

Applicability of Culture Circles in Health Education: An Integrative Literature Review

Aplicabilidade dos Círculos de Cultura na Educação Em Saúde: Uma Revisão Integrativa de Literatura

Aplicabilidad de los Círculos Culturales en la Educación para la Salud: Una Revisión Integrativa de la Literatura

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar as potencialidades e aplicabilidades dos círculos de cultura de Paulo Freire para as práticas de educação em saúde. **Metodologia:** trata-se de uma revisão integrativa de literatura conduzida a partir de uma busca na BVS, PubMed, Web of Science e Scopus, a partir dos protocolos PRISMA 2020 e ENTREQ. **Resultados e Discussões:** a partir da análise dos trabalhos se evidenciou em dois eixos temáticos aspectos como as etapas, a instrumentalização e as potencialidades dessa abordagem para a práxis da educação em saúde sendo possível evidenciar aspectos positivos como o vínculo, a horizontalidade, longitudinalidade, interdisciplinaridade e corresponsabilização promovidos por essas práticas, em razão da abertura ao diálogo e ao protagonismo dos educandos que ocorre nesse processo. **Considerações finais:** identifica-se a importância dos círculos de cultura na promoção da autonomia, reflexão e consciência crítica aos pacientes diante dos processos educativos.

DESCRIPTORES: Educação em Saúde; Ensino; Integralidade em Saúde; Humanização da Assistência.

ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the potential and applicability of Paulo Freire's culture circles for health education practices. **Methodology:** this is an integrative literature review conducted based on a search in the VHL, PubMed, Web of Science and Scopus, based on the PRISMA 2020 and ENTREQ protocols. **Results and Discussions:** based on the analysis of the works, aspects such as the stages, instrumentalization and potential of this approach for the practice of health education were highlighted in two thematic axes, making it possible to highlight positive aspects such as the bond, horizontality, longitudinality, interdisciplinarity and co-accountability promoted by these practices, due to the openness to dialogue and the protagonism of the students that occurs in this process. **Final considerations:** the importance of culture circles in promoting autonomy, reflection and critical awareness of patients in the face of educational processes is identified.

DESCRIPTORS: Health Education; Teaching; Comprehensiveness in Health; Humanization of Care.

RESUMEN:

Objetivo: analizar las potencialidades y aplicabilidades de los círculos de cultura de Paulo Freire para las prácticas de educación en salud. **Metodología:** se trata de una revisión integradora de la literatura realizada a partir de una búsqueda en BVS, PubMed, Web of Science y Scopus, siguiendo los protocolos PRISMA 2020 y ENTREQ. **Resultados y Discusión:** a partir del análisis de los trabajos, se evidenciaron en dos ejes temáticos aspectos como las etapas, la instrumentalización y las potencialidades de este enfoque para la praxis de la educación en salud, destacándose aspectos positivos como el vínculo, la horizontalidad, la longitudinalidad, la interdisciplinariedad y la corresponsabilidad promovidos por estas prácticas, debido a la apertura al diálogo y al protagonismo de los educandos que ocurre en este proceso. **Consideraciones finales:** se identifica la importancia de los círculos de cultura en la promoción de la autonomía, la reflexión y la conciencia crítica de los pacientes en los procesos educativos.

DESCRIPTORES: Educación en Salud; Enseñanza; Integralidad en Salud; Humanización de la Atención.

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INTRODUCTION

In view of the phenomena of medicalization and interventionism in healthcare practices and the consequent reduction in the patient's leading role in the health-disease process¹, the importance of actions aimed at promoting health is identified, based on the construction of knowledge around healthy habits and behaviors, focused on preventing harm and maintaining biopsychosocial well-being.²

However, for this purpose to be achieved, there is a need to guarantee pedagogical spaces for the promotion and construction of such health knowledge with the community, which gives rise to the importance of educational practices capable of reaching users through a horizontal, humanized and unique process.

