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A school that learns and teaches: mental health training for the SUS

Uma escola que aprende e ensina: a formação em saúde mental para o SUS

Una escuela que aprende y enseña: la formación en salud mental para el SUS

ABSTRACT

Objective: This experience report aims to present the mental health educational actions carried out at ESP-MG over the past 15 years, seeking to identify the learning outcomes derived from them for continuing education in health. **Methods:** To address this objective, we analyzed an already completed systematization of ESP-MG's production of mental health educational actions from 2010 to 2025. **Results:** The continuous and diverse offering of mental health educational initiatives made it possible to understand the importance of having workers with a background and engagement in the SUS and the Psychiatric Reform, of maintaining openness to the socio-sanitary context and emerging health issues, and of engaging in dialogue and learning with social movements and SUS workers. **Conclusions:** We conclude that these factors are relevant for continuing health education that is attentive to the population's health needs and to the challenges faced by workers and by policies in implementation.

Keywords: *Education continuing; Education; Mental Health Services.*

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este relato de experiência tem como objetivo apresentar as ações educacionais de saúde mental, realizadas na ESP-MG, nos últimos 15 anos, buscando identificar as aprendizagens delas decorrentes para a educação permanente em saúde. **Método:** Para responder ao objetivo proposto, analisamos uma sistematização já realizada da produção de ações educacionais em saúde mental da ESP-MG de 2010 a 2025. **Resultados:** A oferta permanente e diversa de ações educacionais em saúde mental permitiu compreender a importância de contar com trabalhadores com trajetória e militância no SUS e na Reforma Psiquiátrica, de manter uma

abertura para o contexto socio-sanitário e para os problemas de saúde emergentes, de dialogar e aprender com os movimentos sociais e com os trabalhadores e trabalhadoras do SUS. **Conclusão:** Conclui-se, que tais fatores são relevantes para uma educação permanente em saúde atenta às necessidades de saúde da população e aos desafios dos trabalhadores e das políticas em implementação.

Palavras-chave: *Educação Permanente; Ações Educativas; Serviços de Saúde Mental.*

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Este informe de experiencia tiene como objetivo presentar las acciones educativas en salud mental realizadas, en la ESP-MG, durante los últimos 15 años, con el propósito de identificar los aprendizajes derivados de dichas iniciativas para la educación permanente en salud. **Método:** Para responder al objetivo planteado, analizamos una sistematización previamente elaborada sobre la producción de acciones educativas en salud mental de la ESP-MG, entre 2010 y 2025. **Resultados:** La oferta continua y diversa de acciones educativas en salud mental permitió comprender la importancia de contar con trabajadores con trayectoria y compromiso en el SUS y en la Reforma Psiquiátrica; de mantener una apertura hacia el contexto socio-sanitario y hacia los problemas emergentes de salud; y de dialogar y aprender con los movimientos sociales y con los trabajadores y trabajadoras del SUS. **Conclusión:** Se concluye que tales factores son relevantes para una educación permanente en salud atenta a las necesidades de salud de la población y a los desafíos enfrentados por los trabajadores y por las políticas en proceso de implementación.

Descriptores: *Educación continua; Educación; Servicios de Salud Mental.*

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we intend to analyze the mental health training offered by the Escola de Saúde Pública do Estado de Minas Gerais (ESP-MG) (Public Health School of the State of Minas Gerais). We start from the recognition that this is one of the themes that has stood out in the institution's trajectory, the first state public health school in Brazil, founded in 1946.

ESP-MG is dedicated to training workers involved in the care and management of the Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS) (Unified Health System) in the state of Minas Gerais and also develops educational actions with social control and social movements. Despite almost 80 years of existence, only in 2009 did it hold its first public exam to constitute its own workforce. ESP-MG currently has a faculty composed of people with different experiences and trajectories in management, care, and research. The institution develops actions on different themes in the field of collective health, such as health surveillance, primary care, health management, and mental health.

ESP-MG has permanent health education (Educação Permanente em Saúde) (EPS) as its political-pedagogical conception. This conception considers work difficulties as starting points for training that aims to transform it. Ceccim helps us understand how EPS relates work and training:

To traverse work through training means to interrogate work. To interrogate the insertion of workers, the relationships between various services, to understand the implications of work with the lives of its users, to understand that daily life serves for the construction of knowledge and practices, in addition to interrogating the intersection of experiential knowledge and formal knowledge¹.

