







Review article

Community of research and Freirian thought: transformative approach in education

Comunidade de investigação e pensamento freiriano: abordagem transformadora na educação

Comunidad de investigación y pensamiento freireano: enfoque transformador en la educación

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Abstract

Objective: to critically reflect on the theoretical convergences between the Community of Inquiry (CoI) and Freirean pedagogy, highlighting their contributions to higher nursing education. Method: theoretical essay of a critical-reflective nature, based on conceptual and interpretive analysis of national and international literature addressing the foundations of CoI and Freirean pedagogy. Results: the integration between the Community of Inquiry and Freirean pedagogy reveals the potential of collaborative and dialogical practices that promote collective knowledge construction, student engagement, and the repositioning of the teacher as a mediator. Conclusion: the intersection of these theoretical frameworks contributes to more inclusive and humanized pedagogical practices, strengthening the critical and ethical education of nursing professionals committed to social transformation.

Descriptors: Nursing Education Research; Education, Nursing; Empowerment; Teaching; Learning

Resumo

Objetivo: refletir criticamente sobre as convergências teóricas entre a Comunidade de Investigação (CoI) e a pedagogia freireana, destacando suas contribuições para o ensino superior em Enfermagem. **Método:** ensaio teórico de natureza crítico-reflexiva, fundamentado na análise conceitual e interpretativa de produções nacionais e internacionais que abordam os fundamentos da CoI e da pedagogia freireana. **Resultados:** a integração entre a Comunidade de Investigação e a pedagogia freireana evidencia a potencialidade de práticas colaborativas e dialógicas que favorecem a construção coletiva do conhecimento, o engajamento dos estudantes e o reposicionamento do professor como

mediador. **Conclusão:** a interseção entre esses referenciais teóricos contribui para práticas pedagógicas mais inclusivas e humanizadas, fortalecendo a formação crítica e ética de profissionais de Enfermagem comprometidos com a transformação social.

Descritores: Pesquisa em Educação de Enfermagem; Educação em Enfermagem; Empoderamento; Ensino; Aprendizagem

Resumen

Objetivo: reflexionar críticamente sobre las convergencias teóricas entre la Comunidad de Investigación (Col) y la pedagogía freireana, destacando sus contribuciones a la educación superior en Enfermería. **Método:** ensayo teórico de naturaleza crítico-reflexiva, basado en el análisis conceptual e interpretativo de producciones nacionales e internacionales que abordan los fundamentos de la Col y la pedagogía freireana. **Resultados:** la integración entre la Comunidad de Investigación y la pedagogía freireana evidencia el potencial de prácticas colaborativas y dialógicas que favorecen la construcción colectiva del conocimiento, el compromiso estudiantil y la redefinición del rol docente como mediador. **Conclusión:** la intersección entre estos marcos teóricos contribuye a prácticas pedagógicas más inclusivas y humanizadas, fortaleciendo la formación crítica y ética de profesionales de Enfermería comprometidos con la transformación social.

Descriptores: Investigación en Educación de Enfermería; Educación en Enfermería; Empoderamiento; Enseñanza; Aprendizaje

Introduction

In the contemporary context, higher education presents itself as a field in constant transformation, requiring coherent articulation between theoretical Practical experiences and emerging social demands.¹ Technological changes and new forms of communication have driven a profound review in teaching practices, redefining the role of teacher and student and requiring a more active teaching-learning process, critical and participative.^{1,2} In this context, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated some of these transformations, but its effects exceeded the health conjuncture, reinforcing the need to rethink the pedagogical the interaction models between subjects and knowledge and the role of virtual environments in training.³⁻⁵

Therefore, with the expansion of the use of digital technologies and virtual environments, the educational process began to demand not only new tools, but above all, new ways of thinking about learning. The online spaces have become environments of collective production of knowledge, in which pedagogical planning needs to integrate strategies capable of promoting engagement, dialogic communication and critical reflection on the contents worked.^{2,6-7} Thus, collaborative practices, continuous

feedbacks and problematization situations have become central elements of quality in higher education.

