

Circle of culture in supporting the identity process of adolescents: an action research


Círculo de cultura no suporte ao processo identitário de adolescentes: uma pesquisa-ação


Círculo de cultura en el apoyo al proceso identitario de los adolescentes: una investigación-acción

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To report and discuss the experience of the Circle of Culture in a school space, with attention to the social identity of adolescents.

Method: Action research, conducted under the assumptions of the Circle of Culture, from August to December 2019. Participants were 16 adolescents, enrolled in Elementary School, in a state public school, in the rural district of a city of São Paulo. Data collection took place through photographic records, participant observation and field diary.

Results: The relations of friendship were the central agenda of the Circles of Culture when dialogues about their structuring and influence on the identity construction were developed.

Conclusion: Circles of Culture mediated by health professionals in the school setting have the power to problematize the reality of each adolescent's life and, simultaneously, dialogue about the common, an aspect that empowers identity projects.

Keywords: Adolescent. Social identification. Health education. Nursing. Health services research.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Relatar e discutir a experiência do Círculo de Cultura em espaço escolar, com atenção a identidade social de adolescentes.

Método: Pesquisa-ação, realizada sob pressupostos do Círculo de Cultura, no período de agosto a dezembro de 2019. Participaram 16 adolescentes, matriculados no Ensino Fundamental, em escola pública estadual, do distrito rural de uma cidade do interior paulista. A coleta dos dados deu-se por registros fotográficos, observação participante e diário de campo.

Resultados: As relações de amizade foram elencadas como pauta dos Círculos de Cultura, quando foi oportunizado diálogos de seus estruturantes e influência na construção identitária.

Conclusão: Círculos de Cultura mediado por profissionais de saúde no cenário escolar tem potência para problematizar a realidade particular da vida de cada adolescente e, simultaneamente dialogar sobre o comum, aspecto que empodera para projetos identitários.

Palavras-chave: Adolescente. Identificação social. Educação em saúde. Enfermagem. Pesquisa sobre serviços de saúde.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Relatar y discutir la experiencia del Círculo de Cultura en un espacio escolar, con atención a la identidad social de los adolescentes.

Método: Investigación-acción, realizada bajo los supuestos del Círculo de Cultura, de agosto a diciembre de 2019. Participaron 16 adolescentes, matriculados en la Enseñanza Fundamental, en una escuela pública, en el distrito rural de una ciudad de São Paulo. La recolección de datos se realizó a través de registros fotográficos, observación participante y diario de campo.

Resultados: Las relaciones de amistad fueron catalogadas como la agenda de los Círculos de Cultura, cuando los diálogos de su estructuración e influencia en la construcción identitaria fueron ofrecidos.

Conclusión: Los Círculos de Cultura mediados por profesionales de la salud en el ámbito escolar tienen el poder de problematizar la realidad particular de la vida de cada adolescente y, simultáneamente, dialogar sobre lo común, aspecto que potencia para proyectos identitarios.

Palabras clave: Adolescente. Identificación social. Educación em salud. Enfermería. Investigación sobre servicios de salud.

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■ INTRODUCTION

Adolescences are diverse, involving body, psychological, relational and value elaborations, with a view to identity construction and autonomy⁽¹⁾. The particularities of the social context, resources, values and vulnerabilities influence them^(2,3). The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Brazilian health system consider the age range from ten to nineteen as adolescence, covering about 26% of the world population⁽⁴⁾.

Identity construction is part of a life project, a structural theme of the National Guidelines for Comprehensive Health Care for Adolescents and Young People (*Diretrizes Nacionais para a Atenção Integral à Saúde de Adolescentes e Jovens*)⁽⁵⁾. Weaving it involves knowing yourself, family and social historicity, aspects that permeate social identity⁽⁵⁻⁷⁾, reconstructions and transitions of meanings, principles and values⁽⁵⁾, consequences for autonomy, role in decision-making and definition of actions⁽⁸⁾.

The social identity of adolescents is determined from the social insertions and interactions conceived there, with consequences for development, coping and positive attitudes⁽⁹⁾.

