

**EATING, FOOD AND CULTURE: ANALYSIS OF THE TEACHING ABOUT FOOD
IN UNDERGRADUATE IN NUTRITION**

***O COMER, A COMIDA E A CULTURA: ANÁLISE DO PROCESSO DE ENSINO
SOBRE ALIMENTAÇÃO NA GRADUAÇÃO EM NUTRIÇÃO***

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Bianca Martins FABBRI¹
e-mail: lapes@unicamp.br



Julicristie Machado de OLIVEIRA²
e-mail: julicr@unicamp.br

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¹ State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), Limeira – SP– Brazil. Graduated in Nutrition.

² State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), Limeira – SP– Brazil. Doctoral degree in Public Health Nutrition from the School of Public Health. Faculty member of the Undergraduate Nutrition Program, the Graduate Program in Nutrition Sciences, and the Sports and Metabolism Program (CNEM).

ABSTRACT: The teaching of human and social aspects of Food in the Nutrition undergraduate has become an important object of reflection and debate. The aim of this study was to analyze the teaching about Food to Nutrition students at a state university in Sao Paulo, within the scope of the Food and Culture course. Data collection was carried out through participant observation of classes and two focus groups carried out with 9 students. After data analysis, semantic categories were listed on the topics covered, such as "Respect and appreciation of traditional cultures and way of doing", "The oppression of black and indigenous cultures and contempt for the local", "Food, memory, tradition and affective bonds" and "Care, training and performance of the nutritionist". In conclusion, the course was able to humanize the perspective of future Nutrition professionals, making them more sensitive to sociocultural and affective aspects of Food.

KEYWORDS: Food. Culture. University education. Nutrition.

RESUMO: O ensino dos aspectos humanísticos e sociais da Alimentação para a graduação em Nutrição tem se tornado um importante objeto de reflexão e debate. O objetivo deste estudo foi analisar o processo de ensino sobre Alimentação para estudantes de Nutrição de uma universidade estadual paulista, no âmbito da disciplina Alimentação e Cultura. A coleta dos dados foi realizada por meio de observação participante das aulas e de dois grupos focais realizados com 9 estudantes. A partir da análise dos dados, foram elencadas categorias semânticas sobre os temas tratados, como "Respeito e valorização das culturas e modos de fazer tradicionais", "A opressão das culturas negra, indígena e menosprezo pelo local", "Comida, memória, tradição e laços afetivos" e "O cuidado, a formação e atuação do nutricionista". Concluiu-se que a disciplina foi capaz de humanizar o olhar das futuras profissionais de Nutrição, tornando-as mais sensíveis aos aspectos socioculturais e afetivos da Alimentação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Alimentação. Cultura. Ensino superior. Nutrição.

RESUMEN: La enseñanza de aspectos humanísticos e sociales de la Alimentación en la graduación en Nutrición se ha convertido en importante objeto de reflexión y debate. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar la docencia de la Alimentación para estudiantes de Nutrición de una universidad estatal paulista, en la disciplina Alimentación y Cultura. La recolección de datos se realizó a través de la observación participante y los grupos focales realizados con 9 estudiantes. A partir del análisis, se enumeraron categorías semánticas sobre los temas tratados, como "Respeto y valoración de las culturas y formas de hacer tradicionales", "La opresión de las culturas negras, indígenas y el desprecio por lo local", "Comida, memoria, tradición y vínculos afectivos" y "El cuidado, formación y actuación del nutricionista". Se concluyó que la disciplina logró humanizar la perspectiva de los futuros profesionales de Nutrición, haciéndolos más sensibles a los aspectos socioculturales y afectivos de la Alimentación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Alimentación. Cultura. Enseñanza superior. Nutrición.

Introduction

Nutrition is a fundamental dimension of social and cultural life, as it is closely linked to individual and collective imaginaries (MENASCHE; ALVAREZ; COLLAÇO, 2012). Additionally, it establishes a connection with the past, the environment, and the places where life experiences are constructed (BLOCH-DANO, 2011). The various eating forms unveil a society's significant characteristics, reflecting its social structures and lifestyle patterns (ROSSI, 2014). Eating binds us to the land, history, culture, and personal and collective memories (MONTANARI, 2013).

