

FOCUS GROUP AND EXPERIENTIAL PEDAGOGY: INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUE OF DATA COLLECTION

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ABSTRACT

The objective is to characterize the use of focus group based in Experiential Pedagogy Humanescent as a technique for innovative data collection as well as to elucidate the perceptions of nursing students about the benefits of lived experience. This is an exploratory and descriptive study. For data collection, we used the technique of focus group conducted in accordance with the Experiential Education Humanescent: humanescent transcultural pedagogical reality, with eight nursing students of a public university in Brazil. Data were analyzed based on the guiding principles based on the work of Alfred Schutz. It was demonstrated that the successful achievement of a focus group is guided by its systematic planning, and clarified that the use of experiential pedagogy resulted in another element that provided a warm, comforting, spontaneous environment of exchanges of ideas stimulator, which fostered the research data. The study aims to serve as input to other qualitative research, confirming the effectiveness of the use of focus group as data collection technique and suggesting the use of Experiential Education Humanescent as a beneficial element to the richness of the meeting.

Keywords: Nursing research. Qualitative research. Methodology. Focus groups. Nursing.

INTRODUCTION

Scientific research is characterized as a set of activities aimed at the pursuit of knowledge, distinguished by the method, the techniques, by turning to the empirical reality and the way to communicate the knowledge produced⁽¹⁾.

Therefore, the "do research" is a complex process, combining theory, method, operation and creativity, and to this end, "being a researcher" is to be integrated in the world, since "[...] there is no scientific knowledge above or outside reality"⁽²⁾.

In this scenario qualitative research is understood as capable of incorporating the meaning and intentionality as inherent to acts, relations and social structures⁽²⁾. Thus, the search for qualitative methodologies relates to subjective study inquiries, characterized by dynamism, the interaction of the subjects, centering on human experience from the life

context⁽³⁾.

It is a process that seeks to understand the perceptions of subjectivity, human experiences, not in quantifiable terms, not reductionist, not Cartesian; which sits on the philosophical bases that defend the interdependence of individuals, and value individual experience of being human.

Among the data collection techniques, the focus group is stood out, increasingly used in scientific circles, mainly in research with qualitative approach. This is a research technique that collects data through group interactions, based on comprehensive and constructionist proposal, based on a relational, flexible and dynamic nature, which seeks to promote a broad questioning over a specific theme or focus^(4,5).

According to the literature, a focus group technique of history can be outlined in three phases: it arises during the 1920s, when social scientists had developed it by using it mainly for the development of questionnaires of public

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survey; between World War II and the 1970s, when the focus groups were used by researchers in the field of marketing, especially to investigate the potential of persuasion of war propaganda for the troops; and finally, 1980s to the present, when the focus groups have been widely used by various professionals, emancipating themselves in scientific circles⁽⁶⁻⁸⁾.

In this context, the focus group is highlighted as a research technique that can be used as a complementary technique, as a preliminary study for further development of instruments (scales and questionnaires); it can be used in studies using multiple qualitative techniques such as focus groups, participant observation and in-depth interviews; or may be a self-referential group, when used as a single technique^(4,9).

In addition to its various ways of consolidation, the focus group seeks to obtain a variety of information, feelings, experiences, small group representations about a particular theme, emphasizing that the group process is greater than the sum of the opinions, feelings and individual views⁽⁶⁾.

Therefore, a new strategy gains ground to support data collection in focus groups, the Experiential Education Humanescent (EEH). The EEH is a strategy that seeks to learn how to learn, to rethink how to teach, to relate being educational, and to consolidate humanescence - rebirth of human essences⁽¹⁰⁾. The EEH is guided by six stages, namely: imagine or redeem prior experience; express or imagine through projective technique; promote cognitive dissonance; relate the imaginary to the real; reframe the concepts and practices; and enable change through a new Doing⁽¹⁰⁾.

The valuation of the individuals' subjective expressions and meanings which are inherent for the meaning expression process approach the EEH to the qualitative research, this happens because it allows reflection, building ideas, interpretation and the unveiling of meanings through experiential activities that stimulate the logic of imagination and meaning based on prior knowledge of the subjects involved⁽¹⁰⁾. Thus, the appreciation of the subjective expression of individuals and the meanings which are inherent in the object of study approaches the EEH to the qualitative research.

