

# CUIDADO É FUNDAMENTAL

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PESQUISA

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## Professional competencies of managers of an integrated nursing curriculum

Competências gerenciais de gestores de um curso de graduação em enfermagem

Responsabilidades de los gestores curriculum profesional integrada de enfermería

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To understand the skills that the manager of an undergraduate degree in nursing must have to develop the methodology of an Integrated Curriculum. **Method:** Qualitative, descriptive and exploratory research, conducted through interviews with managers of an undergraduate degree in nursing from a public university in the South of Brazil. **Results and discussion:** Two categories were found: “Among The Cognitive Aspects and Operative Practice in Educational Management” and “From Interactive Skills to Democratic Practice”. **Conclusion:** It was identified that, nowadays, managers need skills that concern cognitive and interactional aspects to exercise a skilled and democratic educational management, with a view to promote qualified education, so that future professionals can be committed to exercise a qualified work.

**Descriptors:** Nursing education; Health management; Competency-based Education; Curriculum.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Compreender as competências referentes ao gestor de um curso de graduação em enfermagem, que desenvolve a metodologia do Currículo Integrado. **Método:** Pesquisa qualitativa, descritivo-exploratória, realizada por meio de entrevista projetista com gestores do curso de enfermagem de uma universidade pública do sul do país. **Resultados e discussão:** Duas categorias surgiram: “Entre os Aspectos Cognitivos e a Prática Operativa na Gestão Educacional” e “Das Habilidades Interacionais à Prática Democrática”. **Conclusão:** Ao se desvelarem as competências inerentes ao papel do gestor de um Currículo Integrado em saúde, foi possível identificar que, atualmente, os gestores necessitam de habilidades que sejam de aspectos cognitivos e interacionais, para exercer uma gestão educacional qualificada e democrática, com a finalidade de promover um ensino qualificado e futuros profissionais comprometidos com o exercício de uma profissão de excelência.

**Descritores:** Educação em enfermagem; Gestão em saúde; Educação baseada em competências; Currículo.

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## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Comprender las habilidades para el gerente de un título de grado en enfermería que se desarrolla la metodología del plan de estudios integrado. **Método:** La investigación cualitativa, descriptiva y exploratoria, realizada a través de entrevistas con los gestores de viajes progetista enfermería de una universidad pública en el Sur. **Resultados y Discusión:** Dos categorías surgieron: "Entre Los Aspectos Cognitivos Y Práctica De Operaciones En Gestión De La Educación" y "Habilidades De Interacción A La Práctica Democrática". **Conclusión:** Cuando desvelar los poderes inherentes a la función del administrador de un plan de estudios integrado en la salud, se identificó que en la actualidad los gerentes necesitan habilidades que son los aspectos cognitivos y de interacción, para ejercer una gestión educativa cualificada y democrático. Con el fin de promover aún más profesional y calificado educación comprometida con el ejercicio de una profesión de excelencia.

**Descriptor:** educación en enfermería; gestión de la salud; habilidades educativas basadas; Plan de estudios.

## INTRODUCTION

The socioeconomic and political development of the 21st century reveals changes in the educational context that encourage us to look closely at the Higher Education Institutions (HEI), regarding strategic and marketing issues in vocational training.<sup>1</sup>

The expansion of universities in recent years and the consequent competitiveness among them are responsible for the increased demand for entrepreneurial projects aimed at the quality of education. These projects should employ defined and planned strategies, interpret the context in which they are found, and follow the management of knowledge with a strategic vision, enabling these to promote improvements in the educational field and, consequently, to apply this training in professional practice.<sup>2</sup>

In several higher education institutions, including the health area, there is already a need for projects that encompass the social context, with selection and articulation of contents from different areas of knowledge and the use of innovative methods and techniques which can provide more quality upon learning and studying.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

