

CRITICAL DISCLOSURES ABOUT SEXUALITY AMONG ELDERLY WOMEN AS A DIALOGICAL EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT DEVICE

DESVELAMENTO CRÍTICO EM SEXUALIDADE ENTRE IDOSAS COMO DISPOSITIVO DE AVALIAÇÃO EDUCATIVA DIALÓGICA

REVELACIONES CRÍTICAS EN SEXUALIDAD ENTRE MUJERES ANCIANAS COMO DISPOSITIVO DE EVALUACIÓN DIALÓGICA EDUCATIVA

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Objective: to analyze the perceptions about sexuality and respective critical disclosures collected in culture circles conducted with elderly women. **Method:** this is a qualitative study using constructivist evaluation, conducted in June and July 2014 in a municipality located in the Northwest region of the state of Paraná, Brazil. It focused on the critical disclosures provided in the culture circles developed by Freire, preceded by a stage of thematic research, through an evaluation of Limit Situations and definition of Generating Themes, Coding and Decoding. **Results:** The following critical disclosures were collected: biopsychosocial understanding of sexuality; understanding of social and psychological differences of sexuality; and understanding of sexuality in old age. **Conclusion:** the elderly women recognized the biopsychosocial perception of sexuality and understood their social and psychological differences and the different forms of pleasure of any stage of life, showing positive aspects of the dialogical proposal adopted and reaching the goal of liberation, thus emancipating knowledge.

Descriptors: Sexuality. Health Education. Aging. Women. Health of the Elderly.

Objetivo: analisar as percepções sobre sexualidade e os respectivos desvelamentos críticos apreendidos nos Círculos de Cultura desenvolvidos com mulheres idosas. *Método:* pesquisa avaliativa, de abordagem qualitativa e construtivista, realizada durante os meses de junho e julho de 2014 em um município localizado no Noroeste do estado do Paraná, Brasil. Foi centrada na etapa do desvelamento crítico do referencial do Círculo de Cultura de Freire e precedida pelas etapas de Investigação Temática, por meio do levantamento das Situações-limites e definição dos Temas Geradores, Codificação e Descodificação. *Resultados:* os seguintes desvelamentos críticos foram apreendidos: compreensão

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biopsicossocial da sexualidade; compreensão das diferenças sociais e psicológicas da sexualidade; e compreensão da sexualidade enquanto vivência na terceira idade. Conclusão: as mulheres idosas reconheceram a percepção biopsicossocial da sexualidade e compreenderam suas diferenças sociais e psicológicas bem como as diferentes formas de prazer possíveis em qualquer fase da vida, demonstrando aspectos positivos da proposta dialógica adotada e alcançando o objetivo da libertação, emancipando saberes.

Descritores: Sexualidade. Educação em Saúde. Envelhecimento. Mulheres. Saúde do Idoso.

Objetivo: analizar percepciones sobre sexualidad y sus respectivas revelaciones críticas aprendidas en Círculos Culturales desarrollados con mujeres ancianas. Método: investigación evaluativa, de abordaje cualitativo y constructivista, realizada en julio y julio de 2014 en municipalidad del Noreste de Paraná, Brasil. Centrada en etapa de revelación crítica del referencial del Círculo Cultural de Freire; precedida por etapas de Investigación Temática, mediante relevamiento de Situaciones-Límite y definición de Temas Generadores, Codificación y Decodificación. Resultados: se aprendieron las revelaciones: comprensión biopsicossocial de la sexualidad; comprensión de las diferencias sociales y psicológicas de la sexualidad; y comprensión de la sexualidad como experiencia en la tercera edad. Conclusión: las mujeres ancianas reconocieron la percepción biopsicossocial de la sexualidad, comprendieron sus diferencias sociales y psicológicas y las diferentes formas posibles de placer en cualquier etapa de la vida, demostrando aspectos positivos de la propuesta dialógica adoptada y alcanzando objetivos de liberación, emancipando saberes.

Descriptorios: Sexualidad. Educación en Salud. Envejecimiento. Mujeres. Salud del Anciano.

Introduction

Educational practices in health enable changes in aspects related to well-being, especially when based on theoretical and methodological bases that lead or strengthen empowerment. For this purpose, the emerging paradigm of education and health is not taken into account, as it refutes the knowledge transfer and alienation, suggesting the adoption of a dialogical approach in the course of its development⁽¹⁾.

