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A REFLECTIVE LOOK AT DEMOCRACY AND HIGHER NURSING EDUCATION BETWEEN 1978 AND 1981

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to reflect on the relationship between democracy and higher nursing education in the period between 1978 and 1981, a period of military dictatorship in Brazil. We believe that this reflection, by highlighting the problems of nursing education at that time, can contribute to the process of consolidating teaching excellence in the training of nurses and raise questions that may, in some way, point to the current challenges of nursing education. From this perspective, this reflection has shown that one of the biggest challenges facing nursing education in 1978, which persists today, is overcoming disciplinary fragmentation and the centrality of biological science disciplines to the detriment of social science disciplines, which may be interfering with the consolidation of a nursing education capable of training autonomous, critical and purposeful professionals who transform the reality around them.

Keywords: democracy; nursing education; higher education; curriculum.

INTRODUCTION



NURSING AND MIDWIFERY

We urge you: Never say - That's natural. In the face of everyday events. At a time when confusion reigns. In which blood flows, in which disorder is ordered, in which arbitrariness has the force of law, in which humanity is dehumanized... Never say: That's natural! So that nothing becomes unchangeable

Figure 1

Source: personal collection

My experience as a nursing student at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) in the years between 1978 and 1981, in times of military dictatorship, was a qualifying element for debating the issue of democracy and nursing education.

With this in mind, we sought to briefly contextualize the complexity of the historical conditions in which the UFMG nursing course developed at the time. In analyzing this problem, we initially started with the reflections raised by the epigraph by the German poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), described on the diploma of the nursing course of the students who entered UFMG in 1978 (Figure 1); because we consider that it portrays the non-conformity of the graduates with the social and political context of that period:

We urge you: never say that it is natural in the face of everyday events. At a time when confusion reigns, when blood flows, when disorder is ordered, when arbitrariness has the force of law, when humanity is dehumanized (...) never say: that is natural, so that nothing becomes unchangeable... (BRECHT, 1986, *apud* JANTSCH, 2001: 261).

This context refers to the history of the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985). Although the dictatorship itself is not the focal point of this reflection, highlighting this period is the initial condition for advancing the discussion on nursing education at UFMG in 1978. From this perspective, it is important to remember that on March 31, 1964, Brazil woke up under the tutelage of a military dictatorship, and panic and fear of communism spread. Many leaders of social movements were arrested and collective defense associations were abolished. All that remained was immobility, fear, silence and widespread disbelief (PEREIRA, 2001, p. 114). In the author's words,

With the repressive violence, we lost the integrity of our bodies, of our *selves*, of our belongings, and all we could do was experience primitive reactions such as fear, fragility and regression. At the level of subjectivity, the population watched everything in a frightened, perplexed way and immersed in a climate of terror. Speech and language became forbidden, the desiring subject was censored by bayonets. Urban social movements were prevented from exercising their legitimate demands and, in some cases, some of the leaders of this segment were co-opted by the military regime. Later, in the mid-1970s, several activists joined union opposition movements, factory groups, residents' associations, literacy, education and popular community development groups and progressive religious activities, in the struggles for health, education, public transportation, popular housing and others (PEREIRA, 2001, p. 114-115).

According to Santos *et al.* (2012, p. 25), with the 1964 coup, a phase of forced silence began for mass movements. From then on, student struggles were reborn in resistance to the dictatorship's educational reform project and in the fight against the police and military repression it fostered, demanding changes that would spread social justice to all sections of the population.

In general, the youth of this time witnessed an intense movement of cultural renewal that affected the means of cultural dissemination, from popular music to new cinema, passing through theater and literature, engaging in the denunciation of crucial issues that shook the Brazilian reality, becoming one of the means of greatest resistance to the military regime (ALVES, 2000, p. 236).

In the field of education, according to Costa & Costa (2020), the long-awaited university reform took place in 1968. However, unlike what the Student Movement advocated, and intensifying the context of authoritarianism, it was based on the consolidation of the Ministry

of Education and Culture's agreement with the *United States Agency for International Development (USAID)*, whose principles were rationalization, technicality and productivity, which meant a threat to national sovereignty.

