to be useful to the society" (G., engineering student).

Those are another student words:

"Due to the moments I had at the entity, I could experience human values, which sincerely, I could believe it was possible to find nowadays. I believed the actual world was a greedy place where people were only moved by personal interests. Well the reality I faced was completely different. There are people willing to work for the future of the ones who has a whole live ahead, and the most important, people who do it for personal satisfaction" (W. engineering student).

The contact with social entities tests the individual and non-transferable responsibility which is everyone's duty on social and political level. It is frequent that some students become volunteers at the visited entities or get involved in different volunteer projects. But this contact favors the student consciousness about how valuable the group action is and how important to avoid the public assistance

dependency. They are capable to offer creative and effective solutions to social problems, emphasizing the belief that State should play a subsidiary role to promote the integral develop of all human being.

“Somehow, we verified and lived a very small scale of what could be implemented to the entire society: the fraternal and humanitarian action born from the consideration of the person as the life center and dignity gifted. [...] The solidarity, with its principles, is the way to reach the social justice providing cohesion and, at the same time, autonomy between people. Result of individual will, it must be stimulated and organized by the groups and reinforced and subsidized by the State, which role should be oriented to the person” (H., engineering student).

We can ensure the social work is a valuable instrument to the personal formation, the only way to create economic and social relations oriented to justice realization and the collective welfare.

“To work at Lar Mamãe Clory, no doubt, was a big event to me, especially because this kind of work opened the horizons about what a human being should be. Working here I was taught to help because the meaning of life, in my point of view, is to be useful” (G., engineering student).

The moment the students face the goals and operation of the chosen entity, which aims to support the needs of the ones who are frequently forgotten by the society (e.g.: needy children and teenagers, elderlies, homeless, disabilities people) the solidarity, the person centrally and the subsidiarity come out the **theoretical** plan to be recognized as a part of the social life.

Lastly, it is important to see the student realize the vast solidarity network existing in Brazil, based by thousands of social entities which are born from the individual or collective initiative to supply the needs of education, healthcare and culture sectors promoting silently the social development. The students realize those entities are a visible expression of the charity and they support the social needs in a more humanized way.

“The solidarity changes the social relationship. It is about an act which brings other people hope, changing the idea of an unhappy and non-future

world. If this work is taken seriously by the ones who practice, the result is satisfactory because you can invade the reality of the ones who are discrediting the live and transform this thinking in action to change. The moment that it reaches groups of people, their social relationships which were full of preconception barriers and inability feeling before, are now open for new realities” (L., engineering student).

In this case, draws attention the testimony by student B. during his presentation back in June 2019. He worked at Lar da Criança Emanuel<sup>12</sup>. At the end of his presentation, B. asked to say a personal testimony telling us that three years before he was selected to the Junior Badminton Brazilian Team where he met another athlete who lived in a favela of Rio de Janeiro. This athlete told B. his life had changed with a social project acting in his neighborhood. Because of that, he was able to leave his previous job as drug dealer. He said that smiling. But two years later this athlete was back to the drug business and left badminton although they keep in touch through social media. B. also told the night before his work presentation of Church’s Social Doctrine he had been communicated his friend was killed in an Army operation in the favela that he lived. So, B. concluded the perception that how important the social institutions were to change people live and how it could save lives although in this case the final was tragic.

## **5. Dialogue with Ignatian Pedagogy**

The experience that we do in the discipline of Social Doctrine of the Church at the FEI dialogues, in my point of view, with an Ignatian Pedagogy in two points:

### **1) Person integral formation**

The Christian humanist formation should not be understood as a simple addendum to the formation of students in technological and management areas. The authentic Christian humanism want to foment an integral development, which does not only attend the requirements of economic and financial utility or the demands of the labor market, but which is sensitive to other dimensions equally essentials of human experience, such as the search for the meaning of our own existence and the demand for justice, for example.

“[...]Faced a deeply individualistic culture, the new humanism rescues the social and the justice. Face the loneliness, it is essential to rediscover solidarity. [...] Faced a culture that privileges the market to attribute value, it is necessary to rediscover gratuity and true freedom” (Montes, 2010).

## 2) University social insertion

Another important challenge of Jesuit Education is to train citizens capable of dialoguing with everyone and understanding the environment in which they play, proposing innovative solutions for the professional and social challenges that they faced (Companhia de Jesus<sup>13</sup>, 2009).

As effectiveness, the intention is not only to train good professionals, but also people who, in the exercise of their profession, can make decisions in favor of the collective welfare - or, to put it another way, people who are, in the words of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, former Principal of Society of Jesus, “men and women for the others” (Companhia de Jesus, 2009, p. 15).

In this way, the discipline wants to stimulate the student's discernment about the reality experiences in which they find himself, an important factor for the student to develop a critical and transforming vision. It is also necessary that students are faced experiences which they can understand themselves as a social protagonist, thus, when they can practice their citizenship, collaborating for the reality transformation with a view to a society development of a more just and human.

“[...] we consider that Christian inspired universities in the Ignatian way, in the next years should communicate to young university and offer our anthropological vision more comprehensive and cultivating the taste for the collective welfare and a way to understand the life whose ultimate and supreme reality is the love. [...] Even for those who do not have a political vocation, it is necessary to cultivate the social and public responsibility of their profession and business activity in which personal fulfillment is related to the achievement of a just society, which includes as a central objective to overcome the poverty” (Ugalde, 2013, np).

