

**FROM BENCH TO SMALL NOTEBOOK: DISCRETION AND STIGMA IN  
ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES IN CARIOCAS'S SCHOOLS**

***DO BANQUINHO AO CADERNINHO: DISCRICIONARIEDADE E ESTIGMA NOS  
PROCEDIMENTOS DE MATRÍCULA EM ESCOLAS CARIOCAS***

***DE LA BANQUETA AL CUADERNO: DISCRECIÓN Y ESTIGMA EN  
PROCEDIMIENTOS DE MATRÍCULA EN ESCUELAS CARIOCAS***

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**ABSTRACT:** The article analyzes the enrollment procedures of municipal schools in Rio de Janeiro. We consider that Regional Education Coordination (CRE) and school are the bureaucrats responsible for implementing the enrollment policy and may act in a discretionary way. We consider that their perceptions about schools, students and parents are based on stigmas. We used interviews carried out with regional staff and with school directors. The results show the bureaucracy's discretion in enrollment procedures and reveal the production and reproduction of stigmas in schools, reinforcing a scenario of educational inequality and a tendency towards inequity in the distribution of places.

**KEYWORDS:** Educational bureaucracy. School enrollment policy. Street level bureaucracy. Stigma.

**RESUMO:** O artigo analisa os procedimentos de matrícula de escolas municipais do Rio de Janeiro. Partimos da ideia de que os gestores da Coordenadoria Regional de Educação (CRE) e das escolas são os burocratas responsáveis pela implementação da política de matrícula e podem agir de forma discricionária no atendimento ao público. Consideramos que suas percepções sobre as escolas, estudantes e famílias estão pautadas em estigmas. Utilizamos entrevistas realizadas com a assessoria da CRE e com diretores de escolas da mesma região da cidade. Os resultados evidenciam discricionariade da burocracia nos procedimentos de matrícula e revelam a produção e reprodução de estigmas das escolas, reforçando um cenário de desigualdade educacional e com tendência à iniquidade na distribuição de vagas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Burocracia educacional. Políticas de matrícula escolar. Burocracia de nível de rua. Estigma.

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**RESUMEN:** El artículo analiza los procedimientos de matrícula de las escuelas municipales de Rio de Janeiro. Partimos de la idea de que los directivos de la Coordinación Regional de Educación (CRE) y las escuelas son los burócratas responsables de implementar la política de matrícula y pueden actuar de manera discrecional en la atención al público. Consideramos que sus percepciones sobre las escuelas, los estudiantes y las familias se basan en estigmas. Utilizamos entrevistas realizadas con la CRE y los directores de escuelas de la misma región de la ciudad. Los resultados muestran discrecionalidad de la burocracia en los procedimientos de matrícula y revelan la producción y reproducción de estigmas en las escuelas, reforzando un escenario de desigualdad educativa y una tendencia a la inequidad en la distribución de plazas.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Burocracia educativa. Políticas de matrícula escolar. Burocracia de nivel de calle. Estigma.

## Introduction

**"VG" then goes to Safira. And then, we end up with the "R's".**  
(Dorothy, principal of Turmalina Elementary School<sup>4</sup>)

The excerpt in focus is part of an interview with a principal who narrated the process of school enrollment among schools in the municipal network of Rio de Janeiro. She described how first-segment elementary schools sent students, in a process called reallocation, to second-segment schools. The director indicated that some schools received students from "more structured" families and with "VG" concepts" (Very Good), and others had to "keep the R (Regular)"<sup>5</sup>.

The director's description reveals a situation in the Rio de Janeiro municipal network already analyzed in the sociological literature: the distribution of students in enrollment among school units does not occur exclusively randomly, with the educational bureaucracy having an active role in the process of granting vacancies. (ALMEIDA, 2019; BRUEL, 2014; CARVALHO, 2014; MOREIRA, 2014; OLIVEIRA, 2020; ROSISTOLATO *et al.*, 2016, 2019). The set of actions of bureaucrats involves, as we will demonstrate, discretionary actions, in the sense proposed by Lipsky (2019); and they end up contributing not only to the reproduction of inequalities within education networks, but also to the production of new forms of inequality.

The enrollment policy in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, although it has rules and procedures delimited in the legislation, has the managers of the Regional Education Coordinator

<sup>4</sup> All names are fictitious.

<sup>5</sup> The Municipal Education Secretariat of the city of Rio de Janeiro evaluates the students' learning process with concepts.