The usual passive educational model has changed in recent times, as students are recognized as participants in the construction of their own knowledge, which is observed in active education models that incorporate the experiences and realities of participants in this process⁽¹⁻³⁾.

Therefore, education is regarded as an essentially human practice, a pedagogical process focused on the creation of a sharing environment that favors human development, values student autonomy, thus promoting conversation and the construction of new knowledge and skills, a model that is superior to knowledge transfer⁽¹⁾.

This educational perspective is founded on Freire's thought^(2,3), that is, dialogue and critical reflection to promote transformation

of knowledge and practices, supported by a dialogical relationship between educator and student based on care, affection, and love, which is required for knowledge exchange and student autonomy and emancipation^(1,3-4). Disseminated in several educational contexts, this perspective has been widely used by health professionals in several educational practices⁽⁴⁾.

Such a critical approach to reality, in this educational process of discovery by students and mediated by dialogue⁽³⁾, reveals existing contradictions and supports reflections about the reality itself. Through a process of action-reflection-action, it drives self-transformation and interventions in the reality to transform it. In this sense, education takes place not only in its individual dimension, but also in its collective and social dimension⁽³⁻⁴⁾.

Therefore, educational practices constructed through dialogue, especially in health, are social practices that, besides promoting transformations in individuals – they are able to decide and build their own history⁽³⁾ – also rebuild knowledge and the reality of those who experience it.

The need to evaluate the trajectory and results of educational practices in health to support

the analysis of their scope must be recognized. In vertical processes, educational practices favor the deposit of communication, creating mechanisms driving students to reproduce knowledge. Their studies often measure the results based on the parameter of reproducing the communicated content, which requires memorization⁽⁵⁾. However, it does not apply to dialogical educational practices whose product is the process of knowledge construction.

Dialogue represents a device to evaluate educational processes, as it critically discloses the reality and promotes awareness of the existential problem that begins to be revised, allowing a new action for resolution. The educational processes founded on dialogue enable to re-signify the situations experienced, showing the criticality reached in a certain theme⁽¹⁻²⁾. The culture circles developed by Freire⁽²⁾, as a dynamic space for learning and exchange of knowledge, offer a path to critical disclosure and, therefore, empowerment.

Sexuality in aging, among the diversity of themes that may be the focus of dialogical educational practices, has an urgent demand, since elderly people are still socially viewed as asexual beings, making them deny their human dimension. Therefore, sexuality in aging is a topic for critical and dialogical discussion, and can support the emancipation of those involved⁽⁶⁾.

Believing in the relevance of dialogical educational practices in sexuality in aging that can be evaluated in terms of the problematized process of the existential situation of those who experience it, the following question guided this study: What perspectives of sexuality can be critically dialogued and disclosed in culture circles with elderly women?

This study aimed to analyze the perceptions about sexuality and their respective critical disclosures collected in culture circles conducted with elderly women.

Method

This is a qualitative study using constructivist evaluation⁽⁷⁾, focused on analyzing the critical

disclosures related to the limit situations listed during an educational action supported by Freire's research itinerary⁽²⁾, whose data are partial results of a master's degree dissertation⁽⁸⁾.

It should be noted that the constructivist evaluation approach is based on a holistic view ranging from the design of a project – in this study, an educational action – to its results and social implementation^(7,9). Therefore, this study evaluated the educational action and the relevance of its results regarding the direction of new knowledge based on collective construction, whose evaluation parameter was the critical disclosure.

A thematic investigation, coding/decoding and critical disclosure⁽²⁾ were developed during the course of this study. The educational procedure was guided by the educator-student interaction in a horizontal manner through dialogues – named culture circles – in which students are not taught; they learn through 'reciprocity of consciousness.' No teacher was present, but a coordinator, who provided the information requested by the participants and ensured favorable conditions for group dynamics, minimizing direct intervention in the course of the dialogue process⁽²⁻³⁾.

Limit situations were analyzed during the thematic investigation through semi-structured interviews, conducted at home, to assess the perceptions of elderly women about sexuality. These perceptions, analyzed with the thematic content technique⁽¹⁰⁾, produced a limit situation, that is, concrete perceptions of sexuality that could be overcome through dialogue. The generating themes were extracted from these situations, which would be the main subjects related to sexuality taken to the culture circles⁽¹¹⁾ to be coded/decoded and critical disclosed by the group⁽²⁾, so that their legitimacy could be confirmed. For this reason, the excerpt of this study, of evaluative focus, refers to the critical disclosures related to the limit situations. It is noteworthy that critical disclosures occurred in three culture circles.