In the same perspective of analysis, Fávero (2009), apud Costa & Costa (2020, p. 8) defined this agreement as a strategy of hegemony, through the technical, financial and military assistance offered by *USAID* to reorganize Brazilian education. Thus, this reform ended up being yet another measure to curtail the wishes of the student movement adopted by the dictatorial regime.

From 1974 onwards, the military regime gave political signals that there would be a return to institutionality, although the repressive apparatus of the state and its intelligence and information services were in full operation. The resumption of university student organization was taking place beyond the university walls. In May 1976, the organization of National Student Meetings (ENE) continued debates on paid education and the consequences of university reforms (ALMADA, 2021).

This return to organization allowed one of the first exclusively student demonstrations after 1968 to take place on March 30, 1977, against the reduction in funding for national education, a fact that did not result in any conflicts, nor was it reported in the newspapers. However, on July 4, 1977, in Belo Horizonte, preparations began for another national meeting of students, around four lines of action: democratic freedoms; the democratization of the university; the search for better teaching conditions; and the reorganization of the student movement. However, the event failed and, with the city center practically besieged by police forces, more than 1,200 students were arrested for breaking the National Security Law (ALMADA, 2021, p.1-20).

The period between 1975 and 1985 corresponds to one of the country's great historical moments. The grassroots political movement in the neighborhoods, and the work of the Catholic Church's Ecclesial Base Communities (CEBs), enabled important articulations in various civil society institutions. During this phase, the forces of resistance advanced and practices were developed to confront the military regime, which was already losing its legitimacy in society. From then on, various national movements came onto the scene, such as the movement to re-democratize the country, the student and teacher movements, feminism, the struggle for amnesty, the demands of health professionals and public sectors, the work of the pastoral land ministry and others (PEREIRA, 2001, p.123).

In 1978, according to Eder Sader, a wave of strikes took hold of the country and marked a turning point in Brazil's political history. In Sader's view, the strike movements and social movements of this period had the common characteristic of demanding rights, the first being the '*right to demand rights*' (SADER, 1991, p. 237).

During 1983 and 1984, above all due to the '*Direct Elections Campaign*', there was an intense movement to re-democratize the country, culminating in the election of civilians to the presidency of the Republic. They ascended the plateau on March 15, 1985, consolidating the transition to a democratic regime, with the immediate convocation of the National Constituent Assembly (FAUSTO, 1995, p. 508).

In this period of democratic transition, the novelty in the scenario of collective actions was that they began to occupy channels of institutional participation, with the creation of networks, councils, movements, forums of a propositional nature, based on broad negotiations between civil society and the state (PEREIRA, 2001, p.132).

After briefly going through the scenario we had in the 1970s, it is necessary to delimit the object around which this reflective study was developed. To this end, the first question is: which subjects made up the curriculum of the UFMG nursing course in 1978? Is it possible to establish a relationship between the subjects that made up the curriculum at that time and the theme of democracy?

With this in mind, the aim of this study was to reflect on nursing education in the period between 1978 and 1981. We believe that this reflection, by highlighting the problems of nursing education at that time, can contribute to the process of consolidating teaching excellence in the training of nurses and raise questions that may in some way point to the current challenges of education and democracy in nursing education.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objective of reflecting on nursing teaching at the Federal University of Minas Gerais in the context of the military dictatorship in Brazil, personal observations on the subject and documentary analysis were used. In order to map out the subjects that made up the curriculum, we used the nursing course transcript from 1978 and the current pedagogical project for the nursing course at UFMG. It is important to note that the school transcripts mentioned above are part of the author's personal collection. The pedagogical project for the current nursing course was found on the school's website and is therefore in the public domain.

