## THE BRICOLAGE METHOD IN HEALTH AND NURSING RESEARCH - BUILDING THE WAY TO WALK

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Objective: to promote reflection on bricolage and its application in health and nursing research.

**Method**: to carry out a theoretical revision regarding *bricolage* in different literary bases like printed books and virtual means with access to event annals, articles, e-books, dissertations and theses.

Results: the available literature is mostly found in the field of arts, while being scarce in the area of health, it provided initial understandings on the subject and instigated reflections on its use in nursing. The scriptural composition of this article involved information coming from the readings in conjunction with the experience of researchers on *bricolage*, describing its emergence in the field of fine arts to the use in the construction of scientific knowledge. The central reflection concerns the dispensability of predetermined methodological plans in health and nursing research, demonstrating that the *bricolage* method follows a construction while the research is carried out, that is to say, it does not propose a pre-established path.

**Conclusion**: *Bricoleur* researchers need to find original ways to study the various phenomena involved in the health and nursing sectors. *Bricolage* provides the researcher with a method of his or her own, such as a research method, a multilateral solution, a contextualization and a complexity of reality.

**DESCRIPTORS**: Research. Nursing research. Methodological research in nursing. Qualitative research. Methodology. Nursing. Health. Integrality in health.

# O MÉTODO DA *BRICOLAGE* EM PESQUISAS EM SAÚDE E ENFERMAGEM - CONSTRUINDO O CAMINHO AO CAMINHAR

#### **RESUMO**

Objetivo: promover reflexão acerca da bricolage e sua aplicabilidade em pesquisas em saúde e enfermagem.

**Método**: realizou-se um resgate teórico sobre a *bricolage* em diferentes bases literárias como livros impressos e meios virtuais com acesso a anais de evento, artigos, e-books, dissertações e teses.

Resultados: a literatura disponível é majoritariamente inserida no campo das artes, e mesmo sendo escassa na área da saúde, propiciou compreensões iniciais sobre o tema e instigou reflexões sobre sua utilização na enfermagem. A tessitura escritural deste artigo envolveu informações advindas das leituras em junção à vivência das pesquisadoras sobre a *bricolage*, descrevendo desde seu surgimento no campo das belas artes até a utilização na construção do conhecimento científico. A reflexão central versa sobre a dispensabilidade de planos metodológicos predeterminados em pesquisas em saúde e enfermagem demostrando que o método da *bricolage* segue uma construção ao passo em que a pesquisa se concretiza, ou seja, não propõe um caminho preestabelecido.

**Conclusão**: pesquisadores *bricoleurs* necessitam encontrar maneiras originais para estudar os diversos fenômenos envolvidos no setor saúde e na enfermagem. A *bricolage* proporciona ao pesquisador *bricoleur* a oportunidade de criar seu próprio método, surgindo como um 'óculos' a fomentar uma visão multilógica, contextualizada e complexa da realidade.

**DESCRITORES:** Pesquisa. Pesquisa em enfermagem. Pesquisa metodológica em enfermagem. Pesquisa qualitativa. Metodologia. Enfermagem. Saúde. Integralidade em saúde.

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# EL MÉTODO DEL BRICOLAGE EN INVESTIGACIONES EN SALUD Y ENFERMERÍA - CONSTRUYENDO EL CAMINO AL CAMINAR

RESUMEN

Objetivo: promover reflexión acerca del bricolage y su aplicabilidad en investigaciones en salud y enfermería.

**Método**: se realizó un rescate teórico sobre el bricolage en diferentes bases literarias como libros impresos y medios virtuales con acceso a memorias de eventos, artículos, e-books, disertaciones y tesis.

Resultados: la literatura disponible es mayoritariamente insertada en el campo de las artes, e incluso siendo escasa en el área de la salud, propició comprensiones iniciales sobre el tema e instigó reflexiones sobre su utilización en la enfermería. La tesitura escritural de este artículo involucró informaciones provenientes de las lecturas en unión a la vivencia de las investigadoras sobre el bricolaje, describiendo desde su surgimiento en el campo de las bellas artes hasta la utilización en la construcción del conocimiento científico. La reflexión central versa sobre la dispensabilidad de planes metodológicos predeterminados en investigaciones en salud y enfermería demostrando que el método del bricolaje sigue una construcción al paso en que la investigación se concreta, o sea, no propone un camino preestablecido.

