

Original article



## **Determining the needs for continuous psycho-pedagogical training in teachers at the primary education level**

**Determinación de necesidades de formación psicopedagógica continua en docentes del nivel educativo primario**

**Determinar as necessidades de formação psicopedagógica contínua para professores do ensino fundamental**

**Yamilé Martínez Rosales**<sup>1</sup>  0000-0003-3213-2908  [yamilemarosal@gmail.com](mailto:yamilemarosal@gmail.com)

**Ramiro Gross Tur**<sup>2</sup>  0000-0003-3892-7883  [rgrosstur@gmail.com](mailto:rgrosstur@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> Diagnostic and Guidance Center of Palma Soriano, Santiago de Cuba. Cuba.

<sup>2</sup> University of Oriente, Municipal University Center of Palma Soriano. Cuba.

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### **ABSTRACT**

The new challenges teachers face in addressing diversity in the classroom context require ongoing training and commitment. Therefore, the objective of this study is to determine the ongoing psychopedagogical training needs of primary school teachers in Palma Soriano. The research was conducted following the socio-critical paradigm with a qualitative approach. It was descriptive-explanatory in scope; observation, interviews, and document review were used as data collection techniques. The theoretical methods employed were analysis-synthesis and inductive-deductive reasoning. Non-probability sampling (convenience sampling) was used, and the sample consisted of 30 primary school teachers. The study identified a need for mastery of psychopedagogical intervention methods and strategies to address diversity. Teachers possess varying levels of

experience and knowledge, highlighting the need for psychopedagogical training. They recognize the necessity of psychopedagogical support; however, they believe that a psychopedagogue is the specialist who should provide it. Attention to diversity has been primarily focused on addressing deficits rather than potential. There is agreement that possessing educational tools and the necessary precision in determining the needs and potential of students during the diagnosis and characterization of their learning is fundamental. Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers need to deepen their understanding of how to identify needs and potential in the diagnosis and characterization of students, and how to clarify the boundaries between general and specific psycho-pedagogical actions that should be carried out during the teaching-learning process.

**Keywords:** attention to diversity; inclusive education; continuing education; psychopedagogical training.

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## RESUMEN

Los nuevos retos que afrontan los docentes para atender a la diversidad en el contexto áulico requieren formación continua y compromiso. Por ello, el objetivo de este trabajo es determinar las necesidades de formación psicopedagógica continua de los docentes del nivel educativo primario en Palma Soriano. La investigación se realizó siguiendo el paradigma sociocrítico desde un enfoque cualitativo. Tuvo alcance descriptivo-explicativo; se emplearon: la observación, entrevista y estudio documental como técnicas de recogida de información. Los métodos teóricos utilizados fueron: análisis-síntesis e inductivo-deductivo. El muestreo fue no probabilístico (por oportunidad) y la muestra estuvo constituida por 30 docentes del nivel educativo primario. Se identificó la necesidad de dominio de métodos y estrategias de intervención psicopedagógica para atender a la diversidad. Los docentes poseen niveles variados de experiencia y conocimiento, por lo que destaca la necesidad de formación psicopedagógica. Reconocen que la atención psicopedagógica es necesaria; sin embargo, consideran que el psicopedagogo es el especialista que debe realizarla. La atención a la diversidad ha sido agrupada, fundamentalmente, en la atención al déficit y no a las potencialidades. Coinciden que poseer herramientas educativas y la precisión necesaria al determinar las necesidades y potencialidades en el diagnóstico y caracterización de los educandos, es fundamental. Por lo anterior, se puede concluir que el profesorado requiere profundizar en la determinación de necesidades y potencialidades en el diagnóstico y caracterización de los educandos, y en la

clarificación de los límites entre las acciones psicopedagógicas generales y específicas a realizar durante la dirección del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje.

