World Café Method: The Possibility of Understanding Active Methodologies in Remote Learning

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Abstract

The great challenge in these last decades in education is the growing search for innovative teaching methodologies that enable a pedagogical praxis able to form subjects with ethical, historical, critical, reflective, transformative and humanized profile. The present study stems from the following problematization: what is the contribution of the active teaching methodology called "World Café" in teaching and learning processes, so that it favors teaching innovation in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? In facing this problem, the following objectives were listed: a) understanding the contributions of the World Café Method in teaching and learning process innovation; b) analyze the viability of the World Café Method in remote learning. A quali-quantitative, descriptive and applied methodological strategy is employed, drawing on Barbosa (2013), Berbel (2011), Brown and Isaacs (2007), Minayo (2010), Moran (2014) and Triviños (1987). The data were analyzed using discourse analysis techniques (Bardin, 2016). We conclude that it is possible to use the World Café Method in virtual, remote learning, as it enables the promotion of ideas, discussions, reflections, questions, and engages participants, that is, a collective learning process.

Keywords: active methodologies; World Café Method; remote teaching

1. Introduction

During the last decades, major changes have been observed in several areas of knowledge. The exponential growth of these changes, typical of the globalized world, has also impacted teaching and learning processes, especially in teaching methodological strategies, thus prompting reflection in search of new pedagogical alternatives for the improvement of education in basic and higher education.

It should be noted that the inclusion of information and communication digital technologies (ICDTs) in a traditional, lecture-style classroom does not abate collective student dissatisfaction, as technology alone does not guarantee learning.

Thus it is necessary to switch to other teaching methodologies, which enable to a more dynamic and interactive construction of knowledge, promoting student autonomy, and developing critical sense for each situation addressed in the classroom. Attitudes that provide opportunities for listening to students, valuing their opinions, promoting empathy, answering questions, and boosting self-esteem promote motivation, and create a favorable learning environment (BERBEL, 2011).

Active methodologies come into being in order to largely minimize the learning deficit problem, and move away from a mechanical and often out-of-context lecture-based teaching.

The development of active methodologies for their use in remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the following problematization: how may the Word Café Method contribute to teaching and learning processes, so as to favor teaching innovation in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? In facing this problem, the following objectives were listed: a) understanding the contributions of the World Café Method in teaching and learning process innovation; b) analyze the viability of the World Café Method in remote learning.

Therefore, this paper will initially present the importance of active methodologies in teaching and learning processes, focusing on the World Café Method, its concepts, features and history, as well as the fundamental methodological principles for its applicability. It then comments on the virtual viability of the World Café Method in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and concludes with the description and analysis of the experience report, that is, the application of the method in remote learning, presenting the results achieved with its use, as well as some suggestions for further application.

2. Active Methodologies in Teaching and Learning Processes

Active methodologies promote student engagement, and stimulate the development of their critical and reflective skills; in addition, their application changes teachers' attitudes, that is, their teaching methods are re-purposed, as they move away from being knowledge safe-keepers, and begin to stimulate students to seek their own knowledge, in addition to guiding them in this search.

According to Freire (2006), active methodology consists of an educational conception that stimulates the constructive processes of action-reflection-action, where students have an active attitude towards their learning in practical situations, by challenging problem-situations, thus stimulating them to research and discover solutions applicable to reality.

Valente (2017, p. 464) claims that active methodologies are characterized by "situations created by the teacher with the intention that the learner has a more active role in their teaching and learning processes". However, for this teaching methodology to become beneficial, it is important that students are truly engaged in this learning process, so that they can "read, write, ask, discuss or be busy solving problems and engaging in projects" (BARBOSA; MOURA, 2013, p.8).

In today's world, there are several types of active teaching methodologies widely used in basic schools and universities, which are centered on students, who cease to be passive subjects, and start to reflect on the contents developed in the school environment.

