

The mouse gave life to the mountain: Gramsci and health promotion

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SUMMARY

Health promotion and salutogenesis are embodied in people's everyday lives and in their stories. The assumptions of these scientific theories are similar to Gramsci's theory for better wellbeing in a community, where praxis and capacity building for reflective practice is the way forward for an equal global change. By explaining the road for transformation through narratives, particularly fables, Gramsci manages to reach people from all walks of life, from academics to children. One of these fables, the mouse and the mountain, is here presented as a trigger to health promotion action and as a metaphor for salutogenic thinking. The narrative paradigm for health promotion is the context within which the analogies among 'the mouse's plan', health promotion theory, the salutogenic model, empowerment as well

as the practitioners' opinions and experience are discussed and presented. In so doing, a 'storytelling bridge' is created between academics, practitioners and other stakeholders from the health, social and pedagogical arenas in knowledge construction environments. Hence, the article confers the possible contribution of Gramsci's educational perspective within health promotion by presenting a practical example of the use of narratives for capacity building. This is described through the interpretation of the same story in a hypothetical speech told by different storytellers, communicating their personal vision of the mouse's plan and so create a narrative-centered health promotion communication for meaning-making and for embracing theories among scholars and practitioners.

Key words: capacity building; narrative; competencies; salutogenesis

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we explore the possible contribution of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian author and political theorist, whose work has been used within the nursing dimension of a clinical institutional setting in a critical pedagogy framework (Holmes, 2002), but has been less developed in the field of health promotion. Nevertheless, Gramsci's vision about knowledge construction and social action could be a challenging discussion among health practitioners and researchers, as suggested by Holmes, who highlights the potentials of Gramsci's ideas for reflective practice connected with Freire's idea of transformative practice.

Capacity building for a reflective and transformative practice in health promotion needs to bridge the gap between the discourses of the scientific community and the realities the community of practitioners face. Not only theoretical sciences, but also health promotion and salutogenesis are embodied in people's everyday lives and in their stories. The narrative paradigm is a way to surpass this gap and bring health promotion and salutogenic research closer to practice, building storytelling bridges among the scholar community, stakeholders, health and social practitioners (Freire, 1976; Labonte *et al.*, 1999).

Narratives can serve as a method of knowledge construction and capacity building in health

promotion. Inspired by Labonte's (Labonte *et al.*, 1999) research work about storytelling and the story/dialogue method, we present the possible contribution of Gramsci's thought by narrating and commenting one of his fables. 'The mouse and the mountain', which is considered an ecological fable (Ekers *et al.*, 2013), is here narrated and then commented first as a metaphor of health promotion and salutogenic theory and, secondly as a basis to discuss Freire's ethic in the use of narratives as a way of knowledge construction and capacity building in health promotion. The article will discuss the use of fables in capacity building in health promotion and the possible contribution of Gramsci's thought to the development of health promotion competencies among practitioners who work for community action. Influenced by narrative thought (Bruner, 1990), we believe we could present this second point in the form of hypothetical speeches activated by different storytellers who talk about a peculiar mouse's plan to promote community action for global change.

GRAMSCI, FABLES AND THE NARRATIVE APPROACH IN HEALTH PROMOTION

Antonio Gramsci has become, over the years, a renowned philosopher, writer and political theorist. Gramsci was one of the most important Marxist thinkers in the 20th century. He was a founding member and onetime a leader of Italian Communist Party. He was imprisoned by Mussolini's Fascist regime. He was a writer, politician, political theorist, philosopher and sociologist (Rosengarten, 2013). During his imprisonment, he wrote regularly. His writings are heavily concerned with the analysis of culture and political leadership (Vacca, 2012). However, among Gramsci's texts, there is also a collection of stories. In prison, he often wrote to his family, translating Grimm's fairy tales, and often reported and commented traditional tales both from Sardinia, the region in which he was born and which influenced his cultural learning environment, as well as from other regions in Italy and foreign countries. Gramsci considered stories as the ideal medium for implicit moral reflection among the lay public. Recent literature is exploring Gramsci's literary production to better understand his philosophy especially from a pedagogical perspective: 'his writing is very

visual, with the story quickly evolving in a number of short scenes. [...] Gramsci believes that the task of turning ideas into action would need a significant educational input, a new holistic approach to the educational development of the individual and society' (Nicholson, 2010). What we intend to concentrate on in this article is the latter educational purpose of Gramsci's writings (Nicholson, 2010) on community change and collective will within a health promoting model.