It is therefore necessary to consider a pedagogical methodology that goes beyond didactic transposition³, including patients effectively in the therapeutic process, based on a worldview open to overcoming banking conceptions in education, creating,

through dialogue, horizontality between participants and recognizing them as unfinished subjects and in communion through the constant search for "being more".^{4,5}

In view of this, the relevance of the worldview proposed by Paulo Freire is highlighted, whose conjectures defend a pedagogy capable of stimulating autonomy and critical reflection of students regarding the reality in which they find themselves inserted, in order to promote a process of transformation of the individual and their social context based on dialogical educational practice.⁵

And in the face of such a theoretical framework, the culture circles, proposed by Freire^{4,5}, materialize this worldview, constituting one of its most prominent approaches, especially in the areas of human sciences and literacy, achieving, based on a horizontal arrangement of participants, a pedagogical approach mediated by dialogue and the integration of realities in the educational process.⁶

In turn, this panorama aligns with the needs of current health education practices, given the constant dehu-

manization and ineffectiveness that have plagued this context, leading to an educational process that is disconnected from the real needs of individuals and inefficient in terms of adherence and effective reach of this public⁷, which gives rise to the application of such an approach in this process, given its effectiveness, especially in popular and community settings.

That said, identifying the need for studies that gather the available evidence on the use of such a methodology in this context, this study aimed to analyze the potential and applicability of Paulo Freire's culture circles for health education practices.

METHOD

This is an integrative literature review⁸ focused on the synthesis of evidence related to the applicability of culture circles in health education practices, based on previous empirical studies.

To this end, a comprehensive search was carried out, using the search strategy described in Table 1, in the search engines of the Virtual Health Library

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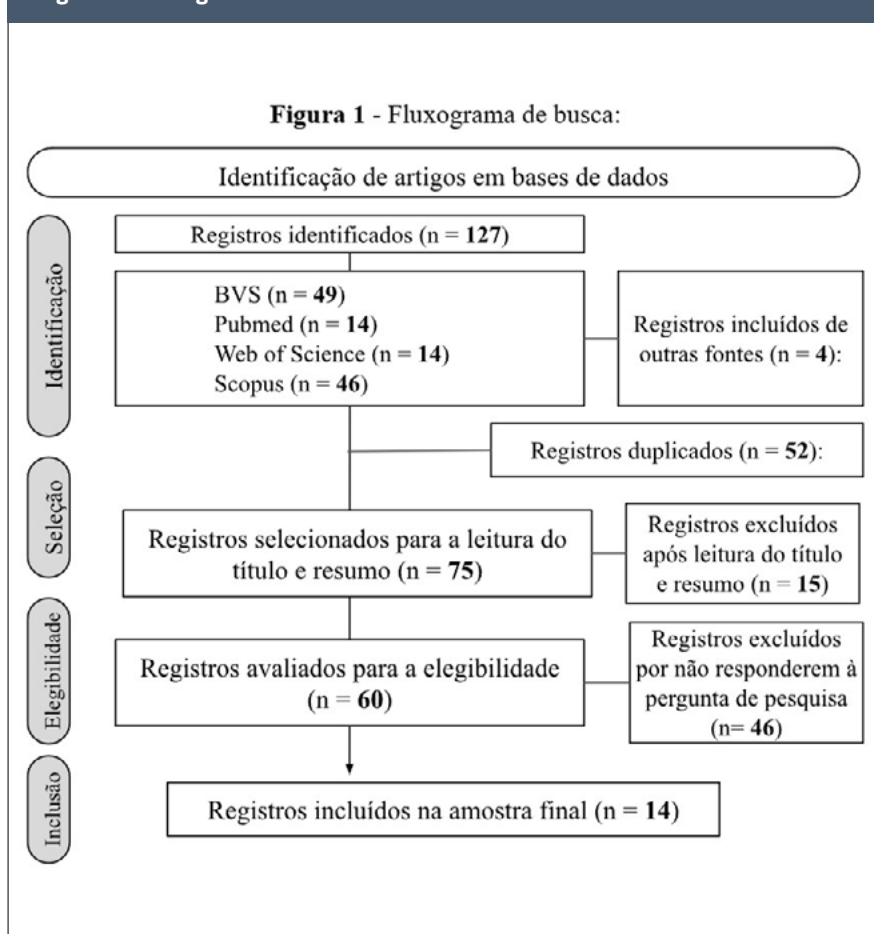
(VHL), PubMed, Web of Science and Scopus, where Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS/MeSH) were used and crossed using the Boolean operators “AND” and “OR”.

Table 1 - Search strategy:

Database	Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS/MeSH)
VHL	((“Círculo de cultura”) AND ((“Saúde”) OR (“Letramento em Saúde”) OR (“Educadores em Saúde”) OR (“Sistema de Aprendizagem em Saúde”) OR (“Educação em Saúde”) OR (“Educar para a Saúde”) OR (“Educação para a Saúde”) OR (“Educação para a Saúde Comunitária”) OR (“Educação Sanitária”)))
PubMed, Web of Science e Scopus	((“Culture circle”) AND ((“Health”) OR (“Health Literacy”) OR (“Health Educators”) OR (“Learning Health System”) OR (“Health Education”)))

Source: prepared by the authors, 2024.

