RESEARCH

## BETWEEN GLIMPSES, UNCERTAINTIES AND EXPECTATIONS: MARCOS IN BUILDING COLLABORATIVE IDENTITY OF NURSE

Entre vislumbres, incertezas e expectativas: marcos colaborativos na construção da identidade do enfermeiro

Entre destellos, incertidumbres y expectativas: marcos de construcción colaborativo identidad de enfermeira

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To understand the formative process of nursing students, through milestones considered collaborative to the construction of the professional identity of nurses. **Method:** Qualitative exploratory-descriptive study with 26 nursing students through semi-structured interview and questionnaire. Information collection took place in May and June 2015. The findings were subjected to Content Analysis and supported by Claude Dubar's concepts. **Results:** The findings bring the choice of the course by vocation, influences and approach to medicine, characterizing the inherited identity. The targeted and virtual identities were influenced by frustrations during the training. Moreover, permanence in the course results from the need for recognition when completing a higher education and the understanding of a moral duty. **Conclusion:** The study brought the reflection of important milestones in the constitution of identity. Understanding identity as a multifaceted constitution recognizes the need for further studies to explore this phenomenon in other contexts.
**DESCRIPTORS:** Nursing students; Bachelor of nursing; Choice of profession; Nursing education; Professional practice.

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## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Compreender o processo formativo do estudante de Enfermagem mediante marcos considerados colaborativos à construção da identidade profissional do enfermeiro. **Método:** Estudo exploratório-descritivo, qualitativo, com 26 estudantes de enfermagem mediante entrevista semiestruturada e questionário. A coleta de informações ocorreu em maio e junho de 2015. Os achados foram submetidos a Análise de Conteúdo e sustentada nos conceitos de Claude Dubar. **Resultados:** Os achados trazem a escolha do curso pela vocação, influências e aproximação com a medicina, caracterizando a identidade herdada. As identidades visada e virtual foram influenciadas por frustrações durante a formação. Ademais, a permanência no curso resulta da necessidade por um reconhecimento ao concluir uma educação superior e do entendimento de um dever moral. **Conclusão:** O estudo trouxe a reflexão de marcos importantes na constituição da identidade. Entendendo a identidade como uma constituição multifacetada, reconhece-se a necessidade de realização de outros estudos para explorar esse fenômeno em outros contextos.

**DESCRITORES**: Estudantes de enfermagem; Bacharelado em enfermagem; Escolha da profissão; Educação em enfermagem; Prática profissional.

## RESUMEN

**Objective:** to understand the formative process of nursing students, through milestones considered collaborative to the construction of the professional identity of nurses. **Método:** estudio cualitativo exploratorio descriptivo con 26 estudiantes de enfermería mediante entrevista semiestructurada y cuestionario. La recopilación de información tuvo lugar en mayo y junio de 2015. Los hallazgos fueron sometidos a análisis de contenido y respaldados por los conceptos de Claude Dubar. **Resultados:** los hallazgos traen la elección del curso por vocación, influencias y enfoque de la medicina, caracterizando la identidad heredada. Las identidades dirigidas y virtuales fueron influenciadas por las frustraciones durante el entrenamiento. Además, la permanencia en el curso resulta de la necesidad de reconocimiento al completar una educación superior y la comprensión de un deber moral. **Conclusión:** el estudio trajo el reflejo de hitos importantes en la constitución de la identidad. Comprender la identidad como una constitución multifacética reconoce la necesidad de más estudios para explorar este fenómeno en otros contextos.

**DESCRITORES**: Estudiantes de enfermería; Licenciatura en enfermería; Elección de la profesión; Educación en enfermería; Práctica profesional.

## INTRODUCTION

The university plays an important role in the professional training process, preparing the subject for the field of activity and, in addition, it acts in the integral construction of the human being, allowing him to have a critical-reflective thinking about the issues of society.[1] It influences, then, the identity composition of its graduates.

