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Learning to be an entrepreneur: Outlining aspects of social entrepreneurial learning at the university

Aprender a empreender: Delineando os aspectos da aprendizagem empreendedora social na universidade

Aprender a emprender: Esbozando aspectos del aprendizaje empresarial social en la universidad

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ABSTRACT

This article sought to understand entrepreneurial learning and the aspects related to its occurrence based on a study carried out with university students who founded startups at a Brazilian university. Narrative research associated with the focus group technique makes up the methodological course of the investigation. The results point to five aspects that influence the occurrence of learning at the university as a socially situated phenomenon: learning and experiences, the learning context, pedagogical design, multiple identities and social interactions. Knowing that students engaged in entrepreneurship may face a number of challenges, a holistic understanding of the social learning environment by educators can help make the university a safer place for student entrepreneurship.

Keywords: learning; entrepreneur; student; university; startup.

RESUMO

Este artigo buscou compreender a aprendizagem empreendedora e os aspectos relacionados a sua ocorrência a partir de um estudo realizado com estudantes universitários fundadores de startups em uma universidade brasileira. A pesquisa narrativa associada à técnica de grupo focal compõe o percurso metodológico da investigação. Os resultados apontam cinco aspectos que influenciam a ocorrência da aprendizagem na universidade como um fenômeno situado socialmente: os aprendizados e as vivências, o contexto de aprendizagem, o design pedagógico, as múltiplas identidades e as interações sociais. Sabendo que os estudantes envolvidos no empreendedorismo podem enfrentar uma série de desafios, uma compreensão holística do ambiente social de aprendizagem pelos educadores pode ajudar a tornar a universidade um lugar mais seguro para o empreendedorismo estudantil.

Palavras-chave: aprendizagem; empreendedor; estudante; universidade; startup.

RESUMEN

Este artículo buscó comprender el aprendizaje emprendedor y los aspectos relacionados con su ocurrencia a partir de un estudio realizado con estudiantes universitarios que fundaron startups en una universidad brasileña. La investigación narrativa asociada a la técnica de grupos focales conforma el derrotero metodológico de la investigación. Los resultados apuntan a cinco aspectos que influyen en la ocurrencia del aprendizaje como fenómeno socialmente situado: aprendizajes y experiencias, contexto, diseño pedagógico, identidades múltiples e interacciones sociales. Sabiendo que los estudiantes que participan en el espíritu empresarial pueden enfrentar una serie de desafíos, la comprensión holística de los educadores del entorno de aprendizaje social puede ayudar a hacer de la universidad un lugar más seguro para el espíritu empresarial de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje; emprendedor; estudiante; universidad; startup.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The question of whether entrepreneurship can be taught is obsolete (Kuratko, 2005). The first time an entrepreneurship course was held took place on February 1947 at Harvard's Business School, in the United States of America (USA). Since then, an infrastructure consisting of more than 2,200 courses in more than 1,600 schools and more than 100 entrepreneurship centers has emerged in the USA (Katz, 2003). However, the reality of entrepreneurship education as a force in business schools began in the early 1970s, with the rise in the number of colleges and universities offering courses related to entrepreneurship (Kuratko, 2005). In Brazil, the teaching of entrepreneurship dates from a more recent period when compared to the USA, being introduced in 1980 by Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV) through a discipline taught in a specialization course and dedicated to business creation (Fernandes, 2013).

The growth of teaching in universities highlights the relevant role of these institutions in articulating resources and learning opportunities for entrepreneurship. However, there are critical challenges in entrepreneurship education (Kuratko, 2005), since the creation or recognition of a business opportunity, as well as its transformation into a real company, is a complex human process, which can involve more than the resources and skills that the entrepreneur has to start a business.

In the light of the Historical-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) it is argued that, just as typically human characteristics are not present from the birth of the individual, the entrepreneur is also not an individual with innate characteristics. On the other hand, it is believed that "becoming" an entrepreneur is a process that originates in the interaction with their social world and this involves the educational processes of learning. The Historical-Cultural Theory theoretically supports the idea that the development of the human being depends on the learning carried out in a social group and that, in turn, learning is an articulation of external and internal processes, aiming at the internalization of cultural signs by the individual. This notion is central to this study, as it allows expanding the field of investigation of learning.

Regarding the use of this approach, it is considered that, although Vygotsky's work may relate to studies of child development, it should not be confused with a theory of child development (Cole & Scribner, 1991). Vygotsky's emphasis on the study of child development stemmed from his conviction that this was the elementary theoretical and methodological means to unravel complex human processes (Cole & Scribner, 1991).

Following Rae and Carswell (2001) and Rae (2003, 2004, 2005), it is argued that entrepreneurial learning is a social process in which people learn through social participation. Despite entrepreneurial behavior being an intensely social activity (Rae, 2003), traditional conceptions of learning, often interested in the individual's cognitive

processes, may have underestimated the social context in which learning takes place.

Recently, Williams-Middleton, Padilla-Meléndez, Lockett, Quesada-Pallarés and Jack (2019) investigated the influence of socialization on the constitution and integration of the learning process in universities in Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Thomassen, Williams-Middleton, Ramsgaard, Neergaard and Warren (2019) studied how a given learning context can affect the planning and practice of entrepreneurship education from a systematic literature review. Nielsen and Gartner (2017) addressed different aspects and forces of tension related to student and entrepreneurial identities at a university in Scandinavia and Pocek, Politis and Gabriellsson (2015) studied the social and situated learning experiences of students and entrepreneurs in a startup program collaborative.

These studies indicate a growing interest in the subject in the student context and the need to explore this topic in entrepreneurship research covering non-predominant conceptual and methodological repertoires, as well as its occurrence in different educational institutions. This finding is the starting point for carrying out this study, which is developed from the following research question: how does it occur and what aspects influence entrepreneurial learning in a Brazilian higher education institution?

