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# Social entrepreneurship: translation of knowledge and practices in Brazilian nursing students

Empreendedorismo social: translação de saberes e práticas em estudantes de enfermagem no Brasil  
Emprendimiento social: traducción de conocimientos y prácticas en estudiantes de enfermería brasileños

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## Abstract

**Background:** The Brazilian curriculum guidelines for undergraduate health courses encourage social entrepreneurship activities by advocating the training of reflective professionals regarding different dimensions of health. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the professional skills to develop these social activities during academic training.

**Objective:** To understand the meaning to Brazilian nursing students of social entrepreneurship activities developed in a recycling association.

**Methodology:** The Grounded Theory approach was used in this study. Data was collected from 2016 to 2017 by interviewing 25 students and 4 workers from a recycling association in southern Brazil.

**Results:** Initially, students demonstrated distancing and prejudice, then indignation and nonconformity and, finally, a change in the way of thinking and acting. Three facets resulted from the interviews: Deconstructing and constructing of preconception; Knowledge and practices; and Promoting transformations.

**Conclusion:** The meaning of social entrepreneurship activities was configured as a deconstructing, constructing, and reconstructing process of pre-conceived knowledge. Its meaning transcends personal and social boundaries and enables a movement of approximation, identification, and translation of knowledge and practices.

**Keywords:** social participation; students; nursing education; community health nursing

## Resumo

**Enquadramento:** As diretrizes curriculares brasileiras para os cursos de graduação em saúde estimulam atividades socialmente empreendedoras, preconizando a formação de profissionais reflexivos. Logo, é necessário reforçar as habilidades profissionais para desenvolver estas atividades sociais durante a formação acadêmica.

**Objetivo:** Compreender o significado para os estudantes brasileiros de enfermagem de atividades socialmente empreendedoras, desenvolvidas numa associação de reciclagem.

**Metodologia:** Recorreu-se à abordagem da Grounded Theory neste estudo. Os dados foram recolhidos entre 2016 e 2017, entrevistando 25 estudantes e 4 trabalhadores de uma associação de reciclagem no Sul do Brasil.

**Resultados:** Inicialmente os alunos demonstraram distanciamento e preconceito, depois indignação e inconformidade e, por fim, uma mudança no modo de pensar e agir. Três categorias resultaram das entrevistas: Desconstruir e construir o preconceito; Conhecimento e as práticas; e Promover transformações.

**Conclusão:** O significado das atividades de empreendedorismo social configurou-se como um processo de desconstrução, construção e reconstrução do conhecimento pré-planeado. O seu significado transcende as fronteiras pessoais e sociais e possibilita um movimento de aproximação, identificação e translação de conhecimentos e práticas.

**Palavras-chave:** participação social; estudantes; educação em enfermagem; enfermagem em saúde comunitária

## Resumen

**Marco contextual:** Las directrices del programa de los estudios de grado del ámbito sanitario en Brasil fomentan las actividades de emprendimiento social mediante la promoción de formación de profesionales reflexivos en torno a diferentes dimensiones de la salud. Por ello, es necesario mejorar las habilidades profesionales con el fin de desarrollar estas actividades sociales durante la formación académica.

**Objetivo:** Comprender qué significan las actividades de emprendimiento social desarrolladas en una asociación de reciclaje para los estudiantes de enfermería de Brasil.

**Metodología:** En este estudio se utilizó el enfoque de la teoría fundamentada. Los datos se recogieron de 2016 a 2017 mediante entrevistas a 25 estudiantes y 4 trabajadores de una asociación de reciclaje en el sur de Brasil.

**Resultados:** Al principio, los estudiantes demostraron distanciamiento y prejuicio, luego indignación e inconformismo y, finalmente, un cambio en la forma de pensar y actuar. De las entrevistas surgieron 3 facetas: Deconstrucción y construcción de preconceptos; Conocimientos y prácticas, y Promoción de transformaciones.

**Conclusión:** El significado de las actividades de emprendimiento social se configuró como un proceso de desconstrucción, construcción y reconstrucción de conocimiento prediseñado. Su significado trasciende las fronteras personales y sociales, y permite un movimiento de aproximación, identificación y traducción de conocimientos y prácticas.