(CRE in the Portuguese acronym) and school managers as responsible for its implementation. This configuration allows the managers to act with autonomy and discretionary actions on the granting of openings for students, guided by their perceptions and decisions, within the limits of the law. Policy implementers act in a field of possibilities and in the implementation process there is a series of punctual actions that do not necessarily contradict the text of the law, but may be antagonistic to the spirit of the law (LIPSKY, 2019; MAYNARD-MOOD; MUSHENO, 2003). This action takes place in a dynamic space that also depends on the social navigation capacity of managers.

From this perspective, the general objective of this article is to analyze the actions and interactions of the school bureaucracy - CRE and school principals - in the process of enrollment and its consequent production and reproduction of stigmas (GOFFMAN, 1988). We will analyze the municipal legislation on enrollment and work with the set of interviews conducted with principals of municipal schools of the 1st and 2nd segments of elementary school in a region of the city and the interview conducted with the CRE enrollment officer.

There is previous research on enrollment procedures in the municipal network of Rio de Janeiro (ALMEIDA, 2019; BRUEL, 2014; CARVALHO, 2014; OLIVEIRA, 2020; ROSISTOLATO *et al.*, 2016, 2019), but they do not focus on the role of the CRE in the process. This is one of the contributions of our article that introduces this instance into the reflections on street-level bureaucracy in education policy (LIPSKY, 2019). Moreover, the relevance in addressing these issues originates in the debate on inequalities of educational opportunities. The gaps in the regulation of enrollment policies for Rio de Janeiro's municipal schools and the informal rules and discretionary actions of the bureaucracy can create barriers to school access, giving rise to inequalities in the distribution of places.

Our argument is that school and CRE managers are the bureaucrats responsible for implementing enrollment policy and can act discretionarily in serving the public (LIPSKY, 2019; PIRES; LOTTA; OLIVEIRA, 2018). Moreover, their perceptions of schools, their students, and their families act in the production and reproduction of stigmas of schools and students (GOFFMAN, 1988).

Following the text, we will present the debate on street-level bureaucracy, discretion and stigma, describe the enrollment legislation of the city of Rio de Janeiro, and present the perceptions of school and CRE managers about enrollment procedures and their performance in each process. The analysis of the material will highlight the discretionary nature of the

bureaucracy in enrollment procedures and the production and reproduction of stigma in schools, reinforcing a scenario of educational inequality.

### **Street-level bureaucracy, discretion, and stigma**

The enrollment policy in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro has rules and procedures determined by legislation and has the CRE and school managers as responsible for its implementation. This configuration allows managers to act with a degree of autonomy over the granting of vacancies for students, guided by their own perceptions and decisions, within the limits of the law, through discretionary actions. (ALMEIDA, 2019; BRUEL, 2014; CARVALHO, 2014; OLIVEIRA, 2020; ROSISTOLATO *et al.*, 2016, 2019).

Although there is awareness that this enrollment procedure happens in a formalized space, with rationalized bureaucratic logic (WEBER, 2000) and built to be random, within a republican logic, there are a number of elements that contradict it. According to Lipsky (2019), the street-level bureaucrat is the agent responsible for implementing a public policy, who acts directly in its execution, in direct contact with the policy's target audience. Street-level bureaucrats are a fundamental part of the public policy implementation process, being seen as those who make it and with a relevant role in its reconfigurations occurring in the course of interactions with citizens.

Lipsky (2019) argues that in the implementation of any and all public policy there will necessarily be the action of these agents and their roles "are built on two interrelated aspects of their positions: relative high degree of discretion and relative autonomy from organizational authority" (LIPSKY, 2019, p. 55). This perspective places street-level bureaucrats as policymaking agents and provides the idea of discretion as inevitable, inherent, and even desirable for policy implementation and reconfiguration (CAVALCANTI; LOTTA; PIRES, 2018). For Lipsky, "discretion is a relative concept. The greater the degree of discretion, the more obvious this analysis becomes for understanding the character of workers' behavior" (LIPSKY, 2019, p. 58).

Lipsky (2019) demarcates two ways in which street-level bureaucrats act with the policy target audience. In the first, the agent of the bureaucracy at street level would serve all individuals equally according to their needs or characteristics, guaranteeing all the same rights. In the second form, the service would favor citizens according to the bureaucrat's reading of certain characteristics and contexts. This relationship can take place in exchange for favors, for

stereotypical readings related to the policy's target population, for convenience, or for passing on specific information.

Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) show that public agents, although governed by formal regulations, act differently in each situation. The normative judgments of bureaucrats exist in the tension between institutionalized rules and norms - formal and tacit - and the situations presented by citizen-clients. The ongoing tensions and incompatibilities between policy or practice and the case or circumstance provide insights into the nature of norms and the possibility of change.

Studies in Brazil on school managers are divided between those that define them as street-level bureaucrats (ALMEIDA, 2019; OLIVEIRA, 2020; OLIVEIRA; LIMA; OLIVEIRA, 2018; ROSISTOLATO *et al.*, 2019) and those that define them as mid-level bureaucrats (OLIVEIRA; ABRUCIO, 2018). Muylaert (2019) emphasizes that the role of the principal is complex and hybrid, as at times he acts in direct contact with students and their families, but also performs administrative work that binds him to the institution that appointed him and represents him. We consider the role of school managers and CRE members as hybrid, as they act as mid-level bureaucrats in defining, implementing, and monitoring the enrollment policy and play the role of street-level bureaucrats in direct service to the policy's focus audience.

School enrollment procedures involve a series of procedures that require school managers and CRE members to negotiate with students' families. Thus, from our perspective, school enrollment allows bureaucrats to move between levels. Bureaucrats, in their mid-level or street-level roles, use spaces of discretion and perform discretionary actions according to their judgments in distributing vacancies among schools and directing students to existing vacancies. We are not analyzing the actions of one bureaucrat or another, considering middle and street levels, but rather the performances of one and the other. The actions related to enrollment occur in negotiation scenarios, in which the places occupied by the professionals sometimes allow transits and some level of fluidity, considering even the profiles of the families that directly contact them.

The discretionary actions of managers, based on value judgments, prejudices and preconceptions established in social interactions may result in stigmatizing situations. For Goffman (1988), the concept of stigma comprises a set of attributes and marks granted to individuals or social groups that entails a perception of ineligibility for full social acceptance. The author lists a double perspective on the term stigma, in which the stigmatized person

assumes that his/her distinctive characteristic is already known or immediately evident, in a condition of being discredited; or that this characteristic is not known or perceptible in the relationship with those present, configuring a condition of being discreditable.

According to Goffman (1988), what separates the discredited from the discreditable is the difference between virtual identity - what is expected - and real identity - what is shown. If the virtual identity presents characteristics that lead to the formation of negative concepts and it is close to the real identity, the individual can be considered a discreditable. If it keeps both sides in a relative balance, the individual is a discreditable.

In our study, the public school can be considered as discreditable and considering a scenario of interaction, from the virtual social identity, its students can also be considered discreditable. A school with underperforming students can be stigmatized and both the school and its students can be discreditable. However, some students can be considered discreditable. The disreputable have this particular dynamic between the two identities and by joining this group they become stigmatized.

Analyzing the differences that generate stigma, Link and Phelan (2001) list that stigma exists when: people distinguish and label differences; dominant cultural beliefs lump labeled people into negative stereotypes; labeled people are placed into distinct categories separating the us and them; and labeled people experience lower status and discrimination. Stigmatization is linked to social and economic place and political power, allowing for the identification of differences, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled people into distinct categories, and the complete execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination in a power relationship. For Bailey (1971), individual reputations are constructed and maintained in face-to-face interactions and reputation is not made by the qualities a person possesses, but rather, by the opinions others have of him or her. This perspective reaffirms that stigmas, labeling, and reputation come from the setting of social interaction. In these contexts individuals and entire groups are constructed who come to be characterized as unfit for full social acceptance.

The discretionary spaces in the enrollment procedures of Rio de Janeiro schools may configure a scenario that favors the production and reproduction of stigmas and reputations among school units. The identification of differences, the construction of stereotypes based on virtual social identity, the separation of "us" and "them" between those who deserve a place in certain schools and those who don't, not only reproduce social inequalities of origin, but also produce new forms of inequality.

## **Methodology**

To carry out the analysis, we worked with different and complementary sources of data. We used the municipal legislation that regulates the school network and the enrollment policy to analyze the formal and legal procedures. To understand the managers' perceptions about the enrollment procedures, we used the interviews<sup>6</sup> held at the CRE with the enrollment advisory and with six municipal school managers from an enrollment hub<sup>7</sup>. The schools were chosen because, considering the diversity and locality of the public attended, they are stratified in socioeconomic level and hierarchized by prestige and school performance.