The objective of this article is to understand the entrepreneurial learning process and the aspects related to its occurrence from a study carried out with university students who founded startups at a Brazilian university. Some argue that the emphasis placed by education-related literature on the content that is learned by students has resulted in a neglect of how learning is integrated into an individual's personal logic (Williams-Middleton et al., 2019), since learning is a human activity in which the entrepreneur acts on an opportunity to turn it into a business.

To achieve the research objective, a social approach to learning is adopted based on the Historical-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and on the work of Rae and Carswell (2001) and Rae (2003, 2004, 2005). The methodological framework that guided this study is based on narrative research (Alves & Blikstein, 2006; Gabriel, 2015), divided into two levels. First, the collection of narratives from research participants during three individual sessions. Subsequently, the exploration of emerging themes in four collective sessions using the focus group technique (Freitas & Oliveira, 2006).

Thus, this study presents its contribution at three levels. At the theoretical level, it contributes to a growing body of national and international academic works that expand the study of entrepreneurial learning in the student context, highlighting the occurrence of the theme in a Brazilian educational institution. Despite recent momentum, the literature on entrepreneurial learning is highly individualistic and fragmented, characterized by the recurrent use of experiential and organizational learning theories in the entrepreneurship process (Wang & Chugh,

2014). In Brazil, Vogt and Bulgacov (2018) understand that national research is basically characterized by the use of international theoretical bases of the early learning stages.

At the methodological level, the work combines research techniques at individual and collective levels, expanding the methodological repertoire of research in entrepreneurship and suggesting new methodological possibilities. Finally, at the practical level, the work contributes to discussions related to the development of pedagogical practices and institutional policies that qualify learning spaces for student entrepreneurship.

This work is divided into five parts. Following this introduction (part one), the second part presents the theoretical framework of the study within a social approach to entrepreneurial learning. The third part describes the methodological course of the research in two stages. Further on, in the fourth part, the analysis and discussion of the results are addressed. In the fifth part, the final considerations are presented, including the limitations and implications of the study.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Historical-Cultural Theory as a foundation for understanding learning

Lev Vygotsky (1978) initiated Historical-Cultural Theory in the 1920s and early 1930s (Engeström, 2001). Vygotsky's ideas sought to overcome innate postulates, arising from rationalist and idealist philosophy, based on the belief that the basic capabilities of human beings were innate (Rego, 2014). His ideas also sought to overcome environmentalist postulates of human development, which were inspired by the empiricist and positivist philosophy, which exclusively attributes the origin of human characteristics to the environment (Rego, 2014).

Faced with the limitations of these approaches to explain how typically human characteristics were established throughout human history and how they developed during the life of an individual, Vygotsky sought to study human development using a socio-interactionist approach, influenced by Karl Marx (Luria, 2018). Vygotsky demonstrated that typically human characteristics do not accompany the individual from birth, nor are they mere pressures from the external environment, but are constituted as a result of the individual's interaction with his social world (Rego, 2014). Human mental development, therefore, could not be dissociated from the historical development and social forms of human life. Palangana (2015) explains that for Vygotsky, human consciousness is the result of this historical process and its development is conditioned to the development of the social relations that it maintains with the outside world, so human consciousness is contaminated from the beginning by objective reality.

Vygotsky started from the studies of child development to understand complex human processes and, although he devoted most of his efforts to the study of the child, considering him as a student of child development is

a mistake (Steiner & Souberman, 1991). Palangana (2015) explains that Vygotsky broke barriers in the field of Psychology, as he was the first to describe the mechanisms by which culture is incorporated into the nature of each individual, emphasizing the social origins of language and thought.

In the light of the Historical-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) it is argued in this article that, just as typically human characteristics are not present from the birth of the individual, the entrepreneur is also not an individual with innate characteristics. At university, students develop entrepreneurial skills immersed in a social learning environment that involves the educational processes of learning. Vygotsky's work directs towards studying the learning activity as a socially situated phenomenon.

In this sense, entrepreneurial learning is explored as a social activity, in which people actively engage with their social world to act on opportunities. This activity covers the educational learning processes that are accompanied by pedagogical instruments developed in the teaching activities. The university, then, has a key role in promoting learning that anticipates the development of entrepreneurial skills.

In his studies, Vygotski (1991) observed that learning and development are interrelated from the first day of a child's life, but entering school would provide another type of knowledge, articulated with concepts already existing in their repertoire. Palangana (2015) and Rego (2014) agree that learning is present from the beginning of the child's life and that every learning situation always has a historical precedent, while producing something new in the child's development. Similarly, it is assumed that students' admission to university and their introduction to entrepreneurship do not occur dissociated from the learning and previous experiences that accompany them throughout their lives.

At the university, these learnings are combined with a type of knowledge, or scientific knowledge, carried out through teaching activities with the aim of promoting the development of still embryonic skills. For Oliveira (1993), the routines that normally occur at school within the teaching processes, such as demonstration, assistance and instructions in activities are fundamental. When learning situations are not conducive, cognitive development is impeded.

Vygotski (1991, p. 60) understands that "good learning" is one that anticipates development and, in this way, contributes to the triggering and maturation of embryonic cognitive functions. These routines also appear at the university and, in the same way, are essential for teaching entrepreneurship. They involve the use of methods, techniques and resources (Rocha & Freitas, 2014) and approaches in teaching entrepreneurship (Pittaway & Edwards, 2012).

As for the approaches, Pittaway and Edwards (2012) show that they can be presented as an "on", "to" or "through" type, all of which can be combined. While the first seeks to

provide knowledge about what entrepreneurship is and focuses more on knowledge than on experience, the second focuses on business content and skills from the combination of theory and practice; the third perspective, in turn, explores the value of experiential learning in which educational practice is incorporated into other courses, providing students with the experience of entrepreneurship as something relevant to their field of interest (Pittaway & Edwards, 2012).

Another relevant aspect of learning is the social environment itself. Oliveira (1993) shows the relevance of the environment arguing that a child, who grew up in an environment exclusively formed by deaf-mutes, would not develop oral language, even if the necessary innate requirements were present. In a Vygotskian perspective, the full development of the human being depends on the learning carried out in a certain cultural group; thus, in addition to the content taught, the context and learning interactions matter in the course of a child's development. The groups of children present diversity in terms of knowledge already acquired in different areas and a child who is advanced in a certain subject can contribute to the development of others (Oliveira, 1993).