With regard to reporting studies based on the use of focus groups in nursing research, it is seen that it is still presented as well simply with few, but important, disclosure of its use as a data collection technique in nursing^(9,11,12). In relation to application of EEH in research, we could observe the incipient which encourages the construction, application and dissemination of research projects that use it as a technique associated with the focal group for data collection.

Thus, this study aims in contributing more and more with the release of positive experiences of using focus groups as an effective data collection technique in qualitative nursing research as well as elucidating differential way to consolidation of the focus group, guided by the Experiential Education Humanescent unveiling as a mechanism to facilitate the perceptions of research subjects,.

The purpose is to characterize the use of focus group based on Experiential Education Humanescent as innovative data collection technique and clarify the perceptions of nursing students about the benefits of this methodological innovation.

METHODS

This is an exploratory and descriptive study which is part of the pilot test results of the focus group associated with EEH, the dissertation project called "Understanding the typical ideal of nursing technicians about the systematization of nursing care"⁽¹³⁾, developed by the Graduate Program in Nursing at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), Brazil.

For data collection, we used the technique of focus groups conducted in accordance with the EEH: transcultural pedagogical reality humanescent guided in the knowledge of being, their human skills, their subjectivity and their corporeality⁽¹⁰⁾. This design was used with the aim of facilitating the expression of the motivations of the subjects, like other studies that also used complementary techniques for the implementation of the focus group^(11,12,14).

It was used in this context the practice of human poietic mandala, with the figurative representation through thumbnails and mass model, to grasp the perceptions of nursing

students about the SAE, associating the representing, the drafting and sharing reflections as a means to facilitate the ideal typical seizure of subjects, from the key question: "What are your perceptions about SAE?".

Inclusion criteria in the study of nursing students were: a scholarship of scientific initiation, being at least the 5th period of the nursing course.

The establishment of criteria was a search for the homogeneity of the participants⁽¹⁰⁾. In addition, it was established the 5th period of the course as a basis criterion to ensure that all subjects had already contact with the SAE in the academic environment, since participants must have experience with the topic discussed in the focus group, providing wealth information exchange⁽¹⁵⁾.

So, we invited through e-mail twelve scholars, eight of them attended the meeting. These are identified in the text by letters AE (Academic Nursing), followed by sequential number, from one to eight (AE1, AE2, until AE8).

The meeting took place on September 18, 2012, in a prepared room of the Department of Nursing at UFRN, totaling 125 minutes.

After listening to the recordings of the meetings, its transcription was held and the rapporteur of the focus group read the records.

Finally, the lines were organized through multiple readings, and analyzed based on the guiding principles⁽¹⁶⁾ based on the work of Alfred Schutz, phenomenologist that reflects on the subjective experiences of the human being.

The study followed the ethical and legal principles which rule scientific research in humans, recommended in Resolution No. 196/96, updated by Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council, keep the voluntary character of the participants and the anonymity of interlocutors, being approved by Embodied Opinion of the Committee of Ethics in Research of UFRN, No. 98 424 of August 31st, 2012, CAAE No 05906912.0.0000.5537.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The textual element "results and discussion" will be presented in two theoretical topics. The first one aims to characterize aspects of the focus

group and the EEH as a methodological innovation. From this characterization, in the second topic perceptions of nursing students will be presented.

Characterization of methodological innovation

The focus group entitled "What I think about the SAE" had the participation of eight nursing students at the UFRN, who responded positively to the inclusion criteria.

The participation of eight subjects is consistent with what is recommended in the literature, establishing an ideal quantitative of six for 15 participants, the choice will depend on the objectives of each study, so that to generate more ideas, the better option is to organize larger groups, and, on the other hand, when it is expected to deepen the theme in the discussion, we should opt for smaller groups⁽¹¹⁾.

It is noteworthy also that is more important than the number of participants the quality of the meeting, which is guaranteed by the organization and careful planning, reflecting the results⁽⁴⁾. Thus, prior to the achievement of the focus group, this was carefully planned, and an instrument of systematization of the meeting was made, comprising: identification, general purpose, organization and schedule, defining the steps, duration of times and duties of each component – mediator, rapporteur and collaborator.

Some days before the focus group is conducted, such an instrument was discussed with the team members in order to ensure an organized and integrated pursuit, in which everyone was tuned and trained to carry out what was being proposed.

The mediator, i. e. the master student, acted from the focus group, together with her advisor, to the transcript of it, playing during the meeting the key role of mediating the discussion, allowing the effective participation of all members.

