

The importance of interdisciplinary work during undergraduate nursing studies



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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate nursing courses are seeking, through interdisciplinary work, the training of professionals capable of promoting the integral health of human beings. This process of (re)construction of knowledge places the student at the center of the teaching-learning process. Thus, the objective of

this study was to evaluate the perception of nurses in relation to the interdisciplinary work carried out in undergraduate courses, as academics and, today, as professionals. We opted for a descriptive field research, carried out with a questionnaire, applied through the Facebook social network of the Meta® group to 96 nurses who performed interdisciplinary work throughout their undergraduate studies. The result of the research showed that there was a change in the interviewees' perception of the importance of work during the course and after graduation. Of those surveyed, 70% said they did not consider work important at the beginning of the course, while 88% said they understood the importance of it after graduation. Exactly 76% of the nurses interviewed considered interdisciplinary work more difficult than other jobs and 59% claimed that they would not have done the work if it had not been a curricular requirement. Despite the complexity, the curricular requirement enabled the students to have the interdisciplinary experience necessary for professional life, since 83% of the interviewees recognized the importance of the work for the profession. Thus, the interdisciplinary work applied during undergraduate nursing, despite the challenges, changed the perspective of nurses in relation to knowledge, making them critical, reflective professionals, capable of working as a team, promoting integral health and exercising citizenship.

Keywords: Interdisciplinarity, Nursing, Teaching and learning.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century, science moved towards specializations, but today it presents the opposite movement, through interdisciplinarity, a path of integration of knowledge (POMBO, 2004). Interdisciplinarity "seeks the totality of knowledge, respecting the specificity of the disciplines" (FAZENDA, 2012, p.87). This is a new attitude towards the issue of knowledge (FAZENDA, 2001).

In higher education, interdisciplinarity emerged as a way to enable the development of critical-reflective knowledge with the challenge of training professionals better prepared for the job market. In



the area of nursing, the National Curriculum Guidelines emphasize the need for integrated education with a generalist profile, based on scientific rigor (BRASIL, 2001; SANTOS, 2003). These guidelines determine that theory and practice permeate all nursing education, highlighting the integrated and interdisciplinary nature of its structuring (GALINDOI; GOLDENBERG, 2008).

This work is justified because it deals with a contemporary theme, which has undergone (re)constructions to be put into practice in higher education institutions. However, as in any process of change, the discomfort and complaints of the agents involved are inevitable. Are academics prepared to understand and accept interdisciplinary work? In order to evaluate this process of change, we opted for a field research with nurses who performed interdisciplinary work during their undergraduate studies at a nursing school in the interior of Minas Gerais. Among the various possible questions pertinent to the theme, the following question was guided: What is the opinion of nurses about the interdisciplinary work carried out during graduation, from the perspective of students and, today, as professionals?

Thus, the objective of this study was to evaluate, through a questionnaire, the perception of nurses in relation to the interdisciplinary work carried out in the undergraduate course, as academics and, today, as professionals.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Interdisciplinarity emerged in Europe in the 1960s, from student movements that demanded a new status of education, with the breaking of the fragmentation of teaching (FAZENDA, 2012). In the 1970s, the movement arrived in Brazil, revealing its main theorists in the area, Hilton Japiassú and Ivani Fazenda. These two researchers influenced practically all bibliographic production on the subject in the country.

The 1970s were fundamentally marked by the search for terminological clarification of the word interdisciplinarity, although there is still no consensus on its definition (FAZENDA, 2012). The definitions of interdisciplinarity range from the simple cooperation of disciplines, to the reciprocal exchange of knowledge. According to Japiassú (1976, apud FAZENDA, 2012), the prefix 'inter' means exchange or reciprocity, while the term 'discipline' means instruction or science. Therefore, interdisciplinarity can be understood as an act of exchange between various areas of knowledge.

However, more important than defining interdisciplinarity, because the very act of defining establishes barriers, is to reflect on the attitudes that constitute interdisciplinarity, such as humility in the face of the limits of knowledge (TRINDADE, 2008). It is a new attitude, a win-win exchange: students, teachers and society.



