

## Ongoing training in the development of nursing teacher skills



*A formação contínua no desenvolvimento de competências do professor de enfermagem*

*La formación continua en el desarrollo de competencias del profesor de enfermería*

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To acknowledge the importance given to continuous training in the development of professor skills.

**Method:** A qualitative, descriptive and exploratory study involving fifteen (15) career professors, selected intentionally, from the scientific nursing area of two public higher education institutions in Portugal. Data were collected using the discussion groups technique and analyzed using the content analysis technique. This process was submitted to the evaluation of two experts, resulting in agreement coefficients, which offer guarantees regarding the inferences and the categorization process.

**Results:** The professional development of the professor arose (category), involving two indicators: learning and the professional knowledge and skills development.

**Conclusions:** The data obtained shows that continuous training is determinant in the professional development of these professors, through learning and professional knowledge and in the development of skills.

**Keywords:** Continuous training. Nursing education. Professor. Skills.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Conhecer a importância atribuída à formação contínua no desenvolvimento de competências do professor.

**Método:** Estudo qualitativo, descritivo e exploratório, envolvendo quinze (15) professores de carreira, da área científica de enfermagem, de duas instituições públicas de ensino superior em Portugal, selecionados intencionalmente. Os dados foram recolhidos utilizando a técnica dos grupos de discussão e foram analisados através da técnica de análise de conteúdo. Este processo foi submetido à avaliação de dois peritos, resultando coeficientes de concordância, que oferecem garantias em relação às inferências e processo de categorização.

**Resultados:** Emergiu o desenvolvimento profissional do professor (categoria), envolvendo dois indicadores: a aprendizagem e o conhecimento profissional e o desenvolvimento de competências.

**Conclusões:** Os dados obtidos permitem colocar em evidência que a formação contínua é determinante no desenvolvimento profissional destes professores, pela aprendizagem e conhecimento profissional e no desenvolvimento de competências.

**Palavras-chave:** Formação continuada. Educação em enfermagem. Professor. Competências.

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Conocer la importancia atribuida a la formación continua, en el desarrollo de la competencia formativa del docente.

**Metodología:** Estudio cualitativo, descriptivo y exploratorio, con una muestra de quince (15) profesores de carrera en el área de enfermería, de dos instituciones públicas de enseñanza superior en Portugal, escogidos intencionalmente. Se recolectaron los datos a través de la técnica de grupos de discusión y se analizaron mediante la técnica de análisis de contenido. Este proceso se sometió a una validación de dos expertos, obteniéndose coeficientes de concordancia que proporcionan garantías sobre las inferencias y sobre el proceso de categorización.

**Resultados:** Se hizo patente que el desarrollo profesional del profesor (categoría), comprende dos indicadores: el aprendizaje y conocimiento profesional, y el desarrollo de competencias.

**Conclusiones:** Los datos obtenidos indican que la formación continua es determinante en el desarrollo profesional de estos profesores, por el aprendizaje y conocimiento profesional y por el desarrollo de competencias.

**Palabras clave:** Formación continua. Educación en enfermería. Profesor. Habilidades.

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## ■ INTRODUCTION

The approaches to teacher training and their professional development are of major importance and in recent years more relevant from the guidelines set out in the Lisbon Strategy. These guidelines reinforced the importance of teacher development in the context of lifelong learning policies. In this context, teachers have a decisive role as agents of change in a process of educational modernization and achievement of these goals<sup>(1)</sup>.

Teachers should act as agents of change, responding to social needs and challenges. They should transform these needs into learning for students by taking on the role of facilitators in learning future professionals. To this end, it is necessary to focus on their training and professional development, in defense of the change in teaching practices<sup>(2)</sup>.