National and traditional cuisines face a significant battle against nutritionism, threatening them by reducing food and its entire complexity to a fragmented view of "nutrients" (DÓRIA, 2021). However, humans do not merely ingest nutrients; they eat, savor, and incorporate interconnected, affective, and chemical elements (BLOCH-DANO, 2011).

Given that nutrition is a phenomenon endowed with complexity, involving various dimensions related to ethical, aesthetic, technical, and other issues (BENEMANN *et al.*, 2023), a profound understanding of its humanistic and social aspects is required, especially in the context of educational processes for professionals who consider it a privileged subject, such as nutritionists.

Despite the relevance of teaching these aspects of nutrition in undergraduate nutrition programs, studies analyzing their pedagogical dimensions have not been identified. Thus, the present study aims to analyze the teaching process of nutrition for nutrition students within the scope of the "Food and Culture" discipline at the College of Applied Sciences, State University of Campinas, FCA/UNICAMP.

Methodology

This pertains to a qualitative study wherein data were collected through participant observation of classes held in the "Food and Culture" discipline at FCA/Unicamp, along with conducting focus groups with the respective students.

The discipline is grounded in the frameworks of Humanities and Social Sciences within the realm of Food and Nutrition. It emphasizes Food in its historical, geographical, and socio-anthropological aspects, addressing its interconnections with Arts and Literature, agricultural and Food practices of traditional peoples and communities, the formation of Brazilian cuisine, national food heritages, the history of recipe books, commensality, and taste memories.

Through lectures, discussions, and culinary practices, the goal is to collaboratively construct a space for debate and understanding of the historical, sociocultural, and affective aspects of nutrition with nutrition students.

The analysis of the aforementioned discipline was conducted based on data recorded in a field diary (participant observation) by the first author of the study, who attended all classes of the "Food and Culture" discipline intensively in February 2020, taught by the second author of the study.

Detailed information about the discipline and its developmental plan is described in Table 1. As suggested by Mónico *et al.* (2017), a qualitative record was compiled in the field diary with the observations made after each class. As emphasized by the authors, participant observation proves suitable for studies aiming to propose the generalization of interpretative aspects observed and systematized in narrative records. By positioning herself as a listener in the discipline, the first author became part of the group, facilitating engagement with comments and discussions in each class and providing the opportunity to reveal the meanings and significance of the content covered.

Table 1 – Syllabus, objectives, program, and class plan of the "Food and Culture" discipline at the College of Applied Sciences, State University of Campinas (FCA/UNICAMP), Limeira, 2020

Discipline: Food and Culture (2020)
Syllabus
Humanities and Social Sciences in Food and Nutrition. Historical, geographical, and socio-anthropological aspects of Food and Nutrition. Art, Literature, and Food.
Objectives
To collaboratively create a space for discussion and understanding of aspects related to humanities and social sciences in food and nutrition, as well as their interconnections with literature and the arts.
Program
1. Historical and geographical aspects of Food and Nutrition. Ingredients, exchanges, taste memories, recipe books, biodiversity, colonialism, and power. 2. Social and cultural aspects of Food and Nutrition. Cultivation, cooking, food, eating, drinking, commensality, social distinction, and the body. 3. Food in arts and literature. Meanings, feelings, and social relations.
Class Plan (total 45 class hours, 15 classes)
Class 1: Cinema and Food Film: "Lunchbox" (BATRA, 2013) and discussion on the affective aspects of food; Class 2: Literature and Food Activities include poems by Cora Coralina (2012) and the biographical documentary " <i>Cora Coralina – Todas as Vidas</i> " (BARBIERI, 2017); Class 3: Arts, History, Geography, Socioanthropology of Food 1 Reading and discussion of the text and the documentary " <i>Registro do Patrimônio: Sistema Agrícola Tradicional do Rio Negro, AM</i> " (IPHAN, 2010); Class 4: Arts, History, Geography, Socioanthropology of Food 2 Reading and discussion of the text and the documentary " <i>Registro do Patrimônio: Sistema Agrícola Tradicional Quilombola do Vale do Ribeira, SP</i> " (ISA, 2017).

