

Acquiring nursing knowledge through the constructivist method

A CONSTRUÇÃO DO CONHECIMENTO DA ENFERMAGEM BASEADA NO MÉTODO CONSTRUTIVISTA

LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL CONOCIMIENTO EN ENFERMERÍA BASADO EN EL MÉTODO CONSTRUCTIVISTA

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects on Vygotsky's theory of knowledge construction by nursing professionals. In the Vygotskian approach, persons are seen as agents who transform and are transformed by the social relationships of a particular culture, or more specifically by the life-long dialectical interaction of human beings and their social and cultural environments. The theory of constructivism seeks to explain the modification of an individual's knowledge strategy throughout his or her life. The constructivist ideas advocated by Vygotsky may represent an alternative method for theoretical and practical health studies, particularly in relation to the subjective dimension of nursing staff collective work.

DESCRIPTORS

Education, nursing
Knowledge
Learning

RESUMO

Este artigo teve o objetivo de realizar uma reflexão acerca da teoria de Vygotsky no processo de construção do conhecimento dos profissionais de enfermagem. Na abordagem vygotskyana, o homem é visto como alguém que transforma e é transformado nas relações que acontecem em uma determinada cultura, caracterizado por uma interação dialética desde o nascimento entre o ser humano e o meio social e cultural em que se insere. A proposta do construtivismo encaixa-se nesse contexto, pois busca explicar como se modificam as estratégias de conhecimento do indivíduo no decorrer da sua vida. As ideias construtivistas preconizadas por Vygotsky podem representar um método alternativo para os estudos teórico-práticos na área da saúde, especialmente quanto à dimensão subjetiva do processo de trabalho junto à equipe de enfermagem.

DESCRITORES

Educação em enfermagem
Conhecimento
Aprendizagem

RESUMEN

Este artículo tuvo como objetivo realizar una reflexión de la teoría de Vygotsky en el proceso de construcción del conocimiento de los profesionales de enfermería. En el enfoque de Vygotsky, el hombre es visto como alguien que transforma y es transformado en las relaciones que se producen en una determinada cultura, que se caracteriza por una interacción dialéctica desde el nacimiento entre el ser humano, el medio social y cultural al que pertenece. La propuesta del constructivismo se inscribe en este contexto, ya que trata de explicar cómo se modifican las estrategias de conocimiento del individuo a lo largo de su vida. Las ideas constructivistas preconizadas por Vygotsky pueden representar un método alternativo para los estudios teóricos y prácticos en materia de salud, especialmente en lo que se refiere a la dimensión subjetiva del proceso de trabajo con el equipo de enfermería.

DESCRIPTORES

Educación en enfermería
Conocimiento
Aprendizaje

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INTRODUCTION

Learning, which enables intelligent action and productive thinking, promotes goal-oriented, behavioral changes that are reflected in experience or practice. It is defined as an intentional action, that is, an action directed toward a goal⁽¹⁾.

Following this line of thought, we find that Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896), while not leaving a complete and finished theory, pointed to productive research paths for other investigators. In the Vygotskian approach, persons are seen as agents who transform and are transformed by the social relationships of a particular culture, one that is characterized by the life-long dialectical interaction of human beings and their social and cultural environments⁽²⁾.

Through social interactions, a person constantly learns and transforms. The role of education, and hence learning, gains prominence in Vygotsky's theory of development, which asserts that learning is not the mere acquisition of information and does result from the simple association of retained ideas; rather, it is an internal, active, and interpersonal process⁽²⁻³⁾.

Based on this perspective, nursing education has reflected the rapid changes occurring in society, including political and ethical ones, and the large volume of networked information. Through diversified and inclusive learning strategies, it has sought the participation of the learner and the cultivation of a more liberating, creative, reflective, constructive, and questioning approach⁽³⁾.

Constructivist thought, in turn, presents a psychological theory that seeks to explain the modification of individual knowledge strategies over time. Constructivism, strengthened by Vygotsky's line of reasoning, defends the idea that knowledge is comprised of an individual's interaction with the environment, symbols, social relations, and his or her own actions, rather than by prior appropriation or hereditary baggage⁽⁴⁾.

This process of learning and thought formation is awakened and encouraged by society and the constant communication of individuals involved in the construction of teaching and learning, which allows for the exchange of experiences. In this exchange, the educator is the mediator and problem-giver, and the student is the systematizer of ideas and thoughts. For Vygotsky, learning triggers various internal processes of mental development, which take shape only when the subject interacts with objects and other cooperating subjects⁽⁵⁾.

That same interaction must also occur in nursing. The learning process should value the production of knowledge by collective and cooperative work that cannot be individually garnered. The nursing professional must, therefore, be committed to lifelong education, in which learning and

teaching are incorporated into work and the daily life of organizations⁽⁶⁾.

This paper seeks to demonstrate the importance of Vygotsky's contributions for knowledge production in nursing education. This theoretical text thus presents and discusses some of the author's assertions and reflects on the constructivist perspective on teaching and learning in nursing.