**Conclusión**: investigadores bricoleurs necesitan encontrar maneras originales para estudiar los diversos fenómenos involucrados en el sector salud y la enfermería. El bricolage proporciona al investigador bricoleur la oportunidad de crear su propio método, surgiendo como 'lentes' para fomentar una visión multi-lógica, contextualizada y compleja de la realidad.

**DESCRIPTORES**: Búsqueda. Investigación en enfermería. Investigación metodológica en enfermería. Investigación cualitativa. Metodología. Enfermería. Salud. Integralidad en salud.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This theoretical reflection article represents the continuity of an intellectual investment of the authors in the understanding of *bricolage*\* as a theoretical-methodological alternative for nursing and health research.

Reading, understanding and developing scientific works in this theoretical perspective, continue to be challenges in methodological terms of research. Reflecting on the path that has led us to the continuity to such a challenge, which began in 2012 with the development of a Master's dissertation in the nursing area, there is the reminder about the first theoretical contact with the present *bricolage* in a book on planning in qualitative research, which reports specifically on the use of *bricolage* in the absence of plans. This material would become the gateway to other texts from different areas, literature in which we immerse ourselves.

The search for literature, which broadened the understanding of the subject, did not obtain much success regarding indexed scientific bases. The term *bricolage* is not a descriptor in the health sciences (DeCS) or in the platform of the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH). Its references in virtual and printed media are largely linked to the making of handicrafts, which made it difficult to search for the theme. The first most illuminating findings, besides the aforementioned book, came from random searches on the internet from publications in annals from the area of administration and visual arts, and one article from the educational area. These first readings indicated new bibliographical references

and, thus, part of the literary collection about *brico-lage* was perpetuated as a research in the snowball format, in which bibliographical references indicated others, which made findings on the internet and ordering of books on the theme possible.

The immission in the consumption of this material brought us closer to the concept of *bricolage* as it has been used in the field of arts, architecture, administration, construction, education, health, psychology, and also in the field of scientific research. Early information on *bricolage* emphasized the essence of randomness, unpredictability, and occurrences of random games. In methodological research terms, it exemplified the contingencies confronted by researchers in the course of their work and ignored, in most cases, by the monological predominance of scientific knowledge.

The main source of *bricolage* in the context of social research was quoted by Lévi-Strauss<sup>2</sup> in his book, The Savage Mind, in which he refers to *bricolage* as a kind of primitive knowledge or first science, that is guided by intuition and experimentation, with unlimited curiosity for things pertaining to the world.

After, the term gained new methodological research connotations from Kincheloe and Barry,<sup>3</sup> who adjusted it within a complex and multireferential paradigmatic perspective, in which everything is connected and woven together, attributing interdisciplinarity as the center of this new conception; broadening the contexts in the formulation of research, stimulating the use of diversified tools; and giving the researcher the opportunity to create his or her own method.

<sup>\*</sup> We will maintain the use of the term bricolage in its original version (French) throughout the text.

We emphasize the importance of this aspect of methodological creation which can add value and quality to the advancement of health and nursing research. In a new era in which we are experiencing a paradigmatic transition, we recognize that health and nursing have received new social connotations embedded in subjectivity as well as cultural, political, economic, religious, influences. It is incumbent upon us, researchers constantly rising, to realize the limitations imposed on us by conventional research methods and to combine, reformulate, and even create new ways of producing knowledge in health and nursing, always being aware of the influences of the environment, with a more open focus, recognizing the power relations inserted in the context of the research.

It is precisely on this broad and multidisciplinary aspect of *bricolage* that we intend to approach in this article, with the objective of clarifying theoretical issues on the subject, in order to promote reflections on its potential use in health and nursing research. *Bricolage* is elevated due to its characteristic of freedom provided to the researcher, accepting his or her connection with the studied object and the opportunity to become a *bricoleur*, building the methodological path to take.

Thus, this article unfolds, rescuing the *bricolage* concept from its early influences in the movement of the fine arts, followed by its application to scientific knowledge, bringing the theoretical and methodological potential of this referential to health and nursing research.

