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# Networks that connect: overcoming challenges in serving higher education students

*Redes que conectam: superando desafios no atendimento aos estudantes do Ensino Superior*

*Redes que conectan: superando desafíos en la atención a estudiantes de Educación Superior*

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## Abstract

This study examined the conjuncture of public higher education regarding the obstacles faced by students and the actions of psycho-pedagogical support to overcome them. We developed a multiple case study, and the Qualitative Epistemology was based on the analysis through the Constructive-Interpretative Method. The result indicated a positive evaluation of the psycho-pedagogical support actions offered to students. The Federal identified limits in its proposal and established determinants for the creation of an academic space that combines higher education and university permanence with quality. It is necessary to address the root causes of obstacles through interconnected and inclusive practices and by welcoming and co-responsibility in serving students.

**Keywords:** Higher education. Educational inclusion. Psychopedagogy.

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## Resumo

*Este estudo examinou a conjuntura do Ensino Superior Público referente aos obstáculos enfrentados pelos estudantes e às ações de apoio psicopedagógico para superá-los. Realizou-se o estudo de múltiplos casos e a Epistemologia Qualitativa embasou a análise através do Método Construtivo-Interpretativo. O resultado indicou uma avaliação positiva das ações de apoio psicopedagógico ofertadas a estudantes de uma Universidade Federal, identificou limites na sua propositura e estabeleceu determinantes para a criação de um espaço acadêmico que conjugue formação superior e permanência universitária com qualidade. Conclui-se que é necessário atuar sobre a causa dos obstáculos, por meio de práticas interligadas e inclusivas, e de acolhimento e corresponsabilização no atendimento aos estudantes.*

**Palavras-chave:** Ensino Superior. Inclusão Educacional. Psicopedagogia.

## Resumen

*Este estudio examinó la coyuntura de la Educación Superior Pública referente a los obstáculos que enfrentan los estudiantes y las acciones de apoyo psicopedagógico para superarlos. Se realizó el estudio de múltiples casos y la Epistemología Cualitativa fundamentó el análisis a través del Método Constructivo-Interpretativo. El resultado indica una evaluación positiva de las acciones de apoyo psicopedagógico ofrecidas a los estudiantes de una Universidad Federal, identificó límites en su propuesta y estableció determinantes para la creación de un espacio académico que conjugue formación superior y permanencia universitaria con calidad. Se concluye que es necesario actuar sobre la causa de los obstáculos, por medio de prácticas interconectadas e inclusivas, y de acogida y corresponsabilidad en el servicio a los estudiantes.*

**Palabras clave:** Enseñanza superior. Inclusión educativa. Psicopedagogía.

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## Introduction

This article discusses the coexistence of excess and scarcity within the organizational structure of public higher education. It also addresses the need to connect excess and scarcity to construct meaning around university experiences, fostering a dignified, high-quality environment for life and professional, social, and human development. This research was developed with the following question: How does the coexistence of excess and scarcity within the organizational structure of public higher education impact the construction of meaning within students' university experiences?

Excess is inscribed in heightened demands, competitiveness, unlimited immersion, and the devaluation of rest, leisure, and personal connections (Ariño; Bardagi, 2018). This excess is present in the experiences of students, professors, and other university members. Studies conducted with the Research Group on Education, Health, and Inclusion at the Federal University of Santa Maria corroborate previous findings (Catunda; Ruiz, 2008; Silva; Heleno, 2012) regarding the quality of life of university students. They affirm that quality of life in the academic environment is related to physical, psychological, interpersonal, and environmental conditions (Magnago, Schmitz, Pavão, 2021; Marchesan, Magnago, Pavão, 2023).

Numerous authors discuss the importance of culture, history, and institutional context, which impact retention in higher education, often resulting in illness, stress, and burnout (Ferreira; Miranda; Gurgel, 2016; Glina; Rocha, 2010; Souza; Torres, 2020). Productivism models, a culture of competition, and the demand for results are portrayed as factors that lead to suffering among the higher education faculty and students, culminating in absences and leaves of absence, and loss of semester, retention, and dropout among students.

