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REFLECTIONS ON PAULO FREIRE'S RESEARCH ITINERARY: CONTRIBUTIONS TO HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to reflect on Paulo Freire's Research Itinerary as a theoretical-methodological framework developed within the Culture Circles and their contributions to health.

Method: the text was constructed with the support of the Freirean praxis, seeking to reflect on its method of work, which occurs in three dialectical and interdisciplinary phases: thematic research; coding and decoding; and critical unveiling. The research itinerary values the cultural and historical sources of the participants, which can be revealed in the Culture Circles.

Results: this framework is based on a critical-social pedagogy, which has an ethical commitment to emancipation and liberation from society to promote quality of life. For this to occur there are two fundamental elements in its philosophy: awareness and dialogue. These reflect a true exercise of transdisciplinarity, especially in the area of health, whose practices are aimed at the human being. Paulo Freire is an educator, based on a political-humanist vision, whose main concepts are: dialogue, culture, praxis, oppressor/oppressed, emancipation and Culture Circles

Conclusion: freirean praxis reflects reality and intervenes in such, theorizing it not pedagogically but in its political dimension. It is articulated with qualitative research, seeking to unveil social reality.

DESCRIPTORS: Methodology. Qualitative research. Health. Nursing. Autonomy.

REFLEXÕES SOBRE O ITINERÁRIO DE PESQUISA DE PAULO FREIRE: CONTRIBUIÇÕES PARA A SAÚDE

Objetivo: refletir acerca do itinerário de pesquisa de Paulo Freire como referencial teórico-metodológico desenvolvido no interior dos Círculos de Cultura e suas contribuições para a saúde.

Método: o texto foi construído com suporte da práxis freireana, buscando refletir sobre seu método de trabalho, que ocorre em três fases dialéticas e interdisciplinares: investigação temática; codificação e descodificação; e desvelamento crítico. O itinerário de pesquisa valoriza as fontes culturais e históricas dos participantes, que podem ser desveladas nos Círculos de Cultura.

Resultados: esse referencial está embasado em uma pedagogia crítico-social, que tem um compromisso ético de emancipação e libertação da sociedade para promover qualidade de vida. Para que isso ocorra há dois elementos que são fundamentais na sua filosofia: a conscientização e o diálogo. Esses refletem um verdadeiro exercício de transdisciplinaridade, especialmente na área da saúde, que tem suas práticas voltadas ao ser humano. Paulo Freire é um educador que se fundamenta em uma visão político-humanista, cujos principais conceitos são: diálogo, cultura, práxis, opressor/oprimido, emancipação e Círculo de Cultura.

Conclusão: a práxis freireana reflete a realidade e intervêm sobre ela, teorizando-a não pedagogicamente e sim na sua dimensão política. Articula-se com a pesquisa qualitativa, buscando o desvelamento da realidade social.

DESCRIPTORIOS: Metodologia. Pesquisa qualitativa. Saúde. Enfermagem. Autonomia.

REFLEXIONES SOBRE EL ITINERARIO DE INVESTIGACIÓN DE PAULO FREIRE: CONTRIBUCIONES PARA LA SALUD

RESUMEN

Objetivo: reflexionar sobre el itinerario de investigación de Paulo Freire como referencial teórico-metodológico desarrollado en el interior de los Círculos de Cultura y sus contribuciones a la salud.

Método: el texto fue construido con soporte de la praxis freireana, buscando reflexionar sobre su método de trabajo, que ocurre en tres fases dialécticas e interdisciplinarias: investigación temática; codificación y descodificación; y desvelamiento crítico. El itinerario de investigación valora las fuentes culturales e históricas de los participantes, que pueden ser desveladas en los Círculos de Cultura.

Resultados: este referencial está fundamentado en una pedagogía crítico-social, que tiene un compromiso ético de emancipación y liberación de la sociedad para promover calidad de vida. Para que esto ocurra hay dos elementos que son fundamentales en su filosofía: la concientización y el diálogo. Estos reflejan un verdadero ejercicio de transdisciplinariedad, especialmente en el área de la salud, que tiene sus prácticas orientadas al ser humano. Paulo Freire es un educador que se fundamenta en una visión político-humanista, cuyos principales conceptos son: diálogo, cultura, praxis, opresor/oprimido, emancipación y Círculo de Cultura.