As a starting point for analyzing the data collected, we first sought to understand the theoretical assumptions of Cornelius Castoriadis (2002) on democracy, as this is an important element in supporting this reflection. Therefore, like Castoriadis (2002, p.107), we believe that education for democracy should occupy a prominent place in society. Accord-

ding to this author, nowadays people find it difficult to say what it really means to be a citizen in a democratic society. For him, citizenship is only possible through the establishment of a truly democratic regime:

In a democratic regime, citizens effectively participate in the establishment of the laws under which they live, not through representatives or referendums on issues whose content and purpose we are not allowed to know, but with knowledge of the facts, so that we can recognize in the laws, our own laws, because we have had the effective opportunity to participate in their creation (CASTORIADIS, 2002: 254).

From this perspective, for Castoriadis (2002), the centrality of education in a democratic society is indisputable. In a sense, it can be said that a democratic society is an immense institution for the permanent education and self-education of its citizens, because a democratic society, like a reflective society, must constantly request the enlightened participation of all citizens in decision-making processes about everything that affects their lives.

In short, a democratic society is one in which all aspects of its culture are committed to autonomy and the non-predetermined dimension of life. Such a democracy goes far beyond the procedures for choosing its representatives, in other words, a democratic society is not one that only holds elections, but one that enables the constant, active and autonomous participation of all citizens (CASTORIADIS, 2002, p. 84).

According to Ferreira (2012, p.105), Castoriadis establishes what he calls the true meaning of the democratic project: to create institutions that are capable of making it possible to question the established law and that, internalized by individuals, facilitate their autonomy and emancipation, enabling people to participate effectively in all explicit power in society.

Educating for citizenship, democracy, tolerance and autonomy are the requirements of an education that prepares individuals for the new needs of an increasingly complex world. Therefore, learning citizenship corresponds to knowledge of a series of prerequisites necessary for the proper performance of the functions indispensable to social life (FERREIRA, 2012, p.109).

For (Saviani, 2014), when we say that we want a school that prepares individuals to exercise citizenship, we are saying that we want a school that forms emancipated, autonomous individuals, capable of initiative, which implies that they are aware of the situation so that they can make decisions, actively interfering in social life. All of this is reinforced by the addition of the adjective “conscious”, since the legal expression “conscious exercise of citizenship” suggests the educational objective of forming active, autonomous, critical and transforming citizens (SAVIANI, 2014, p. 16-17).

In the next section, Table 1 will show the mapping of the subjects that were part of the UFMG nursing course curriculum in 1978 and, in order to contribute to the analysis process, the subjects of the same course curriculum in 2023 have been included in this table.

RESULTS

In this section, we present the mapping of the compulsory subjects of the nursing course in 1978 and 2023. To make it easier to see how the subjects fit into different areas of knowledge, the subjects belonging to the biological sciences were colored blue, the subjects belonging to the nursing sciences were colored orange and the subjects belonging to the social sciences, health sciences and exact sciences were colored green. Subsequently, the percentage of subjects per area of knowledge and the distribution of their workloads in the curriculum matrix were calculated.

PERIODS	COMPULSORY SUBJECTS -1978	HOURS
1º	GENETICS AND EVOLUTION	54
1º	CELLULAR BIOCHEMISTRY	92
1º	BIOPHYSICS	32
1º	CYTOLOGY AND GENERAL HISTOLOGY	87
1º	PHYSICAL EDUCATION A	30
2º	BASIC IMMUNOLOGY	46
2º	BASIC PHARMACOLOGY	33
2º	BASIC PHYSIOLOGY	61
2º	GENERAL EMBRYOLOGY	20
2º	SPECIAL HISTOLOGY	96
2º	INTRODUCTION TO MAMMALIAN ANATOMY	26
2º	GENERAL PATHOLOGY I	62
3º	PHARMACOLOGY APPLIED TO NURSING	56
3º	MEDICAL PHYSIOLOGY	96
3º	BASIC MICROBIOLOGY	34
3º	MICROBIOLOGY APPLIED TO NURSING	45
3º	ANATOMY APPLIED TO NURSING	147
3º	MEDICAL PARASITOLOGY	74
3º	PHYSICAL EDUCATION B	30
4º	INTRODUCTION TO NURSING	75
4º	INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC HEALTH	90
4º	NUTRITION	30
4º	PSYCHOLOGY	90
4º	SOCIOLOGY	60
5º	ADMINISTRATION APPLIED TO NURSING I	45
5º	DIDACTICS APPLIED TO NURSING	60
5º	MEDICAL-SURGICAL NURSING I	225
5º	HISTORY OF NURSING	30
5º	NURSING METHODS AND TECHNIQUES	75
6º	NURSING FIRST AID	30
6º	MEDICAL-SURGICAL NURSING II	300
6º	ORTHOPAEDIC NURSING	45
6º	PSYCHIATRIC NURSING	150
7º	ADMINISTRATION APPLIED TO NURSING II	165
7º	MATERNAL AND CHILD NURSING	300
7º	NURSING PRACTICE	30
7º	STUDIES OF BRAZILIAN PROBLEMS A	15
8º	COMMUNICABLE DISEASES NURSING	105
8º	MATERNAL AND CHILD NURSING II	255
8º	STUDIES OF BRAZILIAN PROBLEMS B	15

