THOUGHT, REFLECTION, AND ACTION IN NURSING PROFESSIONAL’S KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION

ABSTRACT
Objective: present a reflection on John Dewey’s theory with regard to the knowledge construction process of nursing professionals. Method: this is a theoretical reflection, in the light of literature, on nursing education and professional training based on concepts of the reflective practice proposed by John Dewey. Results: we found out that reflection opens new possibilities for action and leads to new professional pathways, appreciating the personal knowledge construction and legitimizing the epistemological value of nursing practice; there is a need for introducing a “new” model for nursing professional training that enables conditions to develop the competences needed for practicing the craft. Conclusion: reflection, combined to action, opens new possibilities for knowledge construction and leads to an improvement of the nursing professional profile. Descriptors: Thought; Learning; Nursing Education.

RESUMO
Objetivo: apresentar uma reflexão sobre a teoria de John Dewey em relação ao processo de construção do conhecimento dos profissionais de enfermagem. Método: trata-se de uma reflexão teórica, à luz da literatura, sobre educação em enfermagem e formação profissional com base em conceitos da prática reflexiva propostos por John Dewey. Resultados: constatou-se que a reflexão abre novas possibilidades para a ação e conduz a novos caminhos profissionais, valorizando a construção pessoal do conhecimento e legitimando o valor epistemológico da prática de enfermagem; faz-se necessário apresentar um “novo” modelo para a formação do profissional de enfermagem que propicie condições de desenvolver competências necessárias ao exercício do ofício. Conclusão: a reflexão, combinada à ação, abre novas possibilidades para a construção do conhecimento e conduz a um aprimoramento do perfil do profissional de enfermagem. Descritores: Pensamento; Aprendizagem; Educação Em Enfermagem.

RESUMEN
Objetivo: presentar una reflexión acerca de la teoría de John Dewey con relación al proceso de construcción del conocimiento de los profesionales de enfermería. Método: esta es una reflexión teórica, a la luz de la literatura, acerca de la educación en enfermería y la formación profesional con base en conceptos de la práctica reflexiva propuestos por John Dewey. Resultados: se constató que la reflexión abre nuevas posibilidades para la acción y conduce a nuevos caminos profesionales, valorizando la construcción personal del conocimiento y legitimando el valor epistemológico de la práctica de enfermería; se torna necesario presentar un “nuevo” modelo para la formación del profesional de enfermería que propicie condiciones para desarrollar competencias necesarias para ejercer el oficio. Conclusión: la reflexión, combinada con la acción, abre nuevas posibilidades para la construcción del conocimiento y conduce a un perfeccionamiento del perfil del profesional de enfermería. Descriptores: Pensamiento; Aprendizaje; Educación En Enfermería.
INTRODUCTION

According to the Law of Guidelines and Bases of the Brazilian Education (LDB) (Law 9,394/96), among the purposes of Higher Education stands out the need for stimulating the education of professionals with a scientific spirit and a reflective thinking. By means of this law, the National Curriculum Guidelines (DCN) were created, defining the profile and competences to be achieved, highlighting the need for more flexible undergraduate curricula, and enabling the education of professionals who are more critical, thoughtful, active, dynamic, and adaptable to the labor market.¹

The guidelines address education as a human phenomenon, multiple and differentiated, which links professional training to social practice. Based on LDB, a document was issued in the 3rd National Week of Guidelines for Nursing Education in Brazil, which recommends the profile of nurses graduated from a college of Nursing, characterizing a generalist, critical, thoughtful professional with technical, scientific, ethical, political, and socio-educational competence.²

John Dewey’s philosophical thought was among the factors which triggered the movement for renewal of ideas and pedagogical practices. Reflective thinking is characterized by a continued learning that combines “happening” and “understanding” in search of meanings for experiences. This process will determine perceptions and interpretations, besides targeting decision making, enabling people to face everyday life problems.³

John Dewey, educator, philosopher, and psychologist born in Burlington, in the North-American state of Vermont, in 1859, states that the origin of thought is a perplexity, confusion, or doubt and, for bringing it about, something has to provoke it; in turn, learning consists in the reconstruction of an experience. “The problem to be solved determines the thought’s purpose and this purpose drives the thinking act process” ⁴⁵

Dewey’s educational ideas had great influence on the Brazilian education. In the 1930s, the political aspects of Dewey’s ideas were brought into the country through the work developed by Anísio Teixeira (1900-1971), a renowned Brazilian educator and follower of Dewey’s ideas. Teixeira translated the major Deweyan works into Portuguese, and promoted his ideas for organizing the Brazilian schools according to our society and in tune with it.⁶

As late as in the 1990s, Dewey’s influence was resumed by means of essential concepts of his thought, such as the notion of reflective thinking, linking professors’ education to the concept of “reflective professor”, who seeks a balance between action and thought; a new practice always implies a reflection on her/his experience, beliefs, images, and values.

