

Coping with COVID-19 and the possibilities to promote health: dialogues with teachers

Enfrentamento da COVID-19 e as possibilidades para promover a saúde: diálogos com professores

Enfrentamiento del COVID-19 y las posibilidades para promover la salud: diálogos con profesores

**Jeane Barros de Souza^I, Ivonete Teresinha Schülter Buss Heidemann^{II},
Julia Valeria de Oliveira Vargas Bitencourt^{III}, Denise Consuelo Moser Aguiar^{IV},
Carine Vendruscolo^V, Maria Sylvia de Souza Vitalle^{VI}**

Abstract: Objective: to understand the experience of elementary school teachers in coping with COVID-19, unveiling the possibilities to promote their health in this pandemic context. **Method:** qualitative study, participant action type, with a methodological guide of Paulo Freire's Research Itinerary, which includes three stages: Thematic Research; Encoding and Decoding; Critical Unveiling. Fourteen elementary school teachers, active in private and public schools in different Brazilian states, participated in the Culture Circle. **Results:** the analysis resulted in two generating themes: 1) Challenges in coping with COVID-19; 2) Possibilities to promote teacher's health in times of COVID-19. **Conclusion:** the challenges of remote education to cope with COVID-19 involve overload, stress, anxiety, fears, concerns, insecurity, and missing school. As the possibilities to promote health, teachers seek family support, organizing time to take care of themselves and alleviate anxiety through reading books, watching movies, and exercising.

Descriptors: Occupational Health; Coronavirus Infections; Pandemics; Adaptation, Psychological; Health Promotion

Resumo: Objetivo: compreender a vivência de professores do ensino fundamental no enfrentamento da COVID-19, desvelando as suas possibilidades para promover sua própria saúde nesse contexto pandêmico. **Método:** estudo qualitativo, tipo ação participante, com guia metodológico do Itinerário de Pesquisa de Paulo Freire, que integra

^I Nurse. Ph.D. in Sciences, Post-doctorate in Nursing, Professor of the Nursing Course at the Federal University of Fronteira Sul - UFFS, Campus Chapecó. Chapecó, Santa Catarina, Brazil. E-mail: jeanebarros18@gmail.com; Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0512-9765>

^{II} Nurse. Ph.D. Associate Professor, Department of Nursing, Federal University of Santa Catarina - UFSC. Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil. E-mail: ivoneteheidemann@ufsc.br; Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6216-1633>

^{III} Nurse, Ph.D. degree; Professor of the Higher Magisterium; Federal University of the Southern Frontier - UFFS; Campus Chapecó. Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. E-mail: julia.bitencourt@uffs.edu.br; Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3806-2288>

^{IV} Nurse. Ph.D. in Education, in Postdoctoral Internship, Adjunct Professor of Higher Education; Nursing course, University of Fronteira Sul - UFFS, Campus Chapecó. Chapecó, Santa Catarina, Brazil. E-mail: denise.moser@uffs.edu.br; Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8708-6518>

^V Nurse, Post-doctorate in Nursing; Professor of Undergraduate and Graduate Nursing in the State University of Santa Catarina - UDESC. Chapecó, SC, Brazil. E-mail: carine.vendruscolo@usesc.br; Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5163-4789>

^{VI} Adjunct Professor; Doctor in the Adolescent Medicine Sector, Permanent Professor of the Postgraduate Program Education and Health in Childhood and Adolescence, Federal University of São Paulo - Unifesp. São Paulo, SP, Brazil. E-mail: sylviaitalle@gmail.com Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9405-4250>

três etapas: Investigação Temática; Codificação e Descodificação; Desvelamento Crítico. Participaram do Círculo de Cultura 14 professoras do ensino fundamental, atuantes em escolas particulares e públicas de diferentes estados brasileiros. **Resultados:** a análise resultou dois temas geradores: 1) Desafios no enfrentamento da COVID-19; 2) Possibilidades para promover saúde de professores em tempos de COVID-19. **Conclusão:** os desafios do ensino remoto para o enfrentamento da COVID-19 envolvem sobrecarga, estresse, ansiedade, medos, preocupações, insegurança e saudade da escola. Como possibilidades para promover a saúde, as professoras buscam apoio familiar, organizando tempo para cuidar de si e aliviar a ansiedade por meio de leitura de livros, filmes e prática de exercícios.