In this scenario, the school fosters relationships with peers, favoring social skills, with reflection and integration of knowledge. It is characterized as a promising environment for education and health promotion actions, envisioning positions and decision-making⁽¹⁰⁾ based on empowerment, sharing of knowledge, criticism and recreations⁽¹¹⁾.

Based on the principles of intersectoriality and territoriality, the Health at School Program – HSP (*Programa Saúde na Escola – PSE*) aims to strengthen the partnership between the school and the health sector, especially with the development of education and health promotion actions under the framework of comprehensive care^(12,13). In this direction, the health professional, especially nursing, can occupy a privileged place and assume the dialogue of this partnership.

Interventions developed within the scope of the HSP tend to be centered on care, prevention or management of risk behaviors, with a vertical and prescriptive positioning, whose scope is described as ineffective, especially due to the lack of dialogue with personal, family and social and cultural contexts⁽¹²⁾. In this direction, stands out the importance of adopting participatory and dialogical approaches for the construction of knowledge in the school space. The Circle of Culture (CC) stands out as a strategy, as it is structured in dialogue, critical reflection and shared production between adolescents and mediators⁽¹⁴⁾.

Given the above, the research question was: What are the scopes of adopting CC technology in schools to support the

identity construction of adolescents? The aim of the study was to report and discuss the experience of the Circle of Culture in the school space, with attention to the construction of the social identity of adolescents.

■ METHOD

Action research (AR), of a qualitative nature, developed under the framework of Circles of Culture (CC)⁽¹⁵⁾. The CC are structured around the active participant, intend circularity, dialogue, sharing of experiences and knowledge. Conceiving that participatory and contextualized life experiences evoke reflections, critical awareness and active social postures^(14,15). Thus, the proposal was to promote dialogue about the relationships and social identity of adolescents, in order to process with them the exploration of the issues that are addressed in this theme, supported by the CC.

All adolescents, regularly enrolled in the eighth grade of Elementary School at a state public school in the rural district of a city of São Paulo, were invited to participate in the activity. Of the 32 adolescents, 16 chose to participate and sought ethical documentation to do so; 14 did not had consent to the research; and 2 had denied participation by their guardians.

The study included 16 adolescents aged between 13 and 14 years who met the inclusion criteria: being an adolescent regularly enrolled in the educational institution and being in the year selected for the study, indication made by the school board. And as exclusion criteria it was established: (b) absent for two consecutive meetings of the proposed activity. The intentionality of the scenario and participants reinforces the spontaneous participation and integration of adolescents in the CC, essential to the method.

This scenario was selected due to the discrepancy between the rural zone and the urban areas, regarding structure, culture and, above all, the environment. Additionally, this is an area neglected by research. In rural areas, vulnerabilities are revealed in the scarcity of options for leisure and culture, sports or public spaces, and in the negative influences brought by social, political and economic inequalities, which also expose adolescents to risk situations, reflecting on their health⁽¹⁶⁾. Thus, understanding how adolescents give meaning to this rural environment is powerful to create strategies for coping with the nuances experienced, life projects and identity construction.

The activity, and therefore data collection, was conducted from July to December 2019, totaling six CC, all mediated by the first author of this article, with the support of the second author, lasting an average of 90 minutes each. They took

place in the school space, during class hours established by the school board. Both mediators had an approach to the theme of adolescence and were involved, prior to the development of the CC, in free training to facilitate groups. The second author is studying pedagogical complementation, with readings and discussions about Paulo Freire.

Considering that the AR assume the active participation of those involved in its process, data collection took place in two sequential stages⁽¹⁷⁾. The first, intervention planning, comprised the thematic investigation of the CC, in which the aim was to approach the adolescents and introduce them to the theme of social identity. The second, implementation and evaluation of the activity, occurred at the same time with the development of the CC, comprising the thematization and problematization phases.

The intervention took place monthly and was interspersed every two weeks with a planning meeting. The dynamics occurred as follows: immediately after the CC, the mediators recorded information and perceptions about the experience that made up the field diary of each one. Therefore, a set of 12 field records with an average of 800 words each was assembled. The records were for CC planning, as well as for data for the study.