BUILDING A CONSTRUCTIVIST ENVIRONMENT IN NURSING

Learning builds relationships that conceptualize the learner as a dynamic being who interacts with the world and who is responsible for the direction and meaning of what is learned. From this perspective, teaching is understood as a method to facilitate the construction of knowledge: the teacher stimulates and explores the experiences that result in learning. The construction of knowledge occurs through the dissonance between what is understood by the student and what he or she observes in the environment⁽⁷⁾.

Constructivism strengthens the learning process when it turns the individual into an active agent who is responsible for his or her own knowledge, meaning and emotions, and inter-contextual representation of reality. Above all, it defends the progressive construction of cognitive structures of individuals, and this knowledge results from the interaction between the subject and the environment⁽⁸⁾.

A nursing learning environment will be constructivist only if it promotes meaningful learning through genuine experiences, leads to the integration of new ideas with the prior knowledge of students, and promotes the personal reflection and collective analysis of student experiences. In this approach,

the teaching and learning process in nursing demonstrates that intellectual development aims at personal maturation—beginning with the student's psychic substrate—in a progressive, complex redevelopment trajectory⁽⁹⁾.

It is necessary to think about educational planning and about the methods and strategies of education. Specifically, it is essential to understand that learning standards are not simply given; rather, certain strategies favor the maintenance of dialogue, the exchange of experiences, and the understanding of their meanings. Environments that are rich and compatible with constructivist learning are those that put the student in control of the learning process, promoting the continuous pursuit of knowledge in a contextualized manner⁽⁸⁾.

The interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships advocated by Vygotsky comprise the human being's ability to transform the physical and social environment and

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to establish a dialectical relationship with the whole by which he or she is also transformed, since every person is engaged in constant reciprocal interaction with others⁽⁸⁾. This assertion is evident in nursing, where a personal body of knowledge is constructed based on a commitment to the interests and needs of humanity, which demonstrates the nurse's role as a participant in the therapeutic process of the individual, his family, and the community.

Human development is understood not as the result of isolated factors that mature, nor of environmental factors that act on the body, controlling its behavior, but rather as a product of reciprocal exchanges, which are established throughout life between the individual and the environment, each aspect influencing the other⁽²⁾.

We build the knowledge that enables our intellectual development through learning with others. In this process, learning is produced through the constant dialogue between the individual's exterior and interior, since exchanges with the outside world are necessary for the formation of mental events. Cognitive development, which is natural for the human being, takes place under social constraints. For Vygotsky, the concept is not static and is subject to interference from historical-cultural assumptions⁽¹⁰⁾.

Nursing students at the beginning of their academic journeys often associate the profession with religion and charity and its subordination to other professions. As we acquire information, guidance, and access to scientific concepts, these notions are transformed through learning about the scientific nature of nursing.

Learning, understood as the construction of knowledge, presupposes the understanding of its scope and process, that is, of the way in which students personally develop knowledge through the replacement of isolating by unifying thought, which links all knowledge⁽¹¹⁾.

Upon graduation, academic internship is important as a teaching strategy to develop and articulate unity relationships among different subjects and realities. The internship becomes an investment in the development of skills and makes the nursing student capable of coordinating the care process; it also favors new experiences that strengthen student knowledge.

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Constructivism views the university as an institution responsible for the appropriation of knowledge by students. This knowledge and the formation of scientific concepts guide the student throughout life and perpetuate his or her assumptions. It ultimately seeks to make the individual more human, allowing him or her to go beyond everyday understanding, surpassing it through the development of new scientific knowledge⁽¹¹⁾.

The ideas advocated by Vygotsky may represent an alternative method for theoretical and practical studies, particularly with reference to the subjective relationships of nurses. Thus, the assimilation of concepts regarding maturity as the main driver of human thought development is well accepted by health care professionals, who are accustomed to this type of approach⁽¹²⁾.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding teaching and learning processes and the analytical bases of the diverse levels of training in superior education are of utmost importance for health programs.

The assimilation of knowledge and the development of scientific concepts in nursing will enable the student to adopt assumptions that will guide his or her actions and professional activities. When we refer to the term professional activity, we consider the nurse as someone engaged in and helpful to society, someone concerned with the living conditions of human beings and engaged in solving problems.

The process of dialectical interaction, described by Vygotsky, signals that the individual, as he or she internalizes cultural forms, transforms them, creating self-liberation in the process. To this end, learning and various constitutive processes of human beings are triggered by the relationship of the subject and the environment to which he or she belongs.

Building nursing knowledge based on these assumptions gives priority to an environment that is seen as an extension of the universe; seeks personal and collective balance; searches the knowledge necessary for complementary, simultaneous, and continuous interaction; and takes actions to repattern vital human processes. It proposes appropriate therapeutic actions that favor changes capable of influencing both the environment and humanity.

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