The mediator, also called moderator or coordinator of the focus group, exercises elemental role in the unfolding of the meeting and should play a passive role, allowing synergy between the study subjects⁽¹⁷⁾. Its function is related to the preparation and exploitation at all stages of the process, seeking to encourage integration and exposure of opinions, mediating

discussions, leading the group avoiding the concentration of lines in a few participants, stimulating and maintaining the focus of discussion on the topic research^(5,18).

Therefore, the literature highlights some properties needed for the mediator: tranquility; dynamism; ability to hear; awareness of nonverbal communication; selection capability and exploitation of group members; competence to deal with the unexpected; good mood; good memory; flexibility; host an attitude towards participants; and being aware of their verbal and non-verbal interventions^(6-14,18).

To perform such a function, it is essential that the researcher seeks its improvement to lead discussions, to record observations, to elaborate important issues for research without losing the objectives, and to know how to deal with a large amount of data⁽⁷⁾, aspects that sought to be promoted in this study.

Another key component of the focus group is the rapporteur, who also plays the essential role of observing the meeting by noting what cannot be captured by recordings, such as facial expressions, body language, among other things. This function, in the reported focus group, was performed by a master in nursing, professor at the university which is field of study.

The observer is essential to validate the research when using focus groups by analyzing network interactions during the group process, through a less active position by restricting the nonverbal communication record, para-verbal, language, attitudes, concerns and order of answers that is considered important⁽⁶⁾.

In addition, there is the help of a collaborator who is also master degree in nursing. The collaborator provided logistical support during the meeting, handed instruments, took pictures and handled the recorders.

It is emphasized that nursing students who participated as active subjects in the focus group were being trained for collaboration in the collection of data for an argumentative project, when experiencing every single moment, which is in accordance with the principles of Experiential Education Humanescent, which argues that learning to be meaningful must be experiential⁽¹⁰⁾.

For the effectiveness of the focus group, another aspect that should be considered is the environment. This must be free of noise, of situations which allow the distraction; have to be comfortable, nice, have an array of chairs that allows the egalitarian view by the moderator and observer of all participants, and also by each group member with each other^(6,7,9,19).

The environment, previously prepared, was well placed: in the center of the room was the place where the mandala would be built with a "carpet" of 3.00 x 4.20 meters of green TNT and an orange center circle, where they were willing to building boards of the scenarios, the play-doughs and thumbnails; in a semicircle behind the previously described space, there were chairs, so that participants first attend the presentation of research and after sign the terms and fill out the questionnaire of characterization; and, in front of these spaces there was the chair where the rapporteur would describe the details noted in the course of the meeting.

The meeting took place on September 18th, 2012, in a prepared room of the Department of Nursing at the UFRN, totaling 125 minutes, time recommended as ideal for literature^(6,7,9,11,19). Following the pre-planning, the meeting was systematized in moments, with set times, as well as determining the role of each team member, as shown in table 1.

As differential of methodological innovation reported, we highlight the use of Experiential Education Humanescent, through the humanpoietic mandala art. This was used in order to facilitate better understand the perceptions of the participants. The use of techniques such as dynamic, use of texts and supporting sentences, with the aim of facilitating the discussion, it is not common, but it is described as possible and facilitator in the implementation of focus groups^(9-12,14).

The room layout for the development of experience caught the attention of academic, who demonstrated initially curiosity about the layout of the environment and anxiety to learn how to participate in the research. The initial feeling of concern, however, from the presentation of research and clarification of the mediator, was turning slowly in engagement with the focus group.

Table 1. Focus group systematization, Natal/RN, 2012.

Duration	Moment	Tasks		
		Mediator	Collaborator	Rapporteur
5 min	Reception of participants	Warmly welcoming the participants	Delivering the identifiers	To report start time of the meeting and presence of participants
15 min	Presentation of research and participants	To present synthesis of argumentative study and mediate the presentation of the participants		To note perceptions of presentation of the study
5 min	Signature of terms	Requesting the signing of the terms, emphasizing ethical aspects	Distributing terms for signing and, after signing, call recorders	Registering conduct of activities
20 min	Questionnaire completion and introduction of participants	Requesting the questionnaires and the presentation of the participants, solving any doubts	Distributing questionnaires and assist with questions from participants	Registering perceptions and conduct of activities
40 min	Presentation of the activity and construction of the mandala	Presenting key issue and explaining Mandalas construction procedure	Taking photographs	Noting perceptions about the construction of mandalas
30 min	Sharing results	To facilitate sharing of results, ensuring answer the questions and participation of everyone	Taking photographs	Noting perceptions about the sharing of the results
10 min	Closing of the meeting	To end meeting, after asking suggestions of participants	To present their perceptions, suggesting improvements	To present their perceptions, suggesting improvements

