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Pedagogical practices developed by nursing teachers

Prácticas pedagógicas desarrolladas por docentes en la enseñanza de enfermería
Práticas pedagógicas desenvolvidas por docentes no ensino de enfermagem

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Abstract

Background: The pedagogical practices in nursing education are a wide field of study due to the new health needs.

Objective: To identify the pedagogical practices developed by teachers in an undergraduate nursing program.

Methodology: Qualitative research, case study type. Data were collected in 2020 through in-depth interviews with five nursing teachers working at a public university in Mexico. Data were organized and analyzed using an inductive approach based on Minayo's operational proposal.

Results: Four categories emerged: Teaching - Why and for what; Pedagogical preparation for teaching; Teaching-learning strategies used by nursing teachers; Challenges of pedagogical practice from the perception of nursing teachers.

Conclusion: Teachers report that they did not have pedagogical training and that, at the beginning of their teaching career, they individually sought the necessary preparation to teach.

Keywords: nursing; faculty, nursing; education, nursing

Resumen

Marco contextual: Las prácticas pedagógicas en la enseñanza de la enfermería constituyen un amplio campo de estudio debido a las nuevas necesidades de salud.

Objetivo: Conocer las prácticas pedagógicas desarrolladas por los docentes en un curso de pregrado en enfermería.

Metodología: Investigación cualitativa, a modo de estudio de caso, cuyos datos fueron recolectados a través de entrevistas en profundidad, en 2020. Participaron cinco profesores de enfermería que laboran en una universidad pública de México. Los datos fueron organizados y analizados de manera inductiva con base en la propuesta operativa de Minayo.

Resultados: Surgieron cuatro categorías: por qué y para qué enseñar; Preparación pedagógica para la docencia; Estrategias de enseñanza-aprendizaje utilizadas por los profesores de enfermería; Retos del ejercicio pedagógico en la percepción del profesorado de enfermería.

Conclusión: Los docentes informan que no tenían formación pedagógica y que, al iniciar la docencia, buscaron individualmente la preparación necesaria para trabajar en la docencia.

Palabras clave: enfermería; docentes de enfermería; educación en enfermería

Resumo

Enquadramento: As práticas pedagógicas de enfermeiros constituem um amplo campo de estudo em virtude das novas necessidades de saúde.

Objetivo: Conhecer as práticas pedagógicas desenvolvidas por docentes num curso de graduação em enfermagem.

Metodologia: Pesquisa qualitativa, tipo estudo de caso, cujos dados foram colhidos através de entrevistas em profundidade, em 2020. Participaram cinco docentes de enfermagem que exercem funções numa universidade pública do México. Os dados foram organizados e analisados indutivamente com base na proposta operacional de Minayo.

Resultados: Emergiram quatro categorias: Porquê e para o que ensinar; Preparação pedagógica para o ensino; Estratégias de ensino-aprendizagem utilizadas por docentes de enfermagem; Desafios do exercício pedagógico na percepção de docentes de enfermagem.

Conclusão: Os professores relatam que não tiveram formação pedagógica e que, ao iniciarem a docência, procuraram individualmente a preparação necessária para o ensino.

Palavras chave: enfermagem; docentes de enfermagem; educação em enfermagem



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Introduction

Teaching and learning is a major challenge, especially in professional nursing education, as it requires nurses to teach skills that promote the interaction between two fields of knowledge - education and health - and raise the awareness of those involved to understand the dynamics of human life in its dialectics and the importance of becoming autonomous enough to transform themselves and their surroundings (Barriga, 2021; Freire, 2018).

From a dialogical perspective, the educational process requires teaching-learning strategies, didactic resources, and learning environments relevant to social needs and demands and respond to the objectives set out in the learning programs.

These aspects should support the pedagogical practices of the nursing professionals who are responsible for planning, designing, and anticipating strategies to promote meaningful and comprehensive learning for students while strengthening critical and reflective thinking and decision-making for the delivery of quality and equitable health care (Enderle et al., 2018; Vieira et al., 2020).