In this panorama, the Research Community (CoI) stands out as a theoretical model that seeks to understand and enhance collaborative learning in face-to-face environments or mediated by technology.⁸⁻⁹ CoI is structured into three interdependent dimensions: the social presence, which favors the bond and dialogue between participants; the cognitive presence, responsible for supporting critical thinking and the collective construction of knowledge; and the teaching presence, which ensures planning, guidance and pedagogical mediation.^{8,10} The balanced interaction between these presences promotes the creation of more dynamic, meaningful and affective learning environments.

Understanding the educational process, however, requires a philosophical and critical perspective that considers the origin of knowledge and the human relations that support it.^{3,4} Since antiquity, thinkers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle highlighted the value of dialogue and shared reflection as paths to knowledge.¹¹ These conceptions were taken up and re-signified in modernity by authors who defend an experiential education, based on autonomy and the resolution of concrete problems.^{8,12} These perspectives are close to the foundations of the CoI, which understands learning as an active process of investigating and reconstructing senses.^{10,12}

For the CoI to be effective, an intentional and integrated pedagogical planning is indispensable, in which the social, cognitive and teaching dimensions are articulated around common training objectives.^{8,10} This articulation cannot be spontaneous or isolated, but should reflect an institutional commitment to meaningful and collaborative learning. Training environments built in this logic value participation, problematization and critical reflection, promoting educational practices aligned with the skills required in health education.⁷

Freirean thought complements and deepens the foundations of CoI by emphasizing the ethical, political and transformative dimension of the educational act.^{6,13-14} Paulo Freire's pedagogy defends dialogue, the problematization and the collective construction of knowledge as means for the emancipation of the subjects.^{6,13} By recognizing the student as the protagonist of his own learning and the educator as a

critical mediator, Freirean thought extends the understanding of Col, guiding it towards a social and humanizing commitment to education.¹⁴

In Nursing education, the integration between the Col and the Freirean principles has been shown to be powerful for strengthening clinical reasoning, critical thinking and the articulation between theory and practice.^{7,10} This approach promotes the development of core competencies, broadens student engagement and humanizes the learning process, especially in hybrid and digital contexts.¹⁵⁻¹⁶

Social interaction and dialogue, foundations present in both Col and Freirean pedagogy, contribute to the construction of bonds, to co-responsibility and to the formation of reflective, ethical and socially committed professionals.^{6,13} When intentionally incorporated into educational practices, these approaches make learning more meaningful, critical and transformative, responding to the contemporary challenges of health education.¹⁵

Therefore, the convergence between the Col and the Freirean principles supports a pedagogical proposal committed to the collective construction of knowledge, to the critical formation of students and to the transformation of educational practices, deepening the understanding of the intersection between these theoretical references and highlighting their contributions to a more critical pedagogical approach, dialogical and focused on integral training in higher education in nursing. Thus, the objective of this article is to critically reflect on the theoretical convergences between the Research Community (Col) and Freirean pedagogy, highlighting their contributions to higher education in nursing.

Method

This study is a theoretical essay of critical-reflexive nature, based on the conceptual and interpretative analysis of theoretical frameworks that address the Col and the principles of Freirean pedagogy. This modality of study allows the integration of different perspectives and the elaboration of an argumentative reflection on the intersection between both references, seeking to understand their implications for critical training in higher education in nursing.

The theoretical-critical essay was chosen because of the need to go beyond the description of studies or the mere synthesis of evidence, proposing an analytical and dialogical interpretation between concepts, authors and epistemological foundations. This approach is based on the principle that theoretical reflection is a legitimate form of scientific production, because it makes possible to build new meanings from the critical reading of different conceptual matrixes.¹ This methodological path dialogues with general guidelines of conceptual analysis and reflexive organization presented by Carrera-Rivera,¹⁶ especially regarding the process of theoretical synthesis.