It has been claimed that Dewey’s theory emerged to demystify an uninteresting and even discouraging schooling style experienced by subjects in the teaching/learning process.⁵ In this scenario, the thinker Donald Alan Schön focused his studies on organizational learning and professional effectiveness, with decisive weight on reflection, supporting his ideas on Dewey’s thought, especially with regard to reflection as an instrument for developing competences, based on the process of reflection in action, catching a glimpse of learning perspectives by means of doing in professionals’ training.¹,⁶

It is also noteworthy that professional training by competences and reflection are, nowadays, the concepts most frequently used by various researchers and educators, who emphasize their importance to shape being/doing and pedagogical action. The act of reflecting must be within the educator’s social context, awakening critical sense, unveiling reality, and joining the personal and professional thinking.

Nursing must be within this educational context. We should adopt this educational practice, since education plays a role in the health care process. The way how a person perceives nursing practice determines the way how it is put into practice and how it is taught, studied, and investigated, affecting the professional practice throughout its range.

Scholars suggest a model which enables reflecting in action, taking into account the relationship between caregiver and patient observed in the context experienced by the nursing professional, and proposing it as an act of change in nursing practice.⁷

This article aims to:

♦ Present a reflection on John Dewey’s theory in the knowledge construction process of nursing professionals.

METHOD

This is a theoretical analysis study, in the light of literature, on nursing education and professional training based on concepts of reflective practice proposed by John Dewey. Following analysis, we defined as thematic axis: Reflection for action and professional behavior in nursing.
DEVELOPMENT

Reflection for action and professional behavior in nursing

Nursing is a combination of knowledge from physical, human, and social sciences and its historical roots enable students and professionals to prepare for meeting the health care needs in the 21st century. Given this context, the ideas advocated by Dewey on education and its relation to changes in society, in addition to the applicability of knowledge to social practices, are closely interconnected to nurse’s academic education to play her/his social role as a professional.

It is a responsibility of nursing caring for human beings from the integral perspective, requiring a comprehensive academic education, grounded and aimed at professional practice. During the profession evolution, numerous technical, scientific, and ethical transformations emerged, making the education of new nurses a continuous challenge.

As a science, nursing is grounded on a body of knowledge that is always diversifying itself, due to new discoveries and innovations, and, as a profession, it requires that its members have distinct kinds of knowledge and skills to take a multitude of roles and professional responsibilities.

Before, Nursing teaching concentrated its actions in clinical tasks, it was seen and respected as the science that knew how to care for the patient. Subsequently, Nursing became a university career and research became indispensable. With this evolution, the professor started facing the problem of having to know the theory, having practical experience, although without dedicating her/himself to an ongoing activity in the field.

Like in the professional practice, nurse’s academic education must follow the complex transformation process that society went through, since the transformations required in educational structures have an intimate relation to social and economic transformations and they have to be based on methods and teaching and learning strategies that enable cooperation, consensus, reflection, and adaptation to changes, diversities, and unexpected events.

It is shown that the proposal is organizing school according to society and in line with it. Given this context, the notion of change occupies a central position in John Dewey’s thought, influencing the mindset of educators who understood his way of thinking. Anisio Teixeira, from the Brazilian reality, was among the creators of the so-called New Education, which aims to adapt the country’s education to the modern world changes.

The new kind of society – democratic and scientific – could not regard its perpetuation as possible without a completely special school apparatus. The old spontaneous education processes were no longer possible. With the whole technological development of society, it becomes, in fact, so complex, artificial, and dynamic that, with all the laissez-faire, a minimum of social planning becomes impossible, aided by a system of intentional education, i.e. school, which is indispensable, indeed.

It is noteworthy that individuals “act and react in their environment through the interaction and experience and that the experience adds directions to the individual, transforming and developing her/his own environment.”

It has been stated that, while traditional education was concerned with theory, the current education is concerned with practice, as far as experience is regarded as a source of knowledge. Contemporary education relates the processes of student’s actual experience to education and it does not depart from life, providing the student with conditions so that she/he solves her/his problems for her/himself.

Education, as the reconstruction or reorganization of experiences, increases the ability to drive the course of subsequent experiences. This constitutes an alternative to increase knowledge of the reality of nursing practices, by promoting a reflection on the experiences, thus favoring a better understanding of the situation, a more appropriate decision making, and an improvement of skills to act.

The desired educational theory must be connected to social practice, since scientific investigation only makes sense when researchers break the boundaries of their specialties and adopt an overt cooperation with other social occupations, showing to be sensitive to the problems of their fellows.

The teaching/learning process is active, requiring the involvement both of the professor and the student in an effort to achieve the desired result: a behavioral change. The professor does not merely convey knowledge to the student, but rather acts as a facilitator of learning.