### WHERE IT ALL BEGAN: THE INFLUENCE OF THE ARTISTIC MOVEMENT

The concept of *bricolage* or, in Portuguese, *bricolagem*, comes from French and means unplanned improvised manual work. It is influenced by artistic movements characterized by causing controversy and debating bourgeois logic and academic imperatives, which maintained itself as supremacy and prevented new artistic currents from establishing themselves with force and vitality for the expression of reality in keeping with hidden social truth.

Thus, from the European artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century, the myth of the savage originated - which excluded everything that was conventional and prevailed the "spontaneous and intuitive character of the art of the peoples considered uneducated". 4:1040 Such interest was not restricted to primitive people, but also extended to the "productions of the marginal, the mad and the

children". 4:1040 From this attempt to escape bourgeois artistic power, among other modern artistic tendencies, the Dadaist movement arose, which had no identity of its own and assumed a miscellany of features and elements identified in other preestablished artistic movements.

The escape to the pre-established is remarkable to Dadaism and grants him, an anti-art status or rebel movement in favor of the negation of the dominant power. The search for ruptures of the instituted provoked reactions in the members of this movement against the predominant systems that dictated the artistic tendencies.

Its strong characteristic of consideration regarding the power relations established in the context, and its struggle for the fall of the predominant hegemony logic is noticed in the first understandings about the interconnection of *bricolage* and the artistic movement. When we analyze the factors that this rupture provoked, we realized that new ways of producing art were inserted in the world, expanding possibilities of creation and providing aesthetic freedom to the artist, now free of any stylist rule or moral.

Led by the Dadaist movement, surrealism emerges with theoretical support in Marxism, psychoanalysis and occult philosophies, and thus structures its doctrine based not on the destruction of prevailing logic, but on the possibility of constructing its own logic, from a open and wide perspective, that brings the unconscious as a psychic dimension to be explored.<sup>4</sup>

Surrealism empowers *bricolage* with theories, and its influence goes beyond the barrier of the arts, expanding into different areas of production, not only artistic but also scientific. Therefore, we will further examine how Lévi-Satruss applied this reasoning to the field of knowledge,<sup>2</sup> and also how Kincheloe and Barry deepened it in the scientific methodological perspective.<sup>3</sup>

### BRICOLAGE AND SCIENCE-KNOWLEDGE FIRST

Lévi-Strauss's contact with *bricolage* occurred during World War II, during the period of his exile in New York in the United States of America, where he lived with influential artists of the Dadaist and Surrealist movements as well as refugees, with whom shared common interests regarding indigenous arts and culture. In that same period, Claude Lévi-Strauss endeavored to give life to his new work: the Savage Mind.<sup>2</sup>

The principle of his theoretical thinking starts from the denial that all knowledge accumulated by primitive people's initiative of a practical necessity. For him, knowledge aspired to order in the universe, and such a search was guided by intuition. For many, many years before modern science, knowledge was already advanced through human experimentation guided by "assiduous and always alert curiosity, a will to know for the pleasure of knowing".2:30 As an example, he cites the domain of Neolithic man regarding the "great arts of civilization as pottery, weaving, agriculture and animal domestication. For him, each of these techniques supposes centuries of active and methodical observation, daring and controlled hypotheses, in order to reject or confirm them".2:29

Levi-Strauss believed that the forms of knowledge elaborated before modern science were already constituted by means systematized in a spontaneous way, and that even if it did not follow the scientific rigor, with total control over the variables as recommended by modernity, man already carried a long heritage of scientific tradition, which tended to seek different knowledge about the world, becoming a *bricoleur*, that is to say, using indirect means without definite planning.<sup>2:30</sup>

Thus, in this context the *bricoleur* is able to perform diversified tasks, using multiple materials, which makes it impossible to define *a priori* project. At that moment, in an attempt to make himself understood, Levi-Strauss makes a comparison of the *bricoleur* to the engineer, explaining that the former works with signs, while the latter with concepts and, although signs and concepts represent the same things, signs embrace the sensitive, overlapping meanings that flee from the conceptual logic, capturing the aesthetic and extending the possibilities of interpretation.