It is important to highlight that the term interdisciplinarity is found in the middle of the words multidisciplinary and transdisciplinarity. Pombo (2004) considers that multidisciplinary is the minimum pole of integration, involving the juxtaposition of disciplines, without worrying about interconnecting them. Transdisciplinarity, on the other hand, is the maximum pole, presupposing the sharing of fundamentals, when the cooperation between the various subjects is such that it is no longer possible to separate them. Interdisciplinarity, therefore, is defined in the multiple possible variations between the two poles, with the aim of defragmenting knowledge.

It can be seen, therefore, that not only the term interdisciplinarity is polysemic, but also the initiatives to apply this concept. Lenoir (1998) points out that interdisciplinarity can be classified based on four purposes: scientific, scholarly, professional and practical. Each purpose is organized based on the objectives we wish to achieve, both in terms of research and teaching, and their applicability in the context of the classroom.

In school interdisciplinarity, the perspective is educational, therefore, the notions, purposes, skills and competencies aim, above all, at the learning process, respecting the student and his knowledge (FAZENDA, 2008). Regardless of how it will be applied in an educational institution, interdisciplinarity aims at dialogue between disciplines, the integration of knowledge, and the purpose of finding unity in the diversity of knowledge (FAZENDA, 2001).

2.2 INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK

The interdisciplinary initiatives are as varied as the concept of the theme itself. Each interdisciplinary action has a theoretical-practical status that depends on one's own point of view, on the experience of each one and on the educational experience, which is particular (POMBO, 2004). No proposal for interdisciplinary praxis can be judged as adequate or inadequate, due to the problems and difficulties that will certainly arise in its development, but it should be judged as necessary and natural.

Interdisciplinarity presupposes an interaction and interpenetration between disciplines, from the simple communication of ideas to the mutual integration of knowledge (JAPIASSÚ, 1994). Teaching based on interdisciplinarity, whether with disciplines, assignments or research, has great structuring power. All concepts and procedures are organized around more global units, in which several disciplines are articulated, providing the student with a critical-reflective look at the proposed themes, as well as a view of the socio-professional knowledge experienced in theory or practice (FAZENDA, 2012). In this context, the application of interdisciplinary work in higher education institutions becomes essential for good professional training.

It is important that these works encompass a movement at three levels – curricular, didactic and pedagogical – within an educational institution, as proposed by Lenoir (1998). The curricular level



occurs when the disciplines are defined and consequently the interdependence and complementarity between them is determined, thus providing an interdisciplinary structure, prescribed in the curriculum. The second level, related to didactics, consists of articulating what the curriculum prescribes, inserting it into learning situations. Finally, the pedagogical level consists of the use of didactic interdisciplinarity in the classroom, taking advantage of all the possible implications of this space (LENOIR, 1998).

In this way, the interdisciplinary work applied in a higher education institution has the function of improving the reflection on knowledge; seek the totality of knowledge, respect the specificity of the disciplines; promote the integration of praxis with socio-professional needs, in addition to narrowing the distance that separates the university from society. Interdisciplinarity enables, therefore, the development of critical-reflective knowledge, in order to train citizens and professionals better prepared for the job market.

Higher education institutions that are open to the possibility of interdisciplinary work propose the overcoming "that is accomplished through dialogue between people who make the discipline a movement of constant reflection, creation-action. An action that depends, above all, on people's attitudes" (JOSÉ, 2008, p. 94).

It is important to emphasize that despite all the benefits of interdisciplinary work, it is a paradigm shift, and like any change, it provokes attitudes of fear and refusal. Every new one bothers you. Because it questions what has already been acquired, what has already been instituted, what has already been fixed and what has already been accepted (JAPIASSÚ, 1994). Pulling teachers and students out of their comfort zone can cause awkwardness and aversion. It is necessary, however, to insist, because society has changed and needs professionals established on an interdisciplinary basis, especially in the area of health, a fundamentally interdisciplinary sector.

