

EMPOWERMENT: REFLECTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF VULNERABILITIES AND NURSING PRACTICES

EMPODERAMENTO: REFLEXÕES NO CONTEXTO DAS VULNERABILIDADES E DAS PRÁTICAS DE ENFERMAGEM

EMPODERAMIENTO: REFLEXIONES EN EL CONTEXTO DE VULNERABILIDADES Y PRÁCTICAS DE ENFERMERÍA

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Objective: to share the experience of a culture circle about empowerment in the context of health vulnerabilities and nursing practices. **Method:** experience report, involving professors and students of a Postgraduate Program in Nursing, of a public university in southern Brazil. The culture circle was held using word-hunting, music videos, making concepts about empowerment in the context of women, indigenous and black, going through the stages of Paulo Freire's research itinerary. **Results:** the participants demonstrated knowledge of Freire's assumptions, highlighting the relevance of empowerment, constituted by the dynamic process of awareness. In situations of health vulnerabilities, nurses act in favor of the empowerment of these populations, through educational and emancipatory activities, based on the health conditions and reality of these people. **Conclusion:** the culture circle promoted reflection-action-reflection on situations of health vulnerability and on nursing praxis.

Descriptors: Empowerment. Health Vulnerability. Nursing. Health Education. Education, Nursing.

Objetivo: compartilhar a vivência de um círculo de cultura sobre empoderamento no contexto das vulnerabilidades em saúde e das práticas de enfermagem. *Método:* relato de experiência, envolvendo docentes e discentes de um Programa de Pós-Graduação em Enfermagem, de uma universidade pública do Sul do Brasil. *Realizou-se o círculo de cultura, com utilização de caça-palavras, vídeos musicais, confecção de conceitos sobre empoderamento no contexto das mulheres, indígenas e negros, percorrendo as etapas do itinerário de pesquisa de Paulo Freire. Resultados:* os participantes demonstraram conhecimento dos pressupostos freireanos, destacando a relevância do empoderamento, constituído pelo processo dinâmico de conscientização. *Nas situações de vulnerabilidades em saúde, o enfermeiro age em prol do empoderamento dessas populações, por meio de atividades educativas e emancipatórias, baseando-se nas condições de saúde e realidade desses públicos. Conclusão:* o círculo de cultura promoveu a reflexão-ação-reflexão sobre as situações de vulnerabilidade em saúde e também sobre a práxis da enfermagem.

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Descritores: Empoderamento. Vulnerabilidade em Saúde. Enfermagem. Educação em Saúde. Educação em Enfermagem.

Objetivo: compartilhar la experiencia de un círculo cultural sobre el empoderamiento en el contexto de las vulnerabilidades en salud y las prácticas de enfermería. Método: informe de experiencia, en el que participan profesores y estudiantes de un Programa de Posgrado en Enfermería, de una universidad pública en el sur de Brasil. El círculo cultural se llevó a cabo utilizando búsqueda de palabras, videos musicales, haciendo conceptos sobre el empoderamiento en el contexto de las mujeres, indígenas y negros, pasando por las etapas del itinerario de investigación de Paulo Freire. Resultados: los participantes demostraron el conocimiento de los supuestos de Freire, destacando la pertinencia del empoderamiento, constituido por el dinámico proceso de concienciación. En situaciones de vulnerabilidades en salud, las enfermeras actúan a favor del empoderamiento de estas poblaciones, a través de actividades educativas y emancipadoras, basadas en las condiciones de salud y la realidad de estas audiencias. Conclusión: el círculo cultural promovió la reflexión-acción-reflexión sobre las situaciones de vulnerabilidad en salud y también sobre la praxis de enfermería.

Descritores: Empoderamiento. Vulnerabilidad en Salud. Enfermería. Educación en Salud. Educación en Enfermería.

Introduction

The expansion of the health concept involving factors related to eating, information, education, culture, work, income and access to goods elucidates the conception of social determinants related to vulnerability, showing itself contrary to the uniquely biological model for the development and maintenance of the characterization of the health-disease process. It comprises the factors that influence the daily lives of people in their respective territories, contributing to the promotion or worsening of the population's health conditions, expanding the need to develop public policies and qualified professionals to meet their needs⁽¹⁾.