Storytelling and writing in general could be considered as coping strategies to surpass one's own critical condition and to empower oneself. Salutogenesis and resilience are two constructs which describe the process of creating health, wellbeing and quality of life starting from normal conditions for human development or by considering how to overcome trauma and adversities in the life course. It is not a coincidence that theories and studies regarding salutogenesis and resilience are phenomenologically grounded on data such as success stories evolving in a positive direction in spite of poor resources or traumatic events (Eriksson, 2007; Milstein and Henry, 2008). In fact, as Bruner stated, the human mind is structured in such a way that it uses either a logical thought or a narrative thought. The logical thought is employed when dealing with abstract concepts and formal procedures, while the narrative thought is used to understand social events and to interact with others by using our natural ability to create stories. This ability to create stories makes it easier to understand the world and reality, or to interpret other forms of communication (Bruner, 1990). Gramsci understands the importance of communication, especially in narrative form, for the creation of a new society. According to Nicholson, he developed 'a philological research method of the texts with the purpose of creating a "budgering texts" process' (Nicholson, 2010). Research is a textual practice, a process expressed in language that includes all the acts of reading, noting, summarizing, rereading and so on. In some way, we can say that Gramsci understands and develops the potential of narratives for individual and social action in the Italian context in which he lived. Within a different setting and period, another author understood and constructed a narrative theory for empowerment and for a new society, underlining the role of education in this process: Paulo Freire. His theory has been widely discussed in health promotion (Wallerstein and

Bernstein, 1988) and contributes to nurture a narrative approach in health promotion and education (Labonte *et al.*, 1999). Even in the rapidly growing field of health communication, narrative approaches are emerging as a promising set of tools for motivating and supporting health-behavior change (Hinyard and Kreuter, 2007).

In reviewing the uses and function of stories in health promotion, two elements highlight their value and potential for capacity building. Firstly, stories have the potential to elucidate the subjective level of the relationship between individual action and the wider social and cultural contexts. Secondly, they give people the chance to speak to the world naming their experience (McCormack and Milne, 2003), and in so doing, using stories as a means of meaning-making quality of life; as an act to empower people in managing their life (Labonte *et al.*, 1999). As argued by Labonte *et al.*, the element of meaning making, which according to Antonovsky is central in the salutogenic model (Eriksson, 2007), is absent from conventional research about health promotion. The challenge consists in using stories in health promotion in a more rigorous manner (Labonte *et al.*, 1999). The promise of listening actively to stories lies in exploring and showing a new frame and script of action capable of helping practitioners in giving meaning in health practices, and to build capacities grounded in health promotion principles.

Fables or fairy tales, in particular, offer a model for coping with basic relationships by giving a general meaning to reality which could be utilized to understand other situations. Stories are often used as a metaphor to describe a learning or organizational process (Westland, 2002), as icebreakers in a teaching session or as memory triggers for communication in complex themes (Short and Ketchen, 2005), and are narrated to introduce a concept in an easy and understandable way (Cameron, 2005). In the field of health education storytelling presents body parts and diseases as characters within the story. In accordance with the Health Belief Model, the stories are presented to promote the individual's sense of empowerment and control by intermittently incorporating empowering phrases and wise sayings throughout the stories (Ola and Magnus, 2003).

One of Gramsci's fables 'the mouse and the mountain' is here presented as a metaphor of health promotion and the salutogenic theory. In a nutshell, this story poses a problem (in this case, the lack and wrong use of resources) and

narrates the process that the mouse goes through to come up with a solution. One specific element of fable literature genre is that it has a structure similar to a project plan. The fable has a typical three-part structure: (i) an introduction, (ii) a conflict situation, divided into action and dialogue, and reaction and reply and (iii) a conclusion. In the story 'the mouse and the mountain', the introduction presents a starving child, the conflict situation consists in the fact that his milk is stolen by the mouse and neither the mother nor the goat is able to feed him. Action and dialogue are activated by a mouse who devises a plan aiming not only to meet the child's need, but also to develop a community action oriented to global change. Examples of reaction and reply are represented by scenes with other actors and the decision-making processes. The conclusion is represented by the final scene which also shows the efficacy of the mouse's plan.

