

World Café: teaching strategy that enables communication and the collective construction of knowledge

World Café: estratégia didática que oportuniza a comunicação e a construção coletiva do conhecimento

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Training competent professionals who reflect on their actions and engage with their context also implies training teachers who understand their role as facilitators and enable students to take the lead in the teaching-learning process.

Experience report: Considering the importance of faculty development programs, the Brazilian Association of Medical Education, through its Minas Gerais Regional Branch, created in 2020 the project “From Minas to Minas: a chat about medical education,” aiming to value all students and faculty members of the 47 medical schools in Minas Gerais, both public and private, by raising common areas of interest across all training spaces. In 2023, an event was held with a central focus on student assessment, utilizing a pedagogical strategy that facilitated knowledge sharing through collective and collaborative dialogue, known as the ‘World Café’. The goal of the World Café discussions is to spark conversations where participants feel comfortable sharing and listening, allowing the spontaneous pollination of ideas and meanings. This report aims to describe and reflect on the World Café strategy, which included 30 (thirty) faculty members, 3 (three) students, and 1 (one) resident from six medical schools in the Minas Regional Branch.

Discussion: The seven steps of the strategy were used: clarifying the context, creating a welcoming space, addressing important issues, encouraging contributions and engagement from all participants, connecting diverse perspectives, active and qualified listening, and sharing collective discoveries. In the end, 100% of the participants felt engaged in the activity and peer dialogue, and 95% stated that the workshop was enjoyable, allowing them to bring up prior knowledge and new perspectives on student assessment.

Conclusion: The World Café was widely accepted as an active, learner-centered methodology that fosters the creative use of social and communication technologies, for effectively thinking and acting together in education and health. Designed for large groups, the strategy can be applied in undergraduate and graduate programs, faculty development programs, continuing and permanent education, and allows the proactive handling of critical issues and questions, simultaneously involving various participants, including faculty, managers, students, service workers, and communities.

Keywords: Interpersonal Relations; Intersectoral Collaboration; Communication; Teacher Training.

RESUMO

Introdução: Formar profissionais competentes que reflitam sobre as próprias ações e interfiram no contexto em que atuam implica preparar docentes que entendam seu papel como facilitadores e propiciem ao estudante protagonizar o processo ensino-aprendizagem.

Relato de experiência: Considerando a relevância dos programas de desenvolvimento docente, a Associação Brasileira de Educação Médica – Regional Minas Gerais – criou em 2020 o projeto “De Minas para Minas: um dedo de prosa sobre educação médica”, com o propósito de valorizar todos os discentes e docentes das 47 escolas médicas mineiras, públicas e privadas, por meio de levantamento de temas de interesse comum em todos os espaços de formação. Realizou-se em 2023 um evento com foco central na avaliação do estudante, em que se utilizou uma estratégia pedagógica que propiciasse de forma coletiva e colaborativa o compartilhamento de conhecimentos por meio do diálogo: o World Café (ou Café Mundial). A proposta das rodas no World Café visa desencadear uma conversa em que os participantes se sintam à vontade para partilhar e escutar, de modo a possibilitar a espontânea polinização de ideias e significados. Este relato teve como objetivos descrever a estratégia World Café e refletir sobre ela, na qual estiveram presentes 30 docentes, três estudantes e um residente, provenientes de seis escolas médicas da Regional Minas.

Discussão: Foram utilizados os sete passos da estratégia: esclarecimento do contexto, criação de um espaço acolhedor, colocação em pauta das questões importantes, contribuição e engajamento de todos os participantes, conexão das diversas perspectivas, escuta ativa e qualificada, e partilhamento das descobertas coletivas. Ao final, 100% dos participantes sentiram-se engajados no diálogo interpares, e 95% afirmaram que a oficina foi agradável porque lhes permitiu levantar conhecimentos prévios e novas perspectivas sobre a avaliação do estudante.

Conclusão: O World Café teve grande aceitação por ser uma metodologia ativa, centrada no aprendiz, que proporciona o uso criativo de tecnologias sociais e comunicacionais, eficaz para se pensar e atuar em conjunto na educação e na saúde. Desenhada para grandes grupos, a estratégia pode ser aplicada na graduação, na pós-graduação, nos programas de desenvolvimento docente, na educação permanente e na educação continuada, e permite lidar de maneira propositiva com assuntos e perguntas críticas que envolvem, simultaneamente, diversas partes interessadas, como docentes, gestores, estudantes, trabalhadores do serviço e as comunidades.

Palavras-chave: Relações Interpessoais; Colaboração Intersetorial; Comunicação; Capacitação de Professores.

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Chief Editor: Rosiane Viana Zuza Diniz. | Associate Editor: Cristiane Barelli.

Received on 10/11/24; Accepted on 03/09/25. | Evaluated by double blind review process.

