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Debates

The National Policy of Popular Education in Health

discussion

Knowledge changes practices

Saberes transformam práticas

Saberes transforman las prácticas

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José Ivo Pedrosa's text presents in brief lines relevant history marks in the field of Popular Education and Health (PEH). It is worth starting this debate with a brief digression regarding the term Popular Education and Health that initially used the connective "the" and not the preposition "in", more used with reference to the very historical process, even adopted in the title of the National Policy on Popular Education in Health in the SUS (PNEPS-SUS). However, the initial collective reflections that triggered the construction process of actions to be ruled by a state policy expressed an idea of articulation between both fields, as a way to emphasize that the process foundation is Popular Education, as a field of resistance, fights, and forces that "bring the concern of incorporating the knowledge of common people in the health policies and practices"[1] (p. 7) overcoming the conception of Health Education as an exclusive responsibility of health care professionals. Popular Education aims at contributing with new ways of providing Health. It was also about opposing to the use of the term Education in Health, little problematized in daily services and practices, and intensely used within an instrumental perspective of Education.

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I highlight what it seems to be an insignificant grammatical preciosity to present a question that permeates Pedrosa's text and has concrete consequences: What does "popular" mean in PEH?

In the production of this field, there is not only a pedagogical positioning but also an epistemological and ethical-political one, supported by actions and practices in the historical fight against oppression and invisibility of various cultures and knowledge. However, how has this "product" been incorporated into the health practices and policies that guarantee these practices? From the convergence perspective of forms of resistance and fight, affirmation of identities, and diversity of knowledge, it is necessary to question if the understanding about the radicalism of the PEH proposal has been effectively comprehended and put into practice in the health sector, a field in which technical and scientific knowledge is still hegemonic.

It is not uncommon that practices self-entitled of Popular Education are indeed focused on seeking different forms of providing Education. restricted to the methodological dimension. It is as if PEH was only restricted to a "happier" and "informal" way of educating, incorporating artistic languages and expressions, such as theater and music, inside out. It is worth emphasizing that it does not consist of denying or disqualifying various expression forms of the popular culture in its potential to converge senses and create new world understandings, capable of strengthening and maintaining people of subaltern and vulnerable groups strong. On the contrary, the critic is directed to the proposals that aim at expropriating these groups from their knowledge and cultural expressions to mimic a stereotyped idea of "popular", which is sometimes done ingenuously and non-critically. Thus, the term "informal" is in between quotation marks, reinforcing the comprehension about a popular education produced in daily life, which exceeds and is outside formality, from forms and formats of institutionalized Education.

It is clear that there is not a unique way of educating and that PEH is not exclusive or property of any group or collective. On the other hand, depending on who conducts the process in each place, there is the risk of reducing it to an expropriation form, a perspective that only names PEH as a non-critical action, with no historicity and uprooted from the local reality, which can end up reproducing traditional prescriptive educational practices and ultimately serve a social order that naturalizes injustice and does not make contradictions and projects in dispute explicit. It is essential to assert that the institutionalization of the PNEPS can be established in various spaces, aligned or not with the popular fights and demands. For this reason, as Pedrosa often states, not all educative actions named popular are indeed so, as well as many initiatives that are not named PE are indeed examples of it.

Therefore, some questions about the limits and the potentialities of institutionalizing PEH should be added to Pedrosa's text. The crucial moment (in the sense of crossroads and choice of paths), which was the dispute and election process of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva to the Presidency, left clues for this reflection. In this period, the National Articulation of PEH Movements and Practices (ANEPS) was organized, which proposed a horizontal movement in its foundations, with a clear political demarcation from which it was intended to act:

> For living in a historical society of classes, where positions of different social groups are always changing in relation to one another, it is important to recognize that knowledge changes practices and that, the fundamental action, from the popular education point of view, is to fight for the transformation of society, for the affirmation of the individuals and, therefore, to respect the differences, know how to listen and recognize[1]. (p. 3)

In this paragraph, we find the foundations and contradictions that have historically produced advances and setbacks, sometimes setbacks in the very advancements, in the PEH movement.

It is necessary to consider that the options regarding the paths and priorities, especially in the face of the limits of resources that could fund mobilization and education actions, and educational materials, among others, demanded strategic decisions within the PNEPS. It was necessary to somehow adjust to the existing conditions while there was an effort to advance projects to expand the PNEPS scope. We questioned to that extent these strategic options drained energies that historically constituted, in the PEH movement, direct, daily, and radical actions from the local agencies: services, territories, communities, and movements.

Despite the fact that the institutional projects, especially the educational ones, are based on participative and strengthening pedagogical methods of popular people, it is necessary to question if there was any capacity loss of PEH, as a health movement, in the hearing, dialog, and debates on the right to health with groups of popular classes at the local level, of the territories. They are questions that have been produced based on the confirmation of the PEH partners about certain imbalance between the agenda of institutional demands (academic congresses, governmental seminars), quite intense in several moments, even if occasional, and our capacity of continuing local dialogs and constructions with minor groups and popular educators in the communities on a systematic, procedural, and daily basis.

Not long ago, José Ivo Pedrosa and I were going by an application transport service to an activity at the State University of Ceará, and this happened exactly in the week when former-president Lula had been arrested. While we were discussing the political situation, we noticed that the young driver was following our conversation with some interest, until when, overcoming his shyness, he asked the following question embarrassed: "Could you, professors, explain something that no one has ever explained to me? What is that thing of the left and the right that people talk so much in politics?" It was a situation that awakened questions about what kind of political debate and collective is being offered to the popular social classes. Besides working to survive, what opportunities for reflection and exchange about the fights for health and decent life exist nowadays?

It is necessary to question the limits and possibilities of a PEH politics, as the political game rules in the relation between movements, academy, services, and governments are not the same.

There is an imbalance between the knowledge accumulated in the PEH journey and our current capacity to create debates with an effective popular participation. On one side, there is maturity in the collective reflection expressed in the increasing academic production and an increase in the visibility of Popular Education and Health within the academic spaces and health institutions. On the other hand, it is noticed that the groups and collectives engaged broadened their charts with the adherence of students and professionals. However, the debates tend to focus on several agendas, which are undoubtedly relevant, but that do not converge to the collective analysis of the contradictions for the social reproduction of the working class, increasingly weakened and fragilized. Recalling Eymard Vasconcelos[2] criticism to the traditional way of teaching, is there a new "cultural ditch" between services, academy, and population?

If "knowledge changes practices", as explicit in the intention of the PEH field facing the emergence of a democratic and popular government in 2003, what knowledge and practices are necessary today to overcome distances and effect new deals capable of defending and guaranteeing the right to health?

These and other questions need to guide our actions from now on whatever space we are in. PEH people in the exercise of pedagogical actions in health that should also be explicitly political and stand in favor of the principles of social justice and rights. It is time to radicalize, get to the roots of the pedagogical practice based on dialog and on the idea of emancipation, once again accepting Paulo Freire's[3] invitation: let us get undressed, get naked, and restart dressing as people.

Conflict of interest

The author have no conflict of interest to declare.

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