The scarcity refers to care (for oneself and others), attentive attention, understanding, and welcoming approaches in this often hostile and perverse space. Specifically for student needs, assistance policies and practices were created at public universities to alleviate material, pedagogical, symbolic, and cultural challenges, among others (Dias et al., 2020). Even so, these instruments are insufficient to guarantee quality education, given the current context, the new student profile, and the need for openness to critical-reflective thinking, increasingly demanded in contemporary society. Given this, it is pertinent to address some of the pitfalls of higher education, as well as the contributions, limitations, and challenges of support services. This article focuses on students, while also considering the culture and institutional context and recognizing the unique role of professors in fostering learning and inclusion.

By highlighting the impact of psychopedagogical support actions for higher education students, facilitated by the Educational Actions Coordination (in Portuguese, “Coordenadoria de Ações Educacionais”, Caed) of a Federal University in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul, this article aims to identify weaknesses and propose networks of connections to overcome challenges in student services.

## Higher education: opportunities and scarcity of academic culture

Higher education is envisioned as an opportunity for personal and professional growth, with a view to career development. Furthermore, it is expected that the academic trajectory will provide positive experiences that enable students to actively and dynamically experience personal and relational processes and aspects involving teaching and learning.

At the same time, entering University represents a period of significant change in individuals' lives, such as the transition from primary to higher education, leaving their parents' home, living alone, residing in another city, and establishing new bonds and relationships (Assis; Oliveira, 2011; Sulkowski;

Joyce, 2012). Expectations and challenges define this university student space, adding to the need for adaptation between institutional characteristics and the subjectivity of the actors that make up a given institution (Marinho-Araujo, 2016).

Adaptation, more than simply conforming to pre-established norms, reflects the student's connection with the circumstances created by the educational system. Therefore, understanding how institutions work, recognizing oneself as part of them, and creating meaning throughout the undergraduate program significantly impacts students' retention in higher education.

What we observe is that, in addition to the anticipated difficulties, we experience what are termed excesses in the mastery of this writing. First, excessive rigidity is cited. Throughout the history of education and special needs, rigidity has been safeguarded by establishing standards of normality, fixed stages and ages for learning to occur, and models to be followed, requiring students to come as close as possible to what was expected (Bentes; Hayashi, 2016; Cunha; Rossato, 2015; Mascaro, 2013).

Currently, rigidity is based on justifications such as the precision in complying with syllabuses and subject plans, in favor of quality teaching. Others even based on moral aspects, such as "being responsible, competent, delivering on time" and training, thus, are often impregnated by demands and an overload of activities, inhibiting the construction of meanings about learning and experiences (Louzada; Pacheco, 2024). The research "We Just Want to Be Strange Like Everyone Else": The Impact of Psychopedagogical Support Strategies on the Academic Trajectories of Higher Education Students (Magnago, 2024) revealed obstacles during the university course that complicated the student adaptation process and resulted in students seeking or referring to the Educational Actions Coordination Office for assistance with the setbacks they encountered. Excessive rigidity during classes, for example, resulted in neglect of each student's own pace and inattention to individual needs, working against educational inclusion.

Inclusion in higher education means considering individuals in their entirety and adopting an interdisciplinary and complex perspective on their learning processes, empowering them to become learners and teachers in the construction of knowledge (Bossa, 2007; Fernández, 1991, 2001a, 2012). Rigid work organization, whether in companies or institutions, is a proven cause of stress and mental illness, requiring a change in structure with the inclusion of safety valves that can more positively regulate the costs and benefits of the work performed (Glina; Rocha, 2010).

In general, this regulation focuses on issues of collective design, ethics, and coexistence among people. Furthermore, we noted that rigid work systems foster a neurotic organization that, combined with neurotic personality mechanisms, affects somatic health and impedes the healthy and creative expression of individuals (González Rey, 2004a). In the wake of this discussion, another excess is identified: the emphasis on memorization and the reproduction of academic content as taught by teachers. Mitjáns Martínez (2006a, 2012a, 2012b) calls this learning reproductive memory, which proceeds through mechanical assimilation and a lack of connection with the subject's life, and which remains prevalent today.