Continuing education is a condition and an integral part of the professional development process of teachers<sup>(1,3)</sup>. It is a condition, because it involves a set of activities that help in the professional development of the teacher<sup>(3)</sup>. Continuous training is also seen as a concept that appears to be associated with the conception of professional development, through the learning that is implicit in these processes<sup>(2-4)</sup>. When viewed as an integral part of the professional development of teachers, continuous training is considered as an individual and/or collective process, permanent and continuous, encompassing the personal and professional development of the teacher and that must be concretized in the school, in the contexts in which who intervene as mediator of knowledge<sup>(5)</sup> and facilitator of learning through multiple experiences of a formal and informal nature, contributing decisively to the development of their professional skills<sup>(3-4)</sup>.

Skill is a concept that involves action, a practical activity contextualized and that presupposes the mobilization of knowledge. Skill is built through teacher training and exercise, involving knowledge, know-how and know-how, and these skills must be combined in their practice and in the contexts where the teacher intervenes<sup>(4,6)</sup>.

Continuing education and professional development programs, besides being a valuable aid for the teacher to fulfill the expectations of the teaching profession and society, are fundamental to help improve the quality of the work developed by the teacher, with an impact on his practices teachers and in order to respond to the students' learning needs<sup>(2)</sup>. These programs involve learning, improving and developing professional skills<sup>(3-4)</sup>.

The teacher is a teaching professional whose activity cannot be dissociated from learning. He is a lifelong learner<sup>(2)</sup>. The profession of teacher materializes considering the

formation and the professional knowledge, inherent and necessary to its professional practice.

The higher education teacher, and the nursing teacher, should incorporate a set of professional skills<sup>(6)</sup> linked to their teaching functions, that allow to focus the learning process on the student and assume their role of facilitator in the training of future professionals.

In this set of presuppositions and reflections, if the learning of the teaching profession is a complex process that accompanies the professional career of the teacher, supported in his teaching practice, in the richness of his experiences and in a very peculiar way, in the relevance of his formative processes, we decided to carry out this study, having as central question: What is the importance that nursing teachers attribute to continuous training in the development of their professional skills?

We defined the following objective for this study:

- Know the importance attributed to continuous training in the development of teacher skills.

We believe that the results of this study can be an important contribution to the reflection of this problem, helping to understand the relevance of the training processes in the professional development of the teacher, in nursing teaching.

## ■ METHOD

We carried out this exploratory and descriptive research, using methods of qualitative approach, based on the development and analysis of discussion groups.

In this study, we used as participants the career professors, from the scientific area of nursing, in public institutions of higher education in Portugal. The selection of career teachers was based on the importance of the participation of teachers who are in a situation of stability in their institutions. The sample includes professors from two higher education institutions, the University of Évora and the Instituto Politécnico de Porto Alegre, selected in an intentional way and duly framed with the selection criteria of the participants: to be a career teacher in the scientific area of nursing and to perform functions in public higher education institutions. It consists of fifteen professors belonging to the polytechnic subsystem, eight from the University of Évora and seven from the Instituto Politécnico de Porto Alegre. The composition of each group was in line with what Ramos advocates<sup>(7)</sup>, that the number of people should range from five to eight people.

The sample of teachers who participated in the discussion groups consisted of eight (8) female teachers (53.3%) and seven (7) male teachers (46.7%). In the sample, teach-

ers aged between 51 and 60 years (60%), followed by the group of teachers between 41 and 50 years, with 40%. We found that 46.7% (7) of these career teachers have a master's degree and that 40% (6) are doctors. Professors of the career range from 25 to 29 years of service, with 40% (6). We highlight the fact that 60% (9) of these teachers have been in teaching for 20 or more years. We also verified that 53.3% (8) are adjunct professors, while 46.7% (7) are coordinating teachers, without aggregation. In this sample, 73.3% (11) of teachers teach in 2nd cycle courses, while 26.7% (4) participate only in 1st cycle courses.

For this study, we chose to use the discussion groups, as a data collection technique. In addition to the characteristics of the participants, the choice of the participants and the technique had criteria, the richness of the data, the stimulation of the participants in the process, the low cost involved and the group assuming itself as an element of stability and consensus in the debate on certain questions<sup>(7)</sup>.

The moderation of the two sessions was carried out by the researcher. It had as a guiding thread, the script built for the purpose, supported in a central question. The sessions were held in a place defined by each institution.

