

## PSYCHOLOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL: PERFORMANCE IN POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTES

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**ABSTRACT.** The Polytechnic Institutes are training spaces of professional nature that integrate the higher education subsystem of Portugal. The expansion and democratization policies for higher education in Portugal required the expansion of academic support actions and hospitality for polytechnic institutes students. Thus, the presence of psychologists has been progressively implemented in the support services for higher education students in Portugal. This qualitative study aimed to map the performance of psychologists in higher education at the Polytechnic Institutes to characterize the practical actions developed by these professionals. It was also intended to broaden the debate on the contributions of school psychology in non-university training spaces, considering the specificities and the diverse demands of the academic community in Portugal. To this end, interviews were conducted with psychologists working in these contexts. Results show that the individualized interventions' approach is still prevalent. However, there are also records of the expansion of psychologists' work in the context of Polytechnic Institutes through programs for the development of transversal competences and for supporting the student's entry into the labor market.

**Keywords:** School psychology; higher education; vocational education.

## PSICOLOGIA NA EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR EM PORTUGAL: ATUAÇÃO NOS INSTITUTOS POLITÉCNICOS

**RESUMO.** Os Institutos Politécnicos são espaços formativos de cariz profissional que integram o subsistema da educação superior em Portugal. As políticas de expansão e democratização da formação superior no país requereram a ampliação das ações de apoio acadêmico e de acolhimento aos discentes dos politécnicos. Nesta direção, a presença de psicólogos tem-se afirmado progressivamente nos serviços de apoio ao estudante da educação superior em Portugal. O objetivo deste estudo qualitativo foi mapear a atuação de psicólogos na educação superior dos Institutos Politécnicos, a fim de caracterizar as ações práticas desenvolvidas por esses profissionais. Pretendeu-se também ampliar o debate sobre as contribuições da psicologia escolar em espaços de formação não universitários, considerando as especificidades e as diversas demandas da comunidade acadêmica em Portugal. Para tanto, foram realizadas entrevistas com os psicólogos atuantes nestes contextos. Os resultados revelam que ainda prevalecem intervenções sob o enfoque individualizante. Mas

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também há registros da ampliação da atuação de psicólogos na educação superior no contexto dos Institutos Politécnicos por meio de programas de desenvolvimento de competências transversais e de apoio ao ingresso no mercado de trabalho.

**Palavras-chave:** Psicologia escolar; ensino superior; ensino profissionalizante.

## **PSICOLOGÍA EN LA EDUCACIÓN UNIVERSITARIA EN PORTUGAL: ACTUACIÓN EN LOS INSTITUTOS POLITÉCNICOS**

**RESUMEN.** Los politécnicos son espacios de formación de carácter profesional que integran el subsistema de educación universitaria en Portugal. Las políticas de expansión y democratización de la formación universitaria en el país requirieron la ampliación de las acciones de apoyo académico y de acogida a los discentes de los Politécnicos. En este sentido, la presencia de psicólogos ha afirmado gradualmente en los servicios de apoyo a los estudiantes de educación universitaria en Portugal. El objetivo de este estudio cualitativo fue realizar un mapeo de la actuación de psicólogos en la educación superior de los Institutos Politécnicos, a fin de caracterizar las acciones prácticas desarrolladas por esos profesionales. También se pretende ampliar el debate sobre las aportaciones de la psicología escolar en espacios de formación no universitaria, teniendo en cuenta las especificidades y las diversas demandas de la comunidad académica en Portugal. Para ello, se entrevistaron a psicólogos que actúan en ese entorno. Los resultados revelan que aún prevalecen las intervenciones bajo una mirada individualizada. Pero también hay registros de una ampliación de la actuación de psicólogos en los Institutos Politécnicos por intermedio de programas de desarrollo de competencias transversales y apoyo para el ingreso al mercado laboral.