The culture of reproduction, submission, and execution is still very dominant in all our institutions. Behind the themes that have emerged strongly in education and training in general, such as learning to learn, there is a need to recover the subject of learning, without which learning to learn can become just another set of sterile techniques. The problem here is not instrumental; it is about recovering the subject, in its dimension of production of subjective meaning and individual creation, deeply interrelated processes. (González Rey, 2004b, p. 26).

This teaching modality "produces an alienation between the aims of the activity and the true needs of the individual, which on certain occasions cannot be identified by them" (González Rey, 2004a, p. 22), promoting passive behaviors and positions on the part of students and, indirectly, diminishing their ability to cope and make decisions. As a further result of this excess, creative expression is inhibited, based on and supported by prescribed methodological and formatting logics that impede the exercise of transformation and autonomous thought.

Finally, as another excess that permeates interpersonal relationships and often manifests itself in the name of a desired hierarchy or a need for control and power, we cite the excess of attitudinal barriers, which hinder the realization of inclusion in the academic environment. The predominant attitudinal barriers are discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, and exclusion, and they result in feelings of inferiority, incapacity, and inadequacy.

Coexisting within the university organizational structure is scarcity, which refers to terms such as accessibility, flexibility, and inclusion, which are at the core of any movement to mitigate these excesses. In this text, the Educational Actions Coordination Office of a Federal University will be highlighted as a powerful student support service and an agent of institutional change. However, it presents limitations that lead to the very scarcity referred to here: an institutional culture that welcomes, including, and learns from differences.

## Methodology

This article is the result of three phases of analysis, each divided exclusively into didactic areas, to address the manuscript's objectives. The first phase is characterized by an evaluation of the psychopedagogical support strategies offered by a Federal Institution of Higher Education (in Portuguese, "Instituição Federal de Ensino Superior", IFES), seeking to define their impact on students' trajectories. Next, the chapter identifies the limitations and challenges in promoting these actions. Finally, the paper proposes networks of connections that enable the recovery of the individual (González Rey, 2004b), the development of subjective meanings in the academic journey, and the consideration of excesses and expansion of inclusive and welcoming practices within the university environment.

For the first two phases, we conducted a multiple-case study with the participation of eight undergraduate students who had utilized the psychopedagogical support strategies provided by the University in question. The research approach underlying this study—Qualitative Epistemology (González Rey, 1997)—provides for the establishment of a research setting structured on dialogue and the ongoing construction of ideas, ultimately composing a complex array of information for the researcher's use while also benefiting the participants' subjective development.

As a subjective space, this preliminary stage encompasses much more than the physical environment in which the research takes place. It reveals the complicity and ethical commitment among individuals, which is strengthened with each encounter and allows "participants to become subjects in the research process" (Rossato, Martins, & Mitjáns Martínez, 2014, p. 41). Therefore, the setting of this research stood out as a place of trust and security for those involved, conducive to dialogue, reflection and transformation of the subjects (Magnago; Carijo; Pavão, 2023), which had a positive impact on the content of this study, which was to examine the psychopedagogical support strategies provided by Caed and their impact on the academic trajectory of Higher Education students.

Qualitative Epistemology arose from complex facts, which demanded a broad, connective, and at the same time singular perspective on reality (Morin, 2005). In this sense, aligned with the Theory of Subjectivity by the same author (González Rey), Qualitative Epistemology considers the processualism of human phenomena, recognizing the importance of communication in the construction

of knowledge, the appreciation of singular cases, and the constructive-interpretative nature of knowledge (González Rey, 2000, 2007, 2011, 2014a, 2017, 2019).

Thus, we chose the Constructive-Interpretive Method of Analysis to transition between theory and epistemology and produce indicators, hypotheses, and zones of meaning based on the multiple and irregular expressions of participants. To form these ideas and interpretations of reality, research instruments were used to induce communication between subjects, to facilitate or provoke students' positioning (González Rey, 2017). Thus, conversational dynamics, sentence completion, and textual production, among others, permeated the meetings and produced increasingly elaborate information (González Rey, 1997, 2011, 2014a, 2019; González Rey; Mitjáns Martínez, 2017).