Descritores: Saúde do Trabalhador; Infecções por Coronavírus; Pandemia; Adaptação Psicológica; Promoção da Saúde

Resumen: Objetivo: comprender la experiencia de profesores de la enseñanza primaria en el enfrentamiento del COVID-19, desvelando sus posibilidades para promover su propia salud en ese contexto pandémico. **Método:** estudio cualitativo, tipo acción participante, con guía metodológico del Itinerario de Investigación de Paulo Freire, que integra tres etapas: Investigación Temática; Codificación y Descodificación; Desvelamiento Crítico. Participaron del Círculo de Cultura, 14 profesoras de la enseñanza primaria, actuantes en escuelas particulares y públicas de diferentes estados brasileños. **Resultados:** el análisis resultó en dos temas generadores: 1) Desafíos en el enfrentamiento del COVID-19; 2) Posibilidades para promover la salud de profesores en tiempos de COVID-19. **Conclusión:** los desafíos de la enseñanza remota para el enfrentamiento del COVID-19 envuelven sobrecarga, estrés, ansiedad, miedos, preocupaciones, inseguridad y sentir falta de la escuela. Como posibilidades para promover la salud, las profesoras buscan apoyo familiar, organizando el tiempo para cuidar de sí y aliviar la ansiedad por medio de lectura de libros, películas y la práctica de ejercicios.

Descriptores: Salud Laboral; Infecciones por Coronavirus; Pandemia; Adaptación Psicológica; Promoción de la Salud

Introduction

In December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was alerted to several cases of pneumonia in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province, China. Chinese authorities confirmed that they had identified a new type of coronavirus called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), being responsible for the disease Coronavirus Disease 2019, recognized by the abbreviation of COVID-19.¹⁻² Since its identification, the epidemic scale of the disease increased rapidly, with cases in other regions and countries.³ In March 2020, WHO declared the situation as a pandemic, advising the countries of the world to act through measures to prevent and control its dissemination, indicated as one of the greatest global health challenges of this century.¹⁻²

Such a situation has challenges to epidemiological surveillance and public policy programs, considering measures that reduce inequalities in access to health systems and structural conditions for self-care. In this sense, we need to be attentive to the behavior of this pandemic in different regions for updating strategies to deal with this global emergency and its repercussions at the local level.⁴

In Brazil, measures have already been taken in favor of reducing physical contact between people, such as the absence of face-to-face classes in schools, the reorganization of teaching based on remote work, and the review of daily conduct with the reinforcement of use hygiene measures, intensification of hand washing, use of alcohol and mask in all spaces. However, these protective measures need to be accompanied by guidance on how to act in the work context of education professionals since it evolves quickly and creates new risk situations to be properly managed.⁵

Infection prevention and control measures are essential to prevent the spread of the disease in the workplace. We highlight the team's training programs. The strategic plan shows indicators whose performance should be monitored as part of assessing the response plan and strategic readiness for each sector.^{4,6}

According to WHO, the main purpose of Occupational Health Services is to promote working conditions that guarantee a high level of quality of life at work, protect workers' health, promote physical, mental, and social well-being, preventing and controlling accidents and illnesses by reducing risk conditions. The aforementioned service is not limited to taking care of the physical conditions of the worker since it deals with the psychological issue, and it supposes support for the improvement of the employees and the conservation of their work capacity.⁷

The Brazilian education system has stopped in-person classes, but some institutions developed remote education to continue the school year. In this context, teachers needed to reinvent their way of teaching with classes mediated by a virtual environment, online activities,

and other virtual actions. However, a report by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) warns that at least a third of the world's schoolchildren are unable to access distance learning during the closure of schools in the pandemic period imposed by COVID-19. Such a report shows an urgent investment to eliminate digital exclusion, reaching all children with remote learning, prioritizing the safe reopening of schools.⁸

