

Group chronicle: a tool for collaborative analysis and improvement of reflection on action research

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The functions that "group chronicle" (narrative of verbal and nonverbal events by a group of people discussing a common topic) might take on within action research projects relating to continuing healthcare education were analyzed. Professional practice was taken to encompass complex and tacit aspects within the social context, as proposed by the practice community. The starting point comprised action research results that used group chronicles as a non-dialectical tool. Thematic analysis was used on 31 excerpts of transcriptions of face-to-face meetings among the participants that contained the word "chronicle". Five functions were identified: facilitation of communication; engagement and identity construction; group memory and continuity of learning; raising of awareness of implicit aspects; and collaborative analysis. This tool addresses educational-investigative projects that seek to promote reflection in order to improve healthcare practices and construct knowledge from this perspective.

Keywords: Continuing education. Qualitative research. Health knowledge, attitudes and practices. Healthcare manpower. Narrative.

The challenge of Permanent Education in Health: action-research contributions and Community of Practice propositions

Changes in health care in Brazil are objects of politics aiming at humanization and networking, demanding strategies of continuous formation, as fomented by the Politics of

Permanent Education in Brazilian Health/PEH. The challenge is the transformation of learning practices in continuous service/education ordered and imposed, verticalized, for professionals of only one category, and centered in processes of technical-instrumental learning for participative proposals, dialogical and that face the reality of people's work, in organization of work processes, care and administration in health¹⁻⁵.

For the effectiveness of these changes it is hoped that PEH crystallizes in collective and critical-reflexive in the work⁴⁻⁸ processes, understanding the learning as dynamics, procedural, resulting of the active engagement in the world, in a process of construction of meaning⁹. Besides, PEH demands to value the experiences so much lived by the professionals and the senses that were built on that - given the tacit character on which the experience is constructed^{8,9} - as the reflection about the experience, that impels the professional to be conscious of what is tacit, to evaluate actions and redefine meanings, being able, like this, to produce new knowledge^{10,11}.

PEH aims to face the crystallization of implicit patterns of organization, work and attendance, because "frequently, problems seemingly of technical nature can express latent conflicts in the manners of thinking and acting of the professionals"⁴, p.897. Therefore to promote the transformation by the education, the problem in subject needs to emerge, the people need to recognize themselves in the singularity of the situation and be recognized in their needs and creative-transforming potential⁴.

These presuppositions are also extolled by the action-research that, in the interface among the fields of education and health, has been used for knowledge production and technology of care, as well as of formation and professional development¹²⁻¹⁷. This modality of qualitative investigation is based on the collaborative production of know-how about a theme of practical order, including all involved (researchers/authors and participants/actors) in reciprocal manners of relationship and accepting the practice, aiming at improvement, when building intentional actions seeking transformations¹⁸⁻²¹.

Some action-research projects in the field of health are referred to in the Community of Practice and Identity (CoP)⁹ for presenting a theoretical-methodological structure that favors the combination of these characteristics²²⁻²⁸. CoP implicates in the active participation of their members, building and molding the knowledge in the dialogue with themselves and with the others, encouraging the participants to reflect, investigate, analyze and collectively evaluate their own actions, values and knowledge. The conductive axis is the negotiation of meanings, when sharing and producing repertoires, knowledge, ways of making, instruments, histories.

CoP offers a structure that foments the continuity of the learning in the interaction between the individuals' participation and the reification (what is produced by the participation) to organize actions and interactions to produce new senses and new participation forms, always with the focus on practice. The reification of the learning processes occurs in different materials (protocols, posters, any real elements of the organizational change of a service) and it creates

external markers favoring the perception and the conscience of what was produced, besides they serve as support points for new reflections, around which the negotiation can be organized⁹.