The central objective of using the Constructive-Interpretive Method was to gain insight into students' subjective meanings and configurations. Therefore, it targeted the subjects' uniqueness (individual and social) and, potentially, their ability to generate personal transformations. Thus, the first two analyses (evaluation of psychopedagogical support strategies and identification of limits and challenges) were based on field research. The participating students "were volunteers, aware of the research objectives, procedures, risks, and benefits, signed the Informed Consent Form containing these data, and also the researcher's commitment to the confidentiality of the information" (Magnago; Carijo; Pavão, 2023, p. 783).

Finally, the third stage of analysis presented in this text resulted from reflections and studies carried out a posteriori by the authors, in response to the challenge of producing more assertive responses to students' demands. Any actions aimed at assistance, psychopedagogical support, or student affairs should emphasize and promote connections between individuals, including students, administrators, teachers, and/or professionals directly involved in student support services. Therefore, the proposed alternatives listed at the end of this article aim to highlight the importance of creating networks of connections at the heart of higher education institutions.

## Results and discussion

As introduced, several obstacles can be part of the higher education journey. Each Federal University, with financial incentives from the *Incluir Program* – Accessibility in Higher Education (Brazil, 2013) and/or the National Student Assistance Program (in Portuguese, “Programa Nacional de Assistência Estudantil”, Pnaes) (Brazil, 2010), has created, regulated, and governed the operation of specific actions to combat the difficulties presented by its students (Toti, 2022).

At Federal University of Santa Maria, there are three departments dedicated to assisting students: the Pedagogical Support Units or Sectors, which work directly with the management of each Teaching Center. The Student Support Center, which receives funding from the Pnaes and is structured to offer subsidies, primarily financial and housing, to low-income students enrolled in the BSE (Socioeconomic Benefit Program). The Caed which receives funding from the *Incluir Program*, provides psychopedagogical services that serve the entire academic community. Due to its scope and importance in ensuring retention in higher education, we chose this Coordination Office for the investigation.

The actions and services provided by Caed can be defined based on two key concepts: the psychopedagogical concept, which positions the individual as the author of learning, considering their constitutive and historical dimensions and intervening through an interdisciplinary perspective (Bossa, 2007; Fernández, 2001a). The broader concept of accessibility focuses on creating mechanisms to promote the inclusion of each student or member of society according to their differences and needs. Thus, to be psychopedagogical and accessible, Caed's actions derive from various areas of knowledge



(Pedagogy, Special Education, Psychology, Speech-Language Pathology, Occupational Therapy, and others) and have subjective implications for the individuals served, which reverberate in the bonds built and the formation of meanings throughout the academic trajectory.

The case study with students allowed us to evaluate Caed's psychopedagogical support strategies and characterize their impact on the academic lives of university students. As an introductory meaning, Caed is a space for listening and welcoming. However, this is not something naturally given but instead it is constructed through the commitment and bond between the service professionals and the students who attend it. Reception lies precisely in the way the listening is carried out: attentive and sensitive, as well as stimulating, to produce new expressions in the subjects. Therefore, the relational nature will determine the tone of the encounter between those involved, allowing for greater or lesser expression by the students.

The outcome for the participants was that the psychopedagogical support strategies, beyond the subjects' statements, embraced their uniqueness and their different ways of representing reality. They embraced, for example, the student's anger toward the professor, as well as feelings such as discomfort, frustration, and expectations, focusing on what is unique and powerful in each situation.

The valorization of subjectivity in this unique encounter allowed the students to confront their subjective movements and enabled emotional and symbolic changes throughout their academic experiences. A significant shift occurred when one student, who was severely stressed, overworked, and overwhelmed, decided to drop some assignments and prioritize her education. This shift marked the beginning of her process of constructing meanings about her higher education journey, a legitimate way to ensure quality retention.

Another observation regarding this aspect is that the students' subjective transformations, stemming from the review of their learning paths, discussions about the academic environment, and the relationship established with psychopedagogical support strategies, enabled more flexible and creative lifestyles, both inside and outside the University. This outcome is the result of an arduous process of reconfiguring students' subjective meanings. For González Rey (2000, 2007), subjective meanings are the explanations or interpretations that individuals give to their experiences; they are constantly evolving and affected by life events.