Figura 1 - Fluxograma de busca:



Source: prepared by the authors, 2024.

RESULTS

Using the search strategy described in the VHL, PubMed, Web of Science and Scopus platforms, applying the established inclusion criteria, a corpus of 123 national

and international records was identified. Four records obtained from other sources were added, totaling 127 records, of which 52 were removed due to duplication.

Subsequently, 75 records remained and went through the selection stage, where the title and abstract of the works were an-

The inclusion criteria were: all studies published in the last five years (2020 to 2024), adopting the exclusion criteria: duplicate studies and those that did not report health education practices aimed at the population based on the use of Paulo Freire's culture circles approach.

In order to ensure greater methodological rigor in the searches, an adaptation of the PRISMA 2020 protocol (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis) was adopted to conduct this review, as well as ENTREQ (Enhancing Transparency in Reporting the Synthesis of Qualitative Research) to assess the quality of the selected works and for the qualitative meta-synthesis of the studies, in order to maintain the reliability and replicability of this process.⁹ Thus, the analysis of the works was carried out using Microsoft Excel® software, following the search flowchart described in Figure 1.

alyzed in order to keep those that were in fact potentially eligible for the synthesis. Eligibility was assessed, where 60 works were read in full, keeping only those that answered the research question, resulting in a final sample of 14 works, described in Table 2 and included in the review.

Table 2: Characterization of selected studies

Nº	Title	Author and ano	Objective	Results
1	Adapting Paulo Freire's Participatory Education to Develop Self-Management Education Programs for Seniors With Diabetes	Camargo-Plazas <i>et al.</i> , 2021 ¹⁰ .	Recommend the integration of Paulo Freire's culture circles into the development of diabetes self-management education (DSME) programs for older adults.	Freire's culture circles uniquely contribute to empowerment education through their emphasis on problem-posing education and mutual collaboration between older adults and health care providers in ways that transform individuals into emerging teachers and social actors and leaders in their communities.
2	Educational actions with adolescents on the prevention of COVID-19: experience report	Bubadué <i>et al.</i> , 2022 ¹¹ .	to describe the academic experience in carrying out educational actions with adolescents on the prevention of COVID-19.	The educational actions were based on Paulo Freire's cultural circles and problematization, so that adolescents could move from naive awareness to critical awareness on prevention and care regarding COVID-19..
3	Cancer in times of COVID-19: repercussions on the lives of women undergoing cancer treatment	Souza <i>et al.</i> , 2020 ¹² .	to understand the experience of coping with and the repercussions of COVID-19, from the perspective of women undergoing cancer treatment.	In the virtual Culture Circle, two topics were discussed: challenges in coping with cancer and COVID-19; lessons learned from this experience, considering a rebirth from one's own ashes.
4	Culture Circle as a health promotion strategy: encounters between popular education and interdisciplinarity	Borges <i>et al.</i> , 2022 ¹³ .	to describe the process of bringing professionals from a health unit closer to a specific group of residents in the territory with little access and little connection to the health service, through the use of Paulo Freire's Culture Circle and an interdisciplinary approach.	This study presents the use of the Culture Circle, proposed by Paulo Freire, as a tool for bringing health professionals closer to a group of families in vulnerable situations in the context of the territory of a peripheral health unit located in a capital city in the South region.
5	Conceptions of young students about the public health system and services	Mendieta <i>et al.</i> , 2022 ¹⁴ .	to describe the conceptions of young students about the public health system and services, based on participatory research.	The students associate health services with diseases and biological issues, and they know that the services provided by the Unified Health System are financed with public money. The students' view of the Basic Health Unit was worrying due to their lack of knowledge about what this service is, despite its physical proximity to the school. Furthermore, they reported not attending the unit.
6	Conversando sobre a prevenção do HIV/AIDS com homens jovens usuários de crack / Talking about the prevention of HIV/AIDS with young men crack users	Pinto <i>et al.</i> , 2019 ¹⁵ .	To report on the educational intervention with young crack users aimed at preventing HIV/AIDS, using the Culture Circle methodology..	The results showed that in most cases, young people did not associate drug use with HIV infection, focusing on the idea that only condoms should be used to prevent the disease, demonstrating little knowledge on the subject.
7	Critical disclosures about sexuality among elderly women as a dialogical educational assessment device	Rodrigues <i>et al.</i> , 2019 ¹⁶ .	To analyze perceptions about sexuality and the respective critical insights learned in the Culture Circles developed with elderly women.	The following critical insights were learned: biopsychosocial understanding of sexuality; understanding of the social and psychological differences in sexuality; and understanding sexuality as an experience in old age.