We also need to consider that the exercise of work activities and working conditions are potential sources of exposure to the virus and the territory where the disease spreads, a stress factor for teachers. In this scenario, organizational measures need to be discussed in the context of each work activity to ensure working conditions that provide a reduction in virus transmission. The worker's health praxis must be among the list of public health measures and actions, aimed at controlling the pandemic. Occupational health of education workers requires planning and decision-making by responsible authorities, based on scientific information, with transparency and integration of actions to guarantee the dimensions of work, a structuring factor of society.⁶

Occupational health is not just limited to taking care of the physical conditions of the worker since it also addresses the psychological issue and supposes support for the conservation of their work capacity. According to the WHO, it is necessary to protect the health of workers, promoting physical, mental, and social well-being, preventing and controlling diseases through the reduction of risk conditions.⁷

The educational context of coping with COVID-19 raises doubts and generates a feeling of helplessness, which at the same time has led teachers to review concepts, reconfigure actions and gestures, experiencing virtual spaces as something current and present in work and social relationships. Thus, the following research question emerged: how is the experience of elementary school teachers in coping with COVID-19, and what are their possibilities to promote health in this pandemic context?

There are few reflections on coping with COVID-19 and its repercussions for the health of elementary school teachers in Brazil, and the need to promote the well-being of these professionals is urgent. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the experience of elementary school teachers in coping with COVID-19, revealing their possibilities to promote their health in the pandemic context.

Method

This is a qualitative study, of the participant action type.⁹ The data are contextualized based on the reality of the participants. It was based on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of Paulo Freire,¹⁰ which is consolidated by a liberating, dialogical, and horizontal pedagogical conception. We followed the Research Itinerary with three interconnected stages: Thematic Research; Encoding and Decoding; and the Unveiling.¹¹⁻¹²

The Research Itinerary took place in spaces called Culture Circles, in which people meet, allowing a dialogical experience, with reflections on situations of the reality of common collective interest. This reference can constitute a strategy for health promotion practices,¹² in line with the proposal of this study. Faced with the pandemic, with the need for social restriction, added to the fact that the participants lived in different locations, the Culture Circle was carried out virtually, using a free application, through the camera of electronic devices, which proved innovative and moved towards meeting the needs of teachers, who had limited time on their online work schedules.

Fourteen elementary school teachers, living in different locations in Brazil, participated in the study. The choice for the number of participants considered the type of approach since Paulo Freire's Research Itinerary foresees that the Culture Circles can be carried out with a small and irregular number of participants to provide an opportunity for approximation between researchers and individuals of research through dialogical praxis.¹¹ We invited the first

six teachers from the researchers' social interaction, via telephone, to join the study. Subsequently, using the Snowball sampling method,¹³ of these teachers invited other professional colleagues to also join the Virtual Culture Circle. All who were invited accepted to participate in the research, with no refusals.

The inclusion criteria were teachers with at least two years of experience in elementary education in the public and/or private sector. The exclusion criteria were teachers on leave during the study period, and not having access to the internet and electronic devices to participate in the Virtual Culture Circle. The day before the Circle, the teachers were guided on how to use the application, scheduling the date and time, through a message via WhatsApp, and they were also asked to provide A4 paper and pens.

The Virtual Culture Circle was held on June 15, 2020, lasting approximately two hours and developed under the supervision of a nurse, doctor, with experience in conducting this type of methodological approach. All teachers introduced themselves, exposing their name and their experience in the educational area. Then, the mediator shared the proposal, detailing the work methodology, and presented a sunflower in a decorative vase in her hands, which she offered in a symbolic way to all participants in the Circle.