Thus, in the same perspective regarding the use of signs, the *bricoleur* is considered a quilter, not in its practical sense, but in the aesthetic meaning, due to its art and to its work with the fragmentary and the use of a variety of tools, methods, theories, strategies, interpretations, etc., always taking into account the context and its particularities as an individual and researcher.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, we can say that Levi-Strauss inserted *bricolage* in the scientific field and the concept has adapted to the different areas of everyday knowledge and praxis. Currently, the term is popularly associated with do-it-yourself activities, also known as 'do it yourself' (DIY), commonly reported in the digital and printed media.

In this perspective, "the *bricoleur* performs using the means and expedients that denounce the absence of a preconceived plan and move away from the processes and norms adopted by the technique". 2:30 *Bricolage* has been much discussed and employed in methodological research terms and is not restricted to handicraft posters.

### THE PRODUCTION OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN THE ABSENCE OF PLANS

When we talk about methodology, we are also talking about achieving goals as a consequence of a certain path. This is because the etymological sense comes from the Greek *méthodos* (*metá:* through/*hódos*: via), meaning 'its way'. That is to say, "the methodology of a research is a set of previously defined strategies," 4:1038 which clearly presupposes the need for planning. 6

Careful planning, with variable control, was always tied to the spell of the Cartesian method', since its "basic emotion was the fear of chaos, the desire to eradicate error, the search for certainty, and the need for guarantees". 6:27 However, if we think "no science begins from a treatise on the method. The discourse of the method was written after the scientific essays which constitute its preface". 6:29 Such temporal inversion consists in declaring that the path preexists the world and knowledge itself.

By accepting the method as a primordial basis for the attainment of scientific truths, Cartesian followers have unwittingly transformed it into the paradigmatic fragility of the evolution of knowledge. In 1962, Kuhn had already demonstrated that paradigmatic crises are initiated mainly by methodological contestations, for in scientific revolutions the method is initially questioned against any specific content of a theory. <sup>6-7</sup> Thus, such a sure structure derived from the positivist paradigm, still very influential in contemporary research, has historically been questioned by scientists who advocated the non-neutral construction of the researcher by assessing "the value of subjectivity in qualitative research and the principle of uncertainty". <sup>8-280</sup>

Since then, social research has invited the academic community to rethink and recreate new and different forms of knowledge production, something that challenges the common and allows all the researcher's creativity to surface. Much has been questioned about this subject, and studies have argued that the concern with the research methodology is out of fashion, warning about a delicate

situation regarding the lack of methodological rigor in terms of published research reports.<sup>9</sup>

Other debates bring the qualitative research with a view to evaluating its quality to the fore. Some initiatives have introduced the pretension to quantitatively value such quality through different instruments, and different opinions polarize this discussion. In this debate, reflexive action during the course of all research is considered as a factor to obtain quality, or rather, an instrument at its reach, since such studies are subjective and deal with human experience and the research itself.<sup>10</sup>

These issues still generate controversy due to the influences of the positivist which still hangs over the scientific paths, emphasizing the need to favor the method. Qualitative research questions Cartesian thinking, demonstrating that it can no longer answer all questions, and precisely because it has this characteristic, it needs a rigorous methodological report. We consider it inadmissible to conduct research without a reliable methodological report or any situation that confuses 'freedom' with 'academic licentiousness', because even in the *bricolage* perspective, it is always based on the methodological rigor designed throughout the research.

Such occurrences are among the arguments that formulate the main criticisms of *bricolage*, because, due to their freedom of creation, many consider it as an 'anything goes' methodology, and with this, there are scientists who do not see it as a rigorous way of doing social research. Another relevant aspect of its critique concerns the conclusions, for in fact the *Bricoleur* researcher does not define truths, since its view of phenomena is only one of innumerable perspectives that can come to exist. 11:4

The innovations that emerged in terms of qualitative research, and their resistance to the scientific field, stimulated the researchers Kincheloe and Berry<sup>3</sup> to invest in the subject of *bricolage* and thus improved the concept of Lévi-Strauss and became references to its use in methodological research terms. Without departing from the original concept proposed by Lévi-Strauss, these authors give the term a postmodern theoretical view, linking the same philosophical, paradigmatic, social, cultural, political and historical implications, making something methodologically subversive, scientific.