Likewise, it is believed that group learning and social interactions should also be conceived as important aspects of entrepreneurial learning. At the university, students can operate on all the cultural material they have access to, observing, experimenting, receiving instruction from more experienced people and sharing their learning with other colleagues. In this sense, entrepreneurial learning is conceived as a social process in which students learn from their own experiences and from the experiences of others.

2.2 Entrepreneurial Learning in a Social Perspective

Entrepreneurial learning emerged as an important concept at the interface of entrepreneurship and organizational learning (Wang & Chugh, 2014) and contributed to a more paradigmatic shift in entrepreneurship. Wang and Chugh (2014) provide a comprehensive notion of the development of the theme as a field of research, identifying a variety of contents, mechanisms, processes and results that portray the domain of research in this area. The authors found that studies on this topic tend to draw on a wide range of theoretical insights, such as experiential learning (Minniti & Bygrave, 2001), organizational learning (Lant & Mezas, 1990), and social cognitive theory (Erikson, 2003).

Vogt and Bulgacov (2018) point out that at the beginning of research on the subject, the individual perspective characterized the works on learning, however, the use of a cognitive perspective based on authors such as Bandura or Piaget was recurrent. The authors also found the use of an experiential approach based on studies by Kolb (1984) and, later, a social perspective based on the model developed by Rae (2004a, 2004b).

In this study, entrepreneurial learning is conceived as a social process in which people learn from their

experiences and from the experiences of others (Rae & Carswell, 2001; Rae, 2003, 2004, 2005). Learning occurs through participation in the community or other networks through which people share experiences and meanings (Rae, 2005). Through social participation, people understand how things happen, establishing routines that work in certain situations (Rae, 2005), to act on opportunities that emerge as a result of their interaction with the social environment.

Despite the relevance of the social aspect in learning, traditional conceptions of learning often emphasize the individual's cognitive processes, underestimating the social environment in which learning takes place (Rae, 2003). Williams-Middleton et al. (2019) noted an emphasis in the literature in the field of entrepreneurship education on the content that is learned by students, paying less attention to the logic of integrating learning into an individual's personal repertoire and social context of learning.

In view of this finding, Williams-Middleton et al. (2019) investigated the influence of socialization on the constitution and integration of the learning process that leads to the development of entrepreneurial competence at the university. The authors emphasized students' learning experiences in relation to the university context and evidenced the development of entrepreneurial competence through socialization with key actors who share their own experiences and knowledge related to entrepreneurship, in addition to engagement in entrepreneurship supported by what is taught in classroom or extracurricular activities.

In this direction, this article deepens the research on entrepreneurship also considering the social learning environment as a source of the development of entrepreneurial skills. Methodologically, it is believed that it is essential to cover the experience of students and entrepreneurs in Brazilian educational institutions, since students involved in entrepreneurship for the creation of real companies may face a series of challenges. Next, the methodological course of the research is presented.

3 METHODOLOGY

To carry out this research, ten student founders of startups were invited to participate in the study, which was developed through 34 virtual meetings. To identify this profile, the chosen institution needed to have, among its teaching activities, a program to encourage entrepreneurship with a place for the creation of real companies. Participants were selected based on a double condition: i) bond with the institution as a student, since the institution supported companies started by entrepreneurs from the external community without the need to have been or to be a student; and ii) having started a venture with support provided by the university, that is, having founded a startup during an undergraduate course.

In this way, all participants should be founders of startups supported by the university's entrepreneurship program, therefore, involved in the entrepreneurial learning

process for the creation of a real company regardless of the stage of development of their startup, since the emphasis of research in the learning process was maintained. The number of participants was defined based on the number of students with startups supported by the institution. Although 15 ventures were identified at the institution, some entrepreneurs had already graduated.

The identification of the participants, as well as the access to them, was made possible by the work of one of the authors in the educational institution where the study was carried out. During the collection of narratives, it was found that one of the students [named as E3] had suspended the undergraduate course, but remained enrolled in a foreign language course offered by the university; in this case, it was decided to keep him among those surveyed. In general, the participants were students of engineering courses: computing, mechanics, electronics and control and automation, aged between twenty and 26 years.

After this definition, narrative research was adopted (Alves & Blikstein, 2006; Gabriel, 2004, 2015) associated with focus group techniques (Freitas & Oliveira, 2006). In order to ensure a robust analysis, the research combined the collection of narratives at two levels: individual and collective. These levels were named in this work as follows: (I) personal narratives and (II) establishing a collective dialogue. The narratives were collected from June to October 2019.

3.1 Level I - Personal narratives

The collection of the students' life narratives was carried out having as a starting point the conceptual model of learning defined by Rae (2005). Three meetings took place with each participant by videoconference, due to social distancing measures in the context of the covid-19 pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020), with a total duration of approximately three hours. These meetings were held using the skype and/or google meet platform to meet the resources accessible to the participants. The meetings were audio recorded and transcribed by the researchers.

In each meeting, the approaches sought to make them informal moments, but always keeping the focus on the narratives. In order to conduct these individual meetings, a standard instrument composed of themes and sub-themes of entrepreneurial learning was established, based on the Triadic Model of Entrepreneurial Learning (Rae, 2005). In the first one, each participant was invited to produce an oral account of their life story, involving events related to family, education, work and entrepreneurship.

In the second meeting, narratives related to the experience of building a startup at the university were collected; at this meeting, curricular and extracurricular activities were addressed from the perspective of students and the interactions that connected them with their social world, understanding the materialization of a startup through relationships with others. Finally, in the third meeting, students narrated events about exploring entrepreneurial

opportunities in the social learning space they were in, including topics related to goals, challenges and motivations for entrepreneurship.