The initial dialogue surveyed the generating themes, triggered by questions about the theme of coping with COVID-19 and the possibilities to promote the health of elementary school teachers. Through Thematic Investigation, we sought to identify the generating themes, from the most significant speeches and problematized by the participants, mediated by the researcher in the Virtual Culture Circle. The dialogue from the reality of the participants and based on the daily experiences of the new educational scenario led to the debate of concrete and real situations that teachers were experiencing in their day-to-day, configuring the themes to be investigated. This exercise, essentially, led to a critical analysis of reality in search of appropriate solutions that started the liberating educational process.¹¹

To go through the stages of the Paulo Freire Itinerary in a concrete, creative and playful way, we decided to draw an analogy with the development of the sunflower, which depends on all its stages to grow healthily and be able to flower, just like the stages of the Itinerary by Paulo Freire, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Paulo Freire Itinerary: analogy with sunflower development (Chapecó, 2020)



Source: adapted by the authors from https://br.freepik.com/vetores-gratis/tres-vasos-de-plantas-de-girassol_1339362.htm.

Thus, the Thematic Investigation stage was compared to the germination of the sunflower, which is a phase that the seeds are sown in a fertile land so that nothing prevents the bud from blooming, which will need to grow strongly and healthily. The mediator approached that the current society is facing several challenges in facing the pandemic, preventing the “blooming of the bud”, represented by a healthy life. From then on, to encourage dialogue in the Culture Circle, she raised the following question: what has prevented you from living the coping with COVID-19 healthier?

The teachers shared the challenges of the experience of the pandemic and had the opportunity to listen to each other, through dialogue and reflection on the reality experienced in the daily actions of each one, especially in the world of their work, opening up possibilities for

their transformation. At that time, they defined two themes that could be discussed: 1) Challenges in facing COVID-19; 2) Possibilities to promote health in times of COVID-19.

From the generating themes, the Encoding stage is relevant, as it organizes the ideas previously expressed in a random manner, making the themes receive meaning as the magical view is replaced by a critical and social view of the subject discussed. This movement, originating from the Encoding enables one to look at the highlighted situation, the fact itself, organized through the elaboration of codes to the generating themes, which leads to the analysis of the situation experienced and engenders the Decoding. In this way, the dynamics are decoding and after decoding, because this movement allows the participants to go through the dialectic, when admiring and reflecting on their action, peering at the inherent contradictions. This new reading of reality aims to expand and exalt reflective power, which promotes the feeling of being able to transform the world and overcome limits.¹¹

In the Encoding and Decoding stage, the mediator turned her eyes to the sunflower in the vase, pointing out that it had already been a tiny bud, which overcame the challenges of the intensely sunny and rainy days, continuing to grow until its complete development. Then, she presented the participants with cardboard, with a sunflower drawing on both sides, and wrote the first generating theme in the center of the sunflower, on one side. The same thing happened with the second generator theme, on the other part of the cardboard.

To this end, the teachers were asked to answer on their A4 sheet of paper the following question: what are the biggest difficulties in experiencing the pandemic in your daily work, which prevents a healthier living? On the other side of their paper sheet, the participants answered the following question: what are the possibilities for promoting health in the face of COVID-19? While the teachers answered the questions, the mediator sang the song “*Girassol*” written by Whindersson Nunes, arousing emotions.

The participants showed their challenges and suggestions to promote health in the experience of COVID-19. While the teachers were talking, the mediator wrote on the petals of the sunflower, drawn on the cardboard, a term or phrase that represented the perceptions shared by them.

The focus on reality, intrinsic to Paulo Freire Itinerary, and the broadening of the scope of vision on a theme allow participants to reach the stage of Critical Unveiling. At that moment, the preliminary reflections of the proposals extracted from the Encoding are mirrored, which is objective, with principles of interpretive subjectivity. Therefore, the themes are reduced and divisions are structured to better understand them from the whole. Thus, awareness of the existential situation is established, in which the limits and possibilities are discovered in the face of reality. Then, the action-reflection-action process unfolds, which empowers people to understand and highlights the importance of concrete, cultural, political, and social action, aspiring to limit situations and confronting contradictions. Consequently, the reality is unveiled as a jointly designed process, in which dialogue composes the dynamic element of action and reflection.¹¹

For the Critical Unveiling stage, the mediator approached that when the sunflower blooms, its stem positions the flower in the direction of the sun. When there is no sun, this flower turns to another sunflower, in search of light. Thus, the mediator commented that in these darkest times, when facing COVID-19, it is up to the challenge of each one to broaden their light, seeking to promote their self-care in favor of a healthier life. However, when strength is lacking, they can turn to other people and exchange experiences and support, such as the moment provided by the Virtual Culture Circle, when one can listen to the other and learn from each other, in search of healthy living.