Kincheloe and Barry resumes the rebellion that aroused the emergence of *bricolage* in Dadaism, which basically translates in denouncing the power relations established in the research contexts. For them, "bricolage operates from a view of dominant

forms of power, adopting a relational ontology and facing the challenge of bringing the difficulties involved in its process to the forefront of research". 12-8

The bricoleur researcher is not naïve. Conscious of his object of research, he is strongly bound to himself and his constitution as an individual; he does not deny this intrinsic relationship, but broadens its possibilities of research knowing that the multiplicity of approaches will generate results with diverse perspectives. Thus, he does not accept the results as absolute truth, but as temporary, limited and provisional approximations of reality.<sup>13</sup> "The interaction of researchers with the objects of their investigations is always complicated, volatile, unforeseeable and certainly complex. These conditions rule out the practice of planning research strategies in advance. Instead of this kind of rationalization of the process, bricoleurs enter the act of research as methodological negotiators". 3:17 That is to say, they will continuously evaluate the need to include or discard strategies during the research development.

In the perspective of Kincheloe and Barry, interdisciplinarity is proposed as the center of *brico-lage*, and to better understand how such a proposal is inserted, in the research we resort to the Morinian complexity, which although not directly mentioned in the main work of such authors, is included into a postmodern theoretical-philosophical orientation, accepting the confluence and the combination of modern and constructivist research techniques, inciting discussions without delimiting boundaries or sovereignty of one paradigm over the other". 11:5

Interdisciplinarity in *bricolage* is based on dialogue, on an interrelationship between knowledge and disciplines, in order to promote an integrated, contextualized research with related knowledge. It is in this sense that complexity is inserted in *bricolage*, and vice versa, showing that the separation of phenomena from their natural environment, from man and from nature, from objectivity and subjectivity, and finally, that fragmentary thinking generates the blindness of knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

### REFLECTING ON THE USE OF BRICOLAGE IN HEALTH AND NURSING RESEARCH

The formulation of the method from the steps and the progress of the research is characteristic in the postmodern aspect. The creation of proper, creative and trustworthy pathways are well valued in the (re)construction of knowledge in the emerging paradigm, therefore, the formulated decisions that will compose the research path are not only about

technical aspects, such as selection of subjects, collection and/or analysis of the data, ie., indispensable items that make up the methodological chapter of a research. Decisions are woven throughout the study, and are contained in each element, from the choice and delimitation of the object to be investigated, to the final considerations drawn from the interpretations of the author.

There are different connotations concerning the terms 'method' and 'methodology' used to describe the production of scientific knowledge. Thus, we clarify that the understanding of the adopted method here encompasses the terminologies method and methodology in an equivalent way.

The method<sup>15</sup> is translated into the praxis of a phenomenon, in its objective, subjective and concrete sense, bringing inextricably printed theoretical views, research types, techniques adopted, forms of analysis, methodologies covered and, most importantly, the personified brand of the researcher.

This understanding is supported by complex notions described between program and strategy, whose understanding is tied to the instability of circumscribed reality and the acceptance of uncertainties. The program is understood "as a predetermined organization of action,"15:29 it needs stability so that it can be fulfilled, improvised, and innovated. It is very characteristic in the positivist aspect because it does not admit corrections to the way already drawn out. The "Strategy finds resources, outlines, investments and deviations", 15:29 it is already able to provide improvisation in the face of unforeseen situations as well as open possibilities of innovation, thus, it does not define or rule out any *a priori* path, as it allows the creation and the opportunity of reinvention according to the context of the research.

The strategy places us in front of the uncertainty of reality and the need to face contradictions, paradoxes, ambiguities, issues that are natural to the reality of health; teaching us how to deal with diversity. Therefore, research in health and nursing, diluted in the unstable reality, and that necessarily needs to consider the various facets/dimensions involved in health services and systems, like *bricolagem*, has the opportunity to use a contextualized and interdisciplinary approach.

*Bricolage* applied to nursing, both in the formulation of research and in the daily work, is based on the principles of integrality and interdisciplinarity, fundamentals in the training focused in the Unified Health System.