After the completion of these meetings, the narratives were coded from the theoretical framework with the help of *Atlas.ti software* employed by the researchers. The common episodes among the different narratives were grouped within the same analysis code. From this analysis, 22 general codes emerged that were grouped into six main themes, namely: entrepreneur, university and entrepreneurship, practices, social relations, entrepreneurial opportunity and student and entrepreneur. These themes were collectively explored at the second level of material collection.

3.2 Level II - Creating a collective dialogue

At this level, a dialogue was created with and between the research participants based on the storytelling idea and theatrical images (Pässilä, Oikarinen, & Kallio, 2013) and on the focus group technique (Freitas & Oliveira, 2006), assuming a spect-acting position (Gill, 2011), during four virtual meetings with a total duration of approximately four hours and thirty minutes using the zoom platform, whose license was acquired by the researchers to meet the purpose of this research. For this, excerpts from the participants' narratives were selected and presented in the form of images, in the latter case, using photographs available on the institution's website or images available on the internet that represented scenes of students and entrepreneurs before and after entering the university, involved in different activities and spaces for social interaction, such as, for example, in childhood games, student projects or activities related to startups.

The meetings addressed the themes: entrepreneur, university and entrepreneurship, practices, social relations, entrepreneurial opportunity and student and entrepreneur, including issues related to the organization of study activities and entrepreneurship, the construction of entrepreneurial identity and university support for the creation of a real company. At the last meeting, participants were invited to produce two stories involving entrepreneurship at the university. For this, they were divided into two rooms created with resources from the zoom platform so that everyone could participate in the dynamics and collectively write these stories. The purpose of this dynamic was to stimulate reflection on the relationship of the characters created with the process of learning to undertake at university, understanding from the collective narrative how the character's story resonated in each one's personal history.

These meetings were recorded in audio and video and the transcripts were systematized using the *Atlas.ti software*. In general, 606 excerpts from the set of narratives and 22 codes were produced, 14 of which were directly related to the cut of this work. The set of narratives and records made up the corpus of analysis and interpretation of the research based on narratology (Alves & Blikstein,

2006). For this, the documents were exported to Microsoft Excel and the analyzes were inserted into a new column relating the empirical findings and the theoretical-empirical framework of the study. It was observed that the citations extracted from the analysis codes addressed social interaction, pedagogical design, the challenges faced

related to multiple identities, learning and the institutional context. In this sense, Table 1 demonstrates, through citation examples, the references that emerged as main aspects of social entrepreneurial learning at the university. Participants were named with the initials SE (Student-Entrepreneur) plus a number to distinguish them.

Table 1
Analysis references

Code	Quotation example	Reference
Business incubator	"We already had a vision of how the incubator worked, we had some colleagues who participated in the incubator (...)" SE6	Pedagogical Design, Context
Relationship Network	"These conversations were even more important than developing the project itself, because this is how you mature your mind and bring people together" SE3	Social interaction
Intermediation by the professor	"(...), but with the professor talking I think it stimulated a lot, (...), the way he talked about us believing in ourselves" SE4	Pedagogical design
Learning and learning	"In the beginning, I used to do a lot of observing [partner], what his daily life was like, what activities he did, what he was worried about (...)" SE1	Social interaction Learnings and experiences
Family Role	"My parents don't understand very well because they don't have an entrepreneurial tradition, so there are a lot of new terms that they end up not understanding, like startup" SE9	Multiple identities
Entrepreneurial opportunity	"During the internship I was already looking forward to having the opportunity to open my own company and start undertaking (...)" SE1	Context
Support for entrepreneurship	"My family supported me, helping me financially when I needed it (...)" SE7	Multiple identities
Entrepreneurship	"On this vision of entrepreneurship, at home it was always the opposite (...)" SE9	Multiple identities
Organization of activities	"We used to stay at the incubator at dawn to deliver the tasks, and still managed to do the tests (...)" SE8	Pedagogical Design
Work activity	"I liked being independent (...) so I worked to be able to pay for this ticket, and not depend on my parents (...)" SE8	Multiple identities
University	"I even tried to get to know a little more about the scientific area (...), I saw that I did not identify myself" SE10	Pedagogical Design, Multiple identities
School (Childhood and adolescence)	"This was at school and church, but in college I saw that the process I had at school was getting similar" SE4	Learnings and experiences
Identity	"I really wanted, (...), desperately, to get out of my house, not because I wanted to be away from my parents, but I really wanted to face the world, fail, get back on my feet again, find my way" SE1	Multiple identities
Mediation by material object	"Then I started selling marbles, (...). I used to play with the boys, I would take the marbles and sell to them" SE2	Learning and experiences

Source: Developed by the authors.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 The transition to university and the entrepreneurship

The narratives of the participants of this research describe experiences and learning that were built in different spaces of social interaction before and after entering the university. The work activity is characterized even before adulthood, as something that rehearses scenes from real life in children's games, when, for example, SE4 played with producing bracelets to sell at school, or in adolescence, when SE6 learned to repair and install electronic equipment, such as television antennas, observing and following the father's work. At one point, SE6 stopped just observing to put the learning into practice, helping neighbors in the neighborhood in exchange for some money. All participants describe episodes that enabled some kind of learning.

At the end of high school, attention turns to the professional career choices to be followed and the decisions to be made encompass the choice of course and educational institution. In some cases, this process is stimulated by the desire for freedom. SE1 emphasized in the

story how much he/she wanted to leave his/her parents' house to "face the world, fail, get back on my feet again, find my way". The transition to university is a process that involves choices and the family is part of them. SE2 and SE3 had the support of parents to study at a university located in another Brazilian Federation Unit. SE4 was surprised by the encouragement he/she received after entering the university. In all narratives, the participants demonstrate that the family played a prominent role in encouraging entry into the university and providing some level of support for its achievement.

Arriving at the university is a period of discovery, which involves the feeling of fear in the face of uncertainties. The fear of failing or not fulfilling all the tasks, the fear of not making friends, the fear of making mistakes or not taking risks outside the classroom. If, on the one hand, there are discoveries, on the other hand, they are not fully explored due to the feeling that circulates the atmosphere of arrival. SE4 recalled that at the beginning of college he/she was excited to the point of looking for activities outside the classroom, but it didn't take him/her long to wonder: "(...) will I be able to do all this? And the subjects, right?. SE4, then,

understood that this was not the time to get involved in extracurricular projects.

