

**DISTANCE EDUCATION AND HEALTH:
A THEORETICAL-EPISTEMOLOGICAL EXERCISE ON APPROACHING THESE
AREAS.**

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Summary

Distance Education is the education of the future / present. Starting from this premise, the objective of this theoretical-methodological exercise is to situate and reflect on the approach of this area to health, aiming its understanding as well as the possibilities and trends of distance education as a strategy for training and qualification of health professionals in the Unique Health System (SUS). The theoretical-epistemological dimension that deals with the scientific knowledge in modern and postmodern science, invites practitioners of this type of education to further readings, discussions and reflections on its approach to the health sector. Thus, this exercise aims to contribute to reflection on the position of distance education in health and on applying its theoretical and epistemological referential to the daily work of health professionals.

Keywords: epistemology, distance education in health.

Abstract

Distance Education is the education of the future/present. Starting from this premise, the objective of this theoretical and methodological exercise is to situate and reflect on the approach of this area to health, aiming its understanding as well as the possibilities and trends of distance education as a strategy for training and qualification of health professionals in the Unique Health System (SUS).

The theoretical-epistemological dimension that deals with scientific knowledge in modern and postmodern science, invites practitioners of this type of education to further readings, discussions and reflections on its approach to the health sector. Thus, this exercise aims to contribute to the situation and thinking about health

distance education and in applying their theoretical and epistemological referential to the daily work of professionals.

Keywords: epistemology, health, distance education.

Initial Considerations

Distance Education (DE) is the education of the future / present. This phrase was the motivation for this work and the context of this debate is the scope of distance education in the health sector.

It can stand as a more democratic form of education in the sense of being more accessible to those who can not afford to travel long geographical distances in search of knowledge.

In this sense, the article aims to contextualize DE in the health sector as a strategy to train and qualify human resources for the Unique Health System (SUS).

This contextualization is the result of: readings and reflections on documents and journal articles relevant to the area, intended as a documentary analysis, and my recent entrance in the Coordination of Distance Education team of the National School of Public Health Sergio Arouca of Oswaldo Cruz Foundation.

For its effective capacity of reaching the farthest locations in our country, DE seems to be the most appropriate strategy for training and qualification of SUS health professionals, contacting as far as formal education can not reach.

Precisely because of its breadth and scope, this type of education can overcome geographic, social and cultural obstacles.

It offers a suitable opportunity and strategy of teaching / learning for the student / learner to appropriate the scientific knowledge of a particular course, offering, in addition, the social and digital inclusion of its participants.

In the following lines, I try to contextualize the DE in the health sector, starting with notes and reflections, with the look of someone who is currently approaching DE and already walked the road of public health in the Unique Health System.

Contextualizing concepts and definitions in Distance Education

When I speak of DE, I mean a mode of education. This assumption means, in our understanding and in agreement with Moran Costas (1994), it is a dynamic process of teaching and learning mediated by information technologies and communication, where teachers / tutors and students are separated spatially and /

or temporally.

Preti (1996) points out some aspects to be considered by its practitioners to think over when developing courses in this mode: the course participants, economic viability and social significance, the profile of candidates, principles, approach and indication of curricular elements.

In relation to the principles of approach, the author points out that the courses being proposed for development of professional training should consider the epistemological dimension in the development of scientific thought, since the agent can get a paradigmatic scheme, according to his way of seeing, deciphering and analyzing the reality in which it occurs and where its action constitutes and is constituted by it.

Paloff and Pratt (1999) posit that the key to the process of distance learning are the interactions between students, interactions between higher education institutions and students, and collaboration in learning that results from these interactions.

The authors indicate that inside the online environment the instructor / tutor has the role of facilitator in the educational process of teaching / learning in the electronic classroom. This paper is related to the pedagogical model for the performance of this professional in the conversion of traditional classroom in a cyberspace electronic classroom.

DE is identified as an education mode with particular ways of creating spaces to generate, promote and foster conditions conducive to teaching / learning, between teachers and students. The striking feature of this mode is the media coverage of relations (Litwin, 2001).

For definitions of DE, Belloni (2003) notes that they are generally descriptive, ie, according to the traditional perspective of teaching in the classroom.