2.3 INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK IN NURSING

According to the National Curriculum Guidelines (DCN) for undergraduate nursing courses, nurses should have generalist, humanistic, critical and reflective education, capable of promoting the integral health of human beings, within ethical principles (BRASIL, 2001). Nurses should be able to intervene in health-disease problems/situations, with a sense of social responsibility and commitment to citizenship, being able to promote the integral health of human beings, thus making up the principles of interdisciplinarity. In the area of nursing, the DCNs also emphasize that all theoretical and practical activities, carried out from the beginning of the course, must have an integrated and interdisciplinary character (GALINDOI; GOLDENBERG, 2008).

Such guidelines triggered a movement by higher education institutions to meet the new educational requirements. Undergraduate courses seek to reorganize the curriculum based on



interdisciplinarity, seeking to adapt to the new legal needs, a reflection of the new labor market. It is necessary to integrate disciplinary contents, innovate in pedagogical methodologies and adapt to the new profile demanded by society (ALMEIDA et al., 2012). In addition, it is important to remember that the area of health is essentially interdisciplinary, since it refers to the human being and its multifacets, which include social relationships, emotional and affective expressions, in addition to biology (GARCIA et al., 2007; OLIVEIRA et al., 2011).

Interdisciplinarity in the health area is often confused with teamwork, however, without knowledge construction, there is no interdisciplinarity, therefore, any step in the construction of knowledge is valid (OLIVEIRA et al., 2011). As Pombo (2004) describes, interdisciplinarity is any of the multiple possible variations between multidisciplinary and transdisciplinarity. Therefore, it is not wrong that it starts with teamwork, but it is essential that it evolves into a transversal work that benefits everyone.

For success, the (re)construction of interdisciplinary work in a nursing school depends on the alliance between students, faculty, and management. Galindoi and Goldenberg (2008), however, point out that the resistance associated with the lack of knowledge of teachers and students can be a major obstacle. However, the change of paradigms is necessary to train nurses who are better prepared to work in this new health scenario, in line with the duties of citizens. Thus, the need to apply interdisciplinarity in the fields of nursing becomes evident, whether during academic training or during professional life.

3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This was a field research carried out with nurses who developed interdisciplinary work as nursing students at a college in the interior of Minas Gerais. The research had a descriptive character, when the researcher only records and describes the observed facts without interfering in them. The data collection procedure chosen was a survey, which involved the direct questioning of people, through the questionnaire technique, an instrument of rapid application to raise opinions (PRODANOV; FREITAS, 2013).

It is important to emphasize that the research also involved bibliographic study, when it was possible to evaluate concepts, results, discussions and conclusions produced in previous research (PRODANOV; FREITAS, 2013). For this part of the study, searches were conducted in scientific publications with free access on the internet, as well as academic books and government websites.

To answer the guiding question of this research, a structured questionnaire was applied to a group of 100 nurses who performed interdisciplinary work throughout their undergraduate studies at a college in the interior of Minas Gerais from 2006 to 2011.



The questionnaire was applied through the social network Facebook®, through the individual inbox of each nurse on the researcher's list of former students. Data collection was carried out from January to February 2014. Each questionnaire was preceded by a brief explanation about the research and followed by a thank you for participating.

The questionnaire consisted of five closed questions, with a 'yes' or 'no' answer, referring to the interdisciplinary work, as follows:

- 1 – At the beginning of the course, did you think interdisciplinary work was important?
- 2 - Was interdisciplinary work more difficult than other academic works?
- 3 - If it wasn't a curricular requirement, would you have done the interdisciplinary work?
- 4 - Today, after graduation, do you understand the importance of interdisciplinary work?
- 5 - Is interdisciplinary work important for your professional life?