Every day, circumstances can shape subjective meanings. Therefore, the presence of teachers who center learning on the role of the teacher, impose inaccessible demands, or retrograde, and view knowledge according to the framework of content reproduction and task execution, can cause emotional dulling and symbolic impairment in students, hindering learning. Therefore, it directly impacts subjectivity. Furthermore, the occurrence of prejudices, stereotypes, and exclusions is subjectively unhealthy, leading to feelings of inferiority and inadequacy and hindering adaptation to the academic context.

Listening, welcoming, and giving students a voice opened up subjective and analytical pathways, empowering them to position and reposition themselves in the situations they experienced; increasingly more appropriate, critical, and reflective. From this research, it was understood that the reconstruction of students' subjectivity was possible through the recovery of their status as author-subjects.

Authorship is achieved through the acquisition of subjective means of placing oneself in the world and simultaneously being and constituting oneself (Fernández, 2001b). It presupposes a movement toward self-knowledge and, also, toward self-disquiet. For González Rey (1999, p. 20), "dialogue, reflection, and contradiction are essential elements for engaging the subject in a climate of learning." The reflective, inquisitive, tension-based, and meaning-building approach provided by the psychopedagogical support strategies used by the students analyzed provided a new perspective on

learning processes, empowering them to be active, creative, and protagonists in their formative, academic, and personal journeys. Furthermore, challenging rigid and inflexible configurations mobilizes the production of meaning and supports the development of subjectivity.

One of the research participants refers to the process she underwent with the Caed as: "I was rescued." The rescue she mentioned represents her resistance to the exclusion and psychological violence she experienced during her course, the support she needed to stay focused, and the drive to create protective and coping mechanisms, reclaiming her autonomy, learning potential, and place as a thinking individual. For Alícia Fernández (2001b), all these issues are intertwined, and the authorship of thought, which depends on the relationship between the emotional, the symbolic, and the social, is only achieved when there is an "authorizing other." Thus, the question arises: beyond the specific strategies adopted by a psychopedagogical support sector, who is responsible for acting as the "authorizing other"?

Related to this discussion is the topic of Inclusion in Higher Education, and through discussions with students, it was found that Caed's psychopedagogical strategies have established themselves as an important tool for supporting inclusion and countering any form of barrier to inclusive education. Inclusiveness, in general, is about accessibility (a broader concept), being accessible, and making accessible. For inclusion to exist, the feeling that each individual's differences are valued and their needs are uniquely recognized is crucial. Furthermore, the provision or creation of mechanisms that enable equal opportunities is essential for each person to feel truly included. In the educational field, focusing on the student's modality, pace, learning style, and personality means tailoring instruction to each student's needs.

For Tacca (2009), depersonalized activities contribute very little to student learning.

They essentially focus on content indistinctly, regardless of who the students are and their development process. There is no understanding that learning occurs through the interweaving of various dynamic functions that are interrelated in specific ways, depending on the context, history, and subjective makeup of the student (Tacca, 2009, p. 66-67).

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The psychopedagogical support strategies offered by the Coordination in question (Caed) recognized students' learning paths and valued their individualities and differences, allowing them to be themselves and make choices freely, autonomously, and creatively. In other words, they were able to become learners-subjects (González Rey, 2014b), taking responsibility for guiding their learning path.

The statement from one of the participants demonstrates this more active and emancipated stance: "Little by little, even though it was difficult internally, I began to understand that I could choose what I wanted to do. And that choosing to leave something is different from giving up. Choosing brings a sense of accomplishment, of freedom, of autonomy".

Cupolillo and Freitas (2007) state that becoming a subject depends on the possibilities one has of being different, of showing these differences, and of being "authorized" by others to do so. Essentially, Caed's psychopedagogical support strategies fulfilled this role, embracing students' differences, strengthening self-esteem, and helping them develop personal defenses against attacks on subjectivity and in favor of self-actualization. In this sense, becoming self-aware and being a subject is linked to a potential sense of inclusion.



Students with learning difficulties, disabilities, or psychiatric diagnoses who participated in the study revealed that they felt particularly challenged to develop subjective resources to overcome the challenges of higher education, as taking ownership of oneself and becoming an author depends on the perspective, authorization, and interest of others in approaching and recognizing differences as potential.