2.1 The World Café Method: concepts, features and history

The World Café Method was developed by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs in 1995, at an event discussing the strategic dialogue of the "California intellectual property". As it was raining on the occasion, they, as hosts, organized a space that was used for breakfast to welcome a group of 20 participants. The participants were then distributed in various tables, forming groups of four to five members. As discussions unfolded, participants changed places with others, who were sitting at different tables. A greater interaction of ideas was observed with this, a good way to perceive collective intelligence, and thus the World Café Method was created.

This "World Café" developed by Brown and Isaacs (2007) is anchored in the understanding that conversation is the central focus of the process that drives personal and organizational business (WORLD CAFÉ COMMUNITY FOUNDATION, 2015).

Currently, the World Café Method is known not only as a simple method, but also as a research and practice community, easily accessed by people all over the world (BROWN, 2001). Brown asserts that the World Café Method can also be seen as a metaphor, that is, an image that allows understanding of the world as a

shared space, in which everyone must be heard, and have their thoughts and emotions respected, and where dialogue is a necessary part of encountering others.

Brown views the World Café as a provocative metaphor, as the invisible and natural power that conversations have in work groups organized to discuss a situation, in universities or in any other work environment, is often ignored.

2.2 The World Café in Remote Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The world was devastatingly impacted by the January 30 World Health Organization (WHO) Declaration that the COVID-19 pandemic (SCHMIDT *et al.*, 2020) constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), the highest emergency alert level of the organization, according to the International Health Regulations.

In the face of a pandemic of the new coronavirus (COVID-19), the Ministry of Education (MEC) answered the request made by the Brazilian Association of Higher Education Maintainers (ABMES) and the guidelines of the National Education Council (CNE), and issued ordinance n. 343 of March 17, 2020, which regulates the replacement of face-to-face classes by classes in digital media during the COVID-19 pandemic (BRAZIL, 2020).

With the increasing spread of the virus in the country, educational institutions and teachers complied with MEC recommendations, and closed their dependencies temporarily. However, they were taken by surprise with the suspension of face-to-face learning activities, and the abrupt change to online activities and emergency remote teaching.

This situation of social isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic poses great challenges to most teachers, students, families, and basic and higher education institutions.

The main difficulties observed are the lack of technology skills to handle tools such as digital platforms and applications, and the lack of Internet access. In any case, we observe a growing search for technological alternatives that may meet the educational needs of all those involved, as a result of the new teaching model.

Thus, it is hypothesized that the World Café Method may be feasible in remote teaching, but it is necessary to create virtual learning models that incorporate it, and promote collaborative and constructivist environments on the chosen platforms (MONTEIRO; MOREIRA; ALMEIDA, 2012; MOREIRA, 2012; MOREIRA, 2018).

These questions about the applicability of the World Café Method in remote teaching will be answered in the report of an experience with 15 subjects, some of whom were doctoral students in Education and faculty members of a state university in Ceará, Brazil.

3. Methodology

The present study takes a quali-quantitative, descriptive and applied approach, drawing on Barbosa (2013), Berbel (2011), Brown and Isaacs (2007), Minayo (2010), Moran (2014) and Triviños (1987). The data were analyzed using discourse analysis techniques (Bardin, 2016).

A consistent national and international theoretical review in specialized literature, in printed and digital formats, was undertaken, especially concerning models, methods and innovative technologies in the field

of education. A previous research was conducted in the main paper repositories, such as Scielo and CAPES Directory.

The participants of this research were 15 professors, some of whom were doctoral students in Education of a state university in Ceará, Brazil, and faculty members of same institution. The duration of the activity was approximately two hours. The choice of the participants was not random, but motivated for two reasons: the specificity of their profile as education professionals, whose knowledge, perceptions and feedback would be qualitatively differentiated and necessary to the objectives of this research, as well as the convenience for carrying out this activity, as it was performed during an Active Methodologies in Education class.

The research was conducted in a virtual environment, with the use of Google Meet software, which offers communication services for desktop and mobile platforms, and can be used as digital educational technology. Such an alternative has proved to be indispensable in the current pandemic context, which the world and education are facing, given the pressing needs of social distance necessary for public health.