Nowadays, it is known that the construction of the circle is active, formed by the knowledge of all participants, without rigidity regarding content and based on collective construction, based on the meeting and taking what was experienced⁽¹⁸⁾. Thus, at the end of each meeting, an evaluation of what was experienced between mediators and adolescents was performed, and then it was tried to establish a theme for the next meeting.

The stages of the CC⁽¹⁵⁾ were complied, namely: a) thematic investigation, approximation of the participants and their life context, with the intention of starting point for the educational process, when central themes result from this interaction; b) thematization, a process in which the themes and generating words are coded and decoded, aiming to reflect on what was lived and its social meaning, enabling the construction of knowledge and understanding about reality, with a perspective to critically intervening on it; c) problematization, reflection of primary knowledge, in order to transform the lived context, highlighting the role of the subject.

The participant observation, the set of notes in the field diary and photographic records of the CC composed data for this AR. The field diary was the strategy used to record participant observations, reflections and knowledge produced; it is a comprehensive method for recording observation of events, feelings, experiences and reflections of the researcher and participants during research⁽¹⁹⁾.

For analysis, the different available research instruments were articulated, aiming at the quality and depth of the data apprehended⁽²⁰⁾. Based on a detailed description of the activities in the CC, obtained by the instruments available, consisting the observations, discussions, experience of the activities and the meaning of the educational experience by the social actors involved, these were organized, analyzed and interpreted in the light of content analysis⁽²¹⁾, based on the theoretical grounding of the CC. That is, the field records of both mediators and the descriptions of photos from the adolescents' words were submitted to reiterative readings to define the *corpus*, when the rules of exhaustiveness, representativeness, homogeneity, and pertinence guided the process. Afterwards, the *corpus* was appreciated in the manifest content and the category of each CC was named and described.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee under CAAE No. 15201219,6,0000,5504 and authorized by the Regional Board of Education, respecting the precepts of Resolution 466/2012 and 510/2016.

■ RESULTS

Knowing the school context – Thematic investigation

Sixteen adolescents were part of the AR, seven boys and nine girls, six with 13 years old and ten with 14 years old.

The thematic investigation stage sought to unveil the vocabulary universe by approaching the territory to be investigated and the social actors inserted there. This approach occurred after three visits to the school setting. The first was more directed to interaction with the school principal and pedagogical coordinator, while the other two were directed to educators and students. In the initial conversations, the school actors talked about space, territory and their perceptions about life and health in a free way. Thus, together with the school's educators, the class that would be invited to the study was delimited, choosing this one based on the understanding that it would be the group with the greatest interactional conflict.

The educators looked at the negative aspects of the students, regarding risky behavior, such as: early sexuality, violence and drug use, highlighting these as predicted for this rural territory. They also point out that it is a space with little regard and actions for the health and life of this population. The adolescents, on the other hand, were curious, and at the same time satisfied with the proposal

for an activity aimed at them and their interests (Field notes, 08/05/2019).

The presentation between us and them occurred simultaneously, during conversations, when the intervention proposal was also exposed.

I was interested about the teenagers in having an activity different from the usual one, it seemed to me that what was different drew attention, as well as being able to talk about what they would like to talk about. The unusual space seemed to arouse interest and motivation (Field notes, 08/08/2019).

These first entries took place over the same week. Later, we returned to present, in fact, the proposal to the adolescents, an action carried out from the joint and dialogued reading of the Free and Informed Consent Form. At the end of this conversation, the need for the guardians to register consent via the Free and Informed Consent Form was explained. We left copies with each of them and agreed that in our next meeting, we would collect the documents.

The insertion in the social space of the adolescents allowed approaching with ways of relating, some habits and life experiences.

These are teenagers who are building interactional processes, like to talk about friendships, yearning for listening and support for family and personal conflicts, as well as sharing feelings about the loving relationships that are starting. They also portray the scarcity of spaces and activities that promote well-being and leisure in the territory in which they live (Field notes, 08/08/2019).