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8	Educação em saúde como estratégia de qualificação da assistência às gestantes no interior do Ceará	Brandão <i>et al.</i> , 2020 ¹⁷ .	To report the experience of health education actions with a group of pregnant women.	Ten intervention meetings were held to observe the needs of pregnant women, with the support of the nurse and the Multidisciplinary Residency Program in Family Health, with the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and clarification of doubts between the academic, family health team, and pregnant women, with a view to promoting health.
9	Educational Actions to Raise Student Awareness About the Donation and Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues.	Corsi <i>et al.</i> , 2023 ¹⁸ .	To raise awareness among school-age adolescents about the method of organ and tissue donation and transplantation.	The following topics were identified: clarifications on the legislative history of donation and transplants; diagnosis of brain and circulatory death; bioethical aspects of transplants; reflections on mourning, death, and dying; maintenance and notification of potential donors; types of organs and tissues viable for donation; and the process from harvesting to transplantation, among others. The comparative analysis showed statistical differences between the pre and post interventions.
10	Strategies for enhancing health promotion actions with children and adolescents in vulnerable situations.	Selau <i>et al.</i> , 2021 ¹⁹ .	To reflect on strategies to enhance health promotion for vulnerable children and adolescents in a civil society organization.	Four proposals were developed in the Culture Circle, which include the democratic participation of children in choosing and caring for the physical environment, the creation of spaces for coexistence and interaction, and community participation. The reflections took on a political and educational character of forming democratic citizens, respecting differences, developing autonomy, and moving towards health promotion.
11	Flowers and thorns during pregnancy: experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic	Rossetto <i>et al.</i> , 2021 ²⁰ .	Understanding the repercussions of COVID-19 on the path of pregnancy.	In the virtual culture circle, pregnant women discussed and critically reflected on two themes that generate flowers and thorns on the path of pregnancy. They understood the experience in the virtual culture circle as spaces for sharing experiences, welcoming and learning, among others.
12	Perceptions of elderly people about coping with COVID-19	Luzardo <i>et al.</i> , 2021 ²¹ .	Understanding the perception of elderly people about coping with COVID-19.	Generating Themes 1) Bitter repercussions of COVID-19, highlighting fears, insecurity, anxiety, lack of contact with people and daily life before isolation; 2) Sweet repercussions of COVID-19, revealing hope, faith, reinvention of life, learning, feeling loved, cared for and supported even from a distance.
13	Relationship between educational planning and cultural circles: experience with a group of elderly people with hypertension	Borges <i>et al.</i> , 2021 ²² .	To analyze the relationship between didactic planning and the stages of the Culture Circle carried out with hypertensive elderly individuals from a Family Health Strategy.	The results demonstrated the didactic planning in the Culture Circle methodology, whose situational diagnosis is made in the thematic investigation stage, planning is carried out during thematization, and problematization corresponds to the execution, and evaluation is a stage present in both methods. At the end of the investigation, an improvement in adherence to treatment and consistent changes in the lifestyle of the elderly were obtained through the educational interventions carried out.



14	Reflections on coping with coronavirus disease 2019: virtual dialogues with pregnant women	Souza <i>et al.</i> , 2020 ²³ .	To report the experience of a virtual Culture Circle, with reflections on coping with Covid-19 and the repercussions for the health of pregnant women.	To analyze the relationship between didactic planning and the stages of the Culture Circle carried out with hypertensive elderly individuals from a Family Health Strategy. The results demonstrated the didactic planning in the Culture Circle methodology, whose situational diagnosis is made in the thematic investigation stage, planning is carried out during thematization, and problematization corresponds to the execution, and evaluation is a stage present in both methods. At the end of the investigation, an improvement in adherence to treatment and consistent changes in the lifestyle of the elderly were obtained through the educational interventions carried out. To report the experience of a virtual Culture Circle, with reflections on coping with Covid-19 and the repercussions for the health of pregnant women. The emerging dialogues and reflections allowed the pregnant women to alleviate their anxieties and fears and to reframe their attitudes, motivating each other in favor of health, in the face of the adversities generated by the pandemic.
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Source: prepared by the authors, 2024.