The moderator started each session, informing the theme and objectives of the study. Each teacher was asked to focus on his/her teaching experience and on the aspects related to the object of study. The role of the moderator

was explained, clarified and reached a consensus around the central question of the study<sup>(7)</sup>. The sessions were as scheduled. Participants discussed the subject freely and spontaneously, focusing on their experiences of teachers in the scientific area of nursing.

The recording of the two sessions involved the use of technological audio resources. Subsequently, this information was properly transcribed and submitted to content analysis (thematic categorical analysis), in line with what Bardin defended<sup>(8)</sup>. The use of this qualitative research technique allowed us to interpret the information gathered through the discussion groups.

While respecting the ethical principles that should guide the development of a study of this nature, some efforts were made with the institutions and participants to ensure their free and informed consent to the study. This study has the opinion 26/2012 (December 11) of the ethics committee of the School of Health of the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu and the opinion of the University of Extremadura.

The content analysis performed on the material collected through the discussion groups was submitted to expert evaluation and focused on the adequacy and pertinence of the inferences in each unit of record, the pertinence of the categorization process and the qualities of exclusivity, homogeneity and objectivity, which resulted in the coefficients of agreement presented in Chart 1 and which are assumed as a guarantee for the inferences and the categorization process.

Evaluation item	Coefficient of Agreement
Adequacy-pertinence of the inference of each registration unit	.615
Relevance of the categorization process	.82
Qualities of exclusivity, homogeneity and objectivity of the analysis	1.0

**Chart 1** - Coefficients of agreement resulting from validation of the data by the experts

Source: Research data.

## ■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

These results derive from a thematic categorical analysis, involving operations of dismemberment of text in units (themes) and the analogical regrouping in categories and indicators, taking as a reference a criterion of semantic categorization.

In the dimension under study, the importance attributed to the continuous training in the development of skills, emerged the category Professional Development of the Teacher, defined posteriori as a result of the analogical and progressive classification of the elements. This category includes two indicators:

- Learning and professional knowledge and
- The development of skills.

Learning and professional knowledge emerge in the discourse of these participants with various meanings.

It is associated with updating teacher knowledge. Being a professional committed to teaching and learning, the updating of knowledge aims to accompany the changes. The teacher is a lifelong learner and ongoing training is the key to ensuring this update, improvement, learning, and effective performance<sup>(2-4)</sup>.

*Knowledge as we all know is ephemeral, is something that lasts. In the present day, knowledge is something with a very limited duration, what we know today, tomorrow is not completely true. Therefore, for me, continuous formation makes me feel in that context, that is, it is precisely as the name itself indicates, it is a formation that is continu-*

*ous because it is constantly updating what is our knowledge. (P10)*

In addition to updating it, it is a necessity for the performance of teachers, and it is fundamental that the training activities are contextualized in the context of the teacher's work, in their practice and framed with the student's learning needs<sup>(1-2)</sup>, and the teacher should be the active protagonist of his/her training, in his/her own working context<sup>(4)</sup> and capable of forming and generating change.

*In laboratory practices we must exemplify something that is not part of our day-to-day life ... that is, we are not in the clinic and we must keep abreast of what is going on in the clinic so that the students take from here preview of what will be its actual implementation [...]. Therefore, the teacher naturally must be up to date with the new currents. It also must be up-to-date, not only in these aspects of clinical practice, but also in a knowledge that sometimes cannot be measured very well, but one that is wanted very much. When we conduct master's and bachelors' work, when we are present at juries there is a whole knowledge that we must have already, to play our part well. (P5)*

It is highlighted that the teacher learns through different training modalities<sup>(3,9)</sup>, including formal learning opportunities available through organized training activities, informal opportunities in the context of learning involving the school, and learning, without specific guidance, from experience<sup>(9)</sup>. The holistic and dynamic nature of professional development processes encompasses the multiple formal, informal, collective, individual activities in which the teacher engages throughout his/her professional career<sup>(9)</sup>. The informal vocational development opportunities experienced by teachers at school and in the different learning contexts in which they intervene are central to their learning<sup>(4)</sup>. This is a reality lived by the professors of the scientific area of Nursing, in which the contexts of practice are decisive in the articulation between theory and practice and in the integration of knowledge<sup>(3)</sup>.

