





## INTERVENTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY: AN INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

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### ABSTRACT

This article seeks to report the internship experience in School and Educational Psychology at a Psychology school service, located at a university in Natal/RN. The interventional project that was developed throughout the internship period sought to provide open group meetings for the students' demands. Thus, three steps were established: 1) dissemination of the project; 2) three intervention meetings; 3) evaluative moment of the actions performed by the internship team. The elaborated interventions highlighted the importance of the university in providing the reception to the complaints of academic daily life, bringing not only the idea of quality of life inside the university, but also offering considerable support to meet the needs of the students.

**Keywords:** school psychology; university education; academic complaints

### Intervenciones a la luz de la psicología escolar en la universidad: una experiencia de pasantía

#### RESUMEN

En el presente artículo se busca relatar la experiencia de pasantía en Psicología Escolar y Educacional en un servicio-escuela de Psicología, localizado en una universidad en Natal/RN. El proyecto intervenido desarrollado a lo largo de la pasantía buscó proporcionar encuentros grupales abiertos a las demandas de los estudiantes. Así, se establecieron tres etapas: 1) divulgación del proyecto; 2) realización de tres encuentros intervenidos; 3) momento evaluativo de las acciones ejecutadas por parte del equipo de la pasantía. Las intervenciones elaboradas explicitaron la importancia de la universidad en proporcionar el acogimiento a las quejas del cotidiano académico, trayendo no solo la idea de la cualidad de vida dentro de la universidad, como también dando soporte considerable para atender a las necesidades de los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** psicología escolar; enseñanza universitaria; quejas académicas

### Intervenções à luz da psicologia escolar na universidade: uma experiência de estágio

#### RESUMO

O presente artigo relata a experiência de estágio em Psicologia Educacional e Escolar em um serviço-escola de Psicologia, localizado em uma universidade em Natal/RN. O projeto interventivo desenvolvido ao longo do período de estágio proporcionou encontros grupais abertos para as demandas dos estudantes. Assim, foram estabelecidas três etapas: 1) divulgação do projeto; 2) realização de três encontros interventivos; 3) momento avaliativo das ações executadas por parte da equipe de estágio. As intervenções elaboradas explicitaram a importância de a universidade proporcionar o acolhimento às queixas do cotidiano acadêmico, trazendo não apenas a ideia da qualidade de vida dentro da universidade, como também oferecendo suporte considerável para atender às necessidades dos estudantes.

**Palavras-chave:** psicologia escolar; ensino superior; queixas acadêmicas

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## INTRODUCTION

This article aims at reporting an internship experience in educational psychology by students in the 6<sup>th</sup> term of the psychology course, in the school-service of a private university located in Natal, in the state of Rio Grande do Norte. The interventions as well as the supervisions with the responsible teacher took place biweekly during the evening classes, in combination with the pedagogical activities of the 2019 semester.

Moura and Facci (2016) emphasize that the first approaches by psychology at Institutions of Higher Education, or “Instituições de Ensino Superior” (IES) occurred in Europe, by means of Psycho-Pedagogical Support Services. The practice focused on individual interventions with students, and on the problems that led them to seek professional help (...)” (p. 196). The authors also produce considerations on the practice of psychology at the IES, between Brazil and Europe, and highlighting the fact that:

In Brazil, the practice of psychologists in Higher Education, or “Ensino Superior” (ES), is less traditional than in Europe; however, the European experiences influenced development in this area, regarding the intervention that is ruled by clinical model assistance, as well as by Psycho-pedagogical Support Services, that have become a considerable force in the country (Moura & Facci, 2016, p. 505).

Considering evasion from ES as a social phenomenon, defined as interruption in the cycle of studies, and that it can be caused by personal, family, social, economic, or institutional factors (Baggi & Lopes, 2011), studies reveal that there are few institutions that are equipped with an institutional program of regular combat to such phenomenon, with the planning of actions, supervision of results, and recording of successful experiences (Baggi & Lopes, 2011).

It is responsibility of the IES not to worry about only learning matters for students and infrastructure, but also about the permanence of these individuals and the democratization of academic space, aiming at different studies (Gomes, Silva & Brito, 2021; Neves & Domingues, 2022) point at the growth in the number of entrances by black/mixed race students and students that belong to low income classes of public school, especially after the affirmative actions, which changed the profile of the universities in our country.

Most often, these students face major challenges to have a good performance and continue to conciliate work and their university studies, adaptation to a new education system that demands greater autonomy, previous formal and informal knowledge of greater complexity, unfavorable financial situation, which implies the purchase of books, transportation to congresses, events, and extracurricular activities (Costa & Dias, 2015).