**Palabras clave:** participación social; estudiantes; educación en enfermería; enfermería en salud comunitaria

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## Introduction

In the health area, social entrepreneurship has progressed in the last decade. It gained strength with the need to generate new spaces for the insertion and, especially, awakening up of new design and action approaches within the context of health promotion, protection, and education.

The archetypal social entrepreneur in health was Florence Nightingale: she changed hospital practices and established the framework of professional nursing through her determination and meticulous attention to detail, even in the face of the fierce opposition from experts and authorities. Such drive is typical of social entrepreneurs around the world working in innumerable fields within the health sector (Drayton, Brown, & Hillhouse, 2006).

Nowadays, in the nursing field, the entrepreneurial vision has taken on a business and social connotation, which relates to the creation or improvement of something to generate market benefits. It also might be associated with the ability to generate interactive processes and associations directed at the emancipation of individuals, families, and communities (Backes, Zamberlan, et al., 2016; Backes, Ilha, et al., 2016). In this framework, the International Council of Nurses (2004) estimated that around 1% of registered practicing nurses are nurse entrepreneurs.

However, although social justice and action for change are among the nursing profession's core values, curricular content on social entrepreneurship for nurses is not as well developed as it is in the educational programs for students in business, engineering, or public policy (Gilmartin, 2013).

Based on the current market trends, nursing students must possess differentiated skills, including tangible skills that can be marketed to future employers, but also skills that awaken the autonomy and the social protagonism. A study demonstrates that a curriculum focused on the development of a new generation of entrepreneurs has the potential to improve the aspirations of students, to enhance job prospects, to enable new approaches to the promotion and protection of health, and to support initiatives focused on social transformation (Hernández, Carrión, Perotte & Fullilove, 2014).

In view of the above, the undergraduate Nurs-

ing Course at the Franciscan University (UFN) proposed to carry out community interventions from the first semester of the course on. The specific learning concept was developed so that students could improve socially entrepreneurial skills in the community. For that purpose, students conducted regular social activities at a recycling association located in the South of Brazil under the supervision of a nursing professor. The students started their projects in the first semester and continued through the whole period. After each activity, the social practices were evaluated individually and collectively within the learning unit.

Furthermore, the task was to document personal views and thoughts regarding their own positions and attitudes and to reflect the perceptions and experiences of students by means of writing a portfolio. The professors supervised and mentored the students during the process. The objective of this approach was to develop solidarity and social entrepreneurship skills. So far, just a little is known about the perceptions of students about this approach and the way that it is being taught. Therefore, this study aims to understand the meaning of social entrepreneurship activities to Brazilian nursing students in a recycling association during their regular academic activities.

## Background

Social entrepreneurship is a new field of practice that has rapidly grown in different areas of knowledge.

Although social entrepreneurship is a concept under construction both in a national and international context, this phenomenon has earned special attention in the world during the last decade. With its own theoretical, methodological, and strategic characteristics, social entrepreneurship differs from business logic, due to its ability to induce social self-organization, the articulation of society to institutionalize and present results that meet the real needs of the population. It also distinguishes itself by its capacity for strategic innovation and its dynamics, which differentiates it from the traditional models based on an assistance intervention. (Backes, Erdmann, & Büscher, 2009). Even though social entrepreneurship

has different connotations, it can be defined as a leading tool to new knowledge and practices, by the means of the confrontation of the social problems with innovative strategies and creative solutions, putting the creation of social value at the center of its mission (Dees, 2007; Gilmartin, 2013).

Consequently, social entrepreneurs are change-makers who apply their expertise in social initiatives to improve the lives of others. They are not charities in the sense that they do not simply provide temporary relief. Rather, they leave a lasting impact on the disadvantaged by creating sustainable social projects to address social problems. Social impact is the criterion for the success of a social entrepreneur's program. In healthcare, this often translates into the number of lives saved or the number receiving quality health care (Drayton et al., 2006).

In Brazil, the entrepreneurship has gained importance in the 1990s with the impulse of the Brazilian Service of Support to Micro and Small Enterprises, which is focused on the economic and social development. Under this approach, entrepreneurship is not exactly part of the academic curriculum, but it is a leading strategy to new approaches for social intervention, in addition to a potentiation strategy of the human skills and competencies (Drucker, 2012).