The initial speech soon became silent and the participants were able to clearly consolidate the initial proposal of introspection to reflect and answer the question in an imagery way. They often looked to the key question that was designed, reflecting on how best to represent their motivations, analyzing carefully the thumbnails and handling the play-dough. Gradually, the scenarios were built, with a lot of creativity and reflexivity

The proposal was to use the triad "ride-speak-write" to stimulate the expression of the participants' perceptions about the guiding question: 1) to build a scenario using the play dough and miniatures; 2) to talk about their representations, sharing ideas and opinions; and 3) to write the description of the scenario built on a survey instrument that contributed to the analysis of the academic's speeches.

Thus, nursing students built a scenario answering the question proposed, wrote a description of their representations and shared

the results with the other elevations, through the construction of true human-poietic mandala, reaching the goal of the focus group. The Picture 1 shows such a moment.

**Picture 1.** Sharing of participants' perceptions, Natal/RN, 2012.

Source: Research data.

The efficacy of experiential activities was also described by research that reported the use

of experience of the focus group technique to collect nursing research data with academic on the subject "sexuality in nursing practice". This study pointed out that as the participants expressed their feelings and ideas through the techniques, they were explaining, arguing and creating "naturally" discussion⁽¹²⁾.

So the use of Experiential Education Humanescent in order to facilitate the expression of the participants in the focus group has resulted in a further element which provided the execution of a warm, comforting, stimulating spontaneous exchanges of ideas: a way for "[...] taking care of those who are participating with us in scientific research, providing a warm, relaxing, loving environment and at the same time creating opportunities for revelation of discussions in a creative and relaxed way "⁽¹²⁾, factor that contributed to the effectiveness of the methodological innovation presented.

Nursing students' perceptions

When asked about their perceptions of participation in a focus group which is based on the Education Experiential Humanescent, the nursing students elucidated the benefits of such an experience, which provided: the flow of ideas; the explanation of all the details by triad "ride-speak-write"; mutual learning; rich discussions; the expression of creativity; the demonstration of emotions; reflection; and the union of different perceptions.

The focus group, among its many advantages, in particular to seek the synergy of a group interaction, is fostered from a freedom of expression of the participants, encouraging exchanges, discoveries, committed participation, allowing the emergence of multiplicity of points of view and emotional processes anchored in everyday experience of the participants, promoting the surveyed an insight, that is, a space for reflection of their own conceptions of a self-assessment, enabling behavior change^(4,9,11,14,15).

[...] The fact that each one can speak their opinion, to be several people spontaneously, it's cool because they can have an opinion about it that I can also have but I have not remembered it that moment and I expressed it another way, and I have other ideas that they also cannot have remembered. So I think it is a very rich, very rich

discussion and learning for us, and for collection of research data. (E3)

Additionally, the use of humano-poietica mandala art, anchored on the principles of Experiential Education Humanescent, have favored the development of the focus group, that according to the academic nursing, through the promotion of an environment encouraged the expression of creativity, emotions, ideas, which allowed the fluidity of thought and collective construction of their perceptions.

I think this this focus group with mandala is a brilliant idea, with these instruments, because it was possible to emerge our creativity and show emotion, I think it was possible to see the emotion in each nursing student like the mandala was made. (AE7)

I think it is very interesting, because it is something that lays the person really to think, you know ... Suddenly they put a lot of things here and a question and you: "So? What do I do?" (Laughs) So, in the end we see that it really flows, which it is very interesting ... So, I think it is very interesting. (AE8)

So the achievement of the focus group allowed the achievement of established goals, based on a participatory dialogue, intersubjective, mutual learning, as the nursing academics reported.

About the realization of the setting for an argumentative study, the methodological innovation presented have encouraged a creative and group thinking in the nursing students about the SAE, and have highlighted the benefits of the use of Experiential Education Humanescent as technical aid of consolidation of the focus group facilitating better understanding in the participating subjects' perceptions.

CONCLUSION

In characterizing the use of focus group allied to the PVH as innovative data collection technique in qualitative nursing research, we seek to contribute in encouraging the use of such methodology in studies that aim to promote group interaction as a means to encourage the expression of participants' ideas, encouraging the promotion of insights, reflections that are not possible in a study guided by individual interviews.

