

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY ACTIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EXPERIENCE REPORT

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ABSTRACT

New ways of working had to be thought out and developed in schools since the Covid-19 pandemic. The objective of this experience report is to present actions developed by the School and Educational Psychology services in two IFES campuses, in this context. The actions were part of a set of activities aimed at promoting mental health and psychosocial care based on weekly publications on campus social networks with topics related to mental health, and online psychological support for students. It can be seen that, despite the challenges faced in remote teaching, the actions brought reflections and worked as approximation strategy, building a sense of continuity, enabling the promotion of health in the school community.

Keywords: school psychology; covid-19; health promotion

Acciones de Psicología Escolar durante la pandemia de la Covid-19: relato de experiencia

RESUMEN

Nuevas formas de trabajo necesitan ser pensadas y desarrolladas en las escuelas a partir de la pandemia de la Covid-19. El objetivo de este relato de experiencia es presentar acciones desarrolladas por los servicios de Psicología Escolar y Educacional en dos campus del Ifes, en ese contexto. Las acciones hicieron parte de un conjunto de actividades y visaron la promoción a la salud mental y cuidado en el ámbito psicosocial a partir de publicaciones semanales en las redes sociales de los campus con temas referentes a la salud mental; y acogimiento psicológico online a los estudiantes. Se puede percibir que, a pesar de los desafíos enfrentados en la enseñanza remota, las acciones trajeron reflexiones y funcionaron como estrategia de acercamiento, de construcción de la sensación de continuidad, posibilitando la promoción a la salud de la comunidad escolar.

Palabras clave: psicología escolar; covid-19; promoción de la salud

Ações de Psicologia Escolar durante a pandemia da Covid-19: relato de experiência

RESUMO

Novas formas de trabalho precisaram ser pensadas e desenvolvidas nas escolas a partir da pandemia da Covid-19. O objetivo deste relato de experiência é apresentar ações desenvolvidas pelos serviços de Psicologia Escolar e Educacional em dois campi do IFES, nesse contexto. As ações fizeram parte de um conjunto de atividades e visaram a promoção da saúde mental e do cuidado no âmbito psicossocial a partir de publicações semanais nas redes sociais dos campi com temas referentes à saúde mental e acolhimento psicológico online aos estudantes. Pode-se perceber que, apesar dos desafios enfrentados no ensino remoto, as ações trouxeram reflexões e funcionaram como estratégia de aproximação, de construção da sensação de continuidade, possibilitando a promoção à saúde da comunidade escolar.

Palavras-chave: psicologia escolar; covid-19; promoção da saúde

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INTRODUCTION: INTERRUPTION OF ONSITE ACTIVITIES AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE WORK OF EDUCATION PSYCHOLOGISTS IN TWO CAMPI OF THE IFES

The objective of this report is to present two of the actions developed by the services of Educational Psychology in two campi of the Federal Institute of the Espírito Santo (IFES), during the Covid-19 pandemic: weekly publications in the social networks of the campi with themes referring to mental health and online psychological support for students.

The Covid-19 pandemic posed challenges for different sectors of society and, regarding education, it was not different. As a means to stop the virus, social distancing was adopted as a strategy. Thus, with the interruption of onsite classes and in combination with the challenges that presented themselves with the implementation of distance education, reflections were started on the possibilities for practice by education psychology in this unexpected context. How would it be possible to keep on offering the students an environment for psychological care aiming at their permanence and well-being, without being physically present at the school? How would it be possible to adapt to the needs of the school community at this atypical moment? How would it be possible to strengthen actions of caretaking, contributing to autonomy in the construction of better strategies for facing the pandemic, while providing for the needs of the school community? These questions proved guidelines for the reconstruction of activities for Education psychologists.

The concept of *holding* (Winnicott, 1983), as sensible adaptation of the caretaker and function by means of which the caretaker provides the baby with support, was taken as the direction for thinking over actions. According to Winnicott (1983), *holding* consists of support, sustenance, and it also includes the physical conditions for protection against harm, and it involves a complete routine of caretaking practices for the baby. Throughout the development of individuals, psychological as well as physical holding remain essential and never cease to be relevant (Abram, 2000).

Thus, we conducted our work towards the construction actions where students and professionals felt supported and sustained. According to Figueiredo (2007), sustenance, or *holding*, in colloquial language, helps “keep things safe”, aiming at the sensation of continuity of existence. Our actions, therefore, aimed at producing this feeling of continuity of the reflections promoted by the education institution. Thus, we worked on the implementation of actions of caring for students and professionals. We will present and discuss two of the actions.

WEEKLY PUBLICATIONS ON SOCIAL NETWORKS: AVAILABILITY OF CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF CONTACT

According to the Fiocruz, conveying to the population

information on expected behavioral and emotional reactions during a pandemic, as well as strategies for the promotion of psychological well-being can avoid the chronification of symptoms that are somehow expected (Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, 2020). With that purpose, seven publications were realized on the social networks of the campi of the IFES on psychological education in order to provide students with information our emotions, feelings, and behaviors that could occur during the pandemic and strategies to handle such phenomena. In all the publications, there was an emphasizing of virtual contact with the psychologists, while opening the possibility for specific support according to the demands of the students and the professionals.

In the perspective of the *holding*, the publications could collaborate as support, helping to keep things safe, in addition to strengthening connections in the school community, and guaranteeing the maintenance of weekly contact. In an attempt to make the publications fit into expectations regarding the necessities of students and professionals, they were able to suggest the themes.