Conclusión: la praxis freireana refleja la realidad e interviene sobre ella, teorizándola no pedagógicamente, sino en su dimensión política. Se articula con la investigación cualitativa, buscando el desvelamiento de la realidad social.

DESCRIPTORES: Metodología. Investigación cualitativa. Salud. Enfermería. Autonomía.

INTRODUCTION

The development of participatory research in health provides a great advance in the involvement of society and the participation of the subjects, true authors and conductors of research that, in a logical sequence of research actions, bring together both academic and social interests. By having dialogue as a key tool in conducting and implementing its steps, participatory research is characterized by understanding and valuing different knowledge, highlighting an ethical and politically committed science with social transformation.¹

The knowledge described and practiced by Paulo Freire seeks the "transformation" of men and women, among whom care and affection relationships are created, through an ethical and humanistic relationship based on respect for the human being and his values and beliefs. However, it goes further, bringing the understanding that every subject is the bearer of knowledge and are essential for establishing an articulation of love and exchanges.²

Paulo Freire affirms that "the empowerment of the subject," is necessary, which is the "liberation of the oppressed" that exists in every human being. But what does he mean by that? The clearest way to understand it is through your own biography, your life, and your practice.

The thinking and work of Paulo Freire (1921-1997) fundamentally reflects the context in which he lived at the beginning of his life journey in northeastern Brazil. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, when he began his adult literacy work half the population was illiterate, experiencing the culture of silence. His work reflects a real exercise of transdisciplinarity. Freire is an educator based on the internationalist humanist vision, his work is not a manual but stems

from a university of the alliance of practical theory.³ He was arrested during the military coup of 1964 and was exiled in Chile between the years of 1964 to 1969 under the Christian Democrat government of Eduardo Frei, where he consolidated his method of literacy and political pedagogical thinking, including his fundamental work, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", published in 1970, directly inspiring the formation of the English theory of empowerment.⁴

Paulo Reglus Neves Freire, a Brazilian, internationally recognized as one of the greatest educators of the twentieth century, "saw" the inability of people to self-recognize themselves as subjects of their lives, which limited them even more in glimpsing some possibility of change of that reality; in addition, he realized that these (the oppressed) were dominated by people who did not recognize them as whole human beings, they only valued them by serving them (the oppressors) and thus reaching their own interests.²

With all this reality rooted in his mind, Freire began his journey as an educator, where with a keen look at the real needs of these subjects, he developed the "Paulo Freire Method" of teaching, empowering and valuing the previous knowledge in these workers. His teachings echoed throughout the hemispheres of the globe and brought to light an understanding for the breakdown of existing paradigms.²

Although Paulo Freire does not explain his thinking through formal conceptual structures, he implicitly implies his worldview in the complexity of his works, especially in "Education as a practice of freedom" (1967), "Education and communication: rural extensionism" (1968) "Education in Change" (1979), "Pedagogy of Hope" (1992), "In the Shade of

this Hose" (1995), "Teacher Yes, Aunt no" (1997), "Pedagogy of autonomy" (1997) and "Pedagogy of indignation" (2000). In all his works, and from different angles, he seeks the subject's awareness, to recognize himself as a person.

