

## **ANÁLISIS LITERARIO - UN ENFOQUE DE LA ALFABETIZACIÓN CRÍTICA AL USO DE UNA NOVELA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DE LA ENFERMERÍA**

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### **Resumen**

Hay pruebas que sugieren que el uso de la literatura no académica es muy adecuado para su inclusión en la educación de enfermería. El análisis literario se diferencia de una revisión de la literatura de revistas profesionales. Una novela, por ejemplo, ofrece un enfoque innovador para el aprendizaje de los demás, desarrollar la empatía y realmente llegar a conocer a otros en el contexto de su vida (fenomenología). Novelas pueden ejemplificar los conceptos fundamentales de enfermería, incluso cuando los temas en la historia no parecen estar relacionadas con la salud. Una novela bien elegida puede ser un vehículo para la exploración de conceptos de enfermería de la salud, las relaciones, los valores, el pensamiento crítico, los determinantes sociales de la salud y así sucesivamente. El educador que actúa en el papel de guía experto llama la atención de los estudiantes a cómo esto es así y les ayuda a interpretar los textos. Además, su capacidad para buscar y evaluar críticamente una novela por su valor potencial para la educación de enfermería es crucial para la apertura de posibilidades; yendo más allá de la palabra superficial para descubrir el significado verdadero y profundo. Para entender esto, enfermeras educadoras se beneficiarán de los conceptos clave en el análisis literario, la alfabetización crítica y el análisis crítico. Este documento ofrecerá eso. Una exploración de la identidad y las similitudes entre los conceptos de pedagogía crítica y enfermería, proporcionará una base para esta innovadora propuesta docente. Importante para los resultados de los estudiantes, el valor se añade al aprender cuando son capaces de generalizar lo que se aprende en el aula y por medio de los libros de texto a otros contextos, ya que no toda la enfermería se produce en el marco estricto de la medicina. Una novela facilita esta transición. La motivación puede ser mejorada, así cuando los estudiantes tienen una tarea basada en una novela en lugar de simplemente libros de texto, artículos de revistas, conferencias y son los temas los que realmente les interesan. Se proporcionan ejemplos para ilustrar estos puntos.

**Palabras claves:** alfabetización crítica, literatura, análisis literario, conceptos de enfermería, educación en enfermería.

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## **LITERARY ANALYSIS: A CRITICAL LITERACY APPROACH TO THE USE OF A NOVEL IN NURSING EDUCATION**

### **Abstract:**

There is evidence to suggest that the use of non-academic literature is well-suited to inclusion in nursing education. Literary analysis differs from a literature review of professional journals. A novel, for example offers an innovative approach to learning about others, developing empathy and truly coming to know another in the context of his or her life (phenomenology). Novels can exemplify core nursing concepts even when the topics in the story do not appear to be health-related. A well-chosen novel can be a vehicle for the exploration of nursing concepts of wellness, relationships, values, critical thinking, social determinants of health and so forth. The educator acting in the role of expert guide draws the students' attention to how this is so and helps them interpret texts. Furthermore, his or her ability to seek out and critically appraise a novel for its potential value to nursing education is crucial to opening up possibilities; going beyond the superficial word to discover true and deep meaning. To understand this, nurse-educators will benefit from the key concepts in literary analysis, critical literacy and critical analysis. This paper will provide that. An exploration of the sameness and similarities between critical pedagogy and nursing concepts will provide a foundation for this innovative teaching proposal. Important to student outcomes, value is added to learning when they are able to generalize what is being learned in the classroom and through textbooks to other contexts, since not all nursing occurs in the strictest context of medicine. A novel facilitates this transition. Motivation can be enhanced as well when students have an assignment based on a novel rather than simply core textbooks, journal articles and lectures and the topics are those that genuinely interest them. Examples will be provided to illustrate these points.