Class 5: Arts, History, Geography, Socioanthropology of Food 3
Reading and discussion of the text and the documentary "*Registro do Patrimônio: Ofício das Paneleiras de Goiabeiras, ES*" (IPHAN, 2006);
Reading and discussion of the text and the documentary "*Registro do Patrimônio: Ofício das Baianas de Acarajé, BA*" (IPHAN, 2007);
Class 6: Formation of Brazilian Cuisine 1
The seminar was presented by students in groups based on chapters from Dória's book (2014);
Class 7: Formation of Brazilian Cuisine 2
The seminar was presented by students in groups based on chapters from Dória's book (2014);
Class 8: Recipe Books, Cuisines, Memories, and Affections
Discussion of recipes from "*O Cozinheiro Nacional*" (1985) and "*Livro de Cozinha da Infanta D. Maria*" (1986);
Class 9: Practice 1 - São Paulo, Quilombola, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul Cuisines
Practical classes in the Dietetic Technique Laboratory with regional cuisines;
Class 10: Practice 2 - Minas Gerais, Goiás, Bahia, and Paraíba Cuisines
Practical classes in the Dietetic Technique Laboratory with regional cuisines;
Classes 11 to 14: Preparation of Final Projects
Fieldwork with each student's family to record traditional recipes and create a book;
Class 15: Submission and Presentation of Final Projects
Presentation of the Final Projects, the Recipe Book, by each student.

Source: Compiled by the authors

Two focus groups were conducted with 9 voluntary students, one on the last day of the practical class of the discipline and the other after submitting the final projects, following Trad's recommendations (2009). The same 9 students participated in both focus groups. All 24 students enrolled in the discipline were invited to participate, and 9 willingly consented, signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF). The project was submitted, analyzed, and approved by the Research Ethics Committee in Human and Social Sciences (CEP – CHS) of the Vice Presidency for Research, PRP/Unicamp (CAAE: 09026919.2.0000.5404).

The groups had a moderator (first author of the study) who followed a script of questions and topics to guide and mediate the discussion. This script included the following questions: Did the discipline influence your perceptions of food's social, cultural, and affective aspects? If yes, how? Which activities or content from the discipline do you consider most significant in shaping your perception of food culture? How important do you think teaching about Food and Culture is for future Nutrition professionals? What was the contribution of the discipline and its activities to your specific training, considering the area in which you intend to work? What other activities and content do you believe could be worked on to help understand the social, cultural, and affective aspects of food? The duration of the two groups was approximately 60 minutes. The audio recordings were made using a cellphone and later transcribed.

For data processing, content analysis was employed following the guidelines of Moraes (1999), Bardin (2011) and Minayo, Deslandes and Gomes (2016). The analysis was organized into three stages: pre-analysis involving a floating reading of field diary entries and focus group

transcriptions; exploration of these records and transcriptions; and analysis of the results, categorizing them semantically to facilitate interpretation and inference.

Semantic categories were defined based on common elements under the following keys: appreciation of cultures, oppression of cultures, memory and affection, and professional training and performance. To preserve the identity of the voluntary students, each one was assigned the name of a gemstone: Amethyst, Emerald, Opal, Moonstone, Ruby, Sapphire, Topaz, Turquoise, and Tourmaline.

The records of participant observation and the transcribed audios from the focus groups were systematized and analyzed, relying on a theoretical framework composed of reference books in Food Studies, such as Fischler and Masson (2010), Montanari (2013), Bloch-Dano (2011), Pinto and Silva (2005), Dória (2014) and Rossi (2014), in addition to relevant scientific articles.

