

Conversation circle on drop out: school psychology in higher education

Anabela Almeida Costa e Santos Peretta¹; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2376-8392>

Ítalo Weiner Martins de Oliveira¹; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3884-3332>

Luana Mundin de Lima¹; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2081-252X>

Abstract

This paper proposes to present a strategy of psychological intervention allied to the research and aimed at university students who considered evading the course in which they were enrolled. It is a conversation circle held with four students from the Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU). This group practice can be divided into six moments: 1) contract; 2) presentation; 3) writing of expressions linked to the academic and personal scope; 4) writing and reading a letter; 5) sharing of ideas; 6) closure. Participants addressed pressures from society, school and family members; expectations, experiences and university dilemmas; symbolic debts; and future professional prospects. In the face of multiple anguish and suffering, Psychology can contribute significantly and the conversation wheels can be an important tool for the psychologist's work in the university, for providing information for institutional actions, providing dialogic space for reception, exchange of experiences, reflection and redetermination.

Keywords: Evasion dropouts; Higher Education; Group Discussion.

Círculo de charla sobre deserción: la psicología escolar en la enseñanza universitaria

Resumen

Este estudio se propone a presentar estrategia de intervención psicológica asociada a la investigación, volcada a Estudiantes universitarios que tenían la intención de dejar el curso en que estaban ingresados. Se trata de círculo de charla realizada com cuatro discentes de la Universidad Federal de Uberlândia (UFU). Esta práctica grupal puede ser dividida en seis momentos: 1) contrato; 2) presentación; 3) escritura de expresiones vinculadas al ámbito académico y personal; 4) elaboración y lectura de una carta; 5) intercambio de ideas; 6) finalización. Los participantes abordaron las presiones advenidas de la sociedad, de la escuela y de los familiares; expectativas, vivencias y dilemas universitarios; las deudas simbólicas; y las perspectivas profesionales futuras. Delante de las múltiples angustias y sufrimientos, la Psicología puede contribuir significativamente y los círculos de charla pueden ser una importante herramienta a la actuación del psicólogo escolar en la universidad, por proporcionar informaciones para acciones institucionales, proporcionar espacio dialógico de acogida, intercambio de experiencias, reflexión y resignificación.

Palabras clave: Evasión escolar; Enseñanza Universitaria; Discusión en Grupo.

Roda de conversa sobre evasão: a psicologia escolar no ensino superior

Resumo

Este trabalho propõe-se a apresentar uma estratégia de intervenção psicológica aliada à pesquisa e voltada para estudantes universitários que cogitavam evadir do curso em que estavam matriculados. Trata-se de roda de conversa realizada com quatro discentes da Universidade Federal de Uberlândia (UFU). Essa prática grupal pode ser dividida em seis momentos: 1) contrato; 2) apresentação; 3) escrita de expressões vinculadas ao âmbito acadêmico e pessoal; 4) elaboração e leitura de uma carta; 5) compartilhamento de ideias; 6) encerramento. Os participantes abordaram as pressões advindas da sociedade, da escola e dos familiares; expectativas, vivências e dilemas universitários; as dívidas simbólicas; e as perspectivas profissionais futuras. Diante das múltiplas angústias e sofrimentos, a Psicologia pode contribuir significativamente e as rodas de conversa podem ser uma importante ferramenta para a atuação do psicólogo escolar na universidade, por fornecerem informações para ações institucionais, proporcionarem espaço dialógico de acolhimento, troca de experiências, reflexão e resignificação.

Palavras-chave: Evasão escolar; Ensino Superior; Discussão em Grupo.

1 Universidade Federal de Uberlândia – Uberlândia – Minas Gerais – MG – Brasil; anabelaacs@gmail.com; italo_xc@hotmail.com; luana_mun_dim@hotmail.com

Introduction

This report presents a conversation wheel developed with students from the Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU) who were undecided regarding the permanence in the courses in which they were enrolled. This group activity was one of the investigative stages of the undergraduate research “Stay or drop out: knowing the process experienced by college students”¹, which aimed to know the factors involved in the process of university dropout.