**Key words:** critical literacy, literature, literary analysis, nursing concepts, nursing education

## **ANÁLISE LITERÁRIA - UMA ABORDAGEM CRÍTICA ALFABETIZAÇÃO DE USAR UM ROMANCE NO ENSINO DE ENFERMAGEM**

### **Resumo**

Há evidências que sugerem que o uso de literatura não-acadêmico é muito adequado para inclusão no ensino de enfermagem. Análise literária difere de uma revisão da literatura de revistas profissionais. A novela, por exemplo, oferece uma abordagem inovadora para aprender com os outros, desenvolver empatia e realmente conhecer outros no contexto de sua vida (fenomenologia). Romances podem ser exemplificados os conceitos básicos de enfermagem, mesmo quando as questões da história não parece estar relacionada com a saúde. Uma novela bem escolhida pode ser um veículo para explorar conceitos de enfermagem em saúde, relacionamentos, valores, pensamento crítico, determinantes sociais da saúde e assim por diante. O educador que atua no papel de guia especializado a atenção dos alunos como isso é assim e ajudá-los a interpretar os textos. Além disso, sua capacidade de buscar e avaliar criticamente um romance de seu valor potencial para a formação do enfermeiro é crucial para a abertura de possibilidades; indo além das palavras de superfície para descobrir o significado verdadeiro e profundo. Para entender isso, educadores enfermeira irão beneficiar os conceitos-chave na análise literária, leitura crítica e análise crítica. Este artigo irá fornecer isso. Uma exploração da identidade e semelhanças entre os conceitos de pedagogia crítica e de enfermagem proporcionar uma base para essa proposta pedagógica inovadora. Importante para os resultados dos alunos, o valor é adicionado ao saber quando eles são capazes de generalizar o que é aprendido em sala de aula e através de livros a outros contextos, e que nem todos enfermagem ocorre no âmbito estrito medicamento. Um novo facilitar esta transição. A motivação pode ser melhorado, por isso, quando os alunos têm uma tarefa baseado em um romance e não apenas livros, artigos de revistas, conferências e são as questões que realmente interessam. Alguns exemplos são fornecidos para ilustrar estes pontos.

**Palavras-chave:** alfabetização crítica, literatura, análise literária, conceitos de enfermagem, educação em enfermagem.

## Introduction

Appreciating that Nursing is both a science and an art, inclusion of materials from both the Humanities and Arts in nursing courses themselves, has always been quite appropriate<sup>1</sup>. In this discussion, literature will now be added to that mix. There is evidence to suggest that the use of non-academic literature is well-suited to inclusion in nursing education<sup>2,3,4,5</sup>. For the purposes of this article, that literature will be a novel.

“A knowledge of the nature of narrative, and the way we understand our lives narratively can be vital for effective communication and understanding of patients' situations<sup>6</sup>.”

A novel is a narrative- a story. Just like the oral narrative nurses attend from a holistic and phenomenological perspective to learn more about clients<sup>2,5,6,7</sup>, the novel-as-narrative offers an innovative approach to learning about others, developing empathy and truly coming to know another in the context of his or her life. Novels can exemplify core nursing concepts even when the topic does not appear to be health-related. A carefully selected novel, a fictional or biographical narrative can be a vehicle for the exploration of nursing concepts of wellness, relationships,

values, critical thinking, social determinants of health and so forth.

## A Literature Review

A literature review in the context of nursing education connotes exploration and analysis of reliable source material based on predetermined topics relevant to nursing. A question is posed and student nurses search for the answer in the literature. This is an activity of research and inquiry. For example, the search for evidence informed practice or other peer-reviewed journal articles on a topic such as life expectancy with adult onset diabetes is a learning activity that student nurses might engage in.

A literature review requires that more than one article be read to inform the reader of similarities and differences in themes, discussions, findings, and methods related to the subject matter. Once that review has occurred, nursing students are asked to critically analyze what has been read, determine salience relative to the question posed and then synthesize the data: the literature<sup>8</sup>. Finally, students will draw a conclusion about what (a) the literature says and (b) how this informs nursing knowledge or practice.

## Literary Analysis

Literary analysis of a story (in this case a novel) looks closely at literature by

examining the parts within it and how these contribute to the whole narrative. There may be multiple characters, multiple themes and multiple plots to contend with. Close inspection is made of the characters, context and situations occurring within as the reader begins to draw meaning from the text. Characters are analyzed for their perspectives, values, actions and experiences as well as their relational capacity. Conflict, crisis and resolution of dilemmas help illustrate how various characters are able to cope. Voice is apparent in the stories of each character's narrative and the ability to truly hear what is being said can enhance a reader's levels of tolerance and cultural sensitivity<sup>2,9</sup>. While reading, readers discover symbols and themes that permeate the story and influence the actions and emotions. When a novel is read to completion, the reader discovers overall meaning or the author's message. They discover the full significance of the story and how each part within; each character within contribute has contributed to that whole. It is easy to see here that nursing concepts are completely at home in the work of literary analysis. Key nursing concepts prevail.