The methodological path was structured in three complementary stages, which guided the construction of reflection:^{6,11}

initial conceptual exploration: a broad search was conducted for theoretical and normative productions published in scientific journals, academic books, and institutional documents, focusing on studies that directly addressed the foundations of Col and Freirean pedagogy. This stage made it possible to map the central concepts and identify convergences between both frameworks;

interpretive and categorical analysis: an analytical reading of the selected sources was carried out, identifying thematic cores and categories of reflection that support the dialogue between the theories. This analysis gave rise to the three dimensions presented in Chart 1, which summarize the main axes of theoretical reflection;

critical and argumentative synthesis: based on the constructed categories, an integrative discussion was developed, articulating the theoretical assumptions of Col and Freirean pedagogy to nursing education, with emphasis on aspects such as dialogue, criticality, autonomy, and reflective practice.

Based on this analytical process, the dimensions that guided the theoretical reflection of the study were structured, as shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1 – Dimensions of the Research Community – Porto Alegre, RS, 2025

Section	Description
Community of Inquiry	Exploration of the theoretical assumptions and their application in higher education.
Freirean Pedagogy	Analysis of the fundamental principles that guide this educational approach.
Convergence between the Community of Inquiry and the principles of Paulo Freire	Investigation of the intersections between the two models and how they can complement each other in the critical training of students.

Source: Created by the authors

These stages of the study allowed the systematic identification and organization of the relations between the analyzed concepts. From them, it became possible to understand how the integration between CoI and Freirean pedagogy can potentiate more critical, dialogical and collaborative teaching-learning practices. Such convergence is relevant to promote an education committed to the emancipation of subjects and the collective construction of knowledge, especially in the training of nursing professionals aware of their social insertion.

The study used exclusively bibliographic sources of public access and did not involve participation of human beings, which dispensed with assessment by the Research Ethics Committee (REC). Nevertheless, all sources were duly cited and referenced in accordance with the principles of integrity, rigor and scientific responsibility.

Results

The transformations that have occurred in higher education in recent decades, driven by technological advances and the need to reconfigure the teaching-learning process, have made evident the importance of more reflective, collaborative and dialogical pedagogical approaches.^{2,15} Hybrid teaching and the incorporation of digital technologies were not limited to the introduction of new tools, but provoked an epistemological change in the way of understanding learning, approaching constructivist and humanistic perspectives that value student protagonism.^{12,18}

In this context, the Col presents itself as a powerful theoretical framework to understand learning processes mediated by social, cognitive and pedagogical interactions.⁸⁻⁹ The model, originally developed by Garrison and Akyol, proposes the integration of three interdependent presences — social, cognitive and teaching — which together form the basis for collaborative knowledge construction⁸. This integration reflects the essence of a democratic and participatory education, in line with the Freirean assumptions, which conceive dialogue as a liberating practice and foundation for the emancipation of subjects.^{6,11,13}

The social presence of the Col has a direct relationship with the dialogical dimension of Paulo Freire, recognizing the value of interaction, acceptance and trust in the educational process.^{6,13} It is through authentic dialogue that the student perceives himself as an active part of the training process and develops the sense of belonging, essential to meaningful learning.³ In nursing courses, this dimension is discussions of clinical cases and collaborative activities, encouraging the exchange of experiences and bringing the theoretical contents closer to the real situations experienced in professional practice.^{7,10}

The cognitive presence, in turn, refers to the student's ability to build and confirm meanings through critical reflection and research.^{8,10} This dimension dialogues with the Freirean conception of knowledge as a result of the problematization of reality, in which learning emerges from the confrontation between the subject and the world.^{6,13} By stimulating critical thinking and contextualized analysis, the teacher contributes to the development of clinical reasoning and intellectual autonomy, central skills for professional health practice.^{15,17}

The presence of teaching, in the structure of the Col, represents the pedagogical intentionality and the mediation of the educator.^{9-11,13} In this perspective, the teacher is understood as a political and ethical subject, responsible for guiding and facilitating the instead of reproducing knowledge in a transmissive way. This mediating function is extended by the Freirean pedagogy, which places the educator in a position of co-apprentice, committed to social transformation and

to the collective construction of knowledge.^{12,14,19} Thus, the teaching presence aligns itself with the concept of "dialogic education" and to the ideal of integral training, surpassing instructional and technical practices.