Vulnerability, in its social perspective, involves critical perception of the scenarios in which the population daily faces situations of oppression and struggle, in favor of freedom and autonomy, as in the case of indigenous peoples, women, blacks, among many other populations present in society. In this sense, it establishes a relationship with Paulo Freire's problematizing education, because, although vulnerability is not a concept specially worked by Freire, there is a relationship between vulnerability and health, with his theoretical elements such as: autonomy, domestication, awareness and empowerment⁽²⁾.

Paulo Freire's assumptions highlight the approximation of individuals through dialogue, proposing autonomy and reflections before concrete situations of existence, not excluding the various experiences and knowledge, but

valuing the contradictions and seeking to overcome and solve them. Thus, it is necessary to empower the individual, so that there is no one who knows more or understands less, but rather different types of knowledge that needs to be shared through a horizontal dialogue, with the responsibility of those who are in the role of teaching/learning, because educating is a political act. In this scenario, the act of educating presents itself when individuals critically analyze their lives, their reality and their problems, which leads to transformation, because education needs to be emancipatory, loving, libertarian, conquered by participation, with the consequent empowerment⁽³⁾.

Empowerment is the central concept of Paulo Freire's assumptions. This term does not refer to transmit power to someone, from an individualistic perspective, but to awaken the creative potential of people, as well as to improve and enhance their abilities. Thus, empowerment arises from the social interactions in which the subjects are constructed, and while critically problematizing the realities experienced, they become aware. This awareness provides the power to transform the social relations of domination, which leads to freedom, the liberation of the oppressed, so discussed by Freire⁽⁴⁾.

Therefore, nurses and other health professionals are responsible for providing the participation of individuals in critical decision-making about their well-being. To facilitate this participation, there is need to share knowledge through strategies to involve the community

in favor of individual and collective health. Nevertheless, each professional needs to recognize health vulnerabilities and use this knowledge in their knowledge and actions, through the praxis of dialogue, seeking to act in their daily work to transform reality.

This article proposes a Freire's study, with the accomplishment of a culture circle, which consists of a moment of dialogue between learning and teaching, so that the participants exchange knowledge and elaborate new hypotheses of world reading, with a democratic and liberating character, with a proposal of integral learning, promoting horizontality and valorization of the existing culture⁽⁴⁾.

Due to the relevance of the subject, the greater current visibility of relationships of health vulnerability and the scarcity of studies addressing this theme, the objective is to share the experience of a culture circle about empowerment, in the context of health vulnerabilities and nursing practices.

Method

This is an experience report that occurred in a subject of a Postgraduate Program in Nursing, linked to a public university in southern Brazil. This culture circle was held in the first half of 2019, and reflected on empowerment. It was attended by two professors and eight nursing students, using Paulo Freire's Research Itinerary.

Between the preparation of the culture circle and its execution, an estimated time of one month was dedicated, and the following activities were carried out: theoretical deepening of the method and theme; collection of didactic material; and structural organization of the activity. The culture circle occurred in a period of three hours, in a university classroom, involving the students of the subject "Theoretical and philosophical foundations of Paulo Freire's thought: research and practice itineraries". The activity was motivated by the need to broaden the reflection on nursing care practice to populations in vulnerable situations, and in

view of the deep dialogues and discussions, the writing of this article emerged.

In Paulo Freire's Research Itinerary, there are three interdependent stages, namely: thematic investigation, codification and decoding, and critical unveiling. Thematic investigation stimulates the critical thinking of the participants based on their realities, thus emerging generating themes and their problematization. The codification occurs with the dialogue of the generating themes, providing action and reflection on reality and its contradictions and an impulse to decoding, in which each one reflects on oneself as capable of transforming the own actions, modifying the world views⁽⁴⁾.

The critical unveiling step approaches reality and possibilities, when the process of "action-reflection-action" is sealed and each participant understands their ability to face the challenges raised, sharing proposals that give way to thinking⁽⁴⁾.

The research itinerary has become a methodological possibility, in which the culture circle helps individuals to understand their reality through their experience and exchange of knowledge, in a space consisting of different beings and practices. In this sense, the participants assume the experience of the praxis of dialogue, in order to discuss their problems and plan concrete actions of collective interest⁽⁵⁾.

The culture circle sought to use interactive techniques in order to promote the discussion of participants in a playful way. For thematic research, a word-hunting was developed with terms used by Paulo Freire in his works, with a view to stimulating participants' reflections, having as central word the empowerment, and distribution of several terms, such as: lovingness, emancipation, autonomy, being more, dialogue, ethics, freedom, indignation, among others.