The dynamics of the experiment with the participants followed the rules and protocols of the active methodology chosen to conduct the activities, that is, the World Café, allied with the 5W2H metacognitive method, having as main theme and trigger "active methodologies in the context of teaching and learning". Data was collected at the end of the research experiment (pedagogical workshop), by means of a digital Google Forms questionnaire, applied to all participants.

Qualitative analysis of the collected data used Bardin's content analysis method, which comprises a list of communication analysis techniques, thus conferring greater rigor to the process of content investigation, and protecting the researcher so as not to be confused by the possible heterogeneity of ideas and contents detached from the research object (BARDIN, 2016).

Qualitatively relevant data were analyzed by elementary statistical analysis. Data normality was analyzed using the Shapiro-Wilk Test. The Mann-Whtiney test was performed to assess whether there was a statistically significant difference between the groups. For data analysis, the GraphPad Prism software, version 6.0 (GraphPad Software Inc., La Jolla, CA, USA), was used. Data showing $p < 0.05$ were considered statistically significant.

Based on this volume of data, a quali-quantitive analysis was conducted that produced the results discussed in the following session.

4. Results and Discussion

The challenge was to think of the virtual application of the World Café Method, providing the participants with theoretical and practical support regarding the importance of using a technique, so it may contribute to teaching innovation, and provoke reflections on proposing strategies that collaboratively favor the construction of knowledge, through conversations based on horizontality.

In addition, the applicability of the technique, as well as its success, were verified in a previous work carried out by the same mediators in a workshop held in January 2020 at the "Congresso Internacional de Ensino e Formação Docente" [International Teaching and Teacher Training Congress] held in Redenção, Ceará, which culminated in the publication of a paper entitled: "*World Café*: metodologia ativa para a

compreensão da Política Nacional de Educação Especial na perspectiva da educação inclusiva" [World Café: Active Methodology for the Comprehension of the National Policy of Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education] (OZÓRIO *et al*, 2020). However, the current proposal differs in that the present one is based on a virtual environment.

The idea was to remotely execute the activity, by means of digital educational technologies, due to the current context, as, according to Bacich and Moran (2018, P. 53), "today, the combination of active methodologies with mobile digital technologies is strategic for pedagogical innovation".

It is important to note that we did not find records of the use of this technique as here proposed, that is, applied in a virtual environment, so it may be considered innovative. However, it should be noted that everyone has the capacity to innovate, but it should be taken into account that: "innovation involves two fundamental elements: creativity and the production of new ideas, which must be able to be implemented and generate impact"(CAMARGO, DAROS, 2018, p.29).

The workshop was held by a synchronous communication service, which "requires all participants to engage at the same time, but not necessarily in the same place" (BATES, 2017, p.264). Four virtual rooms were created (room 01, room 02, room 03, room 04) so that, after the mediators had introduced the theme, the 15 participants could move among these rooms. Thus, each room had an average of four participants, one of which was elected as secretary/host by the group members themselves. The overall theme was "active methodologies"; other sub-themes were: 1. Definition, features and types of active methodologies; 2. Benefits obtained from the use of active methodologies; 3. Difficulties encountered in the implementation of active methodologies; 4. Possible uses of active methodologies in remote teaching.

Each group was responsible for discussing one sub-theme, always starting from the exploratory questions prepared in advance by the mediators, according to each theme.

It should be noted that, for the elaboration of these questions, the "5W2H" technique was used, in which a certain theme is mapped onto 7 essential questions: what?, when?, where?, why?, who?, how?, how much impact? (PAIM, 2016). After approximately 10 minutes, participants should move to the next room, where they would discuss new questions. Thus everyone would go through all the proposed themes. However, only secretaries/hosts would not move. They would systematize what was discussed by taking notes, which would later be presented to the whole class, in order to share the discussions in all groups.

Thus, we would allow the general context to be discussed, instigating, guiding and mediating groups during discussions. We would realize the wealth and connections that would arise. At the end, after all the room-switching participants had joined all rooms, the original groups would rejoin in room 01 (the main room), where the secretaries would present their notes, which would synthesize the knowledge on the sub-themes. This final moment was called "harvest".