Therefore, the mediator invited the teachers to reveal the significant lessons learned in facing COVID-19 and about participating in the Virtual Culture Circle. The teachers shared their meanings in the experience of the Culture Circle, which ended with all of them singing together, even if geographically distant, the song “*É preciso saber viver*”, composed by Roberto Carlos.

We recorded, transcribed, and organized the dialogues of the Virtual Culture Circle in two digital folders, according to the two generating themes chosen by the teachers for discussion. The Critical Unveiling process for data analysis (themes) occurred concurrently with Thematic Investigation, according to Paulo Freire's Research Itinerary, which provides for the analytical process, happening continuously and with the participation of all those involved in the Culture Circle.

The participants analyzed the encoded and decoded themes (data) as the most important that should be unveiled in the Virtual Culture Circle and had a new look at their reality. For data analysis, we read and reread the two digital folders, which contained the records of the dialogues related to the two generating themes discussed in the Circle, articulating with the theme of coping with COVID-19 and the possibilities of promoting health, enabling to redefine the themes and the Critical Unveiling, according to Paulo Freire's approach.¹¹⁻¹²

The study followed the ethical precepts of Resolution 466, of December 2012, of the National Health Council. We sent the Informed Consent Term via email to the participants, who signed it and returned it to the researchers. To preserve anonymity, teachers were named after flowers. The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of a university in the south of Brazil, under number 4,068,387, on June 3, 2020.

Results

The 14 elementary school teachers were female, between 32 and 48 years old, with three working in public schools and 11 in private schools, all with more than eight years of experience in the educational area. The participants lived in Brazil, in different states, with seven from Santa Catarina, three from São Paulo, two from Rio de Janeiro and two from Rio Grande do Sul.

When talking about the first generating theme, Challenges in coping with COVID-19, the teachers were able to expand their meanings in the experience of the repercussions of the

pandemic in their lives and their work, in which they realized that other teachers were also facing similar situations. The participants mentioned the feeling of fear of losing their job and also the fear of their family members acquiring COVID-19:

It was a very good time here with you to realize that other teachers in Brazil are facing situations like the ones I face. (Daisy)

I am very afraid of losing my job with all this situation that involves us.
(Rose)

I am afraid of my family, of my parents getting this terrible disease.
(Sunflower)

The study participants highlighted that the pandemic situation generated the need to work remotely, in their homes, resulting in intense work, stress, anxiety, and insecurity. They needed to relearn how to teach with difficulties in adapting to new technologies, with insufficient training, concomitant with the daily routine of being a mother, wife, housewife, and teacher at the same time:

This pandemic meant that we had to work at home and remotely. (Perfect love)

I will never work as hard as in this pandemic. (Azalea)

This is already giving me stress and I feel very anxious. (Anthurium)

We are having to relearn how to teach because I never did that. I never imagined that one day I would virtually teach children. (Begonia)

I don't know anything about these technologies, so this remote teaching has been stressful, having to adapt and relearn every day. This brings insecurity because we did not have adequate training. (Rose)

It is a challenge to teach remotely at home and at the same time be a mother, wife, housewife. This is not easy! (Violet)

In the Virtual Culture Circle, they also revealed the feeling of missing the classroom and the dialogues with the students. They revealed feeling sad to see the school empty, lifeless with the absence of children. And they also said they were concerned about the future, given the uncertainty of the pandemic:

I miss the classroom classes a lot. (Camellia)

The school without children is empty, lifeless. I miss the dialogues with the children at school. (Calendula)

Everything is very uncertain with the pandemic and that makes us worry about the future. (Carnation)

After sharing the challenges in facing the pandemic moment, the teachers reflected that it would be necessary to overcome the difficulties and discussed the second generating theme, considering the possibility of promoting health in COVID-19 times, empowering each other.