The study was conducted with a group of 15 elderly women from a small municipality located in the Northwest region of the state of

Paraná, Brazil, who met the following inclusion criteria: participating in the group for the elderly; being 60 years old and older; presenting mental conditions to participate in the interview as measured through the Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE); and participating in the culture circles.

The researcher integrated with the group in a participatory manner, since she was in contact with the group since November 2012 and could observe the need for educational practices related to sexuality in old age, a topic of interest and requested by the participants.

The group for the elderly was created in this municipality as an initiative of the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS)⁽¹²⁾. Its objective was to promote among the participants' activities of income complementation by providing crochet, knitting, embroidery courses, and social interaction. As a significant number of elderly women were not assisted by this service, many of them wanted to participate. For this reason, the Sports and Leisure Department of the municipality assumed the coordination of this group which, after January 2013, was disconnected from CRAS.

The culture circles were held once a week, at the end of June and early July 2014. They took place in a meeting room of the Health Department of the municipality, at a specific time defined with the participants, so they could take place privately, without interruption. Participants sat on chairs arranged in a circle for easier communication among them. The number of participants varied with the culture circle: in the first, all 15 women participated; in the second, 13 participated; and, in the last one, 14.

On average, the culture circles lasted one hour and they were recorded using a Panasonic® recorder and a field log. The notes made by the researcher were about the perceptions of dialogicity and criticality of the participants, highlighting the points of interest for the study theme. The recordings of the culture circles were transcribed by the researcher, preserving the identities of the participants, who were identified by names of flowers, selected by the participants themselves.

Data were analyzed by the participants themselves, in the coming-and-going process, characteristic of the method dynamicity, mediated by the researcher and guided by Freire's theoretical-methodological framework⁽²⁾. It allowed the participants to express their perceptions, seeking to explain more latent aspects and make them more visible⁽⁴⁾.

The study development observed current ethical standards for research involving human beings, according to Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council⁽¹³⁾. The participants signed an informed consent form (ICF) in two counterparts. The project was approved by the Permanent Human Research Ethics Committee of the State University of Maringá, under protocol 615.632/2014 (CAAE: 26890314.0.0000.0104).

Results

The critical disclosures that occurred in the culture circles are presented below, based on the limit situations found for each theme related to sexuality:

Theme 1 – Biopsychosocial understanding of sexuality

The first limit situation identified was “The unknown universe of sexuality”⁽¹¹⁾. After it was coded and decoded into programmatic contents, dialogues were developed in the culture circles, seeking an expanded concept of sexuality.

The participants were unaware of the extent of sexuality, as they saw it in a reductionist manner, restricted to the sexual act and an inherent condition of young people. After an initial discussion on the subject, the participants showed obstacles to verbalize their perceptions, whether due to an absent construct or embarrassment.

The researcher-educator started the discussions about sexuality through a dynamic activity named “After all, what is sexuality?”⁽¹⁴⁾, which made them reflect on the multiple dimensions of sexuality and provide their criticality regarding the theme.

The following statements show the critical disclosures provided by the participants of this culture circle by problematizing the educational practices. Critical disclosures took place as the initial perceptions of sexuality – centered on the sexual act – gained broader configurations, revealing new perspectives of feeling and experiencing it.

I thought sexuality was just about the sex relationship of a couple. I didn't think it could involve feelings, behaviors. Today I know sexuality is not something of the couple only, but of each person. (Dahlia)

I also thought sexuality was just about sex, something embarrassing to talk about. Now I know there's no problem to discuss sexuality, because it's part of everyone's life, something usual, and it involves more than sensing the body. (Orchid)

Wow, I've learned a lot! I'll even explain to my daughter, she thought I was coming here to learn about sex. I will explain that sexuality has three dimensions: biological, psychological and social dimensions. (Carnation)

I thought it was going to be complicated, because there are a lot of widowed and separated women here, and I thought this thing of sexuality was for married women only. Now I know it's not, we have to participate in this group, because we all have our sexuality. (Tulip)

Theme 2 – Understanding of social and psychological differences of sexuality

Another limit situation revealed by the participants, which they had to overcome, was the “Divergence of sexuality between men and women”⁽¹¹⁾. Therefore, it was coded and decoded into programmatic content in one of the culture circles, enabling dialogue about the differences of sexuality between men and women. The dialogue was triggered by the dynamic activity named “If I were”⁽¹⁴⁾, which started a discussion about the differences and similarities between men and women and discussions about gender equality, ensuring dialogue in the reality of the elderly women from the group.