In this way, Toledo, Giatti and Jacobi²⁰, identified that action-researchs metodologically structured to offer reflexive tools, nominated dialectics, and non-dialectics, that provide analyses and results for the participants, provide greater implication of all involved in the research, reciprocity in the relationships among researchers and actors^{19, 29} and participation in the project:

When discussing with the participants the results of these instruments, answers are supplied to the inquiries, favoring, inclusive, the credibility of the methodology (reducing the resistance and contributing to the understanding of the involved about the relevance of the problem in focus²⁰, p. 639

The use of the group chronicle as non-dialectic element in action-research

In our study³⁰ we also found results similar to Jacobi, Giatti and Toledo²⁰. Our action-research was interested to understand the occupational therapists' professional development in early career and to contribute to the increase of the reflexivity regarding practice and improvement of the clinical reasoning. The 6 participating professionals in second year of Residence in Occupational Therapy in Mental Health and the action-research was offered as an extension activity. In this action-research, the dialectic elements were the fortnightly participation in loco in a group reflection with an hour and a half of duration, along 10 months; and the writing of reflexive diaries by each one of the participants, with the researcher's feedback, in communication by e-mail³¹. The non-dialectic elements that were part of the methodological design were the group chronicle; the devolutive of preliminary analysis of first six encounters and the devolution of the final data analysis.

The group chronicle is characterized by a narrative of events (verbal and non-verbal) of an encounter, of a group of people aiming at the discussion of a common theme, containing the interpretation of what was discussed by the group and excerpts as examples of these interpretations. This tool interferes theoretically and methodologically in the theory of operative groups of Pichón-Rivière^{32, 33}, that values the communication as key-element for learning. In the operative group, besides the group coordinator's presence, who is responsible for facilitating the communication, there is also the observer who, does not participate in the discussions, but is present making notes about the verbal and non-verbal communication. The observer and the coordinator are responsible for elaborating the group chronicle based on the descriptive report made by the observer, considering what happened before the meeting and in the meeting itself, the main theme and the most relevant contents discussed in the group, themes not understood and discomforts noticed.

In the context of the research, Lucchese and Barros³⁴ suggest that the group chronicle can be used as a field diary, and even as a stage of the analysis of data, due to the coordinator's and the observer's joint collaboration.

In our action-research there was no participation of an observer. Like this, the encounters were recorded in audio and transcribed, and starting from that transcription the chronicle was elaborated. We read each passage of the transcription, to identify the subject on the agenda, so much in temporary terms (a thing after the other) as causal (a thing because of the other), as it can be seen in the Table 1. This strategy was thought of, initially, so that if a participant was absent, would still know what had been discussed, as to serve as base for other discussions, as reified material⁹. Elaborated, the chronicle was sent by electronic mail to all the members, who had the commitment to read it before the next encounter of the group.

Table 01 – Excerpt of the chronicle of the fourteenth meeting of CoP²⁸.

"[...] The group validated the researcher and collaborator's statement, and placed the subject under the point of view of PROFESSIONAL GROWTH, as to how much the maturity can lead to a greater peacefulness in what refers to PROFESSIONAL SPECIFICITY, starting from experiences lived and reflected.

"[...] what is this, not far from our thought what are we talking about today, makes total sense what you are saying, what everybody is saying, then it makes sense because there is something within myself that says this so, but why is it that when I am in practice this catches me in a way that seems like a virus, you breathe in once, you are already contaminated – but it is not occupational therapy, why she wants to give clay to her? She is a psychologist, she will give clay to her - [...] I think that maybe with experience [...] we feel more tranquil in relation to our practice, [...] I don't know if we are in one moment of discovering, and we are in several different places and the people demand different things starting from the understanding they have regarding what we can do, and there we are very lost, [...] I think it is a professional immaturity like this, at least this is how I feel, because makes total sense, [...]"

"[...] I think that this difference that you are bringing that makes sense, [...] among some thing that exists, is experienced, reflected, experienced again, reflected again and experienced and reflected once again, is the construction of experience and of the professional maturity that allows it to come forward with more peacefulness, what you are saying that maybe for the time being I need a reminder every so often and that after a while this will come naturally, with the experience you are going to have, no, I believe.' "

"[...] Like this, I believe more and more that people who are more inconvenienced by its practice are the ones who grow.'
[...]"

Considering the continuous process (18 encounters in group), in which the feed-back offered by the group chronicle of the previous encounter was a constant element, we observed a useful relationship established among the non-dialectic reified element (group chronicle) and the participation in the encounters.

Works that discuss the use of the narrative in the process of action-research of qualitative evaluation, detach the capacity of the narrative to give voice to the multiplicity of subject an ample way, linked, coherent, in approaching the best possible way the reality experience, as well as, what was produced by the participantes^{13, 15, 35, 36}. Besides, they indicate little exploration of capacity of narrative as communication device, in the context of the action-research, as possibility of the subjects to return to previous narrations in a circle of construction¹¹ of meanings, just what observed in our action-research, this characteristic of the group chronicle as communicative potency.