The Brazilian Curriculum Guidelines for Undergraduate nursing courses have gradually encouraged social practices in communities by advocating the training of reflective professionals with regard to different dimensions of the human being health. The professional profile shall include scientific, intellectual, ethical, and social competencies (Fernandes & Rebouças, 2013).

## Research question

What is the meaning to Brazilian nursing students of social entrepreneurship activities developed by themselves in an association of recyclable material?

## Methodology

The Grounded Theory is the approach used in this study. "This approach aims to identify, develop, and relate concepts based on data col-

lected, analyzed, and compared in a systematic and concomitant mode" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 134). "The development of the theoretical framework denotes a set of categories, constructed and based on emerging issues and concepts, which indicate relationships that are capable of forming the theoretical explanatory framework of the social phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 127). The Grounded Theory enables also the generation of concepts that demonstrate changes over time, through simultaneous data collection and analysis (Richards & Morse, 2007).

The data were collected between August 2016 and November 2017 by means of interviews with nursing students and four people that work at the recycling association. The association exists since 2009 with the objective of providing work and income to a group of about 30 people who, through recycling, guarantee the subsistence of their families, composed in their majority by six members. The monthly income of each family is approximately one Brazilian minimum wage.

The first sample group was created with 15 randomly selected students from the second to the fifth semester of the nursing undergraduate course who had actively participated in the social activities in the recycling association, according to a plan of periodic visits that began in the first semester of the nursing undergraduate course. The interviews were based on the following questions: What did the social activities at the recycling association mean to you?; What were the favorable and unfavorable points you have encountered?. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The data analysis was carried out based on the process of open, axial and selective coding (Charmaz, 2006).

The initial properties and hypotheses from the first sample group guided the formation of the second group, comprising 10 students from the last semester of the nursing undergraduate course, selected randomly from the institution's registers. The interview was based on the following questions: What contribution did the practical activities in a recycling association made to your professional training?.

The third group of interviews was conducted with four workers from the recycling association who participated in the practical activities with the nursing students. They were asked

the following question: Which were the contributions of the students' practical activities to your professional life?; What were the contributions to the implementation of health promotion strategies?.. The third group provided supplementary information that indicated the characteristics of the qualification within the social and health context.

The codes were organized according to their respective similarities and differences and grouped into categories and subcategories. After the delimitation of the central category and structuring the theoretical model, which represented the connection between the categories and subcategories, it was validated. The structuring theoretical model was proposed by five of the UFN nursing professors that made suggestions which were incorporated into the final presentation of the model.

The information for this study was collected with the knowledge, informed willingness, and written expressed consent of the participants. The data collection was carried out in two places: the university for students and the recycling association for workers. The research project received the approval by the Ethics Committee of the Franciscan University (Protocol Number 1.641.967/2016).

## Results

The theoretical model of the meaning of social entrepreneurship activities in a recycling association was carried out by nursing students and can be characterized as a deconstructing, constructing, and reconstructing process of knowledge and practices. The effect of these periodic and continuous activities in the association transcends personal, professional, and social boundaries. Initially, the students demonstrated distancing and prejudice, then indignation and nonconformity, and, finally, a change in the way of thinking and acting. The phenomenon experiencing a constructing and reconstructing process of knowledge and practices resulted from the integration of three different aspects, which are: (I) Deconstructing and constructing prejudgments, (II) Constructing and reconstructing knowledge and practices, and (III) Promoting transformations. The content of each of these three categories

resulting from the organization and grouping of their respective codes and subcategories are displayed below.

### Deconstructing and constructing prejudgments

For most students, the initial distancing and prejudice in relation to the members of the recycling association was an established idea. The students never imagined themselves visiting or working in a recycling association. For many students, both the materials and the workers of a recycling association were no more than social garbage. When challenged by one of the local leaders from the association work team during the day of volunteering at the recycling association, the students felt, at the first moment, uncomfortable and scared. They would never expect to be part of such challenge, which along with the process resulted in a life lesson.

On the day that the leader challenged us to volunteer for a day at the recycling association, they invited us to experience their working day, their daily difficulties, and health conditions. We were all terrified and frightened . . . We did not expect this challenge, but all students accepted and participated in the activity. (P2; November, 2016)

The discomfort in relation to the challenge – day of volunteering took place at the recycling association for both students and workers. The workers judged themselves not to be worthy of the help of the students. They said, for instance: “Wow, what was the leader thinking when they challenged the students for this? They will soon hurt their hands; this kind of work is not suited for them”, among other comments.