The planning and elaboration of these projects require that HEI managers are key elements in mobilizing and articulating the competencies of individuals and teams in order to employ defined strategies and, using paradigm shifts and conceptions, to develop projects that promote quality to the education and training.<sup>6</sup>

For this, the manager's profile must be in permanent development, able to follow the technological innovations, being resolute, proactive and have several competences, among them, the ability to always negotiate when facing problematic situations.<sup>7</sup>

Countless definitions of competencies have been shaped over the years, employed at first in the administration, which have become essential also in the educational sphere. In the context of educational management, competence is recognized after the positive evaluation of the professional performance, which includes knowledge, skills and attitudes

acquired in the work, in the confrontation of experiences and in the context of the professional exercise.<sup>9</sup>

Confronted with this, the necessary elements for the development of managerial practices that are intended to be democratic-participative are taught and apprehended at the same time, since teachers are also managers in their practices and work processes. These elements are demonstrated through specific knowledge and skills put into practice, based upon a large amount of knowledges.<sup>10</sup>

Knowledge involves the theory and practice necessary for professional practice, and competences are abilities and attitudes related to these theoretical and practical knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Still, the knowledge is contained in the term competencies when defining professional competence, as the ability to mobilize cognitive resources to deal with particular situations. Therefore, it is understood that the competences are linked to cognitive knowledges and techniques and not only to practical skills and procedures.<sup>11</sup>

Although the term competence is widely used, there are few productions that evidence its understanding by the pedagogical managers of the health area. Therefore, the present study becomes important, due to the fact that understanding how managers perceive and conceive their competences within the scope of educational management in a nursing course contributes to coping with daily difficulties and to the conception of new forms in the intermediation of pedagogical projects that favor the training of qualified professionals.

Therefore, we tried to clarify the following question: What are the competences that the managers of a nursing course consider important for the satisfactory development of their function? The purpose of this study was to understand the competencies of the manager in the development of an undergraduate nursing course that applies the Integrated Curriculum (IC) methodology.

## METHOD

This is a qualitative, descriptive-exploratory research carried out in the undergraduate nursing course of the State University of Londrina (SUL), which uses the methodology of the problem-setting through the Integrated Curriculum (IC).

The participants of the study were 13 managers of the undergraduate nursing course at SUL, who held the positions from 2000 to 2011. The participants have been chosen by selection of intentionality, seeking the coordinators of the collegiate nurses, heads of the Center of Health Science (CHS) and the directors of the nursing department from the University Hospital of Londrina (UHL), who held the position of managers in this period.

For participants' selection, the previous contact was made via e-mail, telephone and personal contact. All the participants selected for this research accepted to participate, and there was no withdrawal.

As a data collection instrument, the projective interview<sup>12</sup> was used through the aid of a memorial album, called scrapbook, which contained photos, documents and reports related to IC. The guiding question was: what are the

necessary competencies to become a manager of an Integrated Curriculum?

The data collection was performed by a single researcher and master of a postgraduate nursing program, from November, 2012 to March, 2013, at the participants' workplace. At the time of data collection, only the researcher and the participants were present. The interviews were recorded using an electronic voice capture device and each interview lasted between 40 minutes and one and a half hour. The conclusion of the interviews occurred when all the selected participants answered all the questions and the criterion of data saturation was not used, since the objective of the study was to identify all the coordinators in this period.

The transcription of the data was performed by a single researcher and there was no use of software. After transcription, the statements were identified by means of letters and numbers (E1, E2, E3 ....). To analyze the data, the content analysis technique was used.<sup>13</sup>

Data analysis was carried out using a three-phase methodological framework<sup>13</sup>, which consists of preanalysis, material exploration and treatment, and Librane's theoretical reference, which evidences the organization and school management in theory and practice.