This and other characteristics observed, as capacity of the tool to promote the participation in the research and to support the recognition of the real problems to be worked in CoP²⁷, they led us to systematize this experience and to understand which aspects surrounded the use of the group chronicle as formative and investigative tool in the action-research process.

Methodology

To understand which aspects surrounded the use of the group chronicle developed of action-research, we located the "chronicle" word in all of the transcriptions of conversations in CoP encounters with the tool of localization of words in software text editor. The word was found 32 times. When analyzing the context in which they were inserted, as well as their meaning, only one contained sense different from "group chronicle" (chronicle as literary style). Those excerpts (the word in the context of the conversation) were submitted to thematic analysis³⁷, looking to reveal their nucleus of sense, the constancy and the importance of repetition to reveal to what purpose the tool was rendering.

Results

Five nucleus of sense in the conversation of the CoP participants' were identified during the encounters. They contained the word "chronicle". The analysis of the themes pointed out five functions that this tool performed during the development of CoP, favoring group participation, collaborative learning and validation of the researcher's interpretations that occurred in previous encounters: 1. to facilitate communication; 2. to support commitment and construction of group identity; 3. to guarantee memory of the group and continuity of the learning; 4. To allow awareness of implicit aspects; 5. To allow collaborative analysis by evaluation of interpretation.

1. To facilitate the communication

Sometimes when the word "chronicle" appeared in the conversations of CoP, it had the function of beginning the conversation, to name its focus, to call the other participants to the

discussion, to offer guidelines, to reduce the anxiety of facing the unknown - mainly in the first encounters of the group, as previous production was presented. This function was used quite a lot by the coordinator/researcher, aiming to facilitate the communication and to propitiate conversation so that people would become involved and participate.

"[...] reading the chronicle, reading again our history in the last group, [...] one of the things that most appeared [...] it was that interaction and me [...] How much this [...] it is suffered by both sides, [...]" (researcher, fourth encounter)

"[...] I made a copy for each one, [...] I would like to know if you agree this proposal of recovering a little... [...]" (researcher, fifth encounter)

"[...] I am remembering the chronicle, when somebody speaks like this: [...]" (Mariana, second encounter)

"I think only to retake [...] the chronicle of the last encounter, [...] we began to choose themes that the group [...] is interested to discuss [...]" (researcher, sixth encounter)

"I think I would feel a little bit lost... and when I read it I felt myself calming down [...]" (Mariana, second encounter)

2. To support commitment and construction of the group identity

In these excerpts, the word "chronicle" was inserted in the CoP participants conversation when they identified with what had been said, and, a lot of times, being aware of themselves in the excerpts of the speeches. This movement seemed to go towards the proposition of construction of identity and engagement in participating in the enterprise⁸, or even, in the propositions of the action-research¹⁶, favoring the implication in the collaborative work, as in the following passages:

"I found interesting to see our speech [...] writing: Wow, did I say that! You read and later you think: Yes, I said that [...]" (Marisa, third encounter)

"[...] they were things that I also felt, but some of them I didn't put in the diary, therefore it was very familiar for me what was discussed." (Mariana, third encounter)

"I was thinking: Wow, incredible! I said: Heavens, wanted to be there and a pleasant sensation come over, you know! I am not alone in my anguishes, in my doubts! [...] it was incredible [...] to

see that everybody experiences these anguishes, for these doubts. It was also touching, the speeches, how they were presented, what the people brought." (Fernanda, fifteenth encounter)

3. To guarantee the memory of the group and the continuity of the learning

The passages of this category demonstrate that chronicle of the group was used as reification of the group production, allowing access to the information for who was absent, and recovery of themes already discussed. That function propitiated that the learning process would not suffer paralyzation, interruption, disagreement or misunderstanding.