Results and Discussion

Based on the analysis of participant observation records and transcriptions, semantic categories were defined to deepen the understanding of students' perceptions regarding the teaching process of nutrition-related topics in undergraduate studies.

1st Category - Respect and Appreciation of Cultures and Traditional Ways

The exposure to the ways of life of traditional, indigenous, and *quilombola* communities, and the cultural clash between these ways and those familiar to the students, led them to a greater awareness of the various ways to occupy a space and live in it, emphasizing the need to respect other cultures and their differences:

[...] what impacted me the most is seeing how.../we don't need to say 'wow, I do this better,' you know, it's just different, [...] and that's what I think we worked on a bit about alterity [...] which is more or less respecting the other's culture, you can't /can't value yours more than the other (Amethyst, Focus Group, our translation).

Rossi (2014) notes that humans perceive another culture through their own lenses, triggering a reflective process. In the relationships between peoples, cultural exchanges, such as culinary ones, are constant because culture and food identity result from long and complex processes of exchanges (MONTANARI, 2013). Thus, each way of doing things is not unique and immutable but a product of numerous insertions and adaptations.

Through learning about indigenous communities in the Rio Negro and Quilombolas in the *Vale do Ribeira*, the students expressed appreciation for the knowledge of cultivation and the intense energy of work applied. They raised the need to reconnect with the production process, distant from their realities but an essential part. They understood the importance and richness of traditional knowledge and the relationship with the land, plants, and nature:

We have no idea about everything that food goes through to reach us. When it arrives at the market for us, it's already ready (Journal entry regarding the class on the Agricultural System of the Rio Negro, from indigenous communities, our translation).

[...] I... Indigenous people have knowledge of so much [emphasis] stuff, and we don't take that into consideration and don't value it at all [emphasis] within society [...] (Ruby, Focus Group, our translation).

In a study conducted in different countries, Fischler and Masson (2010) identified a similar sentiment among participants in the United Kingdom. They reported a lack of knowledge about the origin and production process of food and a perception of being passive and unaware consumers.

The students discussed the excessive technology involved in current food production and emphasized their distance from the traditional, simpler, productive, and sustainable cultivation model linked to ancient knowledge. They also pointed out pathways to address food and nutritional insecurity and the environmental crisis:

We need to change our way of production, and these societies can be the key to teaching us how (Record in the journal regarding the class on the Traditional Agricultural System of the *Quilombola* Communities of *Vale do Ribeira*, our translation).

In the same vein, Montanari (2013) remarks that in traditional societies, various varieties of food are used and harvested at different times of the year, which is interesting for food and nutritional security and ecological balance. Thus, by learning about traditional systems, the students could envision solutions to the main demands in the field of nutrition that involve the appreciation of knowledge from oppressed populations.

2nd Category - Oppression of Black, Indigenous Cultures, and Disregard for the Local

Through the reading and study of the book "*A formação da culinária brasileira: escritos sobre a cozinha inzoneira*" by Carlos Alberto Dória (2014), the students observed the influence of the people who shaped the cuisine of our country: indigenous, African, and Portuguese. Dória (2014) deconstructs the myth of the formation of Brazilian cuisine, in which the three would have equal contributions. In reality, however, there was almost complete suppression of indigenous and African cuisines during the violent processes of Portuguese domination:

I was also horrified by the vision of the extermination of indigenous people... the idea of miscegenation that we learn in school conceals this violence (Journal entry regarding the class on the impacts of reading the book "*A formação da culinária brasileira* (The Formation of Brazilian Cuisine," discussed in seminars, our translation).

Dória (2014) mentions that foods derived from indigenous peoples are seen as if they were found in the form we know in nature, which diminishes the knowledge and efforts of multiple generations in the selection and domestication necessary to impart each species with its current characteristics. The author also discusses the idea of the culinary contribution of enslaved Africans:

Similarly to how slavery represses or suppresses the individual, it hinders what we now call culinary creativity. The enslaved person was not given the choice of anything, let alone their food, and if they participated in the kitchens of the plantation house, it was to satisfy the desires of their masters and the mistresses who directed the domestic kitchens (DÓRIA, 2014, p 69, our translation).