The studies already conducted on Rio de Janeiro's municipal network indicate that due to stratification in Rio de Janeiro's municipal educational system, public schools are distinct both in performance and in prestige and reputation. Research has shown the existence of a dispute among families for high prestige public schools and mechanisms used by schools in this situation, which allow the selection of a certain profile of students, generating stratification of the Rio de Janeiro municipal network (OLIVEIRA, 2020; ROSISTOLATO *et al.*, 2016, 2019).

The surveyed schools are geographically close, many of them sharing walls that delimit the land. From an architectural point of view, they all have equivalent facilities for the care of students. There are 6 schools surveyed: the Elementary School (E.S.) Pérola offers early childhood education; the E.S. Alexandrita offers care exclusively to the years of the 1st segment of elementary education; the E.S. Safira serves the 1st segment of elementary education and has an experimental 6th grade; the E.S. Opala, the E.S. Azurita, and the E.S. Turmalina offer exclusively the 2nd segment of elementary education, with the first offering the 7th to 9th grade and the other two schools offering the 6th to 9th grade.

For this paper we analyze the interviews with a focus on managers' perceptions of the interactions of bureaucracy in enrollment procedures. Based on these, we mapped the discretionary processes grounded in stigmas about schools, students, and their families.

## **The municipal network and the enrollment policy**

The management of education in the Rio de Janeiro Municipal Network is carried out by the central level - the Municipal Secretariat of Education (SME in the Portuguese acronym) - and eleven Regional Education Coordinators (CREs), which are intermediate instances of

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<sup>7</sup> The hub is a group of schools that are geographically close to each other and that organize the allocation of students for enrollment.

school management, divided into coverage areas of the city. The CREs are instances of mediation between the SME and the schools.

Regarding enrollment, the SME is responsible for formulating and implementing the educational policy of enrollment in the municipal public school network. Every year, a Resolution is published with the enrollment calendar and its procedures. The CRE, on the other hand, must work on the coordination, planning and monitoring of the enrollment process in the school units. Although the decree regulates the competencies of the SME and the attributions of the CRE, it does not detail the actions and the way of implementing the enrollment. Each CRE has a Supervision and Enrollment Management Office, which is responsible for coordinating school management supervision activities, organizing and monitoring the enrollment process and promoting enrollment consultations with schools in order to plan the enrollment process in the region.

The analysis of the legislation allows us to indicate that, in relation to enrollment, the SME formulates the enrollment policy, the CREs coordinate, plan and monitor the enrollment process in the region where they operate, and the Enrollment Manager is responsible for implementing the policy by promoting consultations with schools. However, the municipal legislation does not regulate the consultancies, their organization or the monitoring of these actions. Nor is there any mention of the attributions directed at the school enrollment process as one of the functions of the school units, despite the fact that the school units participate in consultancy meetings with the CRE for the distribution of vacancies.

Enrollment in the Rio de Janeiro municipal network is divided into three modalities: initial, renewed or transfer. Since 2016, enrollment procedures are carried out exclusively through the digital platform "matricula.rio", complying with the provisions of the resolution in force and the enrollment calendar stipulated by the SME.

Initial enrollment is the procedure for entering students into the Rio de Janeiro Municipal Network. Renewed registration is the process that refers to the continuity of the student in the network. This procedure is carried out annually by the school. However, due to the configuration of the municipal network in Rio de Janeiro, which has a set of schools that attend only one of the segments of elementary school, enrollment can be renewed through a process called remanagement. Reassignment is the block transfer of students to schools belonging to the same center, which serve the subsequent segment. The vacancy for these students is guaranteed in the municipal legislation, but there is no legal definition of the procedures for transfer. The transfer is the procedure that enables the change of school in the



network. This process can occur throughout the year or at the end of the school term and can be done via digital enrollment or in person at the school.

The regulations do not provide guidance in cases where demand is greater than supply in a particular school, allowing room for decisions and actions by managers. Thus, the process of relocation and transfer depends on the determinations published in the resolution and on the interactions between school managers and the CRE, between managers of schools in the same center, and between managers and families.

Next we will analyze the interviews conducted with the advisor and the school principals of the CRE. The goal is to demonstrate their perceptions about their actions in the enrollment procedures and the spaces for bureaucratic discretion. We will also indicate how interactions among managers, based on virtual social identities, can produce stigmas among schools.