This contribution already announces a certain way of thinking and doing that has been constant in educational actions carried out in the field of mental health at ESP-MG. A training that considers workers, services, users, daily life, practices, and dialogues between formal knowledge and experience. A training that produces knowledge and seeks to promote transformations in work, considering both scientific production and SUS policies. In the field of mental health, we know that the policy implemented in Brazil sought to produce a radical transformation, creating a network of substitute services to the psychiatric hospital and a mode of care, the psychosocial care, that seeks to promote care in freedom for people with mental suffering and problems resulting from the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Over the last 15 years, ESP-MG has produced more than 20 educational actions in the area of mental health, in more than 60 classes, for more than 12,000 students. It also held in-person seminars, webinars, and podcasts. It produced and organized several publications.

Such diverse, extensive, and continuous production in a single thematic area is uncommon at ESP-MG.

In this article, we intend not only to present this production but also to reflect on what has allowed it to be sustained over the years. We start from the assumption that reflections on this training experience will identify important clues for permanent education that actually contributes to work in SUS. We emphasize that, in the midst of the instabilities and fragilities that characterize the experiences of many public health schools in Brazil, what stands out is not only the permanence but also the strengthening of the mental health theme at ESP-MG, which does not exist as an area or sector in the institution's organizational chart. It seems instigating and relevant to us to understand this experience, even recognizing the particularities, singularities, and limits of any and all educational and social processes.

This article therefore proposes to analyze the educational actions in the field of mental health carried out at ESP-MG over the last 15 years, seeking to identify the learning derived from them for permanent health education in SUS. The temporal frame adopted considered the note made about holding the public exam and the constitution of the school's permanent workforce. We will thus reflect on experiences built and lived by the authors of this article who, at different times, were part of the team responsible for offering mental health educational actions for workers in the various health networks of Minas Gerais.

METHODS

To respond to the proposed objective, we considered all the production of educational actions and publications on mental health at ESP-MG, carried out from 2010 to 2025, already systematized by us in another article². We updated this systematization and reflected on our production based on contributions from permanent health education. In this journey, we identified aspects that can be associated with the continuous offering of mental health educational actions and that provide important clues for promoting permanent health education actions in SUS. Next, we conducted a discussion of each of these aspects.

RESULTS

Between 2010 and 2025, ESP-MG held 7 classes in 3 different specializations/postgraduate level; more than 60 classes in 18 in-person and remote free courses, 4 in-person seminars, 14 webinars, and 4 podcasts. In addition, it produced 4 publications: the booklet "Mental Health Care: Dialogues between MST and SUS"; the books "Walking Against the Wind: Care and Citizenship in Attention to Drug Users in SUS" and "Nothing Will Be as Before: Daily Inventions for Care in Freedom in Psychosocial Care Networks"; and the guide "Guide for Work in Psychosocial Care Networks in Minas Gerais: Guidelines and Orientations²."

This production comprises actions carried out with federal and state government funding. Most were requested by the Mental Health Coordination of

the State Health Secretariat of Minas Gerais (Secretaria de Estado de Saúde de Minas Gerais) (SES-MG), based on needs identified in the implementation of mental health care networks. Some actions were requested by municipalities and others were proposed by ESP-MG workers. All these actions, throughout the period considered, were developed in accordance with the national mental health policy centered on care in freedom, Psychosocial Care, and Harm Reduction. One was planned and carried out with the Landless Rural Workers Movement. All were built from dialogues established with SUS workers and managers, social movements, and social control, and included emerging themes that presented themselves as relevant in the social-health context, such as mining disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, and racism. It is also important to highlight that former students, workers in mental health care and management, researchers, and activists from social movements are frequently invited to act as teachers in the educational actions carried out and as authors of the School's publications.

DISCUSSION

In our journey in training work, which is also formative, four learnings have presented themselves as fundamental: a school that learns from SUS and its policies, from social movements, from social-health contexts, and from students who are mostly SUS workers.

Learning from SUS Mental Health Policies

When we consider ESP-MG's mental health production, we perceive that it maintains alignment with the unfolding implementation of mental health policy centered on territorial care, in freedom and in networks. We know that such implementation involved and involves many disputes and a paradigmatic transition that proposes, according to Yasui:

[...] to look at psychological suffering beyond diagnoses that distance us from the concrete life of the subject, with their singularity, their bonds, their place and their time. To rescue life with its mishaps, paradoxes, impasses, but also possibilities, potentials, bonds and encounters, invention of different ways to move forward³.