The students commented on the disregard for everything local, emphasizing the imported, especially from Europe. Thus, they emphasized the importance of valuing our culture and our history, which we often do not even know, discussing that the key to change lies in contact with our past:

[...] I think this issue of giving value, this inferiority complex that we, Brazilians, have, you know [...] thinking that we don't have a history [emphasis], but a lot because our history is veiled [emphasis], right, our history comes from enslavement, from a past of enslavement, of indigenous decimation [...] (Turquoise, Focus Group, our translation).

According to Dória (2014), in countries with a colonial history, there was hardly a process of forming culinary symbols capable of uniting the entire population because the elites, whose identity revolved around their European origin, did not wish to unite with other classes and indigenous peoples, whom they despised as inferior. Therefore, the exaltation of the foreigner refers to the European part of the elites, and the disdain for the locals stems from this scenario, a solid cultural legacy still present.

In this sense, Sammartino (2020), from a decolonial perspective, analyzes tensions related to the delimitations of heritage, the rescue of foods and dishes for the tourist market, as well as the impacts on stigmatized populations in southern countries. The author highlights that such processes intensify conceptions of what is superior or inferior in terms of food, reinforcing the colonial legacy and its underlying inequities (SAMMARTINO, 2020).

The activities developed in the discipline, such as classes that addressed traditional societies, Brazilian Cultural Heritage, and Dória's book (2014), prompted the students to have a greater inclination to value local elements, rescue their culture and history, seeing these aspects as a path to self-knowledge and self-discovery:

And basically, in this discipline, we used food to understand history... we started with a dish and discovered that... our... Black tradition has a total influence on that, you know, so... food is very powerful [laughter] (Turquoise, Focus Group, our translation).

According to Dória (2014), in each dish from a specific region, it is possible to find traces of the people who contributed to the formation of local cuisine. Therefore, food is a pathway to learning about a person's history, formation processes, and origins.

3rd Category - Food, Memory, Tradition, and Emotional Bonds

The students observed more deeply the connections of food with culture, religion, daily habits, and history when learning about the Baianas do Acarajé and discussed the meanings of this dish and its ingredients within Candomblé. They also commented that African-derived religions, such as Candomblé and Umbanda, have an intense connection with food. As one student commented, "There is no celebration without food":

I found it very beautiful, all the significance it has for her... it's not just a little cake, it's connected to religion, a way of worshipping the *orixás*, it has all the strength of palm oil the beads; it has a whole meaning of life for these people,

and Candomblé faces a lot of prejudice (Journal entry regarding the *Baianas de Acarajé* ceremony, presented in class, our translation).

Once again, Dória's book (2014), an essential part of the course, appears in the students' comments, expanding their view of food. Specifically, the bond of Brazilians with beans makes a new appearance, this time under a cultural lens:

I saw that cuisine is not just a combination of dishes; it is historical (Journal entry regarding the impacts of reading the book "*A formação da culinária brasileira: escritos sobre a cozinha inzoneira*" by Carlos Alberto Dória, discussed in seminars, our translation).

I found beans very important because, truly, beans are the history of Brazil, both of the individual and the region. This helped me see that food is indeed history; it is culture (Journal entry regarding the impacts of reading the book "*A formação da culinária brasileira: escritos sobre a cozinha inzoneira*" by Carlos Alberto Dória, discussed in seminars, our translation).

According to Bloch-Dano (2011), food has been surrounded by symbolic associations throughout human history. Among the many cultural associations with food discussed by the author, some examples are cited: "cereals constitute the foundation and symbol of peasants, while meat, for a long time, was a sign of wealth and luxury," vegetables have "little place in poetry and art," have a pejorative sense in culture, and treating a person like a vegetable is offensive (BLOCH-DANO, 2011, our translation).