**Palabras clave:** Psicología escolar; enseñanza superior; enseñanza profesional.

### **Introduction**

The Polytechnic Institutes are responsible for offering higher education courses of professional nature in Portugal. According to Urbano (2011), these institutions have followed the changes brought by the democratization policies of access to Portuguese higher education. In addition to the new entry opportunities for students, these changes reinforced the institutional commitment in the face of regional, economic and social demands in the most different districts of the country, especially in the lower growth areas of the interior.

In Portugal, polytechnic education integrated the higher education subsystem in 1979. At that time, the Institutes experienced their first phase of expansion in response to the great demand of the academic community for this course modality. However, the growth failure or dropout rates in school and the high number of graduates who did not enter the labor market have become elements of concern and contradiction for the Polytechnic (Urbano, 2011). In this context, the students' developmental trajectories, as well as the changes in the Polytechnic scenario, are configured in dimensions of interest to all educational actors, including the performance of psychologists.

In the Portuguese context, traditionally, Higher Education Institutions accompany their academics, regarding learning difficulties and psychosocial development needs, through Psychological Support Services (Dias, 2006). With the expansion of these services, psychological support focused on actions for academic adaptation and interventions for the

personal development and well-being of students (Ferreira, 2009). Besides, psychotherapeutic interventions, vocational guidance and counseling were also offered in order to guarantee learning and success processes to the students (Dias, 2006; Feitosa, Marinho-Araujo, & Almeida, 2016).

The psychologists' performance in Psychological Support Services in higher education is recorded in studies involving the teaching, learning and professional development processes of students. Academic productions involving the intervention of these professionals discuss the following themes: (a) admission to higher education (Balsa, 2008; Dias & Sá, 2013); (b) academic success (Almeida, 2007; Almeida & Soares, 2004) and (c) transition to the labor market (Monteiro & Almeida, 2015; Vieira, 2012).

Specifically, in polytechnic education, studies have been more residual concerning higher education (Urbano, 2011; Leão, 2007). Similarly, research on the practices of psychologists in the Psychological Support Services at the Polytechnics still points to lower production (Seco, Pereira, Santos, Filipe, & Alves, 2008) when compared to the productions involving this performance in university spaces in Portugal (Bisinoto, Marinho-Araujo, & Almeida, 2014; Ferreira, 2009; Gonçalves & Cruz, 1988; Mendes, Abreu-Lima, Almeida, & Simeonsson, 2014).

Defined by higher education institutions in non-university spaces, the Polytechnics record the psychologists' work mainly in the Psychological Offices or the Social Action Services. These institutional sectors have a structure for monitoring the students' academic trajectory regarding performance and professional training (Psychological Offices) or for psychological assistance to students in social vulnerability (Social Action Services). In both work contexts, the intervention of this professional is aimed at promoting the well-being of students, academic success and qualified training.

It is worth noting that higher education appears as a privileged teaching space that can be designed, maintained and restructured according to the historical and cultural changes experienced by society, configuring itself as a powerful context for the intervention of school psychology. According to Marinho-Araujo (2009), at the higher education level, the training processes of autonomous, critical, protagonist and ethically-socially subjects committed with their reality are highlighted and constituted. In this sense, the school psychologist's performance can promote collective actions in favor of the complex psychological development of those who integrate the educational space, favoring changes in their daily institutional life (democratization of access, permanence and inclusion) and qualified training (Marinho-Araujo, 2016).

Given this context, this study aims to map the performance of psychologists at Polytechnic Institutes to characterize the practical actions developed by these professionals. It is also intended to broaden the debate on the contributions of school psychology in non-university training spaces, considering the specificities and the diverse demands of the academic community in Portugal.

## Method

The interpretative character about the phenomena investigated in a given reality defines the qualitative approach. According to González-Rey (2005), knowledge production occurs through the interrelation of the theoretical model that guides the research and the methodological resources chosen to answer the study questions throughout the information construction.