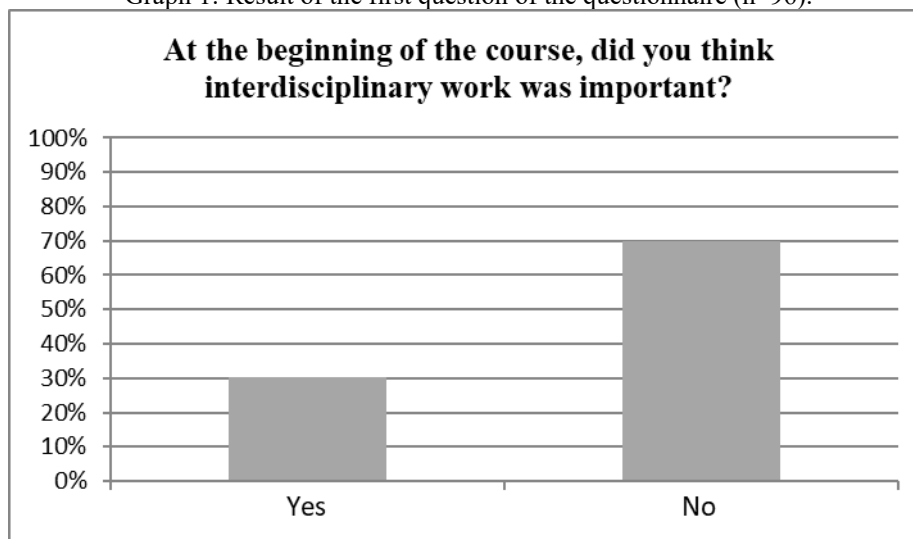
After the questionnaire was applied, the data were tabulated and analyzed to obtain the percentages for each question in the questionnaire. Tabulation made it possible to synthesize the research data in order to be able to represent them graphically, in search of better understanding and quick interpretation (MARCONI; LAKATOS, 2010). Subsequently, the data were interpreted by linking the results with existing knowledge.

4 RESULTS

Of the 100 questionnaires applied through the social network Facebook, 96 responses were obtained from the Meta® group, which became the sample number of the survey.

The initial question of the questionnaire refers to the first impression of interdisciplinary work at the beginning of the undergraduate nursing course. Of the 96 interviewees, 70% did not consider interdisciplinary work important at the beginning of the course (GRAPH 1).

Graph 1: Result of the first question of the questionnaire (n=96).

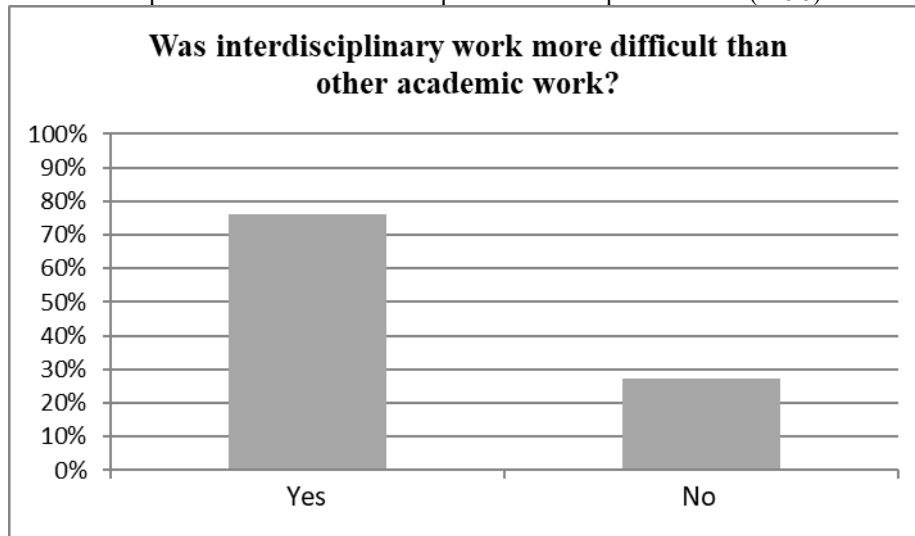


Source: Survey data.



Regarding the second question, regarding the difficulty of interdisciplinary work, 76% of the interviewees claimed that such work was more difficult than other academic work (GRAPH 2).