FROM A STORY-CENTERED COMMUNICATION TO A NARRATIVE-CENTERED COMMUNICATION IN HEALTH PROMOTION

According to narrative theorists, the storyteller has a vision of some kind of community, even if it is only a community of two. By structuring our experience of events, the storyteller in fact constructs our memories of the story so that we can draw on these new skills to act in the future. In this sense, stories give us an opportunity to reconsider and reorder our approach to events; we can recollect them as actions taken and not taken, and act differently in the future (Batini, 2009).

We tell stories to create a community in which cooperation becomes possible. The idea is that narratives, and above all fables, could contribute to close the gap between theory and practice in a simple way without losing complex and contextual elements. As Arnett postulates, 'stories point and suggest, techniques tell and duplicate' (Arnett, 2002).

In any case, stories are not neutral. In knowledge-construction processes, they could also be used with moral aims, especially if they are used as triggers or icebreakers.

The mouse and the mountain is here presented following a process which starts from a story-centered communication (the fable as a trigger

to understand and practice complex theories) to a narrative-centered communicative approach (a contextualized reflection in which everybody could bring his participation and contribution) (Arnett, 2002). Moving beyond the moral use of the story, we discuss the fable in a hypothetical dialogue within a learning community. This is a deeper process of analysis which methodologically proceeds as a hermeneutic cycle by telling and interpreting a story by different storytellers (the health promoter, the salutogenic thinker, the practitioner and the artist) in order to extrapolate the fundamental competencies of the mouse in a final meta-narrative analysis. In this process, the structure and characters of the story remain the same but, the actions are interpreted starting from different perspectives open to multiple and possible action changes and proposals.

In a Freirean perspective, story-centered communication makes participation possible in institutional life (Arnett, 2002). The story is accepted in a community if it is more than a simple story told by a storyteller (Labonte *et al.*, 1999). The story should enhance participation, problem posing, critical thinking and interpretation.

'If a story-teller controls a story, people control (through participation and change) the story of a narrative. A story has main characters, a plot, and a storyteller. A narrative has all the ingredients of a story, agreed-on-participation, and openness to the needs of a given historical moment. In a narrative-centered communication we know the beginnings and address the needs of changing demands before us, but there is no ending, just guidance. When a story has community support, agreement and participation, it becomes a narrative. The meeting of a story, participation, the context, and the historical moment offers guidance to action. A narrative map offers guidance without dictating particular decisions' (Arnett, 2002).

Gramsci's fable has the potential to enhance these central elements in health promotion. The story could be the starting point of producing, communicating and enhancing many narratives in health promotion practice. Fables are characterized by the purpose of educating about a moral or a political thought. The process which leads from a story-centered communication to a narrative-centered communication could neutralize this critical point and ensure a non-hegemonic capacity-building process.

Here, we present how capacity-building communication sessions in health promotion learning

environments shift from a story-centered communicative approach (a story told in a class after a theoretical contribution) to a narrative-centered communicative approach (different interpretations of the story which have been built up in a participatory open dialogue by the teacher/tutors, practitioners, stakeholders and an artist) through different storytellers who talk about this out-of-the-ordinary mouse.

ONCE UPON A TIME: GRAMSCI AND THE FABLE OF THE MOUSE AND THE MOUNTAIN

The following is a faithful translation of the fable written by Gramsci in 1931 and then published in different editions of his Letters from Prison and in other texts about his thought. The style of writing is different from the fables we are used to reading today. Gramsci's fables were written using the present simple form, with short sentences and the use of vocabulary was limited as his writings were specifically targeted for the lay public of the time.

A child is asleep with a glass of milk beside his bed on the floor.

A mouse drinks the milk, the child wakes up and finding the glass empty cries. His mother cries too.

So, the mouse goes to the goat to ask for some milk.

The goat has no milk, he needs grass.

The mouse goes to the field, and the field has no grass because it is too parched.

The mouse goes to the well and the well has no water because it needs repairing.

So the mouse goes to the mason who hasn't exactly the right stones.

Then the mouse goes to the mountain, and the mountain wants to hear nothing and looks like a skeleton because it has lost its trees, but a sublime dialogue between the mouse and the mountain takes place.

The mouse explains the whole story to the mountain. In exchange for your stones, the mouse says to the mountain, the child, when he grows up, will plant chestnut, oaks and pines on your slopes. Whereupon the mountain agrees to give the stones. Later the child has so much milk, he washes in it!