Therefore, inclusion moves away from the concept of framing (of personality, content, curriculum, perspectives, bodies, etc.) and is achieved through life and teaching-learning processes (in the educational sphere) that allow students to navigate "different paths unique to each individual" (Pavão; Souza, 2018, p. 56). By feeling welcomed by Caed and adapted to or included in the world of higher education, students were able to develop subjectively and, thus, leverage their learning paths, effectively demonstrating their knowledge. In other words, the subjective productions triggered by psychopedagogical support strategies fostered more creative learning.

Learning involves affective, symbolic, motivational, and contextual factors (Mitjáns Martínez, 2009). Therefore, emotions, subjective feelings about the university, experiences, motives, and needs of individuals are important for the development of creative learning and depend on the format of relationships established within the university environment. In this regard, believing in students' potential, personalizing learning, and encouraging critical thinking and a reflective stance are crucial elements for providing more qualified learning (Amaral; Mitjáns Martínez, 2006, 2009; Mitjáns Martínez, 2009).

The field research conducted in this study shows that Caed's psychopedagogical support strategies provided the necessary support (dialogical, affective, and constructive-interpretative) that fostered connection, motivation, and the construction of meaning to help students overcome obstacles in higher education. Recalling the elements presented at the beginning of the article, regarding excess and scarcity in higher education, a connection is drawn between scarcity and the limits of Caed's work, which is insufficient to change the operational structure of an entire institution.

One of the weaknesses of this Coordination lies in its punctuality in attending to referred students, which hampers their ability to engage in collective action, prioritizing flexibility, accessibility, acceptance, and inclusion in the academic environment. Furthermore, although active as a microsocial space for change and resistance, the Caed does not intervene in the more rigid processes that encompass classes, work organization, excessive demands, ineffective and meaningless teaching methods for students, and situations of harassment and violence at the University, which are supported by the claim that this is a structural or cultural problem (Magnago, 2024). However, it is precisely this hardened foundation that must be addressed, so that something new can replace the discomfort caused by these excesses.

Furthermore, raising awareness and mobilizing the academic community, especially faculty and management, to adopt a critical-reflective stance is a challenge that arises in the daily lives of educational institutions, and this endeavor cannot be limited to a single sector or support space. Therefore, intersectoral work is of paramount importance to expand care, humanization, attentiveness, active positions, and support for students in higher education. Intersectoral collaboration, which is constantly being implemented, has not yet become the norm for overcoming obstacles and enhancing the implementation of inclusive actions, which requires greater attention from all participants in academic management and organization.

Finally, another weakness is the scarcity of technologies (soft, soft-hard) that enable expanded channels of listening, dialogue, and connection between support services, Learning Center management, faculty, and students. Given these weaknesses and limitations, the institutional structure

lacks intersectionality, flexibility, and consideration for unique individuals, all of which are necessary to welcome better, including, and deliver quality higher education. Thus, the final analysis of this text focuses on proposing alternatives that prioritize the transformation of the university space by establishing networks of connections between practices, individuals, and projects.

Merhy et al. (2003) use the term "soft technologies" to describe interpersonal relationships based on characteristics such as values, understanding, and invention. Furthermore, they emphasize that one can apply some healthcare strategies in the educational field. These include **matrix support** and the **development of care pathways**, both with a preventive focus, capable of achieving broad results in the fields of humanization, management, and university education.

**Matrix support** is understood as a device for intersection and exchange between teams/professionals, being powerful for activating intersectionality. Therefore, for this paper, we suggest expanding the spaces for intercession within higher education. According to Merhy (2004), these spaces are spaces for relationships that arise through the encounter of individuals, which can be activated from the micro to the macro level. The proposal here is to create moments of cooperation, beginning with the guaranteed participation, for example, of student support sectors in Center Meetings, or institutional representatives responsible for accessibility, learning, and affirmative action, among others.