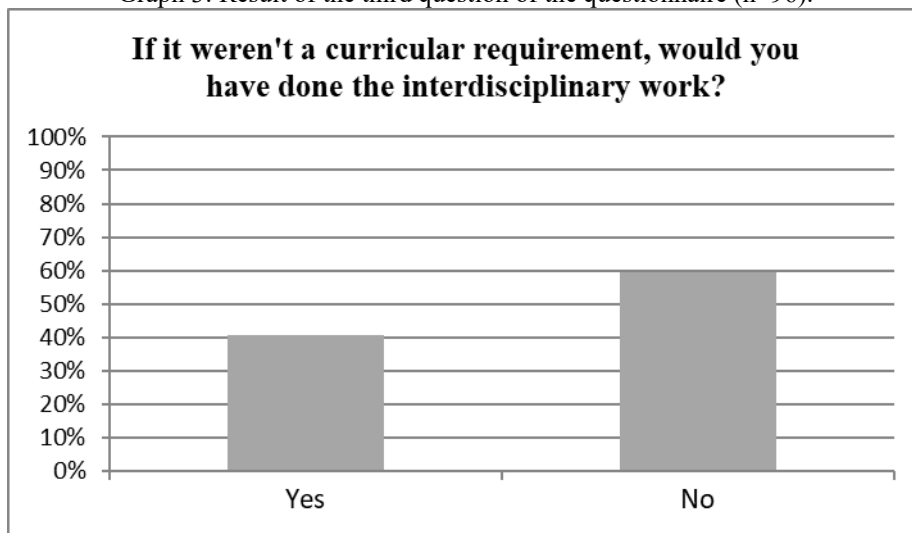
Graph 2: Result of the second question of the questionnaire (n=96).



Source: Survey data.

The third question encompassed the proactivity of the then academics in doing interdisciplinary work, if it were not a curricular requirement. In this question, 59% of the nurses interviewed said that they would not have done the work if they did not need the credits (GRAPH 3).

Graph 3: Result of the third question of the questionnaire (n=96).

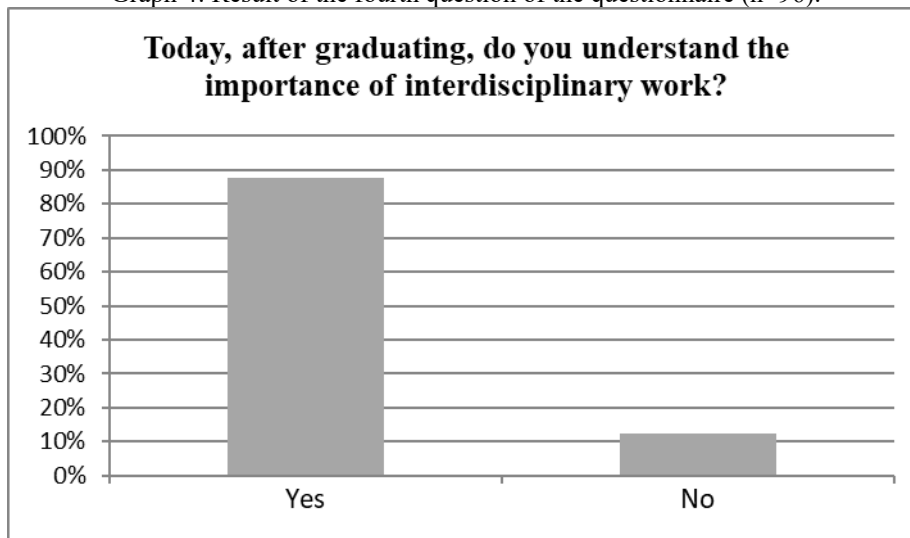


Source: Survey data.

About question four, the nurses were asked if they began to understand the importance of interdisciplinary work after finishing their undergraduate studies. Of the 96 interviewees, 88% said they had come to understand the importance of this type of work (GRAPH 4).