The teachers addressed the need to be humble and ask for help in times of difficulty adapting to virtual tools. They also stated that they seek support from family members to assist in caring for their children to teach remote classes:

You have to be humble and recognize that I need help. I ask for help because I know I have difficulties with these technological tools in teaching and all of this is new to us. (Camellia)

To be able to teach at home, I count on the important support of my family, to be able to take care of my children while I teach. I had to ask for help! (Rose)

In the Culture Circle, they also talked about having hope and seeking to be renewed each morning, believing in better days, with the dedication of time to take care of themselves. They also argued that to promote their health, they watch movies to distract the mind and relieve anxiety, and practice physical exercises and readings, living one day at a time:

I always sleep with the hope that I will wake up more refreshed each morning. (Lily)

We also need to believe in better days, that all this will soon pass. (Rose)

You need to take time to take care of yourself. (Anthurium)

I watch movies with my husband to distract my mind a little. (Hydrangea)

I have tried to relieve my anxiety by reading a book, watching movies, and doing physical exercises. (Gerbera)

We need to live one day at a time and relieve all of our anxiety. (Carnation)

The teachers shared that they seek to learn from the challenges during the experience of the pandemic of COVID-19, turning more to God:

We have faced several challenges, except that I try to learn from the experience of this pandemic. (Perfect love)

I've been trying to get closer to God. (Calendula)

The teachers reflected on the importance of participating in the Virtual Culture Circle, highlighting it as an opportunity to promote mental health and learning, through the exchange of experiences and hopes at a remarkable moment in their lives. They felt welcomed and invigorated to continue the online classes, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Meanings of teachers in the experience of the Virtual Culture Circle (Chapecó, 2020)



Source: adapted by the authors from <https://br.depositphotos.com/vector-images/girassol.html>

Discussion

Teaching has mediated the action of teaching and learning. In this movement, situations that make this action unfeasible require teachers to rethink their actions to (re) conduct educational processes, as when confronting COVID-19.

In the discussion of the first generating theme, in which the teachers addressed the challenges in facing COVID-19, the difficulty in handling new technologies was evident. In addition to dealing with these, they do it from their homes, surrounded by a new context, with children and household chores, a reason for anxiety, insecurity, and stress at the moment experienced. The anguish in this period, experienced by the whole of society, leaves a feeling of helplessness and fear, which goes beyond illness, symptoms, and death, as the economy has been deeply affected and educators fear mass layoffs since the economic situation also covered this sector.

In general, teachers face a wide range of activities in their daily lives. However, with the pandemic of COVID-19, it became much worse, interfering in the mental health of these professionals. Due to the current situation and the resumption of educational activities remotely in elementary education, the organization of a new teaching methodology was necessary, which

reflected in the immediate adaptation to technological strategies, offering quality distance education.¹⁴

The strategy of resuming classes remotely, without adequate training, and convenient planning to offer pedagogical continuity to students, can cause information overload, difficulties in adapting and training teachers. These newly imposed challenges tend to trigger physical and mental malaise, resulting in symptoms such as stress, fatigue, anxiety, and depression, which has repercussions on the health of these professionals.¹⁴ Many teachers had to adapt the content and their classes to the remote format, without mastering these tools and technologies, and the lack or scarcity of experience in this modality causes insecurity to the new teaching form¹⁵ corroborating the findings of this research.

In a survey carried out on the feeling and perception of Brazilian educators in the basic network in the educational context as a result of COVID-19, the impact of the current moment on the teachers' mental health was obtained, on a Likert scale scored from 1 to 5, where the average was 2.16. The survey showed that more than 70% of teachers are seeking support in the following order of priority: informational, emotional and financial.¹⁶

The suffering of teachers and their consequent illness have been the object of study, given the social and economic conditions that permeate the scenario of their work. Although the commitment of teachers' mental health over the years is evident in the literature, few studies report on public health management in this specific population.¹⁴ For this finding, three possible explanations were considered: 1) The programs focused on this category are being carried out, however, the managers are not divulging the experiences, consequently, there are no publications; 2) Research institutions have not been interested in the topic; 3) There are no programs that work with the illness of teachers within the scope of public policies.¹⁷