Thus, the synthesis of the evidence identified in the articles resulted in two thematic axes that described, firstly, the stages and functioning of the culture circles and subsequently the potential of this process for health education based on the practices analyzed.

DISCUSSIONS

Axis 1 - Contextualization and stages of culture circles:

Initially observing the individuals who made up the working class, especially those who did not have access to formal education, Paulo Freire founded cultural circles as spaces where individuals could assume their dignity and possession of their historical and cultural values, representing an educational process guided above all by autonomy, dialogicity and respect for the student.⁶

Freire (1987)⁴ proposed that in these contexts a problematizing scope of reality be implemented, based on a conception of the educational process as a social and political activity, where

educator and student can contribute to the construction of knowledge, through a genuine dialogue, covered in humility, love, faith and hope, with a view above all to transforming social reality.^{4,5}

To this end, in addition to assuming an openness to the student's contribu-

tions to educational practice, the methodology of culture circles requires three specific stages, illustrated in Table 3, to be carried out, in order to ensure effective participation of the actors in the construction of knowledge.

Table 3: Stages of implementing culture circles:

1st Stage - Reading the World (Investigation)	2nd Stage - Reading the Word (Thematization)	3rd Stage - Action/ Transformation (Problematization)
a) Sharing of students' experiences, perceptions and worldviews; b) Defining the generating themes;	a) Coding and decoding of reality (through illustrations, words, photographs), through the generating themes; b) Understanding of a specific situation or context from its distance or abstraction;	a) Overcoming a naive vision to adopt a critical perspective. b) Action-reflection-action; c) Transformation of the lived context.

Source: prepared by the authors, according to Freire⁴, 2024.

Initially, in order to define a starting point for the practice of cultural circles, it is proposed that there be an initial process of opening up to students, so that they can share their experiences and perceptions so that it is possible to investigate their vocabulary universe and the limiting situations surrounding their realities, that is, the needs and challenges that are posed in their life contexts.^{4,5}

To this process, Freire⁴ gave the name of world reading, constituting a stage where students will reflect and point out such aspects of their contexts in order to establish the themes that generate dialogue, which will guide educational practice and the conduct of culture circles.⁶

As described in the literature, this stage constitutes an opportunity for the health professional, in their educational role, to learn about and enter the contexts of their work, so that their practices dialogue with the knowledge of individuals and are effective in extreme situations, finding greater receptivity, adherence and effectiveness in their contributions.

In this line, Borges et al., (2021)²² and Camargo-Plazas et al. (2021)¹⁰, when conducting cultural circles with elderly people with hypertension and diabetes, they highlighted the importance of interpreting the health needs of their audiences, so that practices aimed at promoting health are carried out based on the identification of the specific health realities of these groups, which in turn should arise from the students and not from the educators.

These aspects promote a heightened capillarity and sensitivity to the recognition of the contexts and health needs presented by individuals, as identified in the experiences analyzed, which when conducting cultural circles with pregnant women,^{23,20} elderly²¹ and teenagers¹¹ during the Covid-19 pandemic, they were able to promote more effective health ed-

ucation practices by assessing aspects related to adaptation and the specific needs of these groups in the pandemic context.

In the second stage, called reading the word, it is necessary for the generating themes to go through a process of coding and decoding, so that the knowledge that is already present in the students is used for critical reflection on what they want to learn and to discuss such symbols based on the sociocultural and economic meanings attributed by the participants.^{6,10}

This stage is where awareness techniques occur with greater emphasis, using creative elements, such as objects, dramatizations²², websites¹⁸, games, parodies¹⁵, writing sentences^{12,23}, 21, illustrations, posters or the conversation itself^{13,22}, that are constantly cited in the experiences evidenced.

In this way, as it enables a distancing and abstraction from the reality in which these subjects find themselves inserted, it allows the encounter with the possible consciousness, that is, the solutions, which before, at the core of the real consciousness, were not perceived, which Freire described as the unpublished-viable.⁴

An example of this is the one developed by Pinto et al. (2019)¹⁵, where in a cultural circle about HIV/AIDS prevention with young crack users, cardboard cards were used so that students could create a chart with the known forms of transmission and prevention, which provided an understanding of these aspects based on the emergence of questions and group discussion.

As evidenced by Rodrigues et al., (2019)¹⁶ who were able to discuss with a group of elderly women about extreme situations regarding sexuality, identifying aspects such as biopsychosocial understandings and the experience of this concept in old age, based on discussions and the presentation of a documentary.