At the institution where the internship was realized, there is the psychology school-service for assisting the community, but until then, there was no specific project targeting the academic adversities of ES. After that, the elaborated interventions highlighted the importance of having the university providing not only attention to the complaints of everyday life within the institutions, while this is the students’ perceptions of their own lives, social and cultural context, and values, while taking into consideration their objectives, expectations, and preoccupations (OMS, 1994), as well as support to provide for the students’ needs.

## THE INTERVENTION PROJECT

To Vendramel, Pocaia and Santos (2016), Educational Psychology has the objective to promote preventive and contextualized interventions, aiming at biopsychosocial wellbeing of the school community. Thus, the intervention project of the present internship, in the higher education context, aimed at providing open group meetings for listening to students’ demands.

Three stages were established: the first ones referred to the moment of advertising the project; the second one referred to the intervention meetings; and the third one, to the assessment moment of the actions executed by the internship team, according to the following details.

During the first stage, researchers created advertising actions to be executed with the objective to invite university students to take part in the project. Such actions took place on site, during the evening classes in two of the university campuses, by means of the distribution of leaflets containing the date, time, and place of the interventions, in addition to a link for online registrations. Thus, in order to participate, the people who were interested made their registrations by means of an e-mail address in the leaflets.

Besides that, there was online advertising on social media (Instagram and Whatsapp), aiming at reaching the public in the morning and afternoon classes at the university. In the onsite advertisement, there was the interaction between the internship group and the students, as well as the distribution of leaflets with the most important information and an explanation of the purpose of the intervention.

The second stage corresponded to the interventions, they took place and the psychology school service at the university, from 9:00 PM to 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM, on a pre-established day of the week in a room for group meetings. Researchers established that there would be three meetings and that the group formed for such interventions would be open and targeting the students of the institution.

Because it was an open group, the students could register to take part in the other meetings, even though they had not been present in the previous one; however, it was not possible to accept any new students after that. As a whole, 14 students participated in the intervention,

all of them were women, at different ages, and they were students from law school and from the psychology and language courses (Portuguese).

Three groups with different themes were defined: 1) stress, 2) procrastination and 3) interpersonal communication, were the objective to approach the way these phenomena are experienced in academic life in combination with other student experiences.

It is important to highlight that the process logic on creation of the theme for the 2nd and the 3rd interventions, based on the demands encountered in the first meeting, researchers had considerable content for elaborating the other ones, which were on procrastination and interpersonal communication. Now we present the themes and actions in detail.

### **Building stress confrontation strategies**

The first meeting aimed at listening to the students' complaints related to academic stress. We also presented management possibilities, aiming at helping students get started in the academic environment, it is possible to say that students can face new challenges and come up across new responsibilities experimenting a new form a greater level of work overload and lack of time (Moretti & Hübner, 2017).

Here we understand group dynamics as an activity that promotes the reproduction of the world of relations, but the similarity of the experienced reality by the individual and the dynamics, while it was a transformation agent (Silva, 2008). In this meeting, we started with an activity that consisted of asking participants to reflect and write on a piece of paper what factors they thought were triggers of stress in the university life; this process was realized in order to explore which aspects were experienced as stress makers in the university environment. After that, the slips of papers were put into a box, and students were told that the obtained results would be used later in another activity.

It is understood that the choice of such activity led to a moment of self-analysis for stressful factors for each one of the participants. Thus, the self-reported stress factors were: procrastination, interpersonal problems in teamwork, seminars and, at last, the timetable of academic activities, with all tests set up for the same week.

After this moment of self-reflection, there was a group moment with the extinction project, coordinated by the veterinarian medicine course in partnership with the psychology course, entitled "Intervenções Assistidas por Animais" (IAA), or "Interventions Assisted by Animals", and the three dogs were available for the interventions. The group asked the participants to sit down on the floor in a circle in order to have a conversation so that the demand could be explored by means of person-animal interaction.

Because the IAAS have been widely used as tools

for confronting stress and associated to the reduction of stress (Crippa & Feijó, 2014; Gonçalves & Gomes, 2017), they became a very adequate procedure in the first meeting, which intended to provide opportunities for reflection, confronting and reducing university stress.

It was observed that this moment of interaction with the animals, in addition to serving the purpose of releasing stress, it also served the purpose of promoting a group discussion on the things that caused stress at university for each participant, is in alignment with studies that advocate the IAA and its potential as mediator (Binfet et al., 2018; Crippa & Feijó, 2014; Gonçalves & Gomes, 2017).

