

The welcoming of new undergraduate students: a relational constructivism experience for the integration of nursing students*

Recepção de ingressantes universitários: experiência construtivista relacional de discentes de enfermagem para integração

Recepción de ingresantes universitarios: experiencia constructivista relacional de estudiantes de enfermería para integración

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This article aims at reporting an experience about the integration of undergraduate Nursing students in the reception and welcoming of new students to the course. It aimed at describing how nursing students who are part of the *Programa de Educação Tutorial* (Program of Tutorial Education - PET), developed their activities for the integration of newcomers to the course, having the relational constructivism as their methodological and theoretical framework. This theoretical perspective understands learning to be a process that seeks to instigate curiosity, in which the students are led to find answers in their own knowledge, and in their interaction with reality and their colleagues. The main result is related to the "PET Friends" project, which integrates initiatives such as: integration reception and seminars; book and movie discussion; guidance on how to participate in extension projects and researches. In general, this activity allows the students to have a profound interaction among themselves, and to bring Nursing students closer to the activities developed in the Program of Tutorial Education.

Descriptors: Adaptation; Social adjustment; Students nursing; Universities.

Este artigo tem como objetivo relatar a experiência sobre a integração de discentes de Enfermagem para recepção e acolhimento de ingressantes no curso. Buscou-se descrever como os discentes de enfermagem participantes do Programa de Educação Tutorial (PET) desenvolvem suas atividades para a integração dos novos ingressantes, tendo como referencial teórico metodológico o construtivismo relacional. Essa compreensão teórica considera que a aprendizagem é um processo que procura instigar a curiosidade, onde o discente é levado a encontrar as respostas a partir de seus próprios conhecimentos e de sua interação com a realidade e com os colegas. O principal resultado relaciona-se ao Projeto "Amigos do PET", que integra iniciativas como: recepção e seminários para integração; discussão de livros e filmes; orientações sobre como participar em projetos de extensão e pesquisas. De modo geral, essa atividade proporciona profunda interação dos discentes entre si, e aproximação dos discentes de Enfermagem com as ações desenvolvidas no Programa de Educação Tutorial.

Descritores: Adaptação; Ajustamento social; Estudantes de enfermagem; Universidades.

Este artículo tiene como objetivo relatar la experiencia sobre la integración de estudiantes de Enfermería para recepción y bienvenida de ingresantes en la carrera. Se buscó describir cómo los alumnos de enfermería, participantes del Programa de Educación Tutorial (PET), desarrollan sus actividades para la integración de los nuevos ingresantes, teniendo como referencial teórico y metodológico el constructivismo relacional. Esta comprensión teórica considera que el aprendizaje es un proceso que busca instigar la curiosidad, donde el estudiante es llevado a encontrar las respuestas a partir de sus propios conocimientos y de su integración con la realidad y con los colegas. El principal resultado se relaciona al Proyecto "Amigos de PET", que integra iniciativas como: recepción y seminarios para integración; discusión de libros y películas y orientaciones sobre cómo participar en proyectos de extensión e investigación. De modo general, esta actividad proporciona una profunda interacción de los estudiantes entre sí, y aproximación de los alumnos de Enfermería con las acciones desarrolladas en el Programa de Educación Tutorial.

Descriptorios: Adaptación; Ajuste social; Estudiantes de enfermería; Universidades.

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INTRODUCTION

The ingress of students in higher education is riddled with challenges, both regarding their adaptation to the course and the transition between adolescence and adult life. Thus, one needs to consider the students from a welcoming and distinctive perspective, especially considering the moment of their ingress in the higher education course.

The university student needs to pay special attention for the challenges found in their adaptation to the course to stimulate their transition from adolescence into adulthood, avoiding negative consequences¹.

When students are mentioned, an immediate reference to youth is made. Frequently, this age group is considered as a period of conflict, divergence and disorder, due to many stereotypes and the homogenization of youth culture². The university experience, in fact, cannot be reduced to professional formation.

In the early years, especially for young adults who finish high school and immediately start higher education courses, the university has an impact which goes beyond professionalization. Entering a university implies in a series of transformations in the friendship and social support networks of the young students³.

In this new context of experiences, the institution, the initiation rituals and new friendships are elements considered essential by the newcomers. The tightening of bonds between the students allows them to share expectations, interests and problems, making adaptation easy³.

The way in which the students become integrated into the context of higher education makes it so they can better enjoy the opportunities that university offers, both for their professional formation and for their psychosocial development. Students who become socially integrated since the beginning of their courses have higher chances of growing intellectually and personally than those who face more challenges in their transition to university³.

The university environment provokes a more radical change in the context of life of

young adults, demanding them to provide adaptational responses to a set of situations which are challenging, and relate to the managing of their own lives, something that other studies have already found^{4,5}. In the first semester, interpersonal relationships are more important for the adaptation of the student than the managing of responsibilities, which will only become more important in the second semester⁵.