Developing Circles of Culture – thematizing and problematizing

The AR had six CC, which were named according to their theme: ‘Unveiling relations’; ‘Meaning the relations of friendship’; ‘Supporting each other’; ‘Trusting relations’; ‘The nuances of friendship’; and ‘Unveiling the Self in relations of friendship’ (Chart 1).

The CC provides an environment opposite to traditional educational spaces, developed through the arrangement of participants in a circle, external environment, and playful activities, favoring interaction and dialogue among themselves, with mutual construction of knowledge. Therefore, considering that this study is developed with adolescents, the CC took place outdoors, in the garden, courtyard and sports court and had dynamic activities as triggers, proposed by the moderators to enhance participation and interaction between the participants.

Circles of Culture	Thematizing and Problematizing	Outcome
Unveiling relations	Introduction of the theme of social identity, with a dynamic presentation to understand and reflect on the relational processes that involve the identity construction of the participants, based on characteristics related to: the individual, relations of friendship and family relations.	The main terms to represent their personal characteristics were: affectionate, happy, organized, communicative, calm, lazy, jealous, irritated, angry, grumpy and sad. Regarding family relations, they highlighted conflicts, indifference, bad, control, support, fun, companionship, friendship, and love. Regarding relations of friendship, terms such as joy, fun, very good, companionship, union, well-being, fights, and falsehood were apprehended. Thus, family relations were discussed in the light of trust and support for coping, but were less relevant when compared to friendship. In this regard, friendship was praised as fun, welcoming and advising and for some participants, it was portrayed as support for the difficulties experienced in family.

Chart 1 – Circles of Culture developed at a school in rural area to promote dialogue about relations and the social identity of adolescents. São Carlos, São Paulo, Brazil, 2022

Circles of Culture	Thematizing and Problematizing	Outcome
Meaning the relations of friendship	<p>This Circle was based on the meaning of the relations of friendship, and to problematize the subject it was proposed the construction of living statues that represented them. The results were recorded through photos and later discussed among the members.</p>	<p>The statues presented represented the happiness and affection provided by friendship relations, but portrayed the difficulty of all relating harmoniously, highlighting jealousy and falsehood in these interactions. The issue of belonging to a group stood out, as well as the effects of negative feelings, when this belonging does not happen as expected. Another point highlighted was the essence of support in these relations, emphasizing that trust and union are essential in difficult times.</p>
Supporting each other	<p>Starting from the emphasis on support in relations of friendship, identified in the previous Circle, the reflection on this theme was proposed through the dynamics of the human chair. In this activity, the objective was for the adolescents to remain supported in a circle, without the support of chairs. Because it is a playful activity, it was up to the adolescents the perception that the success of the dynamic would depend on commitment, collaboration and collective motivation. Thus, for problematization, it was proposed a reflection on the strategies and difficulties faced, making a parallel with relations of friendship.</p>	<p>Collaborative teamwork was recognized, as they reported the efforts made to keep the group on its feet, reinforcing the importance of overcoming difficulties for a healthy friendship relation. Another point mentioned was trust, some reported the need to trust their friend in the same way they recognized that some people made more efforts than others to support the weight of colleagues. Comparing with relations of friendship, the adolescents reinforced how fundamental it is to be trustworthy and trust the other, developing a reflective character about values and principles essential to social interactions, directing individual and collective actions, determinants of belonging and social coexistence.</p>
The nuances of friendship	<p>Starting from the theme of trust in relations of friendship, the dynamic of the blind snake was chosen for this Circle. For the activity, they should stay in pairs, one of them being blindfolded and the other the leader. The latter received guidance on the path to be followed, being responsible for giving the coordinates to the conducted. For problematization, the participants were requested to bring their feelings in front of their actions as leaders and led.</p>	<p>The leaders reported: difficulty conducting the activity of the other, fear of hurting the colleague, nervous about having to maintain control of the situation and happiness in making the colleague bump into obstacles. The feelings of the conducted were fear of trusting their colleague's orders, concern for not knowing which route would be taken, trust in the driver and anxiety about going through the path correctly. In this scenario, the presence of obstacles was emphasized and related to those faced daily in relations of friendship, which, in most cases, are easily resolved, as well as the feelings resulting from these confrontations. To assess the scope of the CC, questions were asked about what is needed to maintain this relation, the adolescents highlighted: trust; union; support; patience; love; true; respect; companionship; listening; loyalty and affection.</p>

Chart 1 – Cont.