### **Critical Literacy**

The foundations of literary analysis stem from critical literacy. In the late 1960s, Freire asserted that the ability to read texts required active reflection to truly 'hear' and learn what the message within was – to move beyond the role of

passive and accepting reader to one who continually questions the intent of the writing<sup>10,11</sup>. "Critical literacy enhances and deepens comprehension<sup>12</sup>." Freire's position supports this. He emphasized that only through a deep and critical reflection and review of the written word could people come to fathom how power, inequality and injustice are inherent in and propagated by literature<sup>11</sup>. The development of critical literacy skills is essential in a world of easy access, multimedia sources of information. This holds true for the public just as it does for nursing as they learn to read with a critical eye, and critique the written word. An example for nursing students is the ability to discern between messages in advertising, public relations and promotional texts, as well as personal opinions of others versus fact or evidence-informed practices. Bolton<sup>6</sup> furthers the discussion by adding in the element of exposure to ethical issues in the reading with which the reader might contend. Critical literacy does not lead a nurse or nursing student to disregard the personal viewpoints and perspectives of others. Instead, it helps them determine major themes and undercurrents of narratives finding messages that, once identified will facilitate the work the nurse and client do together towards healthy outcomes<sup>9</sup>.

The skills of critical literacy include the ability to reflect upon and then challenge common assumptions expressed by the author through his/her writing. Lewison,

Flint and Van Sluys<sup>12</sup>, Roberge<sup>10</sup> and Comber<sup>14</sup> show us that critical literacy skills also involve the ability explore multiple perspectives and to imagine the perspectives of others who may have been silenced somehow in the narrative or absent from it at some juncture. Critical literacy offers an opportunity to examine the social determinants of health, including power and power relations, social justice.

Hammer and Green<sup>15</sup> assert that critical reading is a form of academic literacy. Readers engage with the text (in this case a novel) to discover its true meaning. De Silva and Hill<sup>16</sup> identify that critical literacy skills also include the higher order cognitive skills of analysis and synthesis. Skott<sup>17</sup> guides us to really consider how the use of narrative can be transformative for a student nurse. Hull<sup>3,4,18</sup> believes this can be achieved by nursing students using a critical lens to work through a novel. She believes the act of literary analysis and the nursing student's presence within the story simulates that of a real life engagement between a nurse and client. Through a novel, students nurses come to know each character on a deeper, more intimate level, they develop a pseudo-relationship with them. This can be positive, negative or neutral. Either way, as the student nurse challenges himself/herself to remain open to other ways of knowing, being and doing, knowledge and sensitivity; empathy can be achieved. Student nurses can experience suspending personal

judgments to be honestly present with the characters in the novel and the major themes within. In this way, they develop the ability to truly hear and understand what is going on and being said<sup>2</sup>. In essence, the reader is able to be influenced by the text<sup>16</sup>. Additionally, the educator, acting in the role of expert guide draws the students' attention to how all of this is achieved and helps them interpret texts. This is the technique of guided reading.

### **Critical Pedagogy and Critical Social Theory in Nursing Education**

Critical pedagogy concerns itself with the ability to critique, challenge and even expose the intent of text, spoken or written as well as the sociopolitical contexts<sup>11</sup>. Vasquez<sup>19</sup> points out that since texts are by nature socially constructed and reflective of the author's viewpoint, it is essential to develop skills to question the how and why – the purpose of the message and its underlying, seemingly more subtle messages. For example, a moral stance taken by one or many characters may permeate a novel or, the story itself may culminate in a moral stance taken by that author despite the transgressions of the characters. Since nursing is designed and implemented in a socio-cultural process<sup>17</sup>, the key tenets of critical pedagogy as well as critical literacy are applicable to key nursing concepts and skills.

Critical social theory is a core concept in many nursing programs (e.g., in Canada). Just like critical pedagogy, the theory is used to help student nurses learn to recognize and addresses social inequalities, power relations, oppression, empowerment and so forth. Student nurses learn how nurses work within systems, often with marginalized people, and how nurses and clients are impacted by positively or negatively by power and

privilege paradigms. The following table by Hull<sup>18</sup> illustrates the sameness and similarities of critical pedagogy and critical social theory in nursing education. The table helps nurse-educators understand how a novel, used as a teaching and learning tool might approached in a nursing program. It provides key concepts that can be turned to questions that guide readers through the narrative.

### A Comparison of Sameness and Similarity<sup>18</sup>

Critical Pedagogy	Core Canadian Nursing Concepts
Self-reflexive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choice, ways of knowing/ways of being/ways of doing</li> <li>• Relational caring; relational inquiry</li> <li>• Personal meaning</li> <li>• phenomenology, empathy</li> </ul>
Socially grounded	Critical social theory - social and political context
Ethical	Ethics
Politically engaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feminist philosophy; theories of power &amp; privilege; marginalization, oppression</li> <li>• advocacy; leadership</li> </ul>
Context bound	Culture and context; context of caring
Leads to change: transformative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transformative learning</li> <li>• action &amp; empowerment</li> <li>• overcoming</li> <li>• achieving &amp; accessing</li> </ul>

### The mechanics of a literature analysis using a non-academic text, a novel

It is not necessary to use a novel about a medical problem. Student nurses surround themselves with narratives in

the context of their nursing practice and classes on a daily basis. They are inundated with health-based narratives. To develop the ability to generalize knowledge to a greater context (e.g., the community), a chosen novel should be

..... academe health in its focus. Fictional or biographical novels can exemplify core nursing concepts even when the topics in the story do not appear to be health-related<sup>3,4,18</sup>.