Overcoming fear is gradual and involves welcoming the academic community. When students feel safe, effective participation begins to happen. Their experience at the university does not develop in the same way, although something is similar among the majority: participation in extension projects is perceived as something more interesting than participation in scientific initiation projects, because, for them, in the activity extension, it is possible to put into practice the knowledge developed in the classroom, in a real way. It is in this context that entrepreneurship, as the possibility of creating a real company, appears.

In the extracurricular activities timetable, participants describe that the institution offered an optional entrepreneurship course, junior companies, entrepreneurship events, student entities, extension and scientific initiation projects, in addition to a business incubator that supported the creation of startups. Regarding the discipline of entrepreneurship, there was an understanding by those who took it that it could have a more practical approach. SE8 claimed that the approach was theoretical and the assessment was based on the delivery of a business plan, not offering practical experience in terms of entrepreneurial behavior. SE1 evaluated that the entrepreneurship discipline did not motivate him/her to undertake; SE9 also took the course when he/she was in the seventh semester, however, he/she was already undertaking. For him/her, part of the content developed in the discipline had already been learned in a practical way in the incubator.

SE4 had a different experience from colleagues. The period in which SE4 studied the entrepreneurship discipline coincided with the work he/she was developing in another discipline, an experimental software project. With this, SE4 was able to relate what he/she was learning in the two disciplines, that is, the concepts worked in the entrepreneurship discipline were transposed to the project developed in the other discipline. Despite criticisms regarding the discipline of entrepreneurship, the experience of SE4 indicated that the combination of disciplines could make learning more meaningful.

SE3 changed his/her mind about entrepreneurship after he/she entered university. For him/her, before thinking about having a company, it would be necessary to "(...) find a way to make [large financial capital]". SE2 told a story involving one of the company's partners regarding the idea of entrepreneurship at the beginning of college, which also reveals the distance from entrepreneurship. SE2 discovered that he/she could create a company at the university, but the novelty was not very well understood by his/her colleague (current partner):

"I said: 'I can open a company there'. He/She [his/her partner] said: 'no, the company is only after we graduate'. I said: 'no, there's a way you can open it as a student, there's a way you can put a project' and then that really instigated me to research about the incubator".

SE5 and SE6 had a different experience, because, even before entering the university, their parents were already engaged in business activity. In the case of SE5, his/her mother, a teacher and researcher, created a company that was supported by a business incubator. SE6, on the other hand, has lived since childhood with his/her parents' work in a local service-providing trade. It was in this context that SE6 believes he/she learned his/her first lessons about running a company. Even having some notion of the functioning of a company, SE6 and the other participants experienced entrepreneurship in a practical way at the university, making use of the support provided, mainly, by the business incubator, to create a startup.

The reasons that involve starting to explore an opportunity are not the same, but they all came about through institutional mechanisms and curricular and extracurricular activities. SE4 and SE6 had as a starting point an activity proposed in a discipline. The professor asked the class to develop a product that could have marketing applications and solve a problem in society. The idea of SE4 and SE6 came from a problem faced by their colleagues, identified through a virtual community formed by students. After presenting the project in the course, the professor encouraged its continuity in the university's business incubator.

SE10 took advantage of his/her knowledge and experience in extension projects, linking the initial idea with something he/she liked to do – researching cars – to develop her project. SE3 and SE2 had as their starting point an immersion event held by the university with the aim of encouraging the creation of startups, relating the initial idea with the parents' experience in agriculture and livestock. SE5 also had as its starting point an event to create startups, but external to the university.

SE1 followed another path, the idea came up in the workplace. SE1 was doing an internship at a technology startup, after some time working as an intern and influenced by the information he/she had about entrepreneurship at the university, SE1 suggested to his/her boss the creation of a startup, in which they could gather know-how from the university and startup where he/she worked around a new project.

SE8 was sensitized to entrepreneurship at an event held at the reception of freshmen, however, the interest in creating a company arose before, in a work conflict: "I left there [work], but there I already started to see that, like, I had a vision of how a company works, of how it should work (...)". At an event promoted by the university, a question asked by one of the speakers marked SE8: "(...) who has an idea?" and then I had no idea. This thing stuck in my head." This question prompted SE8 to attend entrepreneurship events and, in one of these events, together with other colleagues, the idea arose that started a journey of activities that took on other forms at the university.

The transition to entrepreneurship added a new learning object and a new identity to the trajectory of all participants: a startup and an entrepreneur identity. The

introduction of this object and this identity changed the routine of activities at the university. SE10 established an agreement with colleagues for the development of the startup, the rule required that everyone should have a full commitment. SE4 also stopped doing other things to dedicate to the project, things that for SE4 represented a part of his/her life.

SE3 has a story that describes work overload and how it reflected in his/her choices. His/her trajectory differs from the other participants because at a certain point he/she decided to suspend the undergraduate course and dedicate to the company. SE3 says that he/she had “an onset of depression” amidst the work overload and a drop in the school performance coefficient. SE8 maintained academic performance, but his/her health was impacted in some way and, therefore, it was necessary to reorganize his activities in priorities; the company was one of them: “(...) I always prioritized doing what needed to be done, instead of sleeping, instead of resting, you know? So you end up being much stressed, very anxious.”

The objective of creating a real company redirects learning efforts and modifies social relationships, either by expanding the relationship network or by straining some of its ties. Some of the participants believe that not all friends and family understand the decision to undertake at university. SE1's parents accepted his/her decision to start his/her own business, but this was only possible because he/she became financially independent.

SE8 describes that at first his/her father questioned the decision: “No, you have to focus on college, stuff like that, what if it doesn't work out? They come with these things, you know? You won't get a job, even my father says that to this day”. SE2 recalled his/her father's advice related to college: “no, my child, let's take it easy, finish college, then try to do it, go do it, work in an area'. SE2 pointed out that his/her parents were always narrow minded about searching for security and stability, and this reflected the importance that their parents attributed to their children's completion of studies.