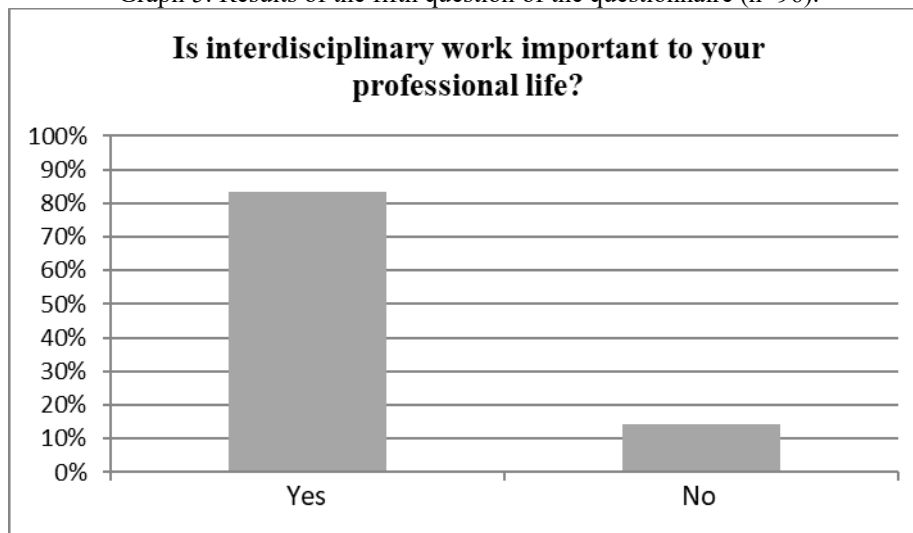
Graph 4: Result of the fourth question of the questionnaire (n=96).



Source: Survey data.

The last question of the questionnaire addressed the importance of interdisciplinary work for the professional life of nurses. In this question, 83% of the nurses interviewed claimed that this type of work is important for their daily work (GRAPH 5).

Graph 5: Results of the fifth question of the questionnaire (n=96).



Source: Survey data.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 IMPORTANCE OF INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

Faced with this globalized world and new market perspectives, education has been breaking traditional teaching models in order to train professionals who are better prepared for the job market and to live in society. Supporting an undergraduate nursing course in accordance with the National Curriculum Guidelines enables nurses to promote the integral health of human beings in an interdisciplinary way (BRASIL, 2001). From this perspective, interdisciplinarity emerges as a way to



overcome the fragmentation between disciplines, providing a dialogue between them, relating them to each other and to the reality of society. The integration of knowledge ensures the construction of a critical-reflective knowledge, which should be increasingly valued in the teaching-learning process.

In the face of frequent changes in society and the demand for more qualified professionals for the labor market, interdisciplinarity is not just another law. Interdisciplinarity is a new attitude towards the question of knowledge (FAZENDA, 2001). It is something that is already being done in society, whether we like it or not (POMBO, 2004). To do so, it is necessary to think interdisciplinary, to do interdisciplinary and to be interdisciplinary. And for this to happen, it is necessary for nurses to practice interdisciplinarity from graduation, to develop the skills and competencies necessary for a good professional and citizenship education.

In higher education institutions, interdisciplinary work offers a stimulus for the discussion of reality, emphasizes the (re)construction of knowledge, and helps in the training of critical-reflective professionals (TELLES; GUEVARA, 2011). Galindoi and Goldenberg (2008) point out that, preferably, all theoretical and practical activities, present from the beginning of the course, should be permeated with interdisciplinarity. In this way, interdisciplinary work, when applied from the beginning of the course, can facilitate the perception of the student as a transforming, thinking, critical and reflective subject, no matter how difficult it may be to change the paradigms of education and convince academics of the importance of interdisciplinarity.

In the present survey, it was found that 70% of the interviewees said that at the beginning of the course they did not consider interdisciplinary work important. For students who had recently entered the academy, it was a novelty that countered the comfort of ready-made knowledge. If knowledge were absolute, education would be mere transmission and memorization of contents, however, it is dynamic, therefore, there is a need for criticism, dialogue, communication, and interdisciplinarity itself (FAZENDA, 2003). Unfortunately, many students have become accustomed to their role as receivers of information imposed by the old educational model, and have forgotten that they must be active subjects in the learning process.

Back to the questionnaire, why would 70% of academics consider something important that they didn't even know about? As Japiassú (1994) said, every change bothers and provokes attitudes of fear and refusal. Getting out of inertia is no easy task. Just like in physics, pulling a body out of the inertia of rest requires force to set it in motion. Therefore, insisting was necessary and not giving up was essential. Once the inertia of rest was broken, the minds of the students were opened and, today, after graduation, almost 90% of the interviewees said they understood the importance of interdisciplinary work developed during graduation. It is important to emphasize that all contact with the object to be known involves a re-admiration and a transformation of reality, therefore, it can take time (FAZENDA, 2003). But time was certainly permeated by the memory of the challenges overcome,



of the active participation in the teaching-learning process, of the possibility of constructing a critical-reflective subject and of the main teaching: learning to be.