Contributing to sustaining a new care paradigm, which involves an ethical, technical, and political dimension, and to strengthening the services of the Psychosocial Care Network (Rede de Atenção Psicossocial) (RAPS), is the task of ESP-MG workers. As soon as RAPS was established by Ministry of Health Ordinance and agreed upon in MG, the School offered 14 classes of Workshops on RAPS, involving the training of more than 500 workers from 2012 to 2016. More recently, it held 12 classes of the Workshop on Integrality of Mental Health Care for about 1,200 workers, between 2019 and 2024, and 2 classes of Specialization in Mental Health Policies and Psychosocial Care, between 2020 and 2025. To strengthen care for people who use drugs in accordance with the Psychosocial Care mode and Harm Reduction, two classes of Specialization in

care for users of alcohol and other drugs were offered, and a Regional Reference Center on Drugs was also created. Other actions were directed at children's and adolescents' mental health, mental health in primary care, creating resistance and promoting (re)existence amid the setbacks in mental health policies from 2017 to 2022; strengthening mental health management, and even fostering training, such as the School of Supervisors and the Training Path.

The development of diverse educational actions, coherent with the different challenges of RAPS, can be understood from the commitment and prior experience of ESP-MG mental health workers with SUS, with Anti-Asylum Psychiatric Reform, and with Harm Reduction - whether in the field of care, management, and/or research, or in acting in social movements. That is, before working at the School, workers already had a trajectory in mental health and a technical-political commitment to building and sustaining Psychosocial Care practices in mental health networks and to strengthening SUS and Psychiatric Reform. Without workers with these work trajectories and militant commitments, it would not have been possible to offer the quantity and diversity of mental health educational actions at ESP-MG.

Learning from Social-Health Contexts: The Pandemic and Disasters

The nefarious repercussions of mining disasters on population health—whether those related to losses (human, environmental, material, and sociocultural), or those related to the emergence of conflicts (between mining companies and affected populations, affected and non-affected populations, settlements, compensation, etc.) led to the inclusion of the disaster theme in 2020 in the Specialization in Mental Health Policies and Psychosocial Care through the creation of a module with two disciplines: "Health, Territory, Disasters and Production of Subjectivities" and "Psychosocial Care Practices in Disaster Situations and Environmental Crimes." Psychosocial care in disaster contexts, amid changes in territorial dynamics, different losses and conflicts, and increased social suffering, became a task for RAPS, and ESP-MG began to address it in its educational actions.

In 2020, the global health crisis context resulting from the COVID-19 epidemic required changes in the School's training strategies. It was impossible for us, SUS workers committed to its strengthening, to close the doors and settle into our homes. Even though it was not possible to carry out in-person educational actions, we proposed a series of actions in formats we were unfamiliar with (remote courses, synchronous or asynchronous, podcasts, and webinars) to contribute to workers in SUS mental health networks, who continued to work in a context marked by deaths, fears, and denialism. In addition to addressing themes related to mental health in the pandemic, we continued offering actions that could strengthen workers and SUS. Between 2020 and 2022, we held: 4 podcasts on mental health in pandemic contexts; 13 webinars divided into 4 series: "Knowledge and Practices in RAPS of Minas:

Sustaining Care in Freedom"; "Clinical-Institutional Supervision and its Contributions to Strengthening RAPS in Minas"; "Mental Health Beds in General Hospitals: What Care Possibilities in RAPS?"; and "Mental Health Conference: Guaranteeing Public Policies, Care and Citizenship in Territories." We also offered a Remote Course on Mental Health in Primary Care and another on Adolescents Deprived of Liberty.

The inclusion of emerging themes in ESP-MG mental health educational actions stems from the recognition that psychosocial care is provided based on the challenges and needs that present themselves in the territories and in the daily lives of the people being cared for. There is no way to disregard them in mental health training. We agree with Yasui, Luzi, and Amarante⁴, who state that mental health care is not disconnected from life as it is.