During the Middle Ages, aristocratic tables exalted wild animals, free like the nobles. Thus, symbolism links the food's intrinsic characteristics to the one who consumes it, bringing the idea that the individual is what they consume, and they consume what they are (BLOCH-DANO, 2011). In this way, among human beings, which foods are consumed, how much, in what order, and their method of preparation are filled with meanings and cultural ties.

Food is intensely linked to memory: the sweet one ate at childhood parties, the cake the grandmother made in the late afternoon, and the dish only made at Christmas. Preparations connected us to moments in our lives when those dishes were present because food is also in our memories (BLOCH-DANO, 2011).

Here we have the concept of gustatory memory, worked on in class and apprehended by the students through discussions and activities:

Some foods bring good and bad memories [...] Food has the power to make you relive a moment of your life, whether it's good or not (Journal entry regarding gustatory memory discussed in class, our translation).

Eating is also a means of connection and bonding, as well as a way to show affection and care for the person you're cooking for:

[...] Food is a bond, we do everything because of Food, you know, so if you want to relate to someone, if you want to captivate the person, invite them to eat (Moonstone, Focus Group).
And it's enjoyable to invite someone to eat your [emphasis] Food [...] (Ruby, Focus Group, our translation).

As Montanari (2013) comments, eating together and sharing Food are characteristics of the human species, which can be considered a way of confirming that one is part of the same family. Thus, commensality, the union of sharing Food, is a fundamental part of human existence. Food is an instrument for creating bonds between people. As Fischler and Masson (2010) explain, in French culture, marked by conviviality, good eating, and company, the one who prepares the Food offers themselves to the other through dedication in preparation.

However, Food doesn't always bring good meaning. Often it expresses memories of scarcity of restriction:

[...] when we think about the words according to the title of the poem '*Antiguidades*,' we think of 'Affection' related to '*Antiguidades*,' and when we read the poem, we saw that affection materialized in the cake, was reserved for the visitors and denied or given sparingly, in crumbs, to the people of the house, the children, thirsty for affection" (Journal entry regarding the poem "*Antiguidades*" by *Cora Coralina*, read and discussed in a creative activity in class, our translation).

Through the activities, the students realized the neglect of orality and "doing together," resulting in a loss of culinary knowledge. They related the tradition of the agricultural systems of Rio Negro and Vale do Ribeira, which are at risk of being lost due to youth disinterest, to their own experiences, reflecting on the fragility of tradition, transmission. They consider that there seems to be no more time to cook together with the elders and share traditions and stories:

I keep thinking about how finite it is because we no longer have the tradition we had before, and our children won't have it either. It's something that won't last, so we're going to lose the tradition... [...] and we lose history at the same time [...] (Topázio, Focus Group, our translation).

According to Fischler and Masson (2010), culinary traditions connect to our history, culture, and heritage, which is lost when not shared with new generations. In cultural realms

influenced by the United States, to which Brazil belongs, eating loses contact with its convivial, shared context and becomes individualistic. Thus, eating together, and even more so, cooking together, is no longer part of our daily habits. Consequently, the transmission of oral knowledge and culinary gestures learned by imitation during joint food preparation ceases to occur, leading to the loss of these skills (FISCHLER; MASSON, 2010).

Recipes can be a record of history, both individual and collective. Recipes from other times can provide clues about the socio-cultural and economic conditions of the people who prepared and consumed them. The final project of the course, in which each student wrote a cookbook from their families, opened their eyes to the emotional aspects involved in the habit of writing and exchanging recipes and the potential to bring people together. Food defines people, marks moments in their lives, and recipes hold their history:

[...] and I got them from my mom [...] most of the recipes I got from her, and then I started asking, like the recipes from Grandma [###], that you ate when you were a child, and it was nice to see, to get to know the history [emphasis] of our family as well (Turquesa, Focus Group, our translation).

In a classroom activity, texts about the history of recipe books were read and discussed, helping the students understand the importance of these devices as sources for recording habits, culture, economy, and even politics. As Monteleone (2021) explains, during the Age of Exploration, the intensive use of spices, which were expensive and hard to access, in preparations was a way of demonstrating economic power.