Later still, when the child becomes a man, he plants the trees, and everything is reborn. The erosion stops, the rain becomes regular because the trees retain the water and prevent the streams from destroying the fields.

So the mouse conceives a complete piatiletka (five-year plan in the Soviet Union).

(Gramsci, 1947, 2007; Ekers *et al.*, 2013)

TWICE UPON A TIME: A HEALTH PROMOTER'S PERCEPTION OF THE MOUSE PLAN

According to the Ottawa Charter, the mouse's strategy generates a process, which enables the individuals and the community to increase control over the determinants of health thereby improving health to live an active and productive life (WHO, 1986).

The mouse understands that the link between people and their environment constitutes the basis for a socio-ecological approach, through the creation of a supportive environment, to face the global challenge. The mouse is sorry and wants to make up for the suffering of the child. He is aware about the fact that the milk (resources for health) is not enough for all who need feeding and he decides to reverse this situation of poor resources. According to Rissel's review on empowerment (Rissel, 1994), the empowerment process is very complex. It should start from the bottom, and is to involve both the individuals and the community. The characters in the fable are at different stages of a complex and long empowerment process. Yet, as Rissel (Rissel, 1994) explains through the different models of empowerment development, each of them contributes to the development of community empowerment. In this fable, the mouse is the principal actor, the leader of a bottom-up empowerment process. Reading the fable through Kieffer's model (Rissel, 1994), the other characters are actively involved in the process of change and place themselves mainly in the second and third stages of the empowerment process whereas the final stage is represented with the boy's action of planting trees over the passing of years:

'The first [stage] covers the initial tentative exploration of authority and power. The second stage is characterized by a mentoring relationship and supportive peer relationship, where dialogue and mutual problem solving contribute to an increase in critical understanding. The third stage covers the development of organizational and political skills and confronting activity. The fourth stage is a time of integration of these social actions into the reality and structure of everyday life' (Rissel, 1994).

More specifically, the mouse reorients the action beyond the primary need (milk), and embraces an expanded mandate which respects and supports the needs and assets of each stakeholder (goat, field, well, mason, mountain, child), and opens channels among broader environmental

components. Through his leadership, all stakeholders become aware of the consequences of their decisions (as in the dialogue with the mountain), and are encouraged to accept their responsibilities (to provide milk, grass, water, work, stones), building a healthy public policy. Even if they need to increase their direct involvement in social interaction and in action for political change, the empowerment process has been activated and is geared toward political change. This policy articulates what is required in the way of systems, infrastructure (water canalization), resources (stones) and skills (mason, goat) for effective action to deliver healthy public policy (IUHPE and CCHPR, 2007).

In so doing, through this strategy, personal and social skills are developed and the options available to people to exercise more control over their own health and over their social and natural environment is increased.

The mouse's strategy works through concrete and effective community action in setting priorities, making decisions, planning strategies and implementing them to achieve better health. The mouse collects ideas from and presents his strategy to the stakeholders. The mountain is asked to be involved in the plan, and its decision is crucial. However, the plan requires the approval and the full involvement of all those involved.

The mouse, starting from a specific primary demand, promotes a process of community empowerment enabling community stakeholders (child, goat, field, well, mason, mountain) to increase control over their lives.

At the beginning, the local community is connected only spatially, with each stakeholder focused on his/her own problem without looking at the context of the global challenge. The mouse develops a process of assessment and advocacy that enables the stakeholders to widen their vision and understand that they share common interests, concerns and identities. The mouse, meeting the stakeholders and talking with them, makes an assessment not only about the individual problems (I do not have grass, water, stones ...) but also about the individual assets (the goat is able to produce milk, the field to produce grass, the well to provide water, the mason to repair the well).

The strong attention to research is crucial: the mouse looks for the roots of the problem until he gets to their core, and this enables him to suggest an action (Rodríguez Prieto and Seco Martínez, 2007).

Communication plays a vital role in this strategy. The mouse goes from the house, where he had stolen the milk, to the goat, the field, the well, the mason, the mountain. His participatory approach encourages discussion and results in an increased knowledge and awareness, and in a higher level of critical thinking.

