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Roseira Boemer, Magali

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Qualitative investigation: zeal for rigor and ethics

The term Health implies on an area in which many professionals work, and the first idea to be approached is this group's composition. It is necessary to look at the different perspectives of those professionals, which is in accordance to the current trend for multiprofessionality. A more encompassing look maybe will require that we climb one more step in this vision, that is, to implement the idea of composition of our knowledge, of their intersection (because they are still seen in a fragmented way), which supposes the construction of interdisciplinarity.

A wider look may mean also the understanding of the relationship Health Professional-Patient as a relation essentially between human beings, which involves the meeting of subjectivities. The idea of Man as part of the world, in all its facticity, has been rescued by many researchers and under different referentials. The very introduction of the teaching of bioethics in some health schools gave substance to shifts of focus in the way we look at the human being we care for and that has been subject-object of our investigations.

However, building relations that contemplate the dignity of the human being is not something established, but a process in permanent construction, involving people in their existential movements. It seems to us that that is where the greatest challenge is: - to deal with this ambiguity inherent to the human condition:

- the possibility of changes, considering our creative, sensitive dimension, with an aspect of solidarity, co-existing with that possibility of "sameness", of the exclusive use of the formal logical thought, of the control of man by man, of the fear of changing.^(a)

A wider look at the person-to-person relation, in a condition that involves health and illness, will require the recognition of human vulnerabilities, fragilities and possibilities, present in the person who cares and in the person who is cared for. Transcending the technical-scientific dimension, that dichotomy does not find support on an existential perspective, in which all of us are in a continuous movement of caring to be.

Under the perspective of scientific investigation, this vision implies on zeal with two relevant poles: the zeal for scientific and for ethical rigor of the investigation.

In what refers to research in its qualitative modalities, the literature and the experience in researching in nursing demonstrate that the best indicator for an investigation work is its internal coherence, the rigor in the use of method and the fidelity of the author to his/her theoretical referential.

The increasing prestige of the qualitative methodologies has not always been accompanied by the adequate use of methodologies that make possible to deal in a competent way with the proposed problem. It is becoming common the a-critical acceptance of alternative methodologies, which, sometimes, may hide the absence of a method. The literature has been expressing that concern.

In the ethical point of view, there are confrontations in qualitative research that lack answers or orientations, such as, for instance, the concern with the storage of the data registered in recorders, field diaries and other resources; the risks to which are exposed all those who take part in research based on interviews, narratives or life stories when the researcher's, the participants' and the research ethics committees' are at stake.

Scientific research requires a pertinent ethical discussion, no matter the area in which the investigation targets are related to different aspects of nature that imply on human existence. That is potentialized when the objects of study are human beings themselves.

Still under the perspective of ethics, there is another warning that has to do with the form in which we direct our students through the paths of research, helping them by opening possibilities, refraining us from turning basic techniques and resources into a "straitjacket" in the data collection process. On the other hand, there will always be the zeal for scientific rigor.

The principles of ethics in research should be preserved in the investigation's very design, its object, objective, theoretical referentials, investigation strategies, diffusion of results and ends researchers have set to themselves.

To finalize, we would say that ethics in Science has been proving itself to be relevant to researchers and, in that sense, it is necessary to emphasize the organization of a Seminar on this theme with the objective of presenting studies on the elaboration of a proposal for a world declaration on ethics in science, which may serve as the basis for a code of conduct for researchers (FAPESP news agency, May 19, 2006).

^(a) Boemer MR, Correa AK. Repensando a relação do enfermeiro com o doente: o resgate da singularidade humana. In: Branco RFGR. A relação com o paciente: teoria, ensino e prática. Rio de Janeiro: Guanabara-Koogan; 2003. p. 263-9.