After the IAA, the last activity was realized. The participants could think about ways to manage the stress factors that were written down on the pieces of paper from the first activity. The proposed starting point was the following question: what are my strategies for facing stress? In order to do it, participants were required to draw the way they would handle the stress factor written on the piece of paper that they picked from the box. They could use the following materials that were available to describe this management: A4 sheets of paper, gouache, crayons, and pens.

It was possible to observe that this final activity mobilized participants around their psychological conditions and led to a process of individual reflection, bringing the alternatives they built to the collective. In order to answer that question, the university students explained by means of the drawings the following strategies: reading books; taking care of plants; watching movies and practicing physical activities. At the final moment, they shared their strategies with the group, interpreted each others' drawings and highlighted how they manage or would manage the stress factors. At the end of the meeting, when the strategies for confronting stress in higher education were made clear, it was observed that in general, activities that promote fun and well-being were emphasized.

The first meeting was realized after the theme was debated by all participants. Information was provided about the following meeting. Thus, researchers communicated the importance that students participate in our meetings because the interventions complemented each other.

The second meeting was produced based on the premises that emerged in the previous meeting regarding the fact that the participants brought out procrastination as a stress factor in academic life.

### **Building strategies to manage procrastination**

Defense considered working with the management of procrastination because such phenomenon in the academic environment is understood as dynamical. Involving environmental, behavioral, and the personal aspects, being characterized by the non-strategic way of delaying of strategies and disturbing the academic

performance of students (Sampaio & Bariani 2011).

The interventions of the second meeting had the intention to promote a reflection on the concept of such phenomenon, because although it was common among the people and especially among the students, it was many times regarded as commonplace. On the other hand, procrastination can be harmful and an obstacle to the accomplishment of tasks.

Initially, by means of a pedagogical video on YouTube entitled "PROCRASTINAÇÃO", or "Procrastination", From the YouTube channel "Minutos Psíquicos", or "Psychology Minutes", researchers demonstrated to students what procrastination means and the obviousness by which this phenomenon expresses itself in the everyday life of any person.

In the sequence, that was a round table on the methodology by Figueirêdo and Queiroz (2012), as conducive to the construction of a dialogical praxis, which leads to the exercise of a shared thinking. At this moment the participants share their definitions and procrastination and explained the way they experienced such phenomenon in their everyday lives.

After this moment, researchers used an activity in order to measure which aspects were facilitators and which aspects were not and they are individual learning processes; in order to do it they were asked to make a list of such aspects on a piece of paper. That way, it was possible to open a discussion in which each person briefly shared the items they had written down on the piece of paper, in order to reflect on the things that disturbed their learning processes, that's what I was learning and what helped it.

Based on the technique entitled "weekly agenda", explained by Soares (2002), it is possible to observe the characterization of the completion of a weekly timetable with an indication of the periods (days and hours), available for every activity with which the student is engaged, and there was the proposal for the creation of such agenda with the participants.

Regarding the fact that the university environment has diverse contingencies that might harm the mental health of students, we consider that this last technique leads to alternatives for solutions to such problems, in view of the fact that most of the university students considered that the university routine negatively influences personal stress levels, And there were aggravating factors such as the accumulation of disciplines, disorganization in the curriculum, outdated methodologies that were being used by the teachers, and scarcity of time (Moretti & Hübner, 2017).

#### **Building strategies for interpersonal communication**

The third and the last meeting was also based on the demand that came from the first meeting, in which the participants mentioned communication with classmates, and the taint work as stress factors in

academic life. Consequently, the meeting brought out the importance of interpersonal communication, something indispensable not only in the academic environment. On this theme, Serrão and Baleeiro (1999) lead us to think of the blank spaces left behind by relational inconsistencies that reverberate in the communication plan: badly communicated, confused speeches with a lot of ambiguity, secrets, and implicit competitions in the communication process.

There was the beginning of an activity, explaining in a game like way, the relevance of communication, with the use of balloons and toothpicks. The mediator told each participant to protect their balloon from bursting because inside it there was a purposeful communication that induced the mistake, because the objective of the activity was to make students understand what might happen when they communicate badly.

After this moment, by means of a round table, the group discussed the role played by clear interpersonal communication, as well as what happens when there are mistakes in communication and the problems that might come after that. Subsequently, researchers used an activity based on a popular child's play named "cordless phone", participants were supposed to whisper messages into each others' ears; the message was supposed to go around the whole circle of people until it reached the last person, who was supposed to say out loud to the content of the message. This activity made clear the mistaken way several people heard the message, and it demonstrated that interpersonal communication might have disturbances and that they might considerably compromise the message that people want to pass along.

