



## Articles

# The rural internship and the meaning of nursing care for Amazonian riverside people

## O estágio rural e a significação do cuidado de enfermagem às pessoas ribeirinhas amazônicas

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### Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the impact of experiences in the rural internship on the meaning of care for riverside people by students in their final year of the undergraduate nursing course at public universities in the State of Amazonas. For this, a qualitative study was carried out, using Vygotsky's historical-cultural approach with nursing students from the Federal University of Amazonas and the State University of Amazonas who experienced the rural internship. The students participated in the study in two stages. In the first, an essay was produced, and in the second, a focus group. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis technique. The results indicate that the rural internship stands out as a pedagogical strategy that allows nursing students to: recognize the social, economic, cultural, and geographic particularities of the riverside territory; learn from its population; and experience working in healthcare in this context, with very specific care practices related to that reality. It was concluded that the rural internship is an enriching environment for giving meaning to nursing care for Amazonian riverside populations by nursing students.

**Keywords:** nursing; nursing education; internship; rural population; nursing care.

### Resumo

Este estudo objetivou analisar a repercussão das vivências no estágio rural para a significação do cuidado às pessoas ribeirinhas por acadêmicos do último ano do curso de graduação de enfermagem das universidades públicas do estado do Amazonas. Para isso, realizou-se um estudo qualitativo, por meio da abordagem histórico-cultural de Vigotski com estudantes de enfermagem da Universidade Federal do Amazonas e Universidade do Estado do Amazonas que vivenciaram o estágio rural. Os estudantes participaram do estudo em duas etapas. Na primeira, foi realizada uma redação; e, na segunda, grupo focal. Os dados foram analisados por meio da técnica de análise temática de Braun e Clarke. Os resultados apontam que o estágio rural se destaca como uma estratégia pedagógica que possibilita ao estudante de enfermagem: o reconhecimento das peculiaridades sociais, econômicas, culturais e geográficas do território ribeirinho; o aprendizado com sua população; e a vivência de trabalhar saúde nesse contexto, com práticas de cuidado muito específicas e concernentes àquela realidade. Concluiu-se então que o estágio rural é um ambiente enriquecedor para a significação do cuidado de enfermagem às pessoas ribeirinhas amazônicas por estudantes de enfermagem.

**Palavras-chave:** enfermagem; ensino de enfermagem; estágio; população rural; cuidado de enfermagem.

### INTRODUCTION

The riverside territory is characterized as rural, considering its distance from urban centers. This conceptualization is a subject of discussion among authors, as there is no well-structured concept of rurality defined in the legislation that does not create a dichotomy between rural

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Study conducted at Escola de Enfermagem de Manaus da Universidade Federal do Amazonas (EEM/UFAM) and Universidade do Estado do Amazonas (UEA.) Manaus, AM, Brasil.



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and urban. In this context, rurality is framed in a residual perspective, characterized as any space that is not urban (Brasil et al., 2016; Sousa; Monteiro; Bosquat, 2019).

It is worth considering the distinction between rural and countryside. The former is related to the social perspective of living in the territory and its influences on various aspects of individuals' lives, especially economic, thus being placed in opposition to urban spaces. The countryside, on the other hand, is conceptualized in relation to the city, being a geographical determination linked to the space where one lives and materialized in landscapes constructed by humans (Hespanhol, 2013).

In this way, the rural space presents its own economic and social development, distinct from the urban space. Due to this particularity, its development is considered low, a fact influenced by the concentration of goods, policies, and public services in regions with higher circulation of people and markets. This is further influenced by the perception imposed on individuals living in rural areas, confining agricultural and livestock activities to the countryside in opposition to industrial and modernized activities destined for the urban man, the city dweller (Cella; Queda; Ferrante, 2019; Hespanhol, 2013). Particularly in the Amazonian rural space, these socioeconomic discrepancies are more evident. They are rooted in historical determinants and the logistical challenges required to overcome the geographical variations characteristic of the region (Gama et al., 2018).