**Palabras clave:** atención a la diversidad; educación inclusiva; formación continua; formación psicopedagógica.

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## RESUMO

Os novos desafios que os professores enfrentam ao lidar com a diversidade no contexto da sala de aula exigem formação contínua e compromisso. Portanto, o objetivo deste estudo é determinar as necessidades de formação psicopedagógica contínua de professores do ensino fundamental em Palma Soriano. A pesquisa foi conduzida seguindo o paradigma sociocrítico com uma abordagem qualitativa. Teve um escopo descritivo-explicativo; observação, entrevistas e revisão documental foram utilizadas como técnicas de coleta de dados. Os métodos teóricos empregados foram análise-síntese e raciocínio indutivo-dedutivo. Foi utilizada amostragem não probabilística (amostragem por conveniência), e a amostra foi composta por 30 professores do ensino fundamental. O estudo identificou a necessidade de domínio de métodos e estratégias de intervenção psicopedagógica para lidar com a diversidade. Os professores possuem diferentes níveis de experiência e conhecimento, o que destaca a necessidade de formação psicopedagógica. Eles reconhecem a necessidade de apoio psicopedagógico; no entanto, acreditam que o psicopedagogo é o especialista que deve fornecê-lo. A atenção à diversidade tem se concentrado principalmente em lidar com déficits em vez de potencialidades. Há consenso de que dispor de ferramentas pedagógicas e da precisão necessária para determinar as necessidades e o potencial dos alunos durante o diagnóstico e a caracterização é fundamental. Portanto, conclui-se que os professores precisam aprofundar sua compreensão sobre a identificação de necessidades e potencial no diagnóstico e na caracterização dos alunos, e esclarecer os limites entre as ações psicopedagógicas gerais e específicas a serem realizadas durante o processo de ensino-aprendizagem.

**Palavras-chave:** atenção à diversidade; educação inclusiva; formação continuada; formação psicopedagógica.

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society demands a constant growth of knowledge to solve the diverse problems that arise daily. Cuba is no exception to this landscape of transformations that places new demands on its school systems. This demand is a priority and aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #4 of the 2030 Agenda, which focuses on inclusive, equitable, and quality education (UN/ECLAC, 2019).

To achieve this goal, new educational approaches require a genuine transformation of daily practice and demand ongoing professional development (OPD) for primary school teachers from a psychopedagogical perspective. From this perspective, these professionals can stay up-to-date on the main trends in understanding and addressing the diversity of students who now come together in classrooms.

In response, the Third Improvement of the National Education System (SNE) in Cuba requires institutions and organizations to take an updated look at teachers' professional development (González *et al.*, 2021). This demands that Primary Education, currently undergoing improvement, make significant efforts to increase teachers' level of knowledge regarding addressing diversity.

The main changes in the SNE, according to González *et al.* (2021) refer to:

- The reshaping of the conceptions of the different educational levels to improve attention to diversity, differentiated and contextualized work, aimed at the development and integral formation of the personality of the students.
- The improvement of the developmental approach to the educational and teaching-learning process, as well as the proposal of various forms of organization of the process and strengthening of practical activity and the use of ICT.

The theoretical and methodological foundations of addressing diversity allow for the revisiting of essential concepts and ideas for contextualizing the teacher's role. It offers cognitive, procedural, and attitudinal tools based on a deeper understanding of the system of relationships for providing comprehensive educational support to students with special educational needs.

From this perspective, attention to diversity in inclusive practices is of great importance. The systematic and planned implementation of actions to achieve this highlights the exchange and the

teacher's professional development. Prioritizing socio-psycho-pedagogical support and didactic-methodological resources to address educational needs in different educational contexts, within the organization of teaching activities, is necessary given the challenges posed by the heterogeneity of the pupils in the classroom.

According to Jiménez Carrillo and Mesa Villavicencio (2020), "attention to diversity consists of implementing an educational model that offers each student the necessary pedagogical support to achieve the development of capacities, skills, interests, and motivations in the learning processes" (p. 6). Considering the above, it is asserted that adequately addressing diversity guarantees a quality education.

Based on this, António and García Díaz (2019) state that the scientific rigor of Pedagogy is an important element when addressing diversity. They emphasize the strictly educational field and propose differentiating parameters to distinguish between people with learning barriers, according to the origin, cause, or condition that presupposes the diversity:

- Diversity caused by differences in abilities.
- Diversity caused by cultural origin.
- Diversity caused by particularities and characteristics.