The first stage of this research involved gathering information about the functioning of Psychological Support Services at Polytechnic Institutes. Initially, visits to the institutional websites were made to identify which were the Polytechnics that had in their technical staff the Psychology professional. Next, the contacts of the Polytechnic psychologists were located and, by e-mail, the research information and the invitation to the interviews were sent<sup>5</sup>. From these contacts, nine professionals expressed interest in participating voluntarily. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the workplace of each participant.

The interview script was composed of two main areas: (a) characterization of the psychologist's training and (b) description of the psychologist's performance. For the analysis of the information, we opted for the codification and categorization proposed by Flick (2009). The interviews were transcribed and interpreted from the perspective of school psychology in higher education.

The speeches of each participant were identified by the acronym 'P', plus numbering among 1 to 7, as they refer to the total number of respondents. It is worth mentioning that the P7 codification incorporated the reports of two more psychologists, because, at the request of these professionals, the interview was conducted in a group. Next, the research and participants' scenario will be presented, as well as the analysis of the information constructed through the interviews.

## **Research scenario and participants**

The Polytechnic higher education in Portugal consists of 15 public Polytechnic Institutes (Barcelos, Beja, Bragança, Castelo Branco, Coimbra, Guarda, Leiria, Caldas da Rainha, Peniche, Lisbon, Portalegre, Porto, Santarém, Setúbal, Tomar, Viana do Castelo and Viseu). Integrated to this subsystem are the non-integrated Higher Schools (Coimbra, Lisbon, Porto and Estoril), two Military and Police Education Institutions (Lisbon and Setúbal) and polytechnic teaching structures in seven universities (Azores, Algarve, Aveiro, Évora, Madeira, Minho, Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro).

In this study, the survey of Psychological Support Services took place exclusively with public Polytechnic Institutes. We opted for this cut due to the changes in educational policies in the last three decades in Portugal that caused continuous adjustments in the offer of education in these training spaces. Among them, it is highlighted the reduction of the regional cleavage with the provision of polytechnic education, through the defense of equal access to higher education for all (Simão, Santos, & Costa, 2002). The presence of these Polytechnics, in different locations in the country, allowed the promotion of new possibilities of offer and the attraction of different audiences.

## **Results**

The initial results showed that among the 15 public Polytechnic Institutes mapped in Portugal, in 14 of them, it was identified the presence of Psychological Support Services offered to the respective academic community, mostly to their students. From this amount, in 12 Institutes, the Psychology Offices integrate the structure of Social Action Services, whose objective is to provide support to students in situations of economic vulnerability or with specific academic needs. In these offices, there is a record of at least one psychologist per team (Rede de Serviços de Apoio Psicológico no Ensino Superior [RESAPES], 2014).

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<sup>5</sup> The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Brasília, via Brazil Platform, Opinion n° 651.082.

In this study, nine psychologists working in the Psychological Support Services and/or Social Action Services of the Polytechnic Institutes distributed in the North, Central and South of Portugal participated. From these services, only the Institute of the Central region consisted of four professionals in charge of the students' demands.

Of these participants, five professionals develop their activities in the Student Support Offices, belonging to the administrative structure of the Social Action Services. Although the number of professionals does not correspond to a representative sample of what is offered in the context of higher education in the country, the respondents contributed to the analysis of the discussions presented below.

### **Psychologist professional training who performs at the polytechnic institutes**

The first categorization that emerged from the results was defined by 'professional training'. This category corresponds to the aspects that characterize the initial and complementary training of the psychologist who performs at the Polytechnic Institute.

In the case of Polytechnics, the psychologists who participated in this research are graduated in Psychology, in a curriculum before the Declaração de Bolonha (1999). The qualification of these professionals was concentrated in two major emphases: the generalist and the clinic.