Therefore, there is a change in the perception of academics in relation to interdisciplinary work, from the perspective of students and, today, as professionals. Interdisciplinary work has come to be better understood over time. After all, this type of work must be (re)built by the entire team along the way, since interdisciplinarity is a joint process. It is the attitude towards knowledge, which highlights the limits of the discipline while valuing the other disciplines and the agents that sustain them (FAZENDA, 2012).

Therefore, the present study demonstrated the maturation of interdisciplinary concepts throughout the undergraduate nursing course. In a study conducted by Oliveira et al. (2011), students in the 2nd period of nursing already express maturity in understanding the concept of interdisciplinarity, demonstrating that the understanding and application of the theme are independent of time. Fazenda (2012) reminds us that it is not enough to understand the meaning of interdisciplinarity in order to work in an interdisciplinary way, it is necessary, first of all, to perceive oneself as interdisciplinary. The attitude of professionals towards this approach is fundamental to favor "the learning process, respecting the students' knowledge and their integration" (FAZENDA, 2008, p.21), in order to develop a reflective critical being, builder of their knowledge and active agent in society.

Thus, adopting interdisciplinary work in an undergraduate nursing course is in line with the commitment to the pillars of education, the National Curriculum Guidelines, and the commitment to the training of citizen professionals. Demonstrating to academics the importance of these works should be a constant challenge towards the training of professionals who are better prepared to work in society.

5.2 DIFFICULTIES IN CARRYING OUT INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK

Interdisciplinary attitudes are necessary, but they are far from a simple process. Today's world demands increasingly versatile people to face society and its frequent changes (TRINDADE, 2008). Working on interdisciplinary issues in educational institutions has been the great challenge for educators.

In this survey, 76% of the nurses interviewed said that interdisciplinary work was more difficult than other academic work. This result was expected, since any interdisciplinary work will have a higher degree of difficulty than other disciplinary works. After all, interdisciplinarity is much more than the joining of disciplines, it is an act of exchange between areas of knowledge. Telles and Guevara (2011) add that interdisciplinary work offers a stimulus for the discussion of reality, emphasizes the (re)construction of knowledge, helping in the formation of critical-reflective professionals, and such activities are not easy for those who are used to traditional teaching. The interdisciplinary works consist



of a deconstruction, a rupture with the traditional and with the school routine (TRINDADE, 2008). These are therefore arduous tasks, but they are necessary and rewarding.

It is worth emphasizing that the complexity of interdisciplinary work is not only related to what is complicated, obscure or inexplicable, but mainly to what can be connected, can be woven, such as a weave, recognizing the order and disorder of knowledge (TRINDADE, 2008). In this aspect, interdisciplinary studies were and will continue to be more complex than other academic studies since they involve a series of variables. These are works that unite disciplines, stimulate discussions, reasoning, promote the (re)construction of knowledge, take the student out of the role of mere spectator and place him at the center of the teaching-learning process.

However, despite the benefits of interdisciplinary work, the initiative on the part of the students was low. This survey showed that 59% of the nurses interviewed said that they would not have done the interdisciplinary work if it had not been a curricular requirement. Therefore, it is still necessary to propose and assign credits to interdisciplinary works, in the expectation of completing the four pillars of education. This data reiterates the need to build the movement at three levels: curricular, didactic and pedagogical, in order to achieve interdisciplinarity (LENOIR, 1998).

The curricular level constitutes the first level, and consists of establishing the disciplines and their interdependencies, in order to set up an interdisciplinary structure to be followed. Galindoi and Goldenberg (2008) add that the search for integration in curricular reorganization is based on the effort to construct multidisciplinary, as a starting point for interdisciplinarity. The didactic and pedagogical levels can only be achieved if there is a curricular foundation for interdisciplinarity, since the curriculum guides all the activities of an institution. Therefore, the curricular requirements, which "oblige" students to do the proposed interdisciplinary work, have great importance within the interdisciplinarity process.