Freire works mainly with the concepts of man, dialogue, culture, consciousness, transformation, praxis, and oppressor/oppressed, banking/liberating education, emancipation, and Culture Circles in his work and thinking. He uses the research itinerary as a working method, which comprises three distinct phases, interconnected dialectically: thematic research; encoding and decoding; and critical unveiling.⁵

For Paulo Freire, the dialogue "is this encounter of men, mediated by the world, to pronounce it, not exhausting, therefore, in the I-you relation."^{2:91} Following this, a list of preconditions for this dialogue as a creative act, occurs: a deep love of the world and people, humility, an intense faith in people, in their capacity to do and create, the climate of trust, a move to hope and critical thinking.⁶

Paulo Freire's *modus operandi* is a methodological option that is not widespread, however effective, because in this methodological strategy the Culture Circle is used, in which researcher and researched make reflections and discussions about reality and collectively seek to unveil and identify the possibilities of interventions. Through an action-reflection-action process, the participants are led to perceive themselves as authors of their stories and with this they become aware and are strengthened to modify their practices. This reflective process values the cultural and historical sources of individuals, which can be revealed in the Culture Circles.

The Culture Circle is a term created by Freire, represented by a dynamic space of learning and exchange of knowledge. Subjects gather in the education process to investigate themes of interest to the group itself. It represents a situation / problem of real situations, which lead to the reflection of reality itself, in order to decode it and recognize it.^{5,7}

Paulo Freire's methodological framework can be delineated as a qualitative research, whose commitment is the political transformation of reality, in which people actively participate in the exchange of knowledge of experiences. It is a methodological reference for the exchange of knowledge between participants and knowledge involved in social reality, giving voice and dialogue to the context in which people live. From the social situations, these seek a collective way of improving the understanding of reality and transforming it.

It would be like helping to change the customs of individuals and populations to improve their lives and transform society.

Qualitative research articulates with Freire's methodological reference, especially since it reflects the social context in which the participants live, through the dialogue promoted by the Culture Circle. The dialogue in Freire makes it possible to reveal the contradictions and limiting situations of the participants in the researched context, reflecting and unveiling what is hidden and boosting their creativity with new proposals for action on reality. This reference in conjunction with the qualitative research allows an integration between the person and the object, with involvement and encouragement so that new actions on the reality can be fulfilled.

Conflicts, contradictions, diversity or positivity that represent an existential situation of health of a given reality and that are experienced by men and women can be characterized through this methodology. Freire's dialogical conception broaden the frontiers of professional performance in an interdisciplinary and intersectorial perspective with greater solvability of health actions and better impacts in the indicators for the assisted population.⁵

Paulo Freire's work has been studied and used by many researchers in different areas of activity. The Laboratory of Research in Nursing and Health (LAPEPS), linked to the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), started its activities in 1994 and since then has been using the Freirean theoretical methodological reference in its studies. Formerly known as the Extension and Research Center for Nursing and Health Promotion/ (NEPEPS), this interdisciplinary group has the tradition of performing qualitative research, and the educational processes in health, with a participative character, being among its lines of studies which justifies the use of Paulo Freire's Research Itinerary.

The present study aims to reflect on Paulo Freire's Research Itinerary, as a theoretical-methodological framework developed within the Culture Circles and their contributions to health.

Paulo Freire's research itinerary

The research itinerary based on Freire represents a participative qualitative research approach with a liberating/emancipatory character. Thus, the schematic of Paulo Freire's research itinerary is shown in Figure 1 which was elaborated by the authors and based on an adaptation that systematizes the steps that constitute the method.⁸

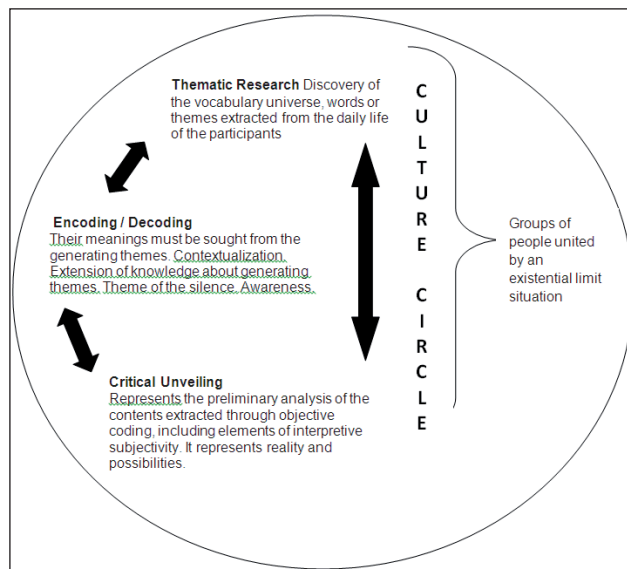


Figure 1 - Schematic of Paulo Freire's research itinerary

Therefore, the article entitled "Health promotion in basic care: a study based on the Paulo Freire method",⁹ in conjunction with his main works, and in the literature that deals with the theme, was used to reflect and operationalize each stage.