Critical thinking enables the stakeholders to understand the interplay of forces operating on their lives, and helps them to take their own decisions. Each stakeholder understands they are a link of a chain including problems and assets. Each asset is able to solve the problem of the next partner activating his/her asset that in turn will solve a new problem and activate a new asset. The mountain will give the stones to repair the well, who will give water to the field, who will produce grass for the goat, who will give milk to the child, who will plant trees for the mountain.

In each phase, the mouse presents the problem as part of a story and is skilled to understand the needs of others just because he puts their problems in a story capable of meaning-making for each other.

‘Through narrative thinking people are able to make sense of what they have done, to imagine the future, and to provide structure to their present life. Through storytelling and active listening it is possible to improve both one’s own ability to organize thought and action as well as meaning-making’ (Batini, 2009).

It is a process of empowerment through which the stakeholders increase their assets and build capacities to gain access, partners, networks and/or a voice, in order to gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives. The overall guiding principle is the need to encourage reciprocal support. Each stakeholder has the potential ability to activate the capacity of a second one, with a cascade process fostering the community and the natural environment. The conservation and restoration of natural resources is emphasized as a global responsibility. The mouse’s action generates living and working conditions that are safe, stimulating, satisfying and enjoyable. The stakeholders are not only provided with what they need, but regain their social role, able to lead an individually, socially and economically productive life. The fountain is not more a ruin, but the source of water for the community, the goat is not begging for grass any longer, but is a source of milk.

In the mouse’s approach, people are not empowered by others. They can only empower themselves by acquiring more different forms of power

(Labonte and Laverack, 2008). He assumes that people have their own assets, and his role is to catalyze, facilitate or accompany the community in acquiring power.

The mouse’s approach is more than the involvement or engagement of the community stakeholders. It implies community ownership and action that explicitly aims at global change and addresses the social, cultural, political and economic determinants that underpin health.

Community empowerment is often a process of re-negotiating power in order to gain more control and health promotion operates within the arena of a power struggle, recognizing that if some people are going to be empowered, then others will be sharing their existing power and giving some of it up (Baum, 2008).

In this tale, all the stakeholders involved in the process gain control and power in a win–win situation. The actions described in the fable/metaphor show why health promotion and salutogenesis are not theoretical sciences. Therefore, it is important, in a capacity building session, to discuss the personal and professional skills of the mouse, the main health promotion agent in the tale. Three areas of skills appear crucial for his success: salutogenic attitude, involvement in the community, specific health promotion competencies.

A SALUTOGENIC STORYTELLER’S PERSPECTIVE OF THE MOUSE’S STRATEGY

According to the salutogenic view, the mouse’s strategy implies strengthening people’s health potential making good health a tool for a productive and enjoyable life. The need of each stakeholder is not an isolated objective, but becomes an asset, emphasizing social and personal resources. The mouse’s strategy creates an empowering environment where people see themselves as active participating subjects who are able to identify their resources and use them to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, to perceive meaningfulness and to change the environment in a health-promoting manner (Eriksson, 2007, pp. 20–21, 87–88; Eriksson and Lindström, 2008). When the child remains without milk the mouse does not cry, like the mother, but the tension challenges him to reflect, to assess the situation he is in and later to understand it. Although he finds himself in an unfamiliar situation, he appears to know what to do (comprehensibility).

The mouse goes from the house, where he had stolen the milk, to the goat, the field, the well, the mason, the mountain. He does not perceive a negative answer as a closure, but as a new challenge that identifies a new resource to mobilize: if the goat cannot provide milk because he needs grass, then the mouse will move to look for grass. This attitude differentiates him from the other stakeholders who lie static, looking at their everyday life as a source of pain and boredom, complaining about their need and so forgetting their assets. The mouse cares about what goes on around him looking at challenges as opportunities of deep pleasure and satisfaction (meaningfulness).

Meanwhile the other stakeholders feel like losers, the mouse appears confident that he can keep the situation under control, particularly because he is not afraid of being treated unfairly or disappointed by partners. This feeling supports him in promoting effective coping by finding solutions and resolving tension in a health-promoting manner (manageability).