To enrich the discussion, bringing contributions and raising the debate, the participants were previously instrumentalized, by e-mail, with papers and books on active methodologies, so they may improve their knowledge on the subject, thus enriching discussions. This action refers to the inverted classroom, in which: "the basic information about a topic or problem can be searched by students so they may acquaint themselves therewith, starting from previous knowledge, and expanding them with references given by the teacher (curation)" (BACICH, MORAN, 2018, P.55).

In order to evaluate the use of the World Café Method with the 15 participants, we developed a questionnaire with the following questions: "Concerning the World café Method applied virtually, were the exposition and the goals clear? Justify your answer." Participants were unanimous (100% of answers) in stating that they had understood how the method was applied, as well as the goals to be fulfilled. However, there were some caveats, such a need to improve room-switching management, for clearer and firmer guidelines regarding the use of microphones, as well as a fuller grasp of the chosen application.

It is noticed that the goal of promoting engagement, motivation and responsibility, creating conditions for a more active participation of the members was achieved, however, according to the above, the teacher conducting the technique needs to master digital technologies so as to achieve success in the execution of the activity. As Moran (2004, p. 2) rightly states: "technologies are only support, a means. But they allow us to carry out learning activities in different ways than before. We can learn by being together in distant places, without having to always be together in a room for this to happen."

When asked about whether they perceived a favorable environment for the debate of ideas, even in a virtual way, most participants agreed. The answers obtained were the following:

> Yes. The only thing that was missing was a small adjustment regarding the use of the technological tool adopted when planning the execution of the activity. (Participant 1)
>
> Yes, ideas are exchanges between participants, and I think we feel even more comfortable and relaxed virtually than in person. (Participant 5)
>
> Yes, it is totally possible, but Meet should be better used, as it allows you to change rooms without interference among them. The initiative was extremely relevant, but adjustments are necessary. (Participant 7)

We may infer from the responses of the participants that active methodologies are indeed applicable in virtual environments, because there was a connection of ideas; in addition, the relaxed and informal environment allowed them to engage, generating a collective pollination of learning.

Regarding the feasibility of participation of all members with the World Café Method, it was noticed that, as in the previous question, the majority admitted that the technique allows the participation of all, and also presented some suggestions:

> Yes, because it involved collaborative learning through interaction between the smaller groups and the larger group. (Participant 4).
>
> Yes, even if the division into groups was not as planned, each group managed to discuss the question it was assigned; unfortunately, it was not possible to present each small group's answers to the big group, so that we could debate each group's opinion. (Participant 5).
>
> It does allow us to participate, but room coordinators need clearer roles; I think there could be one coordinator, controlling time and room dynamics, and one secretary, focused on how the debate is unfolding, and how concepts are being built. (Participant 7)

The above reports show that, as an active methodology, the World Café Method allows for the transformation of the teaching and learning method, in which the classroom dynamics (whether virtual or not) is reconfigured, that is, students and teachers take up other roles, so that students becomes more active, autonomous and engaged in their learning process, as well as, "creative, critical, collaborative, able to work

in groups and solve real problems. Active learning methodologies are developed in this context as a necessary alternative to this end" (CAMARGO, DAROS, 2018, p. 29).

Regarding the difficulties perceived in the use of the World Café Method, we obtained the following answers:

> It [the World Café Method] is still new to this environment. Training, feedback and pointers will put these difficulties behind. (Participant 2).
>
> I thought it was very good, but I felt a certain insecurity in the use of the Google Meet tool, because speaking on the microphone and group productivity were a little confusing. Given it was the first time, I think it was good. (Participant 7).
>
> Organization in smaller groups. It would be interesting going to the smaller group having chosen a leader, so as to better direct it. (Participant 10).

It is clear from the above answers that one of the factors that contributes considerably to the success of this activity in a virtual environment is the preparation of mediator-teachers regarding their grasp of digital technologies. It corroborates the studies of Bacich and Moran, when they state that: "students who are, today, inserted in formal education systems require from their teachers didactic and methodological skills for which they have not been and are not being prepared" (BACICH, MORAN, 2018, p. 16).