Thematic research

The first phase of the research itinerary is called thematic research, and is characterized by the initial dialogue, which seeks to construct education and critical thinking among the participants and the mediators of the research. In this stage the identification of the generating themes occurs, according to the reality of the subjects, through the vocabulary universe extracted from everyday life. Based on this, the problematization is happening to the extent that the problems are raised through dialogue, in which the participating subjects talk about the contradictions, the concrete and real situations in which they are experiencing here and now.²

Thematic research essentially consists of the awareness of reality and of self-awareness that initiates the liberating educational process.² What we seek to research is not men, but the thought and expression of reality, the conception of the world in which their generating themes are found, which are identified not only in the existential experience but also in the critical reflection of the relations between men / the world and men/men.^{2,5}

In view of the objective of "identifying and reflecting on whether health promotion actions comprehend the five Ottawa Charter strategies in

the work process of family health teams, as well as the facilities and difficulties for consolidating health promotion,"^{9: 4} the following generating themes emerged in the first Culture Circles: "individual care, immunization, collective care, reception, community actions, home visits, violence, intersectoriality, health team relationships, attention to the environment, leisure, school health, poor work organization, precarious material structure, difficulty in creating bonds, assistance programs, reference and counter reference, operational resources".^{9: 4}

Thus, the investigation of the generating themes are made permanent by the use of a conscientizing method, allowing to apprehend and to insert the men in a field of critical thought in its world. "This does not mean reducing solidifies the abstract, which would deny their dialectic, but have them as opposites that are dialectical in the act of thinking".^{2:161} This first stage of education as a problematizing practice is affirmed in the search for understanding of the world in its relationships with men and women, evolving from an inert reality, to a path in constant movement, with the awakening to the critical conscience made possible. Thus, the word is no longer an empty word, it is praxis, that is to say, people's action and reflection on reality and to transform that same reality.²

It should be noted that for the reliable recording of information from the Culture Circles, based on LAPEPS experiences, using this methodological framework since 1994, it is recommended to associate apprehension strategies, such as field journal annotations, audio recording and filming to enable a broader understanding of the discussions as well as present interrelationships and nonverbal expressions.

Encoding

With the generating themes, the second phase of the investigation was commenced, in which the identified themes are coded, revealing the contradictions and highlighting the representations of the experienced situations.²

Paulo Freire approaches the encoding of generating themes as a figurative situation that had previously been randomly apprehended and began to gain meaning insofar as these themes are dialogued, contextualized, and replaced the first naïve vision, with a critical and social view of the discussed subject.^{2,5} In the first case, one can use the visual, pictorial or graphic channel, the tactile or the auditory canal. In the second, the multiplicity of

channels.² The selection of the pictorial or graphic visual channel is influenced by the encoded theme and by the participants, in order to produce the didactic material.²

As the encoding (painted or photographed) is elaborated, the participants make their critical analysis, obeying some principles that guide visual confection, such as: 1) The encoded themes represent the reality of the people, which makes them able to be recognizable; 2) The encodings reveal the contradictions that are hidden, opening them up like a fan that drives their decoding; 3) The topics to be discussed cannot be too explicit because they can be transformed into propagandistic encodings, in which people find difficult to discuss and 4) Encodings should not be too puzzling, avoiding a guessing game whereby people cannot perform critical analysis of the situation.²

This phase of the method represents the existential situations, in which the encoding offers different possibilities of analysis in its decoding, which avoids the direction of the propagandistic encodings. The codifications are not ready-made phrases but knowable objects that incite the critical reflection of men and women on the experienced reality.²

The coding of the generating themes occurred from the registration of the keywords of the participants on brown paper boards and panels, using brushes of different colors. These words represented the potential and challenges of health promotion for the participants at that time.

