

Consultancy in School Psychology: Experience Report in Preparation Course for College Admission Exam

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Abstract

In this study we sought to reflect on a research/intervention carried out in a Preparation Course for College Admission Exam, through a proposal of School Consulting linked to a Psychology School Service. The Consultancy's prerogative is to instrumentalize schools by creating devices to alleviate existing problems, stimulating a space for prevention and promotion of decentralized mental health of some of the traditional canons in School and Educational Psychology. In the present study, we sought to elaborate both an intervention and a research movement, following ethnography as a methodological assumption. In terms of results, it was possible to notice that one of the major obstacles to the process of implementing health promotion strategies was the perspective of Psychology as the basis of exclusively clinical demands. In this sense, it was operated in view of the deconstruction of this notion - which involved confronting traditional visions of the problem student and the individual psychological care that was coupled in this traditional setting perspective.

Keywords: School psychology; educational psychology; mental health.

Consultoria em Psicologia Escolar: Relato de Experiência em Curso Pré-Vestibular

Resumo

Neste trabalho busca-se refletir sobre uma pesquisa/intervenção realizada em um Curso Pré-Vestibular, através de uma proposta de Consultoria Escolar vinculada a um Serviço Escola de Psicologia. A Consultoria tem como prerrogativa instrumentalizar as escolas criando dispositivos para minorar os problemas existentes, estimulando um espaço de prevenção e promoção de saúde mental descentrada de alguns dos cânones tradicionais em Psicologia Escolar e Educacional. Procurou-se, no presente estudo, elaborar tanto um movimento de intervenção como de pesquisa, seguindo como pressuposto metodológico a etnografia. Em termos de resultados vemos que um dos maiores entraves para o processo de implementação de estratégias de promoção de saúde foi a perspectiva da Psicologia enquanto sustentáculo de demandas exclusivamente clínicas. Nesse sentido, se operou tendo em vista a desconstrução dessa noção - o que envolveu confrontar tradicionais visões do *aluno problema* e do atendimento individual psicológico que se acoplava nessa perspectiva de *setting* tradicional.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia escolar; psicologia educacional; saúde mental.

Asesoría en psicología escolar: relato de experiencia en curso pre-selectividad

Resumen

En este estudio se busca reflexionar sobre una investigación/intervención realizada en un Curso Pre-Selectividad, por intermedio de una propuesta de Asesoría Escolar vinculada a un Servicio Escuela de Psicología. La Asesoría tiene como prerrogativa instrumentalizar las escuelas creando dispositivos para disminuir los problemas existentes, estimulando un espacio de prevención y promoción de salud mental descentrada de algunos de los patrones tradicionales en Psicología Escolar y Educacional. De modo a elaborar un movimiento de intervención y de investigación, se eligió como presupuestometodológico, en este estudio, la perspectiva etnográfica. En términos de resultados se nota que uno de los mayores obstáculos para el proceso de implementación de estrategias de promoción de salud fue la perspectiva de la Psicología como sustentáculo de demandas exclusivamente clínicas. En este sentido, se actuó teniendo en vista la desconstrucción de esa noción - lo que abarcó confrontar tradicionales visiones del *alumno problema* y de la atención individual psicológica que se acoplaba en esa perspectiva de *setting* tradicional.

Palabras clave: Psicología escolar; psicología educacional; salud mental.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on an intervention research practice carried out in a Preparation Course for College Admission Exam, through a proposal of School Consulting. This perspective was possible because it is an activity linked to a Psychology School Service of a private University in the city of Porto Alegre, which maintains an agreement with public and private schools for uninterrupted systematic insertion. As a compulsory practice of School and Educational Psychology within an organization, the internship aims to assist proposals that favor teaching and learning, by inserting undergraduate students in places of education.

School and Educational Psychology comprises the psychological dimensions connected with educational processes, considering not only their formal but also their informal dimensions (Wechsler, 2001), as well as the assignment of the psychologists working in this field to improve the teaching-learning process in an integral way from services offered to individuals, families and organizations (ABRAPEE, 1991). In this area of action, one should listen to the demands of the school and, from them, suggest ways of modification in the school space. The process of change encompasses, in this sense, "creating forms of reflection within the school, with all subjects (students, teachers and specialists) so that they can work with their relationships and paradigms" (Andrada, 2005).