Situations with feelings of suffering, insecurity, worries, and anguish in workers together with the need to respond to the resulting emotional mobilization, leave them in situations that

require strategies and psychological management to live and deal with their work routine.¹⁸ Also, with the need for social distance, the presence of students at school was lost, which unexpectedly became empty and silent, awakening in teachers the feeling of longing for the school institution in the development of its educational role and also dialogue with students. The strengthening of bonds improves the dialogic and plural knowledge in the teaching-learning process, resulting in educators and students involved in the joint construction of knowledge, which is configured as a factor that humanizes and transforms reality.¹⁹

There is awareness of the great challenges that teachers, students, and government officials experience in the pandemic moment and the implications for the occupational health of these education professionals. However, this crisis only exacerbates a problem that has already been highlighted. In this sense, it is urgent to structure public policies that address the central issue of teachers' health, as much as they allow the demonstration of concrete evidence, showing results of actions, promising or not, aiming at the continuum adjustment of the serious situation.

Due to the current pandemic context, the Innovation Center for Brazilian Education (*CIEB*) built remote learning strategies for Education Departments, which were organized based on five different plans for public managers to take as a reference and develop their class models: transmission of classes and educational content via television; video lessons recorded and available on social networks; remote classes via social networks; sending digital content in virtual tools; availability of online teaching platforms. The plans resulting from the strategies were launched based on studies whose focus was the planning of the Brazilian Education Secretariats for remote education, led by *CIEB* in partnership with the National Council of Education Secretaries (*CONSED*), the National Union of Municipal Directors of Education (*UNDIME*) and the Lemann Foundation.²⁰

Initiatives and projects are put into practice, making a series of options available to teachers and students, such as the resources necessary for the effective implementation of

remote classes. However, although the initiative is assertive, access to the entire system of options provided has not yet reached its full scope, which will sustain the teachers' discomfort. To achieve their effect consistently, technologies structured at a macro level need an access management process that involves communication and a whole network of professionals who, on the path between a political decision and the class, even if remotely, represented by the teacher, will have the role of disseminating, socializing and instrumentalizing for the use of resources.

The reach of these resources has the potential to bring students and teachers back together in a process of essential interaction in the construction of education so that students feel they are protagonists in their formative process and teachers committed to their role as a trainer, reassuring and asserting anxieties arising from an unusual moment.

During the Virtual Culture Circle, due to the positive repercussions, strengthening, and personal and professional valorization, the teachers expanded their focus on the current teaching situation, whose demand implies the reinventing of pedagogical practices, considering the substitution of the classroom space for the virtual, even if temporarily. In this scenario, they discussed the second generating theme, involving the real possibilities to promote their health and adapt to remote teaching-learning, despite the major challenges.

Teachers' health must be preserved, especially in the psychological dimension, and health promotion actions are urgent to reduce the implications of the current context for the well-being of these professionals.¹⁴ In this context, we recommend the balance between work and personal life, practicing exercises promoting leisure time, such as reading and watching movies, maintaining a healthy diet, and participating in group activities of mutual help,¹⁶ even if virtually, which are actions that are in line with the strategies proposed by the National Policy for the Promotion of Health (PNPS).¹⁹

The PNPS deals with working conditions, the environment, housing, leisure, education, culture, and access to essential goods and services.²¹ However, to obtain these conditions and

achieve a state of complete well-being involving the dimensions of the physical, mental, spiritual, and social, teachers need to have knowledge and autonomy to favorably modify their natural, political and social environment.²²

Also, health promotion must occur widely, including in the workplace, remembering that the teachers' home became their working space in the pandemic period, and it is necessary to have the support of family members for the smooth running of their activities.¹⁸ Another factor is that some teachers when facing the repercussions of COVID-19, came closer to God in search of hope and faith to continue the journey of life. Spirituality integrates one of the dimensions of the human being, being a way of meaning life, of having hope and being at peace during challenges. Thus, health professionals must consider the spiritual needs of individuals in their health-disease process as a resource to be used in health promotion.²³

The fact is that writing about uncertain educational horizons is intangible. Despite this, continuity is necessary, because stopping, stagnating, is not possible. The crisis scenario awakens creation and recreation, reinventing towards building a just and egalitarian society, which always aims at freedom, autonomy, and hope for all. Although with nuances of utopia, it is important to be able to believe and aspire to advanced concepts and solutions and take this purpose as a social and life ideal. Even with the social and educational inequalities brought by a government with weak incentives for the educational class, added to the situation of COVID-19 that paralyzed face-to-face education in Brazil, we need to rethink education in times of crisis and terms of hope,²⁴ for the benefit of society and the occupational health of teachers.