This type of work in a recycling association is, in general, underestimated and devalued by society. On the other hand, the students, reproducers of this way of thinking and acting, have never imagined themselves inserted in such working conditions. This reality was unknown and distant, not only geographically, but also at the level of understanding and social co-responsibility.

“I was quite shocked by the reality . . . Sometimes we think that glaring social problems only happen far away from us” (P7; November, 2016). “We were in a reality shock . . . We did the guided tour of the recycling association in order to give some guidance on health, but we



were deceiving ourselves . . . How could we talk about health?” (P11; November, 2016). In their speeches, the students understood that the work in a recycling association was limited to unhealthy conditions, cold and hostile environments, that is to say, environments that are powered by trash. However, they were instigated in their way of thinking on the first visit to the site, as leaders made it clear that recyclable materials are not junk, but raw material for the subsistence of their families.

“Some think that they work with trash... it is a preconception of society” (E13; November, 2016).

“It is a much-devalued job... people do not realize that this “trash” comes from our houses” (P23; November, 2017).

The prejudice towards recycling association workers is associated in part with their invisibility and social devaluation. Both the students and the members of the recycling association felt distant and alien to one another. Borders of all types were created and a dominant knowledge is reproduced where someone is over/against others.

### **Constructing and reconstructing knowledge and practices**

The process of immersion in concrete reality and, more specifically, the experience of the volunteering day at the recycling association helped students to reframe and reconstruct knowledge and practices traditionally imposed and reproduced by the supremacy of scientific and economic knowledge. This process of constructing and reconstructing has generated feelings of indignation, nonconformity, and a strong desire for change in the majority of students, as expressed:

I was outraged with the harsh reality of these workers. I have observed that many materials were improperly packaged and the risk of catching any disease is huge . . . I cannot understand why people do not take better care of their household supplies. (P4; November, 2016)

After this experience at the recycling association, I started to think differently . . . it made me grow as a person and I believe that I was not the only one. We have to respect the differences because they make us more human. We must

never devalue the work of another because we are all connected and we need each other in order to have quality of life. (P8; November, 2016)

The activities and experiences were unique and triggered feelings in the students, which relates to the valorization and recognition of the serious and committed job of the workers in a recycling association. They recognized that the little could become a lot, or be everything to the survival of workers' families. They also recognized that the simplest things could make a great social difference, as they take on responsibility and social commitment. According to a statement:

This experience in the recycling association made me see that for them it meant everything, while for us it was just a recyclable material. I realized that the simplest things make a total difference . . . It was with that experience that I started to see the world differently. An experience that I will carry with me for life, an experience that made me a better human being. (P17; November, 2017)

For other students, the experience lived in the recycling association enabled some questions, reflections, and new meanings about the work, and, above all, a deep desire for changing things. “Having participated and experienced the daily life of these workers has made me think a lot . . . It stirred up a feeling of empathy and desiring enthusiasm to change and contribute to that reality of vulnerability” (Q27; July, 2017).

After a day of volunteering work, I realized how demanding and tiring the work is. I stayed in a reality completely new for me and I realized its importance to the environment. However, what affected me the most and what I am going to carry for life was the speech of one of the female workers: The people who work here rarely get jobs out of here. When they get them, they want to come back here because they feel proud of this recycling work. This speech has made me very thoughtful. (P28; July, 2017)

Based on this constructing and reconstructing process of knowledge and practices, the students realized the need to be prepared to deal and live with the social and economic differences. They recognized the opportunity to study at a

university that prepares them for life and not only for the materialistic work. They reinforced, in this direction, the need for an academic training that will prepare them to deal with any person and any reality, regardless of color, race or social and economic condition.

It was important to carry out these activities in the recycling association in order to grow as people and to know how to live with the differences. The academic training must enable us to deal with any situation and person and thus treat everyone with respect and dignity regardless of color or social and economic class. (P15; November, 2016)

I am sure that I have grown as a person. I started to value more the opportunity that I had to study at a good university . . . Not everyone has the same opportunity or know how to live with the differences. After all, the profession I have chosen cares for everyone without exception. It welcomes and does good to all. I do not see myself in another area. (P26; July, 2017)

In this constructing and reconstructing process of knowledge and practices, students have concluded that investing in recycling contributes not only to the survival of many families but also to the sustainability of the environment and the promotion of healthier cities.