Circles of Culture	Thematizing and Problematising	Outcome
Trusting relations	<p>This CC aimed to focus on the difficulties of relations of friendship. To raise awareness, the dynamics of the mobile card were performed, asking them to answer the following question: "What difficulties do I have in relating to my friends?" The main difficulties listed were: shyness, pride, being annoying, being difficult to deal with, being stressed, being jealous, thinking you are always right, liking things on your way, not supporting falsehood, not trusting the other. To problematize, cards were grouped according to similarities and reflected in the group, with pride and difficulty in trust emerging as central themes.</p>	<p>After this reflective process, they were requested to propose ways of coping with the central difficulties. The strategies listed were: Pride (seeing own mistakes, apologizing, accepting help and accepting the opinion of others); Trust (keeping secrets and being mature). To evaluate the scope of the proposed Circle, a dynamic was performed, which consisted of placing a balloon between the adolescents, with one next to the other, and they should be able to move laterally without letting it fall, thus seeking to stimulate communication, teamwork and support between them.</p>
Unveiling the Self in relations of friendship	<p>Based on the characteristics listed by the participants in their relations of friendship, the theme of the last CC was to identify the SELF of adolescents in these relations. Thus, for problematization, the construction of a Bodymap was proposed, where the characteristics of "How I want to be in my relations of friendship" should be placed on one side. On the other side, they should put "How my friends want ME to be in relations of friendship".</p>	<p>The characteristics highlighted in "How I want to be in my relations of friendship" were: being less jealous, less shy, calmer, not telling secrets, accepting the more the opinion of the other and being honest. And "How my friends want ME to be", expressions such as: being friendly, sincere, keeping secret and talking what they like to hear. In the reflection process of this activity, it was possible to apprehend important characteristics of relations of friendships, which also fluctuated in the other CC, and show the implication of these interactions for the construction of both the personal and social identity of these adolescents.</p>

Chart 1 – Cont.
Source: Research data.

From the CC it was possible to apprehend that the collective experiences achieved in the interactions infer the social development of adolescents. Group belongingness, as well as the conditions that enable these interactions, direct their individual and collective actions in society. Thus, we have that the identity construction occurs from the transformations of adolescents through belonging and group recognition, with the development of relational skills, which contribute to self-knowledge, autonomy and positive attitudes based on principles and values, essential for adulthood.

DISCUSSION

The school is recognized by adolescents as a space for experimentation of social relationships and belonging, where they spend most of the day^(12,13,22). In this scenario, the Health

at School Program (HSP) is an important intersectoral strategy for health promotion, health education and comprehensive care. The way the health professional is inserted in school and moves the HSP is decisive for its scope⁽¹²⁾, when participatory and dialogical actions favor consideration and welcoming of social, economic and cultural particularities, an aspect achieved with the experience reported here.

Health interventions in schools tend to be discursive, centered on the conception of the adolescent as a repository of information. The CC placed the adolescents as active participants and the health professional as a mediator in debates on agendas, with the creation of a dialogical space on issues that experience and shape lives. In and from the collective, awareness and criticism of reality was being woven, considering the particularities of those adolescents who were there, empowerment to experiment with the exercise

of new personal and social behaviors⁽²³⁾. Since the first CC 'Unveiling relations', this intervention strategy was signified by the study participants as liberating, a space to express feelings. In this way, it is noticed that for them, the CC is an enriching experience and different from everything they go through in the educational process.

In the CC, adolescents experienced listening and the voice of themselves and others, with a possible discovery of the SELF and the other in relations⁽²³⁾, an aspect that tends to result in recognition of interpersonal relations as part of the life project⁽²⁴⁾. The Life Project, a structural theme of the National Policy for Comprehensive Health Care for Adolescents and Young People, is seen as a process of strengthening the identity of adolescents, involving the construction of being, knowing oneself, personal values, family and social context, recognizing themselves as active and determining their future⁽⁵⁾. A process that involves, in addition to personal identity, the social identity that is influenced by interactions, group belongingness and the social relationships established there, inferences recognized in this study.