Then, excerpts from music videos that addressed empowerment were shared, portraying problems experienced in the daily lives of some vulnerable people. Then, the participants discussed the lyrics of the songs and their relations with contemporary society. The participants were divided into three groups,

and each was invited to build a concept of empowerment for a specific public, choosing the terms found in the word-hunting, thus going through the stage of thematic investigation.

The main theme was empowerment in the context of indigenous peoples, blacks and women, and the dialogue of the participants in the culture circle allowed discussing and broadening the horizons about the theme, also flowing other Freire's keywords, with emphasis on: emancipation, awareness, autonomy, dialogue and culture. Thus, each participant could develop freedom of thought and learn from one another. By introducing the conception of empowerment, different thoughts were verified, but they correlated with each other when discussing mainly the perceptions about vulnerable groups.

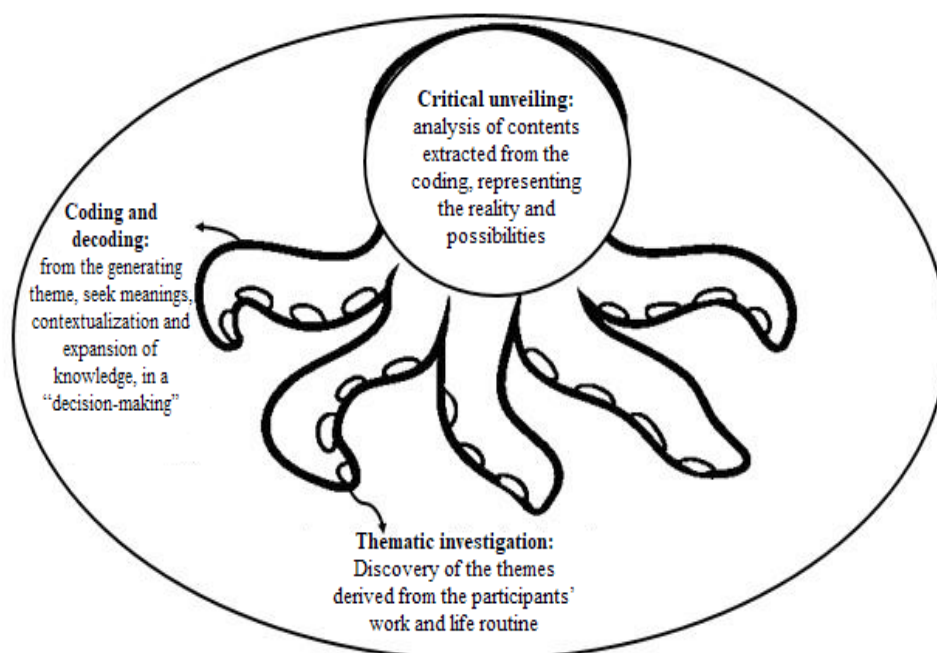
For coding and decoding, the participants of each group, after dialoguing and reflecting on the themes, elaborated and presented concepts, being possible to unveil the situations of vulnerability that involved the indigenous peoples, blacks and women, evidencing the relevance of

empowerment to seek transformations in society and promote the health of these individuals.

For the critical unveiling, participants were invited to observe a paper octopus exposed on the floor in the middle of the circle. The tentacles of the octopus were distributed to the participants, so that they could write the meanings of the moments experienced in the culture circle, portraying the challenges to overcome vulnerabilities and the possibilities of acting in the scenarios of Nursing practice and health.

It should be noted that, although the research itinerary is carried out in three stages, these are interconnected, as are the parts of the octopus. The octopus has tentacles, each has two rows of adhesive suction cups that are used in locomotion and prey capture; at the tip, there are cells specialized in capturing smells, acting simultaneously with each other and among the other tentacles, interconnecting their actions, such as the stages of the research itinerary, according to the following representation (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Paulo Freire's Research Itinerary



Source: Created by the authors.

Finally, each participant received a miniature octopus, made of crochet with cotton thread, made by a group of women from Serra Catarinense, who distributes affection through the exchange of experiences, mutually empowering, while performing the handmade work voluntarily and donating the octopuses made for neonatology.

Thus, the culture circle was concluded with love and distribution of hugs, in the reflection that all participants could “be more” every day and seek awareness of the possibilities of empowering themselves in their knowledge and actions in Nursing.