Despite the clarity about the complexity of teaching and the advances in the discussions on the topic within the community in general, there are still professionals who base their pedagogical practice on the teaching methods used by the teachers who marked their student experience, believing that to be a university professor, it is enough to be a good nursing professional, and prioritizing research over pedagogical training (Zamproga et al., 2019).

This context contributes to the problem that justifies the development of this study. It is necessary to understand nursing teachers' pedagogical practices and identify the progress made and the difficulties encountered to implement intervention proposals to address the needs in this field.

This study is based on the understanding that becoming a teacher is a continuous movement that requires ongoing reflection on practice and the constant attribution of new individual and collective meanings (Mattos & Monteiro, 2017). Therefore, a dialogue between research and the professional development of nursing teachers can inform the development of new studies, strengthen pedagogical practices and, consequently, contribute to the nursing education needed.

Thus, this study aims to identify the pedagogical practices developed by teachers of an undergraduate nursing program in Mexico.

Background

According to Paulo Freire, humans are beings of relationships with and in the world who can transform reality through reflection and action and are aware of their role as agents that transform reality (Freire, 2008).

For Freire, education is part of this context of transformation, autonomy, and freedom, where individuals learn from their interaction with the world. Therefore, teaching is a continuous movement of reflection-action-reflection

developed through progressive and problematizing pedagogical practices that value the subject who teaches and learns (Freire, 2018).

The education persons are individuals who have their own knowledge and expand it as they get to know and recognize the world. Therefore, it is the teachers' responsibility to plan, design, and anticipate the best strategies to make students' learning meaningful and comprehensive. Freire considers every human being a born educator, describing the educational act as transcending the educator-learner relationships in the classroom or formal learning environments. He also believes that teaching requires methodical rigor, research, respect for students' knowledge, criticism, aesthetics and ethics, incorporation of the words by example, critical reflection on the practice, and respect for the learner's autonomy (Freire, 2016).

Freire's pedagogy refers to the fundamental role of education (*conscientization*) in transforming a society of oppressed into a society of equals. "For this to happen, it is necessary, first of all, that the protagonist of education is aware of his or her reality, that is, that he or she is able to act and reflect" (Freire, 1980, p. 30-31).

In this study, the approach to teaching pedagogical practices will follow Paulo Freire's precepts and problematizing thinking on education.

Research question

How do the nursing teachers of an undergraduate nursing program perceive their pedagogical practice?

Methodology

Qualitative research, following the case study method proposed by Yin (2015), whose object is the social phenomena and organizations within a real-life context. This study is part of a wider project entitled "Pedagogical practices for an innovative model of teaching nursing care - Brazil and Mexico" (*Prácticas pedagógicas para un modelo innovador de enseñanza del cuidado de enfermería - Brasil y México*). Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted from January to May 2020 after the end of a course offered to the teachers interviewed in this study. This course discussed the use of active teaching-learning methodologies and promoted a reflection on their pedagogical practices.

Participants were selected based on their participation in the course. The teachers actively involved in a clinical practice learning unit of the undergraduate nursing program were identified. The teachers attending the course were invited to participate in an interview. Those who accepted signed an informed consent form. They were convened in a space (office) and ensured that there were no interruptions for the audio recording of the interviews, which lasted an average of 25 minutes. In addition, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviewees in the months of March to May 2020 were contacted by telephone, and the call was recorded for later transcription.



The number of interviewed participants was established based on theoretical saturation, that is, interviews were suspended if there was a repetition of information in the collected data.

The following questions guided the interviews: What is the purpose of teaching? Did you receive any teaching training? How do you teach professional nursing care? What difficulties did you encounter in teaching?

Data were organized and analyzed using an inductive approach based on Minayo's (2010) operational proposal and following the stages of pre-analysis (reading the material and creating study groups); exploration of the material, which provided a thematic understanding based on units of meaning; data processing, organization, and inductive interpretation.

This study was submitted to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Santa Catarina (number 3.758.324) and the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing and Obstetrics of the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico. Participants accepted and signed an informed consent form. To protect the participants' anonymity, their statements were identified with codes containing the letter "E" (*entrevistado*, interviewee) followed by the corresponding number assigned to them during the meetings.