Chart 1 - UFMG Nursing Course subjects in 1978

Source: Prepared by the author

PERIODS	COMPULSORY SUBJECTS-2023	LOAD HOURS
1º	FUNDAMENTALS OF GENETICS AND EVOLUTION	45
1º	BIOCHEMISTRY APPLIED TO NURSING	60
1º	COLLECTIVE HEALTH	60
1º	SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY	30
1º	INTEGRATION SEMINAR I	15
1º	NURSING IN ITS HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT	30
2º	BIOPHYSICS	30
2º	IMMUNOLOGY	45
2º	STATISTICS	30
2º	MICROBIOLOGY APPLIED TO NURSING	75
2º	GENERAL EMBRYOLOGY	30
2º	CYTOLOGY AND HISTOLOGY APPLIC. NURSING	90
2º	ANATOMY APPLIED TO NURSING	75
3º	INTEGRATION SEMINAR II	30
3º	EPIDEMIOLOGY	60
3º	MENTAL HEALTH	45
3º	HEALTH SYSTEM MANAGEMENT	75
3º	PHYSIOLOGY APPLIED TO NURSING	120
3º	NEUROANATOMY APPLIED TO NURSING	30
4º	PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING APPLIED TO NURSING	60
4º	PHARMACOLOGY APPLIED TO NURSING	90
4º	GENERAL PATHOLOGY	60
4º	HUMAN PARASITOLOGY	60
5º	-	-
5º	HEALTH AND NURSING MANAGEMENT	60
5º	FUNDAMENTALS OF NURSING CARE	150
5º	SYSTEMATIZATION OF NURSING CARE.	135
6º	RESEARCH PROJECT I	30
6º	CLINICAL AND SURGICAL NURSING	180
7º	CHILD AND ADOLESCENT NURSING	120
7º	WOMEN'S HEALTH	120
7º	RESEARCH PROJECT II	30
8º	NURSING IN PRIMARY CARE	105
8º	HEALTH AND NURSING CARE MANAGEMENT	90
8º	PSYCHIATRIC NURSING	75
8º	INTEGRATION SEMINAR III	15
9º	CURRICULAR INTERNSHIP: PRIMARY HEALTH CARE	450
9º	TCC	15
10º	HOSPITAL INTERNSHIP UNIT MEDIUM AND HIGH COMPLEXITY HEALTH UNIT	450

Table 2 - UFMG Nursing Course subjects for 2023

Source: prepared by the author

After systematizing the data in Table 1, it can be seen that the curricular matrix of the UFMG nursing course in 1978 consisted of 40 subjects, with a total of 3311 hours distributed over eight academic semesters, making it possible at that time to complete the course in four consecutive years.

Of the 40 subjects that made up the nursing course curriculum this year, 17 were from the area of Biological Sciences, corresponding to 51.34% of the total; 16 were from Nursing Sciences, or 48.33%. However, it was possible to see that the workload of the Biological Sciences subjects, 1061 hours, corresponded to 32.05% of the total workload and the workload of 1980 hours of the Nursing Sciences subjects corresponded to 59.80% of the total workload.