"I was not here, I think it was very good, I liked a lot to have had this access, [...]" (Mariana, third encounter)

"To have this resource, [...], the memory of the group." (Marisa, third encounter)

"[...] be able to read the seventh chronicle, that several themes already had appeared, in another manner, this responsibility already had appeared before, in another context, but sometimes the themes return. They returned again now." (researcher, eighth encounter)

"Then I think it was also comfortable, it is a care, they are speeches, but of this group, as how we were building, and here is a thing constructed, not only what each one was speaking in the other week, in the other encounter." (Cecília, third encounter)

4. To allow awareness of implicit aspects

Given the tacit character on which the experience is built and its importance for the daily professional practice, the constituent excerpts of that theme reveal this implicit character, and to review what was talked in the group permitted to choose new ways, to be more conscious of conflicts, to evaluate actions and redefine significance. The moments of greater impact in CoP, in the sense to redirect the collaborative work and to elaborate tensions, they were characterized by the awareness of aspects until then unknown²⁷.

"Wow, I had no idea! [...] I had no idea that had spoken about other things, [...]" (Fernanda, fifth encounter)

"I was under the impression that I was way out of the proposal from the group in the other week and there reading, I was: its has a lot to do with the fact of being a therapist, in the initial sense of what we are questioning [...]" (Isadora, fifth encounter)

"Always when I read: how many things! Seems that we don't have the dimension of everything that we said, of everything that was said. I have this sensation, and it is good to look back on what we experienced, to look and to see everything that [...] happened." (Marisa, eighth encounter)

5. To permit collaborative analysis through the evaluation of the interpretation

Although a great part of validation of the researcher's interpretations is visible in the excerpts relative to other functions, some excerpts, in smaller amount within the ambience of all the encounters, were directly related to the participants' appreciation regarding the form and the contents of the chronicle, as well as of the researcher in inviting the participants to this appreciation.

Hi there [...]? I have asked you to take a look at the chronicle, and what did you think [...]?" (researcher, eighth group)

"[...] very nice idea of you to share with us also what you were thinking, [...]" (Mariana, third encounter)

"And I also found it was interesting to know how you will prepare this report. I found interesting to also have access to what you do [...]" (Tatiane, third encounter)

Well... it is very good like this." (Tatiane, eighth group)

Discussion

The first and second categories highlight the function of the chronicle to facilitate the communication of the group, as well as the participation and the construction of the identity in CoP. The active participation, implicated, can be considered the motivating element of action-research¹⁷, indispensable to guarantee the quality and effectiveness of the project, as all the involved subjects build a sense of belonging²¹.

Relationships⁹ are shown between participation and identity, as construction of an identity goes by the negotiation of senses of the experience of being member in social communities. Like this, the practice under the aspect of the identity can be understood as a field of negotiation in the ways of being "a person" in this context, in a process of mutual constitution between individual and community, considering the resulting tensions of the inherent conflict between individual and collective.

The chronicle of the group seemed to favor "becoming member" of a CoP, that when stating the recognition of that belonging, for the speeches submerged in the text, define the participation of each one within the whole construction. Like this, the participants were called on to deal with the identity that the group was producing and to negotiate their identity before this new community.

The construction of the identity is procedural and temporal⁹. Like this, what is aimed at in a action-research is that the participants negotiate meanings and reach clarity of what they value as important or not, for certain theme and certain practice, what contributes to this community's identity and what can be left aside.

This way, the functions of the chronicle facilitating communication, to favor engagement and construction of identity in a individual-community process seems to favor the identification of the problem to be faced/ discussed/negotiated and to increase the participants' perception about her implication in action-research to establish processes of identity negotiation between what they want and the one that the community longs for. These characteristics propitiate group work on tensions generated regarding knowledge construction, considering that research modality is totally dependent on the participation of the subjects^{18, 29}.

The action-research demands a process of actors' transformation in to authors^{19, 30}. In a perspective of the "thinking" professional, it is about transforming professionals into investigators of their own practice, in the context in which it occurs¹⁰. For effectiveness of changes in care practices, the reflection process - considered a thought linked to the action and that it demands a different action from the routine, enlarging the understanding of the relationships with other experiences and ideas and creating conditions for the continuity of the learning^{38, 39}.

The reflection process has the potential of bringing to the surface the implicit aspects of the practice¹⁰. Like this, the group chronicle, placed as reified object of participation of the subjects in CoP, acted as an external mark favoring the conscience of what the group produced and of tacit aspects not noticed previously, which favored new reflections, around which the negotiation can be organized⁹.