Results

The first group, upon reflecting on the empowerment of indigenous peoples, used some terms of Paulo Freire, extracted from the word-hunting, and described: Empowerment for the indigenous peoples has roots in indigenous culture, which promotes being more, freely, with strength and happiness, in contact with nature.

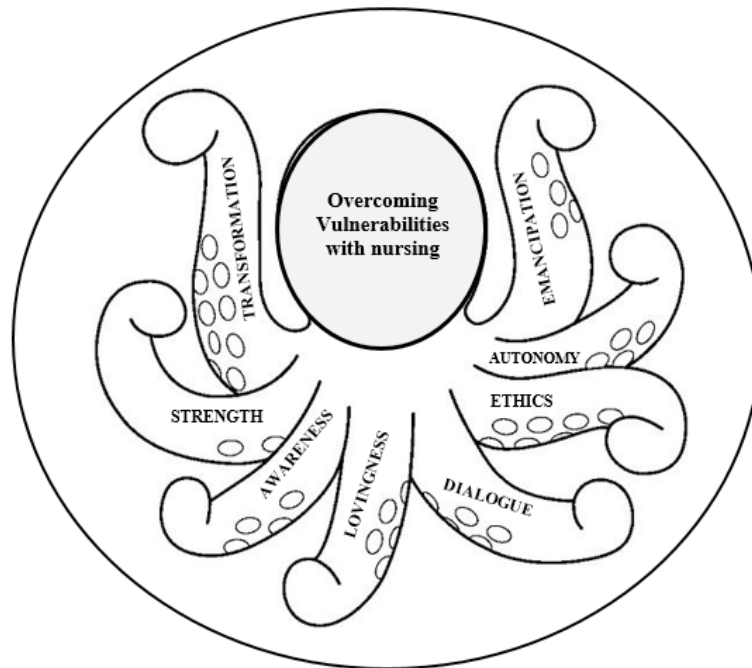
The discussion of the second group sought to dialogue about the empowerment of blacks, bringing the following description: It is necessary to have strength to value their culture, to be able to be indignant, generating awareness for being more of this population, seeking the evolution of thought to freedom and autonomy,

in order to achieve empowerment, aiming at the transformation of the individual and the collectivity.

The third group discussed the need for empowerment in women’s lives, elaborating a concept for discussion: With dialogue and lovingness, women are able to first be indignant, and then to have awareness of their value within society, seeking transformation through autonomy, culture, freedom, emancipation, happiness and strength, achieving empowerment.

The participants reflected in the culture circle that vulnerable populations need to raise awareness of their reality and strength to seek to overcome the challenges that surround them, in order to transform their situation with emancipation and autonomy, reaching empowerment. They also reflected that nurses need ethics in their profession, so that their acts are consistent with their discourses, acting with knowledge and lovingness, seeking to establish dialogue with users, with a view to encouraging their autonomy and emancipation in care to promote their health and quality of life. Thus, the participants of the culture circle elected a word and inserted it in the eight tentacles of the octopus: strength, transformation, emancipation, autonomy, awareness, dialogue, lovingness and ethics (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Challenges to overcome vulnerabilities and possibilities of work in the Nursing practical scenarios



Source: Created by the authors.

The octopus has several tentacles and all of them need to be constantly active, so do individuals within a society, who, in addition to personal and family life, need to work, study, finally, remain active with their lifestyles, which sometimes do not lead them to promote their health, lacking the awareness to remain healthy and strengthened, which is equivalent to empowerment.

Discussion

Empowerment does not happen naturally like biological development, because it is a construction, an achievement, as individuals become more autonomous, with reinforcement of their power to transform their reality⁽⁶⁾, whether from the perspective of indigenous people, blacks, women or any other public.

Upon reflecting on the indigenous context, the vulnerabilities that involve this public are evidenced since the formulations of policies, which are usually elaborated in the offices, becoming distant from their reality, having difficulty access in their communities, and sometimes still need to

be explained in their mother tongue because they do not speak Portuguese, even though they live in the Brazilian territory. The discussions in the culture circle evidenced the little space reserved for this people in society, motivating their ethnic representatives to seek empowerment through educational improvement, as a political and cultural resource, taking care to preserve their autonomy, freedom and tradition⁽⁷⁾. In this context, nursing is responsible for acting according to the reality and culture of this people, seeking practical strategies for the empowerment of this population, respecting their customs and traditions, thus valuing their popular knowledge.