In other regions of Brazil, transportation is essentially terrestrial through roads and highways. However, in the Amazon region, transportation is primarily riverine, as it has the largest hydrographic basin in the world. Its rivers meander through the forest, allowing the transport of people and goods, connecting communities, cities, and states. In other words, the rivers are the highways of the northern residents (Baracuhy, 2021; Rocha et al., 2021).

As a result of these aspects, there is a vast cultural plurality in Brazil, which is particularly pronounced in rural communities. This directly confronts local healthcare practices, underscoring the need for in-depth knowledge of these contexts by professionals implementing public policies in the territory, particularly in the field of public health (Lima et al., 2019). Regarding the aspect of health care provision within the Brazilian National Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde - SUS*), Lima et al. (2020) state that nursing plays a leading role in these territories and constitutes an important workforce to ensure the fulfillment of the right to health and the promotion of health in these contexts.

It should be emphasized that nursing care is only present when culturally competent, as there is no effective care if it does not align with the cultural reality of the environment, since each individual understands care according to their historical and cultural experiences (Leininger, 1988; Nunes, 2016). In this sense, care must be transcultural and adapted to social realities, a fact that requires nursing education to provide tools that enable future nurses to adopt a more integrative perspective, including cultural practices, as they will define the actual care needs present in these contexts (Nunes, 2016; Silva et al., 2019). However, in rural areas, the care model is still based on a logic that disregards the specificities of the rural population, being constructed from an education centered on the figure of the urban being as the standard for care needs (Markey; Okantey, 2019; Lima et al., 2019).

The National Guidelines for Undergraduate Nursing Programs (GNPs) emphasize, transversally across their determinations, the need to change this uniformity bias of the social being, further highlighting the importance of practical activities in community realities to bring future professionals closer to the cultural aspects and specific needs of each territory (Esteves et al., 2018). In this context, the Mandatory Supervised Internship, as well as realistic methodologies in health and nursing education beyond fulfilling curricular requirements. These approaches allow students to correlate the set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes between theory and practice to problematize reality, supporting the development of a critical-reflective individual through a participatory and integrated process (Esteves et al., 2018; Kolahdouzan et al., 2020).

Accordingly, the need for academic immersion in the reality of health services is evident. However, national determinations do not specify the need for supervised internships in various territories of the country, particularly in rural and riverside areas, a fact that does not motivate institutions to implement these practices, including the differentiated reality of the rural context (Lima et al., 2019). Efforts to train health professionals for rural practice date

back to 1960, when some university extension experiences mobilized training for a process of decentralizing health practices. This movement culminated in the creation of rural internships in subsequent years (Silveira; Pinheiro, 2017).

Understanding rural internships as: “internships that take place in inland cities” (Silveira; Pinheiro, 2017), currently, various universities and university centers offer them as formative practice in their curricula. Such activity is essential for training professionals who understand the particularities of the diverse realities of Brazil. In the Amazonian context, it is observed that only two institutions training nursing professionals provide their students with the experience of health training in the rural context: the Federal University of Amazonas (*Universidade Federal do Amazonas - UFAM*) and the State University of Amazonas (*Universidade do Estado do Amazonas - UEA*) (Santos; Siqueira; Vieira, 2019; Costa et al., 2022).

In this context, this research explored students' perceptions after immersion in the internship, aiming to understand the impacts the experience may have had on the development of their professional profile and their understanding of the world and society. The study was grounded in Vygotsky's theory. Vigotski (2001), in his sociocultural theory, emphasizes that meaning is not intrinsic to objects or events but is culturally produced, socially constructed, and transmitted to subsequent generations through the social interactions in which individuals are engaged. In this sense, meaning is a result of social practices, shaped by the norms and values shared within a community. Therefore, meaning is a dynamic process that develops over time, being attributed through individual experiences within the culture in which the individual is immersed. It is in this context that Vygotsky assigns a conceptual role to the word, characterizing it as the “unit of analysis” between thought and language (Góes; Cruz, 2016). In summary, for Vygotsky, meaning is a product of social interaction, language, and cultural mediation processes. Through these processes, individuals make sense of the world around them and construct their understanding of reality (Vigotski, 2001).