Results

Participants were aged 30 to 62 years and had been working as teachers for 3 to 40 years. They had different academic degrees (undergraduate degree, specialization, and master's in nursing) and specializations in different areas, such as pediatrics, nephrology, intensive care, surgery, obstetrics, and public and community health.

From the analysis of the interviews, four categories emerged: Teaching-Why and what for; Pedagogical preparation for teaching; Teaching-learning strategies used by nursing teachers; Challenges of pedagogical practice from the perception of nursing teachers.

When nursing professionals decide to teach, they face a major challenge. Although their academic training has prepared them to have an excellent performance in nursing care, they need other skills to teach that they often did not acquire during their university training. Therefore, they need to develop the necessary teaching skills, usually after having joined the teaching profession. The following statements refer to the first category, Teaching- Why and for what?:

I think we are here for love, because we like it. Personally, I never imagined being on this side, as a teacher, but I like it and teach them what I know. At a certain moment, when the student acquires a skill..., I see a procedure or something they do; or who also reminds us or the way we teach them... It is very satisfying for us. (E2)

"For them to be good nursing professionals. Fortunately, for patients, there are people who provide care" (E3). "We teach so that students can offer their knowledge and skills to the population because, although they are in the health

area and their objective is to provide nursing care, [the final objective is] to protect health" (E5).

Teachers associated the act of teaching with feelings of love and satisfaction and reported that they expect to contribute to society by helping students to develop their knowledge, skills, and competencies for becoming good nursing professionals.

However, a good nursing professional is not always a good teacher. Being theoretically prepared to teach is essential for the teaching-learning process to be successful. Teaching is not only about transmitting knowledge but also about being connected in the context of education.

This requires training in pedagogical practices, information technologies, didactic programs, electronic media, and other tools for teachers to make their practice interesting for students. The second category - Pedagogical preparation for nursing teaching - emerged from these concerns: "We were not trained as teachers, we did not attend a school where we were taught how to impart or transmit knowledge to other people. I think before that we were looking for our own strategies to acquire knowledge" (E1).

I think that the experience we gained at the hospital helped us a lot to meet the objectives of the practice and the students fulfill their competencies... I think that a teacher needs knowledge about teaching-learning, the methodology. I have little knowledge about it, I'm not prepared for teaching, which is complemented by the experience and knowledge of teaching. (E3)

When I started university, I studied on my own, there was no time to be taught..., so I had to adapt; and, after one year, they offered me a course on teaching methodologies... We really need to prepare ourselves, there are no technical preparation courses... We would also like to learn, go to conferences, courses with teachers who have learning resources and training because they can tell us their experience and we can really learn methodologies... I think it's an important part, to have the ability to teach, to transmit knowledge because "Well, I have the knowledge, but I don't know how to transmit it", this is a very important obstacle to learning. (E5)

Participants reported that they had no pedagogical training and that, when they started teaching, they individually sought the necessary preparation to work in teaching. In this context, they pointed out that the experience in care and the technical-scientific knowledge helped bridge the didactic-pedagogical gaps. However, they reaffirmed the relevance of experiencing spaces for dialogue on teaching methodologies and stressed that the scientific basis is not enough if the educator does not make it accessible to the student.

Choosing the best teaching strategy, as well as developing a pedagogical practice that meets students' expectations is not always easy. In order to keep students motivated to build knowledge, the teacher looks for various methodologies, some more interactive, others less active, but all aim at learning. The ideal condition should promote the autonomy and engagement of students with the de-

velopment of knowledge and training to prepare them for their future professional performance. Thus, the third category was called Teaching-learning strategies used by nursing teachers.