**Initial enrollment: "In this very beginning it is the same for everybody. You have no privilege.**

The principal of the E.S. Alexandrita, an elementary school, emphasized in her interview that the implementation of the online enrollment system eliminated the formation of lines at schools and considers it fairer: "So this process, in my opinion, analyzing all this progress, is the straightest, most peaceful process, and for me, there is no injustice! It is the most correct process!

The CRE advisor's speech about the initial enrollment procedure reinforces the idea that this process is free from bureaucratic interference and independent of knowledge or power of influence. All those interested in enrollment - councilors, friends or not - must go through the same procedure.

*But the good part of the site, a councilman comes and asks you... He has the same access as you, me, anyone... a friend of mine who works at the CRE comes and asks me .... I can't give her this job. She will get in through the site. In the beginning, it is the same for everyone. You have no privilege. [...] You won't be privileged because you have a position, because you know someone, because you are a friend of the director [...] (CRE Advisor).*

The moment of initial online enrollment is seen by managers as a process with random distribution. At this stage, according to the resolution, the managers' role consists of guiding parents, if requested, about the procedures and indicating where to find the technological tools to make the registrations, in case they do not have access to the Internet.

The performance of the bureaucracy for the moment of initial enrollment also extends to the definition of how many vacancies will be assigned to the site for each year of schooling in the schools, through meetings between the CRE's consultancy and the schools in the hub. The meetings, called enrollment consultancies, take place in the CRE and, at this moment, the schools inform the projection of students that will be approved/rejected, retained, and the quantity of vacancies that will be made available. The CRE advisor describes how the enrollment consultations work:

*There is consulting for enrollment that begins more or less in the month of August. The schools are called here individually and they make a projection [...] When it closes, on the last day of school [...] We close the number of vacancies, feed the website. [...]. Then everyone is allocated [...]. And then we do another survey within the vacancies that we offered. [...] With the participation of the schools... there is a new consultancy... (CRE Advisor).*

The bureaucrats do not, based on the interviews and the current resolution, have any power to influence this step of the procedure, ensuring that this is a more equitable process for all stakeholders. However, the interviews provided us with an expanded view of the enrollment process that opens space for discretionary actions. These are the actions of the CRE managers in the "meeting the stool" and the directors in the direct enrollment at school, with the "little notebook", and the decisions of CRE managers and schools in the resettlement. In both scenarios it is possible to notice discretionary actions by bureaucrats, both in schools and in the intermediate bureaucracy of the CRE. Such actions occur in direct or indirect interlocution in such a way that sometimes even the specific roles of each agent become fluid. The central issue we will discuss is that the negotiations and fluidity do not occur based on equity in serving the policy's target audience, but rather with a focus on the readings - sometimes stigmatizing - that are made about the students and their families.

### **"Attending the bench" and CRE discretion**

The CRE advisor, when describing her attributions, emphasizes the service to the public that goes to the CRE in search of vacancies, which she calls "attending the bench". This is how she describes it:

*We have more than 80% of our work here focused on attending to the public, attending to vacancies. So the team is very much into this action, which we call here "taking care of the bench". Yes, we call it "waiting at the bench" because people are waiting there at the bench... to be able to apply for a job. [...] They come here looking for a vacancy...All year round (CRE Advisor).*

Due to the exclusively digital procedure, the advisory helps those responsible who do not have access to computers for the registrations, but emphasizes that, although the team feeds the system in the specific period, it does not have management over the site.

*What we do here is to welcome people who do not have... because the site [...] you can access it from anywhere in your home [...] But the population, in general, does not always have the ability to deal with it. [...] What we do is give access to the site, give the welcome, be there instructing the person to use the site [...] (CRE Advisor).*

When the digital enrollment system closes, parents and guardians can demand places directly in schools. Even in this scenario, many parents look to the CRE for a choice. The advisor details one more movement of the "meet the bench":

*Some people don't want to go around the school to find out [...] Then they come to the CRE. Then she, here at the CRE, asks: "I live in [a neighborhood in the north zone]... I want to know where there is a vacancy for 6th grade. Then the CRE looks where there is a vacancy, makes the referral for him, then contacts the school (CRE Advisor).*

Our data allows us to indicate the existence of a space for the bureaucracy to act in the movement of students in the network, selecting specific school units, according to the demands that arise in the CRE. We understand the "attending the bench" as the first space of discretionary action of the street-level bureaucracy.