Concerning, specifically, the Consulting model, the professional who works seeks the best strategies to solve the organization's problems with the community, developing actions for each work moment and promoting spaces for conflict resolution (Almeida, 2006). Thus, the School and Educational Consultancy works to instrumentalize schools by creating devices to alleviate existing problems, stimulating a space for prevention and promotion of mental health. From the identification of the demands of each location, projects are elaborated in a singular way to assist the organizations with systematic and preventive psychosocial interventions.

Given the research/intervention nature of this proposal, the theoretical contributions from School and Educational Psychology were articulated with the perspectives from Anthropology, through an ethnographic perspective. In order to elaborate an intervention and research movement, not seen as dissociated, we chose as an analytical assumption the ethnographic perspective, understood as a way of weaving understandings through the strangeness of the familiar (Geertz, 1989). In this sense, using an ethnographic look as a methodology, we constructed field diaries describing apprehensions about the forms of socialization, of pedagogies - formal and informal - and of cultural inscription that constituted the Course as a space for teaching and learning. According to Woods (1995), the ethnographic perspective is a possible way of approaching the role of teaching and researching as concurrent activities so that, here, we used this dynamic to unite the work of Consulting in Psychology with research in Psychology.

The reflections for the present intervention were based on aspects that we considered pertinent to the develop-

ment of the intervention proposal: first, we sought to know the place and its specificities. The Preparation Course for College Admission Exam¹ was a public initiative, provided from the opening of a notice in partnership with the Secretariat of Youth, with the premise of embracing the young population who could not afford a private course. It was offered in the afternoon and evening shifts, and organized to meet the demand of young people - mostly workers. Classes were held in an old downtown building, with precarious, old architecture. Inadequate lighting, lack of adequate air circulation and simplicity of materials offered for study were part of the daily lives of students and teachers.

The large number of students, around 200 places were offered at the beginning of the year, suffered an intense loss; the dropout was a concern indicated by the Secretariat of Youth. In addition, the uncertainty regarding the payment of teachers' salaries constituted a constant insecurity for the team of workers. In view of the complex situation of the Course, the interventions were elaborated so as to create a space for the expression of feelings, reflection on practices, attitudes and behaviors, construction and maturity, a space where alternatives could be discussed and thought to manage this situation of tension and suit the possibility of schedules allocated by the team to this organization (specifically three week days for three months of consulting).

Report of Activities

The work developed in the organization aimed to enable a mapping of weaknesses and potentialities in that school context and strategically establish intervention axes. Considering the elaborated Consultancy proposal, we worked in three stages: **Recognition of the place and the specificities of the teaching/learning process; Development of collective planning; Development of groups and individual accompaniment.** The first step made it possible to understand that the teaching profile - content-based and vertical - and the students - young workers of lower-middle social classes - required a horizontal planning and a 'rhizomatic' performance in consulting, in order to cover the specificities of the course.

For the **Recognition of the place**, the group of interns attended, for a period of one week, the spaces of the organization. On the first day, the group was welcomed by the local staff and the coordinator of the Municipal Secretariat of Youth. The presentation of the physical space was performed, as well as an active listening about the functioning of the organization. Subsequently, without the accompaniment of employees or the coordinator, a first presentation was held in the classroom, explaining the purpose of the consulting

1 This proposal was possible because it is an activity linked to a Psychology School Service of a University in the southern region of the country, which holds an agreement with public and private schools for uninterrupted systematic insertion. The existence of several courses offered through a public notice in Porto Alegre makes it possible to list the present intervention elements without the risk of identifying participants.

work and making the trainee team available for questions. After this presentation, the team attended the common environments of the place (corridors and waiting room), putting themselves in conversations with the students. The goal was to enable both a close contact with students and staff and to elaborate a process of 'anthropological strangeness' of the reality of the organization, in order to pay attention to its specificities and denaturalize the social processes involved. This step included a two-week period of work.