The Culture Circle in a virtual way proved to be a successful care technology for nurses and other health professionals as it provided an opportunity for dialogue and discussion among teachers, who were able to share the experience of the pandemic. At the meeting, music was used, which is a universal language, and aroused deep emotions in the teachers: fun, stress reduction, as well as reflection, which facilitated the link between the mediator and the

participants.²⁵ Thus, the Virtual Culture Circle was a welcoming and health-promoting space for the teachers who were able to talk about their anguish and fears, germinating mutual learning and empowerment to overcome challenges, sowing new seeds of hope for a (re) start in personal life and at work.

As a limiting factor of the study, some teachers worked in public schools and others in private institutions, with different realities. Among the participants, some teachers had not stopped their classes, while others had recently started teaching remotely, being in the different adaptation processes at the time of the study. However, the different realities were relevant to the exchange of experiences and reflections on non-classroom teaching and its impacts on the health of education professionals in Brazil.

Conclusion

During the dialogues at the Virtual Culture Circle, teachers were provoked to exercise their critical awareness of the social place they occupy by having to improvise online teaching strategies, culminating in likely implications for their mental health. They revealed the experience of coping with COVID-19, highlighting the challenges of non-classroom teaching, such as the need for remote work, concomitant with the role of being a mother, wife, housewife, and teacher at the same time. This condition generated intense work, stress, anxiety, fear, worries, insecurity with the possibility of unemployment, missing school, and dialogues with students.

When searching for healthy living, teachers were also able to reflect on the possibilities of promoting health in coping with COVID-19. They pointed out the importance of family support to overcome challenges, organize a time to take care of themselves, hope for better days, and relieve anxiety through reading books, watching movies, and physical exercise.

The Virtual Culture Circle was useful in promoting teachers' health. Digital communication technologies expand the possibilities of meetings and the sharing of

experiences, greatly increasing the forms of learning. As a technological device of education and, at the same time, of promotion and prevention, the Virtual Culture Circle can be a tool used by Nursing, because it provides social integration and the promotion of the well-being of individuals and groups in situations of restriction or conditions that make physical displacement unfeasible. The methodological strategies for the construction of scientific knowledge have also proved to be positive and we recommend its use in other research of this nature.

As contributions to the area of Nursing and health, the virtual environment was a space for social interaction, learning, and worker health in the current pandemic situation. It was a tool for establishing fruitful relationships between those who work in the production of health and workers in the area of education, with the possibility of applicability to other people that have been facing changes in their work process to adapt to the new reality.

To promote the health of education workers, we need that emotional conditions and psychological adaptation are ensured. The challenges that arise permeate the occupational health of teachers, considering that the pandemic has generated anguish and concerns, and also questions regarding the conduct of the world situation.

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Corresponding author

Denise Consuelo Moser Aguiar

E-mail: denise.moser@uffs.edu.br

Address: Campus Chapecó-SC; Rodovia SC 484 - Km 02, Fronteira Sul, CEP 89815-899

Telephone: (49) 2049-2600

Authorship contributions

1 – Jeane Barros Souza

Conception or design of the study/research

2 – Ivonete Teresinha Schülter Buss Heidemann

Conception or design of the study/research

3 – Julia Valeria de Oliveira Vargas Bitencourt

Analysis and/or interpretation of data

4 – Denise Consuelo Moser Aguiar

Final review with critical and intellectual participation in the text

5 – Carine Vendruscolo

Final review with critical and intellectual participation in the text

6 – Maria Sylvia de Souza Vitalle

Final review with critical and intellectual participation in the text

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