# PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE IN MID-LEVEL PROFESSIONAL NURSING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this study was to identify the pedagogical practices developed by professors of mid-level professional education in nursing. A qualitative descriptive study was conducted, with data collection through semi-structured questionnaires, between October and November 2013, in two schools, with the participation of 15 professors/nurses. The frequencies of the responses and content were analyzed in the light of didactic and pedagogical aspects of the literature. Of the respondents, 66.6% were women, with over three years of pedagogical education and healthcare experience. The pedagogical course project was unknown by 46.6%; 53% claimed to elaborate lesson plans; 86.6% reported performing formative assessment; written tests, though, were only applied by 73.3%. With the completion of the study, it was observed that professors generally develop an educational practice devoid of reflection and meaning when they do not participate in the course syllabus. The majority, however, plans the discipline, albeit using misconception on the evaluation of the training.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Nursing education; Professional education; Education; Faculty.

# PRÁTICA PEDAGÓGICA NA EDUCAÇÃO PROFISSIONAL DE NÍVEL MÉDIO EM ENFERMAGEM

RESUMO: O presente estudo objetivou identificar as práticas pedagógicas desenvolvidas por professores da educação profissional de nível médio em enfermagem. Estudo descritivo qualitativo, cujo dados foram coletados por questionário semi-estruturados, entre outubro e novembro de 2013 em duas escolas profissionalizantes, com participação de 15 professores/enfermeiros. As frequências das respostas e conteúdo foram analisados à luz dos aspectos didático-pedagógicos da literatura. Dos entrevistados, 66,6% são mulheres, com formação pedagógica e experiência assistencial superior a 3 anos. O Projeto Pedagógico do Curso é desconhecido por 46,6%; 53% elaboram planos de aula; 86,6% afirmam realizar avaliação formativa, em contrapartida, a prova escrita é utilizada por 73,3%. Com a conclusão do estudo, percebeu-se que em linhas gerais os professores desenvolvem uma prática educativa desprovida de reflexão e sentido ao não participar do planejamento do curso. Entretanto, a maioria faz planejamento da disciplina e da aula, ainda que utilize conceito equivocado sobre a avaliação da formação.

**DESCRITORES:** Educação em enfermagem; Educação profissionalizante; Ensino; Docentes.

### PRÁCTICA PEDAGÓGICA EN LA EDUCACIÓN PROFESIONAL DE NIVEL MEDIO EN ENFERMERÍA

RESUMEN: El estudio objetivó identificar las prácticas pedagógicas desarrolladas por profesores de educación profesional de nivel medio en enfermería. Estudio descriptivo, cualitativo; datos recolectados mediante cuestionario semiestructurado, entre octubre y noviembre de 2013 en dos escuelas profesionalizantes, participando 15 profesores/enfermeros. Las frecuencias de respuestas y contenido fueron analizadas de según los aspectos didáctico-pedagógicos de la literatura. De los entrevistados, 66,6% fueron mujeres con formación pedagógica y experiencia de atención superior a tres años. El Proyecto Pedagógico del Curso era desconocido por el 46,6%; el 53,3% elabora planes de clases; el 86,6% refieren aplicar evaluación formativa. Como contrapartida, el 73,3% aplica pruebas escritas. La conclusión del estudio percibe, en líneas generales, que los profesores desarrollan una práctica educativa desprovista de reflexión y sentido, al no participar de la planificación del curso. No obstante, la mayoría aplica planificación de materias y clases, aunque utilizando conceptualización equivocada sobre la evaluación de la formación.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Educación en Enfermería; Educación Profesional; Enseñanza; Docentes.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The pedagogical practice is a process that is intrinsically linked to the articulation of the theory and practice of teaching, built and rebuilt day-to-day through careful analytical exercise to interpret it critically. It involves multiple dimensions: professors' education, students' profile, the teaching methodology, objectives and learning content, teaching strategies, educational assessment and the relationship between teacher and student. It is understood to be determined by cyclical and structural aspects of society, essential to the consciousness about education, school and professors' action<sup>(1-4)</sup>.

As a social practice, it is guided by goals, objectives and knowledge. In this sense, professors may develop a practice that is transformative, meaningful and relevant to the students' social context, or adopt a mechanical practice, whose main purpose is to pass on content and perform merely repetitive activities<sup>(4-5)</sup>.