In Portugal, psychologists, who studied for five years and did not specialize in areas applied to education, opted for the areas of Clinical and Health Psychology (Mendes, Abreu-Lima, & Almeida, 2015). In the Polytechnic Institutes, this choice can be seen in the responses of four psychologists. These professionals reported having expertise in different approaches to clinical psychological intervention (psychopathologies, neuropsychology, humanistic and cognitive-behavioral approach). As for the other participants, two hold a Master's degree in Educational Psychology and Human Sexuality, one with a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology, and two of them did not mention other training in their professional career.

Although the Portuguese educational context is favorable to the existence of Psychological Support Services in different training spaces, school psychology was not a recognized and popular area in the initial training of psychologists in the country. The production of Jimerson, Skokut, Cardenas, Malone and Stewart (2008) already highlighted that, in different countries, psychologists working in the school context had initial training in a generalist character, with variations in the level of clarity and specificity of the conception about school psychology. In line with this study, Mendes et al. (2014) pointed out that, for many years, in Portugal, the psychologist worked in the educational system with this general education and developed specific skills based on the exercise of his practices in the most different demands of schools.

Although the majority of Polytechnic psychologists did not have a basic education in school psychology, the performance of these professionals in higher education led them to invest in continuing education, involving the areas: Psychology and Education. In the report of the participants, dealing with the demands and particularities of higher education led them to seek courses that would lead to the development of skills to work with cases of special educational needs and to propose multidisciplinary interventions in care for young academics.

These examples can be interpreted as mobilization of these professionals to adopt strategies that provide a better understanding of the specificities of their initial training before the context of their performance. In different scenarios, the investment in psychologist

training can contribute to feed back the theoretical-methodological basis of this professional performance, enabling the consistent and intentional development of his practical actions. In this sense, through continuous training, psychologists can advance in a performance that is expanded, compromised, and that, to a certain extent, involves all educational actors (Marinho-Araujo & Almeida, 2010).

From the description of the psychologists' training, it is possible to introduce the discussion about the choices of these professionals in directing their performance to support the educational and psychosocial trajectory of academics at the Polytechnic Institutes. Below, the participants' reports about the actions developed in the context of higher education.

### **Psychologists' performance at the Polytechnic Institutes**

The second category identified was 'psychologist performance'. Through this category, it is possible to analyze the participants' reports about their practices at the Polytechnic, the guidelines that orientate their professional behavior, the educational actors involved and the challenges present in the daily life of this professional. The psychologist's performance at the Polytechnic Institutes points to a possible scenario of institutional and academic community recognition about the benefits that psychological intervention can bring to the promotion of the well-being of students, of academic success and students qualified training.

The interviewees' reports, described below, demonstrate the consolidation of Services at the Polytechnic. Considering the first formatting of the service, P1 pointed out that the

The service was created in 2001 and is working so far. At the time, the Office had two emphases: one aimed at students and another at teachers [...]. Over time, the Service became more specialized and became known as part of the organization chart, not just a project, and a separate thing. Moreover, we are the same today: two psychologists, but with a permanent link to the institution. We have curricular internships with people in the 5th year of Psychology every year; we contribute to psychologists training.

In the speech of P2, the professional says that "[...] he performs in the Social Action Service, services that are mandatory in all Higher Education Institutions. At the Polytechnic, it is a requirement to have Psychology Services to support the student". In the sequence, P3 pointed out that at "[...] the Polytechnic, the psychologist's work has, in his regiment, the direction to carry out the psychological monitoring of the student". In the speech of P7 / P8 / P9, these professionals signaled that "[...] the Service's activities are following a general regulation created for the conception of this Service at the Polytechnic, where the guidelines and ways of contacting the professionals are presented".

From these reports, it was observed that there is, initially, an institutional position in complying with the guidelines of the Legal Regime of Higher Education Institutions (Lei nº 62, 2007) when they design the structures and make Psychology Services feasible at the Polytechnic Institutes. In P1's speech, it is understood the consolidation trajectory of the psychologist's performance, briefly highlighting the beginning of the offer and the way this service has been consolidated in these training spaces. Still, in relation to the highlights of the speeches of the participants P2, P3 and P7 / P8 / P9, it was evident that the intervention proposal of these professionals is aimed at the psychological support of the student.