Considering care as the object of nursing study, understanding aspects inherent to the care of rural populations and their making meaning processes becomes essential. This aligns with the theoretical principles of transcultural nursing and highlights the importance of training nurses in the Amazon region to address the realities of riverside communities. In this context, the rural internship emerges as a formative tool, offering future nursing professionals the opportunity to experience and engage with the riverside rural environment. This study, therefore, proposed the exploration of a new field of scientific discussion based on the guiding question: “What is the contribution of the rural internship to the process of making meaning in nursing care for Amazonian riverside populations by final-year nursing undergraduates from public universities in Amazonas?”

Seeking to answer this question, this article aims to analyze the repercussions of experiences during the rural internship on the meaning of care for riverside populations by final-year nursing undergraduates from public universities in the state of Amazonas. It should be highlighted that this article is a result and part of a study conducted for the preparation of a doctoral thesis. The motivation for the theme arose from the researcher's experience with the riverside reality during their undergraduate studies and the observed impact of the pedagogical experience, culminating in their decision to return, after graduation and postgraduate studies, to the Amazonian territory where they grew up, to engage in professional practice in the field of public health.

## METHOD

This was a descriptive, qualitative study guided by the theoretical and methodological principles of Vygotsky's historical-cultural approach. From this perspective arise the elements underpinning the methodological unfolding of this study, namely: the valuing of the histories of the individuals comprising the study population – nursing students; the process of making meaning influenced by historical-cultural correlations within their lives and their experiences during nursing education, particularly the rural internship; and their attitude toward nursing care as a result of this meaning-making, shaped by the knowledge acquired through social immersion, teamwork, and the retrieval of individual histories.

The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of [omitted for peer review] (CAAE: 63087722.3.0000.5393), the proposing institution, and by the REC of the School of Nursing of Manaus/Federal University of Amazonas (CAAE: 63087722.3.3001.5020) and the School of Health Sciences/State University of Amazonas (CAAE: 63087722.3.3002.5016), the coparticipant institutions. Participants who agreed to take part in the research signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF) in virtual format for the first stage and in physical format in two copies for participation in the focus group.

### **Characterization of the population**

The study was conducted at the two public universities in the State of Amazonas: Universidade Federal do Amazonas (UFAM), specifically at the School of Nursing of Manaus (*Escola de Enfermagem de Manaus - EEM*), and Universidade do Estado do Amazonas (UEA), specifically at the School of Health Sciences (*Escola Superior de Ciências da Saúde - ESA*).

The study population consisted of 20 final-year undergraduate nursing students from both institutions who had completed the rural internship. The inclusion criteria for the study were: students enrolled in the educational institution, students who had completed the required credits for the rural internship experience, and students who were not scheduled to graduate before the conclusion of the data collection phase. Students who had not experienced the riverside territory during their internship were excluded. To characterize the population, an exploratory descriptive analysis was conducted using basic statistical measures of central tendency, such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation (SD). The data were organized and illustrated in Microsoft Excel 2016, while the descriptive analysis was performed using the IBM SPSS version 21 software.

Among the 20 students, 11 were from the State University of Amazonas, and nine from the Federal University of Amazonas. Regarding sociodemographic characterization, the majority were female ( $n = 16$ ; 80%). The mean age of the participants was 23.9 ( $\pm 2.4$ ) years. Concerning self-reported color/race, more than half ( $n = 13$ ; 65%) identified as mixed race (*pardo*). All participants ( $n = 20$ ; 100%) were Brazilian. Regarding the place of origin, most ( $n = 18$ ; 90%) were from the State of Amazonas, with two ( $n = 2$ ; 10%) from other states. More than half ( $n = 12$ ; 60%) were from Manaus, Amazonas.

Regarding the students' experience in riverside areas, almost all ( $n = 18$ ; 90%) had never lived in a riverside region, while only two ( $n = 2$ ; 10%) had resided in these areas. Of those who reported living in a riverside area, one ( $n = 1$ ; 50%) had lived there for up to one year, and one ( $n = 1$ ; 50%) had lived there for over ten years. Notably, none of the participants ( $n = 20$ ; 100%) had professional experience in riverside areas.