Consequently, a school that addresses diversity challenges educators to respond to the educational needs of each of their students. "When it comes to diversity, it refers to those characteristics that interfere, positively or negatively, with educational processes and outcomes and that, consequently, the educational process must take into account in order to design appropriate, non-discriminatory actions" (António & García Díaz, 2019).

This perspective leads to a deeper understanding of the term "formation". This category of Pedagogy has been addressed by various authors. Martínez López and López Rodríguez del Rey (2021) define formation "as an intentional, permanent, and continuous act of transformations in which an individual, within the social collective in which he or she is born and develops, creates for and from himself or herself a developing personality" (p. 1379).

On the other hand, García Gutiérrez *et al.*, (2022) state that:

continuing teacher training is the process of gradual and systematic updating of pedagogical training content that allows for general and specific preparation of the teacher aimed at producing changes for decision-making in the context of professional performance (p. 56).

From this perspective, when addressing the category of continuing education, it is clear that it is linked to pedagogical practice; it conceives of the teacher as a professional trained to reconstruct pedagogical knowledge based on the experience they encounter daily. It is considered a dynamic, constant, and systemic process that integrates initial and postgraduate training.

On the other hand, García Gutiérrez *et al.* (2022) state that "psychopedagogical training is a theoretical construct that connotes preparation for educational work and social activism, based on the meaning attributed to the category of training" (p. 55). They refer to the acquisition and application of pedagogical and psychological knowledge in understanding and transforming typical problems of personal and social development. In this sense, ongoing psychopedagogical training contributes to a vision of a dynamic process that is optimized through professional performance and is conceived as a configuration of knowledge; it is that part of subjectivity conceived as professional competencies.

Psychopedagogical training encompasses the following competencies: academic, didactic, communicative and guidance (García Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2022).

Academic competence presupposes specialized intellectual preparation in the social environments where it is performed, general and psychopedagogical culture, educational actions with a strategic approach based on the diagnosis.

For its part, didactic competence allows for the establishment of a methodological approach that is concretized in space and time with the intention of teaching. It identifies and transforms the reference knowledge, content, methods, and resources to define learning content, its organization, and its integration into developmental teaching and learning strategies.

Communicative competence is assumed as the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values that enable the production, reception and interpretation of messages of different types, through different channels that facilitate and promote the start, maintenance and termination of positive interpersonal

relationships. The above points to the humanistic character of the socio-psychological atmosphere in which social development processes take place. This competence is essential in psycho-pedagogical training, since it enables communication to emerge as an appropriate medium for educational processes adjusted to the context.

Competence in educational guidance is understood as a configuration of subjectivity that organizes psychological functions to establish the professional helping relationship from a preventive and developmental approach (García Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2022).

From this perspective, the need to continue teacher training is revealed in order to develop competencies to address, from a psychopedagogical approach, the various problems that arise in the educational field.

This study adopts the definition proposed by García Gutiérrez *et al.* (2022) because, in Cuba, international standards and government regulations guaranteeing attention to diversity are already in place. Therefore, it is understood that attention to diversity should be viewed in an integrative way. From this perspective, teacher training, a category within pedagogy, is a key element in promoting human development.

The analysis suggests that professional development constitutes a training process for teachers. Thus, the concept of educational psychology has generated interest because it is a key issue in increasingly complex educational systems.

This study is part of the institutional project of the University of Oriente (Cuba) Scientific management for sustainable local development in municipalities of Santiago (2024-2026) and in the thematic line on educational work and attention to diversity of the Second Edition of the Master's Degree in Education, of the University of Oriente (Cuba).

For the organization of materials and methods, the epistemic mapping methodology was used and the ten methodological aspects that provide an illuminating and structured path for the scientific text were followed (Deroncele Acosta *et al.*, 2022).

The socio-critical paradigm allows for a social transformation approach to promote change and the pursuit of equality. It advocates for the active participation of individuals and communities in

identifying social problems, seeking solutions, and promoting social change (Martinez Rosales & Gross Tur, 2024).

The above leads to the objective of the research: to determine the continuous psychopedagogical training needs of teachers at the primary education level in Palma Soriano, in order to address diversity.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

Approach: qualitative and descriptive. In this approach, researchers "aim to specify the properties, characteristics, and profiles of people, groups, communities, processes, objects, or any other phenomenon that is subjected to analysis" (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza, 2020).