First, get to know the student's interest in the subject or the career, then base it on their daily life and, after that, understand the [students'] ways of learning are, if they are visual, auditory, if they like to read more or watch a video. If they are not satisfied, I must investigate to see what direction learning should take and start to look at different teaching methodologies. (E5)

I usually do a critical reading first..., so they understand how to read a scientific article. Then I explain to them how they should read and the important sections of a scientific article... They had to read it, take notes in the margin of the article or take notes in a notebook or sheet of paper, so that this would allow them to argue... When you apply this type of skill, besides knowing what the philosophy was and the meaning of this subject..., they had to master other skills. (E4)

In my classes, as a requirement, I always asked them [the students] to study the topic we are going to discuss, so when I arrive, I first ask them to review [the study material]. I took into consideration their participation, I examined their charts, I consulted if there was any information. It was very satisfying... And, in the end, I did the final exam, but I said, "As a requirement, before you do the exam, you must prepare a study guide". (E1)

Everything is based on the scientific method... Everything that is done in care is based first on knowledge and then on skill development..., based on questions and what they saw inside the school..., sometimes, through a mind map to reinforce the student's knowledge. (E2)

I gave them examples of apparently healthy people or experiences I had. We also looked up the bibliography of the case to determine what needs or what care we could provide to our patients... And I told them to write down their doubts, their expectations, how they felt, what they expected from the coordination. Then, when the practice was over, I asked them if it had met their expectations, what experiences they had, or what they would do in a given case". (E3)

Some actions were listed, which can be summarized in activities that sought to connect theory and practice; problematizing reality, case studies, and mind maps. Some of these aspects were considered in the evaluation, such as students' participation in the proposed activities. The teacher's concern with making updated scientific knowledge available to the students within their expectations and understanding should be highlighted, which represents an important active strategy.

At some point in their academic lives, all teachers perceived the following challenges: getting to know students, being close to them, promoting learning, feeling satisfied with classes, choosing the best strategy, orga-

nizing content, meeting the university's administrative and recording requirements, among others. The teaching challenges for novice and experienced teachers may not be the same, but they exist throughout a teacher's career. These aspects gave rise to the fourth category: Challenges of pedagogical practice from the perception of nursing teachers.

"It was something new, it was difficult for me to teach the students how to achieve the program objectives. I knew I had to be documented, update myself constantly, learning and implementing teaching techniques" (E3). The first time I was afraid because I also had to learn to organize myself in order to express myself in front of the group. All this, at some point, is difficult for us. But then we manage to get ourselves organized so that it is also easier for them and for us" (E2).

The first difficulty was trying to cover briefly all the content of the program, because, regardless of whether I finished the program or not, I wanted to create meaningful learning... It is difficult for me to work with very large groups, like 30 to 36 students. I like them to do their individual work, because by doing so we explore each of their skills. It is hard to evaluate 36 or 46 students. (E4)

Every student learns in a different way. I think that is the most complicated thing, having different learning methods and knowing the students as they learn. Because I could have only one method, but it would not be effective for everyone. Everyone has different learning abilities as well. (E5)

The challenges faced by teachers, especially at the beginning of their careers, are insecurity, lack of understanding regarding the management of learning objectives, syllabus contents, teaching methodologies, the number of students, their singularities, and the preparation of assessments.

Discussion

Starting teaching unexpectedly is not unique to this research. In studies on this topic, it is common to find reports of nursing teachers who began their teaching careers accidentally, motivated by supplementing income or replacing a fellow teacher (Souza et al., 2018; Vendruscolo et al., 2018).

In this perspective, some of these nurses only thought about the pedagogical problems after they started their work as teachers. After all, they were professionals who had other careers and, without planning it, became educators (Souza et al., 2018), that is, without any pedagogical preparation or training (Fernandes & Souza, 2017; Vendruscolo et al., 2018).

This aspect helps them to recover their memories from when they were students and reproduce the teaching methodologies used by former teachers who taught them or who were important in some way during their training process (Fernandes & Souza, 2017).

This choice is not always assertive given that the majority of teachers, taken as example, acted based on a transmission or banking model of education, with hierarchical, mechanis-

tic characteristics, disconnected from reality and favoring memorization and unconsciousness, critical repetition, without reflection or students participation (Freire, 2018). Furthermore, the study participants report that, especially at the beginning of their teaching career, they focused on subject-specific knowledge and their professional experience to improve their pedagogical practices. However, it only reinforces the idea that teaching is learned in the practice of teaching and that there is no need for formal training to work in teaching (Souza et al., 2018).