Also, to promote shared responsibility for care, it is beneficial to hold periodic extended meetings with all staff working in student reception and care services, the organization and format of which can be determined by institutional management. This strategy aims to prevent fragmentation from the perspective of the subjects—university students—and to propose, in addition to the Coordination of activities, a space for relationships, reflection, and the exchange of experiences. Creative ideas generally result from this shared environment.

The use of group dynamics to generate ideas encourages the appreciation of differences and mutual support; it constitutes an exercise in collective agency, consistent with the vision of building pathways of care. Building lines of care or attention for higher education students presupposes understanding the available technologies, establishing meanings and associations between them, and organizing methodologies for developing joint, transparent, and humanized work. The objective of matrix support is to promote rapprochement between managers, workers, and higher education students, thus creating a network of connections between subjects, as well as combined, contextualized, and effective practices to overcome the challenges of the academic environment.

Flexibility, accessibility, welcoming, and inclusion are concepts that need to be part of group discussions, as well as collective actions involving students and teachers in the classroom. Regarding the latter, we can cite the initiative of the Pedagogical Support Department of the Health Sciences Center of the Federal University of Santa Maria - RS, located at the same institution where we conducted the research, but with actions limited to a Specific Teaching Center.

The project, classified as Institutional Development and registered with the UFSM Teaching Information System under number 061406, yielded tangible results in terms of the preventive approach to mental health care. In practice, in collaboration with the Center's Directors and Course Coordinators, the Pedagogical Support Department played an important role as an early intervention for the Center's first-year classes, working through group dynamics and case discussions on topics that are crosscutting across the University.

This project facilitated students' attribution of meaning to their academic journey and the creation of an environment conducive to psychological, social, and pedagogical development. These classroom Insertions addressed relational and group coexistence aspects, creating a dialogic and

critical-reflective space for the university context and the different forms of adaptation and learning. The benefits observed from this initiative (initiated in July 2023) are referred to as "increased student communication and expressiveness in the classroom; greater closeness between students and SAP; and students more likely to ask for help when needed." In this case, the students' production of meanings occurred through openness to dialogue, which also prompted their positions.

It is worth emphasizing that "positioning oneself" should and can only be encouraged when the other's position (their difference) is viewed with interest. For example, how emotions are processed, individual paths defined, and how subjective resources are used are issues that are part of and differ from person to person. They acquire meaning when one understands that the plot of a life

appears in the subjective senses that configure the activity of learning and are responsible for many of the behaviors that are often described in a pejorative way associated with school failure, such as indiscipline, dispersion, apathy, indifference, etc. [...] (Mitjáns Martínez; González Rey, 2017, p. 179-180).

These individual characteristics are highlighted to indicate that they are present in the university teaching-learning environment; they will often require a flexible, sensitive approach and consideration for unique individuals, reinforcing once again that individuals' interpersonal relationships shape individuals' experiences and needs, and will consolidate diverse, more or less qualified learning. Therefore, the individualized and investigative approach of professors and course coordinators, for example, reduces the distance between them and students and increases the chances of a solid, trusting relationship of mutual involvement and commitment.

It is necessary to connect with students to get to know them and come to understand their difficulties and strengths. Therefore, classes should include, beyond the presentation of content, spaces for dialogue, discussions, and the Coordination and evaluation of progress in the subject. González Rey (2006) emphasizes that learning occurs through the constant construction of ideas. Therefore, the classroom must be an environment conducive to this movement of thought and reflection. To this end, the presence of celebratory occasions, or the use of educational and dialogic games in the classroom, can generate enriching experiences that promote closeness, flexibility, and appreciation of differences (Canal; Almeida, 2023). Sensitivity permeating human relationships is essential to reducing the barriers that impede accessibility.

Canal and Almeida (2023) state that moments of interaction and integration in classes provide effective learning and can overcome curricular barriers. They argue that teacher training courses and programs should focus on innovating practices and knowledge and expanding educational perspectives for university students.

Up to this point, we have discussed the uniqueness of individuals, the appreciation of differences, collaborative work between student support sectors, the advocacy of intersectionality and shared responsibility in care delivery, and the focus on prevention, welcoming, and flexibility as ways to include individuals and make the academic environment accessible. However, effective communication remains crucial to ensure that student support processes and the creation of care pathways are carried out with greater agility and precision. As Campos and Domitti (2007) rightly point out, matrix support operates based on the logic of co-management of care and networking, in order to avoid fragmented practices. It essentially consists of the exchange of knowledge between services to provide humanization, implicit reception, and inclusion.