INTRODUCTION

Social changes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, together with the wide availability and globalization of knowledge through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and social media, influence the training of health professionals with a profile that deals with the health needs of society and the Brazilian universal health system and, therefore, they currently bring new perspectives into medical education^{1,2,3}.

The requirement to train competent professionals who reflect on their actions and interfere in their context, transforming it when necessary, also implies training teachers who understand their role as facilitators, place the student as the protagonist of the teaching-learning process and, for such purpose, develop pedagogical skills for this constantly evolving training⁴.

Considering the relevance of faculty development programs, the Brazilian Association of Medical Education, in its Minas Gerais Regional (Associação Brasileira de Educação Médica, ABEM - Minas Gerais Regional Branch), created in 2020 the Project called "From Minas to Minas: a chat about medical education", seeking to value all students and professors of the 47 medical schools in Minas Gerais, both public and private, raising topics of common interest in all the training spaces of this large and diverse state of Minas Gerais. In 2023, within this perspective, an event was held with a central focus on student assessment, using a pedagogical strategy that would provide the sharing of knowledge through dialogue, building new knowledges in a collective and collaborative way, the 'World Café'⁵.

The choice of this strategy takes into account the possibility of greater reflection in safe environments that favor the approximation of the participants⁶. According to Maturana⁷ we "create our worlds" through the conversation networks in which we participate; from this perspective, a conversation is action – the pulse and core of relational

and cultural systems, especially in the educational learning environment⁸. In addition, conversational leadership takes root when we understand that in-person meetings are also dynamic networks of conversation and approximation⁹. An intentional and well-structured conversation is the basis of the process for performing the necessary systemic changes. The strategic and elaborate approach to this nuclear process provides the expansion of intellectual and social capital and effective collaboration in our increasingly networked world¹⁰.

The World Café is a communication strategy, created in 1995 by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, in California, USA, which has been used in several countries, seeking to provide a collective experience with the objective of expanding issues of common interests to achieve engagement and collaboration among peers^{5,11,12}. The strategy is based on the principle of spontaneous pollination of ideas and meanings that occurs when people move from one conversation to another, allowing them to learn and explore possibilities^{13,5}. Which makes a lot of sense in Brazilian culture that, historically and culturally, was built with experiences of conversation circles since its colonization. When one thinks of conversation circles, the initial image that comes to mind is of informal conversations with friends and family around the kitchen table or stove, accompanied by hot coffee and freshly made delicacies to share our emotions and thoughts. This is also the case with the proposal of the circles at the World Café, which proposes to trigger a conversation with an intentional focus, in an environment conducive to dialogue, in which the participants feel free to share and listen^{14,15}. Thus, the arrival at the circle is full of experiences and practices of conversation and sharing linked to community customs, previous knowledge and the social relations in which we are ontologically inserted¹⁶.

In a systematic way, the authors⁵ structured the seven principles that support the World Café strategy, which were summarized in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1. Principles of the World Café strategy.

Principle	Objective	Where we want to get to
Clarification of the context	Share the purpose and goals of the meeting	Make clear the products that are to be built at the end of the meeting
Creating a welcoming space	Provide a safe and comfortable environment free from judgments	Allow people to express themselves naturally in a creative way
Putting important issues on the agenda*	Provide questions that are relevant to the group's real-life concerns	Discuss complex issues that bring applicability to the group
Contribution and engagement of all participants	Encourage everyone to participate, either with ideas and perspectives or with active listening	Ensure that everyone feels represented in the final product

Contiue...

Table 1. Continuation.

Principle	Objective	Where we want to get to
Connecting the Diverse Perspectives	Moving between tables, meeting new people, actively contributing to their thinking, and linking the essence of their discoveries to ever-widening circles of thought is one of the distinguishing features of the strategy	As participants bring key ideas or topics to new tables, they exchange perspectives, greatly improving the possibility of surprising new insights.
Active and qualified listening	Listen together for patterns and insights. Giving voice and time to the other, without exercising power	By practicing shared listening and paying attention to topics, patterns, and insights, we begin to feel a connection to the greater whole
Sharing collective findings	After a few minutes of quiet reflection on the deeper patterns, topics, and issues experienced in the small group conversations, everyone should share what the smaller group discussed with the larger group.	The last phase of the Café, often called "harvesting", involves making this pattern of wholeness visible to all in a large group conversation.

* A single question can be explored or a progressively deeper line of inquiry can be used through several rounds of conversation. Source: Synthesis (compilation) compiled by the author Tibiriçá, SHC from the description of Brown & Isaac⁵.

The World Café strategy has been described in various scenarios and contexts, such as in health research⁶, in addressing topics involving large communities¹², in the area of social work¹⁷ and as a mechanism for interprofessional strategic planning¹⁵; however, scientific production in medical education is still scarce regarding the use of World Café as an opportunity for peer learning, which justifies and motivates the performance of this experience report.