The contemporary nursing practice defends attention centered on the patient, considering that it has multidimensions and singularities that define it as a subject. Thus, professional practice requires that nurses are able to apply a range of knowledge for the welfare of one or more individuals. Therefore, studies have considered the activity of the nursing professional as a form of *bricolage*. <sup>16-17</sup>

This analogy is due to the fact that nurses articulate a heterogeneity of fragmented knowledge in their day to day activities which are constructed and reconstructed in the work context, often modifying the initial meaning or intention of their actions, being considered interdisciplinary managers, who perform multiple tasks using available resources.<sup>17</sup>

The concept of the nursing professional as *bricoleur* starts from his or her ability to create evidence-based care, research, professional knowledge and clinical experience in conjunction with patient singularities and preferences. The 'scientist nurse' analyzes and possibly changes his or her practice through investigations, while the '*bricoleur nurse*' changes the events and adjusts the tools to create new practices.<sup>17:121</sup>

However, the ontological security involved in nursing as a scientific discipline, engages most of the innovations that arise and or may arise in the practical reality of the service. These are actions that are lost due to lack of records in books, minutes and medical records, considered as actions lacking value or limited because of restriction of authorization in the professional practice.

Innovations in the field of nursing research, especially in the reality of the service, can be endowed with doubts, questions and, even, the impossibility of execution depending on the organizational culture. The positivist remnant that still hangs over the organizational functionalist standard of care in health and nursing, in general, makes it difficult for innovative methods in the production of scientific knowledge to be adopted, and when they are, they are formulated to meet certain needs following the routine already established in the care environment. In this context, *bricolage* goes beyond the methodological barrier, stating that the context does not define the method, since it can be adapted to the different scenarios of the researched object.

Research proposals that promote specific changes to the reality of nursing services have gained prominence among publications in recent years. They are replicable depending on the context following pre-established phases, for example, we can mention the convergent care research whose execution aims at a practical return to the reality of the service. 19

However, research on the organization and implementation of nursing services can also be performed in the *bricolage* method, but from this perspective, no step-by-step process is suggested , since the change does not come from an isolated event, but it is configured in a multifactorial way by involving knowledge outside the nursing area, that can be used to understand experiences within the service.<sup>20</sup>

In the scenario of innovations in health and nursing research, *bricolage* opens doors, consists of multiple investigation methods as well as diverse theoretical and philosophical notions regarding the various elements that make up the research object.<sup>21</sup> Embracing the plurality of knowledge, and moving beyond the limits of 'being a nurse' can provide reflections on their own constitution as a professional and on the constitution of the services performed.<sup>16</sup>

We can say *bricolage* helps to understand the complexity involved in the nursing service. It honors this complexity by suggesting that nurses are able to modify their actions and context using multiple sources of evidence-based knowledge. This is characterized as innovative, since it allows the development of scientific productions on the phenomena or their facets, which cannot be encompassed by methods based on linear thinking.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The proposal of new methods for the development of health and nursing research can contribute to the advance of scientific knowledge in the area. The complex reality requires the recognition of the uncertainty and the consideration of the multidimensionality involved, in this context, *bricolage* is a viable methodological alternative that allows the capture of the multilingual aspect, as well as the constant need for recreations using diverse materials and techniques during the course of the research.

The *bricoleur* researcher assumes the rebelliousness by disputing the already given method, he uses the creation of his own method as a starting point. The relationships established between the researched object and the researcher are split, leaving no room for perceptual neutrality. Just as it was in the arts movement, represented by dadaism and surrealism, *bricoleur* researchers need to find original ways to study the various phenomena involved in the health sector. Bricolage appears in

the scenario as a way to foster a multi-dimensional and contextualized view, bringing strategy as an ally in the research process.

The concept of 'bricolage nursing' was something new which came from international readings and demonstrates its full usefulness when considering the wide range of knowledge and aspects inherent to the nursing professionals' performance, considering not only the production of knowledge, but also the interventions that can contemplate changes in the practice scenarios.

Sharing new methodological paths as a means of expanding current knowledge can be categorized as a challenge, since there are rigid norms to be considered in most means of scientific dissemination. Thus, we consider it necessary to overcome technical/bureaucratic aspects in order to publish new discoveries as well as new ways of producing knowledge in health and nursing.

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