### **Promoting transformations: the experience of a lifetime**

The process of constant comings and goings to the recycling association lead to a growing movement of transformation in students and workers, which is translated into a change of habits and attitudes, in the expansion of concepts and in the rethinking of everyday practices and behaviors ranging from separation to correct disposal of solid waste in their own houses.

This experience has made me broaden my concept of trash and recyclable materials. Now, I try to separate correctly the materials in my house . . . Before, I did not give much value to this . . . I have changed my way of thinking. (P9; November, 2016)

I have changed my concept of trash and learned that we all have to love everything we do. We expanded our vocabulary on this very important topic that enabled us

to understand health in an expanded and interconnected way with everything that surrounds us. (P25; July, 2017)

With the immersion in the reality of work, the students had the opportunity to know the reality closely and, consequently, to dialogue and interact actively with the members of the recycling association. Both students and workers recognized that the exchange of knowledge and practices enabled the exchange of meanings of life and work that will contribute to the rethinking of health promotion and education strategies.

Upon returning home, after the exchange of knowledge, I had different and much more elaborate ideas on the theme of recycling . . . It was this exchange of energies and wisdom that impressed me the most and that made me change my concepts regarding health. (P21; July, 2017)

Workers are exposed to a number of risks. This particular situation has made me think a lot about various aspects of my life about activities that I could promote to improve their quality of work and health. (P29; July, 2017)

The experience, though challenging, generated a feeling of gratitude, reciprocity, and emancipation in the students. They felt acknowledged and valued by the members of the recycling association for the work developed during the semester. They acknowledged the experience as unique and unspeakable and admitted that all people should experience this.

We spent there only a few days but it was amazing. The feeling of being able to help people and gain new experiences cannot be described. It is something that every person must feel. The workers paid a visit to our institution and reported that our aid in the semester was essential and that the work we carried out in one day was equivalent to 3 days of work for them. This was extremely gratifying to us. I considered these days at the recycling association as the most important of the semester, because we were able to see the reality of the community and carry out practices that have made us better. It was a unique experience that I think everyone should have. (P6; November, 2016)

With the activities in the recycling association, I became someone else. Hearing those simple female workers telling their stories generated in me a true transformation of life. I was very touched by the speech of one woman: I love what I do, I tried to work in other fields, but I went back to recycling because it is where I feel at home and I feel like family. These moments will be in my mind forever, for it is a beautiful lesson of life that all should experience. (P12; November, 2016)

In summary, the results of this study show that both students and members of the recycling association have grown and transformed into this movement of dialogic and emancipatory deconstructions, constructions, and reconstructions. While the members felt honored and valued in their role, seemingly invisible to society, students felt challenged, encouraged, and co-responsible with improving the workers' quality of life. Through this interactive and associative process, all those involved, that is, students and workers of the recycling association, have empowered themselves as protagonists of a new history.

## Discussion

The process of deconstruction, construction, and reconstruction of social knowledge and practices is only possible through the insertion into concrete reality, based on dialogical approaches. For Morin (2015) it is necessary, firstly, to know and recognize that only a little is known about the knowledge and/or the particular organization of recycling associations. Secondly, it is necessary to admit the need to dialogue with the world or with the so-called specific organizations to, thus, share their own knowledge. Finally, it is necessary to think about some intervention related to health promotion and education.

Social entrepreneurship, much more than speeches or something programmed to address poverty, involves a dialogical approach inserted in what Morin stated or a dialogue with the surrounding environment. Social entrepreneurship based on this dialogical conception with concrete reality means potentiating the vital elements that guarantee the self-organization of specific groups, with-

out harming/attacking the particular organization - the only guarantee of survival. Furthermore, promoting social entrepreneurship without regard to the particular organization of individuals and communities means mutilating what remains to them as the most sacred and vital - their own organization and vitalism.