### **School enrollment and discretion: "I have the autonomy to convoke in that notebook."**

As already mentioned, with the end of the online enrollment period, guardians can search for vacancies directly at schools or at the CRE. The decision on school enrollment vacancies is configured as the second discretionary space of the street-level bureaucracy. It is a space for bureaucrats with autonomy to distribute vacancies and select students. The procedures adopted for this stage are not foreseen in a resolution. This configures the possibility of action of the manager with greater autonomy, following his own criteria for the distribution of these vacancies and of a game of influence for the allocation of students in certain schools (ALMEIDA, 2019).

*When the system closes, we have the autonomy to open a notebook, I have a notebook and the mothers come and look for me, they put the child's name, age and phone number. As soon as an opening appears, I call and summon that child [...] through this notebook. I have the autonomy to call in this*

*notebook. I don't need to wait for anything, our autonomy, right? (Anita, principal of E.S. Pérola).*

E.S. Azurita's principal reveals her criteria for receiving students after online registration:

*I look at the person's face, I look at the way he or she talks, I see if he or she is a good responsible person, I see if he or she is a mother who came just to pick up her child and "breastfeed" or if he or she is a mother who really wants a quality school. [...] Look, mom, we have excellent schools in the public system, try one of them because it is the students who make the school (Rebeca, principal of E. S. Azurita).*

The school administrators, in a space of interaction with the caretakers and with relative autonomy to distribute the vacancies existing in their schools, based on a judgment of the characteristics presented by the caretakers, decide whether to allocate the students or to ask the families to return at another time or to look for the CRE so that they can be oriented to look for vacancies in other units.

The action of judging the parents or guardians by the way they speak, the way they dress, their interest and participation in their children's school life, and the search for vacancies outside the period determined by the calendar proposed by the SME can be analyzed from Goffman's perspective (1988). The managers, from a judgment based on previous concepts, that is, on the virtual established social identity of the other, decide who is deserving or not deserving of the vacancy. The discretion appears directly motivated based on stigmatizing readings related to families and students. A mother who is read as someone who wants to "grunt her chest" is not welcome at school. Neither she nor her child. Even if this reading is based exclusively on the views of the agents in the first moment of interaction with families.

### **Relocation and discretion: "It is my call. We think it's the fairest thing."**

Regarding the relocation process, the managers informed that the decision about the schools to which the students will be relocated is made by the CRE. The configuration can be changed according to the territory planning in effect or the organization of school supply defined by the CRE management. The principal Rebeca, from E.M. Azurita, reports the dynamics: "The CRE itself gave the vacancies, we only gave the vacancies to the CRE and the CRE itself did the distribution [...]. It's up to them to distribute, we don't interfere, that's their criteria".

The CRE advisor also presents in her speech an example of how the distribution of vacancies among the schools in the school assignment center happens during the relocation

period and states that the distribution of vacancies is a decision made by the CRE, evidencing the CRE's discretionary power.

*Azurita only receives transfers from the schools around it. [...] then the director is the one who sees with the mothers what the criteria is. The way it will be filled is up to the school.*

*Interviewer: There is no legislation for this?*

*Adviser: No, there isn't. It's my call. We think it is the fairest (CRE Advisor).*

At the same time that we observe the CRE's discretion in the distribution of vacancies among schools in the reallocation, the CRE also allows space for school units' autonomy. Managers exercise their discretionary power in selecting which schools to send students to, and how many and who are the students that will be allocated to the schools. Managers create their criteria and draw lots or indicate priorities for places by performance:

*Some schools do a lottery, some give priority to a child who is performing better... "Ah, he will be awarded because he hasn't been absent so much". It depends on the criteria of each direction... Negotiation with the parents, "who won't give up this one"... (CRE advisor).*

*There are schools that I know that do a lottery, [...], there are schools that let, for example, students who got an 'A' choose first, it doesn't mean that 'B' or 'R' can't come here, that's not it (Rebeca, principal of E.S. Azurita).*

The perceptions of the managers are configured in a series of decisions based on discretionary spaces. The targeting of students and the power of choice are centered in the bureaucracy and in the criteria established with greater flexibility, in part because of the absence of detailed procedure in the resolution.

The decision about reassignment slots configures itself as the third space of discretion of the street-level bureaucracy. Moreover, the whole movement based on the interaction among managers is also analyzable from Goffman's (1988) perspective as stigmas can be guided by previous virtual social identities. The early years schools, which receive students from early childhood education, never seen before by the managers, work with a representation about those students, a stigmatized representation. The schools in the first and second segments, which receive students by reassignment, also work with this representation and are informed about the students in the interaction between managers and teachers.