We would like to highlight that the chronicle was the tool used to sediment the participants' speech, the speech itself a form of reification, however so ephemeral that it seems participation. When reified in narrative form, the speech becomes independent of the person⁹ and the narrative starts to mediate speech and action¹³. Like this, the group chronicle doesn't just deal with the past, but it can be used to change the focus, to allow new ways of understanding and establishing new relationships. In this context, what is new can be transformed in knowledge, which is the ideal context for learning and creation of knowledge⁹.

In our study, the group chronicle was used not only as non-dialectic element, in the perspective of giving back the interpretations/results of the research team to the participants in a single moment, but, inserted in an enlarged process (ten months, in fortnightly encounters) retaking what was produced previously as base for a new production. This characteristic of

continuity of the narrative/chronicle also demonstrated its capacity to foment the communication in a fluent and porous¹³ way, supplying as much the learning process as the research.

Like this, when validating the researcher's interpretations regarding the speech of the previous encounter, the participants also propitiated that the analysis of research data would be continuous and preliminarily made and validated (fifth category). The group chronicle favored the systematization process and objectivation of data, while elucidated theme focus in discussion, guaranteeing what was named constructed visibility¹⁴.

When opening spaces for elements until then unknown, the chronicles tensioned speech and action, generating useful elements for the action-research, and giving visibility to what is subjective and particular, difficult to access in eventual research methodologies, and that do not depend so much on active participation of subjects/actors.

Final considerations

In this article, we aimed to elucidate aspects relative to the use of "group chronicle", tool so much for promotion of reflection, as for collaborative analysis in a action-research process. This way, it was possible to reveal that such tool can contribute to favor the communication in group processes, to foment the participation of subjects/actors in action-research and to favor identity negotiation/construction in the project.

The interaction between participation of subjects and result of this participation, as group chronicle, favored the enlargement of knowledge on the theme/problem in discussion¹⁴, contributing to the knowledge production and care in health that, most of the time, includes problems of complex nature, of transdisciplinary challenges towards successful interventions^{12, 17, 20}.

The group chronicle also propitiated a process of collaborative production of knowledge, when offered as device of recovery of previous production (memory) and that, mainly, it served as independent device of the subject⁹, so that new reflections would be elaborated, in a continuous process.

The references used for construction of our research²⁸, as the Community of Practice and Identity⁹, Practical Rationality^{10,11} Epistemology and the referential of the action-research^{18,29}, were same ones for the analysis of results of this study and it was possible to establish positive relationships between different complementary themes: fomentation of changes in practice, in our case, in healthcare; professional and collaborative learning; the nature of practice and reflection on it as mechanism of knowledge construction; the participation of subjects/actors for knowledge construction regarding the practice and aiming at its improvement; and action-research.

From the point of view of PEH (Permanent Education in Health), these references, as well as " group chronicle" tool, seem to adjust to the objectives of an education for Unique System of Health starting from the tensioning of the work processes, organization and management¹⁻⁸. Besides, taking into consideration that participation of subjects is the factor of warranty of quality

of any formative process, the group chronicle can be used as an extra strategy, that favors construction of a practice community's identity that searches for changes in the Health.

However, if the process of PEH does not insert in a formal action-research, considering the long time required for the accomplishment of transcriptions and elaboration of the chronicle, other strategies can be thought of, as the group observer's presence, or even of participant members that, in certain encounters, assume the task of registration and construction of the narrative/chronicle.

As researchers, we would like to emphasize that the exercise of elaboration of the group chronicle permitted with that we were, constantly, immersed in the research, identifying subjects, questioning, contemplating on which possible actions would adjust better for certain situation. It was a feedback process between intervention and research, fomentation of reflexivity in the research team, and enlargement of range of subjects relative to the project, registered in the field diary.

In relation to the limits of this article, we recognize that our analysis was based on a single experience and, like this, our objective was limited to elucidating some aspects relative to the use of this tool.

Therefore, we highlighted the functionality of the group chronicle as a tool that envisages educational and investigative projects that aim for promotion of reflection on improvement of care practices in health, and action-research projects interested in understanding aspects of the practice from the point of view of how professionals understand it and to build knowledge in this context.

Collaborators

The authors worked together in all the stages of the production of the manuscript.

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