Moore and Kearsley (2008) posit that the basic idea of DE is simple. In it, students and teachers are in different locations during all or part of the period in which they learn and teach. Both need some kind of technology for information exchange and interaction.

Notes on Distance Education

Regarding the historicity of DE, in the late 70's of last century, the Fordist production model still prevailed and went on to be imitated in the educational institutions for distance learning that were created to serve students and workers. The governments of England, Spain and Germany have established public distance universities to meet the demands according to the Fordist model (PRETI, 2005).

Gouvea and Oliveira (2006) indicated the importance of DE due to the new situation descendent from the socioeconomic scenario of industrial revolution that made possible the technical and technological development and established some socio-educative imperatives. Authors indicate a relationship between technological development, socioeconomic conditions and education, as well as the breadth of possibilities for action that the DE offers, compared to the problems faced by the educational system.

Correa (2007) posits that there was an expansion of courses in distance mode, but it was observed the preponderance of educational proposals that are based on the transposition of face-to-face courses for distance education courses.

This transposition comes within the context of compensatory educational policies that use DE in an isolated and therefore reductionist manner without considering the teaching / learning context.

In the context of new paradigms proposed by systemic, holistic and dialectical approaches Preti (2003) proposed studies related to educational policies for,DE; the conceptual bases of its systems, structures and organizational forms and institutional and legal aspects.

Regarding educational paradigms and pedagogical trends, Struchiner and Gianella (2000) point out the approaches; humanistic, behavioral, social-political and constructivist. The latter incorporates elements of each paradigm presented by the authors and seems to be more adequate to educational demands and DE.

From the viewpoint of ecological and systemic vision of the world and life, Moraes (2005) posits that the reconfiguration of the epistemological scenario brings new principles and theories, new constitutive relations between subject / object, the new world view, new discourses and new epistemology with new scientific theories that help in building the knowledge and teaching practices that could result.

This new paradigm proposed by the author, with its respective theories, and macro structural concepts, enable the development of a new praxis. In this sense, the author argues that theory and method are crucial in the process of knowledge construction. However, these two aspects are not addressed adequately enough in this process. In view of this, according to the author, we must be more attentive to the epistemological reconfigurations that are needed in our teaching practice.

Vitorino (2006) posits that the paradigm in this mode constitutes a set of methods, theories and problems that a particular scientific community legitimate. This assertion is consistent with that proposed by Kuhn (2005), when the author argues that the paradigms influence the DE the same way that influence classroom

education.

According to the author, the postmodern paradigms provide new ways of teaching and learning, because they consider the aspects of those who teach and learn.

Among these aspects, the DE mode presupposes exchange, dialogue and interaction, being the student's autonomy one of the ideals of educational action. It becomes active in the process of knowledge construction (Vitorino, 2006).

Distance Education in the health sector

In this item, I contextualized distance education in the health sector, specifically in the Department of Distance Education (EAD), National School of Public Health Sergio Arouca (ENSP) of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ). ENSP, as a Government School of Health, has the mission to train and qualify human resources for the Unique Health System (SUS) and DE, through its coordination in the entrance examination, is one of the essential conditions for health sector reform in training and continuing education of the workforce in health, which should be prepared according Struchiner, Roschke and Ricciardi (2002), to face changes and keep up with the rapid scientific and technological advances of contemporary society.

The authors suggest the need to overcome the challenges of continuing healthcare education, sharing and making available scientific knowledge to solve problems of the health sector.

In this context, a program of continuing distance education in health, with the use of networks, can be a new paradigm, according to the proposal of the authors.

This proposal is formed through the educational technology in health in the search for new alternatives for the realization of the proposed program, incorporating scientific and technological advances in different areas of knowledge that may offer new perspectives and new spaces for the training in health professionals (STRUCHINER, E ROSCHKE RICCIARDI, 2002).

This movement of DE in the health sector meets the Ministry of Health's concern with the continuing education as a means of transforming the educational policy practices of formation, attention management, popular participation and social control in the health sector (OLIVEIRA, 2007).

I see then, according to the author, that continuing education can be achieved through DE, as a strategy to train and qualify professionals, providing them expertise and quality to render service to people using the Unique Health System.