**Reputation and stigma: "We have Azurita, which is the top of the tops. x "We end up accepting this whole process, because someone has to take them."**

The CRE advisor, when asked about her perception of schools in the region, explains that there are stigmatized schools in the network, such as the Integrated Centers for Public Education (CIEP)<sup>8</sup>. However, she points out that the schools are equivalent in quality of care, although some schools have higher demand for places due to factors linked to performance in evaluations<sup>9</sup> and location. The advisor recognizes the prestige of one of the schools and names it: "We have Azurita, which is the top of the tops".

The manager of the E.S. Turmalina shows the perception of a process of stigma construction of her school unit, because it receives, in her conception, the worst students, not being, for this reason, a sought-after school for enrollment in the region: "our school is not much of a spotlight today [...] because we receive more difficult students. [...] If this is left for us, we will have to work! What are you going to do with the children? Throw them away?"

Due to the inexistence of reallocation criteria in the enrollment resolution, managers decide which students go to each school, influencing perceptions about their school and configuring a process of production and reproduction of stigmas and confirmation of good reputations among schools.

*VG goes [...] to Azurita, you know? Because Azurita is an elite school in our center. It is a school that takes the students with the best income. [Safira is an experimental school. [...] It has to be students of excellence to be part of this experimental [...] "MB", so they go to Safira. And we end up getting the "R"s" (Dorothy, principal of E.S. Turmalina).*

For the managers interviewed, the E.S. Azurita has greater recognition in the region because of its performance in the evaluations, the same argument used by the CRE advisor. The school's prestige in the community is recognized, and the fact that it has a small building with few classrooms in a region free of violence would also be an attraction and a preference for families.

The principal of the E.S. Safira reveals the interference of the principal of E.M. Azurita in the advisory meeting, even getting to choose the schools that would send their students in the relocation. We can hypothesize that this principal has greater discretionary power in relation to the other school units, power conferred by the CRE in function of her educational results.

<sup>8</sup> The Integrated Center for Public Education was a project of the State of Rio de Janeiro in the 1980s.

<sup>9</sup> The advisor mentioned the evaluation results of SAEB, the National System for Basic Education Evaluation, developed since 1990 by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) and IDERIO, the Education Development Index of the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, created in 2010.

*[...] at the last advisory meeting. The principal of Azurita said that she prefers to take in as new students, students for 6th grade and not for 7th grade.*

*Interviewer: But that would exclude all of yours, then?*

*Carla: Yes. It excluded all of mine. She prefers to get students for sixth grade and not seventh grade. Because she said she preferred sixth grade because she observed that our students... not only ours, but the students coming from the experimental, when they go to the regular seventh grade at the other school, they have a hard time (Carla, principal of E. S. Safira).*

This evidence suggests that the principal of the E.S. Azurita has a differentiated ability to select students from the other schools in the center, due to its reputation in the region. It is possible to observe that the school, being more sought after and with greater prestige, manages the vacancies available, unlike the less sought after schools that receive the "leftover" students. The school's reputation is connected to the stigma it receives. The relationships established among managers contribute to a non-random distribution of students, increasing the stratification among the schools in the network in the same enrollment pole and amplifying educational inequalities (OLIVEIRA, 2020; ROSISTOLATO *et al.*, 2016, 2019).

The principal of E. S. Turmalina evidences actions that go beyond the limits imposed by digital enrollment, in which the action of defining the student's profile directed to the school is revealed: "Because I think the student R needs someone to welcome him [...]. Someone has to take these children, right? So we end up receiving this child. The transfer of "R" (regular) students to specific schools reinforces a stereotype of a school "that nobody wants" for receiving students "that nobody wants. Dorothy, the principal, considers that she receives the worst students, the ones nobody wants, coming from broken families, making it difficult to do pedagogical work. The principal, through the real identity, which is the confirmation of the virtual social identity, stigmatizes her students and her school. The transfer of high-performing students in the network is directed to schools with good reputation and her school has no demand, becoming the "school that nobody wants". Analyzing the students of E. S. Turmalina from Goffman's (1988) perspective, they have a manifestation of virtual social identity close to their real social identity. They are discredited students who, in this dynamic, become stigmatized. It can be seen that the consolidation of stigmas affects individuals and the institution. The students "that nobody wants" are in schools "that nobody wants" and both trajectories - individual and institutional - continue consolidating stigmas regarding families and students.