Identity is understood as the way the individuals perceives or recognizes themselves and is perceived by the society that surrounds them. It is a dynamic, changeable process composed of values, beliefs and representations that individuals has and differs from one to the other.[2]

This social and plural construction process also manifests itself in the university environment, as, during graduation, the student also experiences interactions with colleagues, teachers and employees. Thus, it is recognized that the teaching-learning process of nursing enables students not only to acquire theoretical and practical knowledge around care, but also around relationships and how students identify themselves as future professionals and build their own identities.[2]

The study, then, aims to understand the nursing students' training process through milestones considered collaborative in the construction of the nurses' professional identity. These are based on the proposition that the construction of students' professional identity along the academic trajectory considers models, professional choices, curricula, biographies and how much identity is essential in the future conduct of each professional's life.[3]

## METHOD

Exploratory-descriptive, qualitative study, developed with students regularly enrolled in the tenth semester of a Nursing Course at a public university in the state of Ceará. The choice of the students' semester in the study was based on the understanding that the participants would have already experienced different situations during the course, and that these would encourage reflections on the professional identity hitherto built. 31 students were identified and 26 agreed to participate by agreeing and signing the Free and Informed Consent Form (Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido – TCLE).

The collection of information took place in the months of May and June 2015, through a semi-structured interview that inquired aspects related to the reasons for starting the course, doubts about permanence and expectations regarding the professional future. It was also used a questionnaire to build the profile of these students, seeking to establish possible relations between the findings.

In view of the issues related to professional identity, the concepts of Claude Dubar, a French sociologist who discusses the constituent elements of identity, were adopted as a theoretical framework to conduct the analysis. This theorist argues that it is necessary to understand the active representations of the participants about the social relationships experienced in the construction of identity.[4]

Active representations are analyzed based on the individuals' interaction with the system to which they are inserted, the relationship with the future, and the way they describe and experience the situation. Thus, identity is linked to essentialism, which deals with "reality itself" and linked to the identity of a group, and the nominalist, based on inherited identities that undergo transmutations, according to the actors' choices.[5]

In the identity composition proposed by Dubar, it is also necessary to understand the aspects inherent to real and virtual social identities. The first comes from a biographical process (identity for oneself) which runs through a subjective transaction that maintains inherited identities, but with the intention of building a new identity in the future, being characterized as targeted identities. Virtual identity, on the other hand, results from the relational process (identity to

the other) through acts of attribution, configuring itself in proposed and assumed identities.[4]

To determine meaningful discourses for the analysis of future professional identity in nursing students, the findings were submitted to Content Analysis (CA),[6] in order to obtain the essence of active representations, through systematic and objective procedures, in addition to the description of the content of the messages.

The study was guided by Resolution No. 466/12[7] and obtained approval from the Research Ethics Committee (Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa) under approval No. 975.088/2015.

To guarantee the anonymity of the participants, the statements were presented by the letter "S", meaning student, followed by an ordinal number, indicating the order of the interviews (S1, S2, for example).

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The characterization of the participants is shown in Table 1, according to the researched variables, with the intention of provoking reflections that reverberate in the construction of the identity of future professionals as a social practice.