The type of research is basic; it produces new knowledge about an aspect of reality (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza, 2020).

Type of study: empirical phenomenology. This refers to the type of study where "you explore, describe and understand what individuals have in common according to their experiences in the face of a certain phenomenon" (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza, 2020).

The scope of the study is descriptive-explanatory, as it goes beyond the description of concepts or phenomena; that is, it is aimed at describing the phenomena and answering for the causes of the associated events.

The phenomenological design was used as the main research method (design). This qualitative method has proven its relevance for exploring, describing, and understanding people's experiences with respect to a phenomenon and discovering the common elements of such experiences (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza, 2020).

The main techniques used for collecting information were observation of the activities of the educational process, interviews, and documentary research.

The theoretical methods were: analysis-synthesis and induction-deduction.

The research was conducted in the urban primary schools of the municipality of Palma Soriano: Oscar Alberto Ortega Ortega and Héroes de Playa Girón. The population consisted of the 67 teachers from

both schools. A non-probability sample, chosen intentionally, was selected, comprised of 30 educators.

The sample was selected according to the following inclusion criteria:

- With 10 or more years of teaching experience.
- That attend, in their enrollment, to students with diversity caused by the difference in abilities, particularities and characteristics in learning, with or without intellectual disability, with a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders and in the affective-emotional sphere.

Ethical aspects: informed consent was obtained and subjects participated based on criteria of anonymity, confidentiality and voluntariness.

The main category of analysis used was the continuous psychopedagogical training of teachers, considering the theoretical criteria of García Gutiérrez et al., (2022). The competence dimension was defined as a subcategory, operationalized in the indicators: academic-didactic, communicative and guidance.

## RESULTS

Regarding the analysis of academic competencies, the review of documents (a sample of individual psycho-pedagogical characterizations) reveals that these lack explanatory and descriptive characterization, focusing on strengths and potential. They place greater emphasis on assessing deficits, framed more as limitations or educational needs than on the students' potential.

The interviews with teachers revealed that, despite their familiarity with the legal framework and methodological documentation on preventative procedures, there are deficiencies in their preparation for carrying out their educational work, particularly regarding addressing diversity, special educational needs, and inclusive education. It was also noted that none of the teachers interviewed were currently participating in any type of professional development or training program.

In the interview, the professionals explain that the main reason for not being incorporated into training programs is the overload of work, mainly the methodological work of preparing classes and the preparation of reports and updating of teaching-methodological documentation.

It was identified that the interviewees have managed to study and delve deeper into the psychopedagogical content related to the relationship of the educational institution with the family and the community, to the psychological characteristics of personality and to educational methods; however, they report that they have difficulties applying them.

During the observation of teaching activities, the predominance of methods characteristic of traditional teaching was noted. Teaching aids and materials were insufficiently motivating, and although audiovisual aids and other resources were used to facilitate content comprehension, differentiated attention to students with special educational needs was not observed. Limited mastery of knowledge appropriate for guiding independent work was evident, and the use of rote learning methods prevailed. Furthermore, teaching tasks did not always correspond to the student's needs assessment, indicating insufficient methodological attention to this aspect.

The analysis of teaching competence also considers data obtained through document review (lesson plans and individual improvement plans). These documents show that teachers regularly present a linear plan, based on the course's pacing. In some cases, they consider different learning styles and include curricular adaptations for students with learning difficulties. The proposed activities do not include collaborative activities that promote teamwork.

The individual improvement plan does not include elements that address the need to master content related to universal design of learning, didactics, and psycho-pedagogical attention to diversity.

In the interview, they consider diagnosis essential to determine the potential and limitations of the student with whom they interact, and the design of attention strategies; however, they lack updated knowledge about universal design of learning, didactics and psychopedagogical attention.

They also recognize the importance of updating their knowledge of educational and psychopedagogical approaches, scientific advances, and new technologies, but in practice, they lack specific spaces for continuing education where these topics are addressed. All of the teachers interviewed stated that they do not know how to access academic social networks and other virtual platforms to find academic information. They declared that the pedagogical and intelligent use of new Information and Communication Technologies is essential for developing students' abilities; however, it is used very little systematically.