Gramsci describes this attitude in other words:

‘Man can affect his own development and that of his surroundings only so far as he has a clear view of what the possibilities of action open to him are. To do this he has to understand the historical situation in which he finds himself: and once he does this, then he can play an active part in modifying that situation. The man of action is the true philosopher: and the philosopher must necessarily be a man of action’. (Gramsci, 1947)

THE PRACTITIONER AS AN ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL: THE STORY OF A MOUSE FULLY INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY

The mouse/health promotion agent is not the traditional expert but Gramsci’s intellectual, organic to the community and entrusted with the responsibility to foster the involvement of the citizens enabling them to act as agents of change (Urbinati, 1998, pp. 145–146).

The mouse is grounded in the community’s everyday life. According to Gramsci his ‘mode of being does not longer consist in eloquence ... but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, ‘permanent persuader’ and not just a simple orator...’ (Gramsci, 1971; Burke, 1999).

The mouse has a commitment to his community (Fischman and McLaren, 2005). He is not

here today and gone tomorrow. He has always lived in the area and has developed relationships with the people he works with which ensures that wherever he goes, he is regarded as part of the community (one of us). Organic intellectuals ‘can strive to sustain people’s critical commitment to the social groups with whom they share fundamental interests. Their purpose is not necessarily individual advancement, but human well-being as a whole’ (Smith, 1994, p. 127).

In our experience, health promotion practitioners recognize themselves in the mouse mainly for its ability to mobilize an important action with the limited resources available. His success inspired and encouraged students and young professionals worried about their lack of experience.

A concrete example about health promotion practitioners’ actions was given by the community of Ulassai, a Sardinian village that, although not explicitly, has made its own the tale written by Gramsci, through a salutogenic pathway including several community-owned actions. Indeed, the events that occurred in Ulassai over the period of 30 years can be considered as an example of community empowerment development (Sardu *et al.*, 2012). The artist Maria Lai, who played a crucial role in this pathway, interprets the tale through artistic expression that saw the involvement of the whole community. She identifies herself in the mouse, and she states that the mountain is Ulassai (La Nuova Sardegna, 2007). According to the operational domain proposed by Laverack (Laverack and Wallerstein, 2001), she was the outside agent who, as the mouse, enabled the community to gain control over the events that shape its life. The whole development of the empowerment process, described in a separate publication (Sardu *et al.*, 2012), will not be presented here since our interest is in the results and changes this process brought about. Examples extrapolated from the evaluation process could help the reader in understanding how the sensation of being part of a story aimed at producing change could enhance the sense of control and power over economy, politics, culture and quality of life of one’s own community. The events that have occurred in Ulassai since Lai’s intervention aimed at creating a sense of community through a live sculpture involving the whole village community are: a collaboration with the artist to increase creativity in local products in order to tackle the economic crisis of local textile

cooperatives; meetings in the streets among women to share opinions about the use of municipal money and to redirect its use; the establishment of a natural park (and the consequent economically linked activities) which incorporates Ulassai and other municipalities; the establishment of a wind farm whose profits are currently directed toward social and cultural services (Sardu *et al.*, 2012). Afterward, the community recognized itself in Gramsci's fable and since 2007 Lai's sculpture representing the Gramsci's tale is exhibited in the museum of Ulassai (Lai, 2007).

THE MOUSE'S COMPETENCIES ARE HEALTH PROMOTION COMPETENCIES: A META-NARRATIVE OF THE STORYTELLERS

In the last part of this paper, we present a meta-narrative of the mouse and the mountain. We suggest the story as a tool for capacity building in health promotion action and we show how if we activate a hermeneutic cycle within a fable (the interpretation from a health promotion perspective, the salutogenic perspective and the possible use to explain health promotion interventions), we are able to construct a *narrative communication* in health promotion research and practice community. Here, we use these narratives to support a critical reasoning about the possible use of it to enhance strategic competencies in health promotion to develop in a lifelong perspective (The Galway Consensus Conference, 2008).

Practically, the mouse/health promotion agent masters the main health promotion competencies.

The mouse is able to:

- (i) *Reawaken and combine synergically the community assets* and so to catalyze change, enabling all stakeholders, from the mountain to the child, to improve dramatically their physical and social health.
- (ii) *Provide leadership* a strategic direction orienting the community towards a common goal of healthy environment. He proposes a stepwise process, able to mobilize and organize dormant resources (stones, mason skills, water system, ability to produce milk and grass) and to build capacity.
- (iii) *Carry out an assessment of needs and assets* (from milk to stones) that leads to the identification and analysis of the

determinants that promote (water, trees) or compromise (war, deforestation) health. He combines observation and interviews and is able to organize the information in a global model that identifies the lack of water as core challenge.