Therefore, in the third stage of the culture circles, it is proposed that, based on the identification of extreme situations and their codification and decoding, through the analysis of the generating themes, reality is problematized based on its interpretation, so that explanations can be constructed together where the naive perception of reality can be transformed into a critical vision, capable of identifying ways to transform it.^{6,4}

At this decisive moment, a discussion of the problems that arose during reflection is proposed, through action/transformation, which constitutes the core of the educational process, meaning the moment of exchange of knowledge between professionals and patients for the construction of knowledge, based on the development of the bond, co-responsibility, and interdisciplinarity.^{13,22,14,11,17}

Axis 2 - Potential of culture circles in health education practices:

Based on the analysis, the potential of health education based on culture circles stands out in three thematic areas represented in the figure: the relationships between professionals and patients, the critical and biopsychosocial understanding of the health-disease concept and its determinants and conditioning factors, as well as the actions of students in extreme situations, based on self-care, modification of habits, customs and ways of life, capable of promoting comprehensive health.

Culture circles are indicated by studies as a lightweight, easy-to-implement and low-cost technology for health services.¹³ Regarding the relationship developed between participants in culture circles, dialogue is the most cited aspect, given that this competence is not only a prerequisite for the functioning of this methodology, but also a result of such practice, being positively fed by it.

And this aspect, in turn, consti-

tutes a high potential for the therapeutic itinerary, given the growing need for dialogue and openness to the patient's contributions in this process and the importance of these elements in care, an aspect notably recognized in the literature^{24, 2} and which is capable of enabling a rapprochement between the actors of care, building and strengthening the bond, through the sharing of thoughts, doubts and experiences, as well as the joint search for solutions^{13, 16, 22, 21}

Furthermore, the interdisciplinarity that can be promoted in this context stands out, given the possibility of rapprochement between health professionals, who, in the face of cultural circles, can position themselves in a more horizontal manner, contributing with their knowledge and specialties in the educational process.¹³

Thus, faced with an increasingly medicalized reality, where educational practices in health are reserved solely for the vertical transmission of knowledge, like bank deposits^{1, 7, 25}, the approach based on culture circles becomes essential for the inclusion of the patient in the therapeutic context and above all for the effectiveness of this process, obtaining adherence, credibility and change in the factors that condition and determine the health of individuals.¹⁹

An example of this is the one described by Corsi et al., 2023¹⁸, who, by holding cultural circles on organ donation with 936 students from a

Brazilian school, achieved a considerable increase in the students' understanding of this process, including with regard to the intention of the participants and their families to be donors.

Furthermore, the reports note the implication of this approach in changing the students' perceptions of health, who begin to recognize this concept no longer as the absence of diseases, nor its motivators, determinants and conditioning factors, as historical determinisms, but rather as factors that are widely subject to modification.^{13, 22, 18}

This process, as it enables an understanding of the patient's leading role in the comprehensiveness of health, gives them back the ability to intervene in their reality, through the instrumentalization of reflection-action-reflection as a tool for promoting empowerment and autonomy for self-care and changing habits, behaviors and ways of life^{22, 17, 21, 19}, allowing these individuals to think critically about the concepts of the health-disease binomial and to free themselves from the extreme situations that affect their realities.^{11, 13, 16, 14}

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on a comprehensive review, this study demonstrated the instrumentalization and potential of using Paulo Freire's cultural circles itinerary, based on empirical health education

practices, identifying its capacity to guarantee humanization and comprehensiveness based on a dialogical practice, responsible for providing autonomy, reflection and critical awareness to patients in the face of educational processes.

Based on this analysis, the ways in which empirical experiences from the literature led to cultural circles are gathered, making it possible to highlight positive aspects such as the bond, horizontality, longitudinality, interdisciplinarity and co-responsibility promoted by these practices, due to the openness to dialogue and the protagonism of the students that occurs in this process, confirming the applicability and effectiveness of these practices especially in community contexts and vulnerable populations.

Thus, it is concluded that, given the often medicalized, welfare-based and banking-based educational practices in health education, culture circles have the potential to effectively reach students by promoting effective changes in the relationships between professionals and patients, in the expanded understanding of the health-disease process and in the actions taken in extreme situations.

Furthermore, the insufficient number of studies that quantitatively and more systematically evaluate the impact of the culture circle approach in different health education contexts is indicated as a limitation of this study.

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