**Table 1 -** Characterization of study participants according to variables by age group. Sobral-CE: 2015.

| Variables | | Age Groups | | | Total |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | 20-23 years | 24-27 years | 28-30 years | |
| Sex | Male | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| | Female | 6 | 10 | 5 | 21 |
| Marital Status | Single | 8 | 9 | 4 | 21 |
| | Married | - | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| | Divorced | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Own-Source Income | Does not have | 3 | 4 | 3 | 10 |
| | Works | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| | Scholarship | 4 | 6 | 3 | 13 |
| | Pension | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Family Income | 1 Minimum Wage | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| | 2 to 3 Minimum Wages | 6 | 8 | 5 | 19 |
| | 4 or more Minimum Wages | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 |
| Place of Birth | Study location | 2 | 2 | 6 | 10 |
| | Surrounding cities | 6 | 9 | 1 | 16 |
| Municipality of Residence | Study location | 7 | 11 | 5 | 23 |
| | Surrounding cities | 1 | - | 2 | 3 |
| Who lives with | Parents | - | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | Friends | 5 | 3 | 3 | 11 |
| | Relatives | 3 | 7 | 3 | 13 |
| High School Institution | Public | 2 | 3 | 6 | 11 |
| | Private | 5 | 7 | 1 | 13 |
| | Both | - | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Previous graduation | Yes | - | - | 4 | 4 |
| | No | 8 | 11 | 3 | 22 |

Source: research data

The research participants were 26 nursing students attending the last semester of graduation. Of these, 11 are aged between 24-27 years and 21 are single. These findings corroborate with those found in another study in which a profile of single marital status is revealed and mostly composed of young people in Nursing.[8]

It appears that 21 students are female, reinforcing the discussion of the persistent feminization of nursing, an aspect that demands paradigmatic reflections. This is because the territories in which this profession operates strengthen

gender binarism when it is intended that care is essentially an attribute of women.[9]

The economic profile of the participants is low, with a family income of 2 to 3 minimum wages; this probably influenced the number of students with scholarships (13), as the university where the study is located has students from surrounding interiors who have low social and economic realities.

Also, 16 students were not native to the study site. This causes in the students the need to adapt to the university

environment, that favors their independence and responsibility,[10] as well as their identity reconstruction.

Of the participants, 13 were from private schools. Public school students represent a minority in higher education due to better preparation of students coming from the private ones.[11] This suggests profound reflections on university access, especially on the social circumstances that limit access to higher education.

The findings presented until then incite reflections that permeate the constitution of the professional identity provoked in nursing students. From the discussion units from the students' active representations: "The beginning of the journey...", "The stones, stumbling, challenges of walking...", and "The persevering and going beyond...".

## The beginning of the journey...

The journey in the professional training process begins with uncertainties about the choice, being largely influenced by the identity inherited from the profession. Many considerations pass through the imagination of the young person who wishes to pursue higher education, with nursing being strongly linked to the entire historical connotation of this profession, considered as the one that offers care in its essence.

*I always liked the care with people, I always had that in me. It has always been really a vocation for care.* (S26)

It is common to associate the identification of the nurse with the vocation for care. This goes back to historical issues of the profession,[12] which are perpetuated in the social imagination, constituting stereotypes of the profession.

In addition, it is necessary to consider the social characteristic of the identity construction process. Many students, when deciding to start a course, perpetuate choices of their daily influences, whether from family members or professionals with whom they maintained some kind of bond.

*I could follow the lives of some professionals, parents of my friends, professionals of my city. I noticed that it was a very beautiful profession, the care, the competence of the nurses, the responsibility they have...* (S18)

The professional choice is marked by the social image of the area and family influence.[13] This aspect brings the reflection of identity as an act of belonging, as the choices are guided by the contexts in which we are inserted and we feel belonging.

However, university insertion is interwoven with uncertain movements regarding the choice of the course. Seven respondents had doubts between medicine and nursing, and decided to join this one because of the proximity they thought existed between the areas.

*I wanted medical school. I tried a few times and failed. So, I did the nurse course because it was similar to medicine...* (S12)

This sense of "substitution" of medicine by nursing is corroborated by another study[14] in which students, when asked about the "professional choice", reported that the destination was the health area and that the entry into nursing occurred for not obtaining classification in medicine, considered as the first option for the majority.