On the other hand, SE5, SE6, SE7 and SE10 find greater support from the family. SE6 says that even during the business incubator selection process, at each stage that the project was approved, the parents celebrated together. For him/her, support has always existed and has been very important in the trajectory. SE3 understands that his parents supported the objectives related to the company, including financially, sending money for its formalization and maintenance of activities, but always emphasizing the desire that SE3 would continue the university course.

A similar experience happens at the university in relation to peer understanding. SE1 understands that not all of them supported him/her: “Not all of the friends from the undergraduate course, the guys, like, preferred to go to a large company, they don't ask me a lot about the company here”. SE9 understands that people did not always understand the path they chose to take, many colleagues questioned his/her choice:

“Oh, man, you're a very smart guy, you did very well in the subjects, aren't you going to work in your area? Are you going to do something totally different, that has nothing to do with your area?”.

On the other hand, colleagues who support play a fundamental role in welcoming, encouraging and sharing learning related to the topic. SE8 and SE7 understand that the main support for entrepreneurship was the environment itself, insofar as it connected people based on their achievements. SE3 adds that: “(...) all the events we went to, we went together, we always discussed among the companies' members, what one could do to help the other”. SE7 agrees and adds that the biggest contribution happened through the relationship network built in the environment:

“(…) what added me most is the small group of people there, because everyone was chasing this knowledge, to exchange a lot of ideas, sometimes someone found something and talked to me, talked to others, we discussed, even in the contact with customers”.

Based on these findings, the following discussions cover the entrepreneurial learning process at the university from five main aspects. The first one refers to the learning and experiences that precede entering the university and entrepreneurship. The second aspect is the learning context. The third refers to pedagogical design, including curricular and extracurricular activities. The fourth aspect corresponds to multiple identities and, finally, the fifth aspect, the social interaction in the learning environment. These aspects influence the socially organized learning process so that the entrepreneur's identity emerges from the interaction with the social world involving the educational learning processes.

4.2 Lifelong experiences and learning

Just like a child who, from an early age, learns many different lessons through interaction in their physical and social environments, as members of a sociocultural group (Rego, 2014), students and entrepreneurs can learn from the experiences that result from their interaction with physical and social environments, observing, experiencing or receiving instructions from others. Learning and development are interrelated from the first day of a child's life. Even in childhood, the object of play permeates reality and “has its own inner continuation in school instruction and work” (Vygotski, 1991, p. 70). The essence of the production of figurines or bracelets at school is to create a new relationship between situations in thought and real situations.

Narratives of childhood and adolescence, such as the sale of bracelets made manually at school, the class leader and the work activity as a possibility of financial independence also suggest bringing them closer to entrepreneurship. The episodes that appear from childhood to youth, before entering college, indicate learning fragments (Vogt & Bulgacov, 2019) that are accessed in social life.

Vogt and Bulgacov (2019) investigated previous experiences of entrepreneurs and found that the

entrepreneurial learning process begins before real entrepreneurship is put into practice. The authors identified several phases in the life of startup founders. The first, “selling lemonade”, is a period that goes from childhood to youth, before entering college. The authors emphasize that past experiences play a crucial role in the entrepreneurial process, as it is in the course of life that fragments of learning emerge.

Furthermore, the episodes and dramatic events shared by the participants, such as the questioning of colleagues or the lack of recognition of the entrepreneurship activity, the conflict described by SE8 that encouraged him/her to want to have his own company, the feeling of fear at the beginning of the course, which made some participants postpone participation in extracurricular activities, are resources that relate to the university experience and entrepreneurship.

These resources are part of an individual's “experiential heritage” (Megale & Liberali, 2020, p. 68), defined by the authors as the “set of resources accumulated from dramatic events experienced with other individuals”. These resources can materialize through different forms of interaction with the world and allow considering multiple ways of being, acting and feeling throughout different experiences. The concept of living heritage makes it possible to cover not only the learning fragments, but also the resources that students gather when interacting with others and that can be used in the learning process.

4.3 Learning context

Universities play a critical role as spaces for entrepreneurial learning beyond formal learning, as they can orchestrate learning resources and opportunities (Williams-Middleton et al., 2019) through extracurricular and institutional activities such as, for example, business incubators.

Thomassen et al. (2019) studied how a given learning context can affect the planning and practice of entrepreneurship education, highlighting three phenomenological levels of analysis: macro, meso and micro. The first of these, the macro level, encompasses policies and economies associated with education, which are governed by national and international guidelines. The second, the meso level, considers universities as the most prominent institutional contexts and influenced by elements found at the macro level, namely, governance and economics. Finally, the micro level covers courses related to the topic and the classroom, which can be influenced by the other levels of analysis. At the micro level, pedagogical design was identified, including teaching methods and resources.

Thomassen et al. (2019) understand that context has often been treated as an element of influence, rather than being addressed as a central focus in entrepreneurship education. For the authors, the context affects the design and practice of entrepreneurship education and can influence entrepreneurial intention. In this study, it was

observed that, although some participants could have had contact with the creation of companies in advance, the real initiation occurred when they were inserted in the institutional context involved by micro-level practices. What seemed distant to some became possible with the help of the institution through extracurricular and curricular activities at the micro level.

However, the context is not limited to these activities; it also involves the interactions and personal heritage of individuals (Thomassen et al., 2019) or, the experiential heritage. Entrepreneurship education is based on experience and narrative rather than structured evidence, formulas or equations (Thomassen et al., 2019) and, in this sense, educators need to consider how learning is integrated into an individual's personal repertoire. (Williams-Middleton et al., 2019).