EXPERIENCE REPORT

In accordance with the Teacher Development Project "From Minas to Minas: a chat about medical education", of ABEM Minas Gerais Regional Branch, in December 2023, a workshop was held with the central topic "Student evaluation". The topic, previously chosen by the participants, aimed to discuss student assessment in its multidimensional aspects, the importance of valuing all attributes of competence (cognitive, psychomotor ability and attitude) for the evaluation process and how to offer feedback to the student. The activity was carried out in-person and had 34 (thirty-four) enrolled individuals, of which 30 (thirty) were teachers, 3 (three) were students and 1 (one) was a resident, from six medical schools. In the first part of the workshop, we chose to use the World Café didactic strategy, in which we followed the principles described in Table 1 following the basic model of Brown & Isaac⁵.

For the World Café strategy, we created a cozy environment with five tables, each covered by a flip chart sheet (which could be cardboard, wood paper, kraft or brown paper) and anatomical Pilot® markers of different colors. Each table was surrounded by five or six chairs, as well as a sideboard containing coffee, water and small snacks. We started by

welcoming the participants and set the context, making the participants feel at home. The rounds of the small groups took place with an interval of 20 (twenty) minutes each.

DISCUSSION

At each table, the participants or "travelers", as they are called in the description of the World Café strategy, encountered problem-situations with different guiding questions, related to student assessment, for which they wrote their perspectives and opinions, based on their previous experiences and knowledges. The "travelers" rotated through all the tables until they returned to their table of origin. In our experience, we adapted the strategy and chose not to leave one person as the "table host", as our intention was that all participants would have the opportunity to contribute to all evaluation topics. This figure is optional and works as a fixed rapporteur at the table, who summarizes for the next round what has been discussed up to that moment.

It is important to note that although we used different problem-situations and guiding questions, specially designed for the context and the desired purpose, they can be used in more than one round or can complement each other to focus the conversation or guide its direction.

The problem-situations and guiding questions dealt with the following topics of student evaluation: formative and summative evaluation (table 1), norm and criterion-referenced evaluation (table 2), psychometric characteristics – validity (table 3) and reliability (table 4) and, finally, the need for multiple perspectives, instruments and methods aligned with the expected student performances (table 5).

Another adaptation made in relation to the original description of the strategy is that the groups of participants

were fixed and rotated simultaneously through all tables, while in the original description the travelers could define their trajectory between the tables. Our choice was due to the intentionality of everyone having the opportunity to discuss all topics.

At the end of the round circuit, the participants returned to their tables of origin and analyzed the contributions of all participants, defining a rapporteur.

This was followed by a dialogued presentation with theorization on student evaluation, divided by the central topics of the tables, always preceded by the report of each table where the rapporteur and the members of the small groups were invited to share ideas or other results of their conversations with the rest of the large group. These results are visually reflected in a variety of ways, usually using flip charts, and this step is often referred to as 'harvesting'⁵. As the dialogues were being connected, new opportunities and insights on the topic appeared in the discussions.

At the end of the strategy, the participants answered a Google forms for the workshop evaluation, whose main results were the following: 100% (one hundred percent) of the participants felt engaged in the activity and in the dialogue between peers and stated that the strategy helped them to raise their previous knowledge about student evaluation, and contributed to expand learning on the subject; 95% (ninety-five percent) of the participants stated that the workshop was agreeable and was in accordance with the proposals of the Project "From Minas to Minas: a chat about medical education" of ABEM Minas Regional Branch.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the complex issues involving the health area and the desired advances in medical education, actions such as discovering shared purposes, awakening collective intelligence and developing effective strategies for effective collaborative action do not happen by chance. To deal purposefully with critical issues and questions involving diverse participants, whether faculty, managers, students, service workers, and communities, one must be intentional about choosing processes that ensure everyone's committed participation and contribution and promote coherent outcomes, without the dominance of any of the groups. Otherwise, joining participants with different perspectives can lead to polarized and fruitless debates, even with the proliferation of ideas, but without the possibility of concreteness.

To strengthen a culture of dialogue, the first requirement is to consider all other people on the same level of importance and equal in dignity, freedom and human value. The next step is to put dialogue at the center of the activity

The Word Café is undoubtedly an active methodology, centered on the learner, which provides the creative use of social and communication technologies, highly effective for thinking and acting together in an intentional way in education and health. It is generally used for large groups and can be applied in undergraduate, graduate studies, faculty development programs, permanent and continuing education.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Sandra Helena Cerrato Tibiriçá contributed to all stages of the study, from the literature search, reading, creation, participation and description of the experience, writing the manuscript and its submission. Alessandra Carla de Almeida Ribeiro, Douglas Vinícius Reis Pereira and Mônica Couto Guedes Sejanos da Rocha contributed to the stages of the reading work, description of the written experience and review of the manuscript. Oscarina da Silva Ezequiel contributed to all stages of the study, from reading, data analysis, writing the manuscript, and its evaluation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

The authors declare no sources of funding.

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