Regarding the black population, racism is revealed. The slave customs of the colonial period are reissued to the present day, so that the theme of racism is demonstrated through the definition of social places, classes, jobs, housing, among others, violating human rights and reducing the potential of these individuals. Thus, the movement from emancipation to empowerment, and vice versa, of the black population goes beyond the strictly economic dimension, because their personal, cultural

and political values are directly related in this process. There is the need for building effective public policies for this population, for a reflective Nursing and other reflective health professionals, capable of analyzing society in a way that guarantees the participation of this group in all spheres of power⁽⁸⁾, giving voice to this public in their health-disease process.

As for women's vulnerability, the discussion pointed out that gender relations are interconnected in society with power relations. In this sense, empowerment is different for women and men, suggesting that the meanings of empowerment and power are different for genders⁽⁹⁾. An example is the relationship of women in situations of violence with their partner, in which they are subjugated to the domination of their partner, even though they have the right to work, food, rest, to relate and enjoy freedom⁽¹⁰⁾. In this context, it is worth mentioning that nursing itself is a mostly female profession, composed of many women who work in various sectors of society, sometimes in more than one job, besides the time spent with house chores and childcare. Therefore, when performing women's health care, several aspects must be considered and valued, seeking autonomy and freedom from women's oppression.

In situations of health vulnerabilities, the nursing professional has the potential to act in favor of the empowerment of these populations, through educational and emancipatory activities, based on the health conditions and reality of these groups. Therefore, nursing itself needs to be empowered. The 2018-2020 triennium is particularly relevant, due to the global Nursing Now campaign, which has stimulated the leading role of the main health profession, with a view to giving visibility to nursing and maximizing the contributions of these professionals⁽¹¹⁾.

The dynamism in the culture circle allowed for discussing in a pleasant and playful way the empowerment and going through all the stages of the research itinerary, turning Paulo Freire's thoughts into something practical and transformative of realities, in a critical reading of the knowledge and actions of Nursing and

the situations of vulnerability that indigenous people, blacks and women experience in society. Moreover, it provided reflections on the relevance of individual and collective empowerment, with the participation of all those involved in dialogical praxis, with exchange of affection, integration and mutual learning.

The limitations of the experience encompass the time for developing the culture circle, because although it occurred in approximately three hours, it was evident that the participants wanted to continue the discussions on the subject.

Conclusion

The discussions experienced in the culture circle evidenced that empowerment constitutes a dynamic process of awareness, based on the perception of individuals in their territories. Upon paraphrasing Paulo Freire, it can be said that teaching resonates in critical reflections about practical actions in society.

The experience allowed for reflecting the need to rethink the experience of lifestyles capable of contributing to the construction of the full and emancipated citizen, through a collective feeling that leads him/her to "be more" and better, whether indigenous, black, white, *pardo*, woman, man, among many other varieties of public.

In this sense, the empowerment of individuals and the collectivity occurs through dialogue and the awareness that one is able to provide conditions and environments for expanding power and knowledge, considering power as a process of awareness and empowerment as an indispensable element in the context of a transformative education.

Furthermore, it was evident that nurses also need empowerment, so that their discourses are consistent with their practices, to provide fertile environments for the emancipation of individuals who are under their care in health care. Thus, it is necessary to review the knowledge and actions of Nursing and perhaps contribute to the transformations of the realities of the individual and the collectivity in their territory, especially

the most vulnerable people, who so much lack health in its broadest sense.

Collaborations:

1 – conception, design, analysis and interpretation of data: Ivonete Teresinha Schülter Buss Heideman, Jeane Barros de Souza, Davydson Gouveia Santos, Daniela Rosa de Oliveira and Lorraine Cichowicz Marques;

2 – writing of the article and relevant critical review of the intellectual content: Ivonete Teresinha Schülter Buss Heideman, Jeane Barros de Souza, Davydson Gouveia Santos, Daniela Rosa de Oliveira and Lorraine Cichowicz Marques;

3 – final approval of the version to be published: Ivonete Teresinha Schülter Buss Heideman, Jeane Barros de Souza, Davydson Gouveia Santos, Daniela Rosa de Oliveira and Lorraine Cichowicz Marques.

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