For Coulon (2008), young people enter the institution as “demanders” of Higher Education and are constituted as students when they face ruptures and transformations of several orders: in academic life, with an affective nature, in ways of relating to knowledge and those around it. Moreover, it is understood that this is a time of increasing autonomy, responsibilities and demands, in which there are periods of professional, personal and political (un)certainty. Coulon (2008) also highlights that it is a moment of fragility that can generate anxiety and several types of crises, thus facilitating the questioning the continuity in higher education.

According to Baggi and Lopes (2011), dropout is directly linked to the historical and social context and past experiences of the student; it can cause social, academic and economic losses for all involved in the educational process (Silva Filho, Motejunas, Hipólito, & Lobo, 2007). The National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) (2014) found that in 2013 there were 1,388,623 freshmen and 521,685 graduates. Significant numbers that point to dropout as a problem to be investigated.

The Special Commission for Studies on Dropout in Brazilian Public Universities (1996) defines dropout as abandonment, re-option, withdrawal or exclusion from the program or institution, and may be a spontaneous, definitive or temporary process. We understand permanence as: establishing a meaningful relationship with the program, colleagues, professors and technicians; insertion in the norms, rules and culture of the institution. Something that can be intensified by involvement with extracurricular activities proposed by the university (Massi & Villani, 2015).

Conversation circle

The survey took place in 2015 and consisted of individual interviews and conversation circle. We privilege here the description of the group meeting, held with four of the eight initial participants: Lara, Samuel, Benjamin and Paula²; which aimed to gather information and provide care and reflection on feelings and anxieties aroused by the research.

We started the meeting with a breakfast, providing a welcoming atmosphere and raising a gradual connection between those present. We then proposed the **contract** that

1 The project was approved by the Ethics Committee (number 54501115.7.0000.5152).

2 To safeguard the identity of the participants, their names are fictitious.

introduced the students to the activity. For the **presentation**, we asked each participant to tell about the meaning or history of choosing their name. Thus, the students told about themselves, their values, socio-cultural contexts and the expectations their parents placed on them.

Subsequently, we asked them to **write three expressions (phrases or words) for each of the fields**: academic and personal. Each participant had access to the expressions produced by one of his/her colleagues and wrote a **letter** in response, based on the theme of dropout and his/her own undergraduate course, seeking to assist and offer other possibilities to the colleague.

Then the letter was read privately by the recipient and each chose the information they would like to **share** with the group. In the discussion, participants referred to the writing of expressions as a moment of self-reflection and self-knowledge “in which we have to be honest with ourselves; sometimes we are living it every day and don’t realize we’re trying to work out, but it’s not. When you stop to think it’s even revealing”, said Paula. Such speech denotes that a dialogic space was provided so that there was a rupture of daily life, resignification and deepening in relation to what they experience as students. In addition, the students stressed the following feelings and themes listed in the discussion: indecision, anguish, fear of leaving college.

The group showed the empathic capacity of the students, by encouraging them to put themselves in the other’s shoes and help each other. Moreover, we can understand, remembering Barros (1993), that the widening of living spaces and sharing of anguish enables the creation of channels that connect the subject to the collective in which he/she is immersed, as it appears in Lara’s speech: “It’s bad, because I’m going through this, but it’s good to know that I’m not alone. So this experience, for me, is being good”. As pointed out by Barros (1994, p.145), the group draws “the attention to the *urgency of creating bonds of solidarity and citizenship alliances*” [emphasis added].

During the sharing, some students expressed astonishment at the importance given by peers to negative feelings and difficulties in personal and academic experiences. As Samuel revealed: “It’s very bad to stop and see that you only have problems on both sides”. After realizing this, he considered the importance of the potentialities: “It’s hard to think that you only have a problem. This person has to have more in his/her life. Sometimes some good part he/she forgot to put on”.

Participants also spoke of the difficulties they experienced in reconciling personal and academic life, as Samuel exemplified: “I think my life is more important than college. Either I focus on one, or I focus on another”. The connection between the two fields is broadened when training and future professional performance are presented as forms of personal fulfillment. Something that does not always occur, as Paula said: “It would be nice to find a program that was also part of your enjoyment, but not a contrast. But sometimes these things seem very far away”.

Some high school experiences were remembered as responsible for breaking expectations and frustration with the

program, such as: the lack of professional guidance, the way programs and professions are presented and the immaturity of the newcomer.