The data in Table 1 also shows that the four Health Sciences subjects in the 1978 curriculum matrix totaled 180 hours, corresponding to 5.43% of the course's total workload, leaving only 90 hours for the three Social Sciences subjects, or 2.08% of the course's total workload. In addition, in the curriculum matrix of the 1978 nursing course, it is possible to observe the absence of scientific methodology subjects and the non-inclusion of course completion work as a compulsory activity for completing the credits of the nursing course that year.

The analysis of Table 2, which refers to the nursing course curriculum for 2023, shows that of the 38 compulsory subjects, 23 subjects (2,370 hours) belong to the Nursing Sciences, i.e. 59.17%, and 14 subjects (870 hours), i.e. 21.72%, belong to the Biological Sciences and only 1 subject of 30 hours, corresponding to 0.74% of the total workload, belongs to the Exact Sciences. It should be noted that, among the compulsory subjects in the 2023 matrix, three refer to scientific methodology, and the preparation and oral defense of a Course Conclusion Paper (TCC) is compulsory.

It is worth noting that the curricular structure of the nursing course in 2023, as approved in the course's Pedagogical Project, provides for 4005 hours, distributed over 10 academic semesters, i.e. 5 consecutive years to complete the course's total credits; by completing 3,270 hours of compulsory subjects, 675 hours of elective subjects and a further 60 hours of free training subjects.

DISCUSSION

For this discussion, we will first look at the results of the total workload of 3,311 hours of the UFMG nursing course offered in 1978, compared to the 4,005 hours of minimum workload for the course offered today at this university. On this issue, Mellin (2010, p.30) says that in the 1970s, the evolution of nursing education in Brazil took place more slowly and was based on the paradigm of American schools, focused only on serving the labor market and, therefore, in addition to the intense fragmentation of theory and practice, there was a reduced and insufficient workload.

It is a minimum curriculum approved by the Federal Education Council, with a basic cycle, a common professional core and the possibility of choosing three qualifications: Public Health Nursing, Medical-Surgical Nursing and Obstetric Nursing. However, it is only since 1996, with the approval of the new National Education Guidelines and Bases Law, that intense debates have taken place in nursing; culminating in 2001, with the approval by the National Education Council of the National Curriculum Guidelines (DCN) for undergraduate nursing courses in Brazil, providing for the training of generalist, human, critical and reflective nurses, based on competencies, based on scientific rigor, requiring the inclusion of CBT, expansion of the total course workload, extinction of the minimum curriculum, basic cycle and professionalizing stage (MELLIN, 2010, p 30-31).

Mapping the subjects in the curriculum matrix also made it possible to observe that since 1978, the workload of the subjects that were part of the Nursing Sciences corresponded to 59.80% of the total workload of the course, showing a significant equivalence with the curriculum matrix of the nursing course in 2023, whose workload of the Nursing Sciences subjects corresponds to 59.17% of the total subjects of the course in that year. This shows that the training is based on scientific knowledge with knowledge specific to nursing.

For Dias et al (2016), the teaching of nursing theories stands out in this context, as they describe, explain, predict or prescribe care, having a strong influence on research and providing scientific support for nurses' actions. In this sense, it is worth noting how important it is to persist in teaching and reflecting on the scientificity of nursing, a fundamental theme for developing the identity and critical thinking of nurses in relation to their care practice; in addition to the need to deepen theory and carry out scientific research that positively transform people's lives (SOUZA et al, 2019, p. 840).

However, in 1978, there was a concentration of subjects in the area of Biological Sciences in the initial periods of the course, totally disconnected from the subjects that integrated the Nursing Sciences. From this perspective, Sena (1998, p.52) points out that the teaching and practice of nursing in Brazil has historically been marked by concepts that support and guide biomedical models of health care, centered on the biological, curative and individual.

Corroborating this view, for Teixeira et al (2006), the minimum nursing curriculum at the time was approved by Opinion 163/72 and Resolution 04/72 of the Federal Education Council. This was based on the biologicist, individualist and hospital-centered model

and was based on a technicist view of health and did not yet value the social determinants of the health-disease process (TEIXEIRA, et al, 2006).