The above points out an important issue to be considered, as it influences in what the course represents for the student and in what it will represent in the future as a nurse. Thus, the target identity can be influenced by the assumed one, in which the student as a nurse in the future will associate his knowledge with that of medicine as a way to fulfill a latent desire to enter this area. Such aspects and, in particular, the idea of sovereignty from one profession to another can limit and weaken the autonomy of the nurses' practice.[15]

The dialogues presented in this section allow us to infer that there are many uncertainties when arriving, but this still reverberates or intensifies during the formative process. It is justified because of the knowledge about the course to deepen, in order to polish previous thoughts and/or revoke ideas of the profession that came intertwined in the students.

## The stones, stumbling, challenges of walking...

Situations during the course can prevent proper recognition of the teaching-learning process, in addition to inciting attitudes that can have an impact on the students' virtual and targeted identity.

*Many teachers are not committed, they miss a lot, they do not pass the content the way we expect. What really made me learn what I know today were the scholarships I got, because the college is very focused on research and that discouraged me a lot.* (S11)

Teaching work is a complex task, requiring specific knowledge and training for its execution. The students' perception of the good teacher can serve as a guideline for interesting reflections on the impact of changes in training, highlighting research on teaching in health.[16]

Recognizing the dynamic and historical characteristics inherent to the concept of health, higher education is brought into line with these changes. Thus, the integrated curriculum, adopted in the course under analysis, has become a frequent option and is based on the possibility of overcoming the dichotomy between theory and practice, in teaching based on the contextualization of knowledge, on problematization and on the articulation between teaching, service and community.[17]

As a way to incite and reinforce the articulation of knowledge still in nursing education, research is a fundamental component, since it is linked to the acquisition of new knowledge, helps in professional performance and provides greater quality in nursing care.[18] However, it is recognized the importance of balance between the various activities that make up the process of training the future nurse.

Other aspects considered challenging in the teaching-learning process and which interfere in the students' intended

identity refer to subjects considered structuring and belonging to the most initial moments of the course. This causes difficulties, making students question whether they will be able to develop their activities competently and whether their identity for the other will be recognized.

> *We have a great deficiency in pharmacology, anatomy, fundamental disciplines for the exercise of the profession, but we have no knowledge. During internships, we arrive and are not well received by professionals. That's because we don't have a tutor in the service to guide us, we get lost.* (S13)

The speech of participant S13 allows us to ponder the impact of the preceptor's absence in the field of practice, understanding him not only as a figure who will teach a pure technique, but also as the one who builds links between the student and the health team, in the perspective of discussing work processes that involve collaboration, knowledge, attitude, ethics, resolvability and belonging. Thus, the figure of the preceptor contributes to an assumed identity of the students in the face of the relational processes that they allowed themselves to experience.

In addition, the students' approach to the field of professional insertion, in addition to providing meaning to training, sometimes presents an environment of devaluation in the face of the nurses' performance. This can influence the target identity of the students, when verifying that the real identity of the group to which they are constituting their belonging does not have the desired prestige.

> *Facing the reality of the job market, we see that the profession is very devalued and very disunited.* (S8)

When the workers are recognized, they develop their work with greater commitment and satisfaction, because the workplace is now identified as an environment of recognition and appreciation. The recognition of nursing and social prestige can make nurses feel satisfied and full with the activities performed in the work context and before society. Satisfaction can motivate them to develop higher quality patient care,[19] which has an impact on their professional identity.

However, even the real identity of nursing signaling professional devaluation, students already bring a movement of transmutation in the intention of building a new identity in the future, through choices made.

## The persevering and going beyond...

This section makes considerations about the "follow" and "finish" the graduation in nursing, even in the face of situations that challenge the process. Here, stands out the identity for oneself, bringing a connotation of personal importance.

> *It is a profession that does not have a good remuneration, a recognition, but for this vocation that exists within me it has made me move forward.* (S26)

The professional nurse is somewhat recognized and admired for its charitable character, in which the professionals seem to support the myth of vocational donation as an alternative to guarantee some social prestige.[13] It is noticed, here, that the vocational characteristic is intrinsic to the student, denoting the subjectivity of the identity for oneself and due to the contexts to which this self belongs.