The articulation between Col and Freirean principles reveals an epistemological and ethical interdependence. While Col offers a theoretical framework focused on the analysis of learning in digital and collaborative contexts, Freirean pedagogy adds the critical and emancipatory dimension, expanding the political scope of the model.^{6,9,13} Both converge in valuing authentic communication, the autonomy of the subject and the co-responsibility between educators and learners, proposing a learning built on reciprocity and dialogue.^{3,11,14}

This integration is especially relevant in nursing education, an area that requires the development of technical-scientific skills combined with ethical and social sensibility.^{7,20} The adoption of pedagogical strategies that mobilize critical thinking and reflection — as case studies, Clinical simulations, conversation rounds and continuous feedback — potentiates active learning and promotes the humanization of care.^{9,10} Such strategies, when supported by the pillars of Col and Freirean principles, contribute to train professionals capable of acting with autonomy, empathy and social awareness.^{17,21}

The dialogue between these two theoretical perspectives also allows us to rethink the notion of "presence" in the educational environment. In the Col model, presence manifests itself on multiple levels — social, cognitive and pedagogical — while, in Freire, it assumes an existential sense, linked to "being with the other" in communion and commitment.^{6,13} Thus, the educator who acts under this but builds human relations based on respect, solidarity and epistemological curiosity.¹²

Thus, the convergence between Col and Freirean pedagogy supports a critical and transformative educational paradigm, capable of integrating technology, humanization and ethical reflection in nursing teaching.^{14,15} This theoretical approach makes it possible to understand education as a practice of freedom and the learning environment as a space for collective research, dialogue and social construction of knowledge indispensable principles for the formation of professionals committed to the transformation of reality and the strengthening of the Unified Health System.

Discussion

The reflections developed in this theoretical essay show that the Col and the principles of Freirean pedagogy converge around a critical and dialogical understanding of the educational process. Both approaches start from the idea that knowledge is built collectively through interaction, dialogue and problematization of reality.^{6,13} Col provides a theoretical framework that explains the dimensions of collaborative learning in digital and face-to-face contexts, while Freirean pedagogy broadens this horizon, giving it an ethical-political perspective focused on the emancipation of subjects.^{12,14}

In recent decades, the integration between active methodologies and virtual learning environments has transformed pedagogical practice, making it more dynamic and participatory.^{15,17} Cognitive and teaching proposals by Col remain relevant in nursing training, as they favor the development of critical thinking, autonomy and co-responsibility between educators and students.⁸⁻¹⁰ This structure aligns with the thought of Paulo Freire, who defends the need for a liberating education, based on active listening, respect for the experiences of learners and commitment to social transformation.^{6,11,13-14}

The social presence, in the context of Col, finds parallel in the dialogic dimension of Freirean pedagogy. In both models, interaction is understood as an act of communion and mutual recognition, capable of promoting belonging and engagement.^{6,8,13} Openness to dialogue creates conditions for subjects to express their ideas, feelings and perceptions, strengthening the sense of community. In nursing courses, this presence is manifested in collaborative practices, reflective forums and activities that stimulate shared learning, bringing teaching closer to the realities experienced by students.^{7,10,15}

The cognitive presence is directly articulated with the Freirean concept of problematization. For Freire, knowledge is not reduced to the transmission of contents, but emerges from critical reflection on the world and the ability to question reality in order to transform it.^{6,11,13} Therefore, the Col proposes that learners construct meanings from research and collaborative analysis, developing interpretive and argumentative skills.^{8-9,12} This perspective is essential in health

education, where clinical reasoning, communication autonomy and professional ethics depend on the articulation between theory, practice and criticality.^{7,17}

Finally, the presence of teaching establishes the pedagogical mediation as articulating axis of the other dimensions. The teacher, understood as a political and reflective subject, acts not only as transmitter of content, but as facilitator of dialogue and promoter of collective research.^{9,11,13} This mediating function finds direct correspondence with the role of the Freirean educator, who learns from the student and recognizes him as a partner in the production of knowledge.¹⁴ In both references, the act of teaching involves intentionality, planning and ethical commitment to human emancipation.^{12,17}

The articulation between Col and Freirean pedagogy reveals itself, therefore, as a promising path for the construction of innovative and socially committed pedagogical practices. In nursing education, this integration can contribute to the formation of critical professionals, creative and sensitive to the human dimensions of care.^{14-15,21} Education thus becomes a space for dialogue and transformation, in which learning and teaching are intertwined in a continuous movement of reflection and action.