In addition to following with the observations, these sporadic encounters made it possible to perceive the students available to **collectively develop a plan** for the improvement of their educational process. It was agreed that a general roadmap of priority actions would be constructed by identifying the demands and needs arising from students, teachers, staff and other educational agents. From this movement, some questions were observed and proposals were formulated. In particular, there was a strong notion of the role of Psychology as linked to individualized problems. In this sense, it was shown in the teachers' narratives, the need for a psychological intervention in "problem students", and in the students, the possibility of clinical psychotherapeutic care. These questions first demanded an instructional work regarding the objectives and potentialities of School and Educational Psychology, a process that required communication with teachers and staff. Considering the flow of workers, as well as the nature of individual conversations with teachers and staff, this stage lasted two weeks, concomitantly with the flow of reception to the students.

In particular, the interventions that constituted this stage, in addition to being more informative, focused on: a process of psychoeducation for the staff in terms of the use of spaces, secrecy in interventions, their position of mediation in teacher and students communication with the team of psychology and co-responsibility in the production of mental health. Discussions with teachers about the problems listed trying to displace personalized issues in students as, in fact, cross-sectional problems (through a more systemic reading of case discussion). In this systemic reading, the Psychology team sought to list elements that considered the singular problems enumerated by the teachers as possible in the face of an entire educational and social framework. In addition to this aspect, the reiterated notion of Psychology as necessarily clinical, which supported more traditional performances by teachers and staff, helped in the subsequent work with students, as will be discussed below.

It is worth noting that throughout the internship period, due to the problems listed above, it was decided to keep the interns in the living areas (during the breaks, the beginning and the end of classes), although there was room for individual follow-ups and working groups. This decision aimed to reiterate the idea, explicit in these intervening stages, of work in Psychology as necessarily of the traditional setting, and to better explore the potentialities of working with other social actors in the organization.

One of the concerns registered by the students, in this first moment, was related to the communication process.

Together with the students, we established the use of a Facebook page, a strategy that was unsuccessful and gave rise to another alternative: a notebook at the reception desk. Concern about individual care as spontaneous demand from students, made the internship team affirm the goal of a decentralized listening space of the clinic and that could arise through the formation of **discussion groups concomitant with individual care**.

With the difficulties in establishing suitable schedule for the formation of groups - considering the time demands of the students and the anxiety generated by the proximity to the exam - the first working group was only possible when the teachers strike occurred. With a group of 10 students, it was possible to start a process of reflection about the concerns of approaching the college entrance exam, professional expectations and life projects. Moreover, through this type of intervention, there was a greater approximation of the notion of Psychology decentralized from the canons of the clinic and the notion of problem student. This aspect is important to reiterate, because despite the idea that the position of problem student is only taken through the education professionals, it was observed that among students there was a list of some colleagues who took the position of this "other"- as a naturalized figure of what is a field of school life.

This naturalization was gradually relativized. Through weekly meetings of 60 minutes, in which we discussed personal trajectories, social markers of difference (such as place of origin, gender and ethno-racial dimensions), life projects and other aspects, it was possible to produce approximations between the students and potentiate a space of "blur" of the problem student figure. The project of deconstructing this figure, understood as a way of evading the context of competition among students and the difficulties of work among education professionals (in view of the demand for "success" of the course), was therefore taken as cross-sectional between these three dimensions of relationships: staff, teachers, and students.

Conclusions

The intervention was performed, not without major discomfort and some conflicts, in order to enable a horizontal consulting process. It was possible to perceive as one of the first obstacles to this process, the perspective of students and teachers of Psychology as a support for exclusively clinical demands. In this sense, considering the need for the joint construction of the intervention team with teachers and students, a deconstruction of this notion took place - which involved confronting traditional views of the problem student and the individual psychological care that was coupled in this perspective. We consider that it was a primordial part of Consulting to establish a bond, in which the practices of School and Educational Psychology were better articulated with everyone, moving from a logic of care/caregiver to co-responsibility in health promotion.

One of the nodal points in the process was precisely the maintenance of an appropriate communication rela-

tionship. Despite being a traditional medium, the process of personal communication represented for the large group of students the possibility of dialogue - associations, sharing common desires, fears, intentions - more in line with the possibilities of the course configuration. We understand that this identification attenuated a competition posture among them and facilitated bond building. Assuming that not all students had access to social media, the online device can disadvantage people or groups. It was concluded that most of the students did not know each other, disabling the construction of a support network between them and a collaborative learning, indicating a necessary field of intervention in the group.

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