Participants were asked to score traditional teaching compared to teaching using the World Café Method. Their answers are represented the table below:
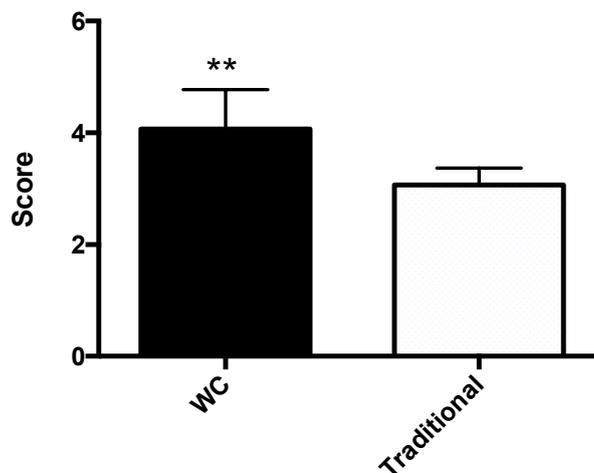

Table 1. World Cafe Method (WC) perception assessment compared to traditional teaching. Values were expressed as mean ± SEM. For statistical analysis, Mann-Whitney test was used, where $p < 0.05$ vs Traditional group.

It was observed that there is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of teaching with the World Café Method (WC) when compared with the traditional group ($p < 0.05$), that is, students perceive better learning with WC online when compared with traditional teaching.

When asked about the importance of active methodologies for contemporary education, the answers were directed to the promotion of significant learning by Ausubel (1963): "especially in the promotion of significant, contextualized, critical and reflective learning, corroborating for the development of skills

and competencies required by the scenario of educational and social technological advances of the XXI century" (Participant 2).

Participants also mentioned metacognitive aspects, of which Flavell (1979) presents two constituents: the knowledge of one's own knowledge and the regulation of this knowledge. We highlight metacognition as a learning strategy, reflecting the autonomy and reflection of the action of learning, in a construction of autonomy, which refers to the work of Paulo Freire (1996). In this regard, the observation of Participant 8 stands out:

> Being well conducted and planned, it is a very rich and highly knowledge-fostering strategy. Learning by doing and understanding that I can build concepts from my own ability to interact with the environment, with other people and with my vital knowledge, makes learning much more meaningful and transformative of my reality. In education, as a practice of freedom, as claimed by Paul Freire and for Engels, "a gram of action equals a ton of theory". (Participant 8)

Teacher training was also taken into account, as working with active methodologies requires better preparation: "contemporary education needs well-trained teachers and the availability of basic resources in the classrooms. Innovating is of no use if we don't have a well-trained teacher" (Participant 10). For Bates (2017), society expects teachers who are trained to deal with rapidly evolving technologies, but, in general, teachers or teaching instructors have little or no training for this.

With regard to the use of technology to support social distancing-driven e-learning, the use of active methodologies associated to technologies, both co-operating to increase learner motivation and interest, was questioned, with particular reference to the following question: "Using interactive and ludic softwares, such as games, provided their use is pedagogically motivated, as well as the possibility of constant feedback on the part of the teachers by synchronous communication […]" (Participant 2). Therefore, pedagogical intentionality is one of the items pointed to good class planning with active methodologies.

On the challenges teachers currently face to arouse students' interest in class, we note the following answer:

> Currently, we face a big challenge in teaching, initially having students pay attention and focus in class, especially in basic education, as the teacher must compete with the alluring effects of technological tools. In my point of view, in order for teachers to achieve their real goal, they must adhere to the use of these technologies, also applying active methodologies, as resources allied to learning. I think this is a way to achieve student learning. (Participant 13)

According to Bates (2017), in the digital age there are much more interesting ways to teach, which will result in better learning along the course or program, such as classes that involve students, causing them to actively participate.

Finally, we questioned about the main difficulties encountered by teachers in their daily lives regarding the use of active methodologies, and obtained the following answer:

> Lack of interest and prejudice towards the methodology; 2) lack of mastery of the methodology; 3) lack of creativity and willingness to change their practices; 4) lack of time, as working with active methodologies requires a much longer time of planning and execution… The convenience

> many teachers find in passively transferring knowledge is still the biggest challenge of today's
> education. (Teacher 1)

A more centralizing teacher with a more traditional take on teaching embodies the above obstacles, but, faced with training that contemplates student needs, and champions various teaching perspectives centered around social objectives, this same teacher can arouse the desire to learn in students, but through the knowledge of students' lives (BATES, 2017).