In higher education, as in other fields, the effectiveness of multidisciplinary and/or multiprofessional processes depends on the quality of communication between individuals, between

departments, or even between departments and management. In this regard, beyond the aforementioned interpersonal interactions, the use of some complex technologies (such as software) is proposed to improve student service. The suggestion is, in fact, the development of an integrated digital system that captures all aspects of a student's academic life, from their entry into higher education to data prior to admission, such as income and family structure, to factors related to academic performance, difficulties experienced by the student, institutional services accessed, service characteristics, problem-solving ability, follow-up, referrals, and so on.

This comprehensive overview provides some clues about the path taken by students within the University, the interpretation of those who accompanied or welcomed them, and the types of assistance requested, compiling essential situations that will bring workers closer to students, other workers, and also to management. Furthermore, it is considered feasible to develop a digital instrument or tool for self-assessment by students themselves (or anyone who wishes to use it). A draft of such a tool would encompass student personality attributes, such as rigidity, malleability, perfectionism, self-demanding, competition, etc., and how relationships are formed within the University, with connections that are more positive and satisfying or negative and unsatisfactory.

It would encompass factors related to academic performance and the student's perception of their progress, with notes such as developed, developing, or experiencing difficulties. In situations considered difficult, it would also be appropriate to encourage students to consider possible solutions and whether these depend on themselves, family support, relationships with peers or teachers, pedagogical or psychological resources, accessibility, or combating violence and discrimination inherent in the educational sphere. Finally, there could be a self-conceptualization of the student's current state of mind.

This instrument would be offered to students for reassessment every six months until the end of the course. The digital approach, so familiar to students, will have a positive impact on their self-perception throughout the course, their academic experiences, and their strengths and weaknesses, aiding in autonomy and self-regulation of learning, social interactions, and needs for support.

## Final Considerations

Psychopedagogical support offered to higher education students is an important tool in overcoming obstacles along the academic path. However, this study found that the discussion goes beyond the existence of a service that "addresses" the everyday situations experienced by students and, perhaps, also by professors, technicians, and other public university staff.

To effectively change the quality of life, study, and education within Federal Higher Education Institutions, it is necessary to address the root causes of the problems that led to student requests for assistance. In this article, these underlying challenges are presented as excesses, as they refer to extreme and recurring situations. Therefore, excessive demands, competitiveness, rigidity during classes, assessments, and scheduling decisions gradually define the institution's operating style, as if forming a university "personality."

Thus, once again, the exclusions seen throughout history are repeated, when individuals affected by the mechanism are led to a specific sector to create mechanisms for coping and adapting to the context, which is, in fact, sick. What happens, then, is that the "weakest" and "most susceptible" are helped to change themselves to cope with the reported excesses. Moreover, this is where the role of the many, and increasingly numerous, student assistance and support centers comes in. They address the effects, not the causes, of the problems, much like the well-known biomedical model.

The Educational Actions Coordination, as one of these spaces, is a benchmark for supporting and welcoming students, positively impacting their academic trajectory. However, this logic is visibly reversed, and the proposals outlined at the end of this article demonstrate the need to shift attention from the organic (from what appears, from the side effect—vulnerable students) to the experiential. This transition from the organic to the experiential is idealized through networks that connect—connecting people, collective actions, practices, and projects. Thus, they mobilize rigid structures, create a deliberate sense of estrangement, sustain previously unthinkable positions, and position themselves critically and reflectively.

The ultimate goal is to transform the university environment through humanization, prevention of exclusion and mental illness, cooperation between sectors, and the articulation of knowledge. All of this aims to produce new meanings for academic experiences and build a dignified, high-quality, and life-affirming educational environment. A limitation of this study is the lack of knowledge about the human and financial resources needed to implement the proposals outlined in the analysis. This limitation itself necessitates future work to assess the University's availability of resources to implement this more experiential project, which involves the development of Higher Education Connection Networks.

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