It is important to mention that the curricular matrix of the nursing course in 1978 did not include subjects on scientific methodology, nor did it provide for the preparation of a course conclusion paper (TCC) to complete the credits. According to Cassiani & Rodrigues (1998), for years, nurses' lack of preparation in relation to research and the application of research findings to practice was due to the lack of emphasis placed on research methodology in the curricula of undergraduate nursing courses. Since 2001, with the approval of the Curricular Guidelines, CBTs have been compulsory in undergraduate nursing courses, prompting the inclusion of scientific methodology subjects in the curriculum (MIGUEL, 2020).

Finally, it is worth noting the reduced number of hours allocated to sociology, the only subject in the social sciences area in the nursing curriculum in 1978, and non-existent in the curriculum of the nursing course offered at UFMG today. This has already been said, but it is worth emphasizing the technical and biologicist nature of nursing training throughout history. What are the impacts of excluding social science subjects from the nursing curriculum? In our view, this directly affects the experience of democracy in nursing education.

From this perspective, according to Sena (1998, p.16-17), nursing is a social practice that is also historically determined. This determination is evident in its thinking, in its doing, in its relationship with the conceptions, objectives and principles of each society in which it is inserted, and it is guided by two philosophical currents that underpin its teaching and care practice: the humanist and the technicist.

There is no doubt about the importance of including the social sciences in general, and sociology in particular, as a science that contributes to understanding the dynamics of people's lives and social relationships, whether in collective, individual or family terms. Sociology has the potential to collaborate with nursing, from its training through to its research methods, because thinking of the phenomena of health and illness as determined by relationships between people causes significant changes in the conception of care, with concrete implications for everyday professional nursing practice (SILVA, 2012, p.14).

According to Cigales (2021, p.75) in Brazil, Sociology returned to the curricula of undergraduate courses during the country's re-democratization period in the late 1970s, being fundamental in schools that want to build democratically and contribute to an education aimed at the exercise of citizenship; but it is necessary to think in practice, how this pluralistic and democratic teaching, which recognizes diversity and other subjects as bearers of rights, should be carried out in the daily life of the school.

In times of democratic crisis, we have to consider that justifying why we teach sociology reminds us that it is not enough to contribute to democratic education mediated by theories, concepts or themes. Democracy also needs to be an exercise in practical reflection by democratic schools. Thus, Sociology as a school subject can contribute to a truly democratic school, one that not only teaches what democracy is, but also structures itself through these practices that are constructed in a critical and collective way (CIGALES, 2021, p.75-77).

It is from this perspective that there is no doubt about the relevance of including subjects from the social sciences in nursing education, reinforcing the commitment to train professionals with a generalist, humanistic, critical and reflective education. A profes-

sional qualified to practice nursing, based on scientific and intellectual rigor and ethical and democratic principles, capable of knowing and intervening in the most prevalent health-disease problems and situations in the national epidemiological profile, identifying the biopsychosocial dimensions of their determinants. They are trained to act with a sense of social responsibility and commitment to citizenship, as promoters of the integral health of the human being.

Thus, as stipulated in the pedagogical project of the UFMG nursing course, it is necessary to ensure a citizen's education, which allows nurses to understand the complexity, plurality and dynamics of society and, above all, the existing social differences and inequalities, in order to build the foundations for a professional performance that is consistent and coherent with the technological bases of the profession and with the principles of autonomy and social responsibility in health care (UFMG, 2006, p.62).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This reflection, both in its origin and in its development, came about as a result of the great connection we have had since 1978 with the undergraduate nursing course, both as students and as teachers, always involved in teaching, research and extension activities; making visible our struggle for democratic and quality education in the process of training nurses.

From this perspective, this reflection has shown that one of the biggest challenges facing nursing education in the 1978s, which persists today, is overcoming disciplinary fragmentation and the centrality of biological science disciplines to the detriment of social science disciplines, which may be interfering with the consolidation of nursing education capable of training autonomous professionals who are critical and transform the reality that surrounds them.

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