The professor and opportunities of student extra class involvement have also been mentioned as elements that favor adaptation in other researches⁶⁻⁸.

One of the main challenges presented is that of proposing, in the university environment, actions that can overcome the situations of disorientation and helplessness in which the new undergraduate students may find themselves in. To a great extent, such a situation takes place due to lack of information, to the unpreparedness of the newcomer to deal with differences between high school and university, to the difficulty they have in finding and getting in touch with professors or pedagogical support as they start their academic lives, before they constitute a strong support network, considering still superficial bonds made with the colleagues and the structures of the university⁶.

The PET-Nursing of the Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM) was instituted in 2006, and its activities usually integrate students starting from the second semester of the course. It has 13 members. One of the main activities developed is the project "PET Friends", which aims at welcoming new students to the course and promotes group integration.

From this perspective, this article aims at reporting an experience about the integration of undergraduate Nursing students in the reception and welcoming of new students to the course.

METHOD

This is an experience report that will present the experiences involving the participation of undergraduate students who are members of

the PET-Nursing in an extension project conducted by the group itself at UFTM.

The activities of the project PET Friends have the following characteristics: every semester, there is a "freshmen reception", which is a moment in which the members of the group present to the newcomers the university and the nursing graduation course, respond to doubts and promote the welcoming of these new students. During the event, the newcomers are invited to participate of PET Friends, and the PET-Nursing members invite their own friends to participate in the project, according to criteria of commitment to the activities. Each member of the PET is responsible for indicating one person.

The students invited will participate in the activities developed by the PET-Nursing group. The meetings of the group take place at Tuesdays from 5:30 pm to 7 pm, and on Thursdays from 5 pm to 7 pm at the UFTM Educational Center.

It should be highlighted that the theoretical and methodological framework adopted both for carrying out the experience and for its report is the relational constructivism. This theoretical perspective understands learning to be a process that seeks to instigate curiosity, in which the students are led to find answers in their own knowledge, and in their interaction with reality and their colleagues. It may also be considered as a potent approach for working with groups, as it seeks the empowerment of its members.

Therefore, this report aims to describe how nursing students who are part of the Program of Tutorial Education developed their activities for the integration of the newcomers. The PET, created in 1979, consolidated the search for quality higher education teaching through the indissociability between research, teaching and extension^{10,11}.

To report this experience, a descriptive analysis of the initiatives conducted by nursing students in the integration of new students was made. It may also be considered as a potent approach for working with

groups, as it seeks the empowerment of its members.

RESULTS

On average, four students participate as PET Friends every semester. They participate on activities such as: observing presentations and seminars from PET members; discussing books, films and articles by the PET group; participating in extension projects coordinated by members of the PET group; collaborating in researches conducted by the members of the group.

Each member must, in the end of the semester, present a 25-minute seminar with no specific theme, using the knowledge acquired during the activities.

From February to July 2017, seminars and updates on many themes were presented, some of which were regarding health, such as: "The Use of Birth Control Pills", "Low-carb Diets", "Healthcare Related Infections", "Physical Activity Practice", "Children and Adolescence Oncology"; some themes were related to popular culture, such as: "Brazilian Folklore", "Urban Legends", "Disney Princesses", "DC vs. Marvel"; some were geopolitical, such as "The War in Syria"; among other themes, such as: "Family", "Love", "There Are Reasons to Believe: the Good Ones Are a Majority" and "Men's Best Friend". Some articles were also presented, most of which were related to health, and more specifically, to nursing.

The discussions and projects conducted during the PET program bring about teachings that may be applied during the entire formation of the student, as well as in their professional activities. The work developed with the PET Friends seeks to arouse their critic minds regarding their own formation, as well as social, political and daily life events. Doing that would empower them to be active in their learning process, not in a traditional way, but in a collaborative one.

Performing this activity helped to bring the PET-Nursing group closer to the students of the course, promoting collaborative knowledge and the participation in teaching, research and extension activities. This is in line with the propositions of this program

regarding restructuring the university model due to the crisis in the traditional one, which was highly elitist.

The contributions of the theoretical and methodological framework should also be

highlighted, since the relational constructivism contributed to the inclusive results proposed by the *PET Friends* project (Image 1).