The study was approved by the Committee of Ethics in Research with Human Beings of the State University of Londrina, under the favorable opinion n° 107.831 / 2012 and CAAE n° 05995612.5.0000.523. Participants signed the Free and Informed Consent Form, signaling their agreement with the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The process of analyzing the competences of an IC manager allowed the content to be grouped into two categories: "Between Cognitive Aspects and Operative Practice in Educational Management" and "From Interactive Skills to Democratic Practice".

### Between Cognitive Aspects and Operative Practice in Educational Management

The understanding of knowledge as a cognitive aspect includes scientific, pedagogical and managerial knowledge, and know-how, as an operative aspect, in view of the insertion of practical knowledge in teaching, nursing and acting as an educational manager.<sup>9</sup>

The term knowledge, as an inherent competency of the manager's role, was approached by a small number of managers in the interviews, being mentioned the knowledge in the area of education, general and specific curriculum knowledge and technical-pedagogical understanding, including methodologies, as shown in the following speech:

*"The person has to be very prepared, must understand a lot of pedagogy of problematization, of active methodology, of meaningful learning, she/he has to know why, otherwise she cannot coordinate [...] you have to possess the competence to*

*understand the entire curriculum, from the first module to the last." (E5)*

Even with the excerpt "has to be very prepared", which infers a concern to have certain requirements to be a competent manager, no contents regarding the contexts of health and education were raised, since it is a curriculum that intends to prepare for the training aimed at the Unified Health System, and it is of great importance that managers have the perception to recognize that, by improving the quality of the teaching, it is possible to meet the health needs of individuals and communities.

To corroborate this assertion, the management practices include actions of technical-administrative and pedagogical-curricular nature. However, there are other aspects that must be considered, which are the intermediation between the course and the higher instances of the university system and the relation of the course with the community and health services.<sup>9</sup>

It can be inferred that the term knowledge was not widely mentioned in the interviews, because it is linked to the idea that, in times of educational change, teaching is not about transferring knowledge, but creating possibilities for its production or construction,<sup>14</sup> and managers seek to acquire the necessary knowledge for the performance on the position, while performing the function of managers. It is known that, in today's world, more than half of the knowledge acquired has no use and the only thing that matters is the 'metamudeness', it means, the change in the way things change.<sup>15</sup>

As a result, managers are faced with various situations, *which make them able to learn in practice*, thanks to a reflexive and updated learning behavior. Based upon this reality, Perrenoud says that "building a competence means learning to identify and find relevant knowledges."<sup>11</sup>

This is not to say that the aforementioned knowledges are not important; on the contrary, the in-depth knowledge of the organization and educational management helps to develop technical-methodological and communicative skills with consequent increase in the possibility of significant interventions in the organization of work and in the breaking of paradigms, but, in addition to scientific knowledge, a critical-reflexive approach is necessary, since teaching is not merely a technical activity, but also an intellectual one, in which science serves to understand and transform practice.<sup>9</sup>

It is understood that only knowledge does not mobilize actions, skills and attitudes are also necessary, that is, know-how besides knowledge. Considering that technical knowledge is necessary for the attainment of know-how, the following themes were mentioned: experience in the current curriculum practice, experience in pedagogical practice, experience in care practice and management experience.

*"I think that the manager, besides teaching, has to work... as a field nurse for two years, has to have the field experience, experience of the academy for at least five years [...] has to have professional experience, cannot be an outsider." (E10)*

The know-how, which involves the practice, although little evidenced by the interviewees, is also necessary. However, management processes can not be reduced to abilities and technical skills. It is known that technicalism is not very welcomed in the educational area, so curricular changes foresee the integration of knowledge into practice so it would become meaningful and intentional. Therefore, it is important that the manager does not restrict himself to the rules of the nursing practice, not consistent with the preparation of a curriculum that induces critical and reflective vision, adaptable to changes, according to the needs to be met.<sup>9</sup>

It is understood that if the manager has not previously been teaching and/or has no professional experience as a nurse, the task of planning the IC will not be simple when compared to someone which already had this experience before. However, this is also very relative, since this can be learned in daily practice.