From this perspective, teaching practice in mid-level professional nursing education, responsible for training nursing technicians, undergoes significant changes, objectified in the National Curricular Guidelines (NCGs). This document contains principles of teaching practices that guide the act of educating, namely: higher thinking skills, intellectual autonomy, critical thinking, own initiative and the ability to view and solve everyday problems<sup>(6)</sup>.

Attuned to these principles, the active learning method, critical and reflective, became part of the ideology of the Brazilian educational legislation and teacher training, which, in its various spaces, has been slowly trying to adopt this standard. Thus, these changes in nursing education can be highlighted as an intent to overcome the traditional model, in which the technical procedures were privileged, and meet the new training proposal, with the emancipation of the student from the teaching process, being able to meet the demands of the healthcare scenario<sup>(7-10)</sup>.

Added to this context is the technological revolution and the reorganization process of work in healthcare with the advent of the National Health System, which require a complete overhaul of the philosophical and political principles of the curricula of mid-level technical professional education<sup>(11)</sup>.

Based on this scenario and with these assumptions, how do technical teachers/nurses conceive their practice from the changes that have taken place in education? The aim of this study was to identify the pedagogical practices developed by teachers of mid-level professional nursing education.

### METHOD

This is a descriptive study with a qualitative approach, in which resources of descriptive statistics and the interpretation of reports and attribution of meaning to the findings were used. It is the last part of a larger study entitled "A educação profissional técnica de nível médio em enfermagem na cidade de Ribeirão Preto (SP): desafios e perspectivas", whose aim was to analyze the education of assistants and nursing technicians, school infrastructure and educational practices.

The project is in accordance with Resolution 466/2012<sup>(12)</sup> and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing at the University of São Paulo (EERP/USP), protocol no. 1473/2011, CAAE: 01433012.8.0000.5393. The anonymity of the professors was guaranteed by an alpha-numeric system encoding (T1, T2, T3...).

The research scenario was a municipality in the state of São Paulo, with a population of over 600,000 people, reference in healthcare. At the time of the study, the city had a total of four mid-level courses in nursing schools (three private and one public). All of which were eligible for the study and were consulted on whether to allow the participation of their professors; two responded to the request and agreed to participate, both private, which have the largest number of students enrolled in technical training courses in nursing, 550 students; and two did not participate because they did not return to the contacts made by phone or by email.

Considering the research proposal in portraying the pedagogical practices developed by professors

in the classroom, the inclusion criteria of the participants were being a professor, with a degree in nursing, having been linked to the educational institution for at least one month and working in professional disciplines. Those who have sporadic or occasional activities or who act exclusively as teaching supervisors in internships were excluded from the study. The total staff of both schools, including professors and internship supervisors, is made up of 35 people. Of these, 21 met the inclusion criteria described above; 15 professors agreed to participate. Six professors were away or on vacation. Data collection was carried out between October and November of 2013.

The semi-structured interview was divided into two parts and consisted of 28 questions. In the first part, sociodemographic aspects were explored, with 11 questions; the second part involved aspects concerning the pedagogical practices (knowledge about the pedagogical course project, lesson plan, teaching method, selection of content, teaching strategies and teaching resources, research sources for class preparation, use of instructional materials and evaluation of learning), with 18 questions in which respondents could justify their choices and feel free to talk about the subject. The analysis of the responses consisted of three phases: in the pre-analysis, data were organized and classified; then, the material was explored and relevant data were structured, categorizing them and interpreting them in the light of the theoretical framework on the didactic elements(3)constitutive of the pedagogical practices, called: "The absence of meaning and method in the act of planning" and "The gaps of didactic-pedagogical knowledge". Quantitative data were treated with calculation of frequencies.

### RESULTS

From the total of 15 participants, 10 (66.6%) were female, six (40%) were between 30 to 39 years of age, 8 (53.3%) had a degree or specialization in teacher training, 5 (33.3%) attended a master course, 6 (39.9%) had less than two years of healthcare experience; and 5 (33.3%) had over 10 years.