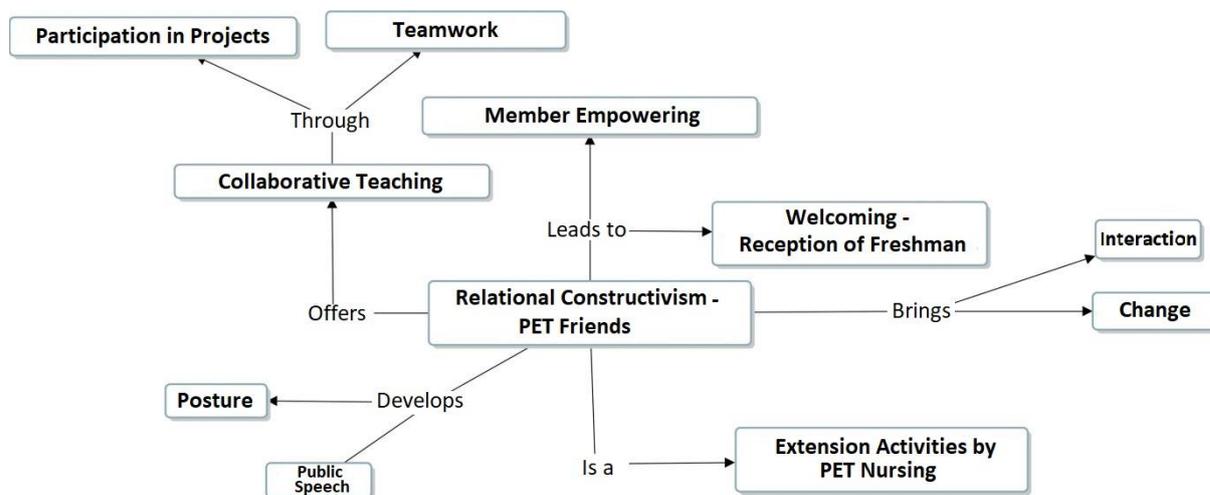


Image 1. Diagram about the results of the PET Friends project from the perspective of relational constructivism. Uberaba, Minas Gerais, 2017.

DISCUSSION

The guidance offered by relational constructivism is defined in three aspects¹¹:

- The ways in which investigations imply in relationships, life situations, and historical and culturally located conversations, for which norms and values are built and which justify future ways to be and act in daily life;
- the possibility that the project of the researcher would emerge in the flux of daily situations;
- any relational practice may become the object of an investigation or transformation.

Relational constructivism does not offer a specific method for the conduction of researches. The researchers need to position themselves reflexively about the chosen methods, committed to the multiplicity and changing nature of realities and relations in this process, including changes in the researchers themselves and in the community that is participating in the research, indicating the indissociability of research and practice.

The knowledge of the researcher may be imposed, preventing the co-construction of a

collaborative research, and thus, not contributing for the growth of relational engagements. The method may also be centered in the appreciation of participants, in which case questions and listening are understood as potentially (trans)formative and (eco)logical.

In general, most activities developed by the group of students who are part of the PET are initiatives its members themselves and have diverse characteristics. The dynamics of the PET actions are flexible - whether they come from the group members or from the students.

In general, the scope of the actions is above all linked to the participation in the activities developed by PET, whether the university or the society are the stage for the development of the activity¹².

The members of PET themselves, as they enter the group, often do not know exactly what is expected of them, who are still undergraduate students. Initiatives such as the one reported here tend to give support to better understanding, as they allow for an exchange of horizontal knowledge between the PET members, who are already used to academic routine, and the new students.

On the other hand, the experience reported presents itself as an alternative for overcoming of challenges to the formation of nurses. Investing in the interactions between new students and PET members allows for the organization of dialogue, which makes viable the performance and dissemination of the political-pedagogical project, and aids in the recognition of demands for the formation of nurses who are more focused on the social reality of new students¹³.

That is considering that teaching, nowadays, has shown itself to be a complex act, and the health demands have been requiring more and more creativity, with critical judgments and technical-scientific precision, so that alternatives are found to deal with these demands. Therefore, the institutions that are responsible for teaching, such as universities, must have strategies that favor the adaptation of the new student to this new reality¹⁴.

From this perspective, the report here described is an alternative for the construction of different spaces for the students, so that this reality can be exercised. It becomes highly important to consider carefully the period of higher education enrollment, for the adaptation of the newcomers and the investment in strategies that may contribute early to the adaptation of the new students to the Higher Education Institution, to the course, and to academic life, since this is an important and decisive period for one's professional future.

Considering worrisome national data regarding higher education school evasion, the initiative reported has the potential of getting the students to be more involved, and work as a factor that can motivate the permanence of the student in the course¹⁵.

CONCLUSION

Many undergraduate students face problems while adapting to university, and the project *PET Friends* offers a profound interaction between the students of the PET-Nursing group and the other students of the course, an interaction which gives them the opportunity to get closer to the actions of the Program of Tutorial Education, and to the its

three pillars: teaching, research and extension.

This proximity enables the student to build a support network, and to take better advantage of the opportunities they are offered during graduation. It also favors group learning, coupled with a more effective course of action in the university and the community, as they directly act in the quality of the professional formation of these students.

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CONTRIBUTIONS

Iasmim de Lima Torres and **Sarah Mota de Sousa** took part in all the stages of the conception of the experience report. **Marina Pereira Rezende** took part in the critical review of the article.

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