In view of this, an important strategy for qualifying and assigning a new meaning to the social practice of nurses associates with professional training for entrepreneurship and social protagonism. Professional training, as expressed by the respondents and supported by scholars in the field, can no longer be limited to the classroom and the decontextualized production of knowledge. The training of health/nursing professionals needs to be articulated with the emerging social demands in the sense of broadening the interactive and associative competences, by maximizing knowledge on the concrete reality of individuals (Aguilar et al., 2012; Backes et al., 2009).

There is an urgent need for change in the way of producing academic knowledge (Cornell et al., 2013). Only pertinent knowledge is capable of situating any information in its real context, considering that it progresses not so much by sophistication, formalization, or accumulation, but by the capacity to contextualize, reconnect, and globalize. The pertinent knowledge needs to guide the student to participate reflexively and critically in its construction process through the perception of the living world, motivated by the network of dynamic relationships, interactions, and associations that are in constant transformation.

It is necessary, to gradually overcome the reductionist and assistentialist approaches of social intervention by stimulating the active methodologies of knowledge construction. According to the logic of the competitive market, nurses need to be able to act in different scenarios in order to explore new practices/technologies and contribute to a creative and responsible way of sustainable social development. The production of knowledge must gradually integrate the paradoxical look of certainties and uncertainties, in order to reduce the barriers of knowledge (Altman, & Brinker, 2016; Backes, Backes, Erdmann, & Büscher, 2012).

Professional training, through the concepts of social entrepreneurship, necessarily requires the

development of active and participatory methodologies, as well as the creation of stimulating environments capable of fostering creativity, initiative, and self-reflection. In this process, the educator as an opinion leader plays a mediating role. In addition to providing ready answers, absolute truths, or certainties about the future, the educator must understand and arouse the human mind to social responsibility and commitment (Sarikaya & Coşkun, 2015). For scholars in the field, social entrepreneurship depends on a complex set of processes that connect different agents, because they understand that innovations occur from associative networks, in which the problems and needs of individuals and the potential of technologies can be creatively associated and enhanced with each other (Lisetchi & Brancu, 2014).

Training nurses to be social entrepreneurs means, from this perspective, to produce open and flexible professionals for the new and the different. Professionals capable of perceiving opportunities amidst contradictions and the possibility of a new order inside of a disorder, uncertainty, and chaos. According to the logic of social entrepreneurship, the university has a dual function: to contribute to the awakening of an entrepreneurial culture and to generate new technologies for social inclusion through teaching, research, and extension. Moreover, both teachers and students have the responsibility of being instigating agents, that is, protagonists of a new history (Backes et al., 2012). Therefore, social entrepreneurship translates itself into gestures of solidarity, ability to negotiate with uncertainties, and dialogue with different realities. In addition, it is the capacity to integrate order and disorder and, through interaction in networks and partnerships, to consolidate a new social order through the inclusion of different private organizations. Social entrepreneurship is only carried out through responsible, bold, creative, and innovative professional attitudes based on active participation in social and health policies.

## Conclusion

The meaning of socially enterprising activities in a recycling association is configured as a deconstructing, constructing, and reconstructing

process of pre-conceived knowledge. Its meaning transcends personal and social boundaries and enables a movement of approximation, identification, and translation of knowledge and practices. In addition, it results in a change of habits and attitudes, the expansion of concepts, and the rethinking of daily behaviours that are not finished in the scientific sense.

One limitation of this study concerning the size of the sample needs to be considered and addressed. The number of participants is limited for generalizations. On the other hand, considering the nature of the Grounded Theory, this study also has a limited generalizability and authors recognize its integration in the research that may have influenced data construction and interpretation.

The gathered evidence allowed describing and providing a rich and contextualized understanding of the overall experiences of this learning process, in order to contribute to the application of knowledge in this research area. Thus, regarding consequences of this study for theory/practice and research, it may contribute to adding knowledge about a theme that has not yet been exploited qualitatively and needs to obtain original contributions. This study emphasizes the need to construct a professional knowledge that consists not only of the application of the theory into the practice but also of the research on the practice in order to make sense to the theory. The confrontation of knowledge, based on the construction of a theoretical knowledge about practice, will contribute not only to improving the professional skills of those who produce it but also to the sustainable social development. On the other hand, the development of the theoretical model explaining the studied phenomenon is an enormous contribution to the training of nursing students and to the guidance of health policies, enabling, among other benefits, the improvement of nursing care and thus the quality of life of the human being.

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