Using the technique of guided reading, the educator draws the students' attention to how this is so and helps them interpret texts. Furthermore, his or her ability to seek out and critically appraise a novel for its potential value to nursing education is crucial to opening up possibilities; going beyond the superficial word to discover true and deep meaning.

Once the novel has been chosen, the nurse-educator considers how to use it in a constructive, educational manner, keeping in mind the activity will not only reinforce nursing but also teach critical literacy skills. For example, readers can be guided by to identify key topics in a story. From there, they move to interpreting what is read, and begin to analyze it from a nursing standpoint (i.e., applying nursing concepts). They might be directed to look for examples that offer direct links to a concept such as self-worth, personal power, overcoming challenges. The choice is infinite.

Nurse-educators might decide to critically analyze a novel collaboratively in the classroom over a series of classes (perhaps dedicating 1 hour at the end of each class for this purpose), or work on it sporadically throughout a semester.

..... activity of critical literacy helps develop an appreciation of differing perspectives and demonstrate how meaning can be co-constructed. In this manner, both students and instructor are able to challenge assumptions about the author's intent and apply concepts of critical pedagogy or critical literacy to that<sup>20,21</sup>. Alternatively, the educator may choose to assign the novel and guiding questions as a term assignment to be done individually.

Student nurses should be guided to make a thematic statement early in the activity and then in critical reflection, revise this as the novel becomes clearer to them. To achieve this, the student should ask himself/herself what the author's intent or primary message is. Next, the literary analysis should include questioning the events and circumstances of the novel as well as the characters, themselves. From this, students will hone their own specific interests, developing themes and linking nursing concepts, etcetera. Free reign to some degree could be allowed here to facilitate critical thinking and creative thought. Once sub-topics or sub-themes are determined, student nurses need to draw meaning from what has been read and what their questioning has led them to research. Clear statements can then be made about meaning drawn from the identified aspects of the novel. This is the step of interpretation. The nurse-educator should guide the learner to support all statements with evidence from the novel as well as the research



that Student nurses should then be directed to write or discuss what they perceive as the educational purpose of the activity; what they have gleaned from it. The nurse-educator ensures that all essential elements of critical literacy/literary analysis are identified once again, cementing key terminology and actions. Finally, students should be required to, in very personal terms, articulate how what has been learned can and will apply to his/her own nursing practice in the future.

### **Examples of Novels appropriate to Nursing Education**

The following is a list of suggestion with a brief commentary of novels this nurse-educator believes are amenable to being used in a nursing program context.

*Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, 1954.

This novel is replete with conflict, violence and peace-keeping, power, bullying, oppression, autonomy, shame, fear and anxiety, and resolution. It includes opportunities to explore the social determinants of health and group theory. Fiction.

*Nature's End* by Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, 1986

This novel speaks clearly to Western versus Eastern concepts of life, health, healing and spirituality. It includes cultural concepts of individual versus collective societies; social determinants

perspective on western societies fear of growing old. Science Fiction.

*The Diary of Ann Frank*

This novel is replete with themes of hatred, bigotry, despair, fear, desperation, courage, resolution, affection, powerlessness and human spirit. It includes opportunities to explore cultural ways of knowing and being; individual, community and global crisis; morality. Biography: non-fiction.

### **Conclusion**

This article has introduced the nurse-educator to the principles and practice of using a novel for literary analysis in coursework. Critical literacy skills are essential skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century where media of all sorts bombard the world with messages and receivers need skills to interpret and challenge the intent of same. At the university level critical thinking, critical analysis and reflective skills are shared concepts amongst a myriad of disciplines. Nursing can clearly avail itself of multidisciplinary pedagogy as it strives to develop critical literacy skills in nursing students. Approaching a novel through the literary analysis; the critical literary analysis of a fictional or biographical novel facilitates this development. Additionally, it demonstrates to student nurses that nursing concepts can be applied broadly across situations; across contexts, and across disciplines in a very significant way. This article has also suggested that

student motivation can be improved when they recognize how skill development can occur through unique

learning activities that genuinely interest them<sup>19</sup>. The use of a novel is an example.

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