The statements of the study participants showing their critical disclosures are presented below:

I think respect for women is taught at home. Today there are men who respect women very much. So it's taught at home. That has to be changed! (Tulip)

I believe these issues are very much related to the role of parents... in the past, parents didn't care when their sons

disrespected their daughters. Today, it's different. Parents have to provide the same treatment. (Fleur-de-lis)

I'll answer, even if it's wrong... I guess it's very good to be a woman these days. I've been through a lot of things with my husband, but because I fight and have some characteristics that are more common to men, I've managed to win in my life. So being a woman is very good! (Sunflower)

I also like being a woman! I think women have gained ground. I see that men and women can have different characteristics and other similar ones, which are built throughout life, but they play their role in society, respecting one another. That's what really matters! (Gloriosa)

Theme 3 – Understanding of sexuality in old age

The third limit situation of critical disclosures was “Sex as a configuration of youth”⁽¹¹⁾, which was coded and decoded into two programmatic content approaches: sexuality in different life cycles and configuration of sexuality in old age.

To promote the discussion about this theme in the culture circle, the researcher-educator presented a documentary titled *Amor e Sexo na Terceira Idade* (Love and Sex in Old Age)⁽¹⁵⁾. The video made the elderly women want to deepen the discussion about sexuality and their experience in old age.

The statements below confirm the critical disclosure provided by the participants:

I thought that everything was over in old age. But I see it's not. Now I can talk more about it and be curious! (Daisy)

Now I think it's not over! It's possible to have sex in old age, but it depends on your partner. It has to be a person who makes the woman interested. (Tulip)

I'm not going to say that I don't miss it. I miss having sex! But I don't know if I have the courage to start all over again. (Lily)

Before we started talking about it here in the group, I didn't think so much about sexuality, about sex. Now I see it's important to think a little about it, because I'm alive, right? (Rose)

Discussion

Organizing the understanding of sexuality in its three dimensions (social, biological and sociocultural) was required to understand the multiple factors that interfere in and determine the understanding of the expression of sexuality

by the elderly women as a human and multidimensional action⁽¹⁶⁾.

In theme 1, naive knowledge had to be overcome, “the unknown universe of sexuality” was discussed, rethought, altered and overcome using a critical view⁽²⁾.

It should be noted that sexuality is a relevant aspect of health in general and is related to the feelings of physical/emotional well-being with a positive impact on improved quality of life of people, including the elderly participants of this study, and therefore needs to be known and discussed by elderly people as well. The recognition of sexual health linked with healthy aging drives improvements in public health policies and programs, in an attempt to offer dialogical spaces to discuss this subject⁽¹⁷⁾.

Therefore, the researchers conclude that, by favoring a reflective dialogue about a limit situation, the engagement of participants is promoted in a dynamic way, allowing them to feel part of the educational process. In the coming-and-going process of the discussions promoted by the culture circle, they coded, decoded and critically unveiled the theme, understanding the need for liberation⁽²⁾.

Regarding gender relations and their relationship with the experience of sexuality, they overcame the evident domestication of female conducts, in a dialogical way in the culture circle, through critical disclosures⁽³⁾. Unfortunately, educational efforts that show control and power towards regulation of female sexual behaviors are still observed, strengthened by sociocultural aspects that reinforce power relations between genders, particularly driving the sexuality of older women and how they experience it⁽⁶⁾.

The fact that women can express their thoughts, critically discuss sexuality and the differences between men and women, and show their feelings about being a woman helped them overcome the limit situation presented, leading them to empowerment in relation to the theme. Even though empowerment is widely discussed in debates in different research fields, public policy forums, and media, it is a concept that needs to move forward in innovative theoretical and methodological frameworks⁽¹⁸⁾.