In a study carried out with health professionals for the validation of the competence concept, contributions related to the notion of ability were adhered to practice, ability to do, clinical experience, repetition and psychomotor exercise. However, it was also emphasized the continuous updating of theoretical knowledge for the improvement of practical ability.<sup>16</sup>

When the management experience issue, which involves know-how, is addressed, the following speech shows some units of meaning that were also characterized as know-how in the management organization's plan:

*"You have to do a planning, you cannot go only with what you think you know, the technical and scientific [...] you must have strategic planning." (E10)*

Related to the management experience, the areas of action, articulated together, ensure pedagogical and operational support, including the planning, formulation, implementation and evaluation of PPP.<sup>9</sup>

It is also relevant to consider the importance of the cognitive and operative quality of learning through the provision of training and didactic-pedagogical advice to the individuals involved in order to favor their professional performance<sup>9</sup>, since introducing and implementing innovations are crucial criteria, once any change of mentalities and culture instituted influences upon the actors of the process.<sup>9</sup> So, it is necessary that the changes could be made in an organized way with planning and care, which implies concrete actions and procedures.

When the IC of this nursing course was considered, more participatory forms of management had to be practiced, since the implementation of a new work process is only possible with the collaboration of all those involved. So, during the preparation, for subsequent implementation, numerous workshops and training were held with discussions about the practice, deconstructing concepts, and rebuilding personal, professional and socio-cultural knowledge and values.<sup>17</sup>

## From Interactive Skills to Democratic Practice in Educational Management

The second category, entitled "From Interactive Skills to Democratic Practice in Educational Management", encompasses the knowledge and awareness of the IC health manager and comprehends the skills related to these knowledges, which directly influence the interpersonal relations mediation in a curricular management, allowing or not to reach a democratic practice.

The importance of interactional skills to be a competent manager was addressed by the majority of respondents. This data shows how much the IC development required these skills in order to insert the teachers in the change process.

Exercising a democratic practice requires that the individual assumes certain positions that allows him/her to carry out participatory and integrative actions. Some discourses expressed important interactional characteristics to perform IC management and pointed to units of meaning defined as: availability, perspicacity, belief, creativity, leadership, maturity, respect, entrepreneurship, love to study, flexibility, encouragement, impartiality, resilience, ability to listen and communicate.

*"One needs to have some personal characteristics like flexibility, listening, understanding what the other is saying, integration, negotiation, great perspicacity, to be able to see the future; if today a change happens in this area, the result will appear three years later." (E4)*

*"I think you must have patience, cannot be a very radical person [...] flexibility is another feature that the manager must have, radicality in a process of change, it puts you to lose, you must hear the same voice for the two opposites speakers [...] leadership, respect, flexibility, listening." (E11)*

*"The first characteristic that the person must have is to know how to listen [...] after knowing how to listen he/she must have competence to know how to respond." (E5)*

There was greater emphasis on certain interactional skills than in others, emphasizing those related to listening and flexibility.

With the experience of the educational process, individuals can deduce the management style to be adopted, since it is reflected in practice, be it with a closer listening of the yearnings and worries, or with a sharper tone of voice, or with authoritarianism or even in discussion and decision-making.

*"I think we often missed a more active listening of some positions and there it is when the teacher stops talking, he sees that there is no echo, or he says: alright, they will do whatever they want, but in the classroom I will do whatever I want. And that's exactly what happens." (E3)*

Current educational practices are reflected in attitudes, ways of acting, and coexistence, essential points to be

discussed when talking about management, since it also involves, in addition to the individual, the collective sphere.<sup>9</sup>

In the interactive competence, communication, listening and expression skills stand out, those that involve knowing how to express and argue properly.<sup>9</sup> Among the highly commented interactive skills, the most important is the listening ability, as this is an essential capacity that allows participatory management, either in the presentation of proposals, or in decision-making, or, finally, in the resolution of conflicts.

