

The perception of students and lecturer of Occupational Therapy on the importance of involvement in research projects: the MIND & GAIT Project

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Collaborating in research projects provides students with the exercise of scientific content and the development of critical capacity, making them an added value for the integration in the academic environment. Additionally, it increases student confidence and promotes teamwork, as well as reducing school unsucess (Ishiyama, 2014).

Being introduced in undergraduate programmes, it is considered an opportunity for students to develop academic and interpersonal skills (Frade, Chora, Marques, & Sim-Sim, 2013). For the past two decades, active learning has been widely discussed, with several studies demonstrating the effectiveness of the use of active teaching and learning methodologies in Higher Education, specially with the increase of motivation and interest, ease of understanding of knowledge, skills development and better collaborative working capacity (cooperative learning) (Machemer & Crawford, p. 11), either as a student or as a future professional (Moreira & Ribeiro, 2016).

This paper explores and describes the importance of using active learning, observing the fundamental exercise of Problem and Project-Based Learning (PPBL) through the collaboration of students in the development of the Cognitive Stimulation Program (CSP) for elderly population with Light Cognitive Decline (LCD), included in the Mind & Gait project¹. The PPBL allows the student to come across a new world: that of research, enabling the active search for information to support complex theoretical premises, consolidating and complementing with subjects learned in the different curricular units (Farias, Martin, & Cristo, 2015).

In this context, it was intended to answer the research question: In the perception of students and lecturers of Occupational Therapy, to what extent does participation in research projects contribute for student's pedagogical and scientific development? "

The goal of the present study was to understand the participants' perception of pedagogical and scientific gains of students after being actively involved in carrying out a research project. Therefore, it followed a qualitative approach, with a descriptive-exploratory purpose to understand and interpret phenomena based on the meaning attributed by the participants, describing the students' perception of their involvement in the development of CSP.

It was carried out a case study research design to capture the particularity and complexity of the case (Ribeiro, Brandão, & Costa, 2016) here consubstantiated in an active learning strategy on cognitive stimulation in the lecture room, with third-year Occupational Therapy students. For data collection, a semi-structured interview, a focus group, with key informants, and a questionnaire, were used for a set of participants (students and a professor) of the third year of Occupational Therapy Degree of the

¹A project aimed at developing a combined intervention, consisting of a program of cognitive stimulation (by computer and through assisted animal therapy) and by a program of physical activity. It also provides for the construction of an auto-blocking mechanism for walkers.



Polytechnic of Leiria. Data was processed resorting to content analysis according to Bardin and supported by WebQDA software.

It was observed the double involvement of students (as participants in the selection and development of the cognitive stimulation sessions and as a research team member). There was evidence of the pedagogical contributions, with perceived effective learning and scientific advancement, namely in the area of cognitive stimulation, particularly in the development of clinical reasoning. The students' practical involvement in research projects enhanced learning and knowledge acquisition, as well the advancement of research practice.

Keywords: Students. Higher education. Research. Cognitive Stimulation. Mind & Gait

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