Learning from Social Movements

Social movements are also important actors at ESP-MG. The Association of Mental Health Service Users of Minas Gerais (Associação dos Usuários dos Serviços de Saúde Mental de Minas Gerais) (ASUSSAM) and the Minas Gerais Mental Health Forum were interlocutors in various actions, participating mainly as teachers and as speakers in conversation circles about care experiences in freedom in RAPS. One action, the "Popular Education Workshop in Mental Health for Populations Settled and Camped in Agrarian Reform Projects of Minas Gerais," was carried out in partnership with the Landless Rural Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais SemTerra) (MST) between 2012 and 2014. In addition to the Workshop, this action resulted in the publication of a booklet reporting and recording the experience. This educational action welcomed rural women workers from agrarian reform camps and settlements working in health care in their communities and SUS-MG health workers with the aim of enriching the reading of the territory, producing approximations, and favoring the construction of partnerships and commitments.

The action was designed from the beginning through dialogue between ESP-MG workers and social movement representatives. The subjects of social movements, with their knowledge and practices, presented dimensions, elements of analysis, and questions that were new to the school to compose the course construction. They shared daily life, the dynamics of struggle, mobilization, articulation, and negotiation to guarantee access to education, health, land, and minimum survival conditions. Notes about eating habits, cultural and religious dimensions of the students, conflicts in the territories, as well as the importance of mysticism, prayers, and rituals, gave distinct contours to what was being planned. MST women also contributed analyses of the prevailing political and economic situation and its impacts on the actions to be developed. In short, multiple dimensions of life reproduction were soaking the School's spaces.

All the problematizations, contributions, and notes made by the various subjects that composed the pedagogical collegial body raised the need to think about curriculum, content, and methodological strategies based on the centrality of the conditions in which students reproduce their existences and human learning⁵.

The questions presented by MST placed educational actions at the level of the struggle for basic rights such as health and education. Arroyo⁵ warns us that social movements are educational and tension pedagogical practice because they mark, emphatically, the centrality of struggles for survival, for the possibility of existing and staying alive, and for humanization. According to the author, "[...] The struggle for life educates because it is the most radical right of the human condition"⁵ p.32. In the pedagogical collegial body, ESP-MG workers and Landless women educated each other, crossed by our world readings and social belongings. We learned from peasant women about ways of life and popular mental health care practices.

Building an educational action in partnership with a social movement like MST taught us about the complexity of power relations present in each territory, about the production of death, pain, and suffering, and about the force of resistance and invention of collectives. It reinforced our understanding of the relationships between living conditions and the production of health and illness. It taught us about integrality in health care.

Learning and Teaching with RAPS Workers of Minas Gerais

Inspired by the political-pedagogical framework of EPS, we have always chosen to plan educational actions collectively. In this perspective, teams composed of ESP-MG workers, state mental health management, and municipal mental health workers met to dialogue, reflect, and identify problems linked to daily work in RAPS and their training needs. We include in our work processes various voices and forms of life, as Feuerwerker proposes: "[...] Taking life and other voices into training opens possibilities"⁶. These collective constructions were fundamental moments for knowing the different realities of territories and the different configurations of RAPS. An opportunity, even if it is a "momentary snapshot," to know the way in which anti-asylum psychiatric reform takes place in the vast territory of Minas Gerais.

Another important principle of our work is porosity and permeability to encounters, exchanges, and problematizations with worker-students in courses. We experienced, in the first class of specialization in Mental Health Policies and Psychosocial Care, a rich learning opportunity with black female student-workers committed to and crossed by the racial theme, who raised and tensioned the debate throughout the course. As a result, other debate spaces were built, and discussions about race and gender were present in various course disciplines, cutting across debates. A powerful space for reflection on a racialized clinic and for anti-racist care was collectively woven. From this, many course completion

papers were developed on this theme and the curricular matrix was reformulated. The course now has a specific discipline to discuss mental health policies and practices from an anti-racist perspective, articulated with decolonial and emancipatory knowledge and practices.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reflecting on this 15-year experience and on the learning processes associated with it, we understand that what keeps ESP-MG alive, active, and attentive to the challenges of mental health care is its openness to the other, to encounter, to daily life, to policies and disputes in SUS, and to changes that are necessary for work in health networks, imposed by reality or by the social-health context. We can affirm that it is a school that opens possibilities, a school that learns while teaching, that remains permeable to encounters and to life as it is, always considering the principles of SUS, Anti-Asylum Psychiatric Reform, and Harm Reduction.

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