### **Data production**

The students participated in the study in two phases. In the first phase, conducted virtually, a written essay was required, and in the second phase, held in person, a focus group (FG) was conducted. To invite participants to the study, students were contacted through WhatsApp class groups, via email, and through faculty members at their respective institutions. The invitation provided information about the research process. After agreeing to participate, 26 students, 13 from UEA and 13 from UFAM, completed an online form. Of these, three students were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. In the second phase, 20 students, 11 from UEA and nine from UFAM, participated, comprising the final study group.

In the first phase, the goal was data generation through writing. Students wrote about the theme "Nursing Care for Amazonian Riverside Populations", based on the guiding question: "In your view, what is nursing care for Amazonian riverside populations, and how did your experience in the rural internship contribute to this view?". This was facilitated using the Google Forms platform. Participants also answered sociodemographic questions via the online form to characterize the sample.

The essays provided input for the development of a guide used to conduct the focus groups in the second phase of the research. In this phase, oral discussions aimed to deepen the meanings expressed during the first phase. Two focus groups were conducted to maximize the dialogic potential of the tool: one with students from UFAM and the other with those from UEA.

The techniques proposed by Cardano (2017) were adopted for conducting the focus groups. The sessions were moderated by the researcher (acting as moderator), with an observer focusing on participant interactions, noting verbal and non-verbal communication. The observer was a master's student in the Graduate Program in Nursing in the Amazonian Context, nominated by a collaborating institution. This individual had prior and ongoing experience with focus groups and was engaged in research concerning rural Indigenous populations. The focus group discussions were recorded using electronic audio devices, ensuring the content could be transcribed and analyzed later.

The script comprised questions designed to investigate deeper the statements provided by the students during the first phase. Therefore, specific questions were tailored for each group. For Group 1 (UFAM), 11 questions were developed, while for Group 2 (UEA), 8 questions were prepared. These questions were divided into two thematic blocks: the meaning of nursing care for riverside populations; and the role of the rural internship in the making meaning process.

### **Data analysis**

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), following a six-step procedure: Familiarization with the data (including transcription); Generation of initial codes (data coding); Searching for themes (grouping codes into initial themes); Reviewing themes (ensuring themes align with the coded extracts); Defining and naming themes (refining the specifics of each theme); and Producing the report (final analysis of the extracts and writing the research report).

The data were transcribed and subsequently organized into a Microsoft Excel 2016 spreadsheet for coding and selection of the extracts that would form the article. The theme search process involved creating mind maps using the MindMeister online software. Codes were grouped to generate potential themes, which later evolved into final themes. Four initial maps were created: two containing codes from the first phase for UFAM and UEA, and two with codes from the second phase for both institutions. The potential themes were then consolidated into two mental maps, one for each institution, combining both phases. Finally, these maps were merged into a single map, converging 12 potential themes.

At the end of the analysis, six themes were defined. This article presents one of these themes: "The rural internship in the making meaning process of care for riverside populations."

To preserve student anonymity in the presentation of the results, extracts were identified using pseudonyms referencing Amazonian fish species, included in parentheses after each extract, followed by the participant's age, an indication of whether they had lived in rural areas, and whether the extract originated from the written essay or the focus group.

## **RESULTS**

The immersion in the rural internship was perceived by the students as an opportunity to experience a territory that was previously unknown to them. The students describe this first contact as;

[...] a reality shock, cultural shock [...]. Most of us had to improvise due to the resources; we have to decide where to use certain materials because something essential is always missing, so we end up having that perspective [...] when you go to the rural internship, you realize you can work in the rural area, in a community, you can work anywhere because, from that experience, you have a sense of what the essential things are [...].  
(Pirarara – 21 years of age – Has lived in a rural area – Focus group)

It was perceived that, for the students, experiencing the rural internship in a riverside context goes beyond the experiences in other academic moments and in life, a fact that caused surprise as they visualized specific aspects inherent to the social reality, which directly affect the way healthcare services are provided. Therefore, it was not just a visit or an academic observation practice. Immersion in the social reality and healthcare and nursing services makes all the difference in understanding the deeper aspects of the territory, as seen in the following statement:

[...] I, for example, born and raised in Manaus, had never been to the countryside, only to Presidente Figueiredo to go swimming, so it was a totally different perception in the countryside, I had heard about it from colleagues, from examples given by professors, but to actually see it, to experience it there is different, and also to observe the perception we have, especially financially. (Pacu – 24 years of age – Has not lived in a rural area – Focus group)

This impact caused by the experience and closer visualization of the social reality of a context to which they belong as an Amazonian – but unknown in its entirety, especially as a professional – provides the student with the opportunity to locate themselves as a nurse, interact with future colleagues, and experience skills with responsibility and team leadership, characteristics that will be fundamental to their training.

Accordingly, the students expressed in their writing and speech the relevance they see in doing the rural internship during their higher education:

The rural internship brings a unique experience in the life of the student, not only because of the travel and experience in another municipality but also due to the healthcare provider's need in the state of Amazonas to understand the particularities and needs of its population. (Aruanã – 23 years of age – Has not lived in a rural area – Essay)

Since we live in the Amazon region, it is too utopian to imagine that throughout our career as nursing professionals, we will not encounter situations like those lived by the rural population, which here is not limited to the inhabitants of the 61 municipalities beyond the capital, but also to those who live in their surroundings, their streams, their districts. (Pirarara – 21 years of age – Has lived in a rural area – Focus group)

In this context, the internship proved to be important in the process of understanding nursing care for riverside populations and contributed to the students' construction of meanings about this reality and the care practices carried out for the population. As the student stated:

[...] it is very important to understand the entire social and cultural context in which this riverside population is inserted, so when we provide nursing care, it is very important to understand what that patient eats, what they do, what they work with, what they usually use, because sometimes we come across the consumption of homemade medicine, so it is very important to have this knowledge of the patient's social and cultural issues [...]. (Aruanã – 23 years of age – Has not lived in a rural area – Focus group)

It was from the concrete experience, in the routine of the community and the health service, that the students reflected on the reality and characterized the care needs of individuals, emphasizing a more assertive understanding of how the reality influences the way they will deal with their health:

I was able to realize in the rural internship experience that the riverside person only seeks the health unit as the last resort, when their efforts and attempts at home treatment no longer work [...] but I realize that, at times, it wouldn't be their lack of care for themselves, but issues of time and logistics, these are also things that hinder and make it difficult to seek care in basic health units [...]. (Jaraqui – 23 years of age – Has lived in a rural area – Essay)

It is important to emphasize that the rural internship allows students to be fully immersed in the environment. This includes both the healthcare service aspect as well as the community experiences within the municipality they are part of.

Therefore, the students go through a process of making meaning regarding care that is closer to the reality of that context and understand that nursing care is the result of a holistic social construction. This fact was evident in the student's perception when they wrote about the meaning of care for riverside populations:

For me, it's about trying to offer the most basic things a person needs, within their psychobiological and social needs, as well as those of the community as a whole, because in nursing, the nurse will be working multiprofessionally since they will be the only one

in the community, so health for them is about trying to meet the basic needs within the community's reality [...]. (Apapa – 28 years of age – Has not lived in a rural area – Essay)

This perspective they develop about the community becomes even more relevant when students understand that territories are diverse, even when belonging to the same region, and that the Amazonian rural context is part of the societal construction they belong to, rather than a mere dichotomous space separated from their lives.

The data shows that much of the study population belongs to the Amazonian territory. However, through the rural internship, getting to know the specificities of the same region in a specific context like the riverside community motivates them to think and operationalize nursing care in ways other than those standardized, based on the logic of an urban environment.