The term leadership was emphasized in several discourses, which leads us to believe in its importance as a mediator in the IC management process, and the leaders need to be able to put into practice a project that would be effective from the moment that the group felt convinced and willing to cooperate for the implementation of the curricular proposal.<sup>18</sup>

Managers also need to understand how and who they are serving, and then help teachers reflect on their practice and collaborate on the process of change, addressing the needs of students and society and teaching processes, because people only attribute meaning to what they believe. Thus, managers can create strategies that aim to broaden the understanding of those involved in the curriculum process and thus strengthen belief in change and help create a supportive attitude towards change.

When addressing the term Democratic Practice, course-centered management is not the best method of conducting an educational process. The current perspectives points out to a democratic management, the course being an educational space and part of a learning community, in which professionals can decide on their work and learn more about their profession, getting involved in other issues, besides administrative and bureaucratic practices, centered on the technical-scientific knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Several speeches emphasized the importance of Democratic Practice. From these discourses, the following units of meanings have emerged: promoting integration, interpersonal relationships, socialization of information, group influence, conflict resolution, and representativeness:

*"[...] of problems, resolution of conflicts ... ability to communicate [...] the arguments were built collectively I just went to represent the group [...] this decision is not mine, it was collective [...] always bring to the group all the information, never vote what I thought [...] consult their peers [...] know not to withhold information [...] socialize the information that is the greatest asset and greatest skill (E3) because if I have a manager who is authoritarian, he/she will not get anything with it, because everything has to start from the group, so the leader has to be able to influence the group, and offer the possibility of leaving the group, otherwise, this does not work, a planning that goes from the top to the bottom does not work." (E7)*

*"To seek integration, to negotiate [...] to listen, to respect and to make the group walk together." (E4)*

In order to exercise effective democratic management, skills must also be interactive, since, in order to resolve a conflict, it is imperative that the manager be able to exercise the listening and communicate clearly and with maturity.

In a study with the same subject, the importance attributed to the way in which the various subjects can be facilitated or hindered depending on the way they interact with the others was evidenced. Social skills were addressed by almost all of the interviewees and considered essential for relationships established in the educational management environment to form the basis for effective management.<sup>19</sup>

It was verified that several aspects should be valued for the success of the implementation of a curricular innovation. It was reiterated the importance of the commitment of those involved in this process, and they emphasized: the conception of educational practices that advance the teaching in order to contemplate the quality of health for the population; the implementation of a teacher training process, concomitant with the changes; the modification of the structure of the educational institution, which should be adequate to the new curricular proposal; and the democratization of pedagogical practice in such a way that all those involved can issue their opinion.

In a study, it was shown that the higher the level of participation and democracy, the greater the possibilities of educational qualification.<sup>21</sup> Authors<sup>10</sup> share this thought when discussing the importance of revisiting the pedagogical practice from time to time. It also expresses that, in the actions of the teachers and in the pedagogical organization of the school, it is necessary to consider the form of administration and to think the education from democratic bases and no more authoritarian and imposing, and give place to the reflective practices in the scope of the school management.<sup>11</sup>

It is essential to make clear that the democratic practice does not mean guiding management processes from the logic of the majority, according to which, between two alternatives, it is decided by the number that obtained the majority of votes. The Democratic Practice should be based upon dialogue and information veracity, and that each decision should be based upon the initial collective objective.<sup>22</sup>

As in this work, other studies show that certain skills stand out: leadership, organization, communication, listening, affective treatment, shared decision making, teamwork. Therefore, interpersonal and personal skills are strongly embedded within the concept of being a competent manager.<sup>23,24</sup> Still, in one of these studies, a physician argues that "leading, anticipating, dreaming, motivating, deciding, acting, and planning are inherent attitudes to all health professionals and managers, and should be part of the curriculum."<sup>23</sup>

Among the various capacities aimed at becoming a competent manager, only those that lead the manager to the efficient performance of what was planned will be contemplated, that is, there is no random competences, but only competence in the act.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, if this project is planned, structured and it is not effective as it says it would

be, all previous leadership skills, communication, scientific knowledge, practical experience during the decisions, conflict management, among others, will succumb.