However, limitations are recognized in this study. Because it is a theoretical essay, there was no collection or analysis of empirical data that prove the applicability of the propositions discussed. The interpretation is based exclusively on available literature, which may restrict the range of conclusions. In addition, the lack of comparative studies on the practical integration between the Col and the Freirean principles in nursing education is a gap that deserves future research. Empirical research and intervention studies can deepen and validate the theoretical hypotheses presented here, testing their repercussions in different educational contexts.

Nevertheless, the reflections produced in this essay offer significant contributions to the field of nursing education. By highlighting the transformative potential of Col allied to the Freirean foundations, it reinforces the need for pedagogical practices that articulate technology, criticality and humanization. This combination allows us to understand teaching as an ethical, political and emancipatory process in which dialogue and research are consolidated as instruments of collective construction of knowledge and transformation of social reality.

Conclusion

Returning to the scenario that motivated this essay, higher education has been through intense transformations, driven by the expansion of digital technologies, new forms of communication and, in a particularly acute way, by the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes stress transmissive models of teaching and highlight the urgency of reorganizing training processes in face-to-face, hybrid and virtual contexts, so as to articulate theoretical knowledge, practical experiences and emerging social demands.

In this movement, virtual environments have ceased to be just spaces for the transmission of content to become places for the collective production of knowledge, where pedagogical planning, dialogue and active participation become central. Understanding how these spaces can favor a critical, collaborative and humanized learning is the starting point and, at the same time, the axis of return of the reflection proposed in this essay. The Research Community (CoI) and Freirean pedagogy were mobilized precisely to illuminate this challenge: qualify the use of technologies and online contexts without losing sight of the ethical, political and educational commitment of nursing education.

The reflection developed in this theoretical essay maintains that the integration between CoI and Freirean pedagogy offers a consistent, ethical and feasible theoretical path to qualify nursing education in front of this scenario. By articulating social, cognitive and teaching presence with dialogue, problematization and emancipation, a formative horizon is produced in which the student ceases to be a mere receiver and becomes a protagonist of shared research processes, with direct implications for clinical reasoning, the professional autonomy and humanization of care.

More than a methodological arrangement, this convergence constitutes a political-pedagogical commitment: teaching and learning become acts of co-responsibility, in which knowledge emerges from qualified listening, critical confrontation with reality and the collective production of meaning. For Nursing, whose practice takes place in complex, sensitive and socially situated contexts, this commitment means to train professionals capable of deciding with foundation, acting with empathy and transforming with responsibility.

From the practical point of view, the theoretical-argumentative findings of this essay suggest that curricula and curricular components in Nursing can be significantly improved through pedagogical designs that intentionally integrate the three presences of Col, promoting cognitive interactions, social and teachers in a balanced way.

There must be also the adoption of dialogic strategies, such as case studies, clinical simulations, conversation rounds and formative feedbacks, guided by the principles of Freirean problematization, which value dialogue and the collective construction of knowledge. In addition, the importance of formative evaluations that favor processes of self-regulation, metacognitive development and ethical decision-making is highlighted. Such guidelines do not require large technological devices, but rather intentional planning, qualified teaching mediation and an institutional culture based on dialogue and critical reflection.

It is recognized, however, that this is a theoretical essay. The propositions defended here lack empirical research that tests their effectiveness in different scenarios (basic care, hospital, clinical and simulated teaching), compares modalities (face-to-face, hybrid, online) and examines educational and care outcomes (clinical reasoning, patient safety, quality of care). Intervention studies, mixed methods and longitudinal evaluations are promising agendas to validate and refine this framework.

In summary, the Col, illuminated by Paulo Freire, puts nursing education back where it should never have left: the human encounter that investigates, cares for and transforms. When the social presence welcomes, the cognitive problematization and teaching media with ethical intentionality; the classroom, physical or virtual, ceases to be space of transmission and becomes a community of meaning, where learning is an exercise of freedom and care, a practice of justice.

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