SE3 used the learning shared by parents about agriculture, SE7 contacted rural producers to learn about a certain productive sector, SE10 used the learning acquired in extension projects related to energy efficiency, and SE1 observed a problem related to service contracting in the experience of colleagues. Narratives illustrate that people can develop intuition and the ability to recognize opportunities in the context in which they are inserted, combining resources and creativity, to act on an opportunity (Rae, 2005). All participants began to address relevant topics that they had not mastered, participating in events, researching, observing, experimenting or receiving instructions from more experienced people.

The context is relevant to promote the entrepreneurial culture, even before starting a business, because, although business creation is an important facet, this is not the complete picture of entrepreneurship (Kuratko, 2005). The characteristics of seeking opportunities, taking calculated risks and having the tenacity to bring an idea to reality combine in a special perspective that permeates entrepreneurs (Kuratko, 2005). Yusoff, Zainol and Ibrahim (2015) investigated the entrepreneurial education practices of higher education institutes in Malaysia, including the challenges faced, facilities and support offered by universities and emphasized the need for a new entrepreneurial teaching and learning methodology to enhance understanding of the entrepreneurial process and support the development of entrepreneurial attitudes. For them, entrepreneurship education is not just about learning the theories of business, but it also requires extensive exposure to practical, personal experience.

In China, Zhang (2014) addressed the teaching of entrepreneurship in higher education and argued that the entrepreneurship education curriculum should be a complete system capable of providing students with theoretical knowledge and, above all, the development of entrepreneurial skills. Zhang (2014) highlighted the need for flexible teaching activities and multiple educational objectives following the different characteristics and requirements of students in the learning context, since teaching for entrepreneurship is carried out throughout the

university with each student as the potential object of education. The studies by Zhang (2014) and Yusoff, Zainol and Ibrahim (2015) highlight the relevance of combined teaching activities in the context of learning through methods and practices in which students can operate on all the material they have access to, observing, experimenting, receiving instructions from more experienced people and sharing the learning with other colleagues to put their projects into practice.

Following Thomassen et al. (2019), a better understanding of the context in entrepreneurship education allows us to stop approaching the context only as an adhered scenario to include the context treated as a dynamic space that can be projected. This means designing teaching and learning with context rather than in context (Thomassen et al., 2019).

4.4 Pedagogical design

Learning at university implies thinking about the learning process combining theory and practice, since entrepreneurial training requires a theoretical-based approach associated with practical activities (Schaefer & Minello, 2016). Extracurricular projects and student-led clubs offer graduates a range of learning benefits that simulate important aspects of entrepreneurial learning through hands-on (Pittaway et al., 2015). These extracurricular activities provide a learning context outside the formal curriculum (Pocek, Politis, & Gabriellsson, 2021) and can be planned with the different activities that cover the university context.

Participation in some extracurricular activities, such as junior companies, extension projects, student entities, the organization of events, scientific initiation projects and the business incubator, is found in all narratives. Although the institution does not have undergraduate courses related to the business area, there is an optional discipline on entrepreneurship. From the perspective of the research participants, its approach can be considered theoretical, that is, of the “about” type. Despite this, there are other complementary activities, demonstrating the combination of “about” and “through” entrepreneurship teaching approaches, based on Pittaway and Edwards (2012).

SE4 narrative describes a learning situation different from that of other colleagues, as it manages to articulate the content and approach of different subjects, making the learning process more meaningful. From Schaefer and Minello, (2016 p. 63), it is argued that, when the university proposes to invest in entrepreneurial training, it must do so in an “integrated, interdisciplinary, harmonized and transversal” way. This implies that educators are aware of the practice they promote or that are promoted by peers in the institutional context.

Yusoff, Zainol and Ibrahim (2015) understand that teaching methods and practices need to provide a real learning experience, centered on a knowledge-based curriculum, in the theoretical context of entrepreneurship and in the classroom. However, most teaching approaches

are generic and fail to inculcate the true value of entrepreneurship. Zhang's (2014) study indicates the need to change the traditional purely didactic teaching mode to an interactive teaching mode, given that business education requires greater openness, flexibility and participation of students and teachers.

The routines that normally occur at school within the teaching processes are fundamental (Oliveira, 1993), as students can combine different types of knowledge (Vygotski, 1991) and resources to practice entrepreneurship, seek partnerships to solve problems and reduce related uncertainties to the development of a startup. However, this process is not linear, as students have to face journeys of activities as a student and entrepreneur.

Organizing the study routine with activities related to the company is a challenge. For some of the research participants, the effects of task overload are perceived on physical and psychological health, social life and academic performance. Creating a startup requires students to invest time and dedication and, despite the support they have, learning to undertake is an activity that changes their routine at university. For some of the participants, when you want to open a business you need to be focused and this implies prioritizing some activities over others. Given this, some may develop learning strategies to respond to teaching activities and maintain dedication to the company, while others cannot. Specifically, one of the participants chose to suspend the undergraduate course in view of the work overload.

The results of this study show that students involved in entrepreneurship for the creation of real companies can face a series of challenges and feel insecure when they have to deal with activities that, although they may be related, may not be fully considered in teaching routines. In this way, the dissemination of entrepreneurship in the school environment provokes researchers, educators or managers to reflect on how to make the university a safe place for student entrepreneurship.

4.5 Multiple identities

Despite the social positions established at work, at university or in the family, people may require an identity that does not always correspond to what people expect to see. Students and entrepreneurs can face situations of tension and conflicts in social relationships. Rae (2005) discusses how family roles relate to the position people occupy at work. In the first theme of the theoretical framework of entrepreneurial learning, he emphasizes aspects related to family, education and the construction of entrepreneurial identity through social relationships.

In this work, it was observed that socially instituted roles can come into conflict when they involve the student's identity related to the teaching object (for example, training in a higher education course) and to the object of entrepreneurship (in this case, the creation of a real company). At university, the idea of entrepreneur and student is not understood by everyone.

For students, the university has an academic emphasis and entrepreneurship still needs to be strengthened. Participants believe that some colleagues do not understand aspects related to entrepreneurship at the university, as well as the decision to create a startup as opposed to taking a job in their area of training. Likewise, the family does not understand what they do and may associate the company as “another college project”, attributing less importance to entrepreneurship. Despite this, some participants perceive the support of the family, showing that students can face entrepreneurship in a different way at the university.