Decoding

The decoding is the analysis of the experience situation, a dialectical moment in which the participants begin to admire and to reflect on their action. At this stage, they regain their reflective power and recognize themselves as beings capable of transforming the world. It highlights the relevance of a concrete practice for overcoming limiting situations. Decoding involves four subsequent moments in which people are asked to describe: what they see or feel, how they define the main level of the theme, how they experience the experiences, why these themes exist, and how to develop and plan actions to address them. Thus, codes are generated and through dialogue new codes can arise and express the critical analysis of what the codification presents, i.e. reality.^{2,5,9}

In the first phase, the group participants describe the coded elements as part of the whole. The

silence of the apprehension of the codified object is evidenced. The decoding of the existential situation causes an abstraction, which enables a going and coming from the parts to the whole and the whole to the parts, in a continuous process of reflection.⁵

The second phase is characterized by the split of the admired totality. The subjects look at the reality from within, but they cannot grasp their totality yet. This separation in the decoding phase represents the description of the situation. The whole, which had previously been apprehended, began to gain signification insofar as it undergoes division and in which thought returns to it, from the dimensions resulting from it.²

During the third phase the participants n admire and apprehend the codified situation in its entirety once more. At every moment of decoding, the world view, the way of understanding it and the dynamics of the researched context is externalized. It is from this everyday way of thinking that the confrontation of reality takes place. Even if a group does not fully express a generative theme, it suggests the theme of silence, the adaptation.²

In the fourth phase, a critical analysis of what the coding presented is performed. There is an extended and in-depth reflection that can spark new glimpses about the participants' reality. As decoding happens, we arrive at what Paulo Freire calls the perception of previous perception.²

It is up to the researcher to listen and to increasingly challenge the participants, contextualizing the codified existential situation from one side and, on the other, contextualizing the emergent answers in the course of the dialogue. In this way, everyone is expressing a series of feelings, opinions of self and of the world.²

Decoding represents the critical analysis of the codified situation through attentive, reflective and interpretive reading of the themes listed.⁹ Subsequently, the participants in the Culture Circles decoded the meaning of the themes, generating a different perspective on health promotion.

Critical unveiling

The critical unveiling phase is the last moment of Paulo Freire's research itinerary.¹⁰ According to the schematic,⁸ the preliminary reflection of the proposals extracted through objective codification is shown which embraces principles of interpretive subjectivity. It portrays reality and possibilities.

At this stage, it is sought to reduce the themes, or rather, to split them up as a totality in order to

know them better.² The awareness of the existential situation, in which the limits and possibilities of reality are discovered. Then there is the process of action-reflection-action that enables people to understand and demonstrate the importance of concrete, cultural, political and social action, aiming at limiting situations and coping with contradictions.^{2,5}

The unveiling of reality is conceived as a joint process in which the dialogue is the driving force of action and reflection.¹¹ In this context, the researcher must be the mediator of this process, pushing the path of democracy and enabling a critical understanding of the reality in which one lives, having the act of saying the truth as a moral duty inherent in his actions, using a frank and courageous dialogue in the course of every process.¹²

In order to unveil the themes, the themes are systematized and re-presented in the Culture Circles for analysis, reflection and referrals. These themes drawn from reality are returned to subjects as experiences that need to be transformed. To mediate the debate, talking about each theme is sought in order to justify that these are the results of the reflections in the Circles.^{5,13}

By realizing the process of transformation proposed by the Circles, the participants experience a process of metamorphosis, transmuting themselves in part of the collective experience, in a collective and dynamic way, having the experience translated into verbalizations and revealed by the shared stories, configuring in the unveiling collective spaces, concrete and legitimate, proposed to the circulation of the word.¹⁴

Participants conduct the debate from the topics they consider most relevant.⁹ The object of study should be the main focus of the discussions, supported by the theoretical framework.