The manager of Opala school states that he cannot deny a place to the families in the relocation process, but indicates that his teachers signal the students' school of origin, demonstrating the construction of stigmas:

*We accept students from all kinds of schools. We know that there are some schools there, so, that the disciplinary part leaves something to be desired, you know... But if I have a place, I can't deny a place, right? The teachers are like: 'Leandro, you come from such and such a place.... (Leandro, principal of E.S. Opala)*

When analyzing the interviews about enrollment procedures, especially about transfers and reassignment, the managers indicate a negative evaluation of the students' profile of origin, justified by the virtual identity they have about them. They argue with their place of residence, family relations, low school performance, and indiscipline, with no information to confirm them.

The statements of the managers follow two trends. In the first, the managers point to the students' conditions as discredited, arguing that they and their families arrive at school with undesirable attributes for the pedagogical development of the school, such as, for example, indiscipline. In the second, there is the defense of the public stigma of the school, of how it is seen by others. Therefore, these are arguments that tend to present the condition of municipal schools as discreditable.

## Final remarks

In this paper we analyze the perceptions of agents of the educational bureaucracy in school enrollment procedures and identify dynamics of production and reproduction of stigmas among municipal schools in the municipal education network. The analysis of the municipal legislation on enrollment indicates rules and norms, but with gaps that allow for adaptations and discretion by bureaucrats.

The interviews conducted with school managers from the same region of the city and with the CRE's enrollment advisory allow us to state that, in their perception, online enrollment is a process "without privileges" and "fairer. This material also provided us with the mapping of the actions of managers in enrollment that indicate three spaces of discretionary action.

The first discretionary space occurs within the CRE with the "meet the stool" that occurs throughout the year. With the online registration system or with the search for vacancies directly in the CRE, there is direct interaction with the citizens that are the target of the enrollment policy, with possible criteria for choice of schools by the bureaucrat, depending on the family



and its history. School enrollment will depend on the CRE managers, guided by their judgments, value judgments, and stigmas.

The second discretionary space occurs in schools at the end of the online enrollment period. At this point, school managers have autonomy with the available vacancies, as families seek vacancies directly in the schools. The criteria can be the order of arrival, with the use of the "notebook", or with the evaluation of the family and their way of speaking, dressing or presenting themselves at the school unit. Managers interact with the public in a discretionary way and, based on what can be observed in this interaction, select their students.

The third discretionary space occurs in the process of reassignment, with active action and interaction between the CRE management and the school principals. The CRE decides numbers of vacancies for each school and the managers exercise their discretionary power when selecting to which schools the students will be directed, how many and who are the students that will be allocated to the schools. Each manager has his or her own criteria for reassignment: lottery, student performance, participation in the meeting.

The interviews showed that the best students are assigned to schools with better performance and reputation. Phrases like "If this is left for us, we will have to work! What are you going to do with the kids? Throw them away?", reveal a universe of stigmatization suffered by school units that receive students with low academic performance and social situation considered unfavorable by the bureaucracy. The managers accept to work with the students simply because it would not be possible to throw them out. The power to exclude them from certain schools is directly related to the reputation built by the schools in the network. It is the stigmatized schools that receive the stigmatized students and thus consolidates a circuit that is not only the reproduction of inequalities, but mainly the production of inequalities within educational systems that should be guided by equity in the distribution of school places and knowledge. The schools with the best reputation have greater decision-making power in situations where demand is greater than supply and are the ones that receive students with better academic performance, reinforcing a scenario of educational inequality and inequity in the distribution of vacancies.

The discretionary actions and interactions of the CRE with managers, among school managers, and between managers and families reinforce the construction of stigmas and the reputation of schools. Discretionary actions are guided by the virtual social identities of students and their families and reinforce stigmatization between school spaces when they determine the profile of students who will be reassigned. Stigmas make up reputations, but how this reputation

is consolidated and legitimized depends on the interactional plane and the biography of the individual. The process of stigmatization of schools is linked to the stigmatization of families, and stigmatized schools are those that receive stigmatized students. Students are stigmatized because they are read as having lower concepts, with discipline-related problems, and coming from families whose parents do not monitor their children's school life or do not have control over their students' performance. Thus, we have an intricate scenario where reputations and stigmas appear as motivating elements for the actions of bureaucrats, not only reproducing, but amplifying and producing new forms of inequality in educational systems.

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