About the pedagogical practices, 53.3% claimed to elaborate lesson plans, 13.3% assumed no to, and 33.3% said they sometimes do. Regarding the discipline program, 53.3% carried out the planning, 20% did not, and 26.6%, partially. As a research source for the planning of courses and classes, 53.3% use internet websites, and 46.6% use books and apostilles, concomitantly or not. Of all participants, 40% of the studied professors knew the pedagogical course project in full, 46.7% did not, and 13.3%, in part.

Table 1 summarizes the data on didactic-pedagogical options most cited by the studied professors.

### The absence of meaning and method in the act of planning

This category identified in the reports of the respondents a pedagogical practice individualized and disconnected from the pedagogical course project (PCP) of the school, or an accession process, absent of meaning.

One of the professors interviewed, who partially knows the PCP, explains it:

When I entered the school, everything was very fast. I know the [PCP] disciplines that I have to prepare and teach, that's it.(T12)

Another one, who does not know the PCP, justifies:

I've never seen the PCP due to the lack of time.(T9)

However, one of the respondents demonstrated real concern about learning and developing pedagogical practices aligned with the school's PCP, recognizing that it is far from the reality and lacks a dialogic space. This respondent held internship from the degree course in the school in which he now works as a professor and said:

I know the PCP because the coordination made it available when I was a student, not as a professor. Today we almost don't have access to it. Little is said and discussed about the pedagogical project, but I understand and have learned that everything must be based on it: student profile to be formed, objectives and curricular structure.(T4)

Table 1 - Didactic-pedagogical options for the study participants. Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo, Brazil, 2014

Variables	No. of citations	Frequency
Teaching method		
Expository	4	26.6
Active	3	20
Problem-solving	2	13.3
Did not answer	6	40
Selecting content		
From the PCP	3	20
From the course program	2	13.3
Apostille	4	26.6
According to the reality of the work	1	6.6
Did not answer	5	33.3
Performing the evaluation		
Formative assessment	13	86.6
Did not answer	2	13.3
Preferred evaluation tools		
Written test	11	73.3
Did not answer	4	26.7

About the course program, an individualized practice in which the PCP is disregarded by the participants was identified in the reports, as illustrated in the following passage:

I always plan the discipline because I like to be organized, and what we have in school needs to be updated. There are important issues that cannot be left behind. (T6)

There was also the concern of reproducing what has been instituted by the school, as exemplified below:

I follow the guidelines from the coordination, I try not to make anything up, otherwise it gets confusing. There's a lot of content.(T1)

Lack of time was the reason appointed unanimously by those respondents who do not conduct the lesson plan or carry it out sometimes. However, one of the participants highlighted its importance in daily life, as in the following passage:

The lesson plan is everything on a daily basis. Everything is disorganized, lost without it. The plan helps us and helps students not to get stressed. Students like organization, even those who seem not to care end up convinced.(T6)

## The gaps of didactic-pedagogical knowledge

This category has identified the gaps in the didactic-pedagogical knowledge of the professors, that is, a weak scientific foundation of educational activities for the training of nursing technicians.

It was noted in the reports that the contents are selected in a diversified, diffused and individualized manner, without considering the learning objectives:

[...] from what is requested in the course program. I also select the content that I consider important, even if it's not in the program. (T2)

[...]with technical course material from another school. (T4)

About the teaching method, respondents who chose the expository method justified their choice by the lack of resources or lack of time. The following excerpts illustrate this issue:

I tried to use other methods, but with the expository I have a better control of time and the program. The content is extensive and time is short.(T1)

[...] The socio-cultural reality of the student must be considered; I use the traditional and technicist practice[...].(77)

Those using participatory and problem-solvingmethods argue that:

I try to use the participatory methodology to build a significant learning [...] problem-solving.(T13)

Students should seek their knowledge and have autonomy, that's why I use the active method. It creates new possibilities for students and they go out of their cocoon. (T3)

Still in this regard, part of the respondents did not identify the method they use or characterized it as teaching strategies, as in the following example:

[...]conceptual, practical, simulation of situations and behavior and through examples.(T9)

Regarding the learning evaluation process, the option for the formative type was justified by one of the respondents by the need to evolve in attitudinal aspects of the students, as expressed in the following quote:

[...] formative evaluation values the attitudinal knowledge, which needs to be observed during the course and in conjunction with the cognitive evaluation [...]. (T8)

# DISCUSSION

The profile of the professors in this study is similar to that found in other studies, pointing to the presence of 42.8% (6 of 14) female professors and older than 30 years<sup>(13)</sup>, in the teaching practice of midlevel professional nursing education. The specialization in the teaching area, the presence of licensed nurses and the inclusion of masters in these spaces also drew attention.