From the perspective of interactivity, the professor can stop being a sharer of knowledge to turn into a formulator of problems, provoking questions, coordinating
work teams, systematizing experiences and the living memory of an education that, instead adhering to transmission, appreciates and enables dialogue and collaboration. This contributes to the construction of reciprocal knowledge, favoring the student/professor relationship.\(^{15}\)

The teaching action refers to teach, learn, and apprehend. These actions are often regarded as dissociated due to the idea that teaching means presenting or explaining content by means of an exposition, thus making the professor responsible for sharing information, naming her/him the only source of knowledge, becoming the bearer and guarantee of truth.\(^{16}\)

Supported by these assumptions, the professor must be a producer of knowledge on the situations faced in her/his teaching practice, and not just a simple narrator and interpreter of some previously established knowledge.\(^6\)

The Higher Education professor is not always close to the teaching/learning approaches or conceptions that enable her/him to work to provide her/his lessons with the same effectiveness with which she/he practices the profession of origin. Challenges inherent to the professor’s craft require that the educator dedicates her/himself to reflection and analysis of practice, aiming at innovation.\(^1\)

Society puts the professor in challenging situations; he intervenes in a complex, living, and changeable scenario, facing individual and group problems, but the professional’s success depends on his ability to handle complexity and solve practical problems, this process is, undoubtedly, reflective and it requires competences on the part of the professor to overcome the challenges emerging in his practice.\(^{1,16}\)

It has been shown that scholars concerned with the practical rationality model recognize that the richness of teaching experience may be found in pedagogical practice and it has been proposed that continuous improvement of education must, necessarily, start from professor’s reflection on her/his teaching practice and experience.\(^{16}\) Thus, by replacing the technical rationality model by the practical rationality model we may find an interaction between theory and practice.

Professor’s involvement in reflective practice implies: open-mindedness, to understand possible alternatives and admit the existence of errors; responsibility, which enables a careful consideration of the consequences of a given action; and commitment to mobilize the previous attitudes. [...] The true reflective practice occurs when a person has a real problem to solve and, in this “case”, she investigates in order to look for a solution.\(^{2,16}\)

Reflective thinking is based on the observation, knowledge, and experience, which cannot be spontaneously acquired, because they require the development of the ability to think, with close and complex relationship between pedagogical practice and reflective thinking. Through reflective teaching, it becomes possible to teach and learn, therefore, reflective thinking constitutes an aspect mediating between teaching and action.\(^{17}\)

The reflective teaching practice requires that the professor is not limited to investigations produced in the academy, it must produce practical knowledge validated by practice itself.\(^{1,11}\) It is through experience that the professional constructs her/his knowledge, defined as a set of schemes, thought, and action. This process will determine her/his perceptions and interpretations and drive decision making that will enable her/him to deal with the problems faced in daily work.

In order to lead knowledge to generate competences, there is a need that knowledge is mobilized through action schemes, deriving from perception schemes, evaluation, and decision, developed in practice. Reflection and action must be interconnected, since they are elements of a set that cannot be dissociated and leads us to think critically and restructure our next actions.\(^{18}\)

The power of reflective over practice as a catalyst of better practices was advocated by John Dewey. Currently, reflective practice is an alternative to develop knowledge on the reality of nursing practices, due to its focus on people’s reflection to better understand their situation, make more appropriate decisions, and improve skills to act. This approach is able to unify action and thought, theory, and practice, essential to the production of knowledge on the area.

**FINAL REMARKS**

This study presented a reflection on teaching with regard to the theoretical and practical concepts related to the training process of nursing and Nursing teaching, through reflective thinking.

Reflection, in partnership with action, may open new possibilities for the construction of knowledge and lead to an improvement of the nursing professional profile. Knowledge constructed by transformations in pedagogical practice, visualized and effected through reflective practice and subsequent action,
results in a new perspective of professional practice, thus contributing to nursing evolution.

Nursing education must enable beneficial situations to the development of prospective professionals, favoring an education consistent with the needs of their daily work, related to the scientific, technical, ethical, and legal knowledge of the profession.

This justifies the continued interest of Nursing educators when faced with the great changes brought about by technological innovations, by appreciating the power of knowledge, by paradigm shifts in education, and by new values of society. This interest may contribute to new formats and new competences that today’s world requires in nurses’ education, supporting new investigations and contributing to a better knowledge of the state of the art of Nursing education.

Higher Education must graduate critical and reflective practitioners, able to live in a world undergoing constant change; for this, the professor must be prepared, equipped with the competences needed for a transformative teaching, thus, there emerges the need for Higher Education institutions to rethink their political and pedagogical projects, based on the concept of reflective practice, indispensable to promote new kinds of knowledge, in order to adopt a methodology that enables participation and commitment of all agents involved in the teaching/learning process.

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