- (iv) *Design a plan* defining measurable goals (to feed the child, to restore the environment) and objectives (to repair the well, to plant the trees) in response to the assessment of needs and assets, and to identify strategies that are based on evidence and practice. Gramsci attributes to the mouse the ability to conceive a complete *piatiletka*.
- (v) *Implement* strategies that are effective, efficient (he makes the most from all available resources), culturally sensitive (all stakeholders are involved according to their traditional role) and ethical (all stakeholders make benefit from the program) to ensure the greatest possible improvements in health, including management of human and material resources.
- (vi) *Define appropriate evaluation methods* that measure the effectiveness of programs and policies. He presents goals and objectives (healthy environment) that are specific (the child has milk), measurable (water, grass, milk are concrete), accepted by all stakeholders, realistic (the mason declare that, as long as provided with stones, he is able to repair the well; the goat declared to be able to produce milk, if provided with grass), defined in time (when the child grows up).
- (vii) *Advocate* with individuals and communities to improve their capacity for undertaking actions that can both improve health and strengthen community assets. The dialogue with the mountain is one of the best example of advocacy, but a similar approach is used with all stakeholders.
- (viii) *Work in partnership with all stakeholders* enhancing the impact and the long-term sustainability, that is the trademark of the mouse's strategy, based on the synergic action of all partners.

CONCLUSIONS

A story comprises a plot, main characters and a storyteller. Gramsci wrote a fable with characters

and a plot to communicate his political thought and his theory for better wellbeing in a community, anticipating the fundamental principles which underpin health promotion and salutogenic theory. In his story, preceding the Ottawa Charter by decades, Gramsci proposes an approach where 'health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play and love. Health is created by caring for oneself and others, by being able to take decisions and have control over one's life circumstances, and by ensuring that the society one lives in creates conditions that allow the attainment of health by all its members' (WHO, 1986). Following these assumptions, we have presented this story for teaching/learning sessions on capacity building in health promotion action: the mouse and the mountain. Academics, professionals and communities alike are encouraged to show their different points of view which are influenced by their cultural and professional background but, in learning environments, everyone's opinion is plausible and may provide new insights.

A narrative has all the ingredients of a story but, in Freire's perspective, it is agreed-on participation, and openness to the needs of a given historical moment. A narrative adds participation and corporate agreement in knowledge. As outlined earlier, 'when a story has community support, agreement and participation it becomes a narrative' (Arnett, 2002). Gramsci's fable may not only become a strategic tool to explain health promotion theory, but may also be the process through which health promotion theory shifts into practice, looking for agreement and participation among the health promotion community by creating other success stories of best practice.

In the narrative framework, stories are accepted by people if the story is not merely a simple fable told by a storyteller; it should become a sort of a participative narrative (researchers' point of view, practitioners' interpretation and so on). This framework is represented in the story–dialogue method and generally in the methodological proposal about the use of narratives of Paulo Freire (Labonte et al., 1999). Gramsci's example presents analogies and differences with this use of narratives. The difference consists in the origin of the story. The fable is written by a narrator, it is fictitious, culturally determined and leads to a moral of the story. The stories of Freire and Labonte come from reality. Their origins are personal and

professional experiences and talk about real events and characters. We can affirm that, in knowledge construction environments, Gramsci's fable is an external stimulus for reflection and critical thinking. Even Freire's and Labonte's stories demand the creation of a story based on personal experience as an internal stimulus for reflection. The analogy we note is that even if Gramsci's fable is a fictitious story, based on his political thought, an external stimulus to reflect on, it could become a participative process in knowledge construction through the educational model, the communicative style and participatory learning methods acted by facilitators oriented towards a critical pedagogy. In this way, a fable could be transformed in a narrative of health promotion actions.

We concentrated our attention on the specific story of the mouse but surely Gramsci's thoughts could activate other questions for research in health promotion about roles of practitioners as intellectuals or his idea of practice compared with that of Freire. In conclusion, Gramsci had anticipated many years earlier what health promotion now proposes. He urged professionals to develop a strong relationship based on communication with citizens to support them in becoming self-reflective and be empowered. His unsurpassed understanding of the relationship between theory and practice stimulates an active participation in the social daily struggles and an investment in the future well-being (Fischman and McLaren, 2005).

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