*And we must not forget that it is not only through formal training, but that here the non-formal, the contact we have with the practice contexts are an important element for the integration of knowledge in the nursing course more directly and that allow an interaction between theory and practice. (P11)*

The learning and professional knowledge that comes from continuous training is also highlighted by its relevance in the activity of the teacher, which allows the stu-

dent to understand and participate in the realities that integrate. The teacher training activities should respond to the needs of the students by allowing them access to and acquisition of this knowledge<sup>(9)</sup>.

*So if we have more demanding students, because they want to compete with others from all over the world. We have students scattered around the world, we also must take these steps and therefore it is difficult only through formal continuing education, but we often update ourselves on the internet, in books we buy, which is important, but we must walk also at the pace that is imposed on us. (P13)*

Contact with clinical practice is highlighted as a space of professional knowledge<sup>(10)</sup>, so that the teacher can learn, keep up to date and connect with professional knowledge. This approach involves a more dialogic, participatory, more practice-oriented training, as well as innovation projects, learning from teachers in practice and practice<sup>(3)</sup>. This is fundamental in the teacher's learning processes and in the connection with professional knowledge, and it is desirable that more knowledge, the ability to manage resources with greater skill and their use in real contexts, and the teacher feel more satisfied and fulfilled, in professional terms<sup>(10)</sup>.

*We also must prepare for clinical skills and this is another dimension that confers complexity to what it is to be a teacher in the nursing area, which is not the case with other professions [...] I think it is extremely favorable ... to make inroads into practice to stay current . Realizing how people are thinking, how they make decisions, what's up with the latest timeliness. (P7)*

Learning and knowledge derive from reflection processes in groups and work groups, assuming the needs of the collective and involved in a collaborative work dynamics<sup>(3,11-12)</sup>. The reflection on the tools they use, the discussion on ways to promote learning, the new methodologies<sup>(11)</sup> and the follow-up of interns. The training presupposes the establishment of spaces for reflection and participation so that teachers in the nursing sciences learn from the reflection and analysis of problematic situations, assuming as a starting point the needs of the collective<sup>(3,5)</sup>. The training centered on a reflective practice is fundamental for the teacher to learn how to deal with difficulties and problematic situations and to learn how to develop new methodological options that facilitate student learning<sup>(11,13)</sup>. The learning processes that are intrinsic to this model of reflexive formation are determinant in the development of critical teachers, autonomous and able to make decisions and intervene in the different contexts of their practice<sup>(3,11-12)</sup>.

*In fact the Bologna process required us much discussion about new tools we use and there really was a need to rethink training, the need to take readings about the new methodologies we use, the discussion between us on new ways to promote learning [...], to use the computer tools as a form of connection to students that also always has an important aspect; as well as the new methodologies that we have adopted, which we discuss among ourselves and that we are always discussing and studying, to better follow up the students in the stage. Here is an [...] organizational learning. We have learned a lot from reflection whether done in a group or done in working groups on the methodologies we use. (P2)*

The role of reflection and exchange of experiences with colleagues (even if they are not of the disciplinary area), of the feedback that the students provide, is emphasized, as well as the importance of communication and socialization among peers<sup>(9)</sup> in the construction of the identity of the teacher<sup>(5,14)</sup>. The reflection on the practice with other teachers, professionals and students, as a collective training resource, fosters the exchange of ideas and experiences, dialogue and the development of cooperative processes that are fundamental to teacher learning and the enrichment of professional knowledge<sup>(3,11-12)</sup>.

