




REFLECTION


**Management of nursing education in theoretical-practical activities:  
reflections in the context of the pandemic**

Gestão do ensino de enfermagem em atividades teórico-práticas: reflexões no contexto da pandemia  
Gestión de la enseñanza de enfermería en actividades teórico-prácticas: reflexiones en el contexto de la  
pandemia

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ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to reflect on the meso- and micromanagement of nursing education for the development of theoretical-practical activities and supervised internships in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Method:** this is a reflective article on the subject of teaching management in nursing and its adaptations to theoretical-practical activities and supervised internships during the pandemic. **Results:** the adaptations and actions carried out in the meso- and micromanagement of teaching in this scenario were crucial for the scope of nursing education, considering the main aspects modified in this context, being the creation of structures for remote work, the use of research activities to contribute to the understanding of COVID-19, the pause and the increase of preparations involved in practical activities. For this, the actors of this management faced challenges such as: insecurity when returning to presential activities; need for new skills and abilities; teachers' service overload; and demand for student autonomy. It was identified that the pandemic affected the practical learning of students and left a limited view on how the gaps caused by this scenario will be managed. **Conclusion:** despite the efforts of managers so far, it is understood that this is an unfinished and constantly evolving process.

**Descriptors:** Nursing education. Pandemics. Nursing. Coronavirus. Organization and Administration.

RESUMO

**Objetivo:** refletir sobre a meso e a microgestão do ensino de enfermagem para o desenvolvimento de atividades teórico-práticas e estágios supervisionados no contexto da pandemia de COVID-19. **Método:** trata-se de um artigo de cunho reflexivo, sobre o tema da gestão de ensino na enfermagem e suas adaptações frente às atividades teórico-práticas e estágios supervisionados durante a pandemia. **Resultados:** as adaptações e ações realizadas na meso e microgestão do ensino neste cenário foram cruciais para o âmbito da educação em enfermagem, considerando os principais aspectos modificados nesse contexto, sendo a criação de estruturas para o trabalho remoto, a utilização de atividades de pesquisa para contribuir na compreensão sobre a COVID-19, a pausa e os preparos a mais envolvidos nas atividades práticas. Para isso, os atores dessa gestão enfrentaram desafios como: insegurança ao retorno das atividades presenciais; necessidade de novas competências e habilidades; sobrecarga de serviço dos docentes; e exigência de autonomia dos discentes. Identificou-se que a pandemia afetou a aprendizagem prática dos discentes e deixou uma visão limitada sobre como se dará a condução das lacunas causadas por esse cenário. **Conclusão:** apesar dos esforços dos gestores até o momento, compreende-se que esse é um processo inacabado e de constante evolução.

**Descritores:** Educação em enfermagem. Pandemias. Enfermagem. Coronavírus. Organização e Administração.

RESUMÉN

**Objetivo:** reflexionar sobre meso y microgestión de la formación en enfermería para el desarrollo de actividades teórico-prácticas y pasantías supervisadas en el contexto de la pandemia de COVID-19. **Método:** artículo de reflexión sobre la gestión docente en enfermería y sus adaptaciones a las actividades teórico-prácticas y pasantías supervisadas durante la pandemia. **Resultados:** las adaptaciones y acciones realizadas en la meso y microgestión de la enseñanza en este escenario fueron cruciales para el ámbito de la formación de enfermería, considerando los principales aspectos modificados en este contexto, siendo la creación de estructuras para el trabajo remoto, la utilización de actividades de investigación para contribuir con la comprensión del COVID-19, la pausa y los preparativos más envueltos en actividades prácticas. Para ello, los actores de esta gestión enfrentaron desafíos como: inseguridad al regresar al presencial; necesidad de nuevas habilidades y destrezas; sobrecarga del servicio docente; y demanda de autonomía estudiantil. Se identificó que la pandemia afectó los aprendizajes prácticos de los estudiantes y dejó una visión limitada sobre cómo se gestionarán los vacíos provocados por este escenario. **Conclusión:** a pesar de los esfuerzos de los gestores hasta el momento, se entiende que este es un proceso inconcluso y en constante evolución.