'Signifying the relation of friendship' proposed, through the dynamics of the living statue, the dialogic of the movement of collective production of the symbol of friendship versus the non-movement of the statue, which translates into the recognition of roles in the interactional process and the inference of individual actions in collective recognition, a reflection on the role of the SELF in relationships and its implications in developing identity.

Relations of friendship were pointed out as determinants of feelings, humor, esteem, psychological well-being. They act dually, when support⁽²⁴⁾ favors companionship, intimacy and confrontations⁽²⁵⁾, and when there are conflicts and group rejection⁽²⁵⁾. Group belongingness and the yearning for relations of friendships are endorsed as relevant to adolescences⁽²⁶⁾.

Family relationships are also determinant to the well-being of adolescents⁽²⁷⁾, they were mentioned in the CC, they were not deepened in discussions, but the safety established from parental bonds directs adolescents to positive actions both with themselves and with others⁽²⁸⁾. For the adolescents in this study, parental interaction was mentioned from a more negative perspective⁽²⁹⁾, an interface that highlights relations of friendship as a support for these confrontations.

The tendency to look at adolescence as "a period of transition" has favored to forget the needs of this population. There is another tendency, that of looking when certain situations are present, such as pregnancy, substance use, violence. These biases disfavor the establishment of relationships that empower them, bet on autonomy and protagonism.

In line with the previous paragraph, the CC 'Supporting each other', 'Trusting relations', 'The nuances of friendship'

and 'Unveiling the Self in relations of friendship', show about the values necessary for the relation of friendship, providing an interactional process of adolescents with themselves, with reflection on their actions in these relations and life projections. Thus, group interaction with the objective of support, achievement of goals and decision-making is the boosting force for identity and autonomy of adolescents.

The CC expanded the repertoire of knowledge, attitudes, and life skills, with indications to be adopted by health professionals. Moving the principles of dialogue, recognition, respect, and appreciation of differences. This is in line with the National Policy for Popular Education in Health, instituted by Ordinance 2761/2013 within the scope of the Unified Health System⁽³⁰⁾ and the guidelines of the National Guidelines for Comprehensive Health Care for Adolescents and Young People⁽⁵⁾.

By putting the adolescent in a circle, without verticality, listening to others, dialoguing with them, there is contact with what is different, reflection on what happens there is intensified and, this process is emancipatory, it teaches everyone from the reality of each one and of the collective, it expands repertoires for life⁽²⁴⁾. Another highlight of this strategy is the bet on dynamic spaces, outdoors and with triggers based on the needs perceived and knowledge built in previous meetings.

Thus, this study, based on the scope presented, reinforces the power of the CC for the development of the HSP and for supporting the identity constructions of adolescents and their life projects.

■ CONCLUSION

The insertion of CC mediated by health professionals in the school setting favors an articulation of the HSP, PNEPS and the National Guidelines for Comprehensive Health Care for Adolescents and Young People, with positive projections for the health of adolescents, given the recommendation of these guidelines for participatory actions, dialogical and horizontal, with an approach that goes beyond vulnerabilities, but with guidance for the life project. Thus, the CC was powerful, allowed dialogues to support the process of construction of social identity.

The findings of the study pointed out the relations of friendship as anchors in the social confrontations of adolescence, raising the importance of understanding these interactions and group belongingness for the autonomy and social development of adolescents.

The proposed activities made the group voice and listening effective, respecting the diversity of conceptions of ways of life and being adolescent. The experience allowed

to recommend activities based on the CC for the partnership between health and education and, in this direction, the training of health and education professionals lacks betting on the adolescent and on egalitarian dialogue.

As a limit, stands out the fact that the activity was developed in a single scenario. Despite, the literature endorses the findings obtained, deriving notes and reflections that can be taken in other scenarios and for the qualification of the health and education partnership. It is suggested that future studies explore family relations in the fabric of the adolescent life project and their relationship with a negative perception on adult life, a relevant aspect for discussions of empowerment and support for adolescents and young people.

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