*My enrichment as a teacher is also found, established and strengthened in the relationship with other teachers in other areas of education. I have a chair in the Master of Education and it is a great learning space whenever I meet with that group of teachers and whenever I also teach the chair. But, especially in meetings with teachers, it is really an area of enormous learning and it improves my role as a teacher. (P8)*

The development of skills reflects the professional development of the teacher in the course of his continuous training<sup>(6)</sup>. Skills are the ability of a person to act effectively in each situation and presuppose more than a set of isolated knowledges. Involve the mobilization of knowledge in contextualized action<sup>(4,10)</sup>. In addition to the cognitive resources that the subject mobilizes, it encompasses a diversification of professional knowledge, schemes of action and attitudes mobilized in contextualized actions<sup>(4,10,15)</sup>.

It is hoped that teacher competencies will facilitate the students' intellectual access to content, to different practices, to foster collaborative work and to contribute to a flexible and well-adjusted training in nursing practice<sup>(4)</sup>.

These participants preferably focus on two competencies of the higher education teacher, design the methodology/organize the activities and communicate with the students<sup>(6)</sup>.

The use of methodologies in nursing education should

be student-centered and their learning<sup>(2,13)</sup>. It is worth noting importance of pedagogical, active, reflexive and participative methodologies, from which research processes and the acquisition of skills in the student<sup>(4,15)</sup>. The uses of technological resources are facilitators of the disciplinary and collaborative learning by the student, assuming the teacher the role of mediator of knowledge<sup>(16)</sup>.

*Training in issues related to new technologies is very important for the teacher, especially those related to the development of the methodologies themselves. [...] Teaching currently must be more student-centered, in its competencies than in processes and in the contents. Therefore, I think that the new methodologies must be grasped by the teachers with seriousness, with scientific honesty [...] I think the issues of didactics and pedagogy are issues that cannot be neglected. (P3)*

In the speech of these teachers, the importance of continuous training in the development of the skill to communicate with students was also highlighted. Emerges the bet of these teachers in the wealth and the exchange of experiences with the students<sup>(6)</sup>, whose formative sense is determinant for their professional development and for the construction of their identity, as teacher<sup>(4-5)</sup>. The teacher's learning of his practice with the students is crucial in the development of his/her relational skills, with repercussions on his/her communication with students and the creation of conditions conducive to meaningful learning and student construction of a transforming spirit<sup>(6)</sup>.

*I seek this enrichment in the day-to-day in the pedagogical relationship that I establish with the students. I seek this enrichment when I go to practice. (P8)*

This skill is crucial for the teacher to take on the role of facilitator of student learning and to engage in collaborative and reflective work. These findings make it clear that communicating and constructively engaging with the student, promoting the student's personal development, supporting the building of meaningful pre-vocational learning<sup>(17)</sup>, and enable a professional judgment in the student, express the concern of a teacher who focuses on the person of the student<sup>(6)</sup>.

## ■ FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The design of this study allowed to know the importance that these professors of the scientific area of Nursing attribute to the continuous formation in the development of professional skills. In general, for these teachers, the con-

tinuous training proves to be preponderant in their professional development, translating into learning and professional knowledge and in the development of skills.

In a more specific way, the learning and the professional knowledge of these teachers appears associated with the updating of knowledge and as a necessity for their professional performance. These teachers learn through different training modalities, the formal and informal learning opportunities and highlight the relevance of these processes in the teacher's activity and to respond to the needs of the students. Continuing education in promoting the professional development of the teacher presupposes incursions into practice so that he can learn and be able to link with professional knowledge. The processes of group reflection and the dynamics of collaborative work are decisive for their learning.

The development of competencies is directed to the needs of the students and to their teaching practice. The most outstanding skills were to design the methodology/organize the activities and communicate with the students.

These findings allow us to consider that institutions involved in nursing education should develop mechanisms that allow them to not only identify but respond to the training needs of teachers and students. This process presupposes the reconciliation of the strategic needs and interests of higher education institutions with the needs and motivations of teacher training. It is essential to develop further studies related to the impact of continuous training on teachers' practices, seeking to understand their motivations and needs for continuous training, within the framework of their praxis.

As a limitation of this study, it is highlighted the difficulty of supporting and comparing this data with that of other previous studies, due to the lack of research on this subject in the context of nursing teaching.

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