The legal requirement for nurses' didactic-pedagogical training in order to work in the training of nursing aides and technicians was instituted in 1968 under opinion no. 837/68<sup>(14)</sup> in an attempt to prepare competent professionals with teaching experience since the beginning of their education. In 2001, the NCGs from undergraduate nursing courses<sup>(15)</sup> demarcated the challenge of strengthening the discussion about the pedagogical dimensions contemplated in the baccalaureate and the restructuring of the degree. However, the lack of undergraduate courses and the high demand for professors/ nurses led to an increase of lato sensu degrees, or specialization courses for professors' education<sup>(16)</sup>. Regarding the masters for professors' training, it has been discussed that graduate programs are often focused in the development of researchers<sup>(17)</sup>.

Despite all the efforts of the law for the formation of nursing teachers, it is known that the selection of professors for this level of education is often still done by the professional's eloquence and proven experience in the nursing field<sup>(16,18)</sup>. However, the pedagogical skills are required in the construction of teaching practice coherently coordinated with the PCP, in order to achieve the learning objectives<sup>(17)</sup>.

About the presence of professors with less than two years of professional experience, review studies identified that, when finishing graduation, many nurses become professors without specific and detailed knowledge about healthcare aspects, and educational and pedagogical practices<sup>(19)</sup>. Reflecting about their practices means reorganizing the thought from their experience, in a systematized analysis process that may avoid the pitfalls of reproducing pre-existing and superficial ideas<sup>(20)</sup>. It is assumed that, to qualify for the job, professors reflect, research and commit to continuous updating, with a willingness to collective work and critical and cooperative action<sup>(2,4-5,9,17,19)</sup>.

Despite not having been carried out under the specific knowledge of nursing, a study conducted in public schools pointed to the need for pedagogical collective working hours, understood as spaces for dialogue, reflection and articulation of skills, knowledge and practices of professors and managers<sup>(21)</sup>.

According to the NCGs for mid-level technical professional education, the PCP should be built

collectively and democratically, by professionals working in the school, managers, staff and professors, and the community in general. Professors still have a secondary role in this construction, and their knowledge is not properly valued. To deepen the discussions on these issues is to bring clarity and commitment of those who participate in them, in a continuous and collective process of learning on the teaching practice<sup>(2,6-7)</sup>.

A study on the perception of the teaching practice in nursing technical education concluded that the exchange of ideas about the curriculum is a feature rarely used by professors for evaluating their pedagogical practice, justified by the lack of opportunity or the absence of requirement from the school. It was seen that professors do not have the habit of discussing the experiences of teaching used in the classroom<sup>(5)</sup>. The lack of educational meetings was also reported, which may explain the individual work of professors and the absence of a collective proposal for the formation of a critical and reflective, competent and ethical employee.

Therefore, this study shows that more than half of the respondents performs lesson plans and uses the internet as a technological resource for finding information, besides books and apostilles, while others assume not planning or doing it partially. The lesson plan is responsible for the coordination of the PCP, and values it when envisions students' comprehensive education<sup>(2,22-23)</sup>. It is a teaching tool that helps to organize and direct their actions in order to achieve the proposed objectives of learning. This registration implies a permanent reflection of the professors about the process for which they are responsible in their daily lives<sup>(3,23)</sup>. A professor that leads the class with a plan that is just in mind, unregistered, acts in an unsystematic way. They merely fulfill an activity, sometimes decontextualized and timeless, that will possibly obscure the purpose of the learning and evaluative process<sup>(19,23)</sup>.

Regarding the teaching methods they use, answers ranged between the traditional and the active method. It is important to note that 40% of respondents did not answer the question, or, when they did, they mistook concepts of method and teaching strategy. The teaching method is the path set by professors to promote and facilitate student learning<sup>(23-24)</sup>.