The first theme approached concerned strategies for psychological care during the pandemic, in which there was evidence of the new Covid-19 scenario and possible reactions and strategies to handle the situation, while also pointing out routes for contact to contribute to online psychological support. The second published theme was on The experience of loss during the pandemic, for example, feelings of loss regarding the suspension of classes, the changes and the distance in relationships, the changes and the routines, and the fear of unemployment. In the following publication, there was the presentation of a reflection on how to handle anxiety and stress, themes that were approached as body reactions to plans, dreams, desires and interests that had to be suspended and would demand a rearrangement regarding the new imposed world order. A breathing relaxation activity was proposed as a possibility for handling stress and anxiety.

The following week was dedicated to the implementation of pedagogical activities that were not to be carried out within the institute’s premises. In order to do it, the two publications consisted of material that aimed at helping students to reflect on the new moment, organizing a routine, establishing study strategies, and reinforcing care for students who were not having access to the Internet or digital means. Another discussed theme was creativity. According to Winnicott (1975), it is defined as inventiveness in order to deal with reality. The role played by the arts was emphasized for working with emotions.

Based on the suggestions of the students and professionals, it was possible to work on the theme of the natural environment and its connection with health, with the celebration of Nature’s day in the month of June. This reflection emphasized the convergence of information

with the present time. In this material, we reflected on the concept of health as something comprehensive, referring to favorable conditions for life. Still in this perspective of convergence with current discussions, in the following week, we promoted a reflection on the impact of racism on the mental health of people, while taking as a reference the wave of manifestations after the death of George Floyd¹. It is possible to reflect on how racism and discrimination create an additional factor of stress, proving the importance of the anti-racism struggle (Presse, 2020).

Later on, we approached the use of the Internet and of social networks, suggestion of professionals and students. With this theme, we reflected on the benefits of digital technologies in a period of social distance, but also as a source of suffering with the demands and impositions for perfection, promoted by social networks. In the following weeks, we worked with the themes of loss of appetite and insomnia in the pandemic context, as a response to the students' and the professionals' reports. Highlighting topics as a reaction of the body regarding the present moment of uncertainty, it was possible to present the importance of not blaming oneself for what is happening and also suggest strategies to handle challenges.

Aiming at understanding how this information reached the students and the professionals, we have developed an online questionnaire so that they could manifest their opinion on the published material. It was possible to verify that reflections were produced, and these worked as strategies for connecting the work of psychology at the IFES campi.

One of the basic elements of psychological care is making oneself available as an implied presence in a discreet way (Figueiredo, 2007). Thus, we can understand that the construction of content for social networks, highlighting a presence on possible experiences in the school community, with the availability of contacts for more specific support, but respecting the movement of people based on these interventions, was our way, as the education psychologists, to handle this new reality and guarantee the availability of care even from a distance.

ONLINE PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE

Psychological care, according to the Ministry of Health, refers to qualified ears for listening to people, while respecting their uniqueness, attempting to provide for their necessities, and appreciating their constructions of a healthy life project (Ministry of Health, 2013; 2015). In this perspective, online psychological care aimed at providing a punctual space for listening that could collaborate to the comprehension of the expressed suffering as well as work on resources for handling the presented reactions.

¹ Afro-descendant citizen of the United States who was strangled a white police officer (Presse, 2020).

By providing our e-mail addresses in the publications and in the social networks so that students and professionals could contact us if they needed to do it, we offered a listening that could be open, reserved, or of the standby type. In online care, support was offered in handling the trauma caused by the disturbing experiences of the pandemic, so that such experiences could be signified, and the strategies could be produced for the promotion of well-being. The holding function that guarantees the experience of continuity to individuals, according to what has already been presented, is necessary for us to exist and reach some sense of reality (Figueiredo, 2007).

We observed that there was greater demand at some moments, such as in the beginning of the distance pedagogical activities, which could indicate that at every new experience, or as a response to new demands in the educational process, new reactions might appear, demanding a closer look, and benefiting the growth and the development of individuals. It is important to highlight the fact that psychology professionals can contribute to this process, but they are not responsible for the availability of such care. All education professionals play, to some degree, the role of caretaker, and this engagement might lead to the construction of educational spaces that are more embracing and conducive to fill formation, not only the academic one, but also the formation of a meaning for life.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article had the objective to report the experience of two education psychologists regarding the challenge of planning and developing a caretaking work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the unprecedented character of the experienced situation, answers needed to be provided and sharing these experiences can contribute to the extension of reflections on the practice of psychologists at learning institutions, especially at moments of crises.

Although the focus of this report is the experience and the developed actions, that does not mean that we disregard criticism concerning limitations of distance education and the impossibility of this format replacing the onsite experience. As a matter of delimitation of objectives, this was not our theme for discussion, although it was present in our professional practice. Despite the unequal experiences that students had during the suspension of onsite activities, the feeling of continuity promoted by the school in the development of distance-learning activities can promote health. Some students reported the importance that the pedagogical activities had, because they led these students to create a caretaking routine, felt hope regarding the experienced adversity, and were able to strengthen connections and organize future projects. They also reported the experience of feeling taken care of and embraced, for example, when they received the printed material, when

they did not have access to the internet or to a computer.

The triple foundation that led to the construction of the work presented here was constituted by formation, planning, and partnership, which produced among professionals a feeling of continuity of the work, which can be transmitted to the school community by means of the actions described here.

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Submitted on: June 03, 2021
Approved on: July 02, 2021

This paper was translated from Portuguese by Régis Lima.