It is worth remembering that it was thanks to this obligation that nursing students were able to experience interdisciplinary work and almost 90% of them said, at the end of the course, that they understood the importance of such work.

Another aspect that hinders the triggering of interdisciplinarity is concentrated in teachers. Many course coordinators highlight the resistance associated with the lack of knowledge and unpreparedness of teachers (GALINDOI; GOLDENBERG, 2008). Many teachers have limitations due to their disciplinary training (GARCIA et al., 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to train teachers to make their real engagement in interdisciplinary work effective (FAZENDA, 2012).

Despite the difficulties of students and some professors, interdisciplinarity is something that is already being done in society (POMBO, 2004). It is up to all those involved to build the work, with re-evaluations at each stage, respecting the consideration of interdisciplinarity as a process (FAZENDA, 2012).



5.3 IMPORTANCE OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN THE PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF NURSES

As previously demonstrated, the nurses interviewed realized, at the end of the course, the importance of the interdisciplinary work carried out during the undergraduate course. In addition, 83% of respondents recognized the importance of interdisciplinary work for professional life.

This result was expected, since health is an essentially interdisciplinary area, since it refers to the human being and its multifacets (GARCIA et al., 2007). Nursing requires professionals who are based on interdisciplinarity and complementarity between the various areas, in order to achieve excellence in the act of caring (OLIVEIRA et al., 2011). It is worth knowing that these professionals are guided by interdisciplinarity to intervene in health-disease problems/situations, with social responsibility and commitment to citizenship.

When the National Curriculum Guidelines law for nursing courses defined the necessary professional profile, it certainly took into account the current society, with new requirements and constant changes. The profile desired by the market, of a generalist, humanistic, critical and reflective nurse, capable of promoting the integral health of human beings and working as a team (BRASIL, 2001), can be shaped by interdisciplinarity. And working, perceiving oneself and being interdisciplinary can be learned from the beginning of graduation and unfolded into professional life.

The new health scenario defends the need to think about multidisciplinary teamwork with a view to interdisciplinarity, despite the fact that interdisciplinary experiences developed in health practice are still scarce (MATOS; PIRES, 2009). Everything is still new, and like all new things generate fear and need time for changes to take place. However, it is necessary to try, after all, any attempt that encompasses something between multidisciplinary and transdisciplinarity because it is considered an interdisciplinary attitude (POMBO, 2004).

Therefore, it was expected that the majority of the interviewees would recognize the importance of interdisciplinary work in their professional lives, since this is what the new market yearns for, although it is still a great challenge for the health area.

6 FINAL THOUGHTS

Interdisciplinarity, which seeks the totality of knowledge, respecting the specificity of the disciplines, emerged as a way to enable the development of critical-reflective knowledge, in order to train professionals better prepared for the job market.

In this context, the application of interdisciplinary work during undergraduate nursing studies has become extremely important, since the health area is essentially interdisciplinary, as it takes care of the human being and its multiple facets. The application of such works ensured the breaking of the paradigms of disciplinarization, allowed the confrontation of the difficulties related to the work,



enabling the significant learning of the students, characteristics necessary for human and citizen development.

The present study demonstrated that, despite the difficulties, there has been a change in the perception of the importance of interdisciplinary work by nurses as academics and, today, as professionals. Several factors may have contributed to the recognition of the importance of interdisciplinary work at the end of the course, such as: maturity, greater understanding of the objectives and demands of the labor market, as well as greater applicability of knowledge in society. In addition, the emerging need for the use of interdisciplinarity in the health work environment allowed a new perception of the then students, now nurses, in relation to the work carried out during the undergraduate course.

Despite the greater complexity of the interdisciplinary work, the curricular requirement was decisive for the students to experience interdisciplinarity throughout the undergraduate course. This experience probably changed the perspective of nurses in relation to knowledge, making them critical and reflective nurses, capable of working as a team, promoting the integral health of human beings and exercising citizenship.

Thus, any work that manages to promote the student as an active subject of his/her learning should be prioritized. And it is in this context that interdisciplinarity emerges, to be (re)constructed with the aim of transforming society. Therefore, the challenges must continue to be overcome, so that an interdisciplinary culture can be established.



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