Even that the performance proposals could eventually be extended, for example, to teachers, the focus of psychological intervention is aimed solely at meeting the demands of

students. In line with the reports of these participants, Bisinoto et al. (2014) pointed out that, in the Psychological Support Services of university contexts in Portugal, the school psychologist has still directed his practices towards individualized and dedicated service, almost exclusively, to students. In this sense, it is apparent that the psychologist's performance in the context of the Polytechnics is associated with the practices that combine the clinical bias of the intervention with the dimensions that permeate the students' academic daily life.

Regarding the activities of psychologists, at the Polytechnics, it can be evidenced by the speech of the participants that the performance is developed based on two major axes of intervention: clinical psychological support and support for students' academic and professional development. The psychological intervention of a clinical character is internationally recognized as one of the most common practices in the context, involving Psychology and Education (Jimmerson et al., 2008). In Portugal, Gonçalves and Cruz (1988) envisioned therapeutic support actions for students as a perspective of the psychologist's performance in the university context in a remedial character and, regarding support in the academic and professional training of students, they highlighted the psychologist performance of the preventive and developmental character.

In the case of the Polytechnics, the participants were unanimous in describing practical actions aimed at psychological consultations and clinical interventions as highlights of their work. P1's speech pointed out that "[...] we offer specific activities for the student's entry, sequence and leaving from the institution. Besides, this always implies a transversal way to psychological consultation and individual psychotherapy". In a similar direction, P2 says that "I carry out a clinical psychological support consultation [...] as my intervention is focused on clinical issues, I do not establish many conversations with other professionals".

P3's description signaled that "[...] my work goes through many things: brief therapies, brief cognitive therapies, monitoring, educational and professional guidance, to be diversified". In the speech of P4, it was highlighted that "[...] we started with psychological care, clinical consultation; P5 also emphasized that he performs clinical care, psychology consultations, I work with psychotherapy, psychological interventions to the community, students, family members or whoever requests the service".

P6's report, in turn, was quite clear about the direction of his performance, "[...] this service is basically for individual psychological counseling sessions, nothing more". Moreover, finally, P7 / P8 / P9 stated that "[...] they are working with both psychological consultations and interventions in the scope of the clinic and with training in the scope of education".

Facing these reports, it appears that the choice for the clinical intervention of these psychologists is very much linked to the conception that the therapeutic support directed, mainly, to the student is what will allow dealing with personal and adaptive difficulties in higher education. Soares, Almeida, Diniz and Guisande (2006) defend the psychologist's performance through the therapeutic support of students to meet the difficulties of psychosocial development and possible problems of adjustment to the new academic reality. According to the authors, the challenges of students in living far from the family nucleus, having contact with a new model of teaching and learning, building new interpersonal relationships with colleagues and teachers, highlighting vocational projects and managing spaces of autonomy are the issues to be worked on by psychologists in a university context.

The practices identified in the participants' statements correspond to what is offered in the psychological support structures of Higher Education Institutions in the European

scenario (Jimmerson et al., 2008; Mendes et al., 2014; RESAPES, 2014). The survey carried out by RESAPES (2014) showed that, in higher education, it is very common for students to have both relational difficulties and personal and family problems, causing anxiety, mood swings, stress, low academic performance and even school dropping out or delay in completing courses.

Even if the literature in the area highlights the relevance of offering individual psychological support to students and argues about the possible demands that constitute the training process of these students, it is necessary to make it clear that strictly psychotherapeutic practices in the school context can naturalize complaints and blame the student before adaptive problems and probable academic failures. In these formative spaces, it is necessary to promote the integration of young people in academic spaces through interventions involving different educational actors, considering the needs of the student, the teacher and, also, the institutional context itself (Almeida, 2007).