[...] Besides all the richness of the experience just by being there, leaving the capital, it's an exchange, right? That we do within our own Amazon, realizing that we think that in Amazonas everyone is the same, everyone knows the same words, but when we get into practice, we see that there are different cultures [...]. (Pirarara – 21 years of age – Has lived in a rural area – Focus group)

[...] The university prepares us for technical work, but it's a more urban-centered technical education, and when we get there, we come face to face with the professional who is already there, and sometimes their way is different from what we learned at the university [...]. (Apapa – 28 years of age – Has not lived in a rural area – Focus group)

The new perspective built and the meanings about care are the result of the contact with the reality in which they are immersed, and this network of understandings is only possible when the student feels free to navigate all aspects of that reality.

In this context, students attributed the potential for lived experience to the rural internship and credited this pedagogical strategy with enriching the skills and attitudes inherent to the nursing care practice for the specific population. They classified it as an innovative action within the academic experience they had had up to that point:

This experience was totally different from everything I've experienced in the healthcare field. During this practice, my social side was heightened a lot. I had to put myself in the other's shoes many times and understand that, in many cases, what seemed common and simple to me was something they had never heard of. (Tamuatá – 24 years of age – Has not lived in a rural area – Focus group)

In one sentence, I would say that the rural internship experience made me more human in all aspects of my life and made me want to give my best to be the most amazing professional those simple people would ever have, just as the next patients I will have. (Apapa – 28 years of age – Has not lived in a rural area – Essay)

Therefore, the rural internship stands out as a pedagogical strategy that fosters reflections on territories, lived experiences, and social dynamics, particularly concerning riverside communities. These communities, while marked by their specificities, represent an Amazonian rural area that is part of the broader territorial totality to which the students belong, even if they do not reside in these regions.

## DISCUSSION

The internship and practical activities during nursing education serve as tools to strengthen the relationship between the university and healthcare services, enabling students to apply the knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes cultivated throughout their training (Esteves et al., 2018). Therefore, the primary objective of the curricular internship in the Nursing program is to prepare professionals with a broad and differentiated view of their field, capable of developing autonomy, responsibility, creativity, and social commitment. The students' contact with the daily reality of professional practice provides an experience that encourages the transformation of knowledge, preparing future nurses for impactful action

within the healthcare field (Silva et al., 2020; Pascoal; Souza, 2021), as clearly demonstrated in Aruanã's statement regarding the importance of the nurse's knowledge about the patient, their habits, work, and customs.

Considering all the impact factors on education, the study also highlighted the rural internship as an opportunity to explore a previously unknown territory for the students. The rural internship is regarded as an academic strategy that allows students to engage with the diverse realities of the Amazon and rural areas, as described by Pacu and Pirara. It provides opportunities to encounter different cultures, beliefs, values, and traditions while observing the social determinants in rural areas, along with the behaviors and needs of these populations. Acting in this context during academic training allows students to reflect on the environment, their profession, and their attitudes toward these settings (Silveira; Pinheiro, 2017).

From a Vygotskian perspective, it is emphasized that experiences are dynamic and participatory processes that bring meaning to existence in the environment (Góes; Cruz, 2016). Therefore, the insertion of nursing students into rural settings allows them to develop new dimensions of care, addressing the specificities of the territory and populations, and thereby constructing more meaningful nursing care. Furthermore, it is important to consider that these dimensions of care involve understanding and applying the nuances of transculturality as proposed by Leininger (1988) in her theory.

Considering the specificities of the riverside territory, one path to achieving such cultural competence is through immersion in the process of new forms of meaning for realities, such as the rural internship. Therefore, cultural care is developed through understanding the historical context of people's social backgrounds and the construction of collective affirmations that influence health needs (Vilelas; Janeiro, 2012; Thofehrn; Leopardi, 2006). Consequently, these experiences provide students with a broader understanding of the health needs of this group and stimulate critical reflection on health inequalities and social determinants of health, as observed in Aruanã's statements.