Other points presented by the participants concern limiting beliefs, tradition-centered pedagogy, infrastructure and teacher training:

> First of all, there are limiting beliefs that active methodologies are for lazy teachers who do little
> "role plays" to deceive students; there is also a great challenge in fostering a culture of innovation
> among teachers, because it is not an easy task to get them out of their comfort zones; I use free
> apps in graduate courses, as universities do not purchase them, because they see them as a cost,
> not as an investment. Tradition-centered school management wants to provide quality education,
> but there are still many infrastructure and financial difficulties, while undergraduate faculty
> members often lack teacher training, and act empirically. In short, teachers and teaching
> institutions, from basic education to graduate programs, should invest on a new culture of digital
> literacy, because there is no turning back, taking advantage of what is good, in each of the
> pedagogical trends. (Teacher 8)

According to the above, maximum action-reflection and action must be present in teaching and learning; we therefore agree with Bates: "teachers who not only know a wide variety of teaching methods, but also theories of learning and their epistemological foundations are in a much better position to make right decisions about how to teach in a particular context" (BATES, 2017, p. 149).

> I believe that there is lack of training fit to teachers' realities. For example, hybrid teaching only
> works if digital technologies such as the Internet are available for the student both in the
> classroom and at home. If my student does not have Internet at home, it becomes pointless to talk
> about hybrid teaching, and so on. We need to talk about training that indeed meets the reality of
> teachers who work in basic education, especially in public schools, which, as we know, do not
> meet students' basic needs. (Teacher 10)
>
> Given this, I can say that the greatest difficulties may be beyond teacher training, both in terms
> of use of technologies and knowledge and appropriation of methodologies, and in terms of access
> of basic education students to technological resources. (Participant 13)

The answers obtained in the workshop lead to the consideration that there is a long way to go before classrooms become more active learning environments, however, some skills need to be part of the training and daily teaching practices: "conceptual skills, such as knowledge management, critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, problem solving, creativity and innovation" (BATES, 2017, p.151).

Several strongpoints and learning challenges based on active methodologies were observed in this workshop using the World Café Method. It was noticed that the difficulties with face-to-face or remote teaching bring in themselves the same challenging situations, however:

> By mastering and providing the new means, teachers reinvent their practice day after day, and
> assume a new attitude towards knowledge and learning; they cease to be knowledge safekeepers

to become facilitators and mediators of the teaching and learning process. In this change, care is needed, because technological evolution requires more creativity, and focuses mediation on the teacher, who has the possibility to develop students' critical thinking, helping them to select information, building new knowledge in a significant way. (FRANCO, 2016, p.14)

It may be said that, whether face-to-face or remote, the big difference lies in how the learning process is conducted, demanding intentionality and a good grasp of the method and medium used for pedagogical purposes, that is, in both contexts, active learning happens if well conducted. There must be investment in teacher training, so they may work with these tools and use various resources, thus expanding their repertoire of work materials, and understanding that these more flexible models are the ones that can be used in this moment of social distancing, meeting the needs of their students, who are active in this digital age.

5. Final Remarks

The use of active teaching methodologies provides an opportunity for dynamic and interactive action, which develops autonomy in the subject in a critical and reflexive way, with the teacher as a mediating agent of this process. In this perspective, the active teaching methodology World Café was the object of study of this investigation. Its use gave the teacher a more dynamic, welcoming and reflective look at teaching and learning, especially when used in a virtual environment, that is, during remote teaching, in which this pedagogical strategy has become a challenging and productive action.

The use of the World Café Method was found to provide participants and mediators with theoretical and practical contributions in teaching and learning, triggering reflections on the collaborative construction and structuring of knowledge, awareness, motivation, and responsibility, creating the conditions for a more active participation of the subjects involved in this proposal.

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