Every method has an implicit theoretical framework, conceptions that guide the professors' work<sup>(3)</sup>. Active methodologies that are based on the critical-reflexive pedagogical conceptions come from real life contexts, intervening on reality, stimulating the interaction among various actors. The valuation of the collective construction of knowledge in its different aspects and learning scenarios is encouraged. As a consequence, it stimulates creativity in the construction of solutions to problems, and promotes freedom of thought and action. Problem-solving has been widely used as teaching, learning and evaluative strategies in the active methodology because it anchors the pedagogical concept that encourages the participation of students, developing autonomy and understanding of individual and collective responsibility in the learning process<sup>(25-26)</sup>. One of the professors mentioned "coming out of the cocoon", which can be understood as the possibility offered by the active method in the construction of professional identity with autonomy.

Regarding the selection of content to be delivered, 40% of the respondents uses the course program or the PCP. Contents are bases for the practical manifestation in which knowledge is coordinated (abstraction of an idea and its mental development), skills (ability to perform an activity) and attitudes (position taken before an issue), and are linked to the very existence of the school and its social function<sup>(22)</sup>. In mid-level nursing education, the selection of learning content is focused on building skills. It is understood as a combination of contents that, mobilized, generate an effective professional action in a given particular context(23). "Being competent is to well accomplish a duty" (24:19). Cognitive, procedural and attitudinal domains of professionals in specific contexts of healthcare are coordinated with their duty<sup>(25-26)</sup>.

Legally, the minimum skills for professional training are expressed in the National Curricular Guidelines and the National Curricular References. These documents guide the development of educational planning, with the identification of functions and sub-functions, distinguishing competencies, skills and technological bases involved in them or needed for them<sup>(7,27-28)</sup>, in other words, the combination of necessary content for the basic formation of nursing technicians.

Many professors referred to the formative assessment, yet they chose the written test, because to measure knowledge it is still the most valued practice in this level of education, confirming

the historical tendency in nursing, in which procedural and factual contents are more valued and evaluated<sup>(29)</sup>. It diverges from the concept of formative assessment, as this happens during the process in order to reflect on the paths taken, especially in the choice of a teaching method. It differs from the classificatory or summative evaluation, which quantifies the knowledge accumulated by students<sup>(30)</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

This study allowed us to perceive that professors are concerned about the commitment of their work. However, in general, they develop an educational practice devoid of reflection and meaning by assigning relative value to the planning of the course. On the other hand, most professors plan the discipline and class, but without a clear coordination among the teaching method, content selection and training evaluation.

If on one hand we found professors with advances in their speeches, denoting progressive language on their pedagogical practice, on the other the answers were permeated with contradiction and inconsistencies on aspects that support education to the principles of the NCGs.

The absence of NCGs in the reports may represent distance of participants to the heart of issues that support the proposed change in the training of nursing technicians, and that partly explains the lack of meaning and the gaps found in their responses. Therefore, it was found that the embracement of the PCPs does not imply a collectively built commitment. In this regard, the participants are not involved in a critical and reflective discussion on the formation of technicians.

This study also found a disarticulation of the pedagogical knowledge with the practice held in the classroom by the majority of professors in the survey. There is no choice of teaching methods and content selection, or a misconception of its meaning, and formative assessment, as this was related to attitudinal knowledge that students must build. In contrast, the written test was the favorite instrument of the respondents.

A transition was clear between the evaluation process to the mold of a traditional teaching model, a reflection of a curriculum fragmented in subjects, in which the evaluation process prevails over of the cognitive, contributing to the summative evaluation and jeopardizing the formative.

The choice of the traditional teaching method also persists and is justified by the lack of time by the majority of professors, disregarding the principles laid by the NCGs.

Finally, there were significant weakness in these professors' didactic-pedagogical formation, to be overcome by the conceptual deepening of the dimensions that make up the teaching practice, in order to align consciously to the National Curricular Guidelines in the shaping of nursing technicians.

In this perspective, this study raised the need to strengthen school management, which in its planning needs to promote and value the meetings that could provide critical and reflective discussions about it, in a familiarization process that makes it inseparable from the daily school life, that is, from the pedagogical practice and the professors' continuing education. This requires to advance in the elaboration of lesson plans with the use of teaching methods that build the development of critical and reflective technicians.

Professors must commit to the construction and development of the school's PCP, as it brings the essence of collective work for the training of professionals/citizens on the basis of a society that continuously makes political choices for health.

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