Concurrently with the psychological intervention offered to students, psychologists also support the academic and professional development of students. In this approach, for psychologist P1 what is offered is

[...] a range set of available training to do interventions, which some can be of more awareness and others of more training character. We work the aroused aspects offering more teamwork, conflict management, success and society issues discussing, assertiveness and issues at other levels (mentoring and emotional project).

For P2, the academic development work involves “[...] vocational guidance, group work on topics of interest to the group, group choice and mediation, training, psychological assessment, time control and anxiety treatment”. Similarly, P4 highlights that the

[...] academic assistance extends to different forms: academic support in learning, academic performance [...] there are many forms, vocational guidance, health promotion initiatives, informationleaf lets that we distribute in the schools in order to get in touch with students, without being an imposing form.

For P5, this service dimension mainly covers

[...] the problems inherent in the transition of young people to the adult world. Basically, issues involving anxiety, panic attacks, phobias and social anxiety have predominated. In some cases, the difficulty of international students has to be dealt with integration difficulties.

In the P7 / P8 / P9 report, they state that “[...] psychologists develop actions that contemplate the study strategies, time management, motivation and preparation for the evaluation exams, providing better adaptation of the student to academic reality and success”.

Based on these reports, it appears that the preventive and developmental actions adopted in the university context (Gonçalves & Cruz, 1988) also appeared in the reality of the Polytechnics psychologists. At first, these practices may be correlated with the psychologists' training trajectory who are ahead of these services, since most of them are graduates from a traditional generalist or clinical curriculum. Also, the identity of the professionals working in the investigated educational context is based on therapeutic psychological intervention.

The progressive increase of students number and heterogeneity, the difficulties identified in their adaptation and academic achievement, the transition to higher education, the enhancement of learning processes, the fight against factors of failure and school dropout and the orientation of the vocational and professional trajectory may also justify the



relevance attributed to the performance of these psychologists along with them. In this direction, academic productions have argued that the different possibilities of psychological intervention in the university context may show the range of contributions for students' successful trajectory and the development of new potential during training (Bisinoto et al., 2014).

Considering the offer of higher education in a Polytechnics Institute, Ferreira, Seco, Canastra, Dias and Abreu (2010) pointed out that the actions performed by the psychologist can promote the psychosocial well-being of students and, consequently, to support the educational process and academic and professional success. In literature, the relevance of this intervention to the academic community is also discussed because with the promotion of students' personal development; it is possible to positively influence their developmental trajectory (Dias, 2006; Dias & Sá, 2013; Ferreira, 2009; Seco et al., 2008).

Regarding the support for the students' developmental trajectory, although the literature points to the vast benefits of the psychologist's performance at the higher education level (Bisinoto et al., 2014), the practical actions developed by this professional remain centralized in an only educational actor: the student. Understanding that Higher Education allows students to make different choices in their training path, the inclusion of opportunities in the course of their training trajectory, the construction of academic and professional relationships, the consolidation of changes in the scope of higher education and the strengthening of this community, may favor the defense of the expansion of psychological intervention to a more collective and institutional dimension (Marinho-Araujo, 2014). According to the author, the expansion of psychological intervention can favor the articulation among other professionals and internal policies, in order to promote the conscious and competent development of educational actors.

Among the set of activities reported by psychologists at the Polytechnics, there is the initial interest in interventions that include student follow-up programs in career guidance, in promoting autonomy and critical training, or even in conducting a development trajectory of technical and transversal skills throughout the training process. In the P1 report, it was identified that

[...] other types of training, more aimed at those entering the labor market, such as skills for employability, focused on alternatives for job search, preparation for both the curriculum and interviews or the professional objectives, decision-making. Parallel to the development of group skills, there is the formation of a personal group and individual psychological consultation: psychological coaching [...] we study with students the challenges and opportunities presented by higher education and help to make this reflection on what skills are needed to acquire, to develop and then to manage these challenges and to turn them into opportunities.