*“Turning problems into challenges, because problems will always exist, yet a manager with strategic vision, with capacity to deal with problems, is what will make all the difference [...] they turn these [problems] into lessons and build the change, this change never ends [...] it is like an unfinished building, in 40 years from now it will probably continue to be constantly modified, improved.” (E14)*

It was observed that many verbalizations expressed concern about an “ideal” manager profile, when they stated “one must have...”, that is, the characteristics that the interviewees think would contribute to the progress of the curriculum. However, since this is a collective activity, it does not only depend on the manager’s individual capacities and responsibilities, but on common and shared goals, as well as coordinated and controlled actions of the agents of the process.<sup>9</sup>

The skills cited in this study as necessary to an educational manager are those that help to maintain an acceptable vocational training performance in order to obtain an education with repercussions on the quality of teaching. However, the skills and their influence on the reorientation of professional training concerned with meeting the social, cultural and political demands that have an impact on the improvement of health services were not mentioned as managerial skills.

However, an “ideal” profile of an educational health manager, regarding the knowledge, skills and attitudes, based on knowledge, is somewhat illusory, although it is important to maintain a balance between them, since the manager is a human being, so as his leaders have their limitations and will not always act according to what is considered “ideal.” To value the intentionality of actions reflected in democratic educational practices, whose purpose is to promote professional training with quality and direct reflection on the improvement of population health care that resort on the National Health System at the national level, is already a significant achievement for the management in force.

Obviously, curricular success does not depend only on management practices, since several processes are involved in a pedagogical project. However, it is believed that, if the approach to democratic practices of management and participatory decision-making was not intended, IC in nursing would not have been practiced for so many years with primacy.

*“I think we have something important for the collegiate course, all module coordinators are part of the collegiate and also the annual assessment forum, so we can look at the curriculum and see how far we go.” (E7)*

Even so, each management period probably had its impasses that have repercussions on curriculum design, and

are acceptable, given the required dynamism of a process that must be revisited, evaluated and, if necessary, modified.<sup>21</sup>

It is worth mentioning that, despite the skills needed to reach the competences, they were presented in different categories for the purpose of detailing the discussion, but are intrinsic to each other and have the same degree of importance.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the contents allowed us to understand the competences inherent to the managerial function of an IC in health, whose approach to democratic management practices are essential for the development of a pedagogical project. And it only becomes applicable in order to meet dynamic social and political demands when effective group membership occurs, when interactive relations are emphasized without ignoring the emergence of knowledge, theoretical and practical experience, nonetheless they are also primordial abilities in the management process.

Therefore, it was evidenced in this study that the professional managers need to have the ability to mediate interpersonal relationships, which is the mediation of conflicts, exercising a democratic management. It is still necessary that they exercise their leadership ability, driving the whole team of teachers to practice a new curriculum proposal. With the purpose of promoting a qualified teaching and future professionals committed to the exercise of a profession of excellence.

Maintaining a management structure based upon competence management, which values the purpose of seeking excellence in training and improving the quality of care in line with the demands of the health sector, it becomes possible to ensure that the organization of the course becomes a learning environment, which helps teachers to reflect, think, analyze and create new practices.

Since this article was based upon elements related to the IC of a specific nursing course, it is expected that the contribution that this work offers can overcome this reality and encourage other institutions to seek the development of dynamic curriculum, as well as research the topic presented. Sharing with other managers the discussion raised here, when dealing with the skills of management practices consistent with the democratic principle, is tantamount to launch a network of knowledges around the educational management in health, which has as a scenario of the quality of the professional training of the nursing area and, and the context of the quality of the service provision in the Unified Health System as well.

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