Both content mastery and experience as a clinical nurse are important for becoming a teacher but do not replace pedagogical knowledge (Lazzari et al., 2018). This concern is even made explicit by one of the participants, who believes that there is a gap between knowing the content and the ability to make it accessible to the student.

The aspects highlighted above contribute to the fact that the educator has fewer tools to face the specific challenges of teaching. According to the study participants, these challenges are represented by fear, especially at the beginning of their teaching career; lack of knowledge of the disciplinary and curricular aspects and the implementation of participatory teaching-learning methodologies.

The vast majority of these challenges are common to other teachers, particularly regarding the implementation of active teaching-learning methodologies (Vendruscolo et al., 2018) due to curricula structure; the resistance from teachers and students, and the difficulty in understanding its applicability in practice (Mesquita et al., 2016).

Amidst the difficulties, teachers reported that they already use, even if instinctively, strategies based on the participatory foundations of teaching-learning, whose discourse is consistent with the problematizing pedagogy and the knowledge necessary for teaching, such as love and respect for students' knowledge, criticality, critical reflection on practice, and the conviction that change is possible and education is a way of intervening in the world (Freire, 2016).

This is also a potential in relation to other studies given that these strategies are more effective when it comes to the development of critical thinking (Oliveira et al., 2016); contribute to a commitment to providing new learning experiences and conditions for the students to exercise freedom, autonomy, and co-responsibility (Berbel, 2011), further promoting proactivity and the learning of meaningful aspects of reality; the development of reasoning and skills for intervention in one's own context (Lima, 2017). Students who experience a teaching process with these characteristics still feel encouraged to continue learning. They are motivated to "be cared for by a human being with sensitivity" and who still demonstrates commitment, organization, and pleasure in teaching (Winters et al., 2017). A teaching practice that is critical and consistent with this discourse involves a dynamic and dialectical movement between doing and thinking about what has been done. In this context, the apprentice educator recognizes that *knowing how to think* is not a gift from the gods (Freire, 2016), which is constantly reported by the nursing teachers who recognize the need for continuous training to prepare themselves for teaching.

Lifelong education is an important strategy to strengthen nursing teachers' problematizing stance and minimize weaknesses related to teaching preparation (Vendruscolo, 2018). It is important to highlight the institution's role as a promoter of these spaces for educators to share knowledge and collectively create new possibilities for health education. This aspect is particularly relevant if we consider the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which teachers, in general, had to transform their pedagogical practice according to the organization's guidelines to prevent the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 without changing the quality of the teaching-learning process.

One of the limitations of this study was the series of five interviews with professionals with different academic degrees (undergraduate, specialization, and master's in nursing) and specializations in several areas. In addition, the interviews were conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

The lack of pedagogical training and the unexpected start of the teaching career contribute directly to the challenges faced by nursing teachers. For the participants, although the nursing-specific scientific knowledge, the care experiences, and the memories of former teachers mitigated the difficulties encountered, they were not enough due to the distance between knowing the content and making it accessible to the students. Under these conditions, nursing teachers consider lifelong learning an important learning opportunity, especially regarding the teaching methodologies that address students' needs. It should be noted that lifelong learning must be consistent with the problematizing conception of teaching so that it supports the strategies already used by teachers instinctively, providing more consistency to the pedagogical practice and contributing to the training of nursing professionals who act in line with society's current needs.

Otherwise, transmission-based teaching will contribute to the perpetuation of teaching models that do not meet the current needs of education, health, and society as a whole. Educational institutions should also understand the importance of pedagogical domains and provide opportunities to access these contents, promoting dialogues and recognizing the importance of preparation for a critical, reflective, ethical, and creative teaching practice. The training of teachers with these characteristics is a key aspect for improving the training of future health professionals who can intervene by transforming society.

Therefore, this study becomes relevant from the moment it reinforces aspects related to the challenges encountered in nurses' teaching practice, while pointing to these professionals' desire to prepare themselves pedagogically for nursing teaching.

Author contributions

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