Through observation of teaching activities, the promotion of an environment of respect and trust is evident, and knowledge, skills, and values are integrated, fostering a cordial and empathetic atmosphere within the student group. On the other hand, shortcomings are apparent in the conception, organization, and monitoring of the teaching-learning process from the perspective of psycho-pedagogical support for diversity. While the potential and strengths of the students are utilized to a limited extent to make their learning activity developmental, the different levels of support needed to enable them to transfer these skills to similar situations are not addressed.

For its part, the analysis of communicative competence through the review of documents (group educational projects) reveals that these documents lack an evaluation of the potential offered by the community environment (networking and inter-institutional communication). It is determined that few teachers recognize the ability to work cooperatively with other professionals as essential for achieving desired transformations.

In the interview, the role of the school psychologist is emphasized, but no mention is made of other specialists and professionals who can also influence the support provided to students with special educational needs. In observing family education meetings, teachers use clear and precise vocabulary, and their messages are clear, concise, and easy for all parents to understand. Different perspectives and opinions are valued, and a pleasant atmosphere of affection, respect, acceptance, and collaboration is established. Positive communication is promoted, but the exchange of ideas is not encouraged; it is primarily informational.

On the other hand, to analyze competence in educational guidance, the planning of topics developed in the Family Education Schools was reviewed. This document shows a linear approach to the interests of the institution and the institutional educational project, but it does not address group and individual diagnosis.

In the interview, they indicated that organizing the guidance process and integrating educational and guidance methods is difficult. They expressed limited mastery of guidance techniques, particularly regarding individual and family counseling. The teachers indicated a greater need for training in providing support and guidance to students with emotional and affective difficulties and those diagnosed with disabilities (intellectual, visual, and auditory), as well as to their families; this clearly points to a pressing need for teacher support.

## Triangulation

- The responses reveal shortcomings in psycho-pedagogical training for addressing diversity. The results fall short of the potential of methodological work as part of continuing education, given its decisive influence on professional performance.
- Insufficient knowledge about the principles of universal design for learning and psycho-pedagogical attention to diversity.
- In reflecting on their teaching practices, teachers identified teaching itself as the activity with the greatest positive impact. They then ranked other activities, such as educational activities with families and the community, with professional development as the least positive.
- Among teachers, the prevailing view is that psychopedagogical training is a necessary process, but it is not systematically put into practice for various reasons.
- Responses regarding prior experience in educating students with special educational needs reflect significant variability. Some teachers reported having no experience, while others shared specific cases, suggesting heterogeneity in educators' career paths in this area.
- Their reflection on practice allows them to delve into those activities that are not so satisfying for them, generating negative experiences that they must perform out of obligation. Among those with the highest level of negative polarity are: working with documentation and self-study.
- Despite recognizing that psycho-pedagogical support is necessary, they consider that the school psycho-pedagogue is the specialist who should apply it and do not promote collaborative networking with other specialists to address diversity.
- Attention to diversity has been grouped primarily into addressing deficits rather than potential.
- In contrast, it is worth highlighting the lack of motivation; "looking the other way" is one of the historical strategies for not actively intervening in the problems we encounter every day in the classroom.

From this perspective, the need to continue teacher training is revealed in order to develop competencies to address, from a psychopedagogical approach, the problems that arise in the educational field.

## DISCUSSION

The finding regarding teachers' insufficient preparation to address diversity in the classroom has also been highlighted in the study by Sánchez Serrano et al. (2021), who point out that, despite positive attitudes toward the work, teachers feel they still lack the necessary knowledge to adequately address diversity. This underscores the importance of strengthening psychopedagogical training to equip future educators with the necessary skills.

This finding underscores the need to reflect on teacher training from a psychopedagogical perspective that fosters the necessary preparation for managing the educational process and providing guidance based on contextual psychopedagogical needs. Along these lines, Martínez Rosales and Gross Tur (2024) propose various applications of the sociocritical paradigm in education and consider the applicability of the benefits and opportunities it offers for developing teachers' thinking skills. They emphasize this approach as an alternative for producing transformative and contextualized pedagogical knowledge.