However, the stage of critical unveiling thus facilitates the consolidation and socialization of proposals, interwoven in the dialogical process and giving each participant the opportunity to remove the veil that does not allow them to see and analyze the truth of things, to reach the depths of these, to know them, discover what is inside, to act on what is known to transform it.^{11,15}

At the end of the Freirean itinerary, a joint evaluation of the experience and transformations perceived by the mediator and the participants is suggested. In this study, the participants highlighted the themes related to the facilities and difficulties in the development of the routine practices of the unit, interpreted as health promotion and disease prevention. From the codification, decoding and

critical unveiling of the topics investigated, the need for greater dialogue on the concept of health promotion and disease prevention is highlighted.

Reflections and contributions to health

Paulo Freire, in proposing the research itinerary, and operating it through the Culture Circle, did not think about its applicability in the health area as a research method and/or as a guiding method of the work process. However, the experiences of the LAPEPS Research Group over the last 22 years have confirmed that this methodology contributes to the study and health work, as it adds transformative and conscientious pedagogical potential to the participants, be they teachers, students, researchers, health professionals or users. It enables meeting spaces between people, breaking with the hierarchical barriers implied in the biomedical logic, democratizing the knowledge in health, valuing everyday life, cultures and ways of thinking and experiences of families, groups and collectivities. In addition, this method enables the active participation of men and women, being built and re-signified throughout the research journey, in a constant action-reflection-action movement.

Currently, this method is being used in researches in the area of health and in practice by professionals concerned with transforming the reality of the users and the places where they act, whether in the public or private network, as well as by teachers, in professional training, as they represent/mean a path to promote critical and creative care.¹⁶

Participatory health research involves the involvement of the participants and the researcher, who are interested in a particular common theme. In this research process, the relevance and impact of change in society is amplified. Participants mediated by dialogue and reflection can work better and create ways to deal with issues to promote health and care. This involvement during the research enables the mobilization of knowledge and has the potential to transform a given reality, generating social impact.¹⁷

However, the application of Paulo Freire's research itinerary still involves challenges in these fields of action, such as: the production of a liberating dialogue based on an education that promotes reflection, since an authoritarian dialogue is repeated that Freire calls banking education; the clarification of the principles that constitute the methodological framework; conducting a non-directive investigation; the possibility of participation

of those involved with availability of time; and the adaptation of the language of the idealized method for adult literacy.^{5,13,18}

Such difficulties go beyond the need to understand Freirean conceptions, demanding a paradigm shift - positivist - whose overcoming will favor the development of a new vision of the individual and, consequently, a practice that is actually more human, affective and effective.¹⁶

It is also perceived that participative methodologies of reflective and liberating nature are on the rise within the scope of academic training, relating to the development of skills and abilities. However, this trend is still recent and, in some cases, is not aligned with the objectives of the training as a whole, and is still poorly understood by teachers and students in every day training.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Returning to the objective of the present study which was to reflect on Paulo Freire's research itinerary and his contributions to health, the relevance of using participant research in health, supported by that itinerary is evident, as it makes the articulation between academic and intervention in the study population possible. It breaks the barriers between the academy and society, taking into consideration the reflection of the study participants who sometimes say they feel demeaned when they are treated only as research objects.

When Paulo Freire proposed his works his research itinerary, he made clear that this should be widely disseminated and used in the various fields of knowledge, and that the ultimate goal of its application should be the transformation of the reality of the participants in the Culture Circle. It should be emphasized that in the participant research, the researcher is also the researched, and must be part of the whole action-reflection-action process.

More research in the health area is recommended, as these contribute to the self-knowledge and reflection of the subjects involved in the health system, providing significant changes, while constantly improving and, mainly, in the way people use it.

The importance of further studies that show the feasibility of using this itinerary as a methodological course in the various fields of knowledge is reiterated. The lack of understanding of the steps of this research itinerary is a limitation for the expansion of the use of this method.

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