The nursing students' approach to vulnerable populations, viewed through a Vygotskian lens, values learning as a socially and culturally mediated process (Vigotski, 2021), integrating knowledge about the riverside population and knowledge gained from the population itself regarding care practices and, especially, cultural specificities. For Vygotsky, culture is not merely a set of norms and values transmitted from generation to generation, but also a symbolic system that influences how people think, learn, and relate to the world around them. The shared beliefs and traditions within a culture contribute to the formation of a collective identity, which shapes social interactions and power relations within the community (Vigotski, 2021). By directly experiencing reality, as in the rural internship, individuals have the opportunity to encounter different contexts, cultures, beliefs, and values, enriching their worldview and expanding their understanding of the complexities of human life. This direct experience also allows people to assign personal and collective meanings to their experiences, as seen in Pacu's statements, where, despite living in the Amazonian territory, he reported having had no contact with the reality encountered during the rural internship. Therefore, the experience contributes to the construction of social identities and the development of skills such as empathy, respect for diversity, and the understanding of differences (Corbellini et al., 2010; Vigotski, 2001).

During the internship, the student has the opportunity to develop nursing skills in care, management, education, and research, as highlighted by Apapa. Additionally, they have the chance to immerse themselves in the professional context, stimulating the development of autonomy, social responsibility, creativity, commitment, and a deeper, more contextualized understanding of health settings (Esteves et al., 2018). Silva et al. (2019) reaffirmed this in their study, highlighting that the experience gained during the internship contributes to the personal and professional development of nursing students, as it enables the enhancement of theoretical-practical competencies and the actions expected of them upon completion of their course.

The students' experience in a rural territory facilitates their proximity to the sociocultural and health realities of the region, promoting an understanding of the cultural richness and the health issues specific to that context. As highlighted by Aruanã regarding the need to



understand the sociocultural reality of individuals embedded in the community context, this experience promotes reflection on the importance of understanding the culture and language of the community and adopting them to ensure more individualized and focused care (Silva et al., 2023).

A study conducted in Spain highlighted that nursing professionals consider it important, in rural areas, to understand the culture of individuals and use this knowledge as a basis for providing appropriate care based on community-developed practices. This concept, understood as cultural care, emerges as a fundamental pillar of the specificities of nursing care in rural settings (Marilaf; Alarcón; Illesca, 2011).

Furthermore, given the specificities observed during the rural internship, students highlighted significant differences compared to the urban environment, especially regarding the frequency of seeking healthcare services. The statement from the student Jaraqui reflects his perception during the internship, where he noticed a lower demand for healthcare services by the riverside populations, attributing it to logistical issues specific to this context. This reality is also evidenced in the study conducted by Silva et al. (2023), where students observe that the population served in rural areas is smaller compared to urban areas, where there is more frequent use of services, resulting in closer proximity between professionals and the community.

Corroborating our results, the study by Leite and Mascarenhas (2021), which assessed interns' perceptions during rural internships in a municipality in the Amazon, highlights that the most significant element of these practices was the opportunity to connect directly with the realities of patients' and communities' lives. This experience contrasts with other health course disciplines, which are typically taught through theoretical discussions and practical classes in outpatient clinics and/or medium- and high-tech hospitals, where social determinants of health are not prioritized inpatient analysis as they are in the rural setting. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the need for students and healthcare providers to adapt to the context in which they find themselves, aiming for effective communication between the health team and users, as highlighted by Trentini, Paim and Vasquez (2011, p. 97): "communication between professionals and users is based on the belief that the user and the professional are equal in their human essence, therefore it is incompatible [...] with an autocratic relationship." The educational preparation of nurses plays an important role in this regard, prioritizing the integration of health care needs in the physical, psychosocial, spiritual, and emotional spheres of patients. The professional values of nursing are humanitarian and centered on the individual, which leads nursing to be widely recognized as an ethical and reliable profession. Nurses consistently demonstrate the necessary competencies to provide safe and high-quality care to patients (Reynolds, 2020). Hence, the importance of the rural internship strategy, placing the student in this context and allowing interaction with the people who live there.

For Vygotsky, humans are in a constant process of learning and transformation, which occurs through social interactions. In this conception, the role of education and consequently, learning, is highlighted in the theory of development, in which it is argued that the dynamism of learning involves not only acquiring information or associating ideas stored in memory but is, in fact, part of an internal, active, and interpersonal process (Casagrande, 2024).