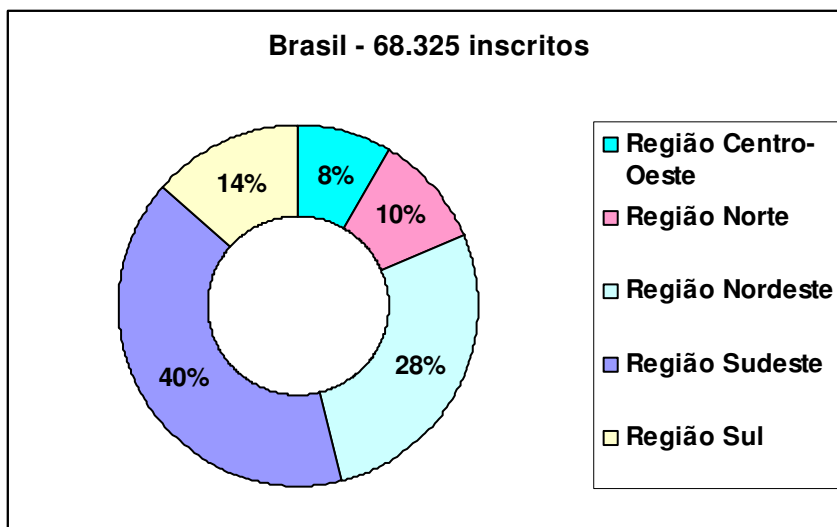
The training and qualification of health professionals in the EAD / ENSP / Fiocruz

EAD / ENSP / Fiocruz was created in 1998 to meet the demand of the Ministry of Health in promoting opportunities for training and qualification of health professionals, thereby contributing to building and consolidating the SUS. The EAD / ENSP was configured as strategic training and qualification in health, to professionals and institutions involved in management systems and health services, acting at the post-graduation.

Until 15/11/2008 were offered ten regular courses and twenty institutional demand courses, of which sixteen were demanded by the Ministry of Health. Six more courses are accredited for implementation in 2008/2009, totaling thirty-six courses.

There are twelve courses of specialization, thirteen courses of training and eleven update courses. The total numbers of this trajectory are frozen on 16/11/2008 and are presented in percentage form, distributed in the following graphic:

Distribution of the percentage enrolled in EAD / ENSP / Fiocruz in the period 1998-2008, according to geographic region of enrollment, 2009.



Fonte: Ribeiro et. al. 2008.

In the Northern region 7105 were enrolled, in the Center-West region 5620 were enrolled, in the Northeast region were 18,805 enrolled, in the Southeast were 27,405 enrolled and in the South 9390 were enrolled.

This graph illustrates the trajectory of the EAD / ENSP / Fiocruz over ten years of

its existence. In the early years the motto was do to exist, after, the motto was to structure quality to continue existing, and now in recent years, the motto is to evaluate with quantity and quality to keep existing.

Final Considerations

DE in the health sector, especially in the Unique Health System is an effective strategy to face the challenges that are present in the everyday work of health professionals.

The effectiveness of this strategy depends on the proximity between the epistemology - theory of knowledge – and the application of this knowledge in the practice of the health worker.

Praxis, understood as a practice that generates a reflection, which in turn generates new practice. Not only do by doing but do by knowing how to do, based on scientific and technological knowledge, and also on individual knowledge - popular knowledge.

The reflection for action and action based on reflection requires, according to Moraes (2005), epistemological clarity in practice, which will help us to cope more competently with the challenges at present, namely:

Learning to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge, educating citizens aware and responsible and contribute to the evolution of human consciousness (p.193).

These challenges can arise not only in education but also in the evolution of society, politics and science. We Identified that the positivist and constructivist / constructionist paradigms, that permeate the DE mode, can approach the paradigm of collaborative learning in cyberspace of Palloff and Pratt (1999); the paradigms proposed by systemic approaches, holistic and dialectical of Preti (2003) and the educational paradigm from an ecological and systemic vision of the world and life, of Moraes (2005).

In the field of distance education in health, we agree with Oliveira (2007) when she puts that continuing education in health in the distance mode is a new perspective and a trend in the health area.

In this perspective, distance education as a strategy for training and qualification of SUS health professionals, strengthens and transforms the everyday practices of those professionals, who work to make the SUS the producer of social equity and quality in health.

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