## 6. Conclusion

The classroom can become a space for discussion, centered on innovative paradigms, so that, from this perspective, it can develop skills in students that enable the development of critical thinking for the demands of our society. The teaching methodologies centered in the students allow that they learn through discovery, from the development of their analytical skills and motivation. The participation and involvement of the students has a great impact on their learning, as well as on the level of responsibility of each one with their own growth process. **The social environment studies works** to enrich the students' experience, develop a sense of reality, decrease the verbalism of the lectures, relate the University with the community, in addition training the observation, data collection and analysis, offering diverse materials to be worked in classroom.

Finally, we realize that the following skills are developed during the activity carried out in the discipline of Social Doctrine of the Church: learn itself, to deal with situations and contexts complexities; make decisions and act in the light of an ethical and humanistic framework; lead multidisciplinary teams, being able to understand, respect and value differences; communicate efficiently in written, oral and graphic forms; and analyze and understand the demand and users of engineering and its context to ask questions and give solutions for the area in question.

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## **Appendix A**

Questionnaire for Social Environment Studies

<b>Questionnaire for data collect</b>
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## Social Work - Social Doctrine of the Church Class

### 1. Institution Data:

Name:

Address:

Telephone: ( )

Historic:

Structure: building, house, equipment (leisure area, court, pool, office, etc.)

Headquarters? Yes ( ) No ( )

### 2. Features

#### Work performed by the entity

Methodology used:

**Service capacity: total :**                      **Current:**

**Clientele:** origin

Motivation:

What selection criteria are used?

( ) income

( ) needs? how do they evaluate?

( ) others

#### Daily Routine

Regular Activities:

#### Operation

#### Profile of Volunteers / Employees

Staff: how many?

Qualification: ( ) elementary school level ( ) high school graduate ( ) university level

For university level, how many?

**Work regime:** ( ) 40 h weekly ( ) more than 40 ; how much? ( ) less than de 40 ; how much?

**Volunteering** ( ) yes; from where ?

( ) no; why?

**Main areas of activity of the volunteers:**

Does the institution count on the involvement of the community, companies, associations? In what way?

### 2.3 Financial resources:

Monthly spend:

Sources:

#### 1. ( ) donations

( ) private individual : forms

( ) legal entity (companies, schools, groups, international institutions)

#### 2. ( ) profitable activities

( ) bazaar ( ) second-hand bookstore ( ) handicraft others:

3. ( ) parties : which, how many, periodicity

#### 4. Other ways of obtaining resources:

### 2.4. Relationship with the State and public bodies

Do you receive any direct assistance?? ( ) No ( ) Yes What kind?

Other forms of relationship:



## **2.5. What are the Institution's greatest needs?**

What is the greatest difficulty that the institution faces to continue its work?

( ) Obtaining resources ( ) qualified staff ( ) volunteers

Others:

Ideas, future projects?

## **Appendix B**

Some banners produced by students that explain the experience of social work in the discipline of Social Doctrine of the Church.

<https://bit.ly/3jcQCYh>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Centro Universitário FEI is a Brazilian Christian college with Jesuit inspiration founded by Father Saboia de Medeiros in 1942, which offers graduation courses to engineering, business and computation science segments and also postgraduation for business and engineering. FEI has about 8.000 students and its campus are located in São Paulo and São Bernardo do Campo, a city in the Great São Paulo metropolitan area.

<sup>2</sup> The choice of an institution is free so there are certain number of options: daycare centers, nursing homes, homeless shelters NGO's, special needs and drug addicted home, etc. Normally the chosen institution located near the FEI campus, the students homes or they are institutions that the students have previously relationship. About 250 students are part of the initiative each half of year – they are 50

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groups acting in 50 different entities. In some cases, more than one group acts in the same institution but in a different project. The projects need to be approved by the institution and are always guided by the discipline teacher.

<sup>3</sup> Every group should prepare the project bibliography with the research (including empirical data) about the institution goal. For example: the group acting in a nursing home will research about nursing homes in Brazil or São Paulo; the group acting in a daycare center will research about abandoned children in Brazil or São Paulo; and so on. This research is also guided by the discipline professor.

<sup>4</sup> The institution visitation and action are done since 2006 but it was interrupted by March 2020 according to the restrictions of Coronavirus pandemic. It will be resumed as soon as possible.

<sup>5</sup> Associação de Pais e Amigos dos Excepcionais, social organization which aims to promote integral attention to people with intellectual and multiple disabilities.

<sup>6</sup> Asylum located in São Bernardo do Campo.

<sup>7</sup> Daycare and nursing home located in São Bernardo do Campo.

<sup>8</sup> Institution which provides activities to children in need located in São Bernardo do Campo.

<sup>9</sup> Homeless shelter located in São Paulo.

<sup>10</sup> Think Tank located in São Paulo to overcome Brazilians institutional issues.

<sup>11</sup> Coast city located 38km far from São Bernardo do Campo.

<sup>12</sup> Institution focused in children in need located in São Bernardo do Campo.

<sup>13</sup> Portuguese translation of Society of Jesus. As the reference used was Brazilian, I kept the name in Portuguese.