As a final activity, students were required to describe on a piece of paper a moment recently when they considered there was unfavorable communication. The objective was to provide examples of factors that influence interpersonal communication. After that, students shared their experiences, and demonstrated, for example, the confused communication of a teacher on what would be on a test, because the disturbances inherent to bad communication compromise the effectiveness of the message for those who listen.

The theoretical elements explained in the activities prove evident by means of the participants' reports. Communication extended itself. The mentioned examples were: absence of communication, violence in communication, sarcasm in communication, carelessness in the choice of terms for conveying ideas, and so on. Such approach that was selected by the internship group proved relevant because it worked strategies based on the raw material made available by the speeches, reconstructing them in order to reach a more assertive communication.

#### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The internship experience proved of significant relevance for the professional competences that are demanded nowadays for the formation of psychologists,

especially due to the fact that the practice offers opportunities to create group interventions with specific objectives, such as in the process of supporting and confronting academic difficulties.

Higher education has gone through transformations and reformulations generated by demands by the social, cultural, and economic contexts, in addition to current guidelines by the educational policies. It is possible to observe that this situation promotes academic, social, and political discussions that lead to the development of differentiated actions for the sake of improvements and they are educational processes (Santana, Pereira, & Rodrigues, 2014).

Thus, based on these observations, it is possible to perceive that higher education institutions are sometimes a space where psychological suffering happens. Students, especially the ones going through stress, pressure, demands, distance from their families, and the need to adapt to the new context might have their academic performance compromised (Lameu, Salazar & Souza, 2016).

Thus, any institution that appreciates quality in teaching and supporting humanitarian practices we'll provide there are students with activities of psychosocial nature, and will develop among their students awareness on the importance of taking care of their mental health (Oliveira, Macedo, & Sousa, 2020).

It was possible to observe that in the intervention project there were a few limitations such as time. The internship was during the morning classes, the advertisements and interventions took place only in the evening and the students during these classes were not able to participate because they were in the classroom. The best thing to do would be that the interventions took place the rain the three parts of the day, so that it could include students from all classes.

Another observation refers to gender aspects. There were no male participants. Concerning that fact, Gomes, Nascimento and Araújo (2007), Villar (2007) and Korin (2001) revealed a close relation between a culturally constructed model of masculinity, understood as cultural signification of being a man and accordingly transforms itself into a way of being and relating, and its influence on the way people take care of their own health.

Consequently, culturally it is possible to say that there is a underlying a difference when it comes to the way men take care of their own health, which can be justified by the conceptions of Braz (2005), with the emphasizing that the masculine subjective construction is connected with the social conception that man must possess an identity that is inherently not homosexual, that is, the opposite of a woman, of being strong, capable, protective, violent, assertive, and the brave (Braz, 2005), such expectations can be bad for the health of men (Korin, 2001), such discussions could take place in the future.

The weekly meeting proposed and the internship supported the students in the university because the insertion in the academic context can be a challenge, because most people face different obstacles in order to accomplish different tasks in the academic (new rhythms and learning strategies, learning and examination systems), social (new patterns of relationships, in addition to the application of social network), personal (establishment of a strong feeling of identity) and vocational environments in the definition of their career goals (Moreno & Soares, 2014, p. 115).

Finally, the interventions realized along the internship prove a possibility suggested for intervention in the direct management of this production of subjectivity, aiming at the necessity to provide such space for university students. According to what has been emphasized before, the studied institution does not have the presence of projects, groups or any type of intervention that is specifically focused on complaints about academic adversity.

It is important to highlight the potential that such interventions possess, because these actions do not have necessarily to be applied only in the higher education context. They can be extended into different levels of school education in a quest for greater reach into any area of education where they can be used. In addition to that, the punctual actions described here do not come before the importance of looking at institutional processes that can be generating problems.

By observing the levels of disorder within the university of arrangements, it is possible to see the need for more information regarding the causes that generate the problem. Particular relations with the course and the chosen area, the timetable of the disciplines, the relationships between teachers and students, the hierarchical relations and the educational processes; perspectives of the institution on professional formation; and life out of the university are some of the possible determining factors for the soldiers among the university students. Punctual actions are of great impact, but it is necessary to see the problem as a whole, and act on the prevention.

The practice described here also aims at inspiring future research works that dedicate themselves to going deeper into the practice as well as in the research seeking possibilities such as incentive to IAA, to the institutionalization of moments for round tables, as well as to the discussion of communication social emotional skills, characterizing it as support for the students in order to help them with the learning processes in the academic and the educational environment. In addition to that, it is important to propose a reflection on the institutional possible causes for disorders in the university public.

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