From this, it is reflected that when choosing a profession, nursing students go through what Dubar defines as an aspiration to a true recognized profession,[4] expressing prestige as something that one wishes to achieve, the target identity.

> *I remained due to the need to have a degree and recognition in society in the future.* (S4)

The achievement of nurses' professional recognition and visibility can be based on the construction of knowledge and the technical skill of nurses for the development of their work. Thus, qualities such as initiative and security denote competence and promote their social visibility.[20]

However, student representations express the conclusion of the course as a need to have a higher education and a return to those who invested in their training. However, this can lead to identities of not belonging to the nursing group, since the subjective relationships that should guide personal choices are essentially transfigured.

> *I did not identify with the profession, but I will finish the course because when I realized it was already past half of the graduation.* (S17)

> *What led me to finish college was knowing that I needed a job to start working and not be dependent on my family anymore, to help them.* (S19)

The dynamism of the demands of the labor market sometimes leads to feelings of a nursing education incompatible with what is required. However, the university is understood as a trigger space for students' learning, considering that it must be everyday, as the needs for incorporations and innovations never cease.

> *I want to look for complements, look for a residence, specialize, I really want a master's degree. Search as much as possible to specialize and be qualified to be a competent professional. [...] I feel very insecure in the hospital area.* (S20)

It is essential that students remain improving to ensure the development of the skills necessary for their work process, even after completing the course.[21] Especially when one of the greatest difficulties of recent graduates is the lack of practical experience as nurses.[22] This highlights the importance of continually investing in integrating theory and practice in the clinical field, to support professional practice.[23]

It is noted that, in the midst of these dilemmas, the target identity is presenting conformations that suggest future areas of performance of students. This identity of the future, of the "I will become", permeates paths of transmutations throughout the course until the professional characteristics of scenarios that are most inserted, of professional postures considered ideal, are consolidated, of the moments and movements that the students experienced, permeating subjective and objective transactions in the constitution of the students' identity as a professional future.

*I feel insecure about going into a hospital to work in care. I wanted to work more in the management area, with paper, with bureaucracy.* (S2)

*By my will, I would work in primary care. I feel much better prepared to work in any city, in any primary care center.* (S14)

The nursing work process involves many interfaces, caring, administering/managing, leading, researching and teaching, that is, it requires the professional to have a complete and permanent training.[24] It is reflected that an essential aspect for the construction of the students' identity is the active representations of the nurses' performance in the job market. Endowed with this, together with intrinsic characteristics of the training process, it is that the identity inherited from students transits between targeted, proposed and assumed identities.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Important results about the identity constructed in nursing students were analyzed. The study invited to reflect on moments of the course considered collaborative landmarks in the construction of the students' identity in the perspective of becoming nurses. When referring to initiation, there is an inherited identity characteristic, in which the student justifies the choice of the course by vocation, influences of experienced contexts and by proximity to medicine.

When advancing the reflection, students are frustrated about the profession, justified by a teaching-learning process considered flawed and devaluation of the profession. Such aspects have repercussions on the identity that the students want to achieve (targeted identity) as a nurse and on the one that they will represent (virtual identity).

At the end of the course of collaborations for the students' identity, the students justify their stay in the course aiming at social recognition, making the target identity different from the nurses' identity that they observed in approaches during the course. Furthermore, it considers it a moral duty towards those who have invested in its formation. In this way, an essential aspect of identity is scored, the capacity of which to transform according to the needs posed; this generated in the students the recognition of transmutation as an essential aspect to the nurses' identity.

The study allowed to recognize movements of construction and deconstruction of the students' identity. However, it presents a limitation of its understanding considering only the process of training nurses; this is considered because the identity in the field of professional training is constituted by the interaction of multiple identities such as the individual and the social that, after contact with the profession, can settle down. In addition, the geographical limitation of the study is emphasized, since the identity also suffers cultural influences.

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