In addition, the students highlighted aspects that made them question the permanence in the program, such as: classroom experiences, professors' didactics, incompatibility between study and work, curriculum issues and the relevance of the subjects studied. About the classroom experiences, Lara said: "I like the university, my dread is being in the classroom watching class. I miss it here, but I don't miss being in class, that's a contradiction to me". Regarding the didactics of professors, Samuel said: "We have some subjects that the professor does not speak Portuguese, passes 120 slides per class. The guy doesn't talk!".

Faced with these questions, students reflected on the need to be present in the classroom and Benjamin pointed out: "When I come, I don't come for class, I sit there; sometimes I come, sign the list and leave". Samuel also said, "Going to all classes, keeping attendance, seems like a waste of time".

When referring to their experiences, participants criticized the very broad focus of their programs and complained about the lack of spaces to create and innovate, as Samuel pointed out: "I liked the part of entrepreneurship, solving problems, creating new things. But the focus [of the program] is not to come up with ideas or solve problems".

Thus, the university is described as a space that does not meet the needs of students, propagates practices devoid of meaning and contributes to the lack of interest in the academic environment. As analyzed by Asbahr and Meira (2014) based on Leontiev, awareness, learning and attention to a given knowledge depend on the meaning that the content and actions of study have for the student. And for an action to have meaning, its purpose must meet the motive of the activity; therefore, the individual must recognize why study that. Something that presents itself as a major challenge for higher education.

However, participants said they found diverse satisfaction in the institution. Benjamin recalled moments of fun and experimentation with professional practice: "I really like the pedagogical part of my program, I have a lot of fun. Now I'm doing an internship and it's me teaching. I have a whole room to have fun and play responsibly". In addition, students recognized the existence of professors who have good teaching, as pointed out by Samuel: "I have had good professors. Some guys that get you in class. A funny, funny guy. A guy who isn't like a robot".

Thus, the university appears as a space of contradiction that does not institutionally predict joy or welcome to anguish, but at the same time, provides places for discussion on such issues, identification with professors, entertainment and communication. Despite the split between the academic and personal spheres, these fields are articulated, influenced and constituted dialectically in the experiences of individuals.

Students also reported pressure from school, society and family members to enter and stay in the program. In this regard, Samuel shared "I never wanted to go to college! Then he [the father] pushed it, and I came in"; Benjamin stated, "I

have always studied in private schools and what they seek is to enter university. So, I never considered not entering. But they always say we have to do medicine, engineering or law". In addition, some participants attributed this obligation to a symbolic debt they believed to have with their families or friends who helped them stay, as Paula commented:

I went to private school and my parents are paying my bills in another city. I see my friends almost finishing the course and me without deciding yet. So, there are pressures from all sides. And you're also afraid of not liking what you'll do next. It's a lot to deal with.

As factors influencing the thought of dropping out, many students approached the issue from the professional perspective, complaining about the lack of regulation and specificity of the profession. However, from the constructive exchange with the other, the students were reflecting on the process of professional choice, envisioning future paths, creating solutions to their own dilemmas and raising resignifications:

Paula - To what extent is a great idealization, I believe that I will find a program that fills me 100%? Do you like 100% of your program?

Benjamin - No. You won't like everything in your program. This has no way. There's always that story you're going to say, "Oh, that thing sucks!". But you are just getting by.

During the circle, we tried to stimulate everyone's role and focus on sharing experiences and helping participants: "I thought about using my experience to try to alleviate something. It was nice to write the letter, I talked about things that I already got over. I was giving tips on what she can do to continue the program because that's what I did", said Benjamin.

In **closure**, each participant meant the experience in one word: fun, insecurity, frustration, identification and diversity. The conversation circle ended and the meeting proceeded informally, as a space for welcoming, sharing and discussion sprang up there.

Conclusion

Higher education has been open to psychology in recent years, being a space full of challenges. The information we obtained from the research reveals that: a) students feel lonely, confused and out of place in the academic universe; b) university curricula and pedagogical practices have not been able to articulate with the needs and experiences of students; c) the university is presented by the high school and the preparation courses for college admission exam in an excessively idealized way, creating expectations that will inevitably be frustrated; c) the market interests that underlie the pressure on young people to enter and stay in certain programs restrict the possibilities for reflection and choice;

Elements that indicate the need for the various dimensions of academic life, caring about school performance, affections, sociability and coexistence (Sampaio, 2010). Aspects that lead us to what is unique about the relationship between students and the university, a theme that should be better explored and studied, in order to support actions aimed at both higher education and the educational spaces that prepare for admission.