In this sense, the socio-critical paradigm can be applied to investigate the psycho-pedagogical training of teachers for addressing diversity in the regular educational setting. This idea is based on the perspective that teachers are active agents and protagonists of change to optimize the quality of education. Consequently, they must develop their skills to improve their performance as a driving force for continuous transformation.

Teachers' reflections on their daily practice allow them to delve deeper into activities they find less satisfying. Among those with the highest levels of negative perception are working with documentation and self-preparation. This finding aligns with research conducted by García Gutiérrez et al. (2022), which concluded that teachers do not always dedicate sufficient time to their preparation. These authors refer to activities that teachers find less satisfying, that generate negative experiences, and that they feel obligated to perform. Among those with the highest levels of negative perception are, among others, working with documentation and preparation.

Teachers rank professional development as a last resort among their preferred activities. While psychopedagogical training is generally considered a necessary process, it is not systematically implemented for various reasons. When assessing their understanding of current theories in the field of psychopedagogy, educators define it as insufficient. They agree that it is necessary for pedagogical

and professional practice, but argue that they lack the time for training, which leads to difficulties in providing intervention and organizing support processes to stimulate potential. These findings are also reported by Espín Marcillo et al. (2023), who highlight lack of time and unengaging training topics as obstacles to professional development.

Teachers acknowledge the need for psychoeducational support; however, they believe that a school psychoeducational specialist should be the one to provide it. This finding aligns with research conducted by Velásquez Saldarriaga et al. (2020), which shows that teachers believe a psychoeducational professional should be present in schools. They indicate that a psychoeducational professional possesses the knowledge and skills to teach and guide teachers on various learning techniques.

Attention to diversity has been primarily focused on addressing deficits rather than potential. This finding differs from the results of research conducted by Espín Marcillo et al. (2023), who highlight that addressing diversity in schools also benefits children without intellectual disabilities because they can learn from an early age.

Deficiencies in the ongoing psychopedagogical training of teachers to address diversity are revealed. This analysis aligns with the findings of the research conducted by Rojas Valladares et al. (2018), which emphasizes that teacher training, from a psychopedagogical perspective, should foster the necessary preparation for managing the educational process and providing guidance based on individual needs. Therefore, the need for continued teacher training is evident, aimed at developing competencies to address educational challenges from a psychopedagogical approach.

In this regard, Espín Marcillo et al. (2023) state that pedagogical practice must achieve this differentiated attention, understanding that diversity is part of human nature. To this end, strategies can be employed that promote the management of teachers' formative potential through the recognition of current trends that contribute to their development (Gross Tur et al., 2021).

Teachers agree that the use of new Information and Communication Technologies is essential for developing students' abilities; however, it is used in a very unsystematic way. This finding is consistent with research conducted by Urdy Cáceres and Tenorio Guevara (2022), who demonstrated that technological strategies can be very valuable for achieving better results in the teaching-learning process. Nevertheless, this also requires teachers to be constantly training and updating their skills.

The analysis reveals that the ongoing psychopedagogical training needs of primary school teachers in Palma Soriano, aimed at addressing diversity, relate to the development of educational support strategies. These strategies tend to prioritize the development of general intellectual skills and cognitive processes, but without tailoring them to the specific needs of each student, resulting in insufficient attention to the affective and pedagogical dimensions.

The integrated actions aimed at addressing the diversity of students and their interests, as determined by the group diagnosis agreed upon in the Group Educational Project, are insufficient. The teachers have experience in the educational field and tend to have a positive attitude and willingness to address diversity, although they demonstrate only basic conceptual knowledge to carry out the actions necessary to achieve this goal. The teachers cite excessive workload as a factor that prevents them from creating new projects and tailoring their support to the identified educational needs.

Teachers need to delve deeper into determining the needs and potential in the diagnosis and characterization of students, and in clarifying the limits between the general and specific psychopedagogical actions that must be carried out during the direction of the teaching-learning process.

When assessing the main causes and the current state of the continuous psychopedagogical training of teachers at the primary education level in Palma Soriano, the need to design an educational strategy to enhance their training in relation to attention to diversity is conceived.

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### **Conflict of interest**

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

### **Authors' contribution**

The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.



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