It is shown that the successful achievement of a focus group is guided by its systematic planning, involving number of participants, ensuring ethical principles, environmental preparation, the meeting time and the correct design of the functions and training of staff that is responsible for running the focus group, highlighting the key role of the mediator and the rapporteur.

Therefore, the investigator should be critical, reflective and creative, seeking the best ways to provide effective participation of all, which also requires the choice on the use of a support technique, which can facilitate the subjective expression of the participants

Therefore, the benefits of using the Experiential Education Humanescent through the humano-poietic mandala art was elucidated as a facilitator of the implementation of the focus group, favoring: the flow of ideas; elucidation of all the details by triad "ride-speak-

write"; mutual learning; rich discussions; the expression of creativity; the demonstration of emotions; reflection; and the union of different perceptions.

Thus, the study aims to serve as input to other qualitative research in nursing, as well as in other areas, confirming the effectiveness of the use of focus group as data collection technique and suggesting the use of Experiential Education Humanescent as beneficial element to the richness of the meeting favoring better understand for the participating subjects' perceptions.

It is noteworthy that the results may be influenced by the educational curriculum of nursing students, suggesting the proposed replication in other settings. There was no difficulty in conducting the study, an aspect that can be influenced by the systematization of the meeting, a key element for the effectiveness of a focus group.

GRUPO FOCAL E PEDAGOGIA VIVENCIAL HUMANESCENTE: TÉCNICA DE COLETA DE DADOS INOVADORA

RESUMO

Objetiva-se caracterizar o uso do grupo focal baseado na Pedagogia Vivencial Humanescente como técnica de coleta de dados inovadora, bem como elucidar as percepções das acadêmicas de enfermagem acerca dos benefícios dessa inovação metodológica. Trata-se de um estudo exploratório e descritivo. Para coleta de dados, utilizou-se a técnica do grupo focal realizada de acordo com a Pedagogia Vivencial Humanescente: realidade pedagógica transcorporal humanescente, com oito acadêmicas de enfermagem de uma universidade pública do Brasil. Os dados foram analisados com base nos princípios orientadores fundamentados na obra de Alfred Schutz. Demonstra-se que o sucesso da consecução de um grupo focal está norteado pelo seu sistemático planejamento, e elucida-se que o uso da Pedagogia Vivencial Humanescente se traduziu em mais um elemento que proporcionou a efetivação de um ambiente aconchegante, confortante, estimulador de trocas espontâneas de ideias, o que fomentou os dados da pesquisa. O estudo busca servir como aporte para demais pesquisas qualitativas, reafirmando a eficácia do uso do grupo focal como técnica de coleta de dados e sugerindo o uso da Pedagogia Vivencial Humanescente como elemento benéfico à riqueza do encontro.

Palavras-chave: Pesquisa em enfermagem. Pesquisa qualitativa. Metodologia. Grupos focais. Enfermagem.

GRUPO FOCAL Y LA PEDAGOGÍA VIVENCIAL: TÉCNICA DE RECOLECCIÓN DE DATOS INNOVADORA

RESUMEN

El objetivo es caracterizar el uso del grupo focal basado en la *Pedagogia Vivencial Humanescente* como técnica de recolección de datos innovadora, así como aclarar las percepciones de los estudiantes de enfermería sobre los beneficios de esta innovación metodológica. Se trata de un estudio exploratorio y descriptivo. Para la recolección de datos se utilizó la técnica de grupo focal realizado de acuerdo con la *Pedagogia Vivencial Humanescente*: realidad pedagógica humanescente transcorporal, con ocho estudiantes de enfermería de una universidad pública de Brasil. Los datos fueron analizados a partir de los principios orientadores basados en la obra de Alfred Schutz. Se demuestra que el éxito de la consecución de un grupo focal está guiado por su planificación sistemática y se aclara que el uso de la *Pedagogia Vivencial Humanescente* resultó en un elemento más que ha proporcionado la efectución de un ambiente acogedor, confortante, estimulador de cambios espontáneos de ideas, lo que fomentó los datos de la investigación. El estudio pretende servir de apoyo a otras investigaciones cualitativas, asegurando la eficacia del uso del grupo focal como técnica de recolección de datos y sugiriendo el uso de la *Pedagogia Vivencial Humanescente* como elemento beneficioso para la riqueza del encuentro.

Palabras clave: Investigación en enfermería. Investigación cualitativa. Metodología. Grupos focales. Enfermería.

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