The search of such empowerment uses the concept of “dialogical self”, referring to critical people with the ability to create and transform through critical and reflective dialogue, as exclusive skills of men. However, in certain concrete situations, when alienated by conduct conditioning, this dialogical power of rethinking and re-creating may be impaired⁽²⁾, acting as a suitable space for dialogical education. It happened in a similar way with the elderly women who, in order to transform the limit situations into social liberation, found a viable solution in dialogue. For this reason, denying dialogue about sexuality in the various social spaces also means reinforcing the maintenance of power relations imposed by society⁽⁶⁾, especially regarding older women, domesticating their way to fully feel and experience it.

Since the study theme referred to sexuality in old age, a subject that involves prejudice and domestication of behaviors, the need for women to free themselves from the limit situations became a driving force for the spontaneous emerging of dialogue, advancing in its criticality at each culture circle. This dialogue – used as a strategy of problematizing education and liberation – enabled older women to demystify sexuality and move towards critical disclosures⁽²⁾.

Such education is authentic for not transferring knowledge from the educator to learners, but for constructing problematized knowledge among those involved in the educational action, mediated by the world, their doubts, desires, hopes, and despair revealed in the generating themes. Thus, this problematizing educational practice allowed the elderly women to critically perceive themselves in the world as experiences of sexuality⁽²⁾.

The problematizing teaching-learning model is an active methodology that favors knowledge integration to develop a critical and reflective role of learners about the reality they experience. It is based on the active construction of knowledge and participation of those involved, supported by authentic dialogue, occupying a position that is the opposite to the mechanisms of content memorization and information transfer⁽¹⁹⁾.

Therefore, it is consistent with Freire's dialogical references⁽²⁻³⁾ assumed in this educational study.

The dialogical and emancipatory approach, as experienced by the elderly women in this study, stimulates critical and reflective thinking through the association of theoretical knowledge and the experiences shared in a group, favoring knowledge in a dynamic and transformative way⁽¹⁶⁾.

The older women, by reflecting together through dialogue as a fundamental presupposition to the emancipatory educational process⁽²⁰⁾, became aware of their world and the world of others. This way, they could think of and intervene for their own sexuality, becoming emancipated and agents of transformation through an action-reflection-action process⁽²⁾ of their own experiences and knowledge about sexuality in old age⁽¹¹⁾.

This movement of knowledge reformulation, supported by problematizing educational moments, agrees with the idea of using crucial disclosures of students for their liberation⁽²⁾ and, in this study, of prejudice and limitation involving sexuality in old aging, considering the elderly women themselves were active in this educational process⁽²⁾. Thus, the dialogical educational activity enabled to free oppressed women^(2,11) from the restrictive knowledge about sexuality they used to have.

A study limitation referred to the fact that it was conducted with a group of elderly women, representing a specific context. Therefore, further studies should be conducted to reveal different realities and scenarios, as the literature has few studies using dialogical educational practices with an evaluation, involving critical consciousness and learners' liberation about sexuality in old age, seeking to expand the results.

Conclusions

The analysis of the perceptions about sexuality and the respective critical disclosures provided in the culture circles developed with elderly women, based on Freire's research itinerary, showed positive aspects of the dialogical proposal adopted. Through Freire's research itinerary, the

elderly women recognized the biopsychosocial perception of sexuality, understood the social and psychological differences of sexuality, and the different forms of pleasure of any stage of life, besides freeing themselves from prejudice related to the verbalization of the sex theme.

Through dialogue, the educational actions developed with the application of a liberating methodology among elderly women provided critical disclosures and empowerment of women to achieve liberation. Therefore, the evaluation of knowledge construction through a dialogical approach is a valuable tool, as it critically discloses and, therefore, emancipates the knowledge of study participants.

Collaborations:

1. conception, design, analysis and interpretation of data: Daisy Mara Murio Ribeiro Rodrigues and Vanessa Denardi Antoniassi Baldissera;
2. writing of the article and relevant critical review of the intellectual content: Daisy Mara Murio Ribeiro Rodrigues, Iara Sescon Nogueira, Ieda Harumi Higarashi, Ivonete Teresinha Schüller Buss Heidemann and Vanessa Denardi Antoniassi Baldissera;
3. final approval of the version to be published: Daisy Mara Murio Ribeiro Rodrigues, Iara Sescon Nogueira, Ieda Harumi Higarashi, Ivonete Teresinha Schüller Buss Heidemann and Vanessa Denardi Antoniassi Baldissera.

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