The students also commented that, due to the social position of the authors of the old recipe books discussed in class, the preserved knowledge often records only the eating habits of the elite. After all, as Montanari (2013) notes, writing is elitist, and the records are made by members of the elite for other members of the elite, resulting in a lack of documentation of the food and culture of the people, which is transmitted through oral tradition.

Recipes prove to be a rich source of knowledge and a valuable tool for understanding the culture of other societies. According to Pinto e Silva (2005), through food preparation, the values and habits of each society can be understood, especially considering that the choice and preparation of food carry something of the person who cooks it, revealing the worldview of each culture.

In this way, recipes reflect their time, perpetuate knowledge of certain contexts, enhance the understanding of the lifestyles of previous generations, and provide clues for contemporary developments.

4th Category - The care, training, and role of the Nutrition Professional

The students observed that care in food and nutrition goes far beyond physiological and biochemical aspects, as they have a sociocultural and emotional load, and all these aspects must be considered in the care process:

[...] you really reconnect with the food, right, it's not just nourishing the physiological aspect there, what you're feeding in that person is much more than the food itself, I think that's mainly what the subject addresses all the time [...] (Moonstone, Focus Group, our translation).

As Montanari (2013) comments, eating behaviors result not only from economic and nutritional factors, thought out rationally, but also from choices connected to the symbols we carry with us, of which we are, in a way, prisoners.

Thus, the fragmented view of the individual, focusing only on their physiological aspects, ignores the sociocultural, historical, and emotional reality to which they belong. This fragmented perception of the health condition may affect the global treatment of the disease, consequently reducing the chances of success:

The predominantly biological focus has progressively distanced social issues from those linked to the body, excluding the human condition from the organism to support other scientific objectives (FREITAS *et al.*, 2008, p. 211, our translation).

With this analytical possibility, in seeking to understand the normative orientation of the professional, it is observed that the diet, within the scope of nutritional care, can be elevated to the category of a medicinal prescription. With organized nutrients, the dietary prescription opposes culture, tradition, habits, and values attributed to eating (FREITAS *et al.*, 2008).

Nutrition courses, in general, prepare professionals in a limited way to deal with the socio-cultural and emotional context of Nutrition, which influences how the individual under nutritional care receives treatment and its success. As Freitas *et al.* (2008, p. 208, our translation), comment, there is a "lack or fragmentation of human content in the training of the nutrition professional who, in general, is encouraged to think of the individual and society as disconnected entities."

During discussions with the students, the importance of teaching humanistic and social aspects of Nutrition to nutritionists and other health professionals was emphasized. This

approach emerges as a way to humanize the perspective and expand the ability to respect differences in the ways individuals approach nutritional care.

The inclusion of Human and Social Sciences in the field of Food and Nutrition promotes the generation of in-depth and sensitive knowledge about the relationship between the individual seeking nutritional care and the nutritionist professional. With this focus, economic, socio-cultural, political, geographical, and historical aspects can stimulate transformative practices, such as changing unhealthy habits (FREITAS *et al.*, 2008).

Through the activities of the course, the students enhanced their understanding of this scenario and commented on the need for the discipline to become mandatory both in their course and in all Nutrition courses:

I think the course was very important because... it showed a side that we almost never see in the Nutrition program [...] I think it's important to have this contact, and [...] not all courses have it, ours doesn't even have it, we had to take an elective course to have more knowledge, you know [...] (Topaz, Focus Group, our translation).

During the debates, the students discussed stigmas that permeate the field of Nutrition today, including the perception of the nutritionist not only as a healthcare professional but, mistakenly, as an exclusive promoter of weight loss, being associated with the realm of aesthetics. They also reflected on the responsibility they have in deconstructing such a conception, considering the new perspective gained through their experience in the course.

[...] the importance of us having this type of class, this type of education is this, "no, guys, sit down because Nutrition has changed," you know, "let's tell the story of current Nutrition, now," and that's it, you know, like telling... People don't see Nutrition as a health professional [emphasis], you know... it's a professional... of aesthetics (Turquoise, Focus Group, our translation).