The professional nature from the Institutes and, consequently, from the educational actors, imply the responsibility of training highly qualified professionals to competently meet the demands of the work world (Vieira & Marques, 2014; Vieira, 2012). It appears that the new reality of higher education in Portugal allows the articulation of psychologists to also act with the requirements of training by skills brought by the Bologna process, as well as to contribute to the construction of a new student profile, resulting from democratization access to higher education in Portugal.

The diversity of the practices of these psychologists demonstrated the different formative and theoretical affiliations in the performance at the Polytechnics. From the reports of these professionals, it is understood that there is a choice for clinical intervention in the educational context, based on approaches that go from the psychotherapy constructs to the development of technical and transversal skills of students. The way of implementing the

different practical actions reveals the multi-methodological character of psychology in this scenario, but it is still directed exclusively at the individual demands that involve the student's life trajectory and his adaptation path at the higher education level.

Even if, in the current scenario, academic productions involving the debate regarding the models of psychological intervention in this subsystem are residual, it is important to highlight the academic specificities required in non-university contexts to support the psychologist's practices. Besides, characterizing the profile for this professional performance may ensure the expansion and development of his actions, preparing the academic community for the technical and subjective issues inherent to qualified professional training.

## **Final considerations**

The changes in the context of higher education in Portugal provided relevant elements to understand the gradual increase in the students' quantity and heterogeneity, as well as the difficulties in their adaptation and academic achievement in the Polytechnics Institutes. Given this reality, the relevance of psychologists' performance has been increasingly evident in these institutions. Mapping the psychological intervention in that subsystem, taking as a reference the reports of psychologists on the wide range of practical actions planned and developed in Higher Education, allowed to analyze the aspects involving the training and performance of this professional in the Psychological Support Services of the Polytechnics.

The characterization of the psychologists' performance in the Institutes revealed, initially, the generalist and clinical aspects of the initial training of these professionals, as well as the predominance of psychotherapeutic emphases in their choices for continuing education. The actions based on psychological monitoring, student support in academic routines and the adaptation to higher education were identified as examples of classic interventions in the area and understood by psychologists as very necessary in the Polytechnics. On the other hand, it was registered the consolidation of some initiatives of these professionals directed to the programs of development of transversal competences in order to articulate the academic formation with the innovations and complexities scenario in the work world.

Identifying the training trajectory and analyzing the psychologist's performance at the Polytechnics allowed us to show that this professional understands the importance of basing himself on the epistemology of human development, from the use of psychological listening and articulation with group formation strategies, and intervening in an empathetic and responsible way towards the academic community. It is worth mentioning that the changes brought by the democratization of access to higher education and the possible impact on the redefinition of the students' profile at the Polytechnics, required from the psychologist, gradually, the extension of their focus in the intervention.

Characterizing the psychologist's performance in Polytechnics education allowed to show that his activities were built according to the transformations brought by the democratization of access to higher education and by the possible impact on the redefinition of the students' profile. This research revealed that, even though this performance is traditionally sustained in the individualized service to the student, there is the potential for broader interventions that promote dialogue between academic training and professional training in the context of Polytechnics.

As a proposition for the future, theoretical-methodological interlocutions in the professional educational context are recommended. In Brazil, there are studies about psychology in higher education that point to interventions with different educational actors in favor of the integral development of the student (Feitosa & Marinho-Araujo, 2016).

Due to similar relationships in this type of teaching between Brazil-Portugal, the model of institutional and collective action in higher education is advocated, which, through the mediation of educational actors development, may contribute to a return to social and reflective changes in the context of critical education (Marinho-Araujo, 2014). It is expected that, from this study, other theoretical articulations, research and experience reports will occur that discuss the interlocutions among the developmental trajectory, the contributions of the psychological intervention and the construction of the profile of this professional at the Polytechnics Institutes, in order to approach him of critical and innovative performance in the referred academic formation spaces.

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