Through this practice report, articulated with the research, we suggest the existence of more dialogic and cooperative spaces in which students can experience their contradictions. Something that implies and invites for the improvement of institutional conditions and for works directed to professors, aiming to reflect on the pedagogical practice and the construction of meanings in relation to what is taught. The importance of the publication of practices aimed at Higher Education is reiterated, as well as studies related to School and Educational Psychology and policies in education (Moura, 2015), to support the performance of the psychologist, thus enabling an understanding of specificities of this context and contributing to the elaboration of socially and ethically compromised intervention projects.

References

- Asbahr, F. S. F.; Meira, M. E. M. (2014). Crianças desatentas ou práticas pedagógicas sem sentido? Relações entre motivo, sentido pessoal e atenção. *Nuances: estudos sobre Educação*, 25(1), 97-115. Recuperado: 20 set. 2017. Disponível: <https://repositorio.unesp.br/bitstream/handle/11449/135454/ISSN2236-0441-2014-25-01-97-115.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Baggi, C. A. S.; Lopes, D. A. (2011). Evasão e avaliação institucional no ensino superior: uma discussão bibliográfica. *Avaliação (Campinas)*, 16(2), 355-374. Recuperado: 20 set. 2017. Disponível: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/aval/v16n2/a07v16n2>
- Barros, R. B. (1993). Dispositivos em ação: o grupo. *Cadernos de Subjetividade*, 1(1), 97-106.
- Barros, R. B. (1994). Grupo e Produção. In Lancetti, A. (Org.), *Saúde e Loucura 4: Grupos e Coletivos* (pp. 145-154). SP: Hucitec.
- Coulon, A. (2008). *A condição de estudante: a entrada na vida universitária*. Salvador: EDUFBA.
- Comissão Especial de Estudos sobre a Evasão nas Universidades Públicas Brasileiras. (1996). *Diplomação, retenção e evasão nos cursos de graduação em instituições de ensino superior públicas*. Recuperado: 20 set. 2017. Disponível: http://www.andifes.org.br/wp-content/files_flutter/Diplomacao_Retencao_Evasao_Graduacao_em_IES_Publicas-1996.pdf
- Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira. (2014). *Censo Escolar da Educação Básica 2013: resumo técnico*. Recuperado: 20 set. 2017. Disponível: http://download.inep.gov.br/educacao_basica/censo_escolar/resumos_tecnicos/resumo_tecnico_censo_educacao_basica_2013.pdf
- Massi, L.; Villani, A. (2015). Um caso de contratendência: baixa evasão na licenciatura em química explicada pelas disposições e integrações. *Educ. Pesqui.*, 41(4), 975-992. Recuperado: 20 set. 2017. Disponível: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/ep/v41n4/1517-9702-ep-41-4-0975.pdf>
- Moura, F. R. (2015). *A atuação do psicólogo escolar no Ensino Superior: configurações, desafios e proposições sobre o fracasso escolar* (Dissertação de mestrado). Centro de Ciências Humanas, Letras e Artes da Universidade Estadual de Maringá, Maringá, PR, Brasil. Recuperado: 20 set. 2017. Disponível: <http://www.ppi.uem.br/arquivos-para-links/teses-e-dissertacoes/2015/fabricio-m>
- Sampaio, S. M. R. (2010). A Psicologia na educação superior: ausências e percalços. Em Aberto, 23(83), 95-106. Recuperado: 20 set. 2017. Disponível: <http://emaberto.inep.gov.br/index.php/emaberto/article/view/2253/2220>
- Silva Filho, R. L. L., Motejunas, P. R., Hipólito, O., & Lobo, M. B. C. M. (2007). A evasão no ensino superior brasileiro. *Cad. Pesqui.*, 37(132), 641-659. Recuperado: 20 set. 2017. Disponível: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/cp/v37n132/a0737132>

Received: October 12st 2017
Approved: November 25st 2017

This paper was translated from Portuguese by E.M.T. Alencar



License information: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the License (type CC-BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original article is properly cited.