The dialectical interaction process described by Vygotsky implies that the individual, by internalizing and transforming cultural forms, intervenes in their environment, thus constituting their own process of "liberation" (Casagrande, 2024). In this view, learning, along with other constitutive processes of human beings, is triggered by the exchange relations the subject establishes with their social environment. In this perspective, future nursing professionals build their professional identity as a result of a social and cultural aspect (Lima; Gonçalves, 2020). Accordingly, the performance of nursing students during the rural internship can have a significant impact on the formation of professionals who are more sensitive to the promotion of holistic care. This is characterized by involving values, beliefs, and feelings in patient care, contributing to a broader and more humanized approach to health care for the rural population (Lima et al., 2019).

Opportunities for learning in the social environment provide conditions for knowledge production while also addressing the emotional and affective dimensions. This Vygotskian

view reaffirms the feelings of students when experiencing the reality proposed in the rural internship (Vigotski, 2021). It is perceived that, in addition to enabling the development of skills and techniques that qualify future nursing professionals, the internship practice plays a fundamental role in shaping a critical professional and knowledge producer. This characterizes it as a complex strategy encompassing the educational process, as it empowers students to become agents of change by reflecting on the reality of work processes and proposing solutions to real problems in the scenarios they are involved in (Moura et al., 2006).

Furthermore, improving access to health in rural areas requires the implementation of systematic and attentive strategies to address the scarcity of professionals in these contexts. The lack of human resources is intrinsically linked to the deficit in the quality of services provided to the community. This scarcity manifests through incomplete teams, which generates significant difficulties in the effective implementation of the principles of the Brazilian National Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde - SUS*), such as universality, comprehensiveness, and equity in health care for riverine populations across the country (Franco et al., 2015). Experiences such as the rural internship may directly impact the human resource deficit while shaping professionals who are more sensitive to developing actions aimed at promoting holistic care. This type of care differs from others by allowing spontaneity, avoiding rigid structures, and facilitating the integration of knowledge and care practices in the areas of action (Leite; Mascarenhas, 2021; Hays; Devine; Glass, 2022; Silva et al., 2023).

The diversification of teaching-learning scenarios in nursing courses brings students closer to the professional reality and the daily life of the community in rural settings, enabling students to develop critical perspectives and analyses of the context in which they are inserted, focusing on the health needs of the population (Silva et al., 2019, 2023). The interaction between teaching, services, and the community, a fundamental principle of the Curricular Internship, holds significant potential to prepare professionals with a biopsychosocial perspective of health system users. It encourages them to analyze and understand the social determinants of health present in society, the social context in which they are engaged, and the service demands arising from these specific characteristics (Esteves et al., 2018; Kolahdouzan et al., 2020).

## CONCLUSION

This study allowed for the construction of a deeper understanding of the formative practices of nurses trained in the Amazonian territory in relation to the reality of the riverine population inhabiting this space. The rural internship stood out for the impact of an immersive formative practice, allowing students to recognize the specificities of the riverine territory, learn from the population, and experience working in health in this context. For the students, it became evident that this population has social, economic, cultural, and geographical particularities that differ from urban reality and demand very specific nursing care practices that are relevant to the reality of this population. In this context, from a Vygotskian perspective combined with Leninger's transcultural care theory, the historical-cultural aspects of a people construct their identity, and this directly influences how individuals will interact with their environment. It is important to understand these nuances to ensure care is centered on the cultural reality of individuals immersed in a social context.

Based on this study, it can be concluded that the rural internship serves as an opportunity for academic immersion in the social reality, allowing students to reframe care for the Amazonian riverine population. It is an experience that enables the collective construction of knowledge and health and nursing practices with cultural competence in response to the specificities of the liquid territory. Therefore, we consider it relevant to prioritize formative practices that are closely aligned with social realities, as they are essential for understanding the ways of life, cultures, and histories of different populations, aiming to deliver specific and more comprehensive care in the most remote territories, distant from large urban centers.

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IOPM: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data management, Data collection, Data analysis, Resources, Data visualization, Writing, Review. MFCG: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data analysis, Project administration, Validation, Writing, Review. LSA: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Writing, Review.

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