

Education for informed citizenship

Since its foundation in 1960, the Instituto Materno Infantil de Pernambuco (IMIP), now known as the Instituto Materno Infantil Prof. Fernando Figueira (IMIP), has assumed as one of its key roles that of training health professionals, under the aegis of a technical and methodological focus that is not based on submission to the values and the demands of the free market. The proposal was to regenerate the paradigms for teaching in the light of the real contemporary world, valuing a doctrine and practice of teaching and learning that goes beyond the classroom walls and incorporates humanistic, ethical and communitarian principles, in such a way as to achieve a profile of professionals who meet the needs of social development and are sensitive to the need to care for the poorest members of society.

It was thus that the need was established to promote close ties between the biological and social sciences, so that the institution is better able to share knowledge with others and develop a genuine commitment to changing society for the better, raising the awareness of students and teachers alike that the quantity of information is not in itself a measure of quality and that the training process is, in some sense, a way of fostering change. Gradually, the IMIP has pressed forward with laying the foundations through training for a technically reliable, effective, ethical and humanistic practice that keeps pace with scientific and technological advances and always strives to adopt procedures that benefit its users.

Over this 47-year history, in the face of every faster and more far-reaching advances in science and technology, and in recognition of the fact that no field of human endeavor has been left untouched by these enormous changes, it has become necessary to keep track of and develop an understanding of the real agenda of changes, since change implies a break with tradition. This has inspired broader reflection on the main social and political changes underway, along with a renewed capacity to develop critical thinking with regard to the health needs of users and the capacity of the Brazilian National Health Service (SUS) to respond to them, in view of the fact that one of the greatest challenges is that of ensuring that health professionals strive to improve their efficiency, effectiveness and the quality of care, with an emphasis on promoting health and preventing illness, as well as treating and curing diseases.

The on-going improvements to the teaching process signal that students and teachers have not confined themselves to being mere critical onlookers, but have taken a stand as people capable of generating constructive dynamic processes. This is an important attribute in an age of learning which requires, beyond up-to-date knowledge, that the professional be familiar with the implications of this knowledge at local and regional level. Such a view requires that teachers act as mediators of scientific knowledge and that educators hold regular discussions to review the topics covered and address the problems that arise, thereby forming a bridge between the content of teaching and the concrete reality of everyday life, with a view to ensuring that knowledge can take the form of action. For this reason, a culture of transdisciplinarity has been built up, thereby clearly signaling that there are different levels of reality and that each requires a different viewpoint.

There can be no doubt that the texts brought together here reveal that, at the IMIP, the purpose of teaching is in line with the recommendations of Michel Thiollent when he says that (1998: 95; 103)¹ "... a question of knowing in order to be able to act, and acting in order to bring about change"... "of striving to generate and spread knowledge that is useful for solving the problems of the real world". Nevertheless aiming to meet the need for wide-ranging treatment of the health problems of individuals, families and communities, without focusing exclusively on the most prevalent diseases, we are all conscious that humanism is the watchword for this new century.

Finally, a training process for health professionals that aims to break with the traditional roles of teachers and students, by virtue of the evidence that the changes the world is going through are posing new challenges for education, requires that the quality of the act of teaching continue to improve, this being in essence a form of human relations between teachers and students, a way of cultivating a healthy relation-

ship between the learner and the educator. The articles contained in this collection remind us of the lesson provided by Fernando Figueira, the founder of the IMIP, who was an educator who went beyond a form of teaching that merely produces knowledge to champion a kind of education that promotes the development of the potential of every individual and incorporates human values into the teaching process. This is, in short, education for informed citizenship, which is, as the specialists argue, all the more liberating in so far as it furnishes the tools for genuine intervention in the real world.

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References

1. Thiollent M. Metodologia da pesquisa-ação. São Paulo: Cortez; 1998.