According to Nielsen and Gartner (2017), the tensions involved in the construction of student entrepreneurial identity are not only a matter of individual development, but are also highly influenced by the university institutional context. According to the authors, each individual feels himself in various ways according to the heterogeneous social environments related to it. In this way, emerging entrepreneurs don't just feel like entrepreneurs, they can also feel like students, scientists, marketers, etc.

In Rae's work (2005), it explains how family roles are related to the position people occupy at work and, at the same time, shows that, although there are socially established roles, people can claim their own right to be seen as someone who can assume another identity. A fundamental point in relationships is that entrepreneurial stories are also constructed with reference to personal relationships with parents, spouses and children (Rae, 2005). The social world and the world of work are part of the same universe and, although roles can be changed through negotiations, relationships do not cease to exist in the context of cultural and social traditions.

In a survey of ten student entrepreneurs in Scandinavia, Nielsen and Gartner (2017 p. 148) concluded that rather than the participants emphasizing the positive and synergistic aspects of the “student” and “entrepreneur” situation, they mainly talked about fragmented “selves”, work overload and stress, among other topics. The authors observed that students experienced the university as a deterministic occupational structure that made them commit to a pre-defined work identity. Consequently, the potential of these young and future entrepreneurs was not fully exploited and their startups were short-lived. Furthermore, participants could end up diminishing or abandoning both their sense of student and entrepreneur identity, and, as a result, not fulfilling their potential as entrepreneurs or students.

Given this, Nielsen and Gartner (2017) concluded that universities should, to a greater extent, value and take into account identity-related aspects of learning in the design of learning activities, approaching teaching beyond the curriculum structure in the conventional sense, otherwise, some students could end up being disengaged and disintegrated. In this study, students reported challenges related to entrepreneurial identity in the learning environment, such as when what they do is not recognized

as a real entrepreneurial activity or when it is questioned by others. In view of this, they turn to colleagues who share common interests and form a cooperation network.

4.6 Social interaction

For Vygotsky (1978), the full development of the human being depends on the learning carried out in a certain cultural group. Students also learn outside the classroom by participating in projects that encourage group learning. At the university, this interaction involves the support that students can receive from professors and key actors in entrepreneurship, such as mentors, clients and more experienced entrepreneurs. Networking is highlighted as one of the most important elements of entrepreneurship at the university, where friends are a source of learning and support for activities related to the company and studies.

Williams-Middleton et al. (2019) investigated the influence of socialization on the constitution and integration of the learning process and found that, in addition to engaging in entrepreneurship supported by what is taught in the classroom or extracurricular activities, students also develop their entrepreneurial competence by socializing with key actors who share their own experiences and knowledge related to entrepreneurship.

Bezerra, Borges and Andreassi (2017) studied how universities bring together local partners to support young entrepreneurs. Starting from a multiple case study approach, the authors demonstrated that the university has a prominent role in the formation of local networks to strengthen student entrepreneurship. One of the implications of the study is that public policies aimed at fostering student entrepreneurship should consider participation and collaboration between universities, industry and business (local partners) and governments at their different levels.

Additionally, the results demonstrate that the participants of this research generally turn to colleagues who share common goals and build a network to share learning experiences and overcome challenges related to their academic and business tasks. This network is mentioned as one of the most important elements of student entrepreneurship. It is expanded during events and, through it, students seek opportunities to develop their enterprise. As a result, some of the participants believe that the main support they have for entrepreneurship is the academic territory itself.

From Oliveira (1993), it is argued that at the university the groups of students can be different in relation to the knowledge they have already acquired in different areas. A student who masters a certain discipline can contribute to the development of his peers. Rae (2005) understands that contextual learning occurs through participation in the community, industry and other networks where people share individual experiences and meanings. At the university, networking and group learning can anticipate the development of students and entrepreneurs, and these

learnings often take precedence over teaching in the classroom.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article problematized how and which aspects influence entrepreneurial learning in a Brazilian higher education institution from a social perspective of learning. Guided by a methodological framework based on narrative research, we sought to explore the entrepreneurial learning process and the aspects related to its occurrence based on a study carried out with university students who founded startups.

The results obtained help illuminate entrepreneurial learning at the university beyond the teaching content related to entrepreneurship. Learning is therefore, conceived as a social process, influenced by the learning and experiences that precede entering university and entrepreneurship, by the learning context, by pedagogical design, by multiple identities and by social interactions.

In the institution where the study was carried out, despite the students' criticism of the discipline of entrepreneurship, the experience of one of them showed that the combination of theoretical and practical disciplines can make learning more meaningful. In addition, other practices that complement learning were identified, evidencing the combination of teaching approaches. When a social learning environment is organized to promote entrepreneurial learning, students have the opportunity to put entrepreneurship and knowledge built in the classroom into practice, but it is critical that educators are aware of the practice they promote or are promoted by peers to design teaching within the institutional context.

In general, the contribution of this study occurred at three levels. At the theoretical level, it contributed to a growing body of national and international academic works that expand the study of entrepreneurial learning in the student context, highlighting the occurrence of the theme in a Brazilian educational institution. The discussion progressed by identifying aspects that influence learning and its occurrence as a phenomenon socially situated beyond a specific content that is taught. At the methodological level, the use of techniques at different levels has expanded the methodological repertoire of research in entrepreneurship.

With regard to the practical contribution, the work can contribute to the development of pedagogical activities and institutional policies that better qualify learning spaces for entrepreneurship. At the university, students can feel insecure to deal with different routines of activities and with multiple identities, so this study is an invitation for managers and professors to reflect on how to make it an increasingly welcoming place for student entrepreneurship.

The research design based on the narratives of ten student entrepreneurs sets limits for generalization. It is believed that future research may contemplate different profiles of participants and educational institutions, including managers and professors directly involved in teaching

and/or in the formulation of policies for entrepreneurship, in addition to deepening the aspects of learning addressed in this work.

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