Another stigma is the prohibition of foods, divided into "good" and "bad," often propagated by the nutritionists themselves, who are thus seen as "food prohibitions." The students also commented on how other professionals contribute to maintaining this restrictive attitude by providing individuals under nutritional care with lists of forbidden foods, without considering each person's individuality, and encroaching into the field of Nutrition:

They can't [don't feel they can] have autonomy, you know, because Nutrition is seen as "restricting, what you can and can't do" [emphasis] [hitting the table while speaking] (Ruby, Focus Group, our translation).

But you know what the biggest problem is, the problem is that they probably have already gone through professionals who treated them like that (Sapphire, Focus Group, our translation).

The students demonstrated a humanized perspective as healthcare professionals and an increased awareness of individuals' cultural, historical, and emotional ties to eating. They also commented on the limitations of educational content related to the sociocultural universe involved in nutrition courses:

[...] when the patient comes to us with a whole cultural background [...] we look at it with different eyes [...] we already have a more open mind to understand what is going on [emphasis] in that patient's head, [...] for me [the course] has completely changed the way we see food, nutrition, and culture within nutrition, which is a completely important thing that in college is very shallow and superficial [...] (Sapphire, Focus Group, our translation).

It is essential to listen to the individual under nutritional care in order to know and understand their reality and perspectives, which are determinants in how they deal with their health condition, after all, "a humanizing proposal for nutrition is the nutritionist's understanding of the meaning of food for the diner, the interpretation of the subject about their diet, their body in their world" (FREITAS *et al.*, 2008, p. 211, our translation).

The students also emphasize the importance of not imposing guidance on individuals under nutritional care but explaining it, empowering them to understand and gain autonomy and responsibility for themselves. Respect for the individual, their culture, and their way of life, learned during the course, emerges as a fundamental part of the nutritionist's role, which, as they mention, should always be guided by health in any area of action, including aesthetics:

[...] it doesn't mean that Nutrition can't work in aesthetics, [...] it's just that it's not only [emphasis] aesthetics, and involving aesthetics doesn't mean that you shouldn't involve cultural, social, health aspects, etc. It's something that has to be linked to everything [...] it has to be related to health [emphasis], always [emphasis], right, whether mental or physical (Ruby, Focus Group, our translation).

Freitas *et al.* (2008, p 213, our translation) mention that many symbolic conceptions are part of eating and individual social relationships, and the prescription of diets causes discomfort "due to the disruption of eating habits" and "interferes with the social identity of the individual." Thus, respect for the individual and their life context is essential in nutritional treatment so that

the proposition of dietary changes is included in the individual's reality and does not promote the rupture of the ties they already have with food.

Similarly, the students reflected on the role of the nutritionist in having a comprehensive view of food, considering it as part of a broader sociocultural and affective context. They also discussed the importance of developing this new perspective alongside the individual, moving away from the fragmented view of food that reduces it exclusively to its nutritional components.

Final considerations

The teaching process conducted in the "Food and Culture" course fostered the humanization of the professional perspective among nutrition students, who demonstrated increased sensitivity to food's sociocultural, historical, and affective contexts. Current anxieties and alimentary difficulties, prevalent in today's society, were given prominence. The discussions, however, constructed pathways that can alleviate such feelings, such as strengthening food traditions and reconnecting with the cultivation and production of food.

From a cultural perspective, stigmas surrounding Nutrition and the role of the Nutritionist were explored and debated, often still perceived as solely focused on "weight loss" and as the "professional who prohibits foods." Such perceptions disrupt human connections with food, generating anxieties for the professional and the individual receiving nutritional attention. The latter is encouraged to abstain from consuming foods that are part of their history and culture, classified as "inappropriate."

The students gained a deeper understanding of this scenario through classes and proposed activities. Therefore, it is concluded that the course's objective was achieved by providing nutrition students with opportunities to build knowledge and discuss relevant topics, enabling them to become professionals capable of understanding the humanistic and social aspects of Nutrition.

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