**Descritores:** Educación en enfermería. Pandemias. Enfermería. Coronavirus. Organización y Administración.

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic caused several changes in the daily life of the population, such as social distancing and sanitary measures, which led to new life and work structures.<sup>(1)</sup> In education, the suspension of presential activities and the encouragement of remote activities were strategies adopted by national regulatory bodies for the continuity of education in this period. In the context of the rapid spread of the virus, with teachers and students unable to be in the classroom, Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) was the method used to mitigate the losses in learning. The ERT consists of the organization and planning of classes by the teacher, who exposes them in real time, teaching the content through telecommunication.<sup>(2-3)</sup>

Despite being an alternative to the adverse scenario, the ERT brought many challenges to teaching, especially for practical activities and supervised internships in courses in the health area. That said, it is worth emphasizing that the National Curriculum Guidelines (NCG) for undergraduate Nursing courses point to a predilection for training processes in which nursing students experience reality in practice. The course structure must ensure, in addition to other behaviors, the preparation of the performance of the student in the service, making essential the alliance between theory and practice of professional exercise.<sup>(4)</sup>

Therefore, it is specified in the NCG that theoretical and practical activities must occur throughout the course, concomitantly with the content covered. Regarding the Supervised Curricular Internship (SCI), a minimum workload of 20% of the total workload of the course is required, being carried out in the last two semesters. Furthermore, it is mandatory that this entire training process must meet the needs of the Unified Health System.<sup>(4)</sup>

In this context, the management of nursing education is characterized from actions and interactions of an administrative nature, for the organizational functioning of activities involving teaching, research and extension. And given the relevance of its role to analyze and plan actions that were viable for the construction of continuous learning, it gained a new look. Furthermore, the professor, through the management of nursing education, is able to articulate interventions and integrate them, because, inserted in the scenario, perceives the pertinent needs and is able to develop, organize and guide decisions and paths individually and collectively, whether in the macromanagement context - institutional level; meso-management - departmental level; or in the context of micromanagement - classroom level.<sup>(5)</sup>

Since it is understood that there is no complete learning without the combination of theoretical and practical activities, so, even in the pandemic context, adaptation to a new reality needs to be based on the full qualification of these future professionals. Therefore, the objective of this article is to reflect on the meso- and micromanagement of nursing education for the development of theoretical-practical activities and supervised internships in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## METHODS

This is a reflective article on the subject of teaching management in nursing and its adaptations in the face of theoretical-practical activities and supervised internships, in the context of the pandemic. For its accomplishment, a survey was carried out in the literature on the mentioned theme, using the descriptors: “nursing education”; “pandemic”; “nursing”; “coronavirus”; “organization and administration”.

The next section was divided into categories according to the following guiding questions: 1) What main aspects of teaching management were modified in the context of the pandemic?; 2) What are the main challenges for educational managers, teachers and students?; 3) How can we evaluate learning in remote teaching in its sufficiency to produce security in the execution of activities?

The categories are called: main aspects modified in the context of the pandemic; main challenges for actors; and learning assessment perspectives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Main aspects modified in the context of the pandemic

The suspension of presential activities, especially practices and supervised internships, was one of the alternatives to combating COVID-19, causing insecurity regarding the continuation of teaching and learning in this new context, which required quick and effective solutions from the management in the face of this and other issues caused by the epidemiological picture. Among the actions aimed at dealing with this unfavorable scenario, committees to deal with the epidemiological outbreak of the coronavirus and contingency plans for the COVID-19 pandemic were implemented.

In the meantime, the importance of elaborating a situational diagnosis that observes and indicates potential solutions to the challenges related to the pandemic itself, to students, teachers, fields of practice and internships, in addition to subsidizing the continuity of theoretical activities, was also highlighted, since they support the student to act in practice. When considering the inserted panorama and the figures involved, the managing professors - at the level of meso-management and micromanagement - are the ones who provide the foundation for a good follow-up of teaching, through decision-making.

In the context of meso-management of nursing education, the creation of these committees and plans come directly from the professors who manage the department, as mentioned above. Other responsibilities of these professionals are: 1) selection of internship fields, in order to sign or arrange agreements with institutions responsible for them and also with municipal bodies, such as the Health Department, focusing on the safety of both teachers and students; 2) create structures for remote work or home office for teachers and students, including providing psychological support for them; 3) planning the use of spaces and

scheduling the use of laboratories; and 4) purchase of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).<sup>(6)</sup>

Thus, by way of example, the management of PPE is one of the actions that start at the departmental level, because even with agreements with these spaces, on condition that they offer this equipment, there was the problem of not having a sufficient amount even for employees of the locations. Therefore, activities that stimulate the creation of their own products, such as PPE, were prioritized, helping the academy and the fields of practice and/or internships.<sup>(6)</sup>

New proposals related to COVID-19, encouraged by managers through meso-management, focused on using research activities to contribute to the dissemination of information and scientific advancement to assist in the understanding of the disease, in addition to training public servants, students and teachers to deal in the best way with this new context caused by the pandemic.<sup>(7)</sup>

In the micromanagement scenario, the main changes were related to a constant resignification and analysis of the inserted scenario, planning and the actions favorable to the teacher-student binomial. The most punctual interventions were aimed at the transition from the presential modality to the online format, with the need to improve on active methodologies, the continuous review of content and schedule adjustments, demanding from the students a continuous preparation.<sup>(8)</sup>

#### Main challenges for actors

The complexity of the various changes experienced in the COVID-19 pandemic scenario aroused insecurities, ruptures, movements and dynamism for both students and professors, especially when considering the suspension and modifications of practical activities and supervised internships.<sup>(9)</sup>

Challenges related to dealing with insecurity on the return of these activities and the new protocols and flows defined by meso- and micromanagement in the inserted context, demanded from the actors of this process the search for new skills and abilities to adapt, dealing with the academic environment introduced in their homes, seeking a balance in the learning process between the overload of the teachers' service and the strengthening of the students' autonomy.<sup>(2)</sup>

For the managers responsible for planning and adapting beneficial actions in this new circumstance caused by the pandemic, another obstacle was executing what the NCG definitions propose by providing for theoretical and practical activities, in which they need to walk side by side, in an integrated and interdisciplinary way, throughout the training of the future nurse. Considering that professional practice must permeate several scenarios, including giving importance to clinical and epidemiological models<sup>(4)</sup>, it was necessary to carry out protocols that would help the return to the field of practice and laboratory classes in a safe way, avoiding possible contamination of students by COVID-19.<sup>(8)</sup>

With this, the professors who are the actors of meso- and micromanagement, needed to analyze

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these obstacles and seek solutions on how to carry out this return to curricular internships in this scenario, since it consists of complementing, through experience, what has already been addressed in theory and in practical classes, focusing and deepening knowledge on the different areas of health, proving to be of paramount significance in the professional training of nursing students. In addition, internships help to foster the necessary skills to later act in a critical, reflective way, based on science and the ability to intervene in the place where they are inserted.<sup>(4)</sup>

In addition, another obstacle experienced by students and professors in the theoretical-practical learning process is related to their adaptation to the virtual format of classes, since professors had to adapt to the new work tool, something that was not familiar to many, and still spread technical-scientific knowledge. Likewise, in this scenario, students needed to seek autonomy and willingness to absorb what was transmitted and use this understanding in their future practices.<sup>(8)</sup>

Another challenging point to consider in the fight against COVID-19 is the lack of supplies, especially related to PPE. With this, the management of education, when inserting its students in health institutions, exposes them to experience a great risk of contamination.

The difficulty in carrying out these actions causes uncertainties, fears and vulnerabilities in teachers, as they are responsible for helping in the construction of knowledge, and also in students, who will be future professionals and will enter the job market.<sup>(3)</sup>

Considering this, in the midst of these decision instabilities, it was observed that many students chose to be voluntarily active in the face of COVID-19, mainly participating in the vaccination campaign against the coronavirus and even in the national campaign against influenza. This type of interaction by students in actions to combat the pandemic contributed to reducing the impact of the absence of practical activities and/or supervised internships, partly causing the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes.<sup>(10)</sup>

#### Learning assessment perspectives

The teaching-learning process, in this context of the pandemic, had perceptible changes experienced by nursing students and professors, mainly related to the presence of students in the health service, where they are presented to the meeting of social needs, comprehensiveness and quality of care, to train as future professionals, acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the service.<sup>(3)</sup>

These changes affect the practical learning of students, impairing the construction of their technical experience and manual dexterity, considering that many students only develop specific skills in the act of doing and repeating, until they can gradually improve. The importance of this know-how of the students is highlighted, because as future professional nurses, even newly graduated, the post-pandemic world will need to absorb qualified professionals.<sup>(11)</sup>

It is important that in the ERT, the objective of building knowledge emphasizing the importance of teaching-service-community integration does not change, being necessary to strengthen in remote teaching the importance of students' relationships with services and the community, so that, safely, when are inserted in real practice scenarios have a noticeable result in their learning process and are able to demonstrate this in their practices. The purpose of highlighting and strengthening participation, autonomy, leadership, decision-making, dialogue, teamwork, political, reflective and critical engagement in the training of nursing students, following the NCG, must be a focus on remote teaching.<sup>(11)</sup>

Thus, there is also a concern to insert students in practical activities, as it starts from the premise that the learning and acquisition of skills and competencies mentioned above is related to the junction of practice with theory. Therefore, teaching management is crucial as it allows a return to practice scenarios in a stepped and safe way.<sup>(12)</sup>

With this, the security of working in the fields of practice and mandatory internships is part of a promotion produced by the theory linked to the practices. The experience of praxis helps to establish the attributions explained in the theoretical content, providing confidence in the execution of procedures by the students, integrating themselves in different professional scenarios and creating an identity as a nurse.<sup>(12)</sup> Something that the teacher, as a manager of teaching, considers when offering this experience, even in an adapted way, reducing the number of students in the fields of practice and reducing their workload, for example.

The limitations regarding the construction of this article are related to the absence of studies that specifically bring the performance of micro and macromanagement of education, in the organization and execution of curricular practices and internships in the pandemic context. In addition, the situation of still experiencing the pandemic, where adaptation to the “new normal” is still a reality, causes a limited notion of perspectives on how the gaps caused by this scenario will be managed.

As a contribution of this work, we highlight the importance of discussion on the subject and the incentive in the search for resolutions for future situations, and consequently more preparation of all parties involved.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The adaptations made for the teaching-learning process to occur, even in a pandemic scenario, were crucial for the scope of nursing education.

Of the aspects of teaching management that were modified in the “new normal”, at the level of meso-management, the following stand out: 1) judicious choice of internship fields; 2) attention to the development of remote work, focusing on the teacher and student, including providing psychological support for them; 3) scheduling the use of laboratories; 4) purchase of Personal Protective Equipment. In the micromanagement scenario, in summary, the main change was related to the

overload of professors, in addition to changes in the work environment, ways of evaluating students, among others.

Regarding the main challenges for educational managers, teachers and students, the following are highlighted, respectively: 1) inaccuracies about protocols and flows; 2) adaptation to technologies and overload caused by the number of assignments; 3) sudden need for a new role, based on greater responsibility for learning itself.

In this context, despite the efforts of managers so far, teaching management is understood as an unfinished and constantly evolving process. In other words, the “new normal” in nursing education management is here to stay.

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**Financing source:** No

**Conflicts of interest:** No

**Date of submission:** 2021/04/15

**Accepted:** 2021/10/28

**Publication:** 2022/06/24

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**How to cite this article:**

Correa TFA, Fontes VMS, Barros KS, Sousa MM, Araújo LSN, Menegaz JC. Management of nursing education in theoretical-practical activities: reflections in the context of the pandemic. *Rev Enferm UFPI* [internet]. 2022 [acesso em